



From Liberal Autonomy to Islamic Freedom: Implications for Political Education in Iran

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Abstract: The study critiques individualistic interpretations of autonomy in liberal thought and reconstructs freedom from an Islamic perspective to derive implications for political education in Iranian Islamic society. Using conceptual analysis and a comparative-critical approach based on Bereday's model, it examines the anthropological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of liberal autonomy and Islamic freedom. Findings show that liberal autonomy, grounded in individualism, self-foundation, and personal choice, creates challenges for social bonds, moral authority, and religious life. In contrast, Islamic thought defines freedom as liberation from servitude to anything other than God and a path toward perfection, termed "Rabbani Freedom." The study develops this concept across cognitive, moral-spiritual, and political-social dimensions and proposes implications including insight, responsibility, and council-based participation for political education.

Keywords: Autonomy, self-determination, Islamic freedom, Rabbani Freedom, political education.

Introduction

The concept of freedom, as one of the most fundamental notions in political philosophy and the philosophy of education, has always remained at the center of theoretical and practical debates in contemporary thought. The significance of this concept lies in the fact that its explication is directly connected to one's understanding of human beings, the purpose of human life, and the relationship between the individual, society, and the transcendent. As Mostashari (2018, Vol. 1, pp. 163-168) emphasizes, freedom cannot be defined without relying on some kind of prior anthropology; since the object of freedom is the human being, every conception of his nature, capacities, and ends has a decisive influence on how the limits and meaning of freedom are understood. Therefore, any discussion of freedom, at a deeper level, entails an anthropological and normative dispute.

Within a part of the modern liberal tradition—especially in interpretations that place greater emphasis on normative individualism and the priority of personal choice—human beings are understood as self-grounded agents, endowed with independent judgment and possessing the right to determine their own way of life (Colburn, 2010). In this framework, autonomy is often taken to mean the individual's capacity to determine the rules of life on the basis of one's own reason and will, as far as possible independent of external impositions (Kant, 1996; Mill, 1978). However, this understanding is not uniform across all liberal interpretations, and thus its critique also requires conceptual precision and a distinction among different versions of liberalism. Despite these differences, some dominant formulations of autonomy have faced serious questions and criticisms, including their relation to excessive individualism, the weakening of shared moral authorities, the difficulty of securing social cohesion, and tension with religious and community-oriented lifeworlds (MacIntyre, 1981; Galston, 1991).

In contrast, Islamic thought, drawing on a different system of ontological, anthropological, and teleological foundations, offers a distinct interpretation of freedom. In this tradition, the human being is not regarded as a purely self-founded being detached from

transcendent truth; rather, he is endowed with a divine disposition (*Fitrah*), intrinsic dignity, and the capacity for transcendence through conscious servitude to God. Accordingly, freedom is not understood merely as liberation from all constraints and external authorities, but is associated with concepts such as **freedom from bondage**, nobility of soul, and emancipation from servitude to anyone other than God. In this horizon, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states: *“Do not be a slave to others, since God has created you free”* (Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter 31). On this basis, freedom in Islamic thought does not mean the negation of every constraint, but rather liberation from the domination of what is false and a conscious movement toward human perfection and divine servitude (Motahhari, 1991; Delshad Tehrani, 2006).

The importance of this discussion in the context of Iranian society is further heightened by the fact that political education in this society is inevitably formulated in relation to its religious, historical, and cultural identity. In such a context, mere reliance on models derived from modern secular traditions, without critical reconsideration of their foundations, cannot by itself respond to the theoretical and practical needs of political education. On the other hand, ambiguity in defining freedom within educational and political discourse may lead to simplistic dichotomies such as “freedom versus religiosity” and “autonomy versus value commitment.” Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the concept of freedom, drawing on the sources and foundations of Islamic thought, in a way that both preserves human dignity and agency and renders intelligible the human relation to truth, moral responsibility, and social life.

