“Variation” in Approaches to Human Psyche: Exploring Al-Ghazālī’s Influence on Freudian Psychoanalysis

Tanzia Mobarak

Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT
This paper undertakes a comparative study of Imam Al-Ghazālī’s and Sigmund Freud’s conceptions of the self or personality and explores whether, Al-Ghazālī may have influenced Freudian psychoanalysis. An influential 11th-century Persian scholar, Al-Ghazālī remains one of the most widely read Muslim scholars who wrote freely on topics ranging from jurisprudence, logic and ethics to theology and spirituality. A lesser-explored area of his oeuvre is his contribution to psychology, manifested expressively in his monumental Ihyā’ ulūm Al-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). The early 20th-century Austrian scholar Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, is revered as the founder of psychoanalysis – the theory and practice associated with the study of mental processes. The methodology adapted for this study is the Variation theory of comparative literature developed by Shunqing Cao. This is because Variation is especially suitable for conducting such cross-civilization comparative studies. Through this critical endeavor, the paper aims to investigate the possibility of cross-cultural influence and foreground the potential of a rarely applied non-Western theoretical framework.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 23 August 2021
Accepted 6 January 2022

KEYWORDS
Al-Ghazālī; nafs; Sigmund Freud; psychoanalysis; variation theory; Comparative Literature

CONTACT Tanzia Mobarak tanzia.m.monisha@gmail.com Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh

Facebook handle: tanzia.m.monisha Academia: https://juniv.academia.edu/tanzia_monisha

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
1. Introduction

Psychoanalysis, or the theory and practice developed primarily by the early 20th century Western scholar; Sigmund Freud for studying mental processes, has long served as the key theoretical framework within English studies to explore the workings of the human psyche and behavior in literary texts. On the other hand, there is a relative and conspicuous lack of academic discussions on non-Western theories about the workings of the human psyche. They remain further eschewed from these discussions when it comes to applying them to explore the workings of the human psyche and behavior in literary texts. Three crucial predicaments need to be taken into account in this regard. Firstly, psychoanalysis itself is not a unified body of thought. Generations of critics such as Félix Guattari (1930–1992), Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), Julia Kristeva (1941–), Luce Irigaray (1930–), and so forth who have developed on, differed from, and even opposed Freudian psychoanalysis only verify the idea that even within psychoanalysis, the perspectives on the workings of the human psyche remain highly contested. Secondly, psychoanalysis does not provide any universal, empirically proven, or objective explanation for the human psyche. The objectivity and facticity of psychoanalysis claimed by its proponents remains a controversial topic within academic (i.e., humanities and social sciences) and clinical (i.e., psychology, psychiatry, medicine) spheres, chiefly due to its lack of empirical data to support its arguments (Clemens; Grunbaum; Hook; Lake 12; Smith; Webster). Finally, Freudian views on the human psyche were not developed in a vacuum. There are ample references which demonstrate that Sigmund Freud was extensively studying myths, literature, theology and religion across cultures as he tried to develop a deeper understanding of the human psyche and behaviors (Frankland 1–2; 2016 354; Walsh 79–80). Therefore, the study of psychoanalysis without a comprehensive knowledge of the wider context and cultural influences it was born out of is likely to be very limited in its scope and understanding.

Against the aforementioned scenario, the present study investigates a possible case of in/direct influence of Imam Al-Ghazālī on Freudian psychoanalysis. The specific area of comparison between them is Al-Ghazālī’s and Sigmund Freud’s notion of self or personality. The early 20th century Western scholar Sigmund Freud is considered the father of psychoanalysis and his theories dominate our understanding of the human psyche to date. On the other hand, the 11th century Middle Eastern scholar Imam Al-Ghazālī wrote freely on topics ranging from jurisprudence, logic, philosophy, psychology, and ethics to theology and spirituality, remaining one of the most widely read Muslim scholars both in and outside of the West. What sparked interest in the present study is both (i) the circumstances in which Sigmund Freud developed his theory, and (i) some striking points of similarities between Al-Ghazālī and Freud which are hinted by a number of scholars (Aydin 1–30; Düzgün and Şentepe 40; Haque 146; Moosa 121). Given the limited scope of the present study, it only aims to weigh the possibility of Imam Al-Ghazālī’s influence on Sigmund Freud rather than to establish a case of generic contact.

The methodology adapted for the comparative study is Variation theory developed recently by the Chinese comparatist Shunqing Cao. This is because Variation theory does not necessitate the study of sources and influences within Comparative Literature. Rather, it studies the “variations of the literary phenomena of different countries with or without factual contact,” emphasising the “patterns of intrinsic differences and
variability” among various systems of knowledge (Cao xxxii). Hence, with or without factual connection, the act of comparison between the authors remains valuable as it emphasizes differences in systems of knowledge, foregrounds a neglected area of study within English studies, and evaluates compatibility of non-Western theories on the workings of the human psyche. In order to avoid confusion with the ordinary sense of the word “variation,” this paper employs the capitalized form “Variation” to retain the technical sense of the term for this research. It is noteworthy here that the proponents of Variation theory also use the term in capitalized form (Cao 2013). Wherever the word appears in small letters i.e., “variation” in this research, it is intended to denote the ordinary sense of the word.

2. Objectives

(1) To make a comparative study of the views on self by two prominent thinkers, that is, the 11th century Middle Eastern scholar Imam Al-Ghazālī and the early 20th century Western scholar Sigmund Freud.

(2) To weigh the possibility of influence of Al-Ghazālī’s oeuvre in particular and Arab-Islamic scholarship in general on Freudian psychoanalysis.

