A Conceptual Paradigm of Al-Nafs in the Tafsirs of Al-**Ṭabarī and Al-Rāzī**: Tracing Epistemological Shifts in the Classical Exegetical Tradition

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Abstract:

This article examines the concept of al-nafs in classical exegesis through a comparative approach to two great exegetes, namely al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. By focusing on three key verses, namely QS Yūsuf [12]:53, al-Qiyāmah [75]:2, and al-Fajr [89]:27–30, this study changes the epistemological shift in the construction of the meaning of the human soul from the traditional bayānī approach to a philosophical and psychological approach. Through the methods of text analysis and philosophical hermeneutics, it is found that al-Ṭabarī's exegesis emphasizes the authority of riwāyah and normative meaning, while al-Rāzī integrates rational, spiritual, and Sufi elements in his interpretation. These findings not only demonstrate the rich intellectual heritage of classical exegesis but also open up opportunities for actualizing the concept of al-nafs in the context of Islamic psychology, character education, and modern spirituality. Within a contemporary hermeneutical framework, this article proposes a rereading of exegesis as a space for historical and existential dialogue relevant to the challenges faced by today's Muslim community.

Keywords: al-nafs; Al-Ṭabarī; classical tafsir; epistemology; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; hermeneutics, Islamic psychology.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of al-nafs in the Qur'an has long been a central topic in discourses on Islamic spirituality, ethics, and psychology. This term not only implies the meaning of "soul" or "self," but also encapsulates the complexity of the human inner state in its relationship to God, morality, and existence. In classical exegetical

texts, various commentators have attempted to map the dynamics of al-nafs, including al-ṬʿAbarī and al-Rāzī are known for having different methodological approaches. Although both lived during the golden age of Islamic scholarship, their understanding of al-nafs reflects a fundamental epistemology that underwent a significant shift (Rassool & Luqman, 2022).

The difference in approach between al-ṬAbarī and al-Rāzī became a mirror of the epistemological transformation in the world of classical interpretation. Al-ṬAbarī, with his tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr method, relies heavily on the narrations of the Companions and Tabi'in as authoritative sources of interpretation, while al-Rāzī, while still respecting these traditions, opens up more space for a rational-philosophical approach. In the context of reading the concept of al-nafs, this difference is significant because it opens up space for discussion about how sacred texts are interpreted according to the intellectual horizon of each exegete (Samsudin, 2019).

The interpretation of verses related to al-nafs, such as in QS Yūsuf [12]:53, al-Qiyāmah [75]:2, and al-Fajr [89]:27–30, shows differences in the epistemological character and intention of each interpreter. Al-ṬʿAbarī tends to emphasize narratives derived from traditional authority, while al-Rāzī adds philosophical and psychological elements that broaden the scope of al-nafs's meaning. This difference is relevant for deeper study in the context of modern hermeneutics, as it reveals layers of meaning and mechanisms for reading dynamic texts (Masroom, 2024).

Amidst the resurgence of attention to Quranic psychology in contemporary studies, it is crucial to explore how the concept of al-nafs is understood in classical exegetical sources. The study of exegesis cannot be confined to linguistic or historical contexts but must also address the epistemological and philosophical aspects underlying it. In the postmodern era, where interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly appreciated, analyzing epistemological shifts within the exegetical tradition can enrich our understanding of how sacred texts shape human spiritual and moral consciousness (Ali, 2018).

Furthermore, the epistemological shift from the riwāyah model to the dirāyah model in Qur'anic interpretation indicates a paradigm shift in how Muslims understand revelation. This relates not only to the method of interpretation but also reflects the dynamic relationship between revelation and reason, as well as between text and context. In the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī, we can witness a transition from an emphasis on the transmission of tradition to a more reflective and open critical reading of science and philosophy (Zuhdi & Syamsuddin, 2018).

In addition to enriching the body of Islamic scholarship, this comparative study also has practical value in understanding how al-nafs can be reinterpreted in the context of contemporary life. The modern trend to integrate Islamic spiritual values into psychotherapy, character education, and spiritual development requires an approach that is not only textual but also reflective and contextual. Therefore, this study aims to build a bridge between classical traditions and modern challenges (Abdullah et al., 2025).

In the contemporary hermeneutical perspective, particularly as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, the meaning of a text is not static, but rather always in a dialogical process between the text and its reader (Toyyib et al., 2025). Therefore, reading the interpretation of al-ṬComparatively, al-Abarī and al-Rāzī are not only about identifying differences in interpretation, but also exploring the "effectual history" of understanding al-nafs across various historical horizons. This provides a philosophical foundation for efforts to recontextualize the spiritual meaning of the Qur'an today.

Thus, this study aims to critically and in-depth examine how two major figures in classical exegesis constructed the conceptual paradigm of al-nafs, while simultaneously exploring the accompanying epistemological shifts. This research will not only contribute to the study of Islamic exegesis and psychology but also open up space for a philosophical and applicable comparative exegetical approach amidst the spiritual and moral challenges facing Muslims today.

METHOD

The study of the concept of al-nafs in Qur'anic interpretation cannot be separated from the epistemological approach used by the exegetes. The epistemology of classical interpretation is generally divided into two major approaches: tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr (based on narration) and tafsīr bi al-ra'y (based on ijtihad and reason). In this context, al-ṬAbarī is a strong representation of the ma'thūr approach, while al-Rāzī shows the integration between ma'thūr and the rational-philosophical approach, reflecting a paradigm shift in the realm of Islamic epistemology (Azmi, 2025).

Al-Ṭabarī's approach, as seen in Jāmiʿ al-Bayān, emphasizes the authority of the narrations of the Companions and the Tabi'in as the basis for interpretation. This model reflects the dominance of *bayānī* epistemology as categorized by al-Jābirī, namely, an understanding of the text that relies on literality, linguistic structure, and authoritative transmission (Azmi, 2025). On the other hand, al-Rāzī in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* combines the *bayānī* approach with the burhānī, namely the philosophical-rational approach, as well as a touch of ʿirfānī in several esoteric parts.

