

An Odyssey of the Mind: Exploring Ghazalian Theory of Soul and Freudian Psychoanalysis

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Abstract:

The present study aims at exploring the venue to the divine insights of Ghazalian thought to be integrated into the study of Freudian psychoanalysis, with its fundamental emphasis on the similarities and variances between them. Besides the current study proceeds from the assumption that though Freudian psychoanalytic theory has provided insightful psychological interpretations, equally appropriate readings result from analyzing Ghazalian theory of soul. This analytical approach may lead to an alternative critical agenda for the better understanding of human psyche. In addition, it is also hoped that the insights yielded by this research study may develop into new forms of understanding in the realm of Islamic studies.

Key words: Mind, soul, psyche, nafs.

The working of human mind has been a topic of renewed interest to man since time immemorial. There have been a large number of poets, writers, philosophers and psychologists who have endeavored to interpret it. The hugely complex phenomena in human beings is nature, which can be approached through several means. Recently, there has been much sought-after interest in the critical analysis of the Western worldview

which induces to study man in a highly-compartmentalized manner, considering him chiefly as a material being. In trying to gain a profounder and thorough understanding of human nature, Western psychological theories have tended to lay emphasis on one aspect of the self (e.g., psychoanalysis sheds light on the conscious/unconscious mind, cognitive psychology concentrates on thoughts, and behavioral psychology lays bare the human behaviour), emphasizing more on the biological and psychical dimensions of an individual, sometimes ignoring the metaphysical side of human nature.¹ As a result, the spiritual being in man is either less acknowledged or just rejected entirely. For this reason, several efforts have been made by social scientists who recognize the want to discern personality and human psychology from a universal perspective, concluding that the spiritual component of man is too vital to ignore in regard to human psychological and temperamental studies.²

Briefly speaking, this complete development has increased our knowledge about what religion articulates about human psyche, its origin and development. However, due to the assertion that religious ideology regarding human psyche lacks experiential substantiation, there still exists lesser interest in this area of study. Though this seems to be a valid concern on the part of researchers, yet there is no denying that some of the most prominent theories in psychology (i.e., personality and clinical psychology) are far from being scientifically established.³ Similarly, a vast treasure of religious teachings and understandings that have exercised a significant influence on the thoughts, behaviours and attitudes of countless generations of people, need to be considered worthy of attention while reviewing human psyche. So, spiritual frameworks, provided by eminent religious scholars, should be given due consideration as a binding field of investigation.

Thus, the present study intends to provide the venue to the spiritual insights of Ghazalian theory of soul to be compared with Freudian psychoanalysis, since both the theorists have enriched the world with their innovative and revolutionary ideas. Although these Islamic and Western models offer somewhat similar attitude towards the inner workings of human mind, however, there exist a number of variances in their philosophical underpinnings. The major concern of the present study is to make an in depth conceptual analysis of these resemblances and variances.

Theoretical Framework

The basis of theoretical framework for the present study is the theories propounded by Ghazali and Freud, whose ideas, regarding the intricacies of human mind are greatly connected. If, in the West, Sigmund Freud has enriched the world with his psychoanalytic theories; in the Eastern world, there have been various approaches that render great help in understanding an individual's personality. Among them, Ghazalian theory of soul explicates, in very clear terms, a distinctive concept of individual growth and development.

Ghazali and Freud have enriched the world with their latest and pioneering ideas. A close examination of their theories reveals prominent resemblances and variances in their "structural and topographic"⁴ dimensions. Ghazalian masterpiece *Ihya Ulum ud Din* (1993) (*The Revival of Religious Sciences*) is extensively known for his psychological insights where he divides the psyche into three categories based on Quran: the first category is *nafs e ammara* which urges man to satisfy socially unacceptable longings and indulge in evil⁵, Freud identifies this concept of psyche as the *id* part of the human mind⁶; The second category is that of *nafs e lawwama*, which is the conscience that leads man towards right or wrong⁷, modern psychology calls it *superego*⁸; The third category is that of *nafs e mutmainna*, which is a self that reaches the ultimate peace.⁹