The main issue of this research is the critique of certain dominant interpretations of autonomy in the liberal tradition and the reconstruction of the concept of freedom on the basis of Islamic thought, with attention to its implications for political education in Iran. The innovation of the article lies in its attempt to formulate an alternative model of freedom through a critical comparison of two intellectual horizons—one that is not reduced to liberal self-grounded individualism, nor leads to the negation of human will, choice, and responsibility. Within this framework, the concept of **“Rabbani Freedom”** is proposed as a theoretical formulation; a concept that

renders freedom meaningful in connection with knowledge, self-purification, responsibility, and social participation.

Accordingly, the main research question is formulated as follows: What criticisms can be raised against certain interpretations of autonomy in the liberal tradition, and on the basis of Islamic thought, what alternative formulation of the concept of freedom can be proposed for political education in Iran?

1. Research Background and Theoretical Gap

Previous studies on the relationship among freedom, Islamic thought, and political education can be classified and analyzed into three general categories:

1.1. Studies focused on the critique of liberal autonomy

Purdust (2011), in her exposition of Kant's practical philosophy, and Javadi and Hosseini Sourki (2017), in their analysis of Mill's "harm principle," have both engaged with the philosophical foundations of autonomy and its consequences for the limitation of individual freedom. In the Latin literature, MacIntyre (1981) and Galston (1991) have likewise questioned autonomy-centered formulations by criticizing liberal individualism and by foregrounding the relation of freedom to tradition, social ties, and pluralism. Still, these works have devoted comparatively little attention to the educational implications of such critiques for Islamic societies.

1.2. Studies centered on the concept of freedom and *Hurriyyah* in Islamic thought

Authors such as Motahhari (1991), in *Spiritual Freedom*, and Javadi Amoli (2007), in *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, have explicated the anthropological foundations of freedom from the perspective of Islamic philosophy and the Holy Qur'an, while also clarifying the distinction between ontological and legislative freedom. In addition, studies such as that of Delshad Tehrani (2006), with a focus on the Alavid tradition, have conceptualized *Hurriyyah* as liberation from servitude to anything other than God and as a requirement of human dignity. Nevertheless, in this body of literature, these abstract and

theological concepts have less often been translated into an operational and institutionalized model for the system of political education.

1.3. Studies in the field of political education in Iran

A number of studies (Bagheri, 2021, Vol. 2, p. 281-370) have examined the challenges of political education in Iran's school system and higher education. These studies have generally emphasized crises of effectiveness, conflicts of values, and the absence of an indigenous theoretical model.

Despite the scholarly value of the aforementioned studies, there remains a clear absence of an integrative approach capable, on the one hand, of systematically distinguishing and critiquing interpretations of liberal autonomy so as to expose their theoretical impasses, and, on the other hand, of reconstructing the concept of freedom in the form of "Rabbani Freedom" in order to provide coherent and applicable implications for the system of political education in Iran. The present study seeks to address this issue and thereby fill the existing theoretical gap.

2. Research Methodology

This study follows a developmental-applied purpose and utilizes a qualitative approach centered on conceptual analysis within a comparative-critical framework. Conceptual analysis is employed as a foundational method to examine, distinguish, and reconstruct key concepts, enabling the derivation of practical educational implications from abstract philosophical premises. (Bagheri et al., 2013, p.134) The research was systematically executed in four integrated stages:

2.1. Stage One: Conceptual and Componential Analysis

The first stage involved decomposing the concepts of "liberal autonomy" and "Islamic freedom" into their constituent components through purposeful textual sampling. The analysis focused on three dimensions: anthropological (human nature, *Fiṭrah*, and dignity), epistemological (sources of knowledge and truth), and axiological (moral values and the individual-society relationship). The analytical unit consisted of classical and contemporary liberal texts (notably Kant and Mill) and authoritative Islamic sources (the Qur'an, Nahj al-

Balaghah, and the works of thinkers such as Allameh Tabataba'i and Shahid Motahhari).

