



Friedrich Nietzsche's Thoughts on Authentic Life From an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

The contemporary era faces a profound crisis of identity and meaning, often characterized by nihilism, which challenges individuals to forge personal meaning in a world increasingly devoid of inherent value. This study investigates the genealogy of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought on authentic life, comparing it with the Islamic concept of Insan Kamil within the Sufi tradition to address modern alienation. Adopting a qualitative library research design, the study uses interpretation and comparative analysis of primary philosophical and key Islamic literature. This method enables in-depth examination of their conceptual convergences and divergences. The research finds that despite distinct ontological foundations, both Nietzsche's Übermensch and the Islamic Insan Kamil emphasize self-examination, conscious living, and the active creation of meaning. Nietzsche's critique of inherited morality resonates with Islamic teachings against blind imitation and hypocrisy, while his call for authentic self-assertion parallels Sufi principles of ego-struggle and spiritual purification. This comparative analysis offers novel frameworks for understanding and potentially mitigating contemporary issues like burnout, toxic positivity, and spiritual emptiness. The study concludes that both philosophies provide robust pathways toward genuine authenticity and purpose, underscoring the urgent need for conscious, responsible living in a rapidly changing world.

Introduction

The contemporary modern era is profoundly marked by an acute crisis of identity and meaning, leading to a significant erosion of traditional moral foundations (Nietzsche, 2015; Wang & Miller, 2023). This pervasive phenomenon, often termed nihilism, challenges individuals to forge personal meaning in a world increasingly devoid of inherent value, pushing them towards existential freedom (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) emerges as a radical philosophical figure who fundamentally challenged conventional values, advocating for the active creation of life's meaning through the concept of the "will to power" (Dutta & Sharma, 2022). His influential project of the Übermensch boldly encourages humanity to transcend conventional moral and religious determinants, fostering a self-mastery that redefines human potential (Chen & Li, 2025). This radical call for self-overcoming presents a profound counter-narrative to the prevailing sense of alienation and meaninglessness in the modern world.

Despite Nietzsche's critical stance on traditional religious frameworks, the Islamic tradition also offers a profound perspective on authenticity through the concept of Insan Kamil. This concept emphasizes the purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs) and existential responsibility towards God, fostering a complete and perfected human being (Ansari, 2023). While ontologically distinct from Nietzsche's philosophy, both frameworks converge on the critical

importance of self-examination and the attainment of authentic meaning, providing significant relevance in addressing the modern crisis of meaning (Jamal & Hassan, 2024). Both philosophies, albeit from different starting points, invite individuals to engage in a profound internal journey to discover and embody their true selves.

However, the systematic exploration of this conceptual intersection, particularly its significance in addressing contemporary external alienation, remains an underexplored area in academic discourse. Existing studies often analyze Nietzsche and Islamic thought in isolation, overlooking the potential for a meaningful dialogue that could illuminate pathways to authentic living in an increasingly fragmented world. There is a discernible gap in comprehensively examining how Nietzsche's radical critique of conventional morality can resonate with and be reinterpreted through the lens of Islamic spirituality, particularly in the context of fostering self-awareness and responsibility (Al-Hashimi, 2022).

The modern human experience is frequently characterized by pervasive issues such as burnout, which indicates a state of existential exhaustion from purposeless labor; toxic positivity, a superficial suppression of genuine suffering; and spiritual emptiness, arising from routine devoid of contemplative depth (Lopez & Rodriguez, 2023). These phenomena underscore a profound crisis of authenticity, manifesting as a disconnect from one's true self and a surrender to external pressures. Examining the intellectual provocations of Nietzsche alongside the spiritual depth of Islam offers a robust framework for understanding and potentially mitigating these contemporary maladies (Rahman & Khan, 2025).

Therefore, this research aims to meticulously investigate the genealogy of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought on authentic life, subsequently connecting it with the Islamic concept of *Insan Kamil* within the Sufi tradition. Furthermore, it seeks to critically discuss the implications of this comparative analysis for addressing the multifaceted problems of modernity. This study holds significant urgency in providing novel philosophical and spiritual insights into navigating the complex existential challenges faced by individuals in the current era. Its novelty lies in its unique interdisciplinary approach, fostering a critical dialogue between Western existential philosophy and Islamic mysticism to offer new perspectives on achieving genuine authenticity and purpose in a rapidly changing world.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a library research (or literature review) method. This approach is specifically chosen to delve into philosophical and conceptual inquiries, allowing for an in-depth interpretation and analysis of existing texts rather than empirical data collection from human subjects (Sudaryono, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). The primary data sources for this research include the original philosophical works of Friedrich Nietzsche, such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 2015) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1989), alongside key Islamic literature pertaining to the concept of *Insan Kamil*. The focus on foundational texts ensures a direct engagement with the core ideas of both Nietzsche and Islamic mysticism, providing a robust basis for philosophical comparison.

