IQBAL'S CONCEPTION OF THE HUMAN BEING: A PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARISON WITH WESTERN THINKERS

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Abstract:

This paper explores Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the human being through a comparative analysis with prominent Western philosophers, highlighting both philosophical resonances and contrasts. Central to Iqbal's thought is the concept of *khudi* (selfhood), which emphasizes individuality, creativity, and moral responsibility as pathways toward the realization of the *Insan-e-Kamil* (Perfect Man). For Iqbal, the human being is not static but dynamically evolving—first as an individual, then as part of a community, and ultimately in proximity to the Divine. This evolutionary vision is grounded in Islamic metaphysics, yet it dialogues fruitfully with Western philosophical paradigms. The study compares Iqbal's ideas with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Goethe's Faustian striving, Bergson's *élan vital*, and Kant's moral autonomy. While Nietzsche and Iqbal converge on the rejection of passive morality, Iqbal anchors empowerment in theism rather than secular will-to-power. Goethe's emphasis on perpetual striving parallels Iqbal's vision of self-becoming, though the latter integrates spiritual fulfillment. Bergson's creative evolution finds echoes in Iqbal's dynamic self, while Kant's moral autonomy contrasts with Iqbal's divinely rooted ethics and epistemology of revelation. The paper concludes by assessing the contemporary relevance of Iqbal's vision in psychology, education, ethics, and inter-civilizational dialogue. In a world fragmented by materialism and moral uncertainty, Iqbal's philosophy offers a holistic framework for human empowerment that harmonizes individuality with responsibility, reason with revelation, and human freedom with divine purpose.

Keywords: Muhammad Iqbal's conception, comparative analysis, evolutionary vision, Islamic metaphysics, Goethe's emphasis, epistemology, Iqbal's philosophy

INTRODUCTION

The question of what it means to be human has remained one of the most persistent and profound concerns of philosophy across civilizations. From classical metaphysics to modern existential thought, philosophers have continuously explored human freedom, moral responsibility, creativity, consciousness, and the ultimate purpose of

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existence. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) occupies a unique position as a philosopher-poet who reinterpreted the concept of the human being through a creative synthesis of Qur'anic metaphysics and modern Western philosophy. His dynamic idea of *khudi* (selfhood) challenges both passive mysticism and materialistic reductionism by presenting the human being as an active, responsible, and evolving moral agent.

Iqbal lived at a critical historical moment marked by colonial domination, the intellectual stagnation of the Muslim world, and the rapid rise of Western scientific and philosophical paradigms. Rather than rejecting Western thought, he critically engaged with it and entered into a deep philosophical dialogue with major Western thinkers such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Goethe. While he appreciated their emphasis on individuality, freedom, and creativity, he also identified their metaphysical and spiritual limitations, particularly their separation of reason from revelation and autonomy from divine purpose.

This article undertakes a philosophical comparison between Iqbal's conception of the human being and selected Western philosophical traditions. It aims to highlight both the areas of convergence and the fundamental divergences between Iqbal and these thinkers. By examining concepts such as *khudi*, freedom, creativity, moral autonomy, and the ideal of the *Insan-e-Kamil*, the study demonstrates how Iqbal reconstructs modern philosophical insights within a theistic and Qur'anic worldview. This comparative inquiry is significant not only for understanding Iqbal's thought but also for addressing contemporary debates on human identity, ethics, education, and civilizational dialogue.

The conception of the human being has always been central to philosophy, theology, and literature across cultures. In Islamic philosophy, Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), often regarded as the "Poet-Philosopher of the East," presents a dynamic and creative understanding of human existence rooted both in Qur'anic insights and in dialogue with modern philosophy. His philosophy of the *khudi* (selfhood or ego) redefines freedom, creativity, and moral responsibility. Iqbal was deeply concerned with reviving the intellectual and spiritual vitality of Muslims, and he saw the reawakening of the human self as the foundation for both personal development and collective progress (Iqbal, 1915/2012).

Central to Iqbal's thought is the concept of *khudi*, which he elaborates in his Persian work *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self). For Iqbal, the human self is not passive but dynamic and evolving. He rejects determinism and fatalism, emphasizing instead that human beings must develop their individuality through will, moral struggle, and creative engagement with the world. Unlike mystical traditions that stress the annihilation of the self (*fana*) in God, Iqbal insists on the affirmation and strengthening of the self, since it is through developing the ego that one comes closer to God (Iqbal, 1930/2013). Human beings, in his view, are co-workers with the Divine in the ongoing process of creation, and thus the individual is called to cultivate selfhood until it reaches its fullest potential, harmonizing with the eternal.

Iqbal's vision often invites comparison with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch (Superman). Both thinkers oppose passivity, herd mentality, and slavish adherence to tradition. Nietzsche's Superman embodies the will to power, transcending conventional morality to create new values (Nietzsche, 1883/1999). Likewise, Iqbal's self-rejects resignation, urging individuality, self-assertion, and creativity. Yet, there is a crucial divergence: Nietzsche's Superman stands alone in a world where "God is dead," and his freedom is detached from divine purpose. In contrast, Iqbal's *khudi* is grounded in theism, oriented toward fulfilling the role of God's vicegerent. While Nietzsche risks sliding into nihilism, Iqbal integrates freedom with responsibility, creativity with devotion, and individuality with divine submission.