2.2. Stage Two: Conceptual Reconstruction via Bereday's Model

A modified version of Bereday's comparative model (1964) was implemented to move from mere description to normative critique. This stage progressed through four sub-phases:

1. Description: detailing the internal structure of each concept.
2. Interpretation: situating the concepts within their respective socio-historical and philosophical contexts (the modern West vs. Islamic-Iranian society).
3. Juxtaposition: identifying points of convergence and divergence regarding knowledge, morality, and the ends of freedom.
4. Comparison and Critique: evaluating liberal autonomy through the lens of Islamic thought to reveal its theoretical and practical inadequacies, ultimately formulating the alternative model of "Rabbani Freedom."

2.3. Stage Three: Practical Inference (Deriving Educational Implications)

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the method of practical syllogism (as reconstructed by Bagheri et al, 2013) was employed. This method derives "educational oughts" by combining a theoretical premise (the foundations of Rabbani Freedom) with a situational premise (the current state of political education in Iran). This ensures a logical and rigorous transition from abstract ontological findings to concrete pedagogical recommendations.

2.4. Stage Four: Validation and Trustworthiness

To ensure qualitative rigor, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility was established through primary text verification and expert auditing; transferability via rich, context-sensitive descriptions; dependability through transparent documentation of all research stages; and confirmability by grounding all findings strictly in textual data and logical argumentation.

3. Research Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the implementation of the methodological steps. The structure of the presentation of findings follows the stages of **Bereday's model**: first, the description and interpretation of the two concepts (Sections 4.1 and 4.2), then juxtaposition and comparison-critique (Section 4.3), and finally the derivation of educational implications (Sections 4.4 to 4.5).

3.1. Description and Interpretation: Autonomy in the Liberal Tradition (Deontological and Utilitarian Approaches)

Based on the first and second steps of the research method (conceptual analysis and the stages of description and interpretation in Bereday's model), the concept of autonomy – derived from the Greek word *autonomia* (meaning self-legislation) – occupies a central place in contemporary Western political philosophy, especially within the liberal tradition. In its simplest definition, autonomy refers to the individual's capacity to direct his or her life on the basis of values, goals, and beliefs that he or she has personally chosen (Christman, 2015). However, a precise analysis of this concept within the framework of the present research requires distinguishing between two major approaches or readings within this tradition: rational-deontological autonomy and personal-utilitarian autonomy.

In Immanuel Kant's moral and political philosophy, autonomy means the capacity of practical reason for moral self-legislation independently of natural inclinations, traditions, and external authorities (Kant, 1996). From this perspective, a moral agent is autonomous when his or her conduct is not determined by external factors (heteronomy), but rather arises from the universal law of reason issued from the agent's own nature. In this view, autonomy is closely tied to the concepts of rationality and human dignity, and the autonomous individual is a being who must never be used merely as a means, but must always be regarded as an end in itself. In this account, autonomy rests on three principal components: epistemic self-foundationalism (practical reason is the source and final judge of moral norms), volitional independence (the human will is subject only to a law it gives to itself), and universality (the moral law must be valid for all rational beings). This account explains a kind of normative-

procedural autonomy that emphasizes how one chooses rather than the substantive content of that choice.

In contrast to Kant's deontological approach, John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*, formulates autonomy more in terms of individuality and the right to choose one's way of life without interference from the state or society (Mill, 1978). In this empirical and utilitarian reading, autonomy means the flourishing of individual creativity and the experimentation with diverse ways of living. Here, instrumental reason serves the realization of personal desires and preferences, while the role of society and the state is limited to guaranteeing non-interference and protecting the individual's private sphere. The principal components of this account are value pluralism (no way of life possesses intrinsic superiority over another), the harm principle (the only legitimate limit on freedom is the prevention of harm to others), and the flourishing of individuality (the ultimate aim is the realization of each person's unique capacities). This account regards autonomy as an intrinsic good and a component of human happiness.

3.2. Description and Interpretation: Foundations and Dimensions of Freedom in Islamic Thought

Based on the stages of description and interpretation in Bereday's model, Islamic thought—drawing on a different constellation of ontological, anthropological, and teleological foundations—offers a distinct understanding of freedom. Conceptual analysis of Islamic texts shows that freedom in this tradition consists of four principal components, which are explained below.

