

Rational-Cum-Transcendental Models of Self-Control: A Comparative and Integrative Study of Plato's and Al-Ghazali's Views on Self-Control

Imam Iqbal

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email : imam.iqbal@uin-suka.ac.id

Muhlas

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung Indonesia

Email: stmurti@ugm.ac.id

Eliawati

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah, Palembang, Indonesia

Email: eliawati_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

Istnan Hidayatullah

Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama, Palu, Indonesia

Email: istnanhidayatullah@uindatokarama.ac.id

*Correspondence: imam.iqbal@uin-suka.ac.id

Received: 2025-05-29; Revised: 2025-09-13; Accepted: 2025-11-25; Published: 2025-11-25

DOI:10.15575/Jaqfi.v10i2.46087

Abstract: *This article compares Plato's rational view with al-Ghazali's transcendental approach to self-control, advancing an integrative model that harmonizes rational and spiritual dimensions. Addressing the lack of systematic integration in existing literature, this study employs comparative-conceptual and hermeneutic methods to analyze the philosophical foundations of both thinkers. The results reveal that their divergence lies primarily in accentuation: Plato emphasizes rationality, whereas al-Ghazali prioritizes transcendence, a difference stemming from their distinct ethical orientations. However, significant similarities exist, providing a basis for synthesis. Consequently, this study proposes a "rational-cum-transcendental" model of self-control. In this framework, rationality evaluates the motivations and consequences of behavior, while the transcendental dimension imbues actions with higher purpose and meaning. This synthesis offers a holistic approach, contributing to Islamic philosophy and interdisciplinary discourses on self-regulation across psychology, ethics, and education*

Keywords: *self-control, Plato and al-Ghazali, similarities and differences, rational-cum-transcendental, integration.*

A. Introduction

Self-control has been a topic of philosophical discussion since classical times and has evolved into an interdisciplinary topic today. Initially, the concept of self-control was discussed by Greek philosophers in their pursuit of truth, wisdom, and a meaningful life. Plato and Aristotle, for

example, placed self-control as one of the four ethical virtues later known as the cardinal virtues: temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.¹ In the modern era, the discussion of self-control becoming more widespread.² It is now studied in various disciplines, from psychology to education. Self-control is considered an important foundation in character building, group integrity, and social cohesion.³ The growing interest of various scientific disciplines in the studying self-control affirms the significance of this topic in providing theoretical understanding, offering a strategic framework, and providing practical solutions to solve contemporary problems related to it.

As a philosophical topic, self-control is discussed in various traditions. In this context, Plato and al-Ghazali's views represent two different traditions in discussing this topic. As a prominent figures in the Western and Islamic philosophical traditions, both apply different approaches to self-control, making their views an interesting topic for further exploration. The exploration of the views of these two figures provides an understanding of how the concept of self-control has been discussed in different philosophical traditions and opens up a space for dialogue and integration between them.

Scholarly interest in Plato's and al-Ghazali's views on self-control has been notable in various disciplines, particularly Islamic philosophy, psychology, and education.⁴ In the case of Plato, scholars such as Quinn, Al-Mesilini, and Calenda have emphasized the primary role of reason in regulating desire to achieve happiness.⁵ Campbell highlights the function of reason in harmonizing the soul's elements,⁶ while Torres interprets Plato's self-control as a form of inner therapy that aligns rationality, emotion, and desire.⁷

¹ Carmen Cozma, "In Quest for Virtue: Learning from a Great Tradition," *Philosophy Study* 12, no. 6 (2022).

² Kaitlyn M. Werner and Brett Q. Ford, "Self-Control: An Integrative Framework," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2023.

³ Daniela Becker et al., "Pleasureful Self-Control? A New Perspective on Old Problems," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 60 (December 2024): 101888; Sally Fowler Davis and Megan Davies, "Understanding the Effects of Social Cohesion on Social Wellbeing: A Scoping Review," *International Journal of Public Health* 70 (January 30, 2025).

⁴ Saeko Yazaki, "To Discipline or to Forget: A Sufi-Zen Comparative Analysis of the Self in the Writings of al-Ghazālī and Dōgen," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (July 30, 2024): 929; Fitria Cinta et al., "Educational Objectives and Criteria for the Ideal Teacher Perspective of Plato and Al Ghazali," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 5 (September 7, 2023): 3031; Seyed Zuhair Al-Mesilini, "A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between Happiness and Reason in the Views of Socrates and Plato, with Emphasis on the Interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Abu Nasr al-Farabi," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (December 20, 2024).

⁵ Philip L. Quinn, "Self-Control," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, n.d.); Al-Mesilini, "A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between Happiness and Reason in the Views of Socrates and Plato, with Emphasis on the Interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Abu Nasr al-Farabi"; Guido Calenda, "Theaetetus 151e-186e: Did Plato Refute Protagoras?," *Peitho. Examina Antiqua* 15, no. 1 (December 12, 2024): 209-230.

⁶ Douglas R. Campbell, "Self-Motion and Cognition: Plato's Theory of the Soul," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 4 (2021).

⁷ Jorge Torres, "Madness and Vice in Plato's Republic," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (May 4, 2021): 373-393.

On the other hand, al-Ghazali's approach has drawn attention for its focus on purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*), which he considers essential for character formation and spiritual well-being.⁸ Rizayanti notes that, for al-Ghazali, the exercise of self-control rests upon an intellect shaped by faith and ethical conduct, seeking to balance sensual desires with rational discernment.⁹ Munjahid notes that his views on self-control are deeply rooted in an intellect guided by faith and ethics, aiming for a balance between carnal desires (*nafs*) and rationality.¹⁰ While Darstan underscores that al-Ghazali's concept of self-control constitutes a central pillar of his educational philosophy.¹¹ In his view, the cultivation of strong character and sound morality is impossible without it.

Several comparative studies on al-Ghazali and Plato have been produced in the form of scholarly articles, comparative essays, and a number of theses or working papers. These works explore aspects of their ethical and spiritual thought,¹² particularly themes such as freedom, virtue, and education.¹³ Karimulla explores the construction of Islamic education for professional teachers through the lens of human concepts in the thought of al-Ghazali and Plato, with the aim of developing future Islamic professional educators.¹⁴ Orak examines the views of al-Ghazali and Plato on education, with particular attention to educational objectives, curriculum, and teaching methods.¹⁵ However, the systematic philosophical comparison and integration of their views on self-control has received only limited attention in the existing literature.

⁸ Ma'muroh Ma'muroh, Abqorina Abqorina, and Amrin Amrin, "The Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs by Al-Ghazali and Its Implementation at Pesantren Darut Tasbih Tangerang," *Edu Cendikia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan* 4, no. 02 (November 23, 2024): 833–844; Mohd Solahuddin Shahrudin et al., "The Influence of Tahfiz Education on the Human Soul According to Al-Ghazali's Perspective," *Journal of Quran Sunnah Education & Special Needs* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 2024): 104–112.

⁹ Hana Rizayanti and Suyadi Suyadi, "Concept of Nafs and Qalb From The Perspective of Neuroscience: A Study of Al-Ghazali's Thoughts," *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2023).

¹⁰ Munjahid Munjahid, "Reconsidering Al-Ghazali's Educational Thoughts in the Millennial Era," *ALSYS*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2025), pp. 1513–26.

¹¹ Darstan Abdulrahman Hussin, Bayar Othman Qadr, and Zryan Hamza Azziz, "The Philosophy of Education and Knowledge in the view of Ghazali," *Journal of University of Raparin*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2024), pp. 481–515.

