

The Balance of the Soul: AL-Ghazali's Perspective in Solving Existential Issues

Jarman Arroisi¹, Hammada Hanifi^{2*},

^{1,2} Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Jl. Raya Siman, Dusun I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, Jawa Timur 63471

*jarman@unida.gontor.ac.id

Abstract. This paper addresses the growing phenomenon of existential emptiness in modern society, a condition shaped by materialism, hedonism, and secularization. Such emptiness manifests as inner anxiety, loss of purpose, and detachment from spirituality. The central issue explored is how al-Ghazali's concept of spiritual balance in Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din can offer both philosophical and practical solutions to this crisis of meaning. Employing a qualitative methodology through literature review, this study examines al-Ghazali's framework of tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the self) as the path toward spiritual equilibrium. The process includes self-commitment, self-monitoring, introspection, struggle against desires, self-sanction, self-reprimand, and consistency in virtuous action. By moderating the impulses of anger and desire, spiritual balance produces virtues such as patience, gratitude, and courage. Findings indicate that al-Ghazali's thought not only provides a classical spiritual paradigm but also remains highly relevant for addressing contemporary existential emptiness. It underscores the importance of orienting human life toward recognition of and devotion to Allah as the ultimate source of meaning. Thus, al-Ghazali's conception of spiritual balance can serve as a practical remedy and enduring paradigm for enhancing spiritual well-being and restoring life's purpose in the modern era.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, Existential Emptiness, Ihya Ulum al-Din, Soul.

1. Introduction

Among all of God's creations, the human being is regarded as the most perfect creature, endowed with intellect, conscience, and spiritual capacity that are not possessed by other beings. This distinction indicates that humans have the obligation to know themselves and to understand their position in the world. To recognize their true identity and purpose in life, humans should refer to the source of their creation, namely Allah SWT, whose guidance is conveyed through the verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These sources must be studied and examined in depth using a comprehensive approach, both theological and philosophical. The Qur'an and Hadith serve as the primary guidance for Muslims and contain principles that direct humans in understanding the essence of their existence and their responsibilities as Allah's servants and as His vicegerents (*khalifah*) on earth.

With all the advancements achieved in the fields of material development, technology, and information, modernity has brought about significant transformations in human life. Although these advancements offer various conveniences and freedoms, they also entail profound psychological and existential consequences. Many individuals experience inner anxiety and a sense of emptiness amidst the fast-paced and efficient rhythm of modern life. This phenomenon emerges when human beings distance themselves from the transcendental values that function as the spiritual and moral foundation of their lives. Modern societies often neglect the deepest human needs for meaning, connection, and inner wholeness, while prioritizing individualism, competition, and achievements driven by external factors. As a result, although outwardly appearing active and successful, many people experience a hidden existential crisis, a condition often referred to as "existential vacuum." In such circumstances,

it becomes increasingly essential to rediscover life's meaning and to seek a spiritual connection with the deeper realities of existence.[1]

In such circumstances, the need for inner balance becomes increasingly urgent. Al-Ghazali, a renowned scholar and eminent Sufi of the medieval period, offers the concept of spiritual balance which refers to the harmonization of the intellect ('aql), desire (nafs), heart (qalb), and spirit (rūḥ), as elaborated in his monumental work *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. According to Al-Ghazali, mental well-being or spiritual equilibrium is the integration of psychological functions reflected in the firmness of faith ('aqīdah), noble character (akhlāq), purity of the heart from moral vices, the cultivation of social ethics, and the attainment of happiness in both this world and the hereafter. The balance he proposes is not merely theoretical, but constitutes a fundamental necessity in shaping the human being in a holistic manner—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.[2]

Amid the widespread rise of existential emptiness, the relevance of al-Ghazali's thought becomes increasingly evident in offering pathways for restoring meaning in life. His concept of spiritual balance is not merely a spiritual remedy, but also a conceptual framework for addressing the alienation and existential void experienced by contemporary society. By emphasizing the importance of synergy between rational and spiritual dimensions, this concept serves as a significant alternative for rebuilding the integrity and wholeness of the human person in the modern era.[3]

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research method, which is used to understand what, how, and where a particular phenomenon occurs. [4] Moreover, qualitative research emphasizes both deductive and inductive reasoning processes, as well as the dynamic relationships among the observed phenomena. [5] This method is applied so that the researcher may evaluate the arguments, concepts, and methodologies used by the figures discussed in this study, thereby requiring interpretative analysis of their works in order to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings they convey.

