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Psycho-Spiritual Consciousness and Its Relevance to Muslim Minority Communities: Integrating William James and Al-Ghazali

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of consciousness in the thought of William James and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali through an ontological, epistemological, and teleological comparison, and explores its relevance to the psycho-spiritual experience of Muslim minority communities. Employing a qualitative philosophical-comparative method based on library research of primary and secondary texts, the study proceeds through four analytical stages: hermeneutical reading, conceptual mapping, comparative analysis, and integrative synthesis. The findings reveal that James conceives consciousness as a continuous, selective, and adaptive stream of subjective experience grounded in empirical-pragmatic epistemology, while al-Ghazali conceives it as a spiritually illuminated state of the soul (*nafs*) attained through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah*, oriented toward *ma'rifatullah*. Despite their divergent metaphysical foundations, both thinkers affirm the transformative, ethical, and meaning-making dimensions of inner experience. This study formulates a three-axis psycho-spiritual integrative model, namely the cognitive-adaptive, spiritual-purification, and ethical-social axes, which demonstrates that James's adaptive consciousness and al-Ghazali's spiritual disciplines function as complementary resources for Muslim minority communities navigating identity negotiation, spiritual resilience, and social participation in non-Muslim majority pluralistic contexts. The model contributes to Islamic psychology and minority religious studies while offering a conceptual foundation for consciousness-based approaches to Islamic education and community empowerment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consciousness occupies a foundational position in philosophical and psychological inquiry, constituting the very ground upon which human experience, self-identity, moral reasoning, and existential orientation are constructed (Ihsan et al., 2022; Jalmagambetova et al., 2024). Across civilizations and intellectual traditions, thinkers have approached consciousness through profoundly different epistemological lenses, reflecting the diversity of metaphysical commitments that shape how human beings understand their inner lives. Within this broad discourse, the philosophical-psychological traditions of the modern West and classical Islam have each developed sophisticated accounts of consciousness, accounts that, despite their differences, share a deep concern for the transformative, ethical, and existential dimensions of inner experience (Ayatollahy, 2023; Haq, 2023).

William James, widely regarded as a founding figure of modern psychology, articulated a vision of consciousness as a continuous, selective, and adaptive stream of subjective experience (James, 1890). His concept of the stream of consciousness, elaborated in *The Principles of Psychology* and extended into the domain of religious and mystical experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, positions consciousness as the dynamic center of selfhood, freedom, and meaning-making (Benevides, 2021; Snarey et al., 2025). For James, consciousness is inseparable from direct experience, pragmatic engagement with reality, and the individual's capacity to navigate and transform their world (Blum, 2015; Taylor, 2010). Crucially, James's phenomenological approach also opened the door to understanding religious and mystical experience as psychologically valid and potentially transformative dimensions of human consciousness, dimensions that resist reduction to purely mechanistic or neurological explanations (Cole-Turner, 2021; Hewitt, 2012).

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), one of the most influential scholars in the history of Islamic thought, developed a conception of consciousness that is at once psychological, ethical, and metaphysical. Within his framework, consciousness is not a product of empirical observation but a spiritual condition of the soul (*nafs*) illuminated by Divine light (*nur al-Haqq*) through the disciplined process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) (Kirabaev, 2024; Rassool & Keskin, 2025). Al-Ghazali's account of the inner life integrates the *qalb* (heart), *ruh* (spirit), and *nafs* (soul) as a unified spiritual structure whose highest function is *ma'rifatullah*, that is, direct and intuitive knowledge of God (Ibrahim & Efremova, 2025; Mohd Akib et al., 2023; Nursoy-Demir et al., 2024). Practices such as *muraqabah* (spiritual vigilance) and *muhasabah* (self-examination) are, in this framework, not merely devotional acts but the very mechanisms through which consciousness is cultivated, purified, and directed toward ultimate truth (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Teten et al., 2025).

The intellectual significance of comparing these two thinkers lies not only in their philosophical differences but in the productive tension between them. James proceeds from a psychological approach grounded in observation, radical empiricism, and pragmatic epistemology, while al-Ghazali stands on an epistemology of revelation, spiritual intuition, and theocentric ethics. Yet both place the inner life of the human being, its transformative potential, its moral depth, and its capacity for meaning, at the very center of their respective projects (Hanna-e-Kalbi & Tahira Basharat, 2020;

Kanzian & Legenhausen, 2007b). This shared concern, across fundamentally different paradigms, opens a rich space for integrative philosophical-psychological inquiry (Melo & Resende, 2020; Santana, 2025).

The relevance of this integrative inquiry extends beyond the domain of philosophy and the history of ideas. It acquires a particularly urgent practical dimension when situated within the lived realities of Muslim minority communities, that is, communities that navigate their religious identity, spiritual practice, and social existence within societies where Islam is not the dominant cultural or institutional force. Across diverse global contexts, Muslim minorities face the dual challenge of maintaining robust religious identity while engaging productively with surrounding non-Muslim majority cultures (Duderija, 2007; Peek, 2005). Studies have consistently shown that the inner spiritual and psychological resources of Muslim individuals, including their faith-based consciousness, their practices of self-reflection and spiritual vigilance, and their sense of connection to a transcendent source of meaning, play a critical role in sustaining identity, fostering resilience, and enabling harmonious social participation in pluralistic settings (Jamal et al., 2025; Mitha & Adatia, 2016; Rutledge, 2025).