There seems to be a complete negligence for this component of human mind in modern psychology, on account of its being secular. Moreover, Ghazali also lays emphasis on the pivotal role of *aq'l* which is the rational part of human psyche.¹⁰ Freudian construct of *ego* greatly resembles it, emphasizing on the effective use of reason and intellect.¹¹ Besides, both the theorists agree that human mind is prone to irrational, primitive behaviour, under the influence of *nafs e ammara* or *id*, despite the existence of a neutralizing force, i.e., *aq'l* or *ego*. The conflicting forces of *nafs e ammara* or *id* and *nafs e lawwama* or *superego*, operating on varying levels, cause psychological conflict and nervousness in their desire for mental peace. Above and beyond, both the models are dynamic which propose the existence of two conflicting forces in individuals, influencing their thought, emotion and behavior.¹² Interestingly enough, at this juncture, the major question arises about these similarities found in the psychological content of Ghazalian theory and Freudian psychoanalysis. What might explicate the fact that the thoughts promulgated by Ghazali in the 11th century are so similar to Freudian psychoanalysis of the 20th century? Could the reason be that Freud was influenced by Ghazali? Or maybe these resemblances affirm to the common source of human wisdom. Although these questions are much interesting, their answers lie beyond the limits of this study.

1. Affinities in The Structural, Dynamic and Topographic Models by Ghazali and Freud

A close examination of the Freudian and the Ghazalian theory reveals prominent similarities in “structural and topographic” dimensions of both the models.¹³ Human psyche comprises various structures, each possessing a diacritical and highly-defined function. Freud (1923/2010) considers the three components of personality (i.e., *id*, *ego*, *superego*) constantly functioning in a different direction, which results in psychological conflict and anxiety and a craving for peace of mind. The exact dynamic of *id* and

superego characterizes *nafs e ammara* and *nafs e lawwama*, the evil and celestial components of human mind respectively, while Freudian construct of *ego* is similar to the Ghazalian concept of *aq'l*. Human mind is prone to irrational, primitive behaviour, under the influence of *nafs e ammara* or *id*, despite the existence of a neutralizing force, i.e., *aq'l* or *ego*. So, these conflicting forces, operating on varying levels, cause psychological conflict and anxiety in their desire for mental peace. Besides, both the models are Dynamic which suggest that “there are forces in conflict within the individual and thought, emotion and behaviour are the resultants of these conflicting forces”.¹⁴

1.1 Similarity between *Nafs e Ammara* and *Id*

As mentioned earlier, Ghazalian *nafs e ammara* and Freudian *id* are the strongest forces within human psyche which operate outside the conscious awareness. The behaviour of *al-Ammara* or evil-instigating soul is the foundation of all longings, intensified by appetites and lust, motivating a person to “immediate gratification, irrespective of moral consequences”.¹⁵ If, on one hand Freud (1933/1964) considers it the “dark, inaccessible part of our personality.... a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations”,¹⁶ on the other hand, Ghazali views it as “evil commanding psyche”,¹⁷ forming the most essential constituent of *nafs*. Both the theorists agree that the processes of *nafs e ammara* or *id* are unconscious, its existence can be comprehended from certain feelings, thoughts and behaviours whose central function is to incite man to evil by breaching the moral boundaries.¹⁸ Moreover, these forces also comprise prohibited wants and instincts, which are administered by the pleasure principle. The viler aspects of human psyche, including physical and sexual appetites, inclination towards evil and socially undesirable conduct,¹⁹ are the outcome of the forces of *nafs e ammara* or *id*, working on the unconscious level. Thus, a detailed analysis of the psychological

disposition of the selected characters reveal the universality of Ghazalian *nafs e ammara* and Freudian *id* and the close resemblances between their structure and functions.