Søren Kierkegaard, often seen as the father of existentialism, also provides an interesting comparison. Kierkegaard emphasizes the individual's responsibility, the anxiety of freedom, and the leap of faith required for authentic existence (Kierkegaard, 1844/1980). Like Iqbal, he rejects conformity and insists that true selfhood can only be realized in relation to God. Kierkegaard sees the human being as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, a tension that produces both despair and the possibility of faith. Similarly, Iqbal views human beings as straddling temporality and eternity, compelled to embrace freedom with moral seriousness. Both thinkers place God at the center of self-realization. The difference, however, lies in their emphasis: Kierkegaard stresses inwardness, solitude, and the subjective leap of faith, whereas Iqbal highlights creativity, action, and collective transformation. For Kierkegaard, faith is primarily an individual inward journey, but for Iqbal, it is the basis of constructive engagement with society.

Iqbal's engagement with Henri Bergson is equally significant. Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution and the concept of *élan vital* (vital impulse) had a lasting impact on him. Bergson argued that life is not mechanical or predetermined but an open-ended process of creativity (Bergson, 1907/1998). Time, for Bergson, is not linear clock time but qualitative duration in which freedom and novelty emerge. Iqbal adopted this view of reality as dynamic, affirming that human beings, like life itself, are centers of creativity. However, he went beyond Bergson by situating creativity within a theistic framework. For Iqbal, evolution is purposeful and guided by divine will, not blind chance. The human being's role is to actualize its freedom within this cosmic creativity, becoming a partner with God in the unfolding drama of existence.

Iqbal also shares resonances with existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, particularly in his focus on freedom, responsibility, and authenticity. Sartre's assertion that "existence precedes essence" aligns with Iqbal's view that the self must carve its own identity through choice and action (Sartre, 1943/1992). Heidegger's emphasis on "being-toward-death" also parallels Iqbal's insistence that humans confront

temporality with courage and creativity (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Yet here again, Iqbal departs from atheistic existentialism. Sartre grounds freedom in radical contingency and denies any divine purpose, whereas Iqbal grounds it in divine creativity. For Iqbal, human freedom is not meaningless but profoundly purposeful, for it participates in God's ongoing creation. This distinction allows Iqbal to offer a religious existentialism that affirms both freedom and transcendence.

The uniqueness of Iqbal's conception of the human being lies in his integration of Islamic anthropology with modern philosophy. Drawing from the Qur'anic idea of the human as *khalīfah* (vicegerent), Iqbal envisions individuals as entrusted with freedom and responsibility to realize God's will on earth (Qur'an 2:30). This requires cultivating the self to its highest potential, balancing individuality with service to community. Unlike Western philosophies that often vacillate between radical individualism and collectivism, Iqbal harmonizes the two. The perfected self is not an isolated ego but a creative personality in tune with God and humanity. In this synthesis, Iqbal avoids the pitfalls of nihilism, atomism, or excessive subjectivism, offering instead a vision of balanced freedom and responsibility.

The concept of *khudi* (selfhood) occupies a central place in Iqbal's philosophy. Introduced most systematically in his Persian poem *Asrar-e-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self), Iqbal uses this concept to emphasize the uniqueness and dignity of the human being. Contrary to mystical traditions that stressed the annihilation of self (*fana*), Iqbal affirmed its strengthening and development. For him, selfhood is not egoistic pride but the creative force within each individual, a divine trust that must be nurtured. Iqbal interprets Qur'anic verses on human vicegerency (*khalīfah*) as confirmation of this idea, arguing that humans are entrusted with freedom, choice, and responsibility (Iqbal, 2012). The cultivation of *khudi* involves developing willpower, courage, and creativity, enabling a person to rise above mediocrity and contribute meaningfully to the world. In this way, Iqbal situates human dignity in self-assertion, but always in harmony with God's will (Schimmel, 1963).

Iqbal also envisions the self as evolving through stages of growth: from individual assertion, to collective solidarity, and finally to divine proximity. In *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (Secrets of Selflessness), the sequel to *Asrar-e-Khudi*, Iqbal stresses that the self is not fully realized in isolation but matures through its integration with the community. A strong community strengthens the individual, and the individual in turn contributes to the vitality of the community. Beyond this social dimension, the self's ultimate goal is nearness to God, achieved through moral effort, prayer, and creative action (Iqbal, 1971). This dynamic process highlights that human existence is not static but an unfolding journey. Unlike deterministic or fatalistic worldviews, Iqbal conceives of the human being as a participant in an ongoing evolution, both spiritual and historical (Malik, 1971).

Related to the evolution of self is Iqbal's reinterpretation of the *Insan-e-Kamil* (Perfect Man), a concept found in Sufi thought, particularly in Ibn al-'Arabi. For traditional Sufism, the Perfect Man is one who mirrors divine attributes by effacing his own individuality. Iqbal revises this idea, arguing that perfection lies not in annihilating the self but in realizing its full potential. The *Insan-e-Kamil* is the individual who, through self-discipline, creativity, and moral responsibility, becomes God's true vicegerent on earth. This perfected human being is not detached from the world but actively engaged in shaping history and uplifting society (Iqbal, 2013). In his poetry, Iqbal often portrays the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the supreme model of the Perfect Man—an exemplar of spiritual strength, compassion, leadership, and transformative action (Schimmel, 1986). Thus, the ideal human is neither passive mystic nor arrogant rebel but one who harmonizes individuality with divine guidance.

Finally, action, creativity, and moral responsibility are indispensable to Iqbal's conception of human development. He was critical of quietism and fatalism, which he saw as having weakened Muslim societies. Inspired by both Qur'anic teachings and Western thinkers such as Nietzsche and Bergson, Iqbal emphasized that human beings must shape their destinies through effort and struggle. Action (*'amal*) is the test of selfhood, for the self grows stronger by confronting challenges and exercising freedom. Creativity reflects humanity's role as a co-creator with God, contributing to the unfolding of the world's potentialities (Bergson, 1998). Moral responsibility ensures that this freedom does not descend into chaos but remains aligned with divine values. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal (2013) insists that religion must inspire action, not resignation, and that human progress depends on individuals who take responsibility for themselves and their societies.