¹² Raximdjanova Dilnavoz, "Comparative Analysis of the Role of the Phenomenon of Freedom in the Views of Plato and Farabi," *Current Research Journal of Pedagogics* 5, no. 9 (September 1, 2024): 56–66; Nur Adillah Omar, "Understanding the Concept of Rulership According to Al-Ghazali in Nasihat Al-Mulūk and Machiavelli in The Prince: A Comparative Analysis," *LECTURES: Journal of Islamic and Education Studies* 3, no. 2 (August 2, 2024): 116–135; Cinta et al., "Educational Objectives and Criteria for the Ideal Teacher Perspective of Plato and Al Ghazali."

¹³ Siti Nuryulia et al., "The Significance of Al-Ghazali's Thought in Contemporary Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Al Hikmah: Journal of Education* 5, no. 2 (December 12, 2024): 163; Nandang Kosim and Aat Royhatudin, "Konsep Merdeka Belajar Dalam Kitab Ihya 'Ulumuddin Menurut Pemikiran Imam Ghazali," *Ta'dibiya* 4, no. 2 (October 1, 2024): 1–13.

¹⁴ Mohammad Karimulla and Ajeng Khodijah, "Memahami Guru Pendidikan Islam dengan Manusia: Wawasan Kritis Pemikiran al-Ghazali dan Plato Menuju Guru Profesional Islami" *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* Vol. 8, No. 1, Januari - Juni 2023.

¹⁵ Jahanbakhsh Orak, "Education From The Perspective of Islamic and Western Scientists (Case Study: Ghazali and Plato)," *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication - TOJDAC* April 2016 Special Edition, DOI NO: 10.7456/1060ASE/013.

This article aims to fill a gap in studies related to Plato and al-Ghazali's views on self-control. So far, there has been insufficiently comparative study that specifically examines and attempts a philosophical integration of their views on self-control, considering the existing similarities and differences. This aspect has gone unnoticed by experts. Three questions are posed to explore and compare the views of these two figures. *First*, how did Plato and al-Ghazali conceptualize and elaborate on self-control within the framework of their philosophical thought? *Second*, what are the fundamental similarities and differences in their respective descriptions of self-control? *Third*, how can their views on self-control be dialogued and synthesized? These three questions will navigate the discussion in this article and simultaneously lead to dialogue and integrate their views on self-control.

This article argues that the different ethical foundations and orientations on Plato and al-Ghazali imply their distinct conceptualizations and accentuations of self-control. Plato prioritized rationality, while al-Ghazali emphasized the transcendence of self-control. The emphasis on the rational and transcendental aspects in the views of the two figures is evident in three ways: (1) the soul as a battleground of self-control; (2) self-control as an ethical mechanism and moral virtue; and (3) ethical orientation of self-control. However, there are also certain similarities in their views. These similarities make it possible to dialogue and integrate their views into a more complete conceptualization, which can serve as a strong philosophical foundation for self-control discourse.

B. Method

This article is the result of qualitative research in the field of philosophy. Plato and al-Ghazali's views on self-control were chosen as material objects because these two are prominent figures representing different philosophical traditions. Plato is known as the leading Greek philosopher, whose philosophical thought remains a reference to this day. While al-Ghazali is a par excellence Muslim thinker whose various aspects of his thought are highly influential in the Islamic world. The relevance of this topic lies in how these two figures emphasize different aspects in the discussion of self-control. Although both of them propose different models of self-control, their similarities can serve as a basis for integrating these differences, thereby enriching the philosophical discourse on self-control with more perspectives.

This article uses the works of Plato and al-Ghazali as primary data sources, especially the parts of their work that deals with the topic of self-control. The other sections are also inventoried insofar they are relevant to the topic. Primary data sources include Plato's compiled works, especially the *Republic*, *Charmides*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, dan *Laws*.¹⁶ While al-Ghazali's

¹⁶ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

works include *Ihyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*,¹⁷ *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*,¹⁸ *Mī'rāj as-Sālikīn*,¹⁹ and others. These primary data sources serve as direct references regarding both of their views on self-control. Secondary data sources in the form of journal articles, proceedings, books, and online literature are utilized to strengthen primary data and as interpretive material for their main views. The use of these various data is aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences in their views on self-control, and then integrate them.

The data collection process was carried out through inventory and documentation of Plato and al-Ghazali's views on self-control. The collected materials were organized thematically and interpreted using a comparative-conceptual and hermeneutic approach, focusing on key philosophical constructs related to self-control. The comparative-conceptual method was chosen to highlight both the commonalities and differences between Plato's and al-Ghazali's conceptualizations of self-control, while the hermeneutic approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the underlying philosophical principles in their works. Through our analysis, self-control emerges as rational in Plato's framework and transcendental in al-Ghazali's. Furthermore, the analysis is directed at the philosophical integration of rationality and transcendence in self-control, thereby enriching philosophical perspectives and cutting-edge scientific understanding of the issue.

C. Result and Discussion

Self-Control: From Philosophical Discourse to Interdisciplinary Topic

The Concept of Self-Control

Basically, there is no single and universally agreed-upon conceptual definition of self-control. Experts hold differing views on which factors are most essential in self-control. These include the "inhibition" factor, the ability to select and implement strategies, the temporal preference factor in decision-making, and various other elements. Studies conducted by Inzlicht show that the conceptual definition of self-control has evolved over time. It has shifted from being understood merely as an effort to restrain impulses due to certain moral considerations, to encompassing any means of prioritizing one motive deemed most essential among others.²⁰ There is no single framework that successfully encapsulates all such conceptual variations.

¹⁷ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005).

¹⁸ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*, ed. Najāḥ 'Auḍ (Kairo: Dār al-Muqaṭṭam, 2010).

¹⁹ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Mī'rāj as-Sālikīn* (Kairo: Silsilāt as-Ṣaḳāfah al-Islāmiyyah, 1964).

²⁰ Michael Inzlicht et al., "Integrating Models of Self-Regulation," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-061020-105721>, 320-322.

However, in general, self-control can be defined as an individual's ability to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions to align with the adopted moral standards and values.²¹ Gufron emphasized the aspect of cognitive consideration in self-control.²² Englert emphasizes the aspect of emotional impulses and rational considerations that prioritize long-term satisfaction.²³ Fujita emphasized other aspects, such as the ability to choose goals, find appropriate methods, consider limitations, and monitor and evaluate the actions.²⁴ In general, self-control refers to the process of integrating cognitive consideration, rational judgment, and the management of emotional impulses, thereby allowing individuals to live a meaningful life consistent with adopted moral values.

Self-Control as a Interdisciplinary Topic

Self-control has become an interdisciplinary concern, with psychology,²⁵ neuroscience,²⁶ sociology,²⁷ behavioral economics,²⁸ education,²⁹ and philosophy offering distinct yet complementary frameworks. While psychology explores self-regulation mechanisms, philosophy emphasizes moral autonomy and virtue cultivation.³⁰ Each of these disciplines examines and provides a unique perspective on issues related to self-control.

In the contemporary discourse, self-control is often associated with three concepts, namely: self-control, self-determination, and mindfulness. Self-control emphasizes the ability to resist short-term impulses and temptations, delay instant gratification, and self-discipline. Self-control prioritizes the achievement of long-term goals. For example, refraining from consuming

²¹ Kentaro Fujita, Jessica J. Carnevale, and Yaacov Trope, "Understanding Self-Control as a Whole vs. Part Dynamic," *Neuroethics* 11, no. 3 (2018), 283-296; Jesús de la Fuente et al., "Self- vs. External-Regulation Behavior ScaleTM in Different Psychological Contexts: A Validation Study," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022), DOI 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.922633, 1-3.

²² M. Nur Ghufon and Rini Risnawati, *Teori-Teori Psikologi* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2010), 41-48.

²³ Chris Englert, "Self-Control – A Critical Discussion of a Key Concept in Sport and Exercise Psychology," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 80 (2025): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2025.102878>, 2-3.