2.1. A Brief Biography of Al-Ghazali

His full name is Abū Ḥāmid ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī. Imam al-Ghazali was born in the city of Ṭūs in the region of Khurasan in the fifth century Hijri, in the year 450 H/1058 CE, and passed away in 1111 CE. He was born in a society whose population was largely composed of Shia Muslims and Christians, and his father was known as a pious and devout scholar ('*ālim ṣāliḥ wa warrā'*) who only consumed what he earned through his own labor and livelihood.[6]

His passion for education had been evident since childhood. Many people admired him as one of the leading Sufi figures due to his strong determination to learn, his intellectual brilliance, and the sociocultural environment of his family. He began his studies in Ṭūs under Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Razakānī, and later in Jurjān under Imam Abū Naṣr al-Ismā'īlī. He then continued his education in Nīshāpūr under Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī, known as Imam al-Ḥaramayn. It was there that he studied '*ilm al-kalām*, logic (*manṭiq*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*).[7]

During his time in Nīshāpūr, al-Ghazālī not only studied under Imam al-Ḥaramayn, but also learned from Abū al-Faḍl ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Farmawī al-Ṭūsī, a disciple of the Sufi master al-Qushayrī. Afterward, he undertook seclusion (*uzlah*), spiritual discipline, and personal Sufi practices. However, these periods of seclusion and Sufi exercises did not immediately lead him to the realization of truth; in other words, he did not attain the stage at which a Sufi receives direct inspiration (*ilhām*) from God. This condition persisted until the death of al-Farmawī in 1084 CE.

However, despite the many worldly comforts and achievements al-Ghazālī enjoyed, they did not bring him peace or happiness. He became restless and suffered both spiritually and religiously. He experienced doubt, even questioning whether the senses, reason, '*ilm al-kalām*, philosophy, and esoteric teachings could truly lead to ultimate truth and the happiness of the hereafter. For instance, the difficulties he encountered in the field of philosophy did not help him attain the truth he sought.

He believed that philosophy not only deviated from the orthodox Sunni teachings he had studied, but was also inconsistent in its methods of proof. Similarly, he viewed the discipline of kalām as employing a largely dogmatic approach. Yet, al-Ghazālī was not disappointed with the purpose of kalām, for he understood that the theologians’ primary aim was to safeguard the doctrines of tawhīd from error. Rather, his disappointment lay in the fact that the certainty he sought could not be found within ‘ilm al-kalām itself.[6]

He then sought guidance from the more extreme Sufi groups known as the Bāṭiniyyah and the Ismā‘īliyyah in his pursuit of ultimate truth. However, on several occasions he experienced disappointment, as these groups, who based their teachings on the authority of their infallible Imam (the spiritual leader of the Bāṭiniyyah and Ismā‘īliyyah), could not maintain consistency in their reasoning, which at times contradicted the very doctrines they claimed to follow. This inconsistency stemmed from the difficulty of relying solely and uncritically on the Imam as the absolute source of truth.[8]

Al-Ghazālī’s works exert a profound influence on Islamic thought in particular, and on humanistic thought in general. His principal work, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, contains his original and mature ideas. This monumental text encompasses knowledge, spiritual guidance, foundational principles of faith, and intuitive understanding (ma‘rifah). In it, he calls Muslims to cultivate noble character and virtuous conduct. He also emphasizes the purification of the soul and its elevation so that it may attain the spiritual rank of ihsān. Among his other well-known works are *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, *al-Iqtisād fī al-I‘tiqād*, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, and many more.[9]

Al-Ghazālī focused his efforts on the teachings of ethics and Sufism—namely the moral and spiritual-psychological dimensions—by reviving the religious sciences and the inner spirit of Islam. He believed that these aspects are the root causes of societal crises, and likewise, the sources from which security, order, and genuine happiness can emerge. He observed that although his society enjoyed material prosperity and luxury, their intellectual, spiritual, and moral life was undergoing decay.[10] Although al-Ghazālī chose the path of Sufism and promoted Islamic spirituality, he did not neglect worldly life nor did he devote himself exclusively to the hereafter. Rather, he sought to establish a balance between the two.