In sum, Iqbal's conception of the human being is a rich synthesis of Islamic spirituality and modern philosophy. By placing *khudi* at the center, he highlights individuality as the basis of human dignity. By outlining the evolution of self, he connects individual growth with community and divine proximity. Through his vision of the *Insan-e-Kamil*, he offers an ideal of human perfection grounded in responsibility rather than passivity. And by insisting on action, creativity, and morality, he portrays humanity as an active partner in creation, entrusted with shaping its destiny. Iqbal's philosophy, therefore, not only revives Islamic thought but also contributes meaningfully to global philosophical discussions about freedom, responsibility, and the meaning of human existence.

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* (Superman) provides one of the most compelling points of comparison with Iqbal's philosophy of the self. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (1999) presents the Übermensch as the ideal human being who transcends conventional morality and creates new values in a world where "God is dead." The Superman embodies the will to power, self-assertion, and the courage to live beyond the constraints of herd mentality. Similarly, Iqbal's doctrine of *khudi* (selfhood) rejects passivity, fatalism, and slavish conformity. Like Nietzsche, he urges the individual to cultivate strength, independence, and creative energy, refusing to be subdued by

tradition or blind obedience. Both philosophers thus critique passive morality and celebrate human empowerment as the path toward authentic existence.

Despite these parallels, crucial differences distinguish Iqbal from Nietzsche. Nietzsche's Superman is rooted in a secular framework, emerging from the declaration of God's death and the rejection of transcendent values. In this context, human freedom is exercised without reference to divine purpose, and the will to power risks lapsing into nihilism or unbridled egoism. By contrast, Iqbal's vision of selfhood is firmly grounded in theism. For Iqbal, the empowered self does not stand in defiance of God but finds its fulfillment in divine nearness and responsibility. The perfected self, or *Insan-e-Kamil*, is God's vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth, tasked with harmonizing individuality, creativity, and moral responsibility with divine will (Iqbal, 2012; Iqbal, 2013). In short, Nietzsche's Superman represents autonomy from transcendence, while Iqbal's self-achieves freedom precisely through transcendence.

This contrast highlights the distinctive nature of Iqbal's engagement with Western philosophy. While he admired Nietzsche's critique of decadence and passive morality, Iqbal reoriented these insights within an Islamic metaphysical framework. In doing so, he preserved the dignity of individuality without severing it from the higher moral and spiritual order. Thus, Iqbal transforms Nietzsche's challenge into a theistic affirmation, showing that true empowerment requires not the rejection of God but a creative partnership with the Divine.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), the towering figure of German literature, exercised an enduring influence on Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the poet-philosopher of the East. Iqbal encountered Goethe during his studies in Europe and was deeply struck by the German poet's breadth of vision, aesthetic sensibility, and ethical commitment. Among Western figures, Goethe was perhaps the one Iqbal admired most, not only as a literary genius but as a thinker whose philosophy of life resonated with Iqbal's own evolving conception of humanity. The connection between the two can be traced through Iqbal's writings, particularly his engagement with Goethe's *Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan*. The theme of perpetual striving in Goethe's work harmonized with Iqbal's doctrine of selfhood (*khudi*), providing him with a literary-symbolic model of human becoming. By examining Goethe's influence on Iqbal's aesthetics, ethics, and vision of perpetual striving, we can better understand the trans-cultural dialogue that shaped Iqbal's conception of the human being.

Iqbal's appreciation of Goethe begins with aesthetics. Goethe's literary works demonstrate a unity of beauty and truth, a fusion of art and philosophy that Iqbal sought to emulate in his own poetry. For Iqbal, poetry was not merely a form of artistic expression but a vehicle for awakening selfhood and inspiring action. Goethe provided a model of how art could transcend cultural boundaries while remaining grounded in one's own tradition. Iqbal particularly admired Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), a work inspired by the Persian poet Hafez, in which Goethe sought to bridge Eastern and Western cultural horizons. In response, Iqbal composed *Payam-e-Mashriq* (Message of the East, 1923), explicitly positioning it as a counterpart to Goethe's *Divan*. In this work, Iqbal celebrated Goethe as a Western thinker open to Eastern wisdom and as an exemplar of cross-cultural synthesis (Schimmel, 1963). For Iqbal, Goethe's aesthetic vision was not escapist but integrative, demonstrating that art could inspire moral renewal and spiritual depth.

Beyond aesthetics, Goethe influenced Iqbal's ethics. Goethe's writings often affirm life, action, and moral striving over resignation and passivity. In works such as *Faust*, Goethe depicts human beings as responsible agents who must wrestle with temptation, error, and moral struggle in the pursuit of higher truth. Iqbal found in this ethical outlook a parallel to his own rejection of fatalism and passivity in Muslim thought. He criticized traditions that encouraged quietism and self-annihilation, arguing instead for a philosophy of empowerment rooted in freedom and responsibility. Goethe's emphasis on action and moral struggle resonated with Iqbal's doctrine of *khudi*, where human dignity lies in cultivating individuality and exercising moral responsibility in alignment with divine will (Iqbal, 2012). In this respect, Goethe's ethics reinforced Iqbal's conviction that true spirituality requires active engagement with the world, not withdrawal from it.