²⁴ Kentaro Fujita, "On Conceptualizing Self-Control as More Than the Effortful Inhibition of Impulses," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 4 (November 17, 2011), doi: 10.1177/1088868311411165, 352-366.

²⁵ Ghufon and Risnawati, *Teori-Teori Psikologi*.

²⁶ Usan Ripaan, "Tinjauan Neurosains Terhadap Konsep Nafs (Amarah, Lawwamah, Dan Muthma'innah) Menurut Al-Ghazali Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Pendidikan Islam," *Islamadina : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* (2023), 201-215.

²⁷ Carter Hay et al., "Collective Self-Control as a Feature of Social Contexts: Theoretical Arguments and a Multilevel Empirical Test," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (2023), 90-135; Li Quancai, Cui Meng, and Cui Kunjie, "Social Control and Self-Control: Factors Linking Exposure to Domestic Violence and Adolescents' Internet Gaming Addiction," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14 (2023), doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1245563, 1-3.

²⁸ Deborah A. Cobb-Clark et al., "Sophistication about Self-Control," *Journal of Public Economics* 238 (October 2024), DOI: 10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105196; Mehrad Moeini-Jazani, Sumaya Albalooshi, and Bob M. Fennis, "Harnessing Opportunity Cost Salience for Effortless Self-Control," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 61 (February 2025): 101945.

²⁹ Quancai, Meng, and Kunjie, "Social Control and Self-Control: Factors Linking Exposure to Domestic Violence and Adolescents' Internet Gaming Addiction."

³⁰ Mai Chi Vu and Nicholas Burton, "The Influence of Spiritual Traditions on the Interplay of Subjective and Normative Interpretations of Meaningful Work," *Journal of Business Ethics* 180, no. 2 (October 4, 2022): 543-566.

fast food for the sake of health.³¹ Self-determination highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation, subject freedom, and emotional regulation in self-control. Intrinsic motivation is believed to be stronger and more durable than extrinsic motivation.³² Mindfulness emphasizes the importance of the ability to be consciously present in the present moment with full attention. The practice of mindfulness involves the observation of thoughts, emotions, and body sensations, so that the person can be more aware of internal impulsive urges and be able to respond to situations more wisely and non-reactively.³³ All three concepts have been used in psychology, self-development, and therapy to help individuals in achieving a better self-control.

Philosophical Discourse on Self-Control

In the realm of philosophy, self-control becomes a topic of ethics. Self-control is not just about resisting impulses or delaying gratification, but also about integrating moral principles into daily life. Self-control is an important foundation in character building, moral maturity, and the path to a meaningful life. Plato and Aristotle placed it as one of the ethical virtues and the key to happiness and a meaningful life (*eudaimonia*). Stoicism placed it as a key to achieving inner peace (*ataraxia*).³⁴ Immanuel Kant saw it as a tangible manifestation of moral autonomy. While the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism place it as a very important factor for achieving enlightenment and a means to maintain harmony between individuals and community. In general, philosophical teachings place self-control as a key element that integrates reason, values, and life experiences to achieve a harmonious inner order and a more meaningful life. A philosophical reviews on self-control has inspired empirical research examining how these values are manifested in human behavior.

As a philosophical discourse, self-control is related to several variables. *First*, self-control is based on a deep understanding of the nature of the self. This self comprises both bodily and spiritual elements, along with the various parts and forces inherent in the soul. *Second*, self-control is related to the ethical mechanism and moral virtues. These represent the efforts involved in internalizing moral values regarded as the highest virtues, which guide behavior and give meaning to what is considered good or bad. *Third*, self-control is related to the ethical orientation and moral goals. These serve as the motivating forces for pursuing outcomes that are considered meaningful. This ethical orientation has a transcendental dimension, which is an aspect that

³¹ Hofmann, W., Baumeister, R. F., Förster, G., & Vohs, K. D. (2012). Everyday temptations: An experience sampling study of desire, conflict, and self-control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1318–1335. doi.org/10.1037/a0026545

³² Richard M. Ryan & Edward L. Deci, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation from A Self-Determination Theory Perspective: Definitions, Theory, Practices, and Future Directions", *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 2020, doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860.

³³ Ryad Chems-Maarif, Kate Cavanagh, Ruth Baer, Jenny Gu, Clara Strauss, "Defining Mindfulness: A Review of Existing Definitions and Suggested Refinements", *Mindfulness* (2025) 16:1-20, doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02507-2.

³⁴ Christina Hirsch, Charlotte von Bülow, and Peter Simpson, "Stoicism, Philosophy as a Way of Life and Negative Capability: Developing a Capacity for Working in Radical Uncertainty," *Leadership* 19, no. 5 (2023), 398. DOI: 10.1177/17427150231178092.

leads to the pursuit of the meaning of life and connection with a higher reality or spirituality. This transcendental dimension affirms that self-control is not merely the act of restraining oneself from momentary urges. It also involves situating one's actions within a broader and more meaningful context. Such a context may include the pursuit of enlightenment or the realization of profound life values.

Rational and Transcendence in Plato and al-Ghazali's Views on Self-Control

In an attempt to understand the essence of self-control from a philosophical perspective, this study compares the views of Plato and al-Ghazali. Such a comparison opens up an interesting space for dialogue on the rational and transcendental aspects of self-control. It also raises the possibility of integrating these two dimensions into a more comprehensive framework. Plato, known as a prominent Greek philosopher, advocated a rational model of self-control. In his model, reason plays the most important role. While al-Ghazali, an outstanding Muslim thinker, emphasized the transcendental and spiritual aspects of self-control. The heart plays the main role in his conception. He regarded the heart as the central faculty guiding and sustaining the practice of self-control. The emphasis on the rational and transcendental aspects in the views of the two figures appears in three aspects; *First*, the soul as a battleground of self-control; *second*, self-control as an ethical mechanism and moral virtue; and *third*, the ethical orientation of self-control.

The Soul as a Battleground of Self-Control

Plato's views on self-control is rooted in his description of the soul as the most important element of the human self. Plato is a dualist. According to him, humans consist of two elements; the soul and body. For him, these two elements are different substances, and not a unit. Between these two elements, the soul is the most important element. In *Cratylus*, he refers to the body as a grave and a prison for the soul.³⁵ In *Phaedo*, he states that the philosophers desires death so that their souls can be freed from their bodies, so they can free themselves from bodily needs.³⁶ He said that the soul is the source of motion that moves its own substance and moves the body.³⁷

Similar to Plato, al-Ghazali grounds his model of self-control in a nuanced view of the soul. He argued that the human being consists of two substances, namely the body (*al-jism*) and the soul (*an-nafs*).³⁸ The soul holds a more noble position than the body. The soul originates from Allah and is therefore spiritual. While the body is material and temporary.³⁹ However, unlike Plato's strict dualism, al-Ghazali conceives the soul and body as an integrated unity, where the

³⁵ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 400c, 119.

³⁶ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 64c, 56.

³⁷ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 895b, 1551.

³⁸ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Ma'ārij al-Qudsi* (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 8-10.

³⁹ al-Ghazālī, *Ma'ārij al-Qudsi*, 9-11.

heart (*qalb*) plays a central role in moral development.⁴⁰ The body serves as a vessel that needs to be maintained and controlled properly. The care of the body is a primary condition for the soul to function optimally in expressing its spiritual-transcendental potential.