2.2. Definition of Existentialism and Emptiness

In philosophy, human existence has been a frequently discussed and very popular topic at one time. Existentialism is a reaction to previous philosophical thinking that was too academic and lifeless. In some cases, existentialism emerged as a protest against a type of rationalism that prioritized intellectual understanding over reality. Existentialism was also a reaction against the tendency to view humans as objects rather than individuals; existentialism also emphasized the idea that the meaning of truth has both subjective and objective elements. [11]

Existentialism aims to prioritize human values and excellence in life. Humans are the main axis of existence. This understanding stems from disappointment with the global instability caused by World War I and II. It supports human freedom in thinking and acting without limits. [12] Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was the first thinker, followed by Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), and Albert Camus (1913-1960). In addition, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has been associated with this school of thought, although more accurately he represents nihilism. [13]

Existentialism studies the birth, life, and death of a human being who is ‘alone’. Human existence precedes thought, feeling, and ethics. This understanding highlights the authenticity of human beings that is different from the rest of the universe. [14] He emphasized the meaning of existence, freedom, and human creative responses to life. [15] It is humans who create the meaning of life through the paths they choose for themselves, without interference from anyone else. [16]

Paul Tillich defines existentialism in three categories: existentialism as a worldview, as a protest movement, and as an expression. [17] Tillich's idea seems to indirectly suggest that existentialism is a common component of any philosophy; it is humanity's attempt to describe its existence with all the difficulties it faces and to find ways to resolve them. Wherever existentialism appears in works of art and literature, and wherever the human condition is difficult to describe philosophically and theologically, that is where existentialism appears. [18]

Existentialism emerged as a critical response to the condition of modern humans, who feel isolated, have lost meaning, and do not know where to go, especially as a result of World War II and the extraordinary growth of industrialization. People are often trapped in routines that alienate them from their essence in a fast-paced, instant, and productivity-focused modern society. People began to lose their sense of values and feel an existential emptiness as a result of globalization and consumerist culture. In contemporary life, humans' reflective awareness of themselves has been lost, replaced by material achievements that have no real meaning. [19]

Existentialism offers a way out of this problem by viewing humans as independent, free subjects who are responsible for their own lives. It is an attempt to free people from rigid social structures and give them space to think deeply about the true meaning of life. [20]

People often struggle to find their own identity, which can make them feel alienated from themselves in an increasingly complex modern world. This happens when someone feels trapped in social structures that demand conformity and prevent them from having the freedom to develop their own potential. Existentialism challenges people to regain awareness of themselves and their life choices in order to overcome the loss of identity that often occurs in everyday life. [21]

Many problems arise as a result of modern domination that refers to rationality and advances in science and technology in the midst of life. This is caused by the rational domination of science and technology, which results in secularism in thought and lifestyle, and conflicts with religion. Most psychologists believe that contemporary human problems stem from loneliness or spiritual emptiness. [22]

No matter how restless, anxious, or dissatisfied they are with what they have achieved, spiritual crises and emptiness arise. People become dissatisfied to the point that they forget the divine dimension and lose their understanding of the direction and purpose of their lives. They are able to achieve material success, but not immaterial success. So, their happiness often ends in the use of drugs, alcohol, and other bad things. [23]

Modern life often neglects spiritual needs, which are actually an important part of basic human needs. The fulfillment of human needs as a whole experiences imbalance and inequality as a result of this neglect. Consequently, it is not surprising that modern human life is often filled with fear, confusion, and inner disagreement.

2.3. The Concept of the Soul According to al-Ghazali

The soul in Arabic is *نفس*. The soul can also be referred to as life, spirit, or character. [24] Linguistically, in the al-Munjid Dictionary, soul (*nafs*) is defined as spirit (*ruh*) and 'ain. [25] In religious and philosophical studies, the soul is not a physical part, but now the meaning of the soul has shifted to include the physical as well.

The word *nafs* has many meanings, including human nature, spirit, reason, which is related to the body, blood flow, and exhaled air (breath). So, linguistically, *nafs* means something soft, which plays an important role in the body and cannot be sensed. [26]

Al-Ghazali describes the soul as an essential identity that is permanent, a knowing subject, independent (not located anywhere), and eternal. [27] This shows that the immaterial substance of the human core is more important than its physical aspects or functions. This is because the physical has a place, while physical functions do not stand alone. This shows that the immaterial substance of the human core is more important than its physical aspects or functions. This is because the physical

has a place, while physical functions do not stand alone. According to al-Ghazali, all members of the body, both external and internal, are merely attributes that will die when the body dies without being followed by the death or destruction of the soul. [27]

Al-Ghazali divides the types of soul into three parts, namely the plant soul (al-nafs al-nabatiyyah), the animal soul (al-nafs al-hawaniyyah), where the animal soul has two potentials, namely the mover and the perceiver, and the human soul (al-nafs al-insaniyyah).

