

## The Will and Free Will According to Ghazali and Spinoza

Zahra Alafchian\*  
Mohammad reza Shamshiri\*\*

### Abstract

The debate of will and volition has always been an important part of the intellectual and philosophical discourse as a whole. The current essay has studied this issue from the points of view of Ghazali and Spinoza in a comparative context. Spinoza has conceived will to be a type of notion while Ghazali considers it a mental quality that deals with preferring one side to the other. It seems that the reason for the disagreement of these two scholars in definition of will lies in the fact that Ghazali believes that will is one aspect of heart and soul whereas Spinoza includes it among the capabilities of mind. First he regarded will as a type of judgment but later due to the fact that judgment is the necessary result of notion he was compelled to consider it a kind of notion. Furthermore, according to Spinoza, an action is volition when it becomes realized out of its nature in the sense that no other internal or external stimulus forces the agent to undertake the action at issue; while Ghazali contends that the criterion for an action's volitionality (the state of being volitional) is its being grounded in will. One may trace the origin of the disagreement of these two thinkers in definition of volition back to their particular views on the issue of human freedom and servitude; because Spinoza based on his specific stance on the problem of human freedom and servitude defines a free agent as one who is actively following the intellect while in his opinion compelled is the one who is exposed to the emotions under the influence of external factors. According to Ghazali, a man can be free whose heart has been already purified of moral vices and devotes oneself to virtues; on the contrary, a man is the servant of Satan who is following the carnal desires and this cannot happen unless by doing volition action based on will. Consequently, for Ghazali every action in human being occurs following a will in the soul. Then he considers will to be based on volitional action. According to Spinoza, intellect and will are identical. However, Ghazali denies the particular philosophical intellect and thus in his view intellect and will cannot be identical. It seems that the cause of identity of intellect and will in Spinoza is the fact that he believes in the unity of notion and judgment and deems intellect and will to be a particular mode of the property of thought. But Ghazali regards will and intellect two capabilities for human soul and does not trace them back to notion and judgment. Intellectual principles of Ghazali in the debate of will and volition consists of the denial of causal necessity and belief in the theory of

---

\* Ph.D. Student of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Islamic Azad University Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran (Responsible author) [alafchian29@yahoo.com](mailto:alafchian29@yahoo.com)

\*\* Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Islamic Azad University Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran [Mo\\_shamshiri@yahoo.com](mailto:Mo_shamshiri@yahoo.com)

Received: 06.07.2016

Accepted: 29.04.2018



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Habit of Allah (‘Adat Allah) whereas Spinoza believes in pantheism and causality. To analytically

compare the intellectual principles of Spinoza and Ghazali one should say that both Spinoza and Ghazali believe in a type of pantheism (unity of existence) and one might trace the cause of the similarity between these two thinkers back to their inner effervescent enthusiasm for knowing God and their thirst for joining their Lord. Of course, Spinoza denies the final cause and it appears even that this denial is a definition that he provides of volition. Because he considers volition one’s ability to act according to his nature and remain uninfluenced by the dominant external factors. On the other hand, Ghazali wholly denies causal necessity. One may state that the basic cause of the difference of these two thinkers lies in their disagreement on the principle of causality as Spinoza considers the latter to be a self-evident truth while Ghazali with a theological impetus seeks to demonstrate the perfect divine agency. Ghazali considers God to be of a will that is something added to the Divine Essence in an eternal fashion while Spinoza does not attribute any will to God. One might trace the root cause of the disagreement of these two thinkers back to their particular approaches to the debate of immanence and transcendence. For Spinoza denies the belief in immanence and seeks to provide proofs for demonstration of a type of transcendence that is not pure and absolute. Ghazali in his discussion of Divine Attributes argues for the unknown immanence in the sense that God has such attributes as All-Hearing and Will but we do not know their quality. As to human will, Ghazali believes in a universal will in man but Spinoza denies the idea of universal will and only accepts particular will. One might say that the disagreement of these scholars has its origin in their particular notion of human soul. Because Spinoza believes in the unity of soul and body and considers human soul to be a mode of Divine Modes while Ghazali regards human soul as an independent substance that has will as one of its aspects. As to human and Divine will, Ghazali denies absolute determinism and submission as regards human will based on his theory of God’s Habit and believes instead in a type of relative determinism because on the one hand, man is compelled and he does not own the whole elements of his action and on the other, he is the subject of Divine Will and is the one who enjoys Divine Action. Then man is compelled to be free and it is only God who is truly effective and acts as He wills. But Spinoza sides with another idea in this regard in line with his intellectual system and believes that volition in the sense of power to decision should be denied both from God and man. He offers a new definition of volition and considers it to be tantamount to necessity of existence in which case only God can be a genuine free agent and man is like a straw that goes one way or another by the wind. Of course, Spinoza does not deny the whole existence of volition in man rather he believes in a type of human volition; the thing that he denies of human will is freedom from the causality and what he accepts of man is acting according to nature. According to Ghazali, man can be an integration of determinism and volition; his being free is in the sense that he is the subject of Divine Will while his being compelled refers to the fact that the productive elements of his action is not for him. It is for sure that they both believe in a type of relative determinism though their impetuses differ based on their intellectual principles.