Nowhere is the resonance between Goethe and Iqbal clearer than in the motif of Faustian striving. In *Faust*, Goethe portrays the scholar Faust as the embodiment of the restless human spirit. Dissatisfied with bookish knowledge and limited pleasures, Faust makes a pact with Mephistopheles in his quest for deeper fulfillment. Although Faust's journey involves error and transgression, it ultimately represents the human being's refusal to remain stagnant. For Goethe, the essence of humanity is *Streben*—unceasing striving toward higher goals. Iqbal interpreted this as a symbol of perpetual self-becoming. Like Faust, Iqbal's ideal individual refuses complacency and embraces struggle as the path to growth. The human being, for Iqbal, is never complete but always in the process of becoming, and this becoming finds its true orientation in God (Iqbal, 2013). Faust's restless pursuit of meaning thus mirrors Iqbal's vision of the *khudi*, which achieves strength and vitality through continuous effort.

Iqbal's doctrine of perpetual self-becoming is central to his philosophy. In *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self), he presents the self as a dynamic reality that must constantly evolve through willpower, creativity, and moral struggle (Iqbal, 2012). The self that ceases to strive degenerates into weakness, while the self that struggles toward higher ideals achieves proximity to God. This perpetual striving is not directionless but teleological, oriented toward the divine. Goethe's Faust embodies a similar principle of restlessness, though situated within a different cultural framework. Faust's striving is ultimately redeemed when it is recognized as a genuine expression of the human will

to transcend limitation. Iqbal found in this narrative a universal truth: that human beings are defined not by passive existence but by striving, struggle, and creative becoming (Goethe, 1994).

Importantly, Iqbal reinterpreted Faustian striving through an Islamic lens. While Goethe presents striving in largely humanistic and sometimes tragic terms, Iqbal situates it within a theistic framework. For him, striving is not simply the human rebellion against limitation but the fulfillment of a divine trust. In the Qur'an, the human being is described as God's vicegerent (*khalīfah*), entrusted with freedom and responsibility (Qur'an 2:30). For Iqbal, this means that perpetual striving is both a privilege and a duty. By striving, the self-strengthens and fulfills its role as a co-creator with God. Goethe's Faust inspired Iqbal to poeticize this idea, but Iqbal transformed it into a spiritual ethic grounded in Islam. Thus, while Goethe dramatized the tragic grandeur of human striving, Iqbal emphasized its divine purpose and moral responsibility (Schimmel, 1986).

Iqbal's *Payam-e-Mashriq* testifies to his deep engagement with Goethe. Dedicated explicitly as a response to the *West-östlicher Divan*, it illustrates Iqbal's admiration for Goethe's openness to the East. In this collection, Iqbal affirms the possibility of dialogue between civilizations through poetry and philosophy. Just as Goethe looked Eastward for inspiration in Hafez, Iqbal looked Westward to Goethe as a model of universality. Both poets, in different contexts, sought to transcend cultural boundaries while affirming their own traditions. This mutual engagement shows how Goethe helped Iqbal shape his vision of a global humanism rooted in perpetual striving and moral renewal (Iqbal, 1923/1971).

In sum, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe deeply influenced Muhammad Iqbal's conception of aesthetics, ethics, and the perpetual striving of the human being. Goethe's fusion of art and philosophy demonstrated to Iqbal that poetry could be a vehicle of moral and spiritual transformation. Goethe's ethical outlook, centered on action and responsibility, resonated with Iqbal's critique of fatalism and his affirmation of *khudi*. Above all, Goethe's Faustian striving paralleled Iqbal's idea of perpetual self-becoming, offering a literary-symbolic framework for his vision of human dignity as struggle and becoming. While Goethe's striving remained largely within a humanistic and tragic frame, Iqbal reoriented it within a theistic vision, grounding perpetual striving in divine purpose. The dialogue between Goethe and Iqbal exemplifies how cultural exchange can enrich philosophy, producing insights that transcend East and West. For Iqbal, Goethe was not only a Western poet but some kindred spirit whose vision of restless striving inspired his own philosophy of the self. Their shared affirmation of becoming over passivity remains a profound contribution to world thought, affirming the dignity of humanity as perpetual seekers of truth and meaning.

Among the many Western philosophers who influenced Muhammad Iqbal, Henri Bergson (1859–1941) occupies a unique place. Iqbal encountered Bergson's works during his European studies in the early twentieth century, particularly *Creative Evolution* (1907). Bergson's philosophy provided Iqbal with a conceptual framework to articulate his own vision of life as dynamic, creative, and open-ended. Through Bergson, Iqbal found philosophical support for his critique of mechanistic materialism and for his affirmation of spiritual intuition as a vital mode of knowing. While Iqbal did not adopt Bergson's philosophy wholesale, he appropriated and transformed key elements, especially the concept of *élan vital* and the critique of rationalism, in order to construct a vision of the self (*khudi*) as a center of perpetual striving and creative evolution.

Bergson's idea of *élan vital*, or vital impulse, is central to his philosophy of life. In *Creative Evolution* (1998), Bergson rejects the mechanistic and deterministic models of Darwinian biology, which he considered insufficient to explain the novelty and creativity of life. Instead, he argues that evolution is driven by a dynamic force that continually generates new forms and possibilities. Life, according to Bergson, is not a closed system but an open-ended process, propelled by a creative impulse that transcends mechanical causality. This view situates freedom and novelty at the heart of existence, affirming that life is not reducible to material processes but is animated by a spiritual principle.

Iqbal found in Bergson's *élan vital* a striking parallel to his own developing philosophy of the self. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (2013), he appropriates Bergson's notion of creative evolution to argue that the universe is not static but dynamic, unfolding in time through creativity and freedom. For Iqbal, this dynamism is rooted not in blind impulse but in divine will. He extends Bergson's idea by grounding it in Qur'anic cosmology, where creation is portrayed as an ongoing process: "God adds to His creation what He wills" (Qur'an 35:1). Thus, while Bergson emphasizes an immanent creative force, Iqbal interprets this as a sign of God's continuous activity in the world. Human beings, as conscious centers of will and creativity, participate in this divine unfolding. The *khudi* is therefore not a fixed essence but a becoming, a co-creative process aligned with the broader evolution of life (Iqbal, 2012).