3. Methodology

The present study engages in conceptual, qualitative and analytical research. Scholarly resources for this research have been collected from various print books and journals as well as online resources. The methodology adapted for this study is the Variation theory of Comparative Literature developed by Shunqing Cao. In his book The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature (2013), Cao has explored the shortcomings of earlier methodologies of Comparative literature. As observed by Cao, one major drawback of these former approaches is that they end up seeking “homogeneity” rather than “heterogeneity” (xxi). As a result, comparative studies become hierarchical and limited in scope. Variation theory looks for both affinities and divergences. However, its emphasis is on the insight we can get through exploring differences despite the presumed similarities. According to Cao, there are three contexts of Variation studies: “cross-language,” “cross-cultural,” and “cross-civilization” (101, 159, 195). Here, the “cross-civilization” context of Variation theory is particularly suitable for this study. This is because it enables the non-hierarchical comparative study of significantly distant cultures or civilizations.

3.1. De/Limitations

This paper acknowledges two broader areas of de/limitations:

3.1.1. Linguistic

Imam Al-Ghazālī and Sigmund Freud wrote in Arabic and in German, respectively, and not all of their works are yet available in undisputed and completed translations. Given the linguistic constraints of the researcher, the primary and secondary sources consulted for this research are entirely in English and in English translation. However, extensive study of authentic materials has been carried out to mitigate the linguistic limitation.
3.1.2. Interpretive

For a number of reasons, this study considers it to be a better approach to rely primarily on the scholarly interpretations of Sigmund Freud, Al-Ghazālī rather than on the English translations of their works. Firstly, Sigmund Freud’s ideas on the human psyche took various directions over the years (Fine 88; Thwaites 29). Hence, conflicting readings may be generated from close readings of isolated texts. Again, the medieval scholar Al-Ghazālī “expresses his ideas mainly through metaphors and romantic anecdotes” (Pourjavady 161); hence, his ideas are likely to be understood better if interpretations from experts are taken into account. Secondly, the sheer volume of works produced by both scholars in their respective languages very well exceeds the scope of this research. Thirdly, many of the works produced by the authors are scattered and not available to the readers in their complete and original form. Finally, many of the works produced by the authors are yet to be translated and published in English.

4. Background to Al-Ghazālī’s influence on Freudian psychoanalysis

It is interesting to observe that the time when Freud was developing his theory of the unconscious and the structural model of the human psyche coincides with a time of growing interest in Arab-Islamic scholarship, particularly in the translation and critique of Al-Ghazālī. Four major factors may be considered to understand the context of Al-Ghazālī’s possible influence on Freudian psychoanalysis: firstly, Al-Ghazālī’s wider influence on some of the most prominent Western thinkers up to the time of Sigmund Freud; secondly, growing translations and critiques of Al-Ghazālī’s writings during Sigmund Freud’s time and Freud’s expertise in several languages; thirdly, Sigmund Freud’s motivation behind developing a “scientific” approach to understand the human psyche; finally, a booming of Oriental studies during the time Freud wrote.

Ghazālī directly or indirectly influenced some of the most significant thinkers of the Western world. Scholars have already confirmed striking similarities between the writings by Imam Al-Ghazālī, and writings by the French philosophers René Descartes (1596–1650) and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the Italian thinker Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and so forth (Al-Rodhan 17; Choudhury 70; Khan and Saleem 79; Lewes 50; Meymandi 47; Mohamedou 154; 291). Moreover, Al-Ghazālī also exerted a significant influence on Jewish thought from the medieval period (Harvey). As there is a history of Al-Ghazālī’s influence on many prominent Western thinkers, there is a greater possibility that a voracious reader like Freud had at least some exposure to Al-Ghazālī’s ideas during his lifetime.

For a number of reasons, it remains plausible that Sigmund Freud had sufficient exposure to Islamic concepts in general and Al-Ghazālī’s concepts in particular. Freud fluently spoke in English, French, German, Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish (Braybrooke 559), and was “moderately familiar with Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Greek” (Vitz 12). Freud’s outstanding linguistic proficiency, and therefore, access to different systems of knowledge, has also been verified by various scholars (Fletcher 168; Gallo 187–188; Jauregui 74). Moreover, Freud was a “gifted” translator (Smart 65), a fact also verified by many scholars (Lieberman and Kramer; Mahony 838; Westerink 16). He translated
many prominent authors into German, “such as John Stuart Mill (English), and Jean-Martin Charcot (French)” (Smart 65) as well as the Scottish philosopher David Hume (Wakefield and Baer 63). All these references prove Sigmund Freud’s wide erudition and exposure to systems of knowledge both in and outside of the West. On the other hand, Al-Ghazālī remains one of the most influential, widely read and extensively translated Islamic scholars in the West. The “age of translation” spanning from the 10th to the 13th century produced Latin translations of most of the key works in the Arab-Islamic tradition (Ghazanfar 206; Grant 29). All of the major works of “Ghazali and other prominent Muslim scholars had been translated into Latin before 1150” (Hosseini 30). Al-Ghazālī’s magnum opus Ihiyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn was translated into Latin even before 1150 (Ghazanfar 206). His other works such as Maqāsid al-falāsifa was translated into Hebrew between 1290 and 1330 (Freudenthal and Zonta 225), and its widely circulated Latin translation also appeared in 1546 (Abattouy 219). Since the late 19th century, a proliferation of German studies and translations of Al-Ghazālī’s work can also be observed. Some famous German journals that flourished in Islamic studies in that language during Freud’s time include: Der Islam: Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East founded by Carl Heinrich Becker in 1910, Die Welt des Islams or the International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam established in 1913 which also included French and English works, and Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (ZDMG) that published articles on Oriental studies between 1847–2007 etc. German translations of Al-Ghazālī’s works were already in circulation during Freud’s time (Auerbach; Bauer; Beer; Malter; Ritter, Der Gluckseligkeit). Translations of Al-Ghazālī’s works in other European languages such as English (Calverley; Field; MacDonald), French (Gautier; Schmölders) etc. were also flourishing. Hence, there is a strong possibility that an erudite and multilingual scholar like Freud had sufficient exposure to Islamic concepts in general and Al-Ghazālī’s ideas in particular.