**Key words:** Will, Free Will , God, Human, Ghazali, Spinoza.

### **Bibliography**

- The Holy Quran

- Spinoza, Baruch (1997). *Ethics*, Mohsen Jahangiri (trans.). 2nd ed. Tehran: Academic Center Press.
- Spinoza, Baruch (2003). *The Principles of the Philosophy of Rene Descarts: Demonstrated in the Geometrical Manner and Thoughts on Metaphysics*, Mohsen Jahangiri (trans.). 1st ed. Tehran: Organization for the Study and Compilation of Human Sciences Books (Samt).
- Strathern, Paul (2000). *Spinoza in 90 Minutes*, Shahram Hamzei (trnas.). Tehran: Markaz Press.
- Scruton, Roger (1997), *Spinoza: A Very Short Introduction*, Ismail Sa'adat (trans.). Tehran: Tarh No.
- Al-marsuqi, Abu Yarab, (1978), *The concept of Al-Sabbiyah Al-Ghazali*, Tunisia: Darbousalamah Press.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko (2010), *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Mohammad Javad Gohari (trans.). Tehran: Rozaneh Press.
- Tahanovi, Mohammad ibn Ali, (1862 AD), *Kashaf Istelihat Al-Fonoon*, 1st Vol. Springer, Kolkata.
- Al-Jorjani, Seyyed Sharif (1419 AH), *Sharh al-Mawakif*, Qom: Al-Sharif al-Radi Pamphlets.
- Jorjani, Ali, (1984), *Al-Tarifat, Ibrahim Abyari*, 1st Vol. Beirut.
- Jahangiri, Mohsen (20054 a), *Spinoza, Immortal Philosopher*, 2nd ed.
- Jahangiri, Mohsen, (2004 b), *Proceedings*. Tehran: Hekmat.
- Hilli, Hassan ibn Yusuf (1984), *Anwar al-Malakot*, Mohammad Najafi Zanjani. Qom.
- Hilli, Hassan ibn Yusuf, (1981), *Nahj Al-Haq Va Kashf Al-Sedq*. Beirut: Al-Banani Art Gallery Press.
- Hilli, Hassan ibn Yusuf, (1996), *Kashf-al- Morad fi Sharh Tajrid-al –Eteqad*, Ayatollah Hassanzadeh Amoli, Qom: Al-Nashr al-Islami Institute, al-Taba al-Sabea.
- Fakhuri, Hanna, & Georr, Khalil (1990), *History of Philosophy in the Islamic World*, Abd alhamid Ayati (trans.). Tehran: Zaman Press.
- Dekhoda, Ali Akbar (1998), *Dekhoda Dictionary*, Dictionary, Tehran: Tehran University Press.
- Raghieb Isfahani (1991), *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān*, Safwan Adnan Davoodi. Beirut: al-dar al-Islam.
- René Descartes (1990), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Ahmad Ahmadi (trans.). Tehran: Academic Press Center.
- Alam al-Hoda, Seyyed Morteza (1999), *Jamal al-Amal Va al-Alam, Seyyed Ahmad Hosseini*, al-Najaf : Maṭba‘at al-Ādāb.
- Alam al-Hoda, Seyyed Morteza (1984), *Rasaleh al-Sharif al-Murtada*, Ahmad Hosseini & Mahdi Rajae, Qom.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (- a), *Ihyaa' Ouloum Al Deen*, researcher Abd al-Rahim ibn Hussein, Hafez al-Iraqi, Dar al-Katob al-Arabi.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad, (1988 b), *al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Deen*, Beirut: Dar al-Kotab al-Elmiah, al-Atab al-Awal.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad (1988 a), *Al-Iqtisād fi al-i'tiqad*, Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Elmiah.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammed (1922), *Al-Risalah al-donyah*, Cairo: Mohi al-Din Sabri.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1961), *Al-mustasfa min 'ilm al-usul*, 2nd ed. Tehran: Ehsan Press.

- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammed (1967), *Munqidh min al-dalāl*, Beirut: Endless.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1994), *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Ali Bumolham, Beirut: Dar al-maktabatah al-Hilal, al-taba'a al-Awli.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad( - b),*Rawzat al-Talibin Va amd al-Salekin*, Mohammed Baqiyat (Ed).
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1984), *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, Musa Muhammad Ali, 1st Vol. Beirut.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad, (1982), *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Tehran: Toloe.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1966), *Mihak al-Nazar fi al-mantiq*, Beirut: Dar al-Nehzah al-Haditha.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammed (1964), *Mishkat al-anwar*, A. Afif (Ed), Cairo.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1975), *Ma'ārij al-quds fi madārij ma'rifat al-nafs*, Beirut: Dar al-Afagh al-Jadidah.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammad (1984), *Maqasid al-Falasifa*, Mohammad Khazaeli (trans.). Tehran: Amir Kabir.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammed (2010 a), *al-Jam al-Awam an Elm al-Kalam, Majmu'at rasa'il al-imam al-ghazali*, Beirut: Dar al-Fekar.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Mohammed (2010 b), *Qisṭās al-mustaqīm, Majmu'at rasa'il al-imam al-ghazali*, Beirut: Dar al-Fekar.
- Miskawayh, Abu Ali (1949), *Al-Havamel Va al-Shavamel*, Ahmad Amin & Ahmed Sacher, Cairo.
- Mansour Nejad, Mohammad (2004), *Intelect in three big skiey religin* , Tehran: Javaneh Puya Press.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn (1989), *The Philosophy of theology*, Ahmad Aram (trans.). Tehran: Alhoda Press.
- Jaspers, Karl (1999), *Spinoza*, Mohammad Hassan Lotfi (trans.). Tehran: Tarhe No.
- adman, I,(1956),*The philosophy of schopenhaver*, the modern library.
- Curley,Edwin,(1988) , *The collected works of Spinoza*, university press.
- Othman,Ali Issa, (1960). *The Concept of man in Islam, in the Writings of al Ghazali* .Cairo.
- Spinoza ,B,(2002), *complete works* , with translations by Samuel shirly , edited with Introduction and Notes, by Michael L.Morgan, Hakett publishing company, Inc , Cambridge .
- Spinoza , B , (1952) , *Ethics* , intrans. w. H . white . Great Books of the western world .Vol ,31 . Descartes , Spinoza. chicago : Enclopedia Britannica.
- Spinoza ,B, ( 1927), *the letters*, edited by a wolf , London.
- Wolfson, Harry ,(1934), *the philosophy of Spinoza* , vol I and II, Harvard..
- Spinoza,B,(1941),*Spinozas short Treatise on God,Man, Will,London*.
- Tiger , Alexande ,(2012) ,Is prired, *Al –Ghazalis Theory of Mystical cognition*,Routledge