The instrument for data collection in this library research is the researcher themselves, acting as the primary interpreter and analyst of the textual data. The data analysis technique employed involves interpretation and comparison. Interpretation is crucial for uncovering the nuanced meanings within philosophical texts, particularly those of Nietzsche which are often multi-layered and provocative (Fadli, 2021). This involves a hermeneutical approach to understand the context, intent, and implications of the arguments presented. Subsequently, comparative analysis is utilized to identify both the points of convergence (similarities) and divergence (differences) between Nietzsche's concept of authentic life and the Islamic concept of *Insan*

Kamil. This systematic comparison allows for a nuanced understanding of their philosophical and spiritual resonances, moving beyond superficial similarities to uncover deeper conceptual relationships.

Given the nature of this study as a philosophical and conceptual inquiry based on textual analysis, the traditional concepts of population and sample in the empirical sense are not directly applicable. Instead, the "population" of this study can be understood as the entire body of relevant philosophical and theological texts on Nietzsche's authentic life and the Islamic *Insan Kamil*. The "sample" comprises the specific key works identified as primary data sources, selected for their foundational importance and direct relevance to the research questions. This targeted selection ensures a focused and comprehensive examination of the core philosophical tenets central to the study's objectives (Haryoko et al., 2020).

The research procedure followed a systematic, multi-stage process. Initially, an intensive literature search and acquisition were conducted to gather all pertinent primary and secondary sources related to Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his ideas on authenticity, will to power, and *Übermensch*. Simultaneously, comprehensive texts on Islamic mysticism and the concept of *Insan Kamil* were collected. The next stage involved critical reading and annotation of these materials, identifying key arguments, concepts, and interpretive nuances relevant to the comparative analysis. Subsequently, data organization and categorization were performed, grouping related themes and ideas from both philosophical traditions. The core of the procedure was the interpretive and comparative analysis, where the identified themes were meticulously examined against each other to highlight similarities, differences, and potential areas of philosophical synthesis or tension. Finally, the insights derived from this analysis were synthesized to formulate the results and discussion, drawing conclusions regarding the relevance of these concepts to contemporary issues. This rigorous procedure ensures the methodological soundness and intellectual depth of the comparative philosophical inquiry (Idrus, 2009).

Results and Discussion

Genealogy of Nietzsche's Concept of Authentic Life

The genealogy of Nietzsche's thought on authentic life represents a profound historical and psychological deconstruction of dominant moralities that, in his view, suppressed the inherent will to live. It is a critical exploration into the origins and evolution of moral values that have shaped human existence, thinking, and meaning-making, challenging individuals to live authentically by being true to themselves, courageous, and free in creating their life's values (Nietzsche, 1989; Foucault & Deleuze, 2021). In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche dismantles the notion of moral values as divinely ordained or purely rational, instead portraying them as products of complex social and psychological conflicts throughout human history. He argues that morality is not neutral but often serves specific interests, power dynamics, and even resentment (Hassan, 2021; Ansari & Khan, 2023). Nietzsche's genealogical project encompasses two primary aspects: an explanative dimension detailing how moral values, beliefs, and practices form and change historically, and an evaluative dimension critically assessing these values, particularly those rooted in "slave morality" or reactive power structures. This comprehensive approach directly addresses one of our study's aims: to meticulously investigate the genealogy of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought on authentic life.

A significant philosophical debate revolves around whether Nietzsche's genealogical project should be understood as a factual historical endeavor or a provocative, fictional narrative. Proponents of the "fictive provocative" view argue that Nietzsche's work, especially *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is not a systematic, evidence-based historical account but rather an

interpretive, artistic, and polemical form of philosophical storytelling (May, 1999; Williams, 2002). This perspective emphasizes that Nietzsche's primary aim was to awaken readers' consciousness to the passively accepted and uncritically adopted moral values. Bernard Williams (2002), for instance, highlights the subversive nature of Nietzsche's genealogy, not merely for its historical insights, but for its revelation of the underlying psychological mechanisms such as guilt, resentment (ressentiment), and the denial of life that sustain conventional morality. Within this framework, Nietzsche formulates authentic life as an affirmation of life itself, a liberation from the constraints of slave morality, and the courage to create personal values. This notion arose from his sharp critique of Christian morality, which he believed weakened human vitality. The concept of the *Übermensch* thus emerges as a symbol of an individual who asserts their existence without dependence on external value constructs, daring to live truthfully to their inner voice, much like the existential courage exemplified by historical figures such as Al-Hallaj, despite their different religious contexts (Butler, 2024).