Bergson's critique of rationalism also resonated deeply with Iqbal. In his philosophical writings, Bergson consistently contrasts two modes of knowing: the intellect and intuition. Rational, analytical thought, he argues, tends to spatialize time, breaking reality into fixed concepts and mechanical categories. While useful for science and technology, this mode of thought cannot grasp the fluid, dynamic essence of life. True understanding requires *intuition*, a direct, lived apprehension of duration (*la durée*), the qualitative flow of time and consciousness. For Bergson, intuition reveals the inner vitality of life, while rationalism reduces it to abstractions.

Iqbal embraced this critique of rationalism, though he gave it a distinctly Islamic orientation. He argued that Western materialism, rooted in a mechanistic view of nature, had reduced life to matter and obscured the spiritual dimension of existence. In his poetry and philosophy, Iqbal laments how rationalism and materialism had stripped

humanity of vitality, producing societies dominated by utility rather than meaning (Schimmel, 1963). Like Bergson, he insisted that reason alone is insufficient for grasping reality. Yet Iqbal did not reject reason entirely; instead, he sought a balance between rational inquiry and intuitive insight. For him, intuition is not a vague feeling but a higher form of knowledge exemplified in prophetic revelation. In this sense, Bergson's intuition provided Iqbal with a philosophical category to defend the legitimacy of spiritual experience as a mode of knowledge (Iqbal, 2013).

The parallel between Bergson and Iqbal becomes clearer when we consider their shared rejection of static metaphysics. Both opposed the idea of reality as fixed and unchanging. Bergson argued that time is real and creative, not an illusion to be explained away by metaphysical abstractions. Similarly, Iqbal emphasized the reality of time and change, criticizing classical Islamic and Western philosophers who viewed the cosmos as a completed system. For Iqbal, the Qur'an presents the universe as dynamic and evolving, constantly moving toward higher forms of order. Human beings, as free agents, embody this dynamism most fully. Their individuality is not to be dissolved but to be strengthened through action, creativity, and moral struggle. This emphasis on becoming, influenced by Bergson's metaphysics of time, shaped Iqbal's understanding of the self as an evolving, striving reality (Iqbal, 2012).

At the same time, Iqbal diverged from Bergson in crucial respects. While Bergson's *élan vital* is a metaphysical principle whose source remains somewhat ambiguous, Iqbal grounds the creative impulse firmly in God. For Iqbal, evolution is purposeful and teleological, directed toward moral and spiritual fulfillment. Where Bergson's intuition reveals life's inner flow, Iqbal's intuition is linked with religious experience, particularly the prophetic consciousness, which provides guidance for human striving. In this sense, Iqbal Islamizes Bergson's philosophy, transforming it into a theistic vision that integrates creativity with responsibility and spirituality.

Iqbal's use of Bergson also had a practical, political dimension. By emphasizing dynamism, creativity, and freedom, Iqbal sought to awaken the Muslim community from intellectual stagnation and colonial subjugation. His call for selfhood (*khudi*) and perpetual striving drew strength from Bergson's critique of determinism, but his goal was to inspire Muslims to reclaim their spiritual and political agency. In *The Secrets of the Self*, he portrays the self as a growing flame that must be guarded, strengthened, and directed toward God (Iqbal, 2012). This vision reflects Bergson's influence but also transcends it by placing creative evolution within a moral and religious framework. For Iqbal, life's dynamism is not merely metaphysical speculation but the ground for ethical action and civilizational renewal.

In conclusion, Henri Bergson's philosophy of *élan vital* and intuition left a significant imprint on Muhammad Iqbal's thought. Bergson provided Iqbal with conceptual tools to articulate a vision of life as dynamic, creative, and evolving, in contrast to mechanistic materialism. Iqbal appropriated Bergson's insights on creative evolution and intuition but transformed them by rooting them in Qur'anic cosmology and prophetic experience. For Iqbal, human beings are not passive products of blind forces but active participants in divine creation, endowed with freedom, creativity, and moral responsibility. The dialogue between Bergson and Iqbal illustrates how modern philosophy and Islamic thought can intersect to produce a vision of humanity that affirms both individuality and transcendence. Ultimately, Bergson's influence enabled Iqbal to craft a philosophy of selfhood that remains relevant today, emphasizing that the essence of human dignity lies in perpetual striving, creativity, and spiritual insight.

Among the great philosophers of modern Europe, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) occupies a special position in Muhammad Iqbal's intellectual engagement with Western thought. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason* laid the foundations of modern philosophy, reshaping debates on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. For Iqbal, Kant represented both a profound influence and a critical point of departure. While Kant's emphasis on freedom, autonomy, and moral dignity resonated with Iqbal's own vision of the self, the limitations Kant placed on metaphysical and religious knowledge prompted Iqbal to seek a reconstruction of philosophy grounded in revelation and spiritual experience. The dialogue between Kant and Iqbal thus revolves around three key themes: Kant's notion of moral autonomy, its comparison with Iqbal's spiritually rooted ethics, and their contrast in epistemology, particularly reason and revelation.

Kant's central contribution to modern moral philosophy lies in his notion of moral autonomy. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1997), Kant argues that morality cannot be based on external authorities, inclinations, or consequences. Instead, true morality arises from autonomy: the capacity of the rational will to legislate moral law for itself. This law is expressed in the categorical imperative, which commands that one act only according to maxims that could be universalized. By grounding ethics in reason and autonomy, Kant elevates human dignity, portraying the moral agent as an end in himself and never merely as a means. For Kant, this autonomy is the highest expression of freedom and the foundation of moral responsibility.