1.2 Similarity between *Aq'l* and *Ego*

Ghazali and Freud have shown somewhat similar attitude on various aspects of *aq'l* or *ego*. As both *aq'l* and *ego* are the conscious parts of the psyche, use logical thinking, and mediate between the deep levels of the psyche and the external reality. Freudian *ego* develops out of modification of the *id*, playing the role of mediator “between the *id* and external reality”.²⁰ Furthermore, *ego* provides a socially acceptable outlet to the immediate demands of *id* which aim at pleasure gratification.

However, Ghazali offers a leading place to the intellect or *aq'l* which comprises reason, the capacity to discriminate “right and wrong, good and evil, the real and the illusory, all of which enable man to get nearer to God”.²¹ The unique characteristic that distinguishes a man from animal is *aq'l*, which has the potential either to elevate him to the status of angels or debase him to the level of animals. In addition to this, as Ghazali highlights, man has been endowed with all faculties for the realization of *fitrah* which can only be achieved by proper application of *aq'l*.²² Besides, this reasoning faculty of *aq'l*, can only be applied through knowledge. In this way, *aq'l* or *ego*'s use of logical thinking, mediates between the deep levels of conscious mind and the external reality. It also provides a socially acceptable outlet to the unrestrained pleasure of *nafs e ammara* / *id* and the restraint-seeking attempts of *nafs e lawwama* or *superego* by delaying the gratification of instinctive drives until they can be properly fulfilled.

1.3 Similarity between *Nafs e Lawwama* and *Superego*

Ghazalian construct of *nafs e lawwama* and Freudian *superego* play the role of the conscience.²³ They strongly criticize the desires of *nafs e ammarah* or *id*, and constitute the ideals that a person attempts to reach. Also, Freud splits the *superego* into

two parts: “the punitive and the ‘ego-ideal’ aspects.”²⁴ The punitive aspect of the *superego* develops out of social norms which reproaches a person and causes feelings of guilt, in case of his yielding to the demands of *nafs e ammara / id*. It also offers a crucial choice either to change behaviour or continue seeking the destructive path of evil inclinations. In contrast, the ‘ego-ideal’ aspect of the *superego* characterizes social norms, values or ethical principles, the emotional attachment and respect which helps in socializing man’s behaviour.²⁵ This state of human psyche remains in continuous awareness “scrutinizing, criticizing and self-accusing”.²⁶ Both Ghazali and Freud agree on the functioning of *nafs e lawamma* or *superego* as to inculcate a sense of guilt and regret. The *superego* is all-seeing and its all-pervasive eye makes a distinction between acts and intentions. This strong power develops a feeling of remorse even for those acts which are just envisioned but never carried out.

Moreover, there is a slight difference between Ghazalian concept of *nafs e lawamma* and Freudian *superego*. Ghazali considers it in the mid of its journey towards its spiritual evolution and perfection, the highest state which can only be achieved when appetent soul is opposed and driven off, while Freudian model fails to capture this spiritual aspect of *superego* on account of his secular foundations.

2. Variances in the Theoretical Foundations

The first striking difference between both the theories lies in the fact that Ghazalian theory of soul is built on certain established and sound foundations of Quranic concept of human mind,²⁷ and his major contribution lies in his delineation of its potential psycho-spiritual structures, so it may safely be called “religious/spiritual/theological theory”.²⁸ Throughout his works, Ghazali emphasizes on the significant part played by the religious and moral experiences to access knowledge. With regard to the profound impact of Quranic revelation on Ghazli’s philosophical

outlook, it needs to be remembered that Ghazalian structure and function of human mind is not complete without an appropriate consideration of the Quranic purpose and meaning of human creation and present life.²⁹ While dealing with the issues regarding the complexities of human body and its intellectual and spiritual dimensions, he refers to the “holistic Quranic view of human nature”.³⁰ Thus, it might be safely asserted that the fundamental underpinning of the Ghazalian theory is “creationism and the pivotal role of the divine-devil antinomy”.³¹ On the contrary, Freudian psychoanalysis primarily concerns itself with biological-evolutionary model. Darwin’s theory of evolution has exercised tremendous impact on Freudian thoughts as much as that he includes human beings as another species of animals and this belief has paved the way for some of the foundations of his advancement of psychoanalysis.³² Moreover, Darwin’s Evolutionary theory discards the idea of the existence of any creator and eliminates any engrained and deep-rooted religious sentiment of divine or satanic influence on human psyche. Therefore, Freudian psychoanalysis offers no corresponding terminology for soul. His anti-religious attitude is widely-known, when in his famous work, *Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927/1961) formally divulged his belief in the non-existence of any integral religious sentiment in human psyche. He decisively holds all the religious beliefs and practices as the result of the repression of instincts, intra-psychic trauma, and vulnerability. He considers religion merely a “mass delusion”.³³ This attitude has greatly influenced his overall judgment of human beings and he fails to identify human personality in an integrated manner.³⁴ Basically, his entire focus revolves around the hidden impulses and intra-psychic conflicts residing within unconscious.³⁵

2.1 Variances in the Portrayal of All-encompassing Concepts of Human Psyche

Another chief difference between Ghazalian and Freudian theories lies in their profundity of covering all the dimensions of human personality. Freud fails to capture all the features of human psyche and ignores human personality in a holistic manner, linking it to only sociocultural factors and communal associations.³⁶ Somewhat similar views have been presented by Nobles (1973) and Paranjpe (2010) when they argue that Freud's central focus is on individual problems which is insufficient for communal or spiritual dimensions of human living.³⁷ Freudian psychoanalysis ignores the spiritual dimension of human personality, considering it in the realm of philosophy. His major concern is with physical, biological aspects only. Commenting on this, Achoui (1998) suggests that in order to achieve a better understanding of human mind, an "interactive and integrative" (p.82) approach is needed, which may bridge the gap in current psychological theories.³⁸

Contrary to this, Ghazali (1993) considers man as being gifted with two dissimilar qualities, body and soul, possessing the twofold nature, corporeal and spiritual. Thus, human being becomes an alloy of closely interrelated spiritual and bodily forces.³⁹ However, it is the soul that mechanizes the physical body to perform tasks, whereas, body plays the role of just a vessel, offering a very suitable place for the soul to reside in and functions as a bridge between bodily and spiritual domains.⁴⁰

2.2 Variances in the Interpretation of Sexual Instincts

Another important point of variance between Ghazali and Freud is the nature of importance given to the issue of sex. In Freudian model, sexual instinct has been considered the most controlling force in human psyche and has been considered as "sex intoxicated psychologist",⁴¹ while Salter lashes out at him for even "sexualizing" soldiers' worry about death, mother's worry about children and man's worry about

failure.⁴² Quite similarly, even Freud's followers as Carl Jung (1875-1961), Alfred Adler (1870-1937) and Karen Horney (1885-1952) vehemently criticize Freud for his overmuch emphasis on sexuality. In addition to this, many researchers have ascribed the western sexual revolution that occurred in the last fifty years, to Freudian multitudinous sexuality. The outcome of this sexual revolution, which has been brought to light in the form of "homosexuality, exploitation, lesbianism, nudism, etc." is the cause of rapid proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases.⁴³ However, Ghazali (1993) considers sex as a propensity, an energy of life which serves the nutrition and growth of human body. In Ghazalian philosophy, human sexuality is potentially a cataclysmic force that needs to be restrained within marriage.⁴⁴ Besides, since sexual desire has been ingrained in men and women to secure the survival of humanity, Ghazali construes sex as wholly a mechanism to reproduction. Erected on this theological edifice, Ghazali makes available a distinguished and exalted purpose to sexual desire, which eventually becomes something superior to the urge for sensual pleasure. For this reason, human race seems to partake in God's creation and erotic pleasure is reduced to being of slight value, "the pleasure which accompanies it [sex]—pleasure which would be unrivaled were it to last—is a harbinger of the promised pleasures in paradise".⁴⁵ Moreover, Ghazali (1993) argues that sexual urge needs to be controlled and gratified appropriately through the institution of marriage which is the only way of maintaining man's virtue and shielding him from moral degradation. Putting it briefly, Ghazalian interpretations regarding sex, diverge widely from Freudian construal in his elaboration of when (marriage) and why (procreation) of sexuality. Ghazali emphasizes on a balance of material desire and desire for the hereafter; dealing with the former through marriage increases the possibility of the latter".⁴⁶ Thus, Ghazali acknowledges the paramount value of sex as an anticipated

and natural activity and gives it a lofty status for its being the only mean of human survival.

2.3 Variances in the Description of Intrinsic Nature of Good and Evil

Another important variance between the two models lie in their difference in opinions regarding the inherent nature of good and evil. Exploring the attitude of Freudian psychology in relation to the intrinsic nature of man, it is evident that he holds an exceptionally pessimistic approach as he finds a little goodness in human beings. Primarily Freudian human nature is *id*, having a strong “Hobbesian foundation”,⁴⁷ it is governed by the self-centered pleasure principle and the yearning for sex; man’s reclusion makes him an impulse-driven animal - violent, ferocious, afraid of death and in search of unhindered sexual pleasure.

Contrarily, Ghazalian approach is an objective one, as he makes a detailed analysis of various aspects of man’s psyche, considering him neither all good nor all evil, always battling against his evil proclivities. According to Ghazalian theory, a man is never impervious to evil and no matter how evil he may be, he cannot be completely deprived of virtuosity. There exist various factors that lead him towards either vice or virtue, like erudition, milieu, biology and personal values. Ghazali views man as an amalgamation of angelic and satanic propensities. Also, Ghazali has faith in the notion that a child is born with the *Fitrah* (primeval nature, free from any tint of sin) which is an Arabic term that discloses certain positive dimensions of human nature. There is no room for any intrinsic evil of human nature as its negative representation as a source of evil and wickedness, is evidently repudiated. A child is born in this world with the purity of soul, while human degeneracy is merely unpremeditated and contravention of his original nature. Religion plays a significant role to guide human nature to its ultimate

destination of perpetual contentment. Over and above that, Ghazali also rejects the dogma of the “Original Sin” as supported by Freud.

Innate in the idea of *fitrah* is the world view that each child is born with an intrinsic proclivity to worship God. Though he is born with *Fitrah*, yet he has a potential to evil incitements which needs to be restrained and directed towards divinely inspired guidance. While Freud made a number of important discoveries in his study of human nature and most of his contribution in the realm of psychology is exceptional, however, there remains a need to counter Freud's anti-religious overtones. The childhood phase, which should be seen as a period of innocence on the part of children, when they learn to explore and acclimatize themselves to the environment and others around them, has been vitiated by Freud with indecent stories, rivalry and forbidden sexual wishes.

2.4 Variance in the Functions of *Aq'l* and *Ego*

Though Ghazalian *aq'l* and Freudian *ego* seem to be the same, yet it is vital to note that there is a dissimilarity concerning the functions that *ego* and *aq'l* serve. Freudian *ego* acts as a mediator between the internal and external forces to reach eventual pleasure. Putting it differently, *ego*'s main function is to maintain discipline over *id* to fulfill its disorderly demands in a socially acceptable and licit manner, just to maximize pleasure.

Contrary to this, Ghazali offers the same logic in his debate about the major function of *aq'l* to discipline *nafs e ammara*, but he varies as regards to its purpose which is to control the devilish elements of *nafs e ammara*.⁴⁸ Besides, his debate takes another different standpoint when he asserts that *aq'l* has an intrinsic angelic element. According to him, angels are pure intellect so man's faculty of *aq'l*, helps him in getting closer to God, making him capable to detach himself from the Satanic stimuli. *Aq'l* plays the most important role in curbing the satanic forces within psyche, thus, forestalling these forces

through proper channels.⁴⁹ He maintains that man's attainment of a state of harmony relies on *aq'l*'s success in lessening the Satanic impact, ultimately making it futile. Since Freud constructs his whole edifice on the animal component of humans as the most forcible force of psyche, he, here, fails to limn any spiritual element in the workings of *ego*.

2.5 Variances in the Achievement of the Optimal State of *Nafs e Mutmainna*

The most noticeable divergence between the approaches of both the theorists seems to be the undisguised importance given to *nafs e mutmainna* in Ghazalian theory. While Freud (1923/2010) contends that human psyche attains its optimal state when the rational *ego* drives the whole psyche, there subsists no equivalent term as Ghazalian *nafs e mutmainna*, the utmost state of psycho-spiritual development that ends in the state of ultimate calmness and serenity. As *nafs* attains an effective control over its appetites and yearnings, it develops into calmness and serenity by becoming free of tension. Then again, in Freudian psychoanalysis, the unconscious is the habitat of sexual lusts like Oedipus complex, etc., having no room for the divine qualities. Guenon (2001) deems it "one of the serious malefaction of psychoanalysis".⁵⁰

Likewise, with regard to the disregard of spirituality in Freudian theory, Ayadin is of the opinion that since Freud rigidly ignored the *nafs e mutmainna* dimension of human psyche, thus, it becomes obvious that the objective of modern psychology is not to lead people to spiritual advancements, while, the ultimate goal of Islam is to achieve this dimension.⁵¹ Ghazali, himself, as he asserts in his autobiography, happens to reach that state after coming into contact with the truth from mystical path. Similarly, Iqbal (1954) adds that "Modern psychology has not yet reached even the outer fringe of religious life, and is, as yet, far from the richness and diversity of what is called religious experience".⁵²

While summing up the whole argument, the above analysis demonstrates that although there are many similarities between the psychic components of Ghazalian theory and Freudian tripartite model of Psychoanalysis, yet, when it comes to the origin of these structures, they significantly deviate in some of their fundamental assumptions. Thusly, in the Western theories of the self, it seems, that no one has grasped the whole truth, which is not due to faulty nature of various theories but because most of them are partially flawless. If this is a true assumption, then, the best way to construct and prove a view regarding self could be “not to pit the various theories against one another but rather to synthesize across them”.⁵³ Current trends in interdisciplinary postulation between science and the humanities validates the hypothesis held here, that not only can we act better in envisioning and knowing human nature, but the genuineness of human nature will become richer as we conjure up seemingly discordant viewpoints into dialogue.

Conclusion

Speaking of the article, it might be concluded that though, in the West, important achievements have been made so far to explore the intricacies of human mind and behaviour, yet not a single western model is truly all-inclusive in itself in providing insight into the interplay between body, mind and soul, and the outcomes of this interplay on human personality development. These major drawbacks in understanding human mind, raise the questions regarding the extent of human knowledge about self, and the depth of human understanding about personality. Even multiple Western schools of thought have proved to be limited, as they kept ignoring a dimension of the self that many regard as vital to being human, i.e., the spiritual dimension.

Though, Ghazalian theory of soul and Freudian psychoanalysis have developed in utterly different times and in dissimilar social, cultural, and religious frameworks as models of the individual human psyche, but they offer diverse possibilities for the growth and development of human mind. This interdisciplinary study has established the fact about the similar functioning of human mind, despite the variations in geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds. The rationale behind profound ideological similarities in Ghazali and Freud, is the depth of their psychological experiences and insight into human consciousness. However, despite certain profound similarities, the study has also recognized variances arising out of particular contexts and peculiar frames of reference in which these theories are produced. The radical variance in both the models lies in the fact that Freudian theory is characterized by a secular, biological-evolutionary nature while Ghazali lays the foundation of his psycho-spiritual structure of human psyche on divine revelation. Existing trends in interdisciplinary theorizing between science and the humanities validate the premises held here, that not only can we perform better in visualizing and knowing human nature, but the genuineness of human nature will become clearer as we conjure up seemingly discordant views into dialogue.

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