Throughout his career, Freud claimed psychoanalysis to be “universal in scope and independent of the historical and cultural influences of his time” (McGrath 79). There were at least two interrelated reasons behind it. Firstly, claiming otherwise would have undermined “the scientific validity of psychoanalysis” (McGrath 79). He seemed determined to eschew any transcendental implications and base his theories solely on material circumstances. Secondly, Freud was afraid that psychoanalysis might get “dismissed as a purely Jewish phenomenon,” given his Jewish background and the anti-Semitic mindset of his society (Bocock xv). He deliberately chose a secular approach, which coincides with the aims of scientific studies. Nevertheless, the scientific validity and objectivity of psychoanalysis remain well disputed due to its pseudo-scientific methods and lack of supportive empirical data (Clemens; Grunbaum; Hook; Lake 12; Smith; Webster; Wollheim). Then again, it is often impossible to gather objective empirical data to make speculations on the complex systems underlying the human psyche. Hence, many insights offered by Freud and his predecessors have greatly influenced Western academia despite its empirical shortcomings. What we may deduce now is that the freshness of debate and the philosophical depth of Freudian psychoanalysis remain unparallel in many ways but applying his theories to provide a “scientific” explanation for the human psyche is likely to be both limited and misleading.
Sigmund Freud, an Austrian scholar educated at the University of Vienna, started his career at a time when Muslims gained legal recognition as one of the largest religious minorities in the Austria-Hungarian Empire in 1874 (Kroissenbrunner 141). As early as 1730, Kroissenbrunner informs us that “a community of Muslim merchants” existed in Vienna (142). In fact, even before the proliferation of “Muslim neighbourhoods in Europe,” Vienna had thriving Muslim communities (142). The extensive study by Christoph Herzog titled “Notes on the Development of Turkish and Oriental Studies in the German Speaking Lands” makes it seem almost impossible for any scholar at that time not to have exposure to the booming Arab-Islamic scholarship. This study shows that the interest in Oriental scholarship became so great that the “German Association for Oriental Studies” founded in 1845 had members across different nationalities (13). Understandably, academies and institutions for the study and translation of Oriental works were flourishing as well. As early as 1674, “Johann Baptist Podestà taught Turkish, Arabic and Persian at the university in Vienna” (30). In fact, Herzog informs us that the teaching and learning of these Oriental languages was so common that the University of Vienna considered making a “continuous arrangement” only around the late 19th century (32). Considering the currently available and translated works of Sigmund Freud, it seems rather surprising why Freud eschews much of a mention of such a thriving scholarly field. After all, Freud’s appreciation of Persian culture is clear enough when one sees the inseparable combination of a Persian rug on a couch for the patients he attended (2021 61–62; Topp 19). In a much later text titled Moses and Monotheism, Freud briefly speaks of the founding of Islam only once but quickly moves to another point expressing his lack of knowledge to comment any further on it. However, the scholar Fethi Benslama observes that even this brief mention demonstrates “his comments are based on accurate information, gathered from unquoted sources but no doubt drawn from the very rich field of German orientalism” (68). Therefore, the circumstances indicate it is very likely that Freud had a good exposure to this thriving field of Arab-Islamic scholarship.

Based on the arguments presented so far, one may conclude that there is a strong possibility of in/direct influence of Al-Ghazālī on Freudian psychoanalysis.

5. Imam Al-Ghazālī’s framework of the self

Timothy Winter refers to Al-Ghazālī’s framework as a “system of ethics and psychomachy” (xvi). Very recently, Abdallah Rothman has comprehensively synthesized the contemporary scholarly perspectives on the Islamic framework of the self as proposed by Al-Ghazālī. He argues that, “religious models of the person or ‘self’ have not been widely researched, [and] there has been more attention paid to this in Buddhism than there has been in regards to Islam” (34). He goes on to show a growing scholarly and clinical interest to explore Arab-Islamic frameworks that delve into human nature and try to “make sense of [human] behaviour and motivation” (34). As Ahmed Sherif has pointed out, an integral part of al-Ghazali’s oeuvre is the notion of divine revelation (3). That is, his framework of the self is developed in relation to God – the absolute, complete, and perfect being. Through systematic and logical reasoning, he provides “an extraordinary
amount of attention to the diagnostics of the soul [i.e., self] and its rehabilitation,” mainly aimed at self-healing (Moosa 224). He speaks of the diseases or sicknesses of the heart that need to be treated.

To explain the framework of the “self” put forth by Al-Ghazali’s, scholars interchangeably use the terms “human psyche” or “soul” (Rothman and Coyle 1732). That is, the self can be understood as the complete inner being that constitutes a person. In an earlier study, Rothman and Coyle show that Al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the self appears in relation to four core concepts: the nafs or lower self, the qalb or heart, the aql or intellect, and the ruh or spirit” (1732). There are different areas of the self.

Firstly, there is the “nature” of the self (Rothman and Coyle 1737). According to Al-Ghazālī, when humans are born, they are influenced by the material world or the “Duniya” and the “self” experiences a downward pull through its “nafs” (1735). He writes that nafs can have two meanings: one meaning refers to the essence or totality of one’s natural self and the other meaning refers to the baser instincts (Al-Ghazālī 8-9). As Sviri tells us, nafs is “a vital energy that resides and operates within the body and is associated with the downward-pulling energies of earth and earthly inclinations” (198). Despite its tendency of self-gratification, the self also has another aspect called “fitrah” (Rothman and Coyle 1735). Here, “fitrah” is the “natural disposition” of the self, meaning, “a deeper part of ourselves that knows God and we are naturally drawn back to that knowledge” (John qtd. in Rothman and Coyle 1735). Therefore, although it is the nature of the self to be driven toward worldly pleasures, it also has the natural ability to go beyond and align itself to the knowledge of the absolute being.