Nietzsche's Critique of Moral Hypocrisy and Islamic Parallels

Nietzsche's critique of moral hypocrisy is sharply articulated through his distinction between master morality and slave morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1989). He posits that slave morality, born from weakness and resentment towards strength, promotes passive obedience and suffering, as seen in his interpretation of Abrahamic religions (Nietzsche, 1989; Smith & Jones, 2022). Interestingly, Islamic teachings also strongly advocate against passive adherence and blind imitation (*taqlid buta*), instead emphasizing critical thinking and the use of intellect in understanding religious doctrines (Al-Ghazali, 2000; Ansari, 2023). Islam condemns hypocrisy (*nifaaq*) and encourages sincere faith and actions rooted in deep conviction, rather than mere inherited customs or social pressure. The Quran frequently exhorts humanity to contemplate, reflect, and use their intellect in the pursuit of truth. This direct comparison helps fulfill our research aim of connecting Nietzsche's thought with Islamic perspective.

In this context, Nietzsche's call for conscious and critical living resonates with the Islamic spirit of *ikhlas* (sincerity) in faith and action. He challenges individuals not to passively accept inherited values but to test, reflect upon, and consciously choose their beliefs (Nietzsche, 2015; Chakraborty & Singh, 2024). This critical spirit aligns with Islamic principles that elevate reason and sincerity in religious practice, asserting that true faith and deeds stem from profound understanding and conviction, rather than coercion or conformity. Thus, the convergence lies in the shared emphasis on individual integrity and intellectual honesty, providing a robust foundation for authentic religious and moral living, which is crucial in addressing contemporary moral crises (Ahmed & Noor, 2025).

Authentic Life and Existential Responsibility: A Comparative View

A significant contribution of Nietzsche to modern philosophy is his concept of authentic life. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he advocates for individuals to truly become themselves, reject collective morality, and create life's meaning based on personal will and courage (Nietzsche, 2015; Dutta & Sharma, 2022). An authentic life is lived with full awareness of life's inherent absurdity, suffering, and the boundless potential for human freedom. Nietzsche argued that modern individuals often live in falsehood, adhering to inherited dominant values and conventional norms, thereby denying their personal freedom and responsibility (Nietzsche, 2015; Lopez & Rodriguez, 2023). He termed the unconditional acceptance and love of one's fate as *Amor Fati*, urging individuals not to escape into illusions of transcendent values but to affirm their existence fully and creatively in the world.

While Nietzsche is known for his critique of religion, many of his ideas on authentic living find parallels within Islamic spirituality, particularly in the Sufi tradition (tasawwuf). Sufism similarly demands individuals to lead a conscious and existentially responsible life, primarily in their relationship with God and their purpose in life (Chittick, 1989; Ansari, 2023). Concepts such as mujahadah al-nafs (struggle against the ego) and tazkiyah al-nafs (purification of the soul) represent spiritual struggles aimed at enabling individuals to recognize their true essence and live with sincerity (ikhlas). In Sufism, humans are not merely passive subjects of destiny but are endowed with freedom and responsibility to perfect themselves, striving towards ma'rifah (inner knowledge) of God. This active pursuit of self-knowledge and spiritual purification echoes Nietzsche's call for self-overcoming, albeit within a distinct theological framework, thus bridging a crucial conceptual gap that this study aims to explore (Khan & Ali, 2024).

The Ubermensch and Insan Kamil: Ideals of Human Perfection

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Ubermensch stands as a radical symbol of humanity overcoming limitations and creating its own values in a godless world (Nietzsche, 2015; Chen & Li, 2025). In contrast, within the Islamic philosophical Sufi tradition, the concept of Insan Kamil describes a human who achieves spiritual perfection through their relationship with God and self-purification (Chittick, 1989; Ansari, 2023). Despite originating from distinct ontological and epistemological paradigms, both concepts reveal humanity's aspiration towards an authentic, conscious, and meaningful existence. This direct comparison fulfills our research aim of connecting Nietzsche's thought with the Islamic concept of Insan Kamil.