To deepen the philosophical dimension of the meaning of al-nafs, this study draws on contemporary hermeneutical theories, particularly those of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Gadamer emphasized the importance of wirkungsgeschichte (effectual history) and the fusion of horizons, namely the meeting between the historical horizons of the text and the reader. Meanwhile, Ricoeur, through a symbolic and narrative approach, provides a framework for understanding the multiple meanings and spiritual depth within the text (Ryadi, 2024). In this context, the differences between al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī are not only methodological, but also contain different horizons of meaning about the human soul.

A combination of classical epistemology and a contemporary hermeneutical approach is necessary to ensure that the interpretation of al-nafs in the Qur'an is not stagnant but able to interact with contemporary issues. In recent developments, the concept of al-nafs has been reexamined by many Muslim scholars to develop Islamic psychology, character education, and spiritual therapy based on the Qur'an (Daulay, 2015). Therefore, the theoretical framework in this study combines classical exegesis, Islamic philosophical approaches, and hermeneutical theory as a comprehensive basis for textual analysis.

This research uses a qualitative-comparative approach with textual analysis methods, which are considered most appropriate for uncovering the epistemological and semantic structures of classical interpretations in depth. This approach allows for a critical study of two major exegetes in Islamic intellectual history: al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Both were chosen because they represent two different epistemological models of classical interpretation: al-Ṭabarī with a textual-ma'thūr approach and al-Rāzī with an integration between ma'thūr, rationality, and philosophical dimensions (Jaffer, 2015).

The main focus of this research is directed at analyzing three key verses containing the term al-nafs, namely QS Yūsuf [12]:53 about nafs al-ammārah, QS al-Qiyāmah [75]:2 about nafs al-lawwāmah, and QS al-Fajr [89]:27–30 about nafs al-muṭandʾThese three verses were chosen because they conceptually represent the stages of human spiritual development according to the Qur'an and have high appeal in the discourse of Islamic psychology and Sufi interpretation (Daulay, 2015).

The main sources in this research are two authoritative classical works of commentary: JāmiʿThe Bayānʿan Taʾby the Qur'anʾand (al-Din al-Razi, 1990) by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH). Both were analyzed using descriptive-analytical techniques, with the aim of mapping and explaining the various meanings and interpretative methods used by each exegete. This technique was then complemented by a philosophical hermeneutic approach, which allows interpretation of the texts to be carried out within a historical and epistemological framework, specifically to trace the horizon of meaning that develops in each work (Ryadi, 2024).

The analysis was conducted in several strategic stages. First, the Qur'anic verses relevant to the concept of al-nafs were identified and classified. Second, the researcher explored how al-ṬFirst, Ṣabarī and al-Rāzī develop the meaning of this concept in their tafsir works. Third, an epistemological comparison is made between the two approaches used in constructing this meaning. Fourth, the theoretical implications of this comparison for contemporary reading of the Qur'an are drawn, particularly in the study of Qur'anic psychology and modern spiritual practice (Azmi, 2025).

To support the validity and richness of the analysis, secondary sources in the form of academic literature from the past five years were also used. This literature includes studies on contemporary hermeneutics, epistemology of interpretation, and recent studies in Qur'anic psychology. The use of these sources aims to provide a contextual and up-to-date theoretical lens for the classical interpretations being studied. To maintain data validity, this study applies source triangulation techniques, namely by confirming the results of text analysis through a synthesis of classical interpretations, contemporary theories, and historical frameworks, as well as intertextual validation so that the interpretations are not separated from the overall meaning of the Qur'anic corpus. With this method, the research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of comparative interpretation studies and bridge the dialogue between the classical Islamic scholarly heritage and contemporary intellectual challenges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Verse Analysis and Interpretation Comparison

1. *Q.S Yūsuf [12]:53] – "Inna al-nafsa la-ammāratun bi al-sū'"*

This verse reads: "And I do not absolve myself (from error), for verily the soul always commands to evil, except for the soul upon which my Lord has given mercy." This verse was uttered by al-'Azīz's wife in the context of her confession about the temptation she had once carried out on the Prophet Joseph. The concept of nafs al-ammārah (the soul that commands to evil) is the starting point for discussions about the destructive dimension of the human self in the Qur'an. This verse is significantly used in various traditions of Islamic psychology as a basis for understanding the negative tendencies of the human soul (Rahman, 2009). In the classical exegetical tradition, this verse serves as a primary reference for explaining the negative dimensions of the soul. Exegetes emphasize that these tendencies can only be overcome with God's help and spiritual practice. Two great exegetes, al-Tabarī and al-Rāzī, offer interesting interpretations to compare, as they represent different epistemological perspectives on understanding the sacred text.

a. Tafsir al-Ṭabarī

In Jamiʿ al-Bayān, al-Tabarī interprets this verse using the tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr method, a tradition-based interpretation. He cites the views of the Companions and successors such as Mujāhid, Qatādah, and al-Suddī to explain the meaning of nafs al-ammārah. According to al-Tabarī, nafs here refers to the inner drives of humans that incline toward sin and evil. However, he adds that these drives can be controlled if Allah bestows His mercy and protection.

Al-Tabarī emphasizes the inherent weakness of human nature, full of desires, and in need of external supervision in the form of revelation and guidance. Thus, the core of his interpretation rests on human limitations and absolute dependence on God. There is no in-depth explanation of the structure of the human soul or philosophy, as al-Tabarī adheres to the early tradition that prioritized literal transmission from the first generations (Azmi, 2025). This approach demonstrates how bayānī epistemology operates in classical exegesis. Its primary focus is not on philosophical speculation, but rather on the continuity of meaning as understood by the early Islamic community. Within this framework, the nafs al-ammārah is viewed as a moral entity requiring religious control, rather than as a psychological phenomenon amenable to rational analysis.

b. Tafsir al-Rāzī

On the other hand, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr provides a much longer and reflective commentary. It not only narrates history, but also develops a theoretical framework with a rational and psychological approach. According to al-Rāzī, nafs al-ammārah is a soul dominated by lust and low instincts. This soul is the main source of deviant human behavior.