Iqbal, too, emphasizes freedom and responsibility, though he roots them in a different metaphysical framework. His doctrine of *khudi* (selfhood) celebrates the individuality and autonomy of the human being, insisting that self-realization requires moral choice and creative action. Like Kant, Iqbal rejects fatalism and external determinism, affirming that the self must be an active agent rather than a passive recipient of destiny (Iqbal, 2012). However, where Kant bases autonomy exclusively on reason, Iqbal grounds it in the spiritual relationship between human beings and God. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (2013), Iqbal explains that human freedom is not merely self-legislation but participation in divine creativity. The perfected self-acts with freedom, yet always in alignment with the divine will, embodying what Iqbal calls the "vicegerency of God" on earth. Thus, while Kant's moral agent

finds dignity in rational autonomy, Iqbal's moral self-achieves dignity in spiritual autonomy, where individuality harmonizes with divine purpose.

The comparison reveals both affinities and divergences. Both Kant and Iqbal insist that morality requires freedom, responsibility, and dignity, and both reject utilitarian or consequentialist ethics. Both view the human being as an autonomous agent capable of shaping his or her destiny. Yet Kant's autonomy is secular and rationalist, while Iqbal's autonomy is spiritual and theistic. For Kant, to be autonomous is to be independent of external determination, including religious authority. For Iqbal, to be autonomous is to fulfill one's divinely entrusted role as a co-creator in the ongoing unfolding of the world. Hence, Iqbal integrates freedom with submission, individuality with transcendence. In his critique of purely secular autonomy, he warns that freedom severed from divine guidance risks degenerating into egoism or nihilism, whereas freedom oriented toward God becomes the basis of true moral and spiritual growth (Schimmel, 1963).

Kant's epistemology further illuminates his contrast with Iqbal. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1999), Kant famously distinguished between phenomena, the world as it appears to us, and noumena, the world as it is in itself. Human knowledge, according to Kant, is limited to phenomena, structured by the categories of the mind such as space, time, and causality. Metaphysical speculation about God, the soul, and the ultimate nature of reality lies beyond the bounds of human reason. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (2002), Kant allows for belief in God, freedom, and immortality as postulates of practical reason necessary for morality, but not as objects of theoretical knowledge. Thus, for Kant, revelation or mystical experience cannot serve as genuine sources of knowledge, since human cognition is confined to the realm of empirical and rational structures.

Iqbal was deeply critical of this epistemological limitation. While acknowledging Kant's brilliance in exposing the limits of abstract metaphysics, Iqbal argued that Kant's system excluded vital dimensions of human experience, particularly intuition and revelation. Drawing on Bergson's philosophy of intuition, Iqbal insisted that knowledge is not exhausted by rational categories. In his view, prophetic revelation represents the highest form of intuition, one that provides access to ultimate reality in a way that reason alone cannot (Iqbal, 2013). For Iqbal, the Qur'an is not merely a set of doctrines but a living encounter with divine reality, guiding human life through direct spiritual insight. By restricting knowledge to phenomena, Kant reduced religion to moral postulates, whereas Iqbal sought to restore it as a genuine mode of knowing.

This difference in epistemology reflects their divergent views of reason and revelation. Kant sees reason as the sole basis of both science and ethics, with revelation relegated to the realm of faith without knowledge. Iqbal, by contrast, integrates reason and revelation, seeing them as complementary. Reason allows for empirical inquiry and practical life, but revelation provides guidance on the ultimate orientation of existence. For him, rationalism without spirituality becomes sterile, while spirituality without rational discipline risks degenerating into superstition. The ideal is a synthesis where reason and intuition, science and religion, work together in the creative evolution of human life. This integration enables the self to grow dynamically, participating in both worldly progress and spiritual fulfillment (Iqbal, 2012; Malik, 1971).

Muhammad Iqbal's intellectual project is best understood as a creative synthesis rather than a simple juxtaposition of East and West. Educated in Europe yet nourished by Qur'anic metaphysics and the Persian–Urdu poetic tradition, he engages Western philosophy to diagnose modernity's spiritual deficits and to recover a dynamic Islamic vision of the human being. Iqbal borrows analytic tools and critical insights from figures such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Kierkegaard, Kant, and Goethe, but he reframes them within a theistic ontology in which God's creative activity is ongoing and the human self (*khudi*) is called to vicegerency (*khalīfah*) through freedom, action, and moral responsibility (Iqbal, 2012; Iqbal, 2013). The result is neither a romantic return to premodern quietism nor an uncritical adoption of Western secular paradigms; rather, it is a constructive reconstruction that seeks to align spiritual depth with historical agency.

Iqbal borrows from Western paradigms where they illuminate human empowerment and creativity, yet he also places principled limits on them. From Nietzsche he appropriates the critique of herd morality and the summons to self-overcoming, but he rejects nihilism and replaces the godless *Übermensch* with the *Insan-e-Kamil*, the perfected person whose strength is measured by fidelity to divine purpose (Nietzsche, 1999; Iqbal, 2012). From Bergson, Iqbal learns to think of life as creative evolution powered by a vital impulse, but he theistically grounds creativity in God's ceaseless act, thereby converting *élan vital* into a sign of providence rather than blind immanence (Bergson, 1998; Iqbal, 2013). From Kierkegaard he takes the primacy of inwardness, decision, and the leap of faith, while redirecting existential anxiety toward prophetic hope and communal transformation, not solitary despair (Kierkegaard, 1980; Iqbal, 2013). Kant's moral autonomy sharpens Iqbal's stress on human dignity and responsibility, yet Iqbal refuses to confine religion to "postulates" of practical reason; revelation, for him, is not merely regulative but disclosive of reality (Kant, 1997; Kant, 1999; Iqbal, 2013). Goethe offers a literary-symbolic vocabulary—most vividly in *Faust*— for perpetual striving; Iqbal amplifies that striving into a spiritually teleological journey aimed at divine nearness and social renewal (Goethe, 1994; Schimmel, 1963). In each case, the borrowing is followed by a transcendence: Iqbal affirms what is life-giving, rejects what is corrosive, and reframes the remainder within Qur'anic horizons.