In the context of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation yet home to significant Muslim minority populations in its eastern regions, these dynamics take on a distinctive character. Muslim communities in Eastern Indonesia, particularly those living as minorities within non-Muslim majority societies, have developed over centuries patterns of acculturation, identity negotiation, and coexistence that reflect both the adaptability and the spiritual depth of Islamic practice in minority contexts (Ashadi et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2025). For such communities, the psycho-spiritual dimensions of consciousness, specifically the inner practices through which Islamic identity is sustained, religious meaning is preserved, and social harmony is maintained, are not peripheral concerns but matters of communal survival and flourishing. The question of how Muslim minorities negotiate identity through both adaptive psychological processes and deep spiritual practices maps directly onto the conceptual terrain explored by James and al-Ghazali, respectively (Brandt, 2013; Mihar, 2019).

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of integrating psychological and spiritual frameworks in understanding Muslim experience. The trajectory of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia has demonstrated the growing scholarly demand for frameworks that move beyond the Western psychological canon toward models that honor the spiritual epistemology of Islamic tradition (Gumiandari, Madjid, et al., 2022; Nasir, 2009; Rothman & Coyle, 2018). Simultaneously, empirical research on Muslim minorities has underscored the centrality of faith-based coping, spiritual resilience, and community solidarity in enabling Muslim minorities to navigate discrimination, social marginalization, and identity pressures (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Jensen & Kofoed, 2022; Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020). Yet a systematic theoretical framework that integrates the philosophical-psychological dimensions of consciousness, drawing on both the Western tradition of James and the Islamic tradition of al-Ghazali, and applies this

integrated model to the specific context of Muslim minority experience, remains notably absent from the literature (Gumiandari, Subandi, et al., 2022; Omais & Santos, 2024).

Within the last five years, several studies have explored the intersection of consciousness, spirituality, and Islamic psychology. Aliana and Rija (2025) examined the metaphor of light as consciousness in Suhrawardi's illuminationist philosophy and its relevance to modern psychology, demonstrating the compatibility between spiritual epistemology and contemporary psychological discourse. Khofifah (2025) highlighted the transformative dimensions of consciousness within Islamic spirituality and transpersonal psychology, though her analysis remains thematic rather than conceptually comparative. Syafii et al. (2025) empirically evaluated the integration of Islamic spiritual practices including *muhasabah* and *muraqabah* into contemporary mindfulness frameworks, affirming the psychological relevance of spiritual consciousness without engaging its philosophical foundations in dialogue with Western thought. Collectively, these studies reveal a significant gap: the absence of a systematic ontological, epistemological, and teleological comparison between James's stream of consciousness and al-Ghazali's spiritual-metaphysical model, and the further absence of any application of such a comparative framework to the lived experience of Muslim minority communities.

This study seeks to address that gap. It aims to: (1) identify the conceptual structure of consciousness in each thinker across its ontological, epistemological, and teleological dimensions; (2) map the convergences and divergences between the two frameworks; (3) formulate a psycho-spiritual integrative model grounded in philosophical analysis; and (4) explore the relevance of this integrative model for understanding the spiritual resilience, identity negotiation, and social participation of Muslim minority communities, with particular reference to Muslim minorities in pluralistic, non-Muslim majority contexts such as those found in Eastern Indonesia. Through this four-fold inquiry, the study advances a contribution that is simultaneously philosophical, psychological, and socio-religiously grounded, one that speaks to the intellectual priorities of contemporary Islamic psychology while addressing the lived realities of Muslim communities navigating the challenges of minority existence in pluralistic societies.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a philosophical-comparative method, which is appropriate for examining conceptual structures and epistemological frameworks across intellectual traditions (Ayatollahy, 2023; Jalmagambetova et al., 2024). The analysis is structured around three analytical categories applied symmetrically to both thinkers: ontology (the nature of consciousness), epistemology (the sources of knowledge about consciousness), and teleology (the purpose of consciousness). These categories were selected on the basis of their established centrality in both the philosophy of mind and Islamic philosophical theology (Kanzian & Legenhausen, 2007b), ensuring methodological transparency and enabling a rigorous, systematic comparison.

Primary data consist of the foundational works of William James and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. For James, the principal sources are *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and

The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), which together represent the empirical-psychological and phenomenological-religious dimensions of his thought. For al-Ghazali (2011, 2013), the primary sources are *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, and *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, selected because they collectively articulate his account of the *nafs*, spiritual consciousness, and the epistemology of inner illumination. Secondary sources were drawn from Scopus-indexed peer-reviewed literature (2004-2025), selected for their relevance to the philosophical-psychological dimensions of consciousness, Islamic psychology, and the socio-religious experience of Muslim minority communities.