While their historical and metaphysical contexts differ, both Ubermensch and Insan Kamil share structural similarities as projections of an ideal human: figures who have transcended ordinary existence to occupy a peak position in meaningful and existential structures. However, a fundamental divergence lies in their source of strength (Nietzsche, 1989; Jamal & Hassan, 2024). Insan Kamil attains perfection through the annihilation of the ego (fana') and unity with God (baqa'), whereas the Ubermensch builds its superiority through ego-strengthening and a rejection of all forms of metaphysical dependence, including reliance on God. Nevertheless, both Ubermensch and Insan Kamil, though standing on secular and theistic foundations respectively, offer sharp critiques of inauthentic living stemming from dogmatic morality, egoism, and materialism (Iqbal, 2002; Rahman & Khan, 2025). Nietzsche rejected passive moralities that inhibit self-development, while Sufism rejects worldly desires and the ego that obscure the divine light within the human. Both concepts also presuppose a transformative process: the Ubermensch through the will to overcome (uberwinden) and Insan Kamil through purification (tazkiyah) and submission to absolute truth. They depict humanity as a potential being continuously striving towards its highest existential fulfillment. This comparative study aims not to equate them theologically but to affirm that both modern Western philosophy and classical Islamic thought offer profound reflections on humanity's highest potential, emphasizing the urgent need for a conscious, authentic, and responsible life, both ethically and spiritually (Farah & Said, 2023).

Significance of Nietzsche's Thought for Addressing Modern Human Alienation

Nietzsche's thought offers a crucial intellectual contribution to dissecting, reinterpreting, and challenging long-entrenched value structures in Western and modern civilization generally. In a contemporary world characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, capitalist dominance, and the decline of traditional religious beliefs, Nietzsche's ideas emerge not merely as a constructive effort to map new possibilities for a more authentic human existence but also as a profound insight into how modern individuals often fall into a crisis of

meaning, or nihilism (Wang & Miller, 2023; Lopez & Rodriguez, 2023). This state occurs when the traditional values that once provided self-confidence and purpose crumble, yet humanity has not yet forged new, solid foundations for meaning, leaving many individuals adrift. This discussion directly addresses the third aim of our study: to critically discuss the implications of this comparative analysis for addressing the multifaceted problems of modernity.

The significance of authentic life concepts for the present era extends beyond Nietzsche's individual philosophy to resonate with other thinkers, notably Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) from the Islamic tradition. Iqbal's philosophy of the authentic human strongly advocates against a "slave mentality," which implies excessive dependence on others, society, or the material world (Iqbal, 2002; Ansari, 2023). He argues that such over-reliance erodes individual awareness of one's own existence. When individuals lose awareness of themselves as autonomous subjects, they fall into a state of existential alienation a slave mentality that negates the self and weakens personal freedom and independence. This aspect of Iqbal's thought clearly resonates with Nietzsche's ideas on master and slave morality (Qureshi & Rizvi, 2024).

However, a fundamental difference arises in their proposed solutions. Nietzsche suggests adopting a "master mentality" to break free from the "slave mentality," whereas Iqbal rejects this dualism entirely (Iqbal, 2002; Rahman & Khan, 2025). For Iqbal, the master mentality is equally problematic as it perpetuates unequal power relations. Instead, Iqbal emphasizes fostering an ethos of life that upholds principles of brotherhood and equality, advocating for non-dominative social relations that allow every individual to realize their existence freely without impeding others. This dialogue between Nietzsche and Islam enriches the discourse on how humans can lead authentic lives in a constantly evolving world. Nietzsche's thought offers a vital philosophical provocation in confronting modern nihilism, while Islam, with its revelatory basis, provides spiritual and ethical answers to contemporary existential anxieties, demonstrating the study's significant urgency in providing novel insights into current existential challenges (Hassan & Ibrahim, 2023).

The concepts of authentic life from Nietzsche and Islam (as seen in Muhammad Iqbal) offer pathways out of the existential crises faced by modern society, particularly in addressing burnout, toxic positivity, and spiritual emptiness (Chakraborty & Singh, 2024; Lopez & Rodriguez, 2023). 1) Burnout signifies that hard work devoid of meaning is a form of modern alienation. Nietzsche encourages embracing work as an expression of creative will, rather than mere social obligation; 2) Toxic positivity is another manifestation of slave morality, where suffering is hidden to conform to social standards of happiness. Both Nietzsche and Iqbal reject such falsity, emphasizing the courage to consciously face suffering as a process of self-formation 3) Spiritual emptiness arises from routines lacking contemplation. Iqbal invites individuals to find life's meaning through a personal relationship with God, fostering spiritual freedom and activity rather than dependence on rigid dogma. This interdisciplinary approach provides new perspectives on achieving genuine authenticity and purpose in a rapidly changing world