One of the most fundamental foundations of freedom in Islam is the belief in the human being's divine *Fiṭrah*. The Holy Qur'an states: *"So set your face toward religion, inclining to truth – the Fiṭrah of God upon which He has created humankind"* (Qur'an 30:30).

On the basis of this verse, the human being possesses a God-oriented and perfection-seeking nature (Bagheri, 2021, Vol. 1, p. 20). This *Fiṭrah* functions as a form of **inner freedom**; that is, it liberates the human being from base attachments and the domination of lower desires and directs him toward truth. In Islamic texts, this condition is

referred to as moral nobility or *Ḥurriyyah*, which differs fundamentally from merely external or legal freedom.

In Islamic thought, the human being possesses a dual existential reality comprised of natural disposition (*ṭabi'ah*) and divine primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), functioning as “a zero point capable of ascending or descending without limit” (Mostashari, 2018, Vol. 1, p. 183). The secret behind the dual and apparently contradictory depictions of the human being in certain Qur'anic verses lies precisely in this characteristic. In some verses, the human being is described as weak and powerless (Qur'an 4:28), unjust (14:34), and ignorant (33:72), while in others he is described as self-aware (75:14), truth-seeking (39:18), and responsible (33:72).

The noble verse, “*And indeed We have honored the children of Adam*” (Qur'an 17:70), indicates the human being's intrinsic dignity. This dignity is rooted in the divine *Fiṭrah* and is granted to the human being by virtue of reason and will. Dignity, as an educational and political principle, means that no human being may be humiliated or deprived of the right to choice and participation on the basis of race, gender, color, or social status. Imam Ali, in his letter to Malik al-Ashtar, states: “*Do not be a ravenous beast toward them, seeking to devour them, for they are of two kinds: either your brothers in religion or your equals in creation*” (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Letter 53).

This statement clearly emphasizes human equality and rejects all forms of domination and humiliation.

In Islamic thought, the concept of freedom is deeply connected with **Ḥurriyyah** and **moral nobility**, as Imam Ali states in *Nahj al-Balaghah*: “*Honor your soul ... and do not be a slave to others when God has created you free*” (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Letter 31).

However, this freedom does not mean license or release from every kind of responsibility; rather, it means liberation from servitude to anything other than God. Shahid Motahhari (1991, p. 259) defines Islamic freedom in this way and regards it as the basis of independence, self-respect, and human dignity in political and social life. In his view, the free human being is one who, endowed with reason, will, and the power of choice, regards himself as responsible before God and consciously chooses the path of his own perfection in

accordance with his divine *Fitrah*—a path in which freedom is not only compatible with piety and commitment to religious principles, but in which piety itself is the very condition of true freedom and protection from bondage to passions and enslaving forces.

For a more philosophically independent formulation of Islamic freedom, one may draw upon the resources of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy. According to the doctrine of the gradation and unity of being, the most intense unity belongs to the most intense mode of being, namely the Necessary Being, and all existing things are manifestations of His names and attributes (Mulla Sadra, 2007, p.36). True freedom is movement within this hierarchy of being and nearness to its source. From this perspective, Islamic freedom may be defined as an existential process of perfection, in which the human being, by passing through different ontological stages—from the commanding self (*nafs al-ammarah*) to the tranquil self (*nafs al-mutma'innah*), and then to the station of divine vicegerency—is liberated from lower constraints and attachments and attains genuine *Ḥurriyyah*.

3.3. Juxtaposition and Comparative Critique: Liberal Autonomy vs. Islamic Thought

Based on the third and fourth stages of Bereday's model, namely juxtaposition and comparison-critique, a comparison of liberal autonomy and Islamic freedom reveals significant differences in their anthropological, epistemological, and normative foundations. These differences also produce divergent accounts of social relations, moral authority, responsibility, and the purpose of human freedom.

