

The Integration of Freud's Concept of Personality Structure and the Nafs in the Qur'an: A Study of Islamic Psychology from the Perspective of Ulil Albab

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ABSTRACT

Psychology as a widely studied academic discipline has undergone a fundamental shift throughout its history. Originally dedicated to exploring the nature of the soul (psyche), contemporary psychology has largely abandoned this dimension, redirecting its focus entirely toward the study of organismic behavior. This shift culminated in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which constructs human personality through the concepts of id, ego, and superego in a framework entirely devoid of spiritual dimensions, even dismissing religion as mere delusion. This study aims to restore the existence of psychology as a science of the soul by examining its relevance through the integration of Freud's personality structure and the Qur'anic concept of nafs (nafs ammarah, nafs lawwamah, and nafs muthmainnah) within the perspective of Ulil Albab. A library research approach was employed, systematically analyzing psychological literature, Islamic scholarship, and empirical studies related to both frameworks. The findings reveal significant points of convergence between the two concepts, alongside fundamental differences: Qur'anic personality is theocentric, dynamic, and open to divine dimensions, whereas Freudian personality is anthropocentric, static, and closed to spiritual dimensions. The Ulil Albab perspective proves to be a productive integrative framework — embracing the positive contributions of Western psychology while enriching and completing them with the depth of Qur'anic nafs concepts, enabling the study of human personality to return to its spiritual essence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychology as a discipline has a long and not entirely linear history of development. Since the mid-nineteenth century, recognized as the birth of

contemporary psychology in the Western world, there have been three main understandings of psychology: as the study of the soul (psyche), as the study of mental life, and as the study of organismal behavior [1]. These three understandings reflect the

shifting orientations that have occurred within the body of psychology over time.

The most fundamental shift occurred when contemporary psychology gradually abandoned the first understanding—namely psychology as the science of the soul—and shifted dominantly to the third understanding, namely the science of organismal behavior. [2] explain that contemporary Western psychology in its development experienced a fundamental distortion: psychology that should discuss the concept of the soul instead ignored or even knew nothing about the nature of the soul, so that contemporary psychology studied humans who do not have souls. This condition makes human psychological symptoms are simply equated with animal psychological symptoms, an epistemologically problematic simplification.

One of the most influential representations of contemporary Western psychology is Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which divides the structure of human personality into three components: the id, the ego, and the superego. Although this theory has made a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of the human psyche, it has fundamental limitations: Freud positions morality solely as a social product within the superego component, and explicitly considers religious belief to be a delusion [3]. This view is certainly not readily accepted by the Islamic scientific tradition, which places the spiritual dimension at the core of human personality.

On the other hand, Islam has a rich and profound concept of the human soul through the term *nafs*. The Qur'an explicitly describes three levels of *nafs* that reflect the dynamics of the human psyche: *nafs ammarah* which tends towards primitive urges (QS. Yusuf: 53), *nafs lawwamah* which has moral awareness and the ability to correct itself (QS. Al-Qiyamah: 2), and *nafs muthmainnah* which has achieved true tranquility in closeness to Allah SWT. (QS. Al-Fajr: 27-28). These three levels offer a much more comprehensive framework for understanding personality because they

encompass the physical, psychic, and spiritual dimensions.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between Western psychology and Islamic concepts. concluded in a comparative study that personality in the Quran is theocentric, while Freud's is anthropocentric. However, this study did not specifically address the mechanisms of integration between the two. [4], [5] linked the three *nafs* (self-centeredness) to the hierarchy of Faith-Islam-Ihsan (faith), but did not directly reconcile it with Freud's structure. [6] attempted to connect the Id-Ego-Superego with Quranic verses, but without a systematic integrative framework. This gap constitutes the research gap in this study—the absence of studies that explicitly use Ulil Albab's perspective as an integrative framework that brings the two concepts together comprehensively and systematically.