Data analysis proceeded through four sequential stages: (1) hermeneutical reading of primary texts, with key passages organized according to the three analytical categories; (2) conceptual mapping, through thematic coding of recurring concepts in each thinker's account of consciousness; (3) comparative analysis, identifying points of convergence and divergence across the ontological, epistemological, and teleological axes; and (4) integrative synthesis, formulating a psycho-spiritual model that combines the insights of both frameworks and explores its relevance for Muslim minority communities in pluralistic contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gumiandari, Madjid, et al., 2022; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Essence of Consciousness

Etymologically, the Indonesian term "kesadaran" derives from the root word "sadar," meaning "awake," "aware," or "to realize something." According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), "sadar" denotes a state of understanding or being aware of what is happening, not being oblivious, being mindful. Thus, *kesadaran* refers to a person's condition or quality of fully and actively recognizing themselves and their environment (Pusat Bahasa, 2008).

In English, the term consciousness originates from the Latin *conscientia*, a combination of *con-* ("with" or "together") and *scire* ("to know"). Initially, the term carried the meaning of "knowing something together inwardly," a form of inner awareness. In the development of modern philosophy, consciousness has come to be understood as the mental state in which an individual is aware of themselves and the external world, either directly or reflectively (Jalmagambetova et al., 2024; Velmans, 2007).

In general terms, consciousness is the condition in which a person is aware of themselves and the world around them. It forms the core of all human experience, serving as the foundation for perception, thought, emotion, and the interpretation of life. The essence of consciousness includes self-presence, that is, the capacity of an individual to recognize themselves as the subject of experience (Searle, 1997). In every act of thinking, feeling, or doing, there is always a consciousness of self-existence that remains present as both observer and actor (Damasio, 1999). Additionally, consciousness possesses the qualities of continuity and unity: even though human experience constantly shifts from one object to another, consciousness is felt as a single, unified stream with seemingly unbroken continuity. What does not change is

the *nafs* (soul) itself, while what changes are only the physical conditions or states of that soul (Ihsan, 2024).

Another defining feature of consciousness is intentionality, namely its inherent tendency to be directed toward something (Husserl, 1982). Consciousness never exists in a void; it is always "about" something, whether a physical object, a thought, an emotion, or a memory. Consciousness is also subjective: it can only be directly experienced by the individual who possesses it and cannot be fully accessed by others. As such, consciousness is a distinctively phenomenological experience that cannot be reduced merely to biological or neurological mechanisms. Moreover, consciousness plays a central role in the attribution of meaning and value; it is not simply a neutral mechanism but the inner realm in which human beings weigh, evaluate, and direct their lives based on moral and existential considerations.

Contemporary philosophers and scientists have also emphasized the richness of these dimensions. John Searle (1997) describes consciousness as encompassing everything directly and internally experienced, such as pain, color, sound, and happiness. Antonio Damasio (1999) explains consciousness as the result of interaction between brain, body, and environment, enabling individuals to experience their own existence within a specific time and space. Edmund Husserl (1982), within the tradition of phenomenology, asserts that all consciousness is always consciousness of something. Thus, in general terms, consciousness can be understood as a subjective control center that enables human beings to become reflective, meaningful, and purpose-driven beings in their lives.

These dimensions of consciousness, subjective, intentional, continuous, and value-laden, are not merely of abstract philosophical interest. They carry concrete significance for human communities navigating complex social and cultural environments. For Muslim minority communities in particular, consciousness in all these dimensions functions not only as a personal psychological resource but as the very medium through which religious identity is sustained, spiritual meaning is preserved, and social participation in pluralistic societies is negotiated (Brandt, 2013; Peek, 2005). This socially grounded dimension of consciousness provides the foundation for the comparative analysis that follows.

The Concept of Consciousness in Al-Ghazali's Thought

In al-Ghazali's thought, consciousness is not merely understood as a mental or cognitive activity but rather as a spiritual condition of the soul (*nafs*) illuminated by Divine light. Consciousness, from his perspective, is the result of a deep inner wakefulness, an interconnectedness between the heart (*qalb*), the spirit (*ruh*), and God. Thus, consciousness is a multidimensional reality encompassing psychological, ethical, and metaphysical aspects (Nursoy-Demir et al., 2024; Rassool & Keskin, 2025).

Al-Ghazali explains that consciousness operates within the realm of the soul (*nafs*), which must be illuminated by Divine light. In its natural, unilluminated state, the *nafs* tends to be dominated by its most base nature, that is, *al-nafs al-ammarah*, the commanding soul, which pulls the human being toward desire, heedlessness, and moral disorder. It is therefore necessary for the soul to be purified and reilluminated, a process that al-Ghazali terms *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) (Arroisi, 2023;

Mohd Akib et al., 2023). According to al-Ghazali, the human being is constituted by both a spiritual and a material dimension. The material dimension refers to the physical and transient aspects of life, while the spiritual dimension relates to the intellectual and transcendental nature of the human being. Since man was created by God, it is in his innate nature (*fitrah*) to be in constant need of Divine guidance and incapable of authentic self-direction independently of that orientation (Arroisi, 2023; Ibrahim & Efremova, 2025).