First, a major criticism of some liberal formulations of autonomy, particularly in communitarian critiques, concerns their tendency to portray the individual as an agent whose identity is conceptually prior to, or detachable from, inherited attachments and social roles (MacIntyre, 1981). When relationships, traditions, and familial or communal commitments are regarded as normatively binding only insofar as they are individually endorsed, non-voluntary moral commitments may be weakened and shared social bonds may become more fragile. Islamic thought, by contrast, understands the human being as possessing intrinsic dignity while also being

essentially relational and socially situated. Human identity is formed not merely through individual choice but also in relation to family, society, religious tradition, and moral responsibilities. In the Iranian context, therefore, atomistic interpretations of autonomy may generate tensions with family-centered social structures and collective religious values.

Second, some accounts of political liberalism emphasize the priority of the right over competing conceptions of the good and require state neutrality regarding particular ideals of moral perfection. Within this framework, the legitimacy of a choice depends primarily on the freedom and fairness of the choosing process rather than on the substantive moral worth of its outcome (Galston, 1991). Critics argue that, if extended without adequate normative qualification, this approach can weaken the basis for shared moral judgment and make it difficult to distinguish between liberty and mere preference satisfaction. Islamic thought, in contrast, maintains that human life has an objective purpose and that freedom must be understood in relation to truth, moral good, and human perfection. From this perspective, freedom is not an end detached from all substantive commitments; rather, it is a condition for attaining *hayat tayyibah* and realizing the human being's higher capacities (Bagheri, 2021, Vol. 1, p. 84).

Third, liberal autonomy, particularly in its Kantian and Millian formulations, grants a central role to individual reason in the justification of moral norms and political judgment. In contemporary theories of public reason and political autonomy, this orientation may limit the direct role of comprehensive religious doctrines in public justification and civic deliberation (Neufeld, 2022). Consequently, religion may be treated primarily as a matter of personal conviction rather than as a potential source of shared moral and political guidance. Islamic thought adopts a different epistemological position by regarding reason and revelation as complementary sources of knowledge. Reason enables reflection, inquiry, and moral discernment, while revelation provides guidance regarding the ultimate ends of human life and the criteria of genuine felicity. Thus, freedom of judgment is not equated with epistemic self-sufficiency but

is exercised through the interaction of reason, revelation, and moral conscience.

Finally, liberal accounts often define freedom primarily as protection from external interference and as the safeguarding of individual rights. Although responsibility is not absent from liberal theory, it is frequently articulated through legal, contractual, or reciprocal obligations. Islamic thought, however, treats freedom and responsibility as intrinsically connected. The human being is free precisely because he or she is capable of conscious choice and is therefore responsible before God, the self, and society. As the Qur'an states, "Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned" (Qur'an 74:38). In this perspective, responsibility is not an external restriction imposed upon freedom; it is a constitutive dimension of meaningful freedom. This unity of freedom and responsibility represents one of the most fundamental points of divergence between liberal autonomy and the Islamic conception of freedom (Alamolhoda, 2012, p.499).

3.4. Practical Inference: Formulation of the Model of "Rabbani Freedom"

Based on the findings obtained from the stages of juxtaposition and comparison-critique, and by drawing on the third step of the research method (practical inference), the alternative model of "Rabbani Freedom" may be formulated at three interconnected levels: the intellectual-cognitive, the moral-spiritual, and the political-social.

At the intellectual-cognitive level, freedom means the capacity for independent thinking, critical questioning, and distinguishing truth from falsehood in the light of reason and revelation. Here, thinking is not defined as a tool for satisfying personal desires, but as a path toward knowing truth and drawing near to God. By emphasizing reflection and rational inquiry, the Holy Qur'an calls human beings to contemplate divine signs and to question their beliefs and assumptions. Intellectual freedom in this model thus becomes the basis for political insight and the ability to critique power and analyze social situations. (Tabataba'i, 1996, Vol.5, p.255)