This gap encourages the importance of integrative studies based on the perspective of Ulil Albab. [7] emphasizes that the knowledge needed today is prophetic social science that contains the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence — prophetic ideals that originate from QS. Ali Imran verse 110. Furthermore, [8] emphasizes that in the process of building theories, borrowing and synthesizing with the treasure of Western knowledge need not be worried about as a westernization of Islam as long as there is a clear framework of values. This framework of values is realized through the concept of Ulil Albab in QS. Ali Imran verses 190-191 — those who combine the ability to think rationally with spiritual awareness simultaneously.

Based on the description above, this study is presented as an effort to contribute to the development of an Islamic psychology model by integrating Freud's concept of personality structure (id, ego, superego) with the concept of *nafs* in the Qur'an, seen through the perspective of Ulil Albab.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Human Personality Structure According to Sigmund Freud

[9] was an Austrian psychologist known as the founder of psychoanalysis. [10] explain that Freud's school of psychoanalysis emphasized the analysis of the relatively stable and enduring structure of the human psyche, with the main characteristic of determining human activity based on the mental structure consisting of the id, ego, and superego. Freud divided aspects of personality structure into three categories: biological (id), psychological (ego), and sociological (superego), without touching on religious aspects at all.

2.1.1 Id (Biological Aspect)

The id is the most primitive component of personality, operating on the pleasure principle—always striving to directly satisfy biological urges without considering reality or moral values. Its primary driver is libido [9]. [10] illustrates the dynamics of the id through Surah Yusuf, verses 23-24—when the Prophet Yusuf was tempted by Zulaikha, he certainly felt the urge of the id, but his educated superego made his ego reject it. This proves that the Qur'an had described the dynamics of the id-ego-superego long before Freud formulated it.

2.1.2 Ego (Psychological Aspect)

The ego develops from the Id as a result of interaction with the real world and operates based on the reality principle. The ego resides at the preconscious level and functions as a mediator between the demands of the Id and the limitations of reality and the Superego [11].

2.1.3 Superego (Sociological Aspect)

The superego represents moral values and social norms absorbed from the environment, existing at the conscious level. Freud stated that the superego's morality is merely external, social, and relative values, not inner values. Freud even considered belief in religion to be a delusion—a view fundamentally at odds with the Islamic perspective [7].

2.2 The concept of Nafs in the Qur'an

In Islamic scholarly tradition, the human soul is described through the term nafs. Mujib and [6] explain that the nafs has a combined nature between the body and the soul, thus acting as a mediator connecting the two. [12] adds a neuroscientific perspective that the three levels of nafs are correlated with the brain's limbic system as a biological mechanism for regulating emotions, so that nafs is not merely a spiritual concept but also has a neurological basis. The Qur'an mentions three levels of nafs personality that describe the dynamics of the human psyche.

2.2.1 Ammarah's Personality (Nafs al-Ammarah)

The ammarah personality tends toward carnal nature and the pursuit of the pleasure principle, compelling the heart to act according to primitive instincts, thus becoming a source of evil and reprehensible behavior [12], [13] add that the ammarah personality correlates with the level of Islam in the spiritual hierarchy—a person remains at the level of fulfilling basic Islamic law without deep inner awareness.

God willing رَبِّي

"Indeed, lust always leads to bad deeds, except lust for which my Lord has given mercy" (QS. Yusuf: 53).

2.2.2 Lawwamah's Personality (Nafs al-Lawwamah)

The lawwamah personality has gained the light of the heart and awakens, improving the balance between the urges of the desires and the control of reason. Sometimes, bad deeds still arise due to their zulmaniah nature, but they are then reminded by divine light and repent [9] explain that the lawwamah nafs correlates with the level of faith—a person begins to feel the vibrations of inner awareness and the urge to improve themselves.

وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

"And I swear by a soul that deeply regrets (itself)" (QS. Al-Qiyamah: 2).

2.2.3 The Personality of Muthmainnah (Nafs al-Muthmainnah)

The muthmainnah personality has been given the perfection of the light of the heart, abandoning blameworthy traits, and is theocentrically oriented as the highest level of conscious personality [11]. [1] explain that this condition correlates with the level of Ihsan—the highest devotion in which a person seems to see God in every action.

رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً

"O calm soul, return to your Lord with a heart that is pleased and pleased with Him" (QS. Al-Fajr: 27-28).

2.3 Ulil Albab's Concept as an Integration Framework

Ulil Albab literally means people who have perfect reason, mentioned 16 times in the Qur'an with the main reference to QS.

Ali Imran 190-191. Ulil Albab are those who combine the ability to think rationally (aql) with spiritual awareness (dhikr) simultaneously — not just intellectually intelligent. This is in line with the mission of developing Islamic Psychology put forward by [14]: not to deny other psychological theories, but rather to present a balance in choosing a model for developing the discipline of psychology. Ulil Albab's perspective in this study serves as an epistemological bridge that brings together Western psychology with the concept of nafs in Islam in a critical and productive manner.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative library research design using a comparative-integrative approach. The data were obtained from primary and secondary sources, including the Qur'an, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic literature, books and scholarly articles on Islamic psychology, and previous empirical studies discussing personality structure, the concept of nafs, and Ulil Albab. The data collection process involved identifying, selecting, and classifying relevant literature concerning Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, as well as the Qur'anic concepts of nafs ammarah, nafs lawwamah, and nafs muthmainnah. The collected data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis by interpreting the essential characteristics of each concept, followed by comparative analysis to identify their similarities and fundamental differences. Subsequently, an integrative analysis was conducted using the Ulil Albab perspective as an epistemological framework that combines rational inquiry and spiritual consciousness to formulate a more comprehensive understanding of human personality within Islamic psychology.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter comparatively analyzes the relationship between Freud's personality structure (id, ego, superego) and the concept of nafs in the Al-Qur'an (nafs ammarah, nafs lawwamah, nafs muthmainnah), with Ulil Albab's perspective as an integrative framework.

4.1 Meeting Point between Freud's Personality Structure and the Concept of Nafs

Both Freud's theory and the concept of nafs acknowledge that human personality is complex and dynamic—composed of several interacting layers. Both acknowledge the dimensions of primitive drives, rational considerations, and moral dimensions within the human being.

4.1.1 Id and Nafs Ammarah: Similarities in the Principle of Primitive Drives

The id and the instinctive nafs both operate based on the drive for pleasure without moral consideration. The id operates based on the pleasure principle [15], paralleling the instinctive nafs, which pursues the principles of pleasure and drives actions based on primitive instincts [16]. Both reflect the universal recognition that humans possess a primitive side that tends toward fulfilling biological urges.

4.1.2 Ego and Nafs Lawwamah: Similarities in Evaluative Functions

The ego and the self-conscious nafs both play a role in evaluating actions between primitive urges and moral standards. The ego functions as a mediator, balancing the demands of the id, reality, and the superego [15]. The self-conscious nafs depicts a personality that awakens and restores its balance [15]. Both represent human consciousness evolving toward moral maturity.

4.1.3 Superego and Nafs Muthmainnah: Similarities in Moral Orientation

The superego and the self-conscious nafs are both morally oriented as the pinnacle of personality. Freud positioned the superego as the highest component [15], paralleling the self-conscious nafs as the highest, theocentric level of personality [15]. Both acknowledge that the pinnacle of human personality is related to the moral dimension.

4.2 Fundamental Differences between Freud's Personality Structure and the Concept of Nafs

4.2.1 Closed System vs Open System

Freud's theory constructs personality as a closed system with no room for the divine dimension, even considering religion as a delusion [15] asserts: the Quranic personality is theocentric, while Freud's is anthropocentric, focusing only on human rationality. In contrast, the concept of the nafs constructs personality as an open system—the human nafs is always connected to God as the ultimate source; the closer one is to God, the higher the level of nafs attained.

4.2.2 Static Personality vs Dynamic Personality

In Freud's theory, the Id-Ego-Superego is a permanent structure that cannot be eliminated, only controlled. This reflects a relatively static personality. Meanwhile, the concept of nafs views personality as dynamic and evolving vertically—from ammarah to lawwamah to muthmainnah [15]—a profound transformation involving a spiritual dimension.