Al-Ghazali explains that true consciousness arises from a heart illuminated by the light of Divine truth (*nur al-Haqq*). The heart (*qalb*), in this sense, is not merely a biological organ but the spiritual center of the human being, the locus of understanding, intention, and the relationship with God (Kirabaev, 2024). In *Mishkat al-Anwar*, he declares that every form of genuine knowledge and awareness is possible only when the heart has been purified and opened to that light:

"The light that comes from God is what opens the inner vision to see the true reality of things. And this light is what is called the light of prophethood and Divine inspiration (Gairdner, 1952)."

Consciousness, according to al-Ghazali, is also intimately related to the practices of *muhasabah* (self-examination) and *muraqabah* (inner vigilance in awareness of God's presence). In *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, particularly in the *Kitab al-Muraqabah wa al-Muhasabah* (Book of Vigilance and Self-Examination), al-Ghazali emphasizes that spiritual consciousness is cultivated through disciplines that purify the soul from inner diseases and strengthen the vertical relationship with God (al-Ghazali, 2011; Hayat et al., 2025). In practice, humans are invited to be constantly vigilant of their intentions, words, and actions, knowing that all are under Divine watchfulness. Consciousness in its deepest sense is a state of wakefulness from wrongful actions. True success belongs only to those who control themselves, suppress their desires in moments of anger, and sustain patience before trials and hardship (Al Faruqi, 2024; Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025).

From an epistemological perspective, al-Ghazali distinguishes between external knowledge, derived from the senses and discursive reason, and inner knowledge, which is derived from Divine light and spiritual intuition. The highest form of consciousness can only be attained through inner knowledge, when a person undergoes *kashf* (unveiling) of ultimate reality through an enlightened heart. This is articulated in *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, where al-Ghazali explains that direct experience (*dhawq*) of truth can only be achieved after a process of purifying the soul and detaching from worldly illusions (al-Ghazali, 2013; Nurlinda, 2024):

"True certainty is not attained through argumentation alone, but through inward witnessing illuminated by the light (*nur*) from God (al-Ghazali, 2013)."

This epistemological distinction, between the merely rational and the spiritually illuminated, is foundational to al-Ghazali's entire account of consciousness. Consciousness at its highest is not the product of logical analysis or empirical observation but the fruit of a profound spiritual journey: the cleansing of the *nafs* from the darkness of base desires and inner ignorance, the opening of the *qalb* to receive

Divine light, and the culminating experience of *kashf* through which reality is perceived not in its surface appearances but in its deepest divine dimensions (Ibrahim & Efremova, 2025; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

The ultimate goal of consciousness in al-Ghazali's perspective is *ma'rifatullah*, that is, direct and intuitive knowledge of God. This *ma'rifah* is not the result of intellectual analysis alone but a spiritual experience that emerges from a heart unveiled and illuminated by Divine light. In *Mishkat al-Anwar*, al-Ghazali describes this state:

"When the light of truth shines upon a person's heart, they see the reality of all things, not merely their outward forms (Gairdner, 1952)."

Thus, in al-Ghazali's thought, consciousness is an inward path toward ultimate truth, where reality is perceived not in a fragmented or superficial manner but in its divine depth of meaning. Consciousness is not something one simply possesses but something to be attained through the purification of the heart, inner vigilance, and spiritual connection with the One who illuminates all things. This understanding of consciousness as a disciplined spiritual achievement carries profound implications not only for individual piety but for communal life: it provides Muslim communities, including those living as minorities, with a robust inner framework for sustaining identity, meaning, and ethical orientation regardless of the social conditions of their existence (Gumiandari, Subandi, et al., 2022; Jamal et al., 2025).

The Concept of Consciousness in William James's Thought

In William James's (1890) thought, consciousness is not merely understood as the passive capacity to receive stimuli or process information. Rather, it is a continuous flow of mental experience, personal, selective, and intentional. James referred to consciousness as the *stream of thought* or *stream of consciousness*, a metaphor illustrating how consciousness does not appear in fragmented parts but rather as a unified, dynamic, and ever-changing flow. Thus, for James, consciousness is a complex psychological reality reflecting the relationship between thought, experience, and the adaptive function of the mind in relation to the external world (Snarey et al., 2025; Taylor, 2010).

James emphasized that consciousness is subjective, always present within the individual as a personal experience that cannot be fully accessed by others. It is also selective: humans do not perceive all aspects of reality simultaneously, but only those deemed relevant or important for action. In this sense, James regarded consciousness as an adaptive mechanism, a biological and psychological function enabling individuals to survive by actively adjusting to their environment (Bella, 2018; Blum, 2015). He expressed this most memorably:

"Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly... it is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described (James, 1890)."