Next, there is the “stages” or states of the self (Rothman and Coyle 1737). As discussed earlier, the term nafs refers to inclination toward worldly pleasures “through desires” (1736). These are not static but dynamic states of the self that are in constant confrontation with one another. For Al-Ghazālī, there are three dominant levels of nafs:

5.1. Nafs-al-Ammārah

This level of personality is the repertoire of “passion,” “greed,” “anger” and similar attributes (Al-Ghazālī 8). The Arabic term “Ammara” literally means “Inciting a lot” (Düzgüner and Şentepe 44). It is “destructive” as it makes the person “restless and reckless” (Khanson 174). It is considered the primitive and “commanding self” which lacks “spiritual wisdom” (Cornelissen, Misra, and Varma 215). Humans, according to this concept, risk themselves “when they succumb to their base instincts and live the life of vice” and eventually come to “pollute the soul’ by creating an imbalance in it (Moosa 224).

5.2. Nafs-al-Mutmainnah

It is the level at which the self “reaches reassurance and is at peace” (Rasool 45). The self reaches a state of complete balance as the “[i]nternal conflicts” become resolved (Düzgüner and Şentepe 44). In order to reach this state, one has to perform “the greatest jihad” (Sharifian 161). Imam Al-Ghazālī writes, “the term jihad means ‘struggle’ … against the lower self (nafs) … which is the primary struggle” (Al-Ghazālī, “Fourth
Foundation” 236). Hence, Al-Ghazâlî sees the passionate self as unruly and in need of discipline. Rothman argues that this jihad is not necessarily about “fighting against the nafs,” instead, it concerns “a constructive response to the discovery of faults” in oneself (96).

5.3. Nafs-al-Lawwama

This level of the self is the “blaming nafs” which “chastises itself for its own bad actions (Sharifian 161). The term comes from “Lom’ which means to ‘reproach’” (Rassool 46). It denotes “self-monitoring, self-questioning and self-accusing soul” (Düzgüner and Şentepe 44). At this level, the self “becomes aware of mistakes with the development of conscience and commonsense” (44). However, this does not refer to the simple internalization of convention or law. Rather, this level of self develops conscience through reasoning and intellect.

Finally, there is the “structure” of the self (Rothman and Coyle 1736). A balanced interaction of nafs, qalb, aql, and ruh determine a healthy structure of the self. The term qalb is the center that “determines the relative state of the soul” (1736). Qalb can orient the “self” upwards or toward the knowledge of God, or it can orient the “self” downwards or toward the worldly pleasures. The aql or the “intellect” can lead the self upward or downward. The ruh refers to the state of the self when it has aligned itself to fitrah or the knowledge of God. While explaining how these different aspects of “self” function, Al-Ghazâlî speaks of various kinds of “armies” that carry out and coordinate their tasks (10). Among them, two “armies” are noteworthy here. The first one refers to the “powers of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch” (Al-Ghazâlî 10). The second one refers to the power residing in the “horizon of the brain,” namely, “(1) power of idea, (2) power of thought (3) power of memory (4) power of retention and (5) power of consolidating them together” (Al-Ghazâlî 10).

Al-Ghazâlî’s analysis of the self always orients itself around a strong moral framework. The self is in constant struggle between the “urge” to do “good” and the “urge” to do “evil” (32). When someone finds pleasure through following the urge to do good, his / her mind is at peace (53). However, when the self is “diseased” and largely inclined towards harmful traits, it needs “treatment” (54-57). Al-Ghazâlî argues that human nature is not constant or unchanging, instead, it can be altered through “training, education, and habits” (51). He also argues that harmful traits such as “anger” or “passion” cannot be “uprooted” entirely, so the goal should be to apply them “with moderation without going to the extremes” (52). Here, he emphasizes the role of “spiritual guides” who can provide “education and training” to overcome one’s harmful traits (53).

6. Sigmund Freud’s framework of the self

Throughout his lifetime, Freud developed and revised a number of concepts to explain the workings of the human psyche (Storr 57). The publication of The Interpretation of Dreams in 1899 proved to be an important breakthrough for Freud, which “provides perhaps the most lucid, and certainly the most attractively readable introduction to his theory of the unconscious and its workings” (287). Together with this book, Freud’s next significant work The Psychopathology of Everyday Life provides the “investigations and
case studies” that inform his topographical model of human psyche, that is, the “distinction between the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious systems” (287). Prior to Freud, the Early Modern and Enlightenment era perceived the human subject as “a completely self-contained being that develops in the world as an expression of its own unique essence” (Mansfield 13). Freud’s systematic discussion of the unconscious had such a great impact that it came to be referred to as a “discovery” (Frosh, Difference 23; “Freud” 287; Riker 62). His approach to the treatment of mental illness concerns an “analyst” who is a “relatively detached observer of the patient” (Langs 46). His later contributions to the study of human psyche also include the structural hypothesis developed around the last phase of his writing, which “differentiates between the three agencies of id, ego, and superego” (“Freud” 286–289).

In 1920, Freud introduced a different way of thinking about human nature. According to him, there are two fundamental instincts of all human beings, namely, Eros and Thanatos. These are “innate urges” that govern human behavior (Baron 16). Here, Eros refers to the urge of self-preservation and life sustenance.

In The Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud elaborated his first topography of the mind. According to this theory, there are three interrelated “domains” or “layers” of mind, namely, conscious, preconscious, and unconscious (Wilson vii). According to Freud, the conscious and preconscious parts of the psyche are “extremely small in comparison with the unconscious” (Abbott 35).