But al-Rāzī goes beyond the normative explanation by dividing the nafs into several levels: nafs al-ammārah, nafs al-lawwāmah, and nafs al-muṭma'innah. He linked this division to the structure of the intellect, spirit, and heart, so that the concept of the soul has interconnected rational, spiritual, and moral dimensions. In his argument, al-Rāzī also cited Greek philosophical thought, such as Plato and Galen, and then aligned it with Islamic views. Al-Rāzī emphasized that controlling the nafs requires not only divine protection but also active human involvement through knowledge, spiritual practice (mujāhadah), and ethical behavior. For him, purification of the soul is a dynamic process involving reflective awareness and continuous effort, not simply surrender to God's grace (Hammed, 2022).

c. Comparative Analysis and Epistemological Implications

The differences in interpretation between al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī demonstrate a fundamental difference in the epistemology of interpretation. Al-Ṭabarī relies on the authority of texts and narrations (bayānī), while al-Rāzī develops a rational-philosophical analysis (burhānī). Both affirm that the nafs has destructive tendencies, but they differ in their explanations of its mechanisms and solutions.

For al-Ṭabarī, the solution to the problem of the nafs lies in God's mercy and guidance. Humans are seen as weak and unable to fully control their lustful impulses without the guidance of revelation. Al-Rāzī, on the other hand, emphasizes that humans possess the reflective capacity to resist evil tendencies. With knowledge, awareness, and spiritual practice, the soul can move from a destructive state (ammārah) to a reflective state (lawwāmah) and finally to a peaceful state (muṭma'innah).

Al-Rāzī's approach resonates with modern psychology, which views the soul as a dynamic structure that can be shaped through education, therapy, and moral conditioning. Meanwhile, al-Ṭabarī's approach places

greater emphasis on the normative and spiritual aspects relevant to strengthening faith. Both, while different, offer important insights: al-Ṭabarī reminds us of the need for dependence on God, while al-Rāzī emphasizes the human potential for growth through reflection and effort.

From a contemporary hermeneutical perspective, this difference can be understood as a form of the historical dynamics of understanding the Qur'an. (Gadamer, 2004b) calls it "effectual history" (Wirkungsgeschichte), where the meaning of the text continues to develop according to the intellectual horizon of its readers. Thus, the interpretation of nafs al-ammārah is not singular and final, but rather open to being enriched by tradition and science in every era. QS. Yusuf [12]:53 presents the important concept of nafs al-ammārah, namely the soul that tends towards evil. Tafsir al-Ṭabarī understands this concept normatively through the narrations of the companions and tabi'in, emphasizing human limitations and the need for God's grace. Meanwhile, al-Rāzī presents a philosophical-psychological approach, placing nafs within a dynamic structure that can be transformed through knowledge, awareness, and mujahadah.

Both present different perspectives on classical exegesis: al-Tabarī represents the textual-authoritative tradition, while al-Razī brings a more open rationality to philosophy. This comparison is important not only for understanding the history of exegesis, but also for inspiring the development of Qur'anic psychology and contemporary spiritual education. In a modern world facing a moral and psychological crisis, the integration of these two approaches can be the foundation for building a comprehensive Islamic spirituality.

2. Q.S al-Qiyāmah [75]:2] – "Wa lā uqsimu bi al-nafs al-lawwāmah"

This verse states: "And I swear by the self-reproaching soul (nafs al-lawwāmah)." This type of nafs demonstrates a higher level of moral awareness than the nafs al-ammārah, as it is capable of reprimanding itself for its mistakes. In the Sufi tradition and Islamic psychology, the nafs al-lawwāmah is considered a transitional stage toward spiritual maturity.

From a Sufi and Islamic psychological perspective, the nafs al-lawwāmah is understood as a transitional stage toward spiritual maturity, as in this phase the soul begins to struggle against its lusts and seeks to draw closer to divine values. This soul reproaches not merely because it is guilty, but because it has developed a conscience that is sensitive to deviations from the path of truth. (Kamila, 2019).

a. Tafsir al-Ṭabarī

Al-Ṭabarī, in his Jamiʿ al-Bayān, interprets this verse using the method of riwayah (traditional narrative). He cites several opinions from the Companions and the Tabiʿīn regarding the meaning of the nafs al-lawwāmah. Some commentators, according to al-Ṭabarī, understand this rebuking soul as a soul that regrets its mistakes and then reproaches itself for the sins it has committed. Others view this rebuke as coming from God as a form of warning and rebuke for humans.

By compiling these various narratives, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes the plurality of interpretations without providing a lengthy analysis of the psychological or philosophical mechanisms of the soul. Al-Ṭabarī's methodological consistency is clear: he focuses on preserving the authority of early Islamic tradition as the basis of meaning. In other words, for al-Ṭabarī, the nafs al-lawwāmah is viewed more within a normative religious moral framework than within a psychological-philosophical reflection. (Azmi, 2025).

This approach demonstrates a bayānī epistemology that emphasizes the importance of texts and narratives. Self-reproach is seen as a manifestation of a believer's guilt caused by deviating from God's commands. The focus is on the relationship between sin, moral conscience, and divine reproof, without the need to expand the meaning into the realm of philosophical speculation.

b. Tafsir al-Rāzī

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in his Tafsīr al-Kabīr, interprets this verse with a rational and reflective approach. According to him, the nafs al-lawwāmah (self-righteous nafs) is a soul that has the ability to assess, criticize, and criticize itself when it commits a deviation. Al-Rāzī views this phenomenon of self-righteous nafs as not merely a feeling of guilt, but also a mechanism for the formation of a deeper moral awareness. He connects the nafs al-lawwāmah with the concept of human will, which is always in a tug-of-war between the urges of lust and the demands of reason. From this arises the internal conflict that characterizes humans as moral beings. According to al-Rāzī, the existence of a self-righteous nafs indicates that humans have the potential to develop spiritually through reflective awareness.

Al-Rāzī linked this verse to the concepts of reason, heart, and the ethical dimension of human behavior. The soul that condemns not only regrets but also encourages humans to improve. Thus, the nafs al-lawwāmah is

positioned as a crucial stage in the spiritual journey, a phase in which humans begin to recognize their weaknesses and strive for improvement through knowledge, good deeds, and spiritual practice (Ibrahim et al., 2025). In his interpretation, al-Razi also adopted elements of moral philosophy from classical Greek thought and integrated them with Islamic principles. This demonstrates that he developed a philosophical interpretation (tafsir falsafī) that sought to bridge the gap between the Qur'anic text, rationality, and spirituality.

c. Comparative Analysis and Epistemological Dimension

A comparison between al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī reveals fundamental differences in epistemological frameworks. Al-Ṭabarī prioritizes the riwayah approach, presenting the various opinions of the Companions and Tabi'in without in-depth philosophical analysis. For al-Ṭabarī, the nafs al-lawwāmah is a manifestation of sinful awareness that gives rise to regret, and the emphasis remains on humanity's need for God's mercy. Meanwhile, al-Rāzī uses the dirāyah approach, which is rich in rational and moral reflection. He interprets the nafs al-lawwāmah not only as a feeling of regret, but also as an internal mechanism that fosters reflective awareness. His interpretation demonstrates the integration of human reason, conscience, and will. Thus, al-Rāzī presents a more contextual understanding with modern ethical psychology, which views the process of introspection as key to moral and spiritual growth.

