

Human Essence and Spiritual Need: A Comparative Analysis of Religious Doctrine and Human Nature

Iffa Afiralda, Renni Hasibuan✉

Madrasah Aliyah Al Irtiqo', Malang, Indonesia

✉ rennihasibuan88@gmail.com

Received: 08-09-2024

Revised: 19-09-2024

Accepted: 20-09-2024

ABSTRACT

The exploration of human essence and the intrinsic spiritual need has become increasingly crucial in understanding how religious doctrines shape and reflect the fundamental nature of humanity, highlighting the ongoing interplay between belief systems and human identity across different cultures and philosophies. This research utilizes library research methods by analyzing primary data such as research books and theses, and secondary data including relevant books, articles, and journals. The data is analyzed using both deductive and inductive approaches. The result research shows that humans, with all their unique capacities and abilities, have a fundamental need for religion and religious doctrine. From the perspective of religion and philosophy, humans are recognized as multifaceted beings capable of rational thought, speech, cooperation in society, and the pursuit of spiritual meaning. Religion provides moral, psychological, and social guidance that helps humans achieve physical and mental well-being in this life and the next. These findings imply that a deep understanding of human essence and spiritual needs, through religious doctrine, can provide valuable guidance for the development of educational policies and social interventions that support human physical and mental well-being in a religious and philosophical context.

Keywords: *human essence, human nature, religious doctrine, spiritual need*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of human essence has long been a major concern in various fields of study, ranging from philosophy to theology.¹ In the context of religious belief, especially in the Islamic tradition, the understanding of human essence

¹ Alland Alexander, *The Human Imperative* (Columbia University Press, 1972).



includes not only individual aspects but also social and spiritual dimensions.² The Qur'an, as the main holy book in Islam, provides an in-depth description of human nature through various terms such as Abdullah, An-Nas, Khalifatullah, Bani Adam, Al-Insan, and Al-Basyar.³ These terms describe human roles and responsibilities within a divine and social framework, emphasizing that humans have a very important role as caliphs on earth.

In the Qur'an, the concept of being a caliph on earth is fundamental and not merely a symbolic position. Rather, it implies an active responsibility to maintain social justice and balance.⁴ This understanding is articulated in verses that emphasize the moral and spiritual responsibilities of humans as God's representatives on earth. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the Qur'anic teaching on khalifah shapes views on human essence and how religious doctrine influences the social and ethical responsibilities of individuals.

One relevant perspective in this study is the Zoon Politikon theory, which emphasizes that humans are social beings who cannot be separated from their communities.⁵ In the Islamic context, this understanding encompasses an individual's responsibility towards collective welfare and efforts to build a just society.⁶ As such, this analysis will explore how religious doctrine, particularly in Islamic teachings, shapes understandings of social justice and equitable distribution of resources, and the implications for social structures and human interactions.

As part of this approach, it is important to review how the teachings of the Qur'an provide moral and spiritual guidance that contributes to the formation of just social structures. The concept of "guidance for mankind" (*hudan li an-naas*) directs individuals to carry out their responsibilities as caliphs with deep awareness of and accountability.⁷ This research will discuss how these principles are

² John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³ Mū'īl Yūsuf 'Izz al-Dīn, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (James Clarke & Co., 2000).

⁴ Shahrul Hussain, "Khalifah, the Environment and Recycling Copies of the Holy Qur'an: A Symbolic Sematic Consideration," *Journal of International Law and Islamic Law* 16 (2020): 162.

⁵ Antonio Oraldi, "Human and Non-Human Political Animals: Aristotle's 'Metaphysical Biology' as the Basis of Political Animality," *Naturaleza y Libertad. Revista de Estudios Interdisciplinarios*, no. 17 (4 Mei 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24310/NATyLIB.2023.vi17.16505>.

⁶ Azyumardi Azra, "1. Islamic Thought: Theory, Concepts, and Doctrines in the Context of Southeast Asian Islam," dalam *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. oleh K. S. Nathan dan Mohammad Hashim Kamali (ISEAS Publishing, 2005), 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812306241-003>.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).

implemented in daily practice and how they shape views on ethics and social responsibility.

Philosophy and the humanities provide additional insights into the essence of human beings, focusing on the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of human existence.⁸ The study will link philosophical perspectives with religious teachings to explore how religious beliefs influence understanding of life purpose and self-perception. Fundamental questions regarding human essence and religious beliefs will be analyzed to understand how such beliefs shape social interactions and engagement in society.⁹

This research will also look at the impact of religious beliefs on individual growth and communal engagement. By understanding the correlation between human essence and religious teachings, we can more deeply understand how religion affects social behavior, interactions between individuals, and engagement in community. Focus will be given to how religious doctrines shape social and ethical values that influence the way individuals play a role in society.