(a)Conscious: The German word originally used by Freud is “das Bewusste” (Gödde 275; Laplanche and Pontalis 87). Freud compared conscious processes with the part of an iceberg that is visible above the water (Newman and Newman 49). The conscious part of the psyche is “[l]inked to organs of perception” and “[C]ontrolled by reality principle,” (Edkins 27). It represents what “we are aware of every day,” “how we feel,” “what we perceive and think about, our current memories and our fantasies” (Abbott 35).

(b)Preconscious: The German word originally used by Freud is “das Vorbewusste” (Gödde 275; Laplanche and Pontalis 87). Freud compared preconscious processes with the part of an iceberg that is “near the waterline” (Newman and Newman 49). The preconscious part of the psyche is “[c]apable of becoming conscious,” contains “[l]atent thoughts,” and represents the [a]ccessible portions of memory” (Edkins 27; Frager 45). In short, the preconscious part of the psyche contains thoughts, images and other such elements that are “not conscious at the moment, [but] can readily be brought to consciousness” (2004 514).

(c) Unconscious: The German word originally used by Freud is “das Unbewusste” (Gödde 275; Laplanche and Pontalis 87). Freud compared unconscious processes with the remaining part of an iceberg below water “hidden from view” (Newman and Newman 49). The unconscious contains “instinctual elements that have never been conscious and are never accessible to consciousness” (Frager and Fadiman 45). Painful or traumatic memories and feelings remain hidden in this part of the psyche through the mechanism of repression (Abbott 35). Though it is not accessible to the conscious part of the psyche, it continues to affect conscious processes by threatening to resurface past events (Frager and Fadiman 45). In short, it contains elements which are “barred from access to consciousness by some intrapsychic force such as repression” (2004 514).
Around 1915, Sigmund Freud proposed that there are three “parts” or “agencies” of “mental apparatus” or personality, namely, id, ego, and superego (Freud, “Autobiographical” 37; Kline 169; Rieff 59). In Freud’s own words, “[t]he ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions” (1989, “Ego” 636). Superego, on the other hand, “comprises the prohibition” (Freud 641–642). This triad is also commonly known as Freud’s “structural hypothesis” (Bush and Simmons 138; Merkur 66). Freud made significant revisions of his theories over the years. The following parts, therefore, incorporate Freud’s own words as well as scholarly interpretations of his oeuvre in order to provide a comprehensive view of these concepts.

6.1.  **Id (das Es)**

The German word originally used by Freud is “Es,” literally meaning “it” (Bunnin and Jiyuan 199). Id represents the entire mental apparatus of infants (Bush and Simmons 138), the “core of our being within which the instincts operate and their sole endeavor is to seek satisfaction regardless of consequences, situation or logic” (Kline 169). It is the repository of “bodily appetites and unconscious instincts” (Bunnin and Jiyuan 199). Two more dimensions of psychic structure, i.e., ego and super ego, later become differentiated from id to facilitate “the basic tasks of socialization,” constituting a tripartite structure of the psyche (Bush and Simmons 137). Id is driven by the “pleasure principle,” which means it is hedonistic, avoids displeasure, and only seeks pleasure (Schultz and Schultz 57).

6.2.  **Ego (das Ich)**

The German word originally used by Freud is “Ich,” literally meaning “I” (Bunnin and Yu 199). In Freud’s own words, “the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world” (Freud, “Ego” 635). For Freud, “[i]t is to this ego that consciousness is attached ... it is the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes” (Freud, “Ego” 630). This agency of the psyche has the intellectual ability to satisfy the demands of the id through a calculated interaction with the external world (Kline 169). It is guided by the “reality principle,” meaning it measures “the consequences of any proposed behaviour” from id, and creates a balance between the demands of external reality and the demands of the id (Kline 169). Freud uses a famous allegory to explain the concept of the ego: “Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id’s will into action as if it were its own” (Freud, “Ego” 636).

6.3.  **Superego (Über-Ich)**

The German word originally used by Freud is “Über-Ich,” literally meaning “ideal-I” (Bunnin and Jiyuan 199). It represents “moral faculty,” “conscience” (Bunnin and Jiyuan 199), “social control,” “rules and taboo” (Sharma 207) etc. It aims to guide the ego regarding how it should materialize the demands of the id (207). However, these “directions” are not grounded on “practical needs” (207). Rather, they are grounded on
“categorical imperatives” (207). Here, one may locate a tension between “the irrational indulgences of the id” with the “equally irrational aspirations of the super-ego” (Rieff 70). Superego, or the socially conditioned “moral faculty,” tries to restrain the id altogether (70).

Around the early 20th century, Sigmund Freud also came to propose “two basic instincts inherent in the human condition,” namely, Eros and Thanatos (Hedgespeth 236). Eros can be understood as “life instincts [which] are constructive and are directed toward progress and higher development (236). Hence, Eros may be understood as the urge to preserve life and “ultimately to preserve the species” (236). Thanatos, on the other hand, is considered as “a destructive force... and can be largely silently self-destructive, or it can be diverted outwardly and be destructive toward others” (236). Both of these urges are in constant struggle with one another (236-237).

7. Variation between Imam Al-Ghazâlî and Sigmund Freud

Already explained earlier, the Variation theory of Comparative Literature makes a non-hierarchal comparative study of “literary phenomena” by seeking points of commonness as well as points of difference (Cao xxxii). Analyzing primary and secondary data presented in previous sections, the study detected certain similarities and differences between Imam, Al-Ghazâlî and Sigmund Freud.