This reframing hinges on Iqbal's integration of Islamic metaphysics with modern existential questions. Against static ontologies, he insists that time is real and that creation is an ongoing event—"God adds to His creation

what He wills"—so that both cosmos and person are sites of novelty (Iqbal, 2013; cf. Qur'an 35:1). The self is not an illusion to be negated but a trust to be cultivated; its growth proceeds from individuality to community to divine proximity, as mapped in the companion poems *Asrar-e-Khudi* and *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (Iqbal, 2012; Iqbal, 1971). The modern problems of alienation, moral paralysis, and meaninglessness are answered not by retreat but by *'amal* (action), creative initiative, and morally ordered freedom. In this scheme, revelation and reason are complementary: reason disciplines and investigates the world; revelation orients reason and discloses the ultimate aims toward which rational effort should be directed (Iqbal, 2013; Nasr, 2007). Thus Iqbal transforms existential anxiety into a vocation—an invitation to co-create under divine guidance.

The synthesis also reinterprets classic Islamic categories in modern vocabulary. Tawḥīd (divine unity) becomes not only a metaphysical proposition but a civilizational grammar that demands coherence between belief and action, spirit and matter. *Khudi* renders individuality as a locus of responsibility rather than self-idolization; strengthened by will and love, the self achieves genuine autonomy precisely through obedience to a higher moral order (Iqbal, 2012; Schimmel, 1963). The prophetic model—especially the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—exemplifies the unity of contemplation and praxis, anchoring Iqbal's ideal of the *Insan-e-Kamil* as leader, lover of truth, and maker of history (Schimmel, 1986). Modern questions about freedom, authenticity, and death are therefore addressed within a horizon of hope, where mortality intensifies purpose and agency rather than dissolving them into absurdity.

What makes Iqbal's contribution distinctive in global philosophical discourse is his theistic reconstruction of modernity: a religious existentialism that is neither anti-intellectual nor anti-historical. He refuses the binary that pits secular rationalism against premodern pietism. Instead, he invites a disciplined imagination that treats scientific method as a Qur'anic imperative to read the signs of God in nature, while treating revelation as a living source that enjoins risk, reform, and ijtihād (creative legal-ethical reasoning) in changing circumstances (Iqbal, 2013; Mir, 2006). This vision underwrites a philosophy of history in which decline is not fate and renewal is a moral possibility—contingent on persons who strengthen their selves, serve their communities, and orient their striving toward the Real.

In comparative perspective, Iqbal offers a corrective to one-sided Western trajectories. To Nietzsche's heroic but godless freedom, he opposes a freedom accountable to love and justice. To Bergson's immanent creativity, he adds transcendent telos. To Kierkegaard's solitary leap, he adds communal vocation. To Kant's majestic but bounded reason, he adds revelation as an epistemic light that widens, rather than cancels, rational inquiry. To Goethe's restless striving, he adds the Qur'anic assurance that striving finds meaning in service of the good. Through these dialogues, Iqbal crafts a vocabulary in which faith becomes a force for cultural vitality, not withdrawal; individuality becomes a motor of solidarity, not fragmentation; and metaphysics becomes an ethic of history, not escape from it (Bergson, 1998; Goethe, 1994; Kant, 1997; Kierkegaard, 1980; Nietzsche, 1999; Iqbal, 2012; Iqbal, 2013).

Ultimately, Iqbal's synthesis is a wager that human beings can be both modern and devout without dilution of either. By borrowing from Western philosophy and then transcending it within a Qur'anic metaphysic of creative becoming, he bequeaths a framework in which persons and peoples can seek excellence without arrogance, autonomy without anomie, and progress without spiritual exhaustion. That framework continues to speak beyond its original South-Asian context, offering to global thought a model of religious modernity that is dialogical, reformist, and courageous—one that invites us to interpret our age not as a prison of material necessity but as an arena for God-oriented freedom.

Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the human being, grounded in *khudi* (selfhood), *Insan-e-Kamil* (Perfect Man), and perpetual striving, remains strikingly relevant in modern contexts, especially in psychology, education, and ethics. His philosophy not only critiques the deficiencies of modern materialism but also offers constructive frameworks for rethinking human potential in light of both spiritual and scientific advances. The questions of autonomy, creativity, moral responsibility, and identity that Iqbal raised are precisely the issues that shape debates in contemporary psychology and education. His vision, therefore, provides a fertile ground for dialogue between Islamic humanism and Western approaches to human development.

In psychology, Iqbal's emphasis on the dynamic growth of the self resonates with contemporary theories of self-actualization and positive psychology. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, culminating in self-actualization, parallels Iqbal's idea of strengthening the *khudi* toward higher levels of integration and creativity (Maslow, 1970). Yet Iqbal extends beyond secular models by integrating spiritual transcendence into personal growth, akin to what Maslow later termed "self-transcendence." Similarly, contemporary humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers, who emphasize authenticity, freedom, and the actualizing tendency of the individual, can be fruitfully placed in dialogue with Iqbal's conviction that the self-flourishes in openness to divine values and creative moral action (Rogers, 1995). In a time of global mental health crises, Iqbal's call for resilience, spiritual grounding, and active responsibility offers a holistic model for psychological well-being that bridges Western therapeutic frameworks and Islamic spirituality.