The soul, according to Plato, has three parts.⁴¹ *First*, the rational (*logos*), which is the soul's ability to think rationally and logically. Plato viewed this rational part as the highest part of the soul and should lead and be the counterweight of the other two parts. This rational part directs human beings towards the pursuit of truth, wisdom, and self-control. *Second*, the emotional (*spirited; thymos*), which relates to courage, honor, self-esteem, ambition, and emotions. This part is a source of motivation and a driver of action. This part should be guided by reason so as not to be excessive. *Third*, the appetitive (*epithymia*). This part relates to desires, physical urges, and basic needs, such as eating, drinking, and other worldly pleasures. This part must be controlled by reason so that the self is not enslaved by excessive desire. In *Timaeus*, Plato mentions the rational part located in the head, the emotional part in the chest, and the appetitive part below the diaphragm. Of the three parts, only the rational part is eternal, while the other two will die along with the body.⁴²

Unlike Plato, al-Ghazali did not place reason as the main part that controls the soul. According to him, the soul is a unity of four substances, namely the heart (*qalb*), the spirit (*rūh*), the soul (*nafs*), and the intellect (*'aql*).⁴³ These four substances are not parts of the soul, but rather different terms to refer to the soul as an essential unity.⁴⁴

For al-Ghazali, these four substances are both spiritual and material. As spiritual substances, these four substances are identical and are divine and transcendental (*latīfah rabbāniyyah rūḥāniyyah*). The heart, soul, and intellect are substances that have the ability to know, understand, and control.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, as a material substance, the heart refers to the organ located on the left side of the chest cavity; spirit (*rūh*) is the subtle energy that originates from the heart and spreads throughout the body through veins and blood vessels; the soul (*nafs*) includes desires (*syahwah*) and emotions (*ghaḍab*); while the intellect (*'aql*) is the thinking power located in the human brain.⁴⁶ In al-Ghazali's view, these four substances of the soul are united in a single transcendental unity that connects the inner dimension of man with the divine reality that transcends the material world.

⁴⁰ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Mi'rāj as-Sālikīn* (Kairo: Silsilāt as-Ṣaqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1964), 40-41.

⁴¹ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 419a-e, 136-137.

⁴² Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 44d-45a, 1248.

⁴³ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, 877.

⁴⁴ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Ar-Risālah al-Ladūniyyah," in *Al-Quṣūr al-Awā'il*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Abū al-A'lā, vol. II (Mesir: Maktabah al-Jundī, 1970), 100.

⁴⁵ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, 877.

⁴⁶ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Ma'ārij al-Qudsi*, 161; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, 880.

Plato and al-Ghazali provide symbolic illustrations of the balance of the soul. In *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah* al-Ghazali describes the soul as a kingdom; the heart as a king, the body as the whole territory, the intellect as the prime minister, desires as the provincial governor, the emotions are the enemy, while the other parts are like the king's armies. A king must cooperate with the prime minister to achieve good governance. The provincial governor must be controlled, and the enemy must be supervised. The condition of the kingdom would be chaotic if the king was weak and the prime minister was unable to control the provincial governor and supervise the enemies. As a result, the entire army and territory will be under enemy control. The same is true of the image of the soul. The heart must be strong so that the reason can control desires and emotions, so that all part of the body can be controlled directed towards goodness. If the heart is weak and dysfunctional, then the reason will also become weak. As a result, desires and emotions will dominate the soul and control all the part of the body.⁴⁷

Plato illustrated the soul as a charioteer about to fly towards the world of Ideas. The horseman symbolizes reason. He was in control of the reins of two winged horses on the chariot. The first horse that symbolizes emotion (*thymos*), is brilliant white, full of spirit, and ready to shoot upwards towards the world of Ideas. The second horse, which symbolizes appetite (*epythima*), is pitch black, wild, difficult to calm down, and always tempted to plunge downwards. The horseman's task is to maintain a balance between the white horse's desire to shoot upwards and the black horse's desire to plunge downwards. Through this illustration Plato intends to say that it is the reason that is in charge of controlling and realizing harmony between the parts of the soul. That balance will be achieved if the reason is able to direct, emotions are supportive, and appetites submissive.

Her form may be described in a figure as a composite nature made up of a charioteer and a pair of winged steeds. The steeds of the gods are immortal, but ours are one mortal and the other immortal. The immortal soul soars upwards into the heavens, but the mortal drops her plumes and settles upon the earth.⁴⁸

The views of Plato and al-Ghazali above point out certain similarities and differences. Both of their views on self-control are based on a descriptions of the soul. For both, the soul is a battleground of self-control. A person will be able to control himself if the soul is controlled by reason according to Plato and by the heart according to al-Ghazali. The control of reason over the soul in Plato reflects the rational character of his views on self-control. In contrast, the control of the heart over the soul and the essence of the soul's spirituality in al-Ghazali reflects a transcendental character.

⁴⁷ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*, 29.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 246a-c, 524.

Plato's and al-Ghazali's Concept of Self-Control

The rationality of self-control in Plato's view is also evident in how he defines this concept in two different senses. *First*, he defines self-control as an individual ethical process and mechanism. This process involves a conscious and continuous effort to make reason (*logos*) become the controller of the emotional (*thymos*) and appetite (*epithymia*).⁴⁹ The outcome is a state of balance and harmony among these three elements.

If appetite (*epithymia*) controls the soul, then desires will become wild. The self will be dominated by excessive desire, boundless pleasure, and even a hedonistic lifestyle. If the emotional (*thymos*) is the controller, the spirit will be dominant. The person will be braver, more persistent, oriented towards self-esteem, honor, and status. Emotions are good as long as they are supported by logical considerations. Uncontrolled emotions will lead to bad self-attitude. Meanwhile, if the rational part (*logos*) controls the soul, then the person will be more able to control himself, be wiser, truth-oriented, and be able to actualize the main ethical values.

Nevertheless, the dominance of reason that negates the emotional and appetite is also not good, as it can lead to a lack of empathy, social engagement, and positive emotions. Therefore, self-control is a process and mechanism that balances the three parts of the soul, where reason become as the primary controller without eliminating the other parts of the soul.

Plato indicates that self-control as an ethical mechanism must be based on deep knowledge and awareness.⁵⁰ Self-control means an active manifestation of self-awareness. A person who possesses self-awareness will act in accordance with his limitations, abilities, weaknesses, and tendencies. He will also understand the consequences that may arise if he exceeds those limits. For example, if he realizes that his emotions tend to overflow and mislead easily, he will try to control them by deeply understanding the causes and consequences.

Second, Plato conceptualizes self-control as *sophrosyne*, a cardinal virtue marked by harmony among the parts of the soul. It signifies not only discipline but also moral maturity and inner balance. In this condition, all parts of the soul are harmoniously arranged, with none being excessive or too dominant. Each part performs its function in a proportionate and balanced manner. *Sophrosyne* is an ideal moral virtue where self-control has become an individual's character and is manifested in daily actions that support a moral life, both personally and socially.⁵¹

For al-Ghazali, the transcendence of self-control is evident in how he defines this concept as an integral process that harmonizes the four substances of the soul within the framework of Islamic spirituality. The process is manifested in four ways. *First*, self-control is manifested through self-introspection (*muḥāsabah*). This practice involves investigating, contemplating, and evaluating one's own thoughts and actions. It also includes examining the intentions that

⁴⁹ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 419a-e, 136-137.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 1651-e, 651-652.