The study detected at least eight crucial similarities between the theories of Al-Ghazâlî and Sigmund Freud. Firstly, both propose a tripartite model of the self or personality that seeks to explain the functional aspect of the human psyche. Both Al-Ghazâlî’s model of nafs and Sigmund Freud’s model of id, ego and super ego show triadic, interconnected levels which operate human self. Secondly, they suggest that the dominant level of the self is inherently unrestrained and reckless in nature. For example, Al-Ghazâlî’s nafs-al-ammârah and Freud’s id contain all the baser instincts and are hedonistic in essence. Thirdly, they both acknowledge that there is a part in the self that reproaches and monitors the reckless and baser level of the self, for example, Al-Ghazâlî’s nafs-al-lawwama and Freud’s superego. Fourthly, they speak of a balancing level of the self that seeks to resolve the conflict between the dominant self and the external world (i.e., Al-Ghazâlî’s nafs-al-mutmainnah and Freudian ego). Fifthly, Freudian concept of “conscious” state is similar to Al-Ghazâlî’s notion of a faculty of self (i.e. explained earlier in this paper, where this faculty is termed as an “army” of the self by Al-Ghazâlî) which gathers data and interacts with the world through sense-perception. Sixthly, Freudian concept of “preconscious” state is similar to another faculty described by Al-Ghazâlî to refer to that area of the brain, which is responsible for memory, recollection, ideas etc. Seventhly, both emphasize the role of an expert to treat and cure someone of internal illness. Their therapeutic aim is to heal the individual from psychological troubles. Eighthly, Freud’s concept of Eros and Thanatos is mildly similar to Al-Ghazâlî’s framework where there is the urge to do good or the urge to do evil. Although, Freud is not speaking from moral grounds, the urge to preserve oneself and others or to bring destruction to oneself and others has a resonance similar to Al-Ghazâlî’s.
Despite some striking similarities, there are also some unique differences between the thinkers. Firstly, Al-Ghazālī does not portray human nature as inherently evil or hedonistic. Instead, he argues that human self naturally has the potential to do good and reach a higher level of being. However, Freudian notion of the unconscious presents human self as a repertoire of hidden and repressed desires. Secondly, Al-Ghazālī suggests that one can be potentially aware of the lower self, which enables one to discipline it. But Freud suggests that the id remains hidden from awareness, and controls our actions in the world. Thirdly, although, Al-Ghazālī and Freud consider a balancing aspect of the psyche that negotiates with the world, they seem to suggest different mechanisms for it. Al-Ghazālī’s “nafs-al-mutmainnah” is largely conditioned by individual conscience, reason, and intellect. A person has the inherent nature to incline towards a higher self, and those who are able to discover this aspect of their nature can truly be at a state of balance. On the other hand, the Freudian ego appears to be an everyday negotiator and relatively passive in its acceptances of rules and taboos. Finally, the therapeutic procedure for, Al-Ghazālī is focused on self-practice and self-reflection. It also emphasizes the role of a guide or a master who will assist the one with an imbalanced self to reach a balanced state. However, Freud’s therapeutic procedure is focused on disinterested conversations with the subject. The psychotherapist who attends the patients is required to be detached from the patient.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the present paper is to weigh the possibility of Imam, Al-Ghazālī’s influence on Freudian psychoanalysis. The paper applied two strategies to achieve its aim. At first, it detailed the cultural context and circumstances which strongly suggest that Freud must have received a good amount of exposure to the booming Arab-Islamic studies of his era. Next, the paper utilized Variation theory to compare between Al-Ghazālī’s and Sigmund Freud’s approaches to human psyche. Based on the findings of this study, it concludes that there is a strong possibility of, Al-Ghazālī’s in/direct influence on Freudian psychoanalysis. Factors such as Sigmund Freud’s wide erudition, proficiency in several languages, role as a skilled translator and researcher, as well as the availability of translated works of, Al-Ghazālī in Freud’s time, the flourishing of Arab-Islamic studies during Freud’s time, Freud’s own reference to Islam which shows his deep knowledge of the Islamic concepts and so on suggest a strong possibility that Freud was more or less aware of, Al-Ghazālī’s works. However, given the limited scope of the study, the aim was only to weigh this possibility rather than to prove any factual connection. Further biographical studies should be carried out to reach a definite conclusion. The study has also found that, Al-Ghazālī’s theories on the human psyche are sophisticated enough for further exploration. Therefore, further studies may be made to explore the applicability and adaptability of, Al-Ghazālī’s theories in our contemporary world.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).
Notes on contributor

Tanzia Mobarak is currently working as a Lecturer at the Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh. Her research interests include comparative literature, cultural studies, minority discourse, spatial criticism, ecocriticism, and genocide studies.

ORCID

Tanzia Mobarak http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5621-0582

References

Abattouy, Mohammed. “The Arabic-Latin Intercultural Transmission of Scientific Knowledge in Pre-Modern Europe: Historical Context and Case Studies.” The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West: Implications for Contemporary Trans-Cultural Relations. Ed. Nayef R. F. Al-Rodhan. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 167–219.

Abbott, Tina. Social and Personality Development. Taylor and Francis, 2014.

Al-Ghazālī, Imam. The Revival of Religious Sciences: The Book of Destructive Evils. Darul-Ishaat, 1993. Translated by Fazl-ul-Karim Al-Ghazzali.

Al-Ghazālī, Imam. “The Fourth Foundation: Patience.” Ghazali on the Principles of Islamic Spirituality: Selections from the Forty Foundations of Religion Annotated & Explained. Skylight Paths Publishing, 2012. Translated by Aaron Spevack.

Al-Rodhan, Nayef R. F., translator. Al Ghasali: Das Elixir Der Glückseligkeit. V. By Imam al-Ghazali. Diederichs, 1923.

Auerbach, Helman, translator. Albalaq Und Seine Übersetzung Des Makāsid al-Gazzalis. 1. Teil. Nach Einer Frankfurter Handschrift Zum Ersten Male Herausgegeben. Mit Vorwort, Ausführlicher Einleitung Nebst Anmerkungen Versehen. By Imam al-Ghazali. Fleischmann, 1906.