1. The soul of a plant refers to the initial perfection of natural matter that has the means to receive and process food, grow, and reproduce. [28] The soul of plants has three potentials that are shared by the souls of humans and animals, namely the potential for nutrition, growth, and reproduction. These three potentials have roles and continuity, where the potential for nutrition plays a role in maintaining the survival of individuals, the potential for growth plays a role in perfecting the physical form of individuals, and the potential for reproduction plays a role in preserving their generation. Equipped with a natural desire to survive, which is given by God to every living creature, every living creature, including humans, will tend to take care of themselves and try to preserve their generation. Therefore, the potential for nutrition serves to replace what has been broken down in individuals, the potential for growth plays a role in the growth process, while the potential for reproduction plays a role in forming human organs and bodies in accordance with certain sizes and appearances as a continuation of the lineage of individuals who have died. [29]
2. The soul of a living being is the initial perfection of natural substance that has the ability to recognize things related to the body and act according to its own will. This soul has two potentials shared between the human soul and the living soul, namely the potential as a mover (al-muharikah) and the potential as a recognizer (al-mudrikah). [28]
3. The human soul or rational soul refers to the initial perfection of the natural body, which has the ability to act based on rational choices and make decisions based on information that is understood in its entirety or universally. [28] The human soul has two unique potentials that are closely related to mental activity. First, there is practical potential, also known as practical reason. Practical reason is the potential that drives the human body to carry out certain activities based on mental considerations and demands, and the resulting behavior is called morality. [30] Second, theoretical potential, also known as the nazari mind. Theoretical potential is the potential of the 'aqli to recognize and 'print' images or forms that are kulli in an abstract manner without being bound to matter. If the image is not yet abstract, then this potential acts to abstract or abstract it so that the image has no connection to matter or any object of knowledge. Therefore, this potential serves to recognize universal images in an abstract manner without being bound to material or objects, or acts to abstract them. [28]

Based on the above description, it can be understood that the human soul has several levels based on the potential possessed by the three parts of the soul. According to its function, the plant soul is at the lowest level because it is only responsible for nutrition, growth, and reproduction to ensure the survival of the masses. Next is the animal soul, which has the functions of the plant soul and perception. This role of perception produces sensations, whether pleasant or painful, which trigger the desire to obtain pleasure or avoid pain. This phenomenon cannot occur without the ability to move, which shows that the animal soul has the ability to move and be active. After that, the human soul plays the same role as the plant and animal souls. Intellect is the potential that distinguishes the human soul from the other two souls. This potential allows humans to understand useful information without having to think, such as our belief that “the whole is greater than its parts” and that “two opposing properties cannot occur in something at the same time,” as well as through proper thinking processes, such as logical methods. [29]

2.4. Non-Physical Elements of Human

According to al-Ghazali, there are four non-physical elements that form the inner reality of humans, namely the heart (qalb), spirit, soul, and intellect. The first is the qalb. In *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Imam

al-Ghazali explains that the qalb is not merely a physical organ in the chest, but rather a subtle substance (*lathifah*) that is spiritual and immaterial. The qalb is the center of human consciousness, the seat of knowledge, inner experience, moral awareness, and the object of divine call and accountability. However, the qalb has a certain relationship with the physical heart, even though the two are not identical. Al-Ghazali acknowledges that most humans experience confusion in understanding the true nature of the relationship between the spiritual qalb and the physical heart. To illustrate this relationship, he uses several philosophical analogies, such as the relationship between accident and substance, attribute and the attributed, user and tool, or between something that occupies a place and the place itself. These analogies show that the spiritual qalb uses the body as a means, even though ontologically it exists on a higher level of existence and is not material in nature. Thus, understanding the qalb must go beyond an anatomical approach and enter the realm of metaphysics and Sufism. [31]