For James, consciousness is also closely tied to direct experience and introspective reflection. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he describes religious experience as a deeper form of consciousness, not always rational, yet possessing transformative power over personality (Benevides, 2021; James, 1902). Here, James enters the realm

of what he calls "transcendent psychology," a dimension in which feelings, intuition, and moral values become integral to a broader form of consciousness that exceeds mere logical awareness (Cole-Turner, 2021; Hewitt, 2012). Crucially, James insisted on the noetic quality of mystical experience: even states of consciousness that resist logical articulation may convey genuine insights into the nature of reality (Cole-Turner, 2021; Melo & Resende, 2020).

From an epistemological perspective, James rejected mechanistic reductionism in explaining consciousness. He favored a pragmatic and empirical approach in which the truth of an idea is judged by its practical usefulness and impact on life. Consciousness, therefore, is not simply a mental phenomenon to be objectively measured but a subjective and meaningful experience, closely related to free will and the freedom to choose (Giri, 2021; Lederle, 2024). James argued that consciousness participates in shaping reality by facilitating decision-making, intention, and moral action; it is not merely a mirror of the world but an active contributor to the world one inhabits.

Consciousness in James's thought is thus a living and reflective inner structure through which individuals actively organize and give meaning to their experiences. It is not a passive mirror but an active agent in the creation of personal meaning. It serves as the center of the selfhood process (James, 1890), enabling human beings to recognize themselves as the authors of their own actions. In this way, James bridges psychology and philosophy by demonstrating that consciousness is the arena where experience, values, and existential choice are intimately connected (Blum, 2015; Santana, 2025).

Therefore, in William James's view, consciousness is an inner stream flowing dynamically and meaningfully, not merely reflecting the external world, but shaping the way humans live within it. It is an active process of understanding, choosing, and responding to the world, and forms the foundation of human existence as a being that thinks, feels, and acts. This adaptive, meaning-making, and religiously open account of consciousness is particularly significant when applied to the experience of Muslim minorities: it offers a psychological vocabulary for understanding how Muslim individuals actively navigate and selectively engage with pluralistic social environments while sustaining their religious commitments and self-identity (Brandt, 2013; Duderija, 2007; Mitha & Adatia, 2016).

Conceptual Convergences and Points of Divergence

The comparative analysis of James and al-Ghazali across the three analytical categories, ontology, epistemology, and teleology, reveals a pattern of productive tension: the two frameworks diverge fundamentally at the level of their ultimate metaphysical commitments while converging significantly at the level of their structural insights into the nature of inner experience. Table 1 presents a systematic mapping of this comparison.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Consciousness: William James and Al-Ghazali

Aspect	William James	Al-Ghazali
Ontology (nature of consciousness)	Consciousness is a <i>stream of consciousness</i> , a continuous flow of thought that is subjective, selective, adaptive, and dynamic (James, 1890). It is not explicitly connected to transcendent reality.	Consciousness is a spiritual state of the soul (<i>nafs</i>) illuminated by Divine light (<i>nur al-Haqq</i>). Its essence is directly connected to the <i>qalb</i> (heart) and <i>ruh</i> (spirit) as the center of the relationship with God (Rassool & Keskin, 2025; Kirabaev, 2024).
Epistemology (source of knowledge)	Knowledge of consciousness is derived from empirical experience, introspection, and pragmatic approaches. Truth is determined by its practical value in life (James, 1890; Blum, 2015).	The highest knowledge originates from Divine light and spiritual intuition. True consciousness is attained through <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i> , <i>muhasabah</i> , and <i>muraqabah</i> . Certainty is achieved through <i>kashf</i> (inner unveiling) and <i>dhawq</i> (direct spiritual experience) (Ghazali, 2013; Ibrahim & Efremova, 2025).
Teleology (purpose of consciousness)	Consciousness functions as an adaptive mechanism enabling humans to survive, make decisions, and act freely. It is pragmatic and oriented toward functional value in life (Taylor, 2010; Snarey et al., 2025).	The ultimate goal of consciousness is <i>ma'rifatullah</i> (direct knowledge of God). Consciousness serves as the path to ultimate truth, spiritual happiness, and Divine pleasure (Nurlinda, 2024; Akib et al., 2023).
Dimension of experience	Emphasizes consciousness as a psychological, personal, and phenomenological experience. Religious experiences are considered valid psychological phenomena, yet not linked to the metaphysical reality of God (Rodrigo Benevides, 2021; Cole-Turner, 2021).	Emphasizes consciousness as a spiritual-metaphysical experience. Religious experiences are not only psychologically valid but serve as objective evidence of the soul's connection with Divine reality (Hayat et al., 2025; Nursoy-Demir et al., 2024).
Moral and ethical function	Consciousness enables free human choice and action according to practical values. Morality is measured by its usefulness and real-world	Consciousness safeguards intentions, words, and actions in accordance with Divine watchfulness (<i>muraqabah</i>). Morality is theocentric, aligned with Shari'ah and God's will

	consequences (James, 1890; Hewitt, 2012).	(Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Hayat et al., 2025).
Points of convergence	Both thinkers emphasize consciousness as the core of human inner life, not merely a biological process, and highlight its transformative, ethical, and meaning-making dimensions (Hanna-E-Kalbi & Basharat, 2020; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).	Both reject biological reductionism. Both view consciousness as a profound inner experience that significantly shapes human personality, moral character, and existential orientation (Gumiandari et al., 2022; Kanzian & Legenhausen, 2013).
Points of divergence	Does not explicitly connect consciousness with God or transcendent reality. Grounds consciousness in empirical, pragmatic, and phenomenological foundations.	Directly and necessarily connects consciousness with God. Consciousness is spiritual-metaphysical and theocentric in its essential nature and ultimate orientation.