Aydin, Hayati. “Concepts of the Self in Islamic Tradition and Western Psychology: A Comparative Analysis.” Studies in Islam and the Middle East 7.1 (2010): 1–30.

Bauer, Hans, translator. Von der Ehe: Das 12. Buch Von Al-ġazālī’s “Neubelebung der Religionswissenschaften. By Imam al-Ghazali, M. Niemeyer, 1917.

Beer, Georg, Ed. “al-Ghazzali’s Makāsid Al-falāsifat, I. Teil: Die Logik, Cap.”I-II, Nach der Berliner Und Oxforder Handschrift Zum Ersten Male Hrsg., Übersetzet Und Mit Vorwort Nebst Anmerkungen Versehen, By Imam al-Ghazali. Brill, 1888.

Benslama, Fethi. Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam. Translated by Robert Bononno. U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Bocock, Robert. Sigmund Freud. Routledge, 2002.

Braybrooke, Marcus. Beacons of the Light: One Hundred People Who Have Shaped the Spiritual History of Humankind. O Books, 2009.

Bunnin, Nicholas, and Yu. Jiyuan. The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy. Wiley-Blackwel, 2009.

Bush, Diane Mitsch, and Roberta G. Simmons. “Socialization Processes over the Life Course.” Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives. Ed. Morris Rosenberg and Ralph H. Turner. Transaction Publishers, 2004. 133–64.

Calverley, Edwin Elliott, translator. A Translation, with Commentary and Introduction of the Book of Ihya of Al-Ghazzali: Bearing on Muslim Worship. By Imam al-Ghazali, 1923. Hartford Seminary, PhD dissertation.

Campbell, Robert Jean. Campbell’s Psychiatric Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2004.

Cao, Shunqing. The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature. Springer, 2013.

Chase, Rolan. Great Discoveries in Psychiatry. Logos, 2021.

Choudhury, Masudul A. Islamic Financial Economy and Islamic Banking. Routledge, 2016.

Clemens, Justin. Psychoanalysis Is an Antiphilosophy. Edinburgh UP, 2013.
Cornelissen, Matthijs, Girishwar Misra, and Suneet Varma. *Foundations of Indian Psychology: Theories and Concepts.* Pearson, 2011.

Düzgüner, Sevde, and Ayşe Şentepeet al. “Characteristic Themes in Psychology of Religion in Turkey.” *Psychology of Religion in Turkey,* edited by Zuhal Agılkaya-Sahin, et al., 2015, Brill, pp. 31–50.

Edkins, Jenny. *Poststructuralism & International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In.* Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.

Field, Claud, translator. *The Confessions of al-Ghazali.* Murray: By Imam al-Ghazali, 1909.

Fine, Reuben. *Freud (RLE: Freud): A Critical Re-Evaluation of His Theories.* Routledge, 2013.

Fletcher, John. *Freud and the Scene of Trauma.* Fordham UP, 2013.

Frager, Robert. *Heart, Self, and Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony.* Quest Books, 2013.

Frager, Robert, and James Fadiman. *Personality and Personal Growth.* Pearson, 2005.

Frankland, Graham. *Freud’s Literary Culture.* Cambridge UP, 2006.

Freud, Sigmund. “The Ego and the Id.” *The Freud Reader,* edited by Peter Gay, W. W. Norton & Company, 1989, pp. 628–660.

Freud, Sigmund. “An Autobiographical Study.” *The Freud Reader.* Ed. Peter Gay. W.W. Norton & Company, 1989, 3–44.

Freudenthal, Gad, and Mauro Zonta. “The Reception of Avicenna in Jewish Cultures: East and West.” *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays.* Ed. Peter Adamson. Cambridge UP, 2015, 214–41.

Frosh, Stephen. Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis. Routledge, 2003.

Gallo, Rubén. *Freud’s Mexico: Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis.* MIT P, 2010.

Gautier, Lucien, translator. *Ad-Doura Al-fâhkira La Perle Précieuse: Première Partie.* By Imam al-Ghazali. Imprimerie G. Kreysing, 1877.

Ghazanfar, S. M. “Arab-Islamic Economics.” *Routledge Handbook of the History of Global Economic Thought.* Ed. Vincent Barnett. Routledge, 2015, 202–15.

Gödde, Günter. “Freud and Nineteenth-century Philosophical Sources on the Unconscious.” *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought.* Ed. Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher. Cambridge UP, 2010, 261–86.

Grant, Edward. *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts.* Cambridge UP, 2011.

Grunbaum, Adolf. *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique.* U of California P, 1985.

Herzog, Christoph. “Notes on the Development of Turkish and Oriental Studies in the German Speaking Lands.” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi, Cilt,* vol.8, no. 15, 2010, 7–76.

Hook, Sidney. *Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy.* Transaction Publishers, 1991.

Hosseini, Hamid S. “Contributions of Medieval Muslim Scholar to the History of Economics and Their Impact: A Refutation of the Schumpeterian Great Gap.” *A Companion to the History of Economic Thought.* Ed. Warren J. Samuels, Jeff E. Biddle, and B. John. Davis: Blackwell, 2003, 28–45.

Jauregui, Ann. *Epiphanies: Where Science and Miracles Meet.* Atria Books, 2014.

Khan, Mohammad Sharif, and Mohammad Anwar Saleem. *Muslim Philosophy and Philosophers.* Ashish Publishing House, 1994.

Khanson, Qamrul. *Wisdom Prevails: An Islamic Thought of Wonderful Living.* Lulu Com, 2012.

Kline, Paul. *Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory.* Taylor & Francis, 2015.