4.2.3 Relative Morality vs. Universal Morality

The superego is formed from the internalization of relative social values—which vary across cultures. Freud stated that the morality of the superego is external social values, not internal values [15]. The nafs muthmainnah, on the other hand, originates from a universal divine nature—making Allah's pleasure the highest standard across cultures and eras [17]. This is what makes the

concept of nafs more epistemologically comprehensive.

Table 1. Comparison of Freud's Personality Structure and the Concept of Nafs

Aspect	Freud	The Concept of Nafs (Islam)
Primitive Level	Id (pleasure principle)	Nafs Ammarah
Evaluative Level	Ego (reality principle)	Self-Compassion
Moral Level	Superego (social values)	Nafs Muthmainnah (divine values)
System Properties	Closed (without divine dimension)	Open (connected to God)
Moral Source	Relative (socio-cultural)	Universal (divine nature)
Change	Static (permanent structure)	Dynamic (can develop)
Views on Religion	Delusion (Freud)	The highest core of personality

4.3 Ulil Albab's Perspective as an Integration Model

[7] asserts that borrowing and synthesizing from Western knowledge need not be considered a Westernization of Islam as long as we have a clear framework of values. This framework of values is embodied in the Ulil Albab—those who combine reason and dhikr (Quran, Ali Imran: 190-191).

Ulil Albab's perspective offers three main contributions. First, it allows for the positive contributions of Freud to be recognized without accepting his view that rejects the spiritual dimension. Second, it encourages academic critique of Freud's limitations by demonstrating the nafs as a more comprehensive framework. Third, it leads to the development of integration—bringing together modern psychology with the richness of the concept of the nafs for a more complete and divinely entrenched understanding of personality.

Ulil Albab's model aligns with the spirit of [18] prophetic social science (2006, p. 87): a science that guides transformation based on humanization, liberation, and transcendence. An Ulil Albab who studies personality psychology will use his knowledge to help humans transition from the nafs ammarah (self-centered) to the nafs muthmainnah (self-centered) — a transformation that encompasses intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the comparative analysis that has been conducted, this study produces three main conclusions.

First, Western psychology—especially Freud's theory—has made an important contribution in mapping the complexity of the human psyche, but consciously leaves the spiritual dimension out of its study as an empirical-materialistic paradigmatic choice, so that as noted by [15], contemporary psychology studies humans who are soulless.

Second, the concept of nafs in the Qur'an offers a more comprehensive framework for personality — encompassing biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions at once — and views personality as something dynamic and capable of developing vertically through a process involving reason, heart, and closeness to Allah SWT.

Third, Ulil Albab's perspective has proven to serve as a productive integrative framework—it neither rejects the contributions of Western psychology, nor accepts them without the filter of Islamic values. This spirit aligns with [15] idea of prophetic social science, which encourages the development of science based on humanization, liberation, and transcendence.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

First, for the development of Islamic psychology, this integrative study needs to be developed more deeply through empirical research that tests the relevance of the concept of nafs in clinical psychology, counseling, and character education in Indonesia.

Second, for practitioners of Islamic education and counseling, the three levels of the nafs can serve as a practical framework for individual mentoring. More concretely, a character education curriculum based on Ulil Albab can be designed with three levels: the first level helps students recognize and control the urges of the nafs ammarah through disciplined worship; the second level develops moral awareness of the nafs

lawwamah through self-reflection and self-reflection; and the third level directs the internalization of the theocentric values of the nafs muthmainnah through spiritual strengthening. This is supported by the findings of [19] who proved that therapy based on dhikr, patience, and tawakkal has been shown to have a significant positive impact on mental health.

Third, for Muslim students and academics, this study emphasizes the intellectual responsibility to develop a model of scholarship that is rooted in Islamic tradition while engaging in critical dialogue with Western scholarship—this is the essence of being an Ulil Albab in the contemporary era.

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