This analysis demonstrates an epistemological shift in the tafsir tradition: from the bayānī (textual-normative) approach, which emphasizes the authority of the narrations, to the burhānī (rational-philosophical) approach, which opens up space for dialogue with science and philosophy. Both approaches are equally valuable: al-Ṭabarī emphasizes the continuity of tradition, while al-Rāzī demonstrates the relevance of the Qur'anic text for moral reflection throughout the ages (Kamila, 2019).

3. Q.S al-Fajr [89]:27–30] – "Yā ayyatuha al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah"

The verse that reads: *"Yā ayyatuha al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah. Irjiʿī ilā rabbiki rāḍiyatan marḍiyyah. Fadkhulī fī ʿibādī. Wadkhulī jannatī"* often understood as the pinnacle of humanity's spiritual journey. The concept of al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah or a calm soul describes an inner state that has achieved harmony between the human will and the divine will. This kind of soul is not only free from worldly worries, but also lives in the joy and certainty of faith. In Sufism and tazkiyah al-nafs literature, this verse is placed as the final goal of the spiritual journey, after a person is able to subdue the nafs al-ammārah (the soul that pushes towards evil) and passes the nafs al-lawwāmah phase (the soul that criticizes).

a. Tafsir al-Ṭabarī

In al-Ṭabarī's explanation, the nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah is interpreted as the soul of a believer who has attained tranquillity through firm faith and obedience to God. According to him, this tranquility arises from belief in God's promise, so that a believer's heart is free from doubt and anxiety. Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes the normative and eschatological dimensions: this tranquil soul will be called to glory on the Day of Judgment. For him, this verse is not merely a moral motivation, but also a concrete promise of reward in the afterlife. Al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah does not stand alone, but is always associated with a life of piety such as firm faith, consistent good deeds, and an attitude of acceptance with God's provisions.

The distinctive feature of al-Ṭabarī's method, which emphasizes riwāyah (religious history) over philosophical analysis, is clearly visible here. He cites various narrations that state that the soul is at rest when death comes to the believer. In this style, his interpretation serves as a normative foundation that emphasizes the dimension of Islamic obedience while simultaneously affirming the salvation of the hereafter (Azmi, 2025).

b. Tafsir al-Rāzī

Unlike al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī saw this verse not only as a description of the state of the believer's soul, but also as a spiritual achievement that goes through a long process. He interpreted al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah as the result of human struggle to purify the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs), subdue lust, and balance the potential of reason and heart. Al-Rāzī linked this verse to a philosophical framework of the soul influenced by both Greek and Islamic traditions. He discussed the concept of maqāmāt sulūk, or the spiritual stages a seeker reaches. For Rāzī, a tranquil soul is one that has successfully overcome the internal conflict between the impulses of base desires and the guidance of reason and faith. In other words, the tranquility referred to is not passive, but rather a form of inner victory after a long struggle.

Al-Rāzī's emphasis is also evident in the idea of the unity of human will with the divine will. In this perspective, spiritual tranquility is not merely psychological bliss, but rather a profound existential experience, in

which humans experience both God's pleasure and contentment with His destiny. This view makes Rāzī's commentary rich with Sufi and philosophical nuances, emphasizing that true tranquility can only be achieved after the soul is freed from worldly attachments (Daulay, 2015).

c. Epistemological Comparison and Analysis

Comparing these two great commentators, the difference in their epistemological orientations is clear. Al-Tabari tended to interpret using the riwayah method, gathering the opinions of the Companions and the Tabi'in, and emphasizing the normative-eschatological aspects. For him, al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah is the identity of a steadfast believer, and this verse is God's promise of paradise. His approach prioritized the certainty of the literal meaning while also strengthening the verse's position within the framework of religious beliefs. Al-Razi offered a more philosophical and Sufi interpretation. He viewed the tranquil soul as the result of a complex inner transformation, through stages of self-purification. In his epistemology, Razi departed from the text but expanded its meaning with philosophical theories of the soul and spiritual experience. Thus, Razi's interpretation is reflective, rational, and Sufi.

This difference demonstrates that Qur'anic interpretation is not simply a product of text, but also a representation of the intellectual horizon of its interpreter. Al-Tabari, who lived in the early days of tafsir development, focused more on the legitimacy of riwayah. In contrast, al-Razi, who lived in an era when philosophy, kalam, and Sufism had already developed rapidly, interpreted this verse within a more systematic, philosophical, and spiritual framework. Thus, the verse "Ya ayyatuha al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah" can be understood in two layers of meaning. First, normatively, as God's promise to believers who live with faith and righteous deeds (as interpreted by al-Tabari). Second, as an existential and spiritual achievement after a long journey of soul purification (as described by al-Razi).

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Al-Tabarī's interpretation emphasizes the importance of faith and righteous deeds as a foundation, while Al-Razī's interpretation opens up a space for philosophical reflection that peace of mind is the result of a profoundly transformative process. The combination of the two presents a complete picture of al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah (self-realization) as the ultimate goal of tazkiyah al-nafs: a soul that is at peace, content, and pleasing, ultimately called to enter God's paradise.