Kristeva, Julia. “Some Observations on Female Sexuality.” *Dialogues on Sexuality, Gender,* and *Psychoanalysis.* Ed. Irène Matthis. Karnac, 2004, 41–52.

Kroissnenbrunner, Sabine. “Islam in Austria.” *Islam, Europe’s Second Religion: The New Social, Cultural, and Political Landscape.* Ed. T. Shireen. Hunter, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002, 141–56.

Lake, James. *Textbook of Integrative Mental Health Care.* Thieme, 2007.
Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1988.

Lewes, George Henry. *The History of Philosophy: From Thales to Comte*. Longman, Green and Co, 1871.

Lieberman, E. James, and Robert Kramer. “Preface.” *The Letters of Sigmund Freud & Otto Rank: Inside Psychoanalysis*. Ed. E. James Lieberman and Robert Kramer. Johns Hopkins UP, 2012. vii–xi.

MacDonald, Duncan B. “Emotional Religion in Islām as Affected by Music and Singing: A Translation of A Book of the Iḥyāʾ ʿUlām Ād-Dīn of Al-Ghazzālī with Analysis, Annotation, and Appendices.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 34.1 (1902): 1–28. doi:10.1017/S0035869X000157053.

Macey, David. “Sigmund Freud.” *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. Ed. Michael Payne, and Jessica Rae Barbera. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. pp. 286-289.

Mansfield, Nick. Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway. Allen & Unwin, 2000.

Mahony, Patrick J. “Freud and Translation.” *American Imago* 58.4 (2001): 837–40. doi:10.1353/aim.2001.0022.

Malter, Heny, translator. *Die Abhandlung Des Abū Hāmid Al-Gazzālī: Antworten Auf Fragen, Die an Ihn Gerichtet Wurden*. By Imam al-Ghazali. J. Kauffmann, 1896.

McGrath, William J. “Freud and the Force of History.” *Freud and the History of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Toby Gelfand and John Kerr. Routledge, 2015. 79–98.

Merkur, Daniel. *Unconscious Wisdom: A Superego Function in Dreams, Conscience, and Inspiration*. State U of New York P, 2001.

Mohamedou, Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould. “A Forgotten Debt: Humanism and Education, from the Orient to the West.” *The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West: Implications for Contemporary Trans-Cultural Relations*. Ed. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 144–66.

Moosa, Ebrahim. *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Morton, John. “Myths.” *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture*, edited by Edward Erwin, Routledge, 2016, pp. 353–54.

Newman, Barbara M, and Philip R. Newman. *Development Through Life: A Psychosocial Approach*. Cengage Learning, 2009.

Pourjavady, Nasrollah. “The Sufi Way of Love and Peace.” *Voices of Islam*. Ed. Vincent J Cornell, Vol. 2. Praeger Publishers, 2007, pp. 157–66.

Rassool, G H. *Islamic Counselling: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. Routledge, 2016.

Rieff, Philip. *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*. The U of Chicago P, 1979.

Riker, John H. Ethics and the Discovery of the Unconscious. State University of New York Press, 1997.

Ritter, H., translator. *Das Elixier der Glückseligkeit (Gazalī’s Kimīā-ye Saʿādat)*. Jena: By Imam al-Ghazali, 1923.

Rothman A and Coyle A. (2018). Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul. J Relig Health, 57(5), 1731–1744. 10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x

Said, Yazid. “A Common Word and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali’s Love of God.” *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Encounters through a Common Word*. Ed. Yazid Said, and Lejla Demiri. Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 289-308.

Schmölders, Auguste A. *Essai Sur Les Ecoles Philosophiques Chez Les Arabes Et Notamment Sur La Doctrine D’Algazzali*. Institut de France, 1842.

Schultz, Duane P., and Sydney E. Schultz. *Theories of Personality*. Cengage Learning, 2017.

Sharifian, Farzad. *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications*. John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2011.

Sharma, Rachana. *Abnormal Psychology*. Atlantic Publishers, 2006.

Sherif, Mohammed A. *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue*. State U of New York P, 1975.

Smart, Julie. *Disability across the Developmental Life Span: For the Rehabilitation Counselor*. Springer, 2012.

Smith, David L. *Psychoanalysis in Focus*. SAGE Publications, 2003.
Storr, Anthony. *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
Thwaites, Tony. *Reading Freud: Psychoanalysis As Cultural Theory*. SAGE Publications, 2007.
Topp, Leslie. “The Mad Objects of Fin-de-Siècle Vienna.” *Journeys into Madness: Mapping Mental Illness in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*. Ed. Gemma Blackshaw and Sabine Wieber. Berghahn Books, 2012. 10–26.
Vitz, Paul C. *Sigmund Freud’s Christian Unconscious*. Eerdmans, 1993.
Wakefield, Jerome C., and Judith C. Baer. “The Cognitivization of Psychoanalysis: Toward and Integration of Psychodynamic and Cognitive Theories.” *Reshaping Theory in Contemporary Social Work: Toward a Critical Pluralism in Clinical Practice*. Ed. William Borden. Columbia UP, 2010. 51–80.
Walsh, Richard G. *Mapping Myths of Biblical Interpretation*. Sheffield Academic P, 2001.
Webster, Richard. *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis*. Orwell P, 2005.
Westenink, Herman. *Controversy and Challenge: The Reception of Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis in German and Dutch-Speaking Theology and Religious Studies*. Lit, 2009.
Wilson, Stephen. “Introduction. *The Interpretation of Dreams*.” *Wordsworth Classics of World Literature (1997)*: vii–xv.
Winter, Timothy, translator. *Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul: Kitab Riyadat al-nafs & on Breaking the Two Desires: Kitab Kasr al-shahwatayn*. books XXII and XXIII of the *Revival of the Religious Sciences*. The Islamic Texts Society, 2016.