⁵¹ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*. 157a-d, 643-644.

underlie those actions. Through self-introspection, one will gain objective self-awareness, as well as recognize the strengths and weaknesses of his soul. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that self-introspection is the gateway to self-control, inner enlightenment, and opens up space for transcendental experiences that connect the human soul with the divine reality that transcends the material world.⁵² Consistent practice of self-introspection will increase self-awareness and the ability to control emotions, thereby supporting moral and spiritual transformation.⁵³

Second, self-control is manifested in the cultivation of the heart (*tarbiyah al-qalb*) through a series of spiritual practices, such as prayer, dhikr, and the implementation of other worship. According to al-Ghazali, the cultivation of the heart is necessary to strengthen the individual's relationship with the transcendental dimension and improve moral qualities. For him, the heart is not only a source of feelings and emotions but also an instrument of knowledge and a vehicle for spiritual development. It functions as a self-controller that regulates and determines the movements of the limbs into actions.⁵⁴ The cultivation of the heart is intended to maximize its function, which includes the cognitive function (creative power), the emotional function (feeling and sense), and intentional function (volitional power). Continuous cultivation of the heart will improve the ability of self-control, emotional regulation, moral integrity, and deepen the connection with the transcendental dimension of reality.⁵⁵

Third, self-control is manifested in the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*). Al-Ghazali emphasized that the human soul was essentially created by Allah in a holy, pure, and perfect original state. Due to exposure to desires and worldly temptations, the soul becomes contaminated by despicable qualities. Self-control will be realized when the soul is able to return to its primordial state of holiness.⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali emphasizes the moral and transcendental dimensions in the three stages of purification of the soul. These stages are the emptying of the soul from despicable qualities (*takhallī*), the filling of the soul with praiseworthy qualities (*tahallī*), and the formation of a soul that is ready to experience transcendence (*tajallī*).⁵⁷ The moral aspect is evident in the stage of *takhallī* and *tahallī* where there is a change from bad to

⁵² al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, 386-390.

⁵³ Azwani Masuwai, Hafizhah Zulkifli, and Ab Halim Tamuri, "The Importance of Self-Assessment for Islamic Education Teacher as Mudarris," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 12, no. 2 (2023).

⁵⁴ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*.

⁵⁵ Małgorzata Steć, Małgorzata Maria Kulik, and Anna Wendołowska, "From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (Kmdd)," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021); Patrick J. Sweeney and Louis W. Fry, "Character Development through Spiritual Leadership," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 64, no. 2 (2012).

⁵⁶ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, 59-65.

⁵⁷ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Imlā' Fī Isykalāt al-Iḥyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1980),

good behavior.⁵⁸ The transcendental aspect is seen in the *tajallī* stage, where the soul is able to absorb and reflect divine values. This stage also opens access to transcendental experience.⁵⁹

Fourth, self-control is formed through an active and intensive mental struggle (*mujāhadah*) to conquer and control worldly desires within oneself. The inner struggle relies on reason as a rational instrument integrated with the heart as a spiritual instrument. According to al-Ghazali, there is always a tug-of-war within human between the power of reason and the power of desires. Reason leads to goodness, while desires want excessive fulfillment.⁶⁰ Mental struggle is necessary so that humans do not get trapped in *an-nafs al-ammārah*. This is the state in which desires and emotions dominate and control the soul. It is also essential to avoid *an-nafs al-lawwāmah*, the condition of the soul that is inconsistent with goodness. Desires, lust, and emotions that are not trained and controlled can hinder the purity of the soul and obscure the divine light in the heart. An active and intensive mental struggle will train the heart and reason to be able to control the desires and emotions, so that the human soul can be calm and close to Allah (*an-nafs al-muṭma'innah*).

The conceptions of self-control in Plato and al-Ghazali reveal sharply contrasting characters and distinct modes of manifestation. In Plato's rational framework, self-control emerges through ethical processes and mechanisms that bring the three parts of the soul into equilibrium. This balance is central to his conception of moral life. He further articulates it through the value and virtue known as *sophrosyne*. In this framework, reason (*logos*) functions as the chief regulator, maintaining balance without suppressing the emotional (*thymos*) or appetitive (*epithymia*) faculties. As a result, self-control manifests as an active expression of self-consciousness.

By contrast, al-Ghazali's transcendental vision of self-control is situated within an Islamic spiritual paradigm. This vision is realized through a series of devotional and formative practices. These include self-introspection (*muḥāsabah*), the cultivation of the heart (*tarbiyah al-qalb*), the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*), and the intensive mental struggle (*mujāhadah*). Each discipline, in his view, progressively refines the believer's will and aligns it with a higher, divinely ordained purpose.

Ethical Orientation of Self-Control

Plato's rationality and al-Ghazali's transcendence are also evident in their views on the ethical orientation of self-control. The subsequent four points make this clear.

⁵⁸ Umaruddin Nasution and Casmini Casmini, "Integrasi Pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali & Ivan Pavlov Dalam Membentuk Prilaku Peserta Didik," *INSANIA : Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* 25, no. 1 (2020).

⁵⁹ Hanafi F. L. and Hambali A.Y.R., "Hakikat Penyucian Jiwa (Takiyat An-Nafs) Dalam Perspektif Al-Ghazali," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 19 (2013), 1-11.

⁶⁰ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, III, 17-19, 61-63.

First, they believe that self-control will ensure internal justice within oneself. Plato states that “justice is doing one’s own work and not meddling with what isn’t one’s own”.⁶¹ Internal justice will be realized if the reason is able to control the emotional and appetitive parts and ensure that each part of the soul performs its own function without negating and interfering with the tasks of the other parts.⁶² Plato called self-control as “the ordering of the pleasures and desires, the greatest and noblest victory”.⁶³ Without self-control (*sophrosyne*), emotions and desires will take over each other, disrupting the inner order, monopolizing actions, and causing injustice.⁶⁴

Al-Ghazali refers the internal justice of the self as the order and balance (*i’tidāl*) of the various soul powers. This internal justice occurs when the soul’s powers are in harmony and do not dominate each other. In this condition, reason takes the leads and desires (both emotions and lust) are kept under control. At the same time, the heart remains enlightened. He said that “justice in mind is when the power of the soul does not rebel against the commands of reason that has been subject to the light of revelation”.⁶⁵ Self-control is not just about restraining desires, but placing each soul power in its proper position and role. For al-Ghazali, this is the moderate state of the soul that shows a balance between moral virtues within oneself, namely wisdom (*ḥikmah*), courage (*syajā’ah*), and temperance (*‘iffah*). This condition shows maturity of the soul.⁶⁶

Second, Plato and al-Ghazali both set the pursuit of happiness as the highest ethical goal of self-control. Plato called it *eudaimonia*, which is true happiness that comes from mental order. Self-control is the path to true happiness that does not depend on external conditions, but rather comes from the internal conditions of the soul.⁶⁷ Only those who have self-control are able to pursue true happiness. The true happiness is not the result of the satisfaction of desires, but rather the direction of the soul towards the highest good. It can only be achieved when the soul is in a state of harmony, and conversely, it is impossible to be achieved by a person whose soul is chaotic. A person who is dominated by emotions and enslaved by desires will live in a state of imbalance soul due to conflicting impulses. Plato states: “One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other”.⁶⁸

Al-Ghazali calls that happiness as *sa’ādah*, that is, true happiness in this world and in the hereafter. Unlike *eudaimonia*, *sa’ādah* refers to the concept of happiness with a transcendental

⁶¹ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 433a, 1064.

⁶² Christopher Moore, *The Virtue of Agency: Sophrosyne and Self-Constitution in Classical Greece* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2023), 108-110.

⁶³ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 647d, 1341.

⁶⁴ Chloe Bamboulis, “Self-Knowledge as Self-Improvement in Plato’s Dialogues and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy,” *Theory and Psychology* 33, no. 3 (2023).

⁶⁵ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, III, 23-24, 66-67.

⁶⁶ Taylan Budur, “Virtue-Based Leadership and Organizational Commitment: A Study from Al-Ghazali’s Perspective,” *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* (August 22, 2024).

⁶⁷ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 507ca, 851.