Finally, the study will conclude by discussing the practical implications of understanding human essence and religious doctrine in the modern context. By considering the Islamic perspective and the results of philosophical studies, this research aims to provide insights into how religious principles can be applied to create a more just and balanced society. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the role of religion in shaping social values and individual responsibility in the context of shared life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a type of library research, which involves exploring a number of data sets, both primary and secondary, in accordance with the following concrete steps: The initial stage of the research process involves reading and analyzing primary data, including research books, theses and dissertations on the subject of teacher personality competence. Secondly, with regard to secondary data, researchers will undertake a detailed examination of relevant books, writings, articles and journals.

The data collection method employed in this research entails the gathering of books, articles, journals, and opinions that address the ideal and realistic aspects of Islamic education. Once all the data has been collected, it is then sorted into three categories: books, articles, and journals. The first category contains texts

⁸ Willem B. Drees, *Human Humanities* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁹ Rob Boddice dan Mark Smith, "Emotion, Sense, Experience," *Elements in Histories of Emotions and the Senses*, September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108884952>.

discussing ideal education in Islamic education, while the second contains texts discussing realistic education in Islamic education. The third category contains texts discussing both ideal and realistic education in Islamic education.

Moreover, the data is analyzed using both deductive and inductive approaches. The process of data analysis is employed to facilitate the processing of data obtained during the course of a research project, with the objective of enabling the drawing of conclusions. Once the data pertaining to the ideal and realistic education in the characteristics of Islamic education has been collated, the findings will be presented through descriptive analysis. In contrast, analysis is the process of describing something in a careful and purposeful manner. The data that has been analyzed is then presented using the deductive method, which begins with the general theory and progresses towards the conclusion, which is the answer to the formulation of this research problem.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Human Essence: Religious and Philosophical Perspectives

This study explores human essence from the perspectives of religion and philosophy, and classifies humans as multifaceted beings with a variety of unique capacities. Humans are recognized as *Homo Sapiens*, a term that highlights human intelligence and essential capabilities.¹⁰ The ability to think abstractly, reflect ethically, and possess high cognitive abilities are the hallmarks of *Homo Sapiens*.¹¹ Furthermore, humans are also known as *Animal Rationale*, which emphasizes the ability to think as rational beings. This ability to think rationally and logically distinguishes humans from other creatures on earth.

In the *Homo Loquens* classification, humans are recognized for their ability to create language, which allows them to express thoughts and emotions through well-structured words.¹² The development of language gave humans an edge in communication, which supported the exchange of more complex concepts and more sophisticated interactions.

The *Zoon Politikon* highlights the ability of humans to collaborate, interact with others, and organize themselves in societies to meet existential needs. *Homo Sapiens* is seen as a social being capable of building societies and managing

¹⁰ Pete Wolfendale, "The Reformatting of *Homo Sapiens*," dalam *Alien Vectors: Accelerationism, Xenofeminism, Inhumanism* (Routledge, 2020).

¹¹ Christopher B. Stringer, "Replacement, continuity and the origin of *Homo sapiens*," dalam *Continuity or Replacement* (CRC Press, 1992).

¹² Muhammad Sholihin, Catur Sugiyanto, dan Akhmad Akbar Susanto, "A systematic review on *homo Islamicus*: classification and critique," *Islamic Economic Studies* 30, no. 2 (1 Januari 2023): 121–42, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IES-11-2022-0043>.

institutions to achieve common goals.¹³ As Homo Economicus, humans are recognized as beings governed by economic principles, with a propensity for frugality.¹⁴ Human behavior is analyzed in an economic context, encompassing choices involving the exchange of commodities and assets.

Beside that, in the capacity of Homo Religious, humans are recognized as entities with religious aspects. Recognition of a supreme entity and the search for the meaning of life through the spiritual dimension characterize humans. As religious beings, humans actively seek deep meaning in their existence.

From an Islamic perspective, the origin of humanity is explained in the Qur'an as the divine will of Allah, the Creator of the universe. Humans were created by His omnipotent will and authority, which is described in several Qur'anic verses, including Surah Sad (38:71-72). The verses describe the process of creating human beings from rudimentary beginnings, starting from a drop of liquid that then develops into an embryo and finally into a perfect entity.

When Allah was about to create Adam as the caliph on earth, the angels asked why Allah created a human being with the potential to cause damage and shed blood. In Al-Baqarah verse 30, Allah explains that He knows what the angels do not know. The question posed by the angels was not based on disbelief or rejection of God's wisdom, but rather a manifestation of their astonishment at man's capacity to cause harm. God explains that humans are endowed with free will and the ability to think rationally, which can be used for good or bad.