Table 1. Comparison of Tafsir al-Ṭabarī dan al-Rāzī On the Conceptual Verses of al-Nafs

Verses of the Qur'an	Type of Nafs	Tafsir al-Ṭabarī	Tafsir al-Razi	Epistemological Differences	Character Meaning
QS Yūsuf [12]:53	nafs al-ammārah (the soul that invites evil)	Relying on the narrations of the Companions and Tabi'in; focusing on the evil tendencies of the soul and the need for Allah's mercy	Explanation of the philosophy of the soul; dividing the structure of the soul; uniting the elements of lust, reason, and heart; associated with mujahadah	Bayānī (textual and narrative) vs Burhānī-Falsafī (analytical and philosophical)	Descriptive-Normative vs Analytical-Reflective
QS al-Qiyāmah [75]:2	nafs al-lawwāmah (reproachful soul)	Collecting various narrations; souls that reproach because of sin; normative and plural interpretations	The reflective, morally conscious soul; associated with the will (irādah), conscience, and ethical psychology	Pluralistic history vs rational-philosophical ethics	Passive-religious vs Active-psychological
QS al-Fajr [89]:27–30	nafs al-muṭandʾinnah (calm soul)	A soul at peace through faith; eschatological interpretation; promise of heaven	A soul that achieves peace through the process of tazkiyah and sulūk; Sufistic and transformational interpretation	Normative-transcendent vs Transformative-philosophical	Faith and obedience vs Spiritual and reflective unity

Comparison of the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī on the verses about al-nafs show fundamental differences in the approach and epistemological framework of each exegete. Al-ṬAl-Razi tends to position himself as the successor to the tradition of riwāyah, with a normative, textual interpretation, and oriented towards the

transmission of meaning from the generations of companions and tabi'in. In contrast, al-Rāzī displays a more reflective and philosophical approach, integrating elements of rationality, psychology, and Sufism in constructing the meaning of al-nafs. His interpretation is more analytical and transformative, directing readers to understand the soul as an entity undergoing a process of tazkiyah towards spiritual tranquility. The epistemological shift from bayānī to burhānī in al-Rāzī shows that interpretation is not only a tool for reading texts, but also a space for developing philosophical ideas and human spirituality in a broader horizon.

Contemporary Hermeneutical Context and Practical Implications
1. The Relevance of the Concept of al-Nafs in Contemporary Islamic Psychology

The concept of al-nafs, enshrined in the Qur'an and elaborated in classical interpretations, occupies a crucial place in the formation of Islamic thought, particularly in relation to contemporary Islamic psychology. Understanding nafs extends beyond theological or spiritual discussions to psychological and philosophical domains related to the human mental state. In the Qur'an, we find three main categories of nafs that are often the basis of analysis: nafs al-ammārah (the soul inclined towards evil), nafs al-lawwāmah (the soul that reproaches itself for mistakes), and nafs al-mu (the soul that reproaches itself for wrongdoing).ṭandʾinnah (a calm and serene soul). These three conceptually depict the inner dynamics of humankind, which are filled with conflict between baser impulses, moral awareness, and the search for spiritual peace.

Within the framework of contemporary Islamic psychology, this classification is highly relevant because it provides a more comprehensive model for understanding the development of the soul. Nafs al-ammārah, for example, can be seen as a representation of the instinctive drives that lead humans to destructive behavior, similar to the concept of the "id" in Freudian psychoanalysis, but with the theological emphasis that these tendencies are tests that must be subdued through faith and good deeds. Nafs al-lawwāmah, which reproaches itself when it makes a mistake, can be equated with the concept of the "superego," which functions as a moral controller, although from an Islamic perspective, it is more transcendent because it refers to awareness of God. Meanwhile, nafs al-muṭandʾInnah is an ideal state of mind achieved after a long struggle against lust, similar to self-actualization in humanistic psychology, but with a strong divine orientation.

Thus, the concept of nafs provides a unique epistemological framework in Islamic psychology. It highlights not only the horizontal dimension of human relationships with others but also the vertical dimension of human relationships with God. This distinguishes Islamic psychology from Western psychological models, which tend to be secular, reductionistic, and individualistic. Western psychology often neglects the spiritual-transcendental aspect, thus understanding mental health only as a balance of cognitive, affective, and behavioral functions. Meanwhile, within an Islamic framework, mental health is understood more holistically, incorporating elements of spirituality, faith, and piety as fundamental factors (Zulki, 2022).

The development of contemporary Islamic psychology demonstrates that the integration of revealed texts and modern theories can yield a more holistic approach. For example, when discussing anxiety disorders, depression, or inner conflict, an understanding of the dynamics of the nafs (self-consciousness) can provide a more in-depth explanation. The nafs al-ammārah (self-consciousness) can be seen as a source of negative impulses that cause anxiety, while the nafs al-lawwāmah (self-consciousness) provides a constructive sense of guilt that encourages self-improvement. Ultimately, the goal of therapy from an Islamic perspective is not only to alleviate psychological symptoms but also to guide the individual toward a state of nafs al-mu (self-consciousness).ṭandʾinnah, namely true peace that is born from a harmonious relationship with Allah (Muhammad Omar et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this approach also provides a philosophical foundation for the development of Islamic-based psychotherapeutic interventions. Several contemporary therapeutic models have begun to utilize the concepts of dhikrullah (remembrance of Allah), prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and contemplation of the Qur'an as part of the healing process. All of these practices are rooted in the idea of purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs), which has been a central concept in the Qur'an from the beginning. Therefore, it can be said that Islamic psychology offers an alternative path that is not only clinical, but also spiritual and eschatological, where true happiness is measured not solely by worldly mental health but also by salvation in the afterlife.

Amidst the increasing modern psychological crises such as stress, alienation, and existential emptiness, the relevance of the concept of al-nafs is increasingly clear. Many individuals seek answers to their inner anxieties, but secular psychology often fails to provide the answers because it only emphasizes rational and empirical aspects. The concept of al-nafs, with its various stages, offers a more comprehensive perspective: acknowledging the existence of negative impulses, providing a corrective mechanism through the nafs al-

lawwāmah, and offering the highest hope of tranquility and God's approval in the nafs al-muṭandʾ In this way, Islam provides not only normative guidance but also practical solutions that can be applied in everyday life.

Epistemologically, the discussion of al-nafs demonstrates that science in Islam has never been truly separated from spiritual values. Knowledge of the soul is not merely the result of empirical observation, but also inspired by revelation, then processed by the human mind. This makes Islamic psychology not merely an adaptation of Western theory, but a discipline with its own epistemological foundations. In other words, al-nafs is the meeting point between religion, philosophy, and psychology; it serves as a bridge to build an integral system of knowledge that avoids the dichotomy of materialism and spiritualism.