Source: Synthesized by authors from primary and secondary sources.

Both William James and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali regard consciousness as the core of human inner experience. Both firmly reject biological reductionism: for neither thinker can consciousness be adequately explained as a mere product of neural processes or material mechanisms. Rather, both affirm that consciousness involves deeply personal, transformational, and morally significant dimensions that exceed what any purely mechanistic account can capture (Hanna-e-Kalbi & Tahira Basharat, 2020; Kanzian & Legenhausen, 2007a; Rothman & Coyle, 2018).

James, in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), characterizes consciousness as a stream of thought, continuous, subjective, and selective, and as the foundation of conscious and free human action. He insists that consciousness is "a stream rather than a chain or train of ideas," highlighting its dynamic and unified nature. Al-Ghazali, in *Mishkat al-Anwar*, portrays consciousness as a Divine light illuminating the human heart, and only a purified heart can perceive the truth of *nur al-Haqq* (Gairdner, 1952; Kirabaev, 2024). For al-Ghazali, true consciousness is not merely about knowing but about seeing the essence of reality through an enlightened inner vision.

Both thinkers also affirm that consciousness serves a moral and ethical function. James, through his pragmatic approach, holds that truth must be evaluated based on its practical and functional value in life (Hewitt, 2012; James, 1902). Al-Ghazali reinforces the ethical function of consciousness through the spiritual disciplines of *muhāsabah* and *muraqabah*, which function as the practical mechanisms through which the human being sustains awareness of Divine watchfulness and preserves the purity of intention and action (al-Ghazali, 2011; Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025). Both, in other words, insist that consciousness is not ethically neutral: it is the inner space in which moral character is formed, tested, and sustained.

The framework of modern Western psychology, as James represents it, primarily focuses on explaining, predicting, and understanding human behavior through empirical observation and pragmatic analysis. Islamic psychology, in the tradition of al-Ghazali, not only explains and understands behavior but orients it toward a transcendent end: the attainment of Divine pleasure (*rida Allah*) and the fulfillment of the human being's *fitrah* (Arroisi, 2022; Gumiandari, Subandi, et al., 2022; Omais & dos Santos, 2024). This difference in ultimate orientation, between the adaptive-functional on one side and the theocentric on the other, constitutes the deepest philosophical divergence between the two frameworks.

Although there are significant points of convergence, the philosophical differences between the two thinkers cannot be overlooked. First, epistemologically, James understands consciousness as a biological-empirical product that can be examined through introspection and pragmatic experience (Blum, 2015; James, 1890). Al-Ghazali, in contrast, asserts that spiritual consciousness originates from Divine light (*nur ilahi*), a form of knowing that is irreducible to rational analysis and accessible only through soul purification (al-Ghazali, 2013; Ibrahim & Efremova, 2025). Second, ontologically, James does not explicitly associate consciousness with God or transcendent reality. Even religious consciousness, in his view, is analyzed as a valid and powerful psychological experience, but one whose metaphysical claims he deliberately brackets (Benevides, 2021; James, 1902). For al-Ghazali, by contrast, the connection between consciousness and God is not an optional supplement but the very essence of what consciousness in its highest form is (Mohd Akib et al., 2023; Rassool & Keskin, 2025).

Despite originating from different paradigms, a conceptual integration between the thoughts of James and al-Ghazali is not only feasible but theoretically productive. The growing movement toward the integration of Islamic and Western psychological perspectives, exemplified by the trajectory of Islamic psychology in Southeast Asia and the development of Islamic psychotherapy frameworks internationally, attests to the scholarly demand for precisely this kind of synthesis (Gumiandari, Madjid, et al., 2022; Haque et al., 2016; Rothman, 2021). James's phenomenological openness to religious experience, his insistence that mystical states carry genuine cognitive significance and transformative power, creates a natural point of dialogue with al-Ghazali's account of *kashf* and *dhawq* as legitimate and transformative forms of knowing (Cole-Turner, 2021; Kirabaev, 2024). And al-Ghazali's detailed account of the inner disciplines through which consciousness is cultivated, including *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah*, complements James's framework by supplying the vertical, transcendent dimension that James's empirical psychology by design leaves open.