The term *ruh*, according to Imam al-Ghazali, has two important meanings that must be understood. *Ruh* (*jism latif*) is a “subtle body” that originates from the physical heart cavity and spreads throughout the body through pulsating arteries. In addition to facilitating sensory functions such as smell, perception, hearing, and sight, the circulation of the spirit serves as the source of life. Al-Ghazali describes this process by referring to the light of a lamp inside a house. The spirit is like a lamp, and life and perception are like the light that radiates from it throughout the body. In the medical world at that time, the spirit was considered a subtle vapor produced by the heat of the heart. However, the second meaning of the spirit refers to a subtle substance that is spiritual and non-physical, which is responsible for the human ability to know and understand. In Surah al-Isra' verse 85, Allah says, “Say: The spirit is the affair of my Lord.” This indicates that the spirit is a divine element. Al-Ghazali considered the spirit to be something extraordinary and divine, and that the essence of the spirit is truly beyond the comprehension of most people. According to al-Ghazali, these two dimensions of the spirit are very important for understanding the essence of humanity. [31]

Imam al-Ghazali said that *nafs* (soul) has two important meanings in his explanation. The first meaning refers to the power within humans that consists of anger (*ghadabiyyah*) and base desires (*syahwiyyah*), each of which is often the source of bad traits. In this context, Sufis consider the *nafs* to be the source of various bad tendencies within humans. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of “killing” or subduing the *nafs* through *riyadhah* (spiritual training) and *mujahadah* (struggle against oneself). The words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, “Your greatest enemy is your *nafs*, which is between your two sides,” indicate that destructive motivations within humans are their main enemy, not external enemies. In the second sense, *nafs* refers to the subtle and spiritual substance described earlier; that is, the true nature of humans—the soul and its deepest essence. The form or characteristics of this *nafs*, however, will vary depending on the circumstances. *Al-nafs al-mutma'innah*, or the tranquil soul, is referred to when the soul submits to Allah's commands and is free from anxiety and carnal desires. Therefore, al-Ghazali states that the *nafs* can not only function as an enemy that must be controlled, but it can also function as a noble soul that is tranquil and close to God, depending on the spiritual state and inner struggle of its owner. [31]

The last is *aql*. According to Imam al-Ghazali, there are two main meanings of the function of knowledge in humans. First, *aql* refers to the power or ability to know the essence of something deeply, so that *aql* refers to the nature of knowledge itself, which resides in the qalb. In this sense, *aql* is understood as an intellectual quality inherent in the spiritual heart of humans. Second, *aql* can also refer to the entity that captures and understands knowledge, namely the heart—in the sense of a subtle substance, not merely a physical organ. Al-Ghazali says that every individual who has knowledge has an entity that exists independently within them that allows knowledge to emerge. In this framework, knowledge is considered an inherent property of the entity, and this property is certainly different from the substance being described. Therefore, the word *aql* can be used both to indicate the level of knowledge a person possesses and the vessel or center of consciousness that functions as the place where knowledge itself emerges. As a result, *aql* is not only understood as a thought process, but also

as a complex inner reality that plays an important role in human consciousness, perception, and spiritual relationship with truth. [31]

The four main terms in Imam al-Ghazali's non-physical elements are interrelated inner components that shape the essence of humanity. According to al-Ghazali, these four components show that humans are not merely physical beings; they are complex spiritual entities that require strengthening of the spiritual dimension and tazkiyat an-nafs (purification of the soul) to achieve gnosis and closeness to Allah.

3. Spiritual Balance in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*

From an Islamic perspective, spiritual balance is defined as a state in which a person's mindset and inner condition are in harmony and support each other to form a stable, healthy, and meaningful personality. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of harmony between the various aspects of the soul—namely, the mind, desires, heart, and spirit. The Qur'an teaches humans to use their reason in contemplating the signs of Allah's greatness (Al-Baqarah: 164), while a pure heart full of faith will influence a person's behavior and become a source of inner strength to face life's trials. [32]

Al-Ghazali states that spiritual balance (tawāzun al-nafs) is the key to spiritual health and the main requirement for achieving true happiness. The human soul contains various potentials, both noble and base, with two dominant potentials: the potential for anger (quwwah al-ghadabiyyah) and the potential for lust (quwwah al-syahwiyyah). Anger is necessary for self-defense against threats, while lust is necessary to fulfill biological needs and sustain life. However, both must be kept in balanced control. Excessive anger will lead to violence and destruction, while anger that is too weak will cause humans to lose their courage and honor. Similarly, uncontrolled lust will drag humans into despicable behavior, while lust that is too weak will kill enthusiasm and gratitude for Allah's blessings. [33]

Often, humans neglect to maintain this control, allowing anger and lust to dominate their responses to life's events. In fact, complete freedom for both will only destroy the soul. However, al-Ghazali emphasizes that without anger, a person will not be able to protect themselves from danger, and without lust, a person will not have the drive to improve their quality of life through the goodness that Allah has given them. [34] Therefore, the golden rule in ethics is moderation in these traits, so that human behavior continues to lead to happiness.