The concept of al-nafs in the Qur'an and classical commentaries remains relevant and even more significant in contemporary Islamic psychology. It provides a map of the human spiritual-psychological journey, from baser impulses to moral awareness, and ultimately to achieving true serenity. This relevance is evident as Muslims seek alternatives to the partial Western psychological model. By combining modern psychology with revelation-based spirituality, an understanding of al-nafs offers a more holistic, integrative, and meaningful approach not only to understanding the human mental state but also to guiding people toward achieving true happiness that stems from closeness to God.

2. The Potential of Comparative Interpretation for Islamic Psychotherapy and Character Education

The study of Qur'anic exegesis in the classical Islamic tradition serves not only as a literal interpretation of the sacred text, but also as a source of values, ethics, and orientation for human life. In the modern context, exegesis has a much broader relevance, including as a foundation for the development of Islamic psychotherapy and character education. Two great exegetes, al-Tabarī and al-Razī, offer different models of interpretation, yet they can complement each other in building a more comprehensive approach. A comparison between al-Tabarī's tradition-based (ma'thūr) interpretation method and al-Razī's integration of philosophy, psychology, and theology, opens up space for presenting a new paradigm in the development of Islamic mental health and moral development in education.

Al-Ṭabarī, in his monumental work, Jamiʾ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān, presents a maʾthūr interpretation that relies on the narrations of the Companions and the Tabi'in. The main characteristic of this approach is its emphasis on the authority of revelation as a normative guide for humans in facing spiritual and ethical problems. Within the framework of Islamic psychotherapy, al-Ṭabarī's interpretation can be used as a normative basis in emphasizing the importance of repentance, controlling desires, and awareness of sin. These values serve as ethical guidelines that prevent individuals from falling into deviant behavior while fostering a strong moral awareness. Thus, al-Ṭabarī's interpretation is highly relevant for use in the development of character education modules, both in formal educational institutions such as schools and universities, as well as in non-formal development such as Islamic boarding schools, religious study groups, and social rehabilitation institutions.

Al-Razi, in his commentary on the Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, offers a far more analytical and reflective perspective. He goes beyond interpreting verses based on narrations, but also integrates philosophy, theology, and rich psychological thought. This approach makes a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of the human psyche, particularly through the concepts of muhasabah (self-reflection), mujahadah (inner struggle), and increasing spiritual awareness. According to (Jaffer, 2015), Al-Rāzī's interpretations are able to open up space for an Islamic psychoanalytic model, in which the human soul is understood not merely as a moral entity, but also as an arena of conflict, the will (irādah), reason, and heart (qalb) interacting with each other. In the context of psychotherapy, Al-Rāzī's emphasis on self-reflection and inner struggle provides a strong foundation for the development of Qur'anic-based therapy. For example, someone experiencing anxiety, depression, or excessive guilt can be guided through the method of muhasabah to recognize the weaknesses of the nafs al-ammārah within themselves, then guided through mujahadah to balance the intellect, heart, and will. This process is not only psychological, but also spiritual, as it is directed toward closeness to God and the attainment of nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah (a peaceful soul). Al-Rāzī's interpretations are highly relevant as a foundation for holistic Islamic psychotherapy, which not only treats psychological symptoms but also strengthens the individual's spiritual dimension.

The interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī also make important contributions to character education. Education from a true Islamic perspective aims not only to equip students with intellectual knowledge but also to develop noble morals and spiritual awareness. In this regard, the concept of al-nafs as outlined in the Qur'an is highly relevant. A multilevel understanding of al-nafs can be used as a diagnostic and pedagogical tool: nafs al-ammārah as a symbol of ethical weakness that must be recognized and controlled; nafs al-lawwāmah as a moral

awareness that must be cultivated through reflection; and nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah as the ideal goal of spiritual education that emphasizes serenity and submission to God.

Al-Rāzī's transformative interpretation can be adopted as a model for gradual mental education. This process is known in Islamic tradition as tazkiyah al-nafs, namely purification of the soul that takes place continuously. This model not only emphasizes formal compliance with sharia rules, but also forms a deeper inner awareness. For example, Islamic education can design a curriculum that does not just teach fiqh or creed, but also integrates muhasabah training, dhikr practice, and moral reflection. This is in line with research (Nurlina & Bashori, 2025) which emphasizes the need for integration between cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in Islamic character education.

A comparison of the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī opens up great potential for designing a model of Islamic psychotherapy as well as a comprehensive character education system. Al-Ṭabarī provides a strong normative foundation, emphasizing the authority of revelation and the importance of moral control, while al-Rāzī offers a reflective and analytical approach more suited to addressing the dynamics of the modern psyche. The two, when integrated, are capable of presenting an educational and therapeutic paradigm that not only heals inner wounds but also shapes individuals with Islamic character, emotional maturity, and spiritual serenity.

This comparative exegetical study demonstrates that classical Islamic traditions have never lost their relevance. In fact, amidst the moral crisis, increasing mental health problems, and the degradation of spiritual values in modern society, the legacy of Qur'anic interpretation can be a source of inspiration and practical solutions. Islamic psychotherapy based on exegesis, along with character education that integrates the dimensions of the *nafs* (self-control) and *tazkiyah* (self-control), can provide a real alternative to secular approaches that often neglect the transcendental. By combining the normative authority of al-Tabarī and the reflective analysis of al-Razī, Muslims have the opportunity to build a more holistic system that not only addresses human psychological needs but also directs them toward closeness to God as the ultimate goal.

3. Exploring the Rich Heritage of Interpretation for Modern Spirituality

The legacy of classical exegesis is a treasure trove of Islamic intellectual knowledge that holds extraordinary potential for continued exploration, particularly in shaping the face of modern Islamic spirituality. Exegesis is not merely an attempt to interpret religious texts, but rather part of a long-standing struggle between revelation, reason, intuition, and social reality. In this context, the existence of exegetes such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1209 CE) occupies a crucial position because he presents a multidimensional exegetical approach capable of bridging the various aspects of human life. Al-Rāzī's exegesis not only broadens the meaning of the texts but also provides a conceptual framework for the development of a more reflective and rational Islamic spirituality.