⁶⁸ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 443d, 1075.

dimension. In *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah* al-Ghazali states that "true happiness is the unity of the peaceful soul, free from the shackles of worldly desires and pleasures, obtained through complete submission to Allah".⁶⁹ In other words, *sa'ādah* is a transcendental-spiritual happiness that indicates closeness to Allah. This transcendence and spirituality of happiness can be achieved because of the spiritual and transcendental dimension of the soul. The heart is the main instrument in achieving this happiness. Khudori Saleh said that happiness in the view of al-Ghazali is an accumulation of the process of spiritual practice which includes recognizing the nature and character of the self, placing the heart as the controller of the soul, and contemplation of Allah.⁷⁰

Third, both thinkers regard self-control as a path to freedom. Plato distinguishes between true freedom and pseudo-freedom. True freedom occurs when the soul is controlled by reason, which consciously directs it towards goodness. Meanwhile, pseudo-freedom occurs when one feels able to do whatever he wants. For Plato, a person who always follows the impulses of his desires is not free, but rather a slave to his own desires.⁷¹ The truly free person is who lets the reason to take control of his soul. A person who lives under the control of his emotions and desires is enslaved and not free.⁷² True freedom arises when reason governs the soul, liberating it from the tyranny of desires.⁷³

In contrast, al-Ghazali views freedom as moral elevation and noble character achieved through purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*) and spiritual discipline. He described noble character as: "a solid state of soul, from which good deeds spontaneously arise without compulsion".⁷⁴ This moral disposition is a habit that is internalized through purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*) and mental struggle (*mujahādah*). This process is carried out actively and intensively, so that the moral virtues (*ḥikmah*, *syajā'ah*, *'iffah*, and *'adālah*) are internalized as a stable disposition of the soul. At the individual level, the orientation towards noble character in al-Ghazali's view become the basis for character building that leads a person towards emotional regulation and moral

⁶⁹ al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*, 38-41.

⁷⁰ Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Al-Ghazali's Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (2022).

⁷¹ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 238e, 517.

⁷² Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 256b, 533.

⁷³ Robin James, "Waves of Moderation: The Sound of Sophrosyne in Ancient Greek and Neoliberal Times," in *Sound and Affect: Voice, Music, World*, ed. Judith Lochhead, vol. 50 (London: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 365–383.

⁷⁴ al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, III, 58-59.

maturity.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, at the social level, this noble character is manifested in positive contributions to society, social virtue (*al-maṣlaḥah*), and avoiding behavior that harms others.⁷⁶

Fourth, Plato and al-Ghazali both hold the view that self-control is the path to the formation of an ideal and perfect human. For Plato, the ideal human is an individual whose soul is ordered like an ideal state, where reason acts as king, emotions as guardians, and desires as obedient workers.⁷⁷ While for al-Ghazali, self-control is the path to a perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*); a person who has adequate knowledge about himself, his God, his world, and his life after death (the hereafter).⁷⁸ The perfect human is the pinnacle of moral, mental, and spiritual development achieved through structured, tiered spiritual practices and self-controlled.⁷⁹ This perfect human level is not a static condition that can be achieved instantly, but rather the result of a continuous process of self-control and purification of the soul.

Rational-cum-Transcendental: An Integrative Model of Self-Control

From a philosophical standpoint, the integration of the rational and transcendental models of self-control as articulated by Plato and al-Ghazali is both feasible and conceptually enriching. We therefore propose rational-cum-transcendental as an integrative model of self-control. This integrative model bridges classical Greek rationalism with Islamic spiritual ethics. Built upon the convergences and divergences in their respective frameworks, this model rests on the following three core arguments.

First, self-control operates through a dual mechanism: reason and heart. Reason disciplines emotions and desires in pursuit of a life aligned with virtue. It also engages in rational clarification, calibrating beliefs, and structuring a coherent hierarchy of goals to ensure consistency between thought and action. The heart, in turn, serves as the conduit for spiritual orientation and the cultivation of a transcendental awareness, grounding rational order within a higher moral purpose.

Second, the model unites the dimensions of rationality and transcendence into a single evaluative framework. Rationality supplies the critical lens for scrutinizing motives and anticipating consequences. The transcendental dimension infuses this process with moral depth and ultimate meaning, orienting conduct toward higher aims. This synthesis harmonizes analytical rigor with spiritual consciousness.

⁷⁵ Najamuddin Amy, Subagyo Adam, and Suparto Wijoyo, "The Concept of Akhlaqul Karimah as a Basic Principle of Character Building in West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia," *PalArch's Journal of Archeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 17, no. 6 (2020); Abd Mukti, Amroeni Drajat, and Mourssi Abbas Mourssi Hassan Kahwash, "Moral Education According to Ibn Miskawayh and Al-Ghazali," *JURNAL TARBIYAH* 28, no. 1 (2021).

⁷⁶ Andi Wahyu Irawan et al., "Building a Culture of Peace in Education: An Exploration of Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on Inner and Social Peace," *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (2023).

⁷⁷ Plato, *Plato Complete Work*, 443d, 1075.

⁷⁸ al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*, 18-20.

⁷⁹ Sumanta, "The Values of Perfect Human Beings in the Dignity Seven of Insān Kāmil," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2021); Nurul Shuhadah Md Yahya and Mohd Manawi Mohd Akib, "Understanding the Concept of Fate as Islamic Psychotherapy," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 9 (September 30, 2024).

Third, the integration of these orientations of rationality and transcendence provides a guiding compass for moral agency. Rationality enables sound judgment and coherent goal-setting. Transcendence ensures that such judgment is anchored in enduring values, fostering inner equilibrium and serenity amid life's challenges.

The operationalization of this rational-cum-transcendental model of self control unfolds in four interrelated stages. It begins with *rational clarification*. In this stage, the beliefs are calibrated and goals hierarchized to align thought, intention, and purpose. This is followed by a diagnostic act of *self-introspection* (*muḥāsabah*) to identify moral strengths, weaknesses, and the congruence between intentions and actions. The third stage is *disciplinary practice*. This stage encompassing habit-formation through virtue exercises and devotional acts such as prayer and *dhikr*, cultivating moral resilience and spiritual receptivity. Finally, the process is maintained through *iterative refinement*. This stage is achieved through a feedback loop that integrates rational and spiritual insights to ensure moral growth.

By fusing these orientations and practices, the rational-cum-transcendental model advances self-control beyond mere inhibition of emotions and desires, evolving into a holistic process of soul-maturation. It empowers individuals to cultivate a strong and balanced character. Moreover, this integrative approach resonates with contemporary Islamic philosophy and psychology. It enriches theoretical perspectives by bridging rational and spiritual dimensions. At the same time, it provides a practical foundation for moral action in everyday life.

In addition to the philosophical standpoint, we intend to highlight how a rational-cum-transcendental model of self-control offers valuable insights for contemporary research and practice in psychology, educational, and ethics. Recent research in the field of Islamic psychology underscores the pivotal role of integrating critical rationality and metacognitive reflection with spiritual practices, such as *dhikr*, prayer, meditation, and heart purification, in cultivating robust self-regulatory capacities. Grounded theory work by Rothman and colleagues proposes a conceptual framework of the soul within an Islamic paradigm that unites conscious cognitive processes with divine awareness, thereby enabling a balanced governance of thoughts, emotions, and actions.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, building on this foundation, Niemiec advances a model that weaves spirituality together with character strengths in the context of the psycho-spiritual journey, empowering individuals to cohere their life trajectories into a unified whole.⁸¹ Complementing these perspectives, Richmond's empirical study illustrates that self-surrender practices, when buttressed by rational argumentation, can significantly bolster self-control and psychological

⁸⁰ Abdallah Rothman and Adrian Coyle, "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018).

⁸¹ Ryan M. Niemiec, Pninit Russo-Netzer, and Kenneth I. Pargament, "The Decoding of the Human Spirit: A Synergy of Spirituality and Character Strengths Toward Wholeness," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020).

resilience in the face of daily temptations.⁸² These convergent findings chart a course toward a holistic theory of self-control that harmonizes analytical rigor with transcendent orientation.