The integration of these two frameworks enables the construction of a holistic Islamic psycho-spiritual model of consciousness that synthesizes intellect (*'aql*), heart (*qalb*), and spirit (*ruh*) as a unified whole in the quest for meaning, virtue, and ultimate truth. Within this model, consciousness is understood simultaneously as an adaptive psychological stream (James) and as a spiritually illuminated inner state (al-Ghazali), two dimensions that are not contradictory but complementary, addressing the horizontal and vertical axes of human existence respectively. This integration carries profound implications for communities whose inner life must sustain both the demands of social adaptation and the imperatives of spiritual identity, a condition

that characterizes, with particular intensity, the lived experience of Muslim minority communities in pluralistic societies (Kaplick et al., 2019; Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013; Subandi et al., 2022).

Psycho-Spiritual Consciousness and Muslim Minority Communities: Implications of The Integrative Model

The integrative model formulated in the preceding analysis, combining James's adaptive stream of consciousness with al-Ghazali's spiritually illuminated *nafs*, acquires particular relevance when examined in light of the lived realities of Muslim minority communities. Across diverse global contexts, Muslim minorities navigate the dual challenge of maintaining robust religious identity while engaging constructively with surrounding non-Muslim majority cultures (Beyer, 2024; Duderija, 2007; Peek, 2005). This dual navigation places distinctive demands on consciousness: it must function simultaneously as an adaptive psychological mechanism enabling social participation, and as a spiritual anchor sustaining the distinctive Islamic orientation of the self against the pressures of cultural assimilation and institutional marginalization (Dornisch et al., 2024; Jensen & Kofoed, 2022).

James's concept of the selective and adaptive stream of consciousness offers a precise psychological vocabulary for understanding the identity negotiation processes of Muslim minorities. Consciousness, in James's framework, does not passively receive all inputs from the environment but actively selects, filters, and organizes experience in accordance with the individual's needs, values, and purposes (Blum, 2015; James, 1890). For Muslim minority individuals, this selective consciousness operates as the cognitive-adaptive mechanism through which Islamic identity is sustained: they consciously attend to, interpret, and integrate social experiences through the lens of their religious commitments, while filtering out or reframing elements that threaten their sense of Islamic selfhood (Grit, 2019; Mihlar, 2019). This Jamesian adaptive consciousness thus explains, at the psychological level, how Muslim minorities can engage fully and productively with pluralistic social environments without surrendering the core of their religious identity.

Al-Ghazali's conception of consciousness as a spiritually cultivated state of the *nafs* complements this psychological account by providing its vertical, transcendent dimension. For Muslim minority communities, the practices of *muraqabah* and *muhasabah*, the constant inner vigilance and self-examination through which the soul is kept oriented toward Divine presence, function as mechanisms of spiritual resilience (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Hayat et al., 2025). These practices sustain the inner spiritual infrastructure of Islamic identity independently of external social conditions: even when institutional supports for Islamic practice are limited, or when the social environment is indifferent or hostile to Muslim identity, the inward disciplines of Ghazalian consciousness provide the individual with a source of identity, meaning, and moral orientation that transcends the social context (Jamal et al., 2025; Mitha & Adatia, 2016; Rutledge, 2025).

Empirical research on Muslim minorities has consistently demonstrated the vital role of faith-based coping and spiritual resilience in enabling Muslim communities to

navigate minority stress, discrimination, and identity pressure. Studies of Muslim communities in non-Muslim majority contexts, from Australia and Canada to Southeast Asia, have shown that individuals and communities with strong spiritual practices and faith-based community bonds report significantly greater psychological well-being, resilience, and social cohesion than those without (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Jamal et al., 2025; Mitha & Adatia, 2016; Rayes et al., 2021). In Indonesian contexts specifically, studies of Muslim minority communities, including Acehese Muslims on the Nias Islands and minority Muslim groups in Eastern Indonesia, have documented the distinctive patterns through which Islamic identity is negotiated, preserved, and transmitted in non-Muslim majority settings, often through the very practices of inner spiritual cultivation that al-Ghazali systematizes (Ashadi et al., 2025; Muliadi et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2025).

The psycho-spiritual integrative model proposed in this study enables a more comprehensive theoretical account of these dynamics. Three axes of integration can be identified. First, the cognitive-adaptive axis, drawing primarily from James, addresses how Muslim minority individuals consciously select, organize, and give meaning to their social experiences, sustaining religious identity through active psychological engagement rather than passive reception, and thereby achieving a creative acculturation that neither assimilates nor isolates. Second, the spiritual-purification axis, drawing primarily from al-Ghazali, addresses how the inner disciplines of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah* cultivate a deepened spiritual consciousness that serves as the metaphysical foundation of resilient minority identity, anchoring the individual in a transcendent source of meaning that is independent of social minority status. Third, the ethical-social axis, representing the convergence of both thinkers, addresses how consciousness, whether understood as pragmatically oriented toward practical value (James) or theocentrically aligned with Divine watchfulness (al-Ghazali), generates moral awareness and social responsibility that underpins harmonious coexistence within non-Muslim majority societies. Together, these three axes yield a psycho-spiritual model of consciousness adequate to the full complexity of Muslim minority experience: its psychological adaptability, its spiritual depth, and its ethical-social engagement (Gumiandari, Madjid, et al., 2022; Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020; Subandi et al., 2022).