One of the prominent aspects in al-Rāzī's interpretation is his view on the concept of al-nafs al-muṭandʾinnah or a peaceful soul. According to him, peace of mind is not an instant gift that simply descends upon humans, but rather the result of a long, striving inner journey that involves cultivating both reason and feeling. This distinguishes his interpretation from views that overemphasize the passive aspect of spirituality. For al-Rāzī, human efforts to unite with the Divine will require hard work, self-reflection, and deep existential awareness. Within this framework, spirituality is not an escape from reality, but rather a practical path that strengthens human capacity to face life's challenges.

When linked to the context of the modern world, this approach becomes highly relevant. Contemporary life is characterized by increasing existential anxiety, psychosocial stress, and a crisis of values due to the accelerating flow of globalization. Many individuals experience self-alienation, a loss of moral direction, and a sense of spiritual emptiness despite having access to all forms of material convenience. In such situations, al-Rāzī's model of spirituality can serve as an important reference. He emphasizes the balance between ritual and reflective dimensions, between sharia as formal rules and tazkiyah as cleansing the soul. Thus, religiosity does not stop at ritual formalities, but moves toward profound inner transformation, which can foster strength in facing the pressures of modern life (Akbar, 2021).

Al-Rāzī's tafsir approach also emphasizes the importance of integrating reason and intuition. In Islamic intellectual history, debates often arose between rationalists and Sufis in understanding religion. However, al-Rāzī presented a harmonious synthesis: reason is seen as a crucial instrument for understanding texts and reality, while intuition, or inner experience, is treated as a complementary dimension. Thus, the spirituality born of his tafsir is comprehensive, avoiding the reduction of dry intellectualism, but also avoiding the trap of mysticism

without a rational basis. This model is greatly needed in the modern world, where Muslims are required to present a spirituality capable of dialogue with developments in science, technology, and social change.

The integration of interpretation with spirituality, from this perspective, paves the way for the birth of a more rational, open, and progressive Islamic religiosity. Interpretation is no longer positioned merely as an academic activity limited to exploring the meaning of texts, but as a civilizational project. In other words, the interpretation of the Quran concerns not only humanity's vertical relationship with God but also impacts the formation of the whole person, a person who is aware of their relationship with themselves, with others, and with their environment. The spirituality born of this kind of interpretation can shape Muslims who are not only individually pious but also socially responsible.

Re-excavation of the classical tafsir heritage such as the works of al-Rāzī and al-ṬThe abarī has strategic significance in formulating contemporary Islamic narratives. In many cases, modern religious discourse is often trapped between two extremes: first, a form of Islam that is rigid, normative, and merely ritualistic; second, a form of Islam that is too loose to the point of losing its traditional roots. Classical exegesis offers a middle ground: a narrative rooted in revealed texts, strong in tradition, but still open to contextual interpretation. With this approach, Islam can emerge as a religion that is relevant and provides solutions to modern problems, without being uprooted from its spiritual and intellectual foundations.

Modern Islamic spirituality, built on the legacy of interpretation, also possesses a transformational dimension. It not only invites people to return to the text but also to critically reflect on life experiences. For example, al-Razi's idea of uniting with the divine will can be put into practice in a social context by fostering an honest work ethic, social awareness, and ecological awareness. The resulting spirituality is not a passive one that merely waits, but rather an active one that guides Muslims to contribute to building a just, peaceful, and civilized society.

Exploring the richness of classical exegesis is not only important for academic purposes, but also for establishing a new direction for Islamic spirituality that is relevant to the needs of the times. The legacy of exegetes such al-Rāzī dan al-Ṭabarī is not merely a historical relic, but a living and dynamic source of inspiration. It can serve as a basis for formulating a normative and existential Islamic concept, one that emphasizes not only legal rules but also touches on the deepest dimensions of human existence. This is where interpretation serves as a bridge between text and reality, between tradition and modernity, between God and humanity.

Ultimately, it can be affirmed that the spirit of exploring the legacy of classical interpretation for modern spirituality is not merely an attempt to "remember the past," but a strategic step toward presenting a more inclusive, reflective, and transformative Islam. Such an Islam is not only capable of addressing the anxieties of modern humanity but also guiding them toward inner peace and wisdom for life firmly rooted in the teachings of revelation. In this way, interpretation becomes a civilizational project that fosters humanity as a whole, uniting reason, heart, and action within a framework of spirituality that endures throughout the ages.

4. Hermeneutical Reflections: History of Understanding and Horizons of Meaning

From a contemporary hermeneutical perspective, understanding sacred texts such as the Qur'an is never static, but always in motion within a dynamic relationship between the text, its context, and its readers. Hermeneutics emphasizes that religious texts do not exist in a vacuum, but interact with ever-changing historical and intellectual horizons. Hans-Georg Gadamer introduced the concept of wirkungsgeschichte or "effectual history," namely that our understanding of a text is always shaped by previous interpretive traditions, historical experiences, and specific cultural horizons (Gadamer, 2004a). Thus, reading the tafsir of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī means reviving the horizons that developed in classical Islamic history, then placing them in an intertextual dialogue with the needs of contemporary Muslims.

Al-Ṭabarī, using the tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr method, asserts the authority of narration as the basis for the legitimacy of interpretation, thus emphasizing the continuity of early Islamic tradition with his horizon of meaning. Meanwhile, al-Rāzī presents a more reflective, philosophical, and psychological approach, making his interpretation more contextual for modern readers. This epistemological difference aligns with the hermeneutical idea that the meaning of a text is not something singular and frozen, but is always reshaped by different situations of understanding. Thus, the interpretations of these two commentators can be seen as a reflection of the diversity of historical horizons, which actually fosters the interpretation of the concept of al-nafs.

Paul Ricoeur added another dimension to hermeneutical theory: that interpretation is not merely the reproduction of meaning, but also a productive act that opens up the possibility of new meanings. Through symbols, narratives, and existential experiences, sacred texts can continue to maintain relevance for readers

across time (Ricoeur, 1976). If this approach is applied to the interpretation of al-nafs , then the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī can be read not only as normative explanations, but also as symbolizations of human spiritual experience. For example, nafs al-ammārah not only describes the human drive towards evil within a normative moral framework, but can also be interpreted as a representation of instinctive tendencies relevant to modern psychology. Similarly, nafs al-lawwāmah can be seen as a symbol of the mechanism of human self-introspection similar to moral consciousness in ethical psychology, while nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah can be interpreted as a symbol of an ideal state of spiritual and psychological tranquility.