The angels showed obedience and acknowledgement of God's wisdom by bowing down to Adam after the explanation. In contrast, Iblis refused to bow down to Adam because he felt superior to humans, which showed his arrogance and hatred towards humans. Iblis' disobedience to God's command led to his fall from God's grace.

The comparison between the responses of the angels and the Devil demonstrates the dynamics of the freedom that God grants to humans. Human free will allows them to choose between obedience or disobedience. The angels showed obedience and reverence for God's wisdom, while Satan showed disobedience and pride, which resulted in his punishment. This emphasizes the importance of obedience, responsibility and submission to Allah in human life.

¹³ Clive R. Boddy, "Is the Only Rational Personality That of the Psychopath? Homo Economicus as The Most Serious Threat to Business Ethics Globally," *Humanistic Management Journal* 8, no. 3 (1 Desember 2023): 315–27, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-023-00150-y>.

¹⁴ Claire Skea, "Emerging Neoliberal Academic Identities: Looking Beyond Homo Economicus," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 40, no. 4 (1 Juli 2021): 399–414, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-021-09768-7>.

In Islamic doctrine, the creation of man also includes the gift of fitrah, or the natural inclination to recognize and worship Allah. Humans are also given reason, passion and free will to live life in a responsible manner. As caliphs on earth, humans are responsible for maintaining justice, balance, and sustainability in building a society based on Islamic principles.

The Qur'an teaches that human values are based on man's pure origin (fitrah), which results in the nature of goodness and holiness. The covenant between God and the human spirit is represented by fitrah, which gives the human spirit an awareness of the Almighty and Holy (Transcendent) God, who is the initial awareness and purpose of everything in the universe.

Ibn Arabi states that perfect human beings are those who worship God in accordance with the precepts of each religion. Self-knowledge, which connects a person with God and requires the understanding of God's will.

Human Need for Religion

Humans intrinsically realize that there is a greater life force beyond themselves. When facing various life difficulties, calamities, and disasters, humans tend to complain and ask for help from something that is considered omnipotent, which is expected to provide a way out of the situation. This is a basic instinct that shows that humans need religion and the Creator.¹⁵ Some argue that the seed of religion comes from fear. This fear then triggered the giving of offerings to entities considered to have frightening powers, which eventually led to the development of animism and dynamism. One of the main factors believed to drive the development of religion is fear.¹⁶ However, this opinion is rejected by some experts.

Some psychologists argue that religion comes from the Oedipus complex. In this theory, a child first feels sexual urges towards his mother and then kills his father. After that, remorse arises in the child, which then results in devotion to the spirit of the father.¹⁷ This regret is believed to be the beginning of the emergence of a sense of religion in humans. However, this does not mean that the seed of religion is the only reason why humans need religion. The human need for religion can be explained through several other basic factors.

¹⁵ Muhammed Muhammed, "Human Rights and Religion: Islam in Perspective," *Lectio Socialis* 5, no. 1 (18 Januari 2021): 25–34, <https://doi.org/10.47478/lectio.788811>.

¹⁶ Jordan W. Moon dkk., "Is Religion Special?," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18, no. 2 (1 Maret 2023): 340–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221100485>.

¹⁷ Rulia Rahmawati dan Badruzzaman M. Yunus, "Human Need for Religion," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 4 (1 April 2021): 110–15.

The human need for religion can be understood through several factors: the human condition, human status, and the basic structure of personality. The Human Condition is made up of both physical and spiritual components that require balanced attention.¹⁸ The human body needs physical nutrition, such as eating and drinking, along with other physical activities like working, resting, and exercising. Meanwhile, the spiritual element requires psychological fulfillment, including religious education, character development, happiness, love, and balance in spiritual activities.¹⁹

Next, the Human Status factor emphasizes that humans, as the most perfect creatures created by God, hold a special position. Humans are endowed with glory, reason, perfect minds, and various other advantages over other creatures. Spiritually, humans possess many complex aspects. They are the only creatures with reason and conscience, which enable them to acknowledge God's existence and recognize that they are not independent of His supervision and provisions.²⁰ Religion plays a key role in teaching humans about God and how to interact with others, their lives, and the environment.

Finally, the Basic Structural Factors of Personality can be explained through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which divides the structure of human personality into three parts.²¹ The first is the biological aspect, which is the fundamental part of human personality, emerging naturally and being subjective without any connection to the objective world. The second is the psychic aspect, which arises due to the organism's need to relate well with the real world. The third is the sociological aspect, representing traditional values and the ideals of society. By understanding these factors, it becomes evident that the human need for religion is deeply rooted in their physical and spiritual conditions, their status and position before God, and the fundamental structure of human personality.