This integrative model thus contributes to the growing body of Islamic psychology scholarship that seeks frameworks capable of addressing the inner life of Muslim communities in their full social and existential complexity. It offers, at once, a theoretically rigorous philosophical foundation grounded in two of the most sophisticated thinkers on consciousness in their respective traditions, and a practically relevant conceptual tool for scholars, educators, and community workers engaged with Muslim minority communities in pluralistic contexts (Kaplick et al., 2019; Keshavarzi & Haque, 2013; Rothman, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has identified the conceptual structure of consciousness in the thought of William James and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali across three analytical dimensions. Ontologically, James conceives of consciousness as a dynamic, continuous, and non-transcendent stream of subjective experience, selective in its attention and adaptive in

its function, while al-Ghazali conceives of it as a spiritually illuminated condition of the *nafs* whose very constitution is determined by the relationship between the *qalb*, the *ruh*, and God. Epistemologically, James grounds the knowledge of consciousness in empirical observation, introspection, and pragmatic verification, judging truth by its functional consequences in lived experience; al-Ghazali, by contrast, locates the highest certainty of consciousness in the inner illumination of the purified soul, attained through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *kashf*, and *dhawq*, a form of knowing that transcends the limits of discursive reason. Teleologically, James regards consciousness as an adaptive mechanism oriented toward free and effective action in the world, while al-Ghazali directs consciousness toward *ma'rifatullah*, that is, the direct and intuitive knowledge of God, as the ultimate purpose of human awareness.

The comparative analysis further reveals a pattern of productive tension between the two frameworks: fundamental metaphysical divergence coexisting with significant structural convergence. Both thinkers firmly reject biological reductionism, affirm the transformative and morally formative power of consciousness, and insist that the inner life of the human being exceeds what any purely mechanistic account can capture. Both also recognize the significance of religious and spiritual experience; James through his acknowledgment of the noetic quality of mystical states, and al-Ghazali through his account of *kashf* as the highest form of human knowing. The deepest point of divergence, however, remains irreducible: for James, the metaphysical grounding of consciousness in God is bracketed as a philosophical question; for al-Ghazali, it is the essential and inescapable constitution of consciousness in its most authentic form. This divergence does not negate the possibility of integration but defines the precise nature of the complementarity between the two frameworks.

On the basis of this comparison, this study has formulated a psycho-spiritual integrative model organized along three complementary axes. The cognitive-adaptive axis, drawn from James, describes how consciousness functions as a selective, meaning-making, and adaptive process through which individuals engage with their social environment while sustaining core values and identity. The spiritual-purification axis, drawn from al-Ghazali, describes how the disciplines of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *muraqabah*, and *muhasabah* cultivate a spiritually deepened consciousness that anchors the human being in a transcendent source of meaning independent of external circumstances. The ethical-social axis, representing the convergence of both thinkers, describes how consciousness, whether pragmatically or theocentrically oriented, generates moral awareness and social responsibility that enables constructive coexistence with others. Together, these three axes constitute a holistic account of consciousness that is simultaneously empirically informed and spiritually grounded, advancing a contribution to Islamic psychology that bridges psychological experience and transcendent purpose.

The relevance of this integrative model to Muslim minority communities has been demonstrated at both the conceptual and applied levels. The cognitive-adaptive axis of Jamesian consciousness provides a precise psychological account of how Muslim minorities actively negotiate religious identity within pluralistic environments, selectively engaging with their social world through the lens of Islamic commitments without assimilating or isolating. The spiritual-purification axis of Ghazalian consciousness explains how the inner disciplines of Islamic spirituality function as mechanisms of spiritual resilience, sustaining Islamic selfhood, moral orientation, and communal cohesion independently of the social conditions of minority existence. The ethical-social axis describes how psycho-spiritual consciousness enables the harmonious coexistence of Muslim minorities within non-Muslim majority societies by generating moral awareness directed toward both personal integrity and social responsibility. The intersection of these three axes is particularly relevant to Muslim communities in Eastern Indonesia and comparable pluralistic contexts, where the inner spiritual and psychological resources of individuals and communities constitute the primary foundation for sustained Islamic identity and social flourishing.

This study therefore advances a contribution that is simultaneously philosophical, psychological, and socio-religiously grounded. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse of Islamic psychology with a rigorously comparative foundation and proposes an integrative model adequate to the full complexity of Muslim minority experience in contemporary pluralistic societies. Practically, it offers a conceptual framework for consciousness-based approaches to Islamic identity formation, spiritual education, and interfaith engagement. Future research is encouraged to examine the empirical manifestations of this psycho-spiritual model within specific Muslim minority communities, including those in Minahasa, North Sulawesi, communities whose centuries of coexistence with a non-Muslim majority represent a rich and underexplored laboratory for the study of Islamic minority identity, spiritual resilience, and socio-religious adaptation.

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