At the moral-spiritual level, freedom refers to the liberation of the human being from the bondage of base desires, selfishness,

prejudice, and self-interest, and in essence represents a return to the true self and emancipation from the illusory self. Shahid Motahhari (1991), through his foundational discussion of the “self in ethics,” shows that struggle against the self is in fact a struggle of the self against the false self—a struggle that liberates the human being from the restraints of the commanding soul (*nafs al-ammarah*) and restores him or her to intrinsic dignity. This view is also corroborated in the works of Mesbah Yazdi, who regards “struggle against the self” (*jihad al-nafs*) and the forsaking of immediate pleasures as essential conditions for “sound thinking” (*tafakkur*) and the comprehension of divine knowledge, and explicitly maintains that self-purification (*tazkiyah*) takes precedence even over the pursuit of knowledge (Mesbah Yazdi, 2022, pp. 274–275). From this perspective, moral freedom is not only a basic condition for responsible political action free from corruption and despotism, but also the fruit of the development of the self and the attainment of the tranquil soul (*nafs al-mutma’innah*). Within this framework, self-restraint, fairness, trustworthiness, and justice-seeking acquire meaning and validity not merely as ethical recommendations, but as essential requirements of free and responsible political action, grounded in self-dignity and knowledge of God.

At the political-social level, freedom pertains to the responsible participation of the human being in determining collective destiny, the rejection of tyranny and domination, and the pursuit of a just social order. In the model of Rabbani Freedom, political freedom does not mean liberation from every rule or norm, but conscious, critical, and committed participation in public life. Such participation arises from the intrinsic dignity of the human being and from responsibility before society and God, and it is manifested through concepts such as consultation (*shura*), enjoining good and forbidding evil, social oversight, and justice-seeking.

These three levels, as the sides of a triangle, reinforce one another, and without any one of them the concept of Rabbani Freedom remains incomplete.

3.5. Practical Inference: Implications of the Model of Rabbani Freedom for Political Education in Iran

On the basis of the third step of the research method, namely practical inference, and through combining theoretical premises, that is, the foundations and components of Rabbani Freedom, with situational premises concerning the characteristics of the political education system in Iran, several implications may be derived for political education.

In approaches influenced by liberal autonomy, political education is generally focused on cultivating an independent individual who is critical and capable of choosing his or her own way of life and political preferences. In the Islamic model, however, the ultimate aim of political education is not merely to produce a “choosing individual,” but to cultivate a “responsible free agent” – a human being who, while possessing the power of judgment and choice, remains committed to truth, justice, society, and God (Motahhari, 1991, p. 259; Bagheri, 2021, Vol. 1, p. 56). Accordingly, the aims of political education in Iran, based on the model of Rabbani Freedom, should include political insight, social responsibility, justice-seeking, rejection of domination, self-restraint, the capacity to recognize the common good, and readiness for conscious participation in public life.

On this basis, the content of political education in Iran should be designed around three interconnected domains: cognitive, moral, and social-political. In the cognitive domain, political education should strengthen the capacities for thinking, analysis, questioning, and distinguishing truth from falsehood. Imam Ali’s statement that “Strike one opinion against another, and right judgment will be born” (al-Amidi, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 158) underscores the importance of dialogue, the encounter of differing views, and the emergence of truth through the exchange of ideas. In the moral domain, political education should foster self-control, fairness, trustworthiness, justice-seeking, tolerance, honesty, and responsibility. If freedom in the Islamic perspective is inseparable from moral nobility and liberation from servitude to the self, political education must likewise seek to form individuals who are not captive to prejudice, self-interest, selfishness, or political

emotionalism. In the social-political domain, political education should cultivate citizens who are sensitive to the fate of their society, participatory, justice-oriented, and resistant to domination. Concepts such as justice, the public good, the common good, critique of power, social oversight, human dignity, and rejection of tyranny should therefore be embedded in political education curricula (Mostashari, 2018, Vol. 1, pp. 163–168).

Political education based on Rabbani Freedom also requires methods through which the learner is recognized as an active agent of understanding and choice. Appropriate methods in this model include guided critical dialogue, engagement with real social issues, moral and political role-modeling, strengthening self-reflection and self-accounting, and practicing responsible collective participation through consultation, group discussion, and voluntary activity. As Bagheri (2021, Vol. 1, p. 104) emphasizes, education in this view is not a matter of external imposition, but a process of awakening innate capacities and consciously guiding the human being toward the good.