The Function of Religion in Life

Religion, which is believed to be created by the Creator of the universe, carries rules that are fair and applicable to all people and nations anywhere and anytime. Religion has various important roles that include religious, psychological,

¹⁸ Robert Towler, *The Need for Certainty: A Sociological Study of Conventional Religion* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003109754>.

¹⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Science & Religion: A New Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

²⁰ Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*.

²¹ Songyang Zhang, "Psychoanalysis: The Influence of Freud's Theory in Personality Psychology" (International Conference on Mental Health and Humanities Education (ICMHHE 2020), Atlantis Press, 2020), 229–32, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200425.051>.

sociological, human nature, anthropological, and ethical aspects.²² However, if religion is only understood as what is written in the holy book, then a literalist religious view will emerge. This view rejects a critical attitude towards the text and its interpretation and ignores historical and sociological developments. Conversely, if religious language is understood not only as a language of explanation and description but also as a language of action and expression, religion can be seen as more dynamic and contextual, in line with the problems and realities that continue to develop in human life. Religion has the nature of transformation, namely creating new values and replacing old values that are no longer in accordance with their beliefs.

From a religious perspective, religion provides an understanding of who our creator is and becomes the foundation of faith that influences human beliefs and behavior.²³ Anthropologically, religion explains to humans about their identity, origins and ultimate purpose. Religion teaches about the origin of human existence, where they came from, and where they want to go. From a sociological perspective, religion aims to overcome various forms of darkness, ignorance, poverty and backwardness. More than that, religion also links rituals of worship to social issues, making religious teachings relevant to everyday life and the challenges faced by society.²⁴ Psychologically, religion serves to calm, soothe and satisfy one's soul, providing a sense of peace amidst the various pressures of life. From an ethical point of view, religion provides guidance on moral values and standards, distinguishing between good and bad, as known in the concept of *akhlak mahmudah* (praiseworthy morals).

The function of religion is not only limited to the above aspects, but also plays a role in helping humans achieve the lofty goals in life, namely achieving physical and mental well-being.²⁵ This is reflected in the Qur'anic verse that tells the story of Allah's warning to Prophet Adam and his wife in paradise: "O Adam, indeed this (the devil) is an enemy to you and to your wife, so never let him take you both out of Paradise, causing you to be wretched. Verily, you shall not hunger therein, nor shall you be naked. And verily you shall not thirst therein, nor shall

²² Zeve J. Marcus dan Michael E. McCullough, "Does religion make people more self-controlled? A review of research from the lab and life," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Religion, 40 (1 Agustus 2021): 167–70, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.12.001>.

²³ Kevin Schilbrack, "The Concept of Religion," 28 Maret 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-religion/?fbclid=IwAR3uwsa2eG1qcGjfr1slhj3SBxnWqT2yKQszEH8ZL81MePOHzSp64SCrC_c.

²⁴ Marcus dan McCullough, "Does religion make people more self-controlled?"

²⁵ Nancy T. Ammerman, "Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 126, no. 1 (Juli 2020): 6–51, <https://doi.org/10.1086/709779>.

the heat of the sun afflict you therein” (*QS. Thaha* 117-119). This verse shows that religion not only provides spiritual guidance but also safeguards human welfare as a whole.

In a social context, religion usually plays an important role in uniting people. Emile Durkheim, a prominent sociologist, argued that religious means are representations of society, and sacredness derives from the power accepted by each member of society as a whole. The function of religion, according to Durkheim, is to maintain and strengthen a sense of solidarity and social obligation.²⁶ Thus, religion becomes an effective tool for building strong social ties and strengthening togetherness in the community.

In terms of pragmatism, there is a view that says that a person adheres to religion because of the functions it provides. Religion, in many ways, helps most people to lead happier lives.²⁷ Through its complex and multidimensional role, religion not only directs people to God, but also provides a moral foundation, soothes the soul, addresses social challenges, and creates well-being that is balanced between the life of this world and the hereafter.²⁸ Therefore, understanding religion in a dynamic and contextual framework is important to appreciate the depth and richness of its functions for human life.