Iqbal's philosophy also has profound implications for education. He rejected passive modes of learning that merely reproduce tradition or mimic the West; instead, he envisioned education as a dynamic process that cultivates creativity, critical thinking, and moral purpose (Iqbal, 2013). His insistence on action (*'amal*) as a component of learning anticipates experiential and transformative models of education promoted by figures like John Dewey in the West

(Dewey, 1916). However, while Dewey stressed democratic pragmatism, Iqbal emphasized the role of spirituality and character in shaping learners into morally responsible agents. In the contemporary context of educational reform, where debates focus on fostering innovation while preserving ethical values, Iqbal's vision is highly pertinent. His ideas encourage educators to balance technological advancement with moral grounding, producing individuals who are not only skilled but also spiritually conscious and socially responsible.

Ethically, Iqbal's conception of the human being challenges both relativism and rigid dogmatism. He envisions morality as rooted in divine guidance but dynamically unfolding through human creativity and freedom. In this respect, his position aligns with modern debates about applied ethics, where rigid universalism often clashes with cultural pluralism. Iqbal provides a middle path: universal values such as justice, dignity, and compassion are reaffirmed, but their implementation requires contextual creativity and social engagement (Schimmel, 1963; Nasr, 2007). In fields such as bioethics, environmental ethics, and social justice, Iqbal's stress on responsible action and stewardship (*khilāfah*) offers a theological-philosophical foundation for addressing global challenges. His vision counters the consumerist ethic of late capitalism by emphasizing accountability to God and humanity, thus providing a moral compass for our age of ecological and social crises. Perhaps the most important contemporary relevance of Iqbal's thought lies in the potential dialogue it fosters between Islamic and Western humanisms. Western humanism, often centered on secular autonomy and reason, and Islamic humanism, grounded in divine purpose and revelation, are sometimes portrayed as irreconcilable. Yet Iqbal's work demonstrates that they can fruitfully converse. By engaging Nietzsche's empowerment, Bergson's creativity, Kant's moral autonomy, and Goethe's striving, Iqbal created a bridge between spiritual transcendence and modern existential concerns. In today's pluralistic societies, his thought can facilitate mutual enrichment: Western frameworks can gain depth through spiritual orientation, while Islamic perspectives can benefit from critical engagement with modern scientific and philosophical insights. Such dialogue is urgently needed in a global context marked by polarization, cultural misunderstandings, and the search for shared human values.

In examining Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the human being alongside major Western philosophers, several significant parallels and contrasts emerge. Like Nietzsche, Iqbal affirmed the creative power of the individual, yet he rooted this empowerment in spiritual accountability rather than secular will-to-power. From Goethe, he absorbed the aesthetic and ethical depth of perpetual striving, transforming it into a metaphysical vision of the evolving self. Bergson's *élan vital* enriched his idea of creative evolution, while Kant's moral autonomy was reinterpreted through the lens of revelation and divine purpose. These comparisons reveal that while Iqbal borrowed from Western paradigms, he consistently transcended them by integrating them with Islamic metaphysics and Qur'anic spirituality.

The enduring relevance of Iqbal's vision lies in his synthesis of empowerment, creativity, and moral responsibility within a theistic framework. His conception of the human being as dynamic, striving, and divinely oriented continues to speak powerfully to contemporary debates in psychology, education, ethics, and inter-civilizational dialogue. In a world often fragmented by materialism, nihilism, and cultural conflict, Iqbal's philosophy offers a holistic vision of humanity that balances individuality with community, freedom with responsibility, and reason with revelation. Thus, his thought remains not only a cornerstone of modern Islamic philosophy but also a vital contribution to global philosophical discourse.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the human being with major Western philosophers reveals a deep intellectual engagement marked by both philosophical harmony and critical divergence. Iqbal shares with Western thinkers a strong affirmation of human freedom, individuality, and creative power, yet he consistently reinterprets these ideas within a theistic and Qur'anic framework. While Nietzsche celebrates self-assertion through the will to power, Iqbal transforms this impulse into a morally guided struggle toward divine nearness. Bergson's creative evolution enriches Iqbal's dynamic view of life, but Iqbal grounds creativity in divine purpose rather than blind vital impulse. Kant's moral autonomy is acknowledged for its emphasis on dignity and responsibility, yet Iqbal transcends Kant by restoring revelation as a genuine source of knowledge and moral orientation. Goethe's motif of perpetual striving finds its spiritual completion in Iqbal's vision of self-becoming oriented toward God.

What ultimately distinguishes Iqbal's philosophy is his integration of freedom with responsibility, individuality with community, and reason with revelation. His doctrine of *khudi* presents the human self as an evolving reality that grows through action, struggle, discipline, and creative moral effort. The ideal of the *Insan-e-Kamil* is not a passive mystic detached from the world, nor an arrogant rebel against it, but a divinely oriented, socially engaged, and morally responsible personality.

In the contemporary world marked by identity crises, moral uncertainty, material excess, and cultural conflict Iqbal's conception of the human being remains profoundly relevant. His thought offers a holistic vision that resists both spiritual escapism and materialistic reductionism. By harmonizing empowerment with ethical responsibility and modern dynamism with sacred purpose, Iqbal provides a powerful philosophical framework for rethinking human

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dignity, freedom, creativity, and historical agency. His philosophy thus stands not only as a cornerstone of modern Islamic thought but also as a valuable contribution to global philosophical discourse.

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