D. Conclusion

This article reveals that Plato and al-Ghazali's views on self-control have a number of similarities and differences. *First*, both of them place the soul as a battlefield of self-control, but they differ in their views on which part of the soul plays the most important role. Plato defines reason as the part that must lead the soul, while al-Ghazali emphasizes the primary role of the heart while asserting that self-control is a process involving transcendental dimensions that can only be achieved by the pure soul. *Second*, both of them defines self-control as an ethical mechanism, moral processes, and individual moral virtue, but they emphasizes different manifestations. These differences further affirm their rational and transcendental models. *Third*, both of them established a certain ethical orientation in self-control, but with different approaches. Plato defines it in a rational framework, while al-Ghazali formulates it in a transcendental model of self-control.

The differences arise because these two prominent figures base their views on different ethical foundations and orientations. Such differences shape the way they conceptualize self-control. They also influence the emphasis each places on particular aspects of it. Nevertheless, the existence of certain points of similarity makes their views can be dialogized and integrated into a more complete conceptualization of self-control, which emphasizes the rational-cum-transcendental model. This proposed model integrates the role of reason and heart as dual mechanisms. It also unites the dimensions of rationality and transcendence into a single framework. Together, these orientations serve to guide the process of self-control. Rational-cum-transcendental model of self-control serve as a strong philosophical foundation for achieving self-well-being and happiness.

The research findings written in this article contribute to three domains. *First*, in the scientific realm of Islamic philosophy, this article contributes to the dialogue of Islamic philosophical views with different philosophical traditions on a particular philosophical topic. This article enriches the literature and fills the gap that has not been filled by scholars, in comparing, dialogue, and integrating the views of two prominent figures from two different philosophical traditions. *Second*, in the realm of interdisciplinary studies, this article can be a foothold for studies related to self-control conducted in various scientific fields, such as philosophy, Islamic psychology, Islamic philosophy, neuroscience, ethics, and others. *Third*, in the realm of contemporary self-control discourse, this article opens up a broader space for reflection on the relevance of the concept of self-control in the context of contemporary life. By integrating Plato's rationality and al-Ghazali's transcendence, this article not only enriches academic understanding, but also provides a foundation for the development of more holistic and applicable methods of self-control. Thus, the contribution of this article lies not only in the exploration of philosophical discourse, but also in the expansion of the scope of knowledge that encourages interdisciplinary dialogue as well as the integration of thought from various intellectual traditions.

⁸² Joel Craig Richmond, "Al-Ghazālī's Moral Psychology: From Self-Control to Self-Surrender" (Thesis, University of Toronto, 2021).

This study is limited to a philosophical comparison between Plato and al-Ghazali and offers an initial framework for integration. Despite of its limitation, this study not only enriches philosophical discourse but also paves the way for interdisciplinary research that combines philosophy, psychology, and Islamic studies. Future research may deepen this dialogue by incorporating empirical insights from psychology and educational praxis, and explore empirical studies that test the applicability of the rational-cum-transcendental model in educational or therapeutic settings.

References

- Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *Al-İmlā' Fī Isykalāt al-Iḥyā'*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1980.
- . “Ar-Risālah al-Ladūniyyah.” In *Al-Quṣūr al-Awā'il*, edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Abū al-A'lā. Vol. II. Mesir: Maktabah al-Jundī, 1970.
- . *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005.
- . *Kīmīyā' as-Sa'ādah*. Edited by Najāh 'Auḍ. Kairo: Dār al-Muqaṭṭam, 2010.
- . *Ma'ārij al-Qudsi*. Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964.
- . *Mi'rāj as-Sālikīn*. Kairo: Silsilāt aṣ-Ṣaqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1964.
- Al-Mesilini, Seyed Zuhair. “A Comparative Study of the Relationship Between Happiness and Reason in the Views of Socrates and Plato, with Emphasis on the Interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Abu Nasr al-Farabi.” *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (December 20, 2024).
- Amy, Najamuddin, Subagyo Adam, and Suparto Wijoyo. “The Concept of Akhlaqul Karimah as a Basic Principle of Character Building in West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia.” *PalArch's Journal of Archeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 17, no. 6 (2020).
- van Baal, Simon Thomas, Lukasz Walasek, Antonio Verdejo-Garcia, and Jakob Hohwy. “Impulsivity and Self-Control as Timeless Concepts: A Conceptual Analysis of Preferences in Intertemporal Choice,” *Decision*, 12 (2), 2022. doi.org/10.1037/deco000257.
- Bamboulis, Chloe. “Self-Knowledge as Self-Improvement in Plato's Dialogues and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.” *Theory and Psychology* 33, no. 3 (2023).
- Becker, Daniela, Katharina Bernecker, Aiste Guobytė, and Daniel Ganama. “Pleasureful Self-Control? A New Perspective on Old Problems.” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 60 (December 2024): 101888.
- Budur, Taylan. “Virtue-Based Leadership and Organizational Commitment: A Study from Al-Ghazali's Perspective.” *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* (August 22, 2024).

- Calenda, Guido. "Theaetetus 151e–186e: Did Plato Refute Protagoras?" *Peitho. Examina Antiqua* 15, no. 1 (December 12, 2024).
- Campbell, Douglas R. "Self-Motion and Cognition: Plato's Theory of the Soul." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 59, no. 4 (2021).
- Carmen Cozma. "In Quest for Virtue: Learning From a Great Tradition." *Philosophy Study* 12, no. 6 (2022).
- Chems-Maarif, Ryad., Cavanagh, Kate., Baer, Ruth., Gu, Jenny., Strauss, Clara. "Defining Mindfulness: A Review of Existing Definitions and Suggested Refinements." *Mindfulness* (2025) 16:1-20, doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02507-2.
- Cinta, Fitria, Nafisatun Najwa, Roni Subhan, and Imam Bonjol Jauhari. "Educational Objectives and Criteria for the Ideal Teacher Perspective of Plato and Al Ghazali." *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 5 (September 7, 2023).
- Cobb-Clark, Deborah A., Sarah C. Dahmann, Daniel A. Kamhöfer, and Hannah Schildberg-Hörisch. "Sophistication about Self-Control." *Journal of Public Economics* 238 (October 2024): 105196.
- Dilnavoz, Raximdjanova. "Comparative Analysis of the Role of the Phenomenon of Freedom in the Views of Plato and Farabi." *Current Research Journal of Pedagogics* 5, no. 9 (September 1, 2024).
- Englert, Chris. "Self-Control – A Critical Discussion of a Key Concept in Sport and Exercise Psychology." *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 80 (2025): 102878.
- Fowler Davis, Sally, and Megan Davies. "Understanding the Effects of Social Cohesion on Social Wellbeing: A Scoping Review." *International Journal of Public Health* 70 (January 30, 2025).
- Fujita, Kentaro. "On Conceptualizing Self-Control as More Than the Effortful Inhibition of Impulses." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 4 (November 17, 2011).
- Fujita, Kentaro, Jessica J. Carnevale, and Yaacov Trope. "Understanding Self-Control as a Whole vs. Part Dynamic." *Neuroethics* 11, no. 3 (2018).
- Ghufron, M. Nur, and Rini Risnawati. *Teori-Teori Psikologi*. Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2010.
- Hanafi F. L. and Hambali A.Y.R. "Hakikat Penyucian Jiwa (Takiyat An-Nafs) Dalam Perspektif Al-Ghazali." *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 19 (2013).
- Hay, Carter, Walter Forrest, Brian Stults, Ryan Meldrum, and Brennan Kirkpatrick. "Collective Self-Control as a Feature of Social Contexts: Theoretical Arguments and a Multilevel Empirical Test." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (2023).