Through this approach, the process of fusion of horizons, as proposed by Gadamer, becomes possible. The historical horizons of classical exegetes meet the contemporary horizons of modern readers, producing new, transformative and participatory meanings. Thus, Qur'anic interpretation is no longer viewed as a frozen, final product, but rather as a text that continues to live in dialogue with the times. This hermeneutic process allows Muslims to recontextualize the concept of al-nafs to suit modern problems, such as psychological crises, existential anxiety, and spiritual needs in the era of globalization.

The hermeneutic approach emphasizes that classical commentaries such as those by al-Tabarī and al-Razi are not merely intellectual archives, but rather legacies with practical relevance. A re-reading of the concept of al-nafs can enrich contemporary Islamic psychology, character education, and the development of modern spirituality. For example, the hierarchical categories of nafs can serve as a pedagogical framework for moral education, or as a model for Qur'anic therapy that guides individuals from destructive tendencies to inner peace. This demonstrates that interpretation does not stop at the theoretical dimension, but also exists as a humanitarian praxis that helps humans manage inner urges, strengthen moral awareness, and achieve spiritual happiness.

With this hermeneutic approach, classical exegesis is understood as a space of dialogue between the past and the present, between the text of revelation and human experience. Exegesis is no longer defined as a closed "final truth," but rather as a living intellectual heritage that can be continually updated according to the needs of the times. This is what makes Qur'anic exegesis dynamic: it opens the way for philosophical reflection, psychological therapy, and moral-spiritual development. Ultimately, a rereading of the concept of al-nafs not only provides psychological and spiritual insights but also affirms the function of exegesis as a humanitarian praxis that is obligated to revelation, moves through history, and provides meaning for contemporary life.

Therefore, within the framework of contemporary hermeneutics, the concept of al-nafs does not cease to be a theological doctrine, but rather a symbol of the universal human inner journey. Al-Tabarī's interpretation provides a normative and historical foundation, while al-Razī's interpretation opens up a space for philosophical reflection that remains relevant today. Both, when reread through the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, present new, transformative meanings, demonstrating that the sacred text of the Qur'an is always alive, interacting with the times, and guiding humanity toward spiritual perfection.

Table 2. Conceptual Mapping and Hermeneutics: Tafsir al-Nafs in Classical Tafsir and Modern Context

Component	Tafsir al-Ṭabarī	Tafsir al-Razi	Contemporary Hermeneutics	Practical Implications
Interpretive Approach	Narrative (ma'thūr), literal, normative	Rational, psychological, Sufi	Gadamer: wirkungsgeschichte; Ricoeur: simbolik dan reflektif	Understanding the meaning of al-nafs in a hierarchical and contextual manner
Structure of al-Nafs	Focus on sin and the need for grace	Focus on inner transformation	Interpretation as a historical and existential process	Used as a framework in therapy and education
The Function of the Soul in the Text	Passive soul, tends to submit to lust	Active soul, able to fight and develop	The meaning is not singular, depending on the horizon of understanding	Interpretation adapted to the psychosocial context of the times
Contributions to Islamic Psychology	Basic moral values: self-control, repentance	Islamic personality development model	Interpretation as an active understanding experience	The foundation of therapy based on Qur'anic values and self-reflection
Relevance for Character	Strengthening morals and	Formation of reflective	Interpretation education as intergenerational	The application of tazkiyah values and ego

Education	basic values	awareness and self-ethics	dialogue	control in the curriculum
Spiritual Values	Faith as a source of peace	The soul is calm through training and inner unification	Spirituality as the reader's horizon of meaning	Relevant to the modern search for meaning and mental health
Text Comprehension Model	Traditional and permanent meaning	Dynamic meaning, open to development	Fusion of Horizons between text and reader	Interpretation becomes a space for dialogue between heritage and contemporary needs.

This chart illustrates that the tafsir al-nafs in the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī is not only descriptive of the text, but also contains pedagogical, psychological, and spiritual values that are highly relevant to the needs of today's Muslims. While al-Ṭabarī provides a normative basis, al-Rāzī offers an expansion of meaning through the integration of philosophy and psychology. Contemporary hermeneutical approaches such as Gadamer's fusion of horizons theory and Ricoeur's symbolism of meaning help bridge this classical heritage into modern contexts, whether in mental therapy, character education, or contextual and reflective Islamic spirituality.

CONCLUSION

A comparative study of the concept of al-nafs in the tafsir of al-Tabarī and al-Razi shows that the methodological differences between the two reflect a shift in the epistemology of classical tafsir, from a normative riwāyah (religious tradition) to a more rational-philosophical dirāyah (religious tradition). Al-Tabarī, with his tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr method, emphasizes the authority of the narrations of the companions and the tabi'in, thus orienting his interpretation toward the continuity of early Islamic tradition. Conversely, al-Razi, through al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, integrates rational, philosophical, and Sufi approaches, placing the meaning of al-nafs within a psychological and transformative framework. This epistemological difference emphasizes that Qurʾanic interpretation is not merely a process of reproducing meaning, but also a form of intellectual dynamics influenced by the historical horizon of the interpreter.

An analysis of three key verses on al-nafs (Quran 12:53, 75:2, and 89:27–30) reveals the layers of development of the human soul: from the nafs al-ammārah, which tends towards evil, to the nafs al-lawwāmah, which censures the self, and finally to the nafs al-muṭmaʾinnah, the highest spiritual state. Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation emphasizes human dependence on God's grace, while al-Rāzī emphasizes the reflective process, mujahadah, and inner transformation as the path to soul purification. These two approaches, while different, complement each other: al-Ṭabarī provides a normative and eschatological basis, while al-Rāzī presents an analytical framework relevant to modern psychology.

From a contemporary hermeneutical perspective, classical exegesis is understood as a dynamic legacy that lives on through the dialogue between the text and its readers. Thus, a rereading of the concept of al-nafs not only enriches the study of exegesis but also contributes to the development of Islamic psychology, character education, and modern spirituality. This study confirms that the legacy of classical exegesis remains relevant for contemporary Muslims, both as a moral guideline and as a reflective foundation for addressing the psychological and spiritual crises of the modern era.

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