This moderation is in line with the concept of ethics, where every potential is used to give birth to praiseworthy qualities such as patience, courage, politeness, and gratitude. Achieving this condition requires tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul) through steps such as self-commitment, self-monitoring, introspection, struggle against negative tendencies, self-punishment, and self-reprimand. Through this process, the soul is restored to its pure nature so that it is able to display the angelic qualities that are the highest essence of humanity. Thus, balance of the soul does not only mean controlling negative impulses, but also directing all human potential to know and serve Allah. [31]

According to al-Ghazali, the greatest benefit of this process is the attainment of peace of mind as a result of “spiritual alchemy.” After undergoing spiritual purification and cleansing negative traits, the soul becomes more resilient and content. [35] Mental illnesses—such as anxiety and restlessness—stem from excessive attachment to the world. These illnesses can be cured through tazkiyat al-nafs, which in the modern context is similar to cognitive-behavioral therapy. Because humans have the ability to change, their behavior can be redirected toward goodness.

The happiness referred to by al-Ghazali is not the endless rush of adrenaline pursued by modern society, but rather a stable spiritual condition. To overcome sadness, humans do not need constant entertainment, but must find meaning in life. According to al-Ghazali, the true meaning of life is to know Allah, obtain His mercy, and devote oneself fully to worship. [31]

Conversely, negative psychological conditions such as prolonged stress can interfere with physical health. Post-traumatic emotional distress can increase heart rate, leading to an increased risk of stroke, heart disease, and other health problems. [36] Anxiety, stress, unhappiness, and other psychological problems weaken the body. Conversely, happiness based on spiritual balance provides benefits for overall health. [33]

4. Handling Existentialism Issues

A person can be said to have fallen into existential emptiness when they lose their meaning and purpose in life. This often occurs in the modern world due to the dominance of consumerist culture, materialism, and secularism, which shift the orientation of life from transcendental values to worldly achievements. Despite living amid technological advances and material comforts, modern humans are often trapped in routines that distance them from the essence of humanity. The loss of reflective awareness, lack of spiritual connection, and loss of connection with divine life goals exacerbate this situation. It can lead to anxiety, confusion, and depression, as well as dangerous compensatory behaviors such as substance abuse or aimless thrill-seeking. [37]

In the context of existential emptiness, al-Ghazali's teachings are relevant because they teach self-control and a clear way of life: knowing and serving Allah. This differs from the Western existentialist perspective, which emphasizes the absolute freedom of each individual without any attachment to an external goal. Al-Ghazali states that true happiness is attained through self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *muhasabah al-nafs*, and *taqwiyyah al-nafs*. [38] Therefore, al-Ghazali's thinking provides philosophical solutions to overcome the loss of meaning in contemporary society as well as spiritual solutions for individuals.

One of them is about self-awareness (*ma'rifat an-Nafs*). According to Helwa, human psychological conditions can be improved with seven recognized components of self-actualization. [39] Knowledge of the inherent characteristics of human beings is the first component of self-knowledge. One of these characteristics is humility. In his explanation of the cure for arrogance, al-Ghazālī links knowledge of Allah with knowledge of humility. If he knows his Lord, he will realize that only Allah deserves to be honored and respected. Here, it is clear that al-Ghazālī uses knowledge of Allah and knowledge of oneself as a cure for one of the diseases of the heart. [31]

The second part of knowing oneself is understanding one's own value. He describes the relationship between animalistic desires and the human self as the relationship between a person and something foreign to them. He argues that the spiritual entity of humans can only know Allah and see Him in the afterlife. This view does not create a contradiction between spirituality and enjoying lawful things. On the contrary, al-Ghazālī's firm tone here aims to emphasize the noble position of humans as creatures. Psychologically, this knowledge increases a person's self-confidence and prevents them from getting caught up in inappropriate desires. [31] He believes that the only way for humans to become spiritual entities is by knowing God and seeing Him in the afterlife. This knowledge increases a person's sense of self-worth psychologically. In addition, it makes them less involved in inappropriate desires.