- Hirsch, Christina, Charlotte von Bülow, and Peter Simpson. "Stoicism, Philosophy as a Way of Life and Negative Capability: Developing a Capacity for Working in Radical Uncertainty." *Leadership* 19, no. 5 (2023).
- Hofmann, W., Baumeister, R. F., Förster, G., & Vohs, K. D. (2012). Everyday temptations: An experience sampling study of desire, conflict, and self-control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1318–1335. doi.org/10.1037/a0026545.
- Hussin, Darstan Abdulrahman., Qadr, Bayar Othman., and Azziz, Zryan Hamza. "The Philosophy of Education and Knowledge in the view of Ghazali." *Journal of University of Raparin*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2024).
- Inzlicht, Michael, Kaitlyn M. Werner, Julia L. Briskin, and Brent W. Roberts. "Integrating Models of Self-Regulation." *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2021.
- Irawan, Andi Wahyu, M. Solehuddin, Ilfiandra Ilfiandra, and Hani Yulindrasari. "Building a Culture of Peace in Education: An Exploration of Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on Inner and Social Peace." *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (2023).
- James, Robin. "Waves of Moderation: The Sound of Sophrosyne in Ancient Greek and Neoliberal Times." In *Sound and Affect: Voice, Music, World*, edited by Judith Lochhead, 50:365–383. London: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- Karimulla, Mohammad., and Khodijah, Ajeng. "Memahami Guru Pendidikan Islam dengan Manusia: Wawasan Kritis Pemikiran al-Ghazali dan Plato Menuju Guru Profesional Islami." *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* Vol. 8, No. 1, Januari - Juni 2023.
- Kosim, Nandang, and Aat Royhatudin. "Konsep Merdeka Belajar Dalam Kitab Ihya 'Ulumuddin Menurut Pemikiran Imam Ghazali." *Ta'dibiya* 4, no. 2 (October 1, 2024).
- de la Fuente, Jesús, Mónica Pachón-Basallo, José Manuel Martínez-Vicente, Francisco Javier Peralta-Sánchez, Angélica Garzón-Umerenkova, and Paul Sander. "Self- vs. External-Regulation Behavior Scale™ in Different Psychological Contexts: A Validation Study." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022).
- Ma'muroh, Ma'muroh, Abqorina Abqorina, and Amrin Amrin. "The Concept of Tazkiyatun Nafs by Al-Ghazali and Its Implementation at Pesantren Darut Tasbih Tangerang." *Edu Cendikia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan* 4, no. 02 (November 23, 2024).
- Masuwai, Azwani, Hafizhah Zulkifli, and Ab Halim Tamuri. "The Importance of Self-Assessment for Islamic Education Teacher as Mudarris." *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 12, no. 2 (2023).

- Md Yahya, Nurul Shuhadah, and Mohd Manawi Mohd Akib. "Understanding the Concept of Fate as Islamic Psychotherapy." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 9 (September 30, 2024).
- Moeini-Jazani, Mehrad, Sumaya Albaloooshi, and Bob M. Fennis. "Harnessing Opportunity Cost Salience for Effortless Self-Control." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 61 (February 2025): 101945.
- Moore, Christopher. *The Virtue of Agency: Sophrosyne and Self-Constitution in Classical Greece. The Virtue of Agency: Sophrosyne and Self-Constitution in Classical Greece*. USA: Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Mukti, Abd, Amroeni Drajat, and Mourssi Abbas Mourssi Hassan Kahwash. "Moral Education According to Ibn Miskawayh and Al-Ghazali." *JURNAL TARBIYAH* 28, no. 1 (2021).
- Munjahid, Munjahid. "Reconsidering Al-Ghazali's Educational Thoughts in the Millennial Era." *ALSYS*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2025).
- Nasution, Umaruddin, and Casmini Casmini. "Integrasi Pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali & Ivan Pavlov Dalam Membentuk Prilaku Peserta Didik." *INSANIA: Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* 25, no. 1 (2020).
- Niemiec, Ryan M., Pninit Russo-Netzer, and Kenneth I. Pargament. "The Decoding of the Human Spirit: A Synergy of Spirituality and Character Strengths Toward Wholeness." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020).
- Nur Adillah Omar. "Understanding the Concept of Rulership According to Al-Ghazali in Nasihat Al-Mulūk and Machiavelli in The Prince: A Comparative Analysis." *LECTURES: Journal of Islamic and Education Studies* 3, no. 2 (August 2, 2024).
- Nuryulia, Siti, Muhammad Ibrohim Futuwatuddin, Agus Gunawan, and Iffan Ahmad Gufron. "The Significance of Al-Ghazali's Thought in Contemporary Islamic Education in Indonesia." *Al Hikmah: Journal of Education* 5, no. 2 (December 12, 2024).
- Orak, Jahanbakhsh. "Education From The Perspective of Islamic and Western Scientists (Case Study: Ghazali and Plato)." *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication - TOJDAC* April 2016 Special Edition, DOI NO: 10.7456/1060ASE/013.
- Plato. *Complete Work*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.
- Quancai, Li, Cui Meng, and Cui Kunjie. "Social Control and Self-Control: Factors Linking Exposure to Domestic Violence and Adolescents' Internet Gaming Addiction." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14 (2023).
- Quinn, Philip L. "Self-Control." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge, n.d.

- Richmond, Joel Craig. "Al-Ghazālī's Moral Psychology: From Self-Control to Self-Surrender." Thesis, University of Toronto, 2021.
- Ripa'an, Usan. "Tinjauan Neurosains Terhadap Konsep Nafs (Amarah, Lawwamah, Dan Muthma'innah) Menurut Al-Ghazali Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Pendidikan Islam." *Islamadina : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* (2023).
- Rizayanti, Hana., and Suyadi, Suyadi. "Concept of Nafs and Qalb From The Perspective of Neuroscience: A Study of Al-Ghazali's Thoughts." *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2023).
- Rothman, Abdallah, and Adrian Coyle. "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul." *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018).
- Ryan, Richard M. & Deci, Edward L. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation from A Self-Determination Theory Perspective: Definitions, Theory, Practices, and Future Directions." *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 2020, doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860.
- Shahrudin, Mohd Solahuddin, Mohd Yadman Sarwan, Muhammad Syukri Mohd Ashmir Wong, Nasharuddin Mohammad, Muhammad Zuhaili Saiman, and S Salahudin Suyurno. "The Influence of Tahfiz Education on the Human Soul According to Al-Ghazali's Perspective." *Journal of Quran Sunnah Education & Special Needs* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 2024): 104–112.
- Soleh, Achmad Khudori. "Al-Ghazali's Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (2022).
- Steć, Małgorzata, Małgorzata Maria Kulik, and Anna Wendołowska. "From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (Kmdd®)." *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021).
- Sumanta. "The Values of Perfect Human Beings in the Dignity Seven of Insān Kāmil." *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2021).
- Sweeney, Patrick J., and Louis W. Fry. "Character Development through Spiritual Leadership." *Consulting Psychology Journal* 64, no. 2 (2012).
- Torres, Jorge. "Madness and Vice in Plato's Republic." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (May 4, 2021).
- Vu, Mai Chi, and Nicholas Burton. "The Influence of Spiritual Traditions on the Interplay of Subjective and Normative Interpretations of Meaningful Work." *Journal of Business Ethics* 180, no. 2 (October 4, 2022).

Werner, Kaitlyn M., and Brett Q. Ford. "Self-Control: An Integrative Framework." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2023.

Yazaki, Saeko. "To Discipline or to Forget: A Sufi–Zen Comparative Analysis of the Self in the Writings of al-Ghazālī and Dōgen." *Religions* 15, no. 8 (July 30, 2024).



© 2020 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) license([Deed - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - Creative Commons](#)).