Finally, the model of Rabbani Freedom does not assign responsibility for political education to any single institution. Rather, it understands political education as the outcome of interaction among multiple institutions: the family, as the first arena in which freedom and responsibility are experienced; the educational system, especially schools and universities, as environments for practicing dialogue and critique; the media and the public sphere, as contexts for shaping political perception; and religious and cultural institutions, such as mosques, religious gatherings, seminaries, and cultural centers, as settings for strengthening moral freedom and justice-seeking.

Conclusion

By examining the relationship between liberal autonomy and freedom in Islamic thought through a comparative-critical conceptual framework, this study has argued that dominant liberal understandings of autonomy tend to define freedom primarily in terms of independence from transcendent authority, the primacy of self-determining choice, and the individual's right to shape life according to self-grounded preferences. Although this view contains

important strengths—particularly its emphasis on agency, conscious choice, and resistance to external coercion—from the standpoint of Islamic thought it remains limited by atomistic individualism, value-neutrality, the separation of freedom from truth and the good, epistemic self-foundationalism, and its incompatibility with revelatory authority.

In contrast, the findings showed that freedom in Islamic thought is rooted in a different anthropological and normative framework. Drawing on Qur’anic sources, hadith literature, and Muslim thinkers, the study demonstrated that freedom in Islam is not merely negative liberty or unrestricted personal choice, but a meaningful and purposive condition grounded in *Fiṭrah*, human dignity, responsible agency, servitude to God, and the human movement toward perfection. In this perspective, freedom signifies liberation from domination by anything other than God, emancipation from the lower self, and the capacity for conscious choice within the horizon of truth and the good.

On this basis, the study reconstructed the concept of Rabbani Freedom as a normative and educational alternative to dominant liberal formulations of autonomy. This model rests on foundational principles including *tawhid*, *fitrah*, inherent dignity, divine vicegerency, and *hayat tayyibah*. Together, these foundations shape a conception of freedom that operates across three interconnected domains: the intellectual-cognitive, the moral-spiritual, and the social-political. The significance of this reconstruction lies in its attempt to preserve human agency and choice while situating them within responsibility, transcendence, and moral purpose.

These findings carry important implications for political education in Iran. If political education is to remain compatible with the cultural and intellectual foundations of Iranian society while also avoiding both uncommitted individualism and authoritarian discipline, it must reconsider its underlying conception of the human being and of freedom itself. Within this framework, political education should not be understood either as a mechanism of political conformity or as the unrestricted release of subjective preference;

rather, it should be conceived as the cultivation of a free, discerning, dignified, responsible, and participatory human being.

The central conclusion of this study, therefore, is that the critique of liberal autonomy acquires strategic value for Iran's intellectual and educational context only when it moves beyond negation and offers a coherent conceptual alternative. The model of Rabbani Freedom proposed here is an attempt in that direction. By relating freedom to truth, dignity, responsibility, and transcendence, it opens a conceptual horizon for understanding the political human being in Iranian society beyond both external domination and self-enclosed autonomy detached from meaning.

Accordingly, political and civic education in Iran should be revised to incorporate dignity, moral freedom, responsibility, dialogue, justice-seeking, and anti-domination alongside civic competencies. More broadly, an indigenous model of political education grounded in Rabbani Freedom should be developed through the resources of Islamic philosophy of education and Islamic political thought in response to contemporary Iranian realities. Educational practice should also strengthen non-indoctrinatory methods—such as dialogue, consultation, problem-solving, and participatory learning—while linking inner freedom to outer freedom through self-restraint, moral formation, and responsible expression. At the theoretical level, imported concepts such as autonomy, liberty, and citizenship require critical reexamination in light of the anthropological and normative foundations of Islamic thought in order to avoid conceptual reduction and misplaced transfer. Finally, further field-based and comparative research is needed to assess the practical feasibility and explanatory strength of the model of Rabbani Freedom in educational and cultural settings.

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