Doctrines of Islamic Religious Beliefs

Imaan in Allah is the very foundation of Islamic teachings, expressed through the phrase “*lailaha illa Allah*,” also known as “the sentence of peace”. This sentence is an acknowledgment of the oneness of Allah and an affirmation that there is no god but Him. It is one part of the *shahadatain* that one is obliged to recite upon entering Islam, as well as being a manifestation of the concept of tawhid Allah, which is at the core of Islamic teachings.²⁹ In this context, the belief in the existence of Allah is the starting point that distinguishes Islamic teachings from other beliefs that recognize the existence of many gods. There are several arguments in favor of the existence of Allah, especially in explaining the origin of

²⁶ Emile Durkheim, “Sociology and the Social Sciences (1903),” dalam *The Rules of Sociological Method: And Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Method*, ed. oleh Emile Durkheim dan Steven Lukes (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1982), 175–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16939-9_9.

²⁷ Moon dkk., “Is Religion Special?”

²⁸ Riris Johanna Siagian, “The Understanding of Religion Related to Motivation and Attitude of Religion” (1st International Conference on Education, Society, Economy, Humanity and Environment (ICESHE 2019), Atlantis Press, 2020), 154–57, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200311.030>.

²⁹ Azra, “1. Islamic Thought.”

the universe. First, there is the view that the universe came into existence by itself from nothing, which is philosophically difficult to accept because everything that exists must have a cause. Secondly, there is the theory that the universe originated from a cell as the nucleus of its creation. However, this theory also raises questions about the origin of the cell itself. Third, there is a more logical view that is accepted by theists, which is that the universe was created by an all-powerful entity, Allah.³⁰

However, it needs to be understood that Allah's substance cannot be discovered or reached by the human intellect, even though the intellect is the main differentiator of humans from other creatures. The intellect has limitations, especially in matters that are beyond the reach of human reason and experience, such as discovering Allah's substance.³¹ This is because Allah is in a different dimension from humans, so knowledge of Him cannot be achieved by reason alone. In Islam, Allah's existence is known through signs of His greatness in the universe and through revelations revealed to the messengers.

In addition to faith in Allah, a Muslim is also required to believe in angels, Allah's books, and His messengers.³² The faith in Allah's angels is the belief that angels are creatures created by Allah from nur or light, and they have various duties to serve Allah. Although the number of angels is vast, Muslims are required to believe in ten archangels and their duties.³³ This belief shows that the existence of angels is part of the Islamic belief system that reflects order and absolute obedience to Allah's commands.

Furthermore, belief in Kitab Allah is also an integral part of a Muslim's faith. A believer should not deny the existence of the books of Allah, namely the Qur'an, Injil, Taurat, and Zabur, because believing in these books is a logical consequence of belief in the One True God.³⁴ These books are believed to be instructions sent down by God to His messengers to guide mankind to the right path. Each book has a historical and spiritual role in conveying divine revelation according to the context of its time.

Furthermore, faith in God's messengers is also a fundamental principle in Islam. According to Islamic teachings, every Muslim is obliged to believe in all

³⁰ Geoffrey Parrinder, "Islamic Doctrine," *Learning for Living*, 1 Januari 1972, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00239707208556768>.

³¹ Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203015247>.

³² Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin & Peradaban* (Gramedia pustaka utama, 2019).

³³ Abdul Wahid dkk., "Manusia Dan Kebutuhan Doktrin Agama," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Pendidikan* 14, no. 2 (12 Desember 2022): 77–82, <https://doi.org/10.47435/al-qalam.v14i2.1359>.

³⁴ Prof Dr H. Faisal Ismail MA, *Islam, Doktrin, dan Isu-Isu Kontemporer* (IRCISOD, 2016).

the messengers sent by Allah without discriminating between one another. This shows that Islam recognizes the continuity of divine revelation sent down through various messengers since ancient times until Prophet Muhammad SAW as the last messenger. These apostles were sent to convey divine messages and serve as examples for mankind in living a life in accordance with God's will.

By understanding these components of faith, it is clear that belief in Islam is not only centered on the oneness of Allah, but also includes a holistic belief in the entire belief system established by Him. This includes faith in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers as an inseparable unity in the structure of a Muslim's faith. This holistic faith is the foundation that shapes Muslims' perspective and behavior in daily life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that humans, with all their unique capacities and abilities, have a fundamental need for religion and religious doctrine. From a religious and philosophical perspective, humans are recognized as multifaceted beings, both as Homo Sapiens, Homo Loquens, Animal Rationale, and Homo Religiosus, which demonstrate the human ability to think rationally, speak, cooperate in society, and pursue spiritual meaning. In the Islamic perspective, humans are created with a fitrah that leads them to the recognition and worship of God as the creator, and are given reason, desire, and free will that must be used responsibly to maintain balance, justice, and sustainability on earth. Religion plays an important role in providing moral, psychological, and social guidance that not only leads humans to God but also helps them achieve physical and mental well-being in this life and the hereafter.

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