Al-Ghazālī points out the third part of self-knowledge, which is knowing that humans are deceitful. One of the deceptions he mentions is saying that in the past, it was easy to do good because there were many helpers, but now, in order to avoid being ridiculed, you must be like the people of your time. Therefore, understanding the deceptions of the self helps a person to be vigilant and return to relevant knowledge in order to make the right decisions and avoid being deceived by false ideas. [40]

The fourth component is understanding what you do not have. On more than one occasion, Al-Ghazālī stated this knowledge. Al-Ghazālī argued that the knowledge necessary to obtain the praiseworthy trait of fear of Allah includes awareness of one's own flaws. The trait of fear of Allah arises quickly when a person realizes these flaws and the dangers they will face. For example, al-Ghazālī says that

remembering past sins is a cure for a scholar who feels arrogant towards great sinners, so that arrogance disappears from his heart. [31]

The fifth component is knowing your own motivation. For example, one way to restrain yourself from anger so as not to violate Allah's law and reason is to think about what makes you angry and reduce your desire for revenge. One reason—whispered by Satan—is that restraining anger shows that you are weak, so that others will look down on you. In this context, al-Ghazālī reminds us of important religious information, such as the benefits of forgiveness (*'afw*) and restraining anger (*kazm al-ghayz*) for the sake of Allah. Thus, a person will attain a higher degree in the eyes of Allah, which is far more important than what can be seen by humans. [31]

The sixth component is understanding the characteristics of praiseworthy and blameworthy heart traits. It is possible that these signs exist within yourself or can be seen from outward behavior. In general, al-Ghazali explains that the same signs indicate the onset of heart disease: loving something more than Allah and having difficulty carrying out the original duties of the heart; knowing and loving Allah and prioritizing the happiness of obeying Him over other pleasures. One sign of a despicable trait is being lazy in worship because of expecting Allah's mercy; a sign of a praiseworthy trait is repenting and being diligent in worship. [31]

Knowing how human nature relates to one another is the seventh component. Al-Ghazālī points out that avoiding certain despicable traits will help eliminate other despicable traits. He also explains the expected consequences of various traits so that people are aware of the bad traits that can arise from other traits without realizing it. [31]

Ultimately, understanding these seven components is beneficial for mental health, such as protecting oneself from heart disease caused by overly high self-esteem (arrogance) or overly low self-esteem (excessive self-deprecation), as well as overcoming existential emptiness that stems from spiritual emptiness and ignorance of oneself. Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that understanding true intentions requires a deep understanding of the secrets of deeds and the depths of the soul, as well as how the human soul works.

Al-Ghazali states that humans can only experience eternal happiness after achieving perfection of the rational soul. This perfection depends on the ability to maintain balance of the soul and consistency in good deeds throughout one's life in this world. True happiness can be achieved through controlling anger and lust, as well as *tazkiyat al-nafs*. Even after the soul leaves the body, it still has the ability to correct its shortcomings in order to achieve perfection. [41] According to Al-Ghazali, the characteristics of eternal happiness are continuous happiness without sorrow, knowledge without ignorance, and sufficiency without deficiency. Thus, true happiness is an inner feeling that grows naturally through *mujahadah* and purification of the soul, not material happiness as Westerners believe. According to al-Ghazali, true meaning and happiness can only be obtained through a balanced soul centered on the recognition and devotion to Allah. This view is also an answer to modern existential emptiness.

5. Conclusion

Al-Ghazali considers the concept of spiritual balance to be an important concept that combines the spiritual, moral, and psychological aspects of human beings. Al-Ghazali states that controlling the two main potentials, anger and lust, is the only way to achieve spiritual balance (*tawāzun al-nafs*). These two potentials should not be eliminated; instead, they must be trained to cultivate virtuous qualities such as patience, courage, gratitude, and modesty. *Tazkiyat al-nafs*, or purification of the soul, is necessary in the process of achieving this balance. This is done through stages of commitment, supervision, introspection, struggle against lust, punishment, reprimands, and consistency in goodness.

This study recommends that further research examine the concept of spiritual balance discussed by al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* in a more comparative manner with Sufi works and modern

psychology, in order to enrich understanding and broaden theoretical perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach is expected to formulate an integrative and relevant conceptual model for resolving the crisis of meaning in the modern era. In addition, empirical research is needed to test the application of the tazkiyat al-nafs method in counseling, character education, and spiritual therapy practices, so that the relevance of al-Ghazali's thoughts on the phenomenon of existential emptiness does not only stop at the conceptual level, but can also be effectively implemented in the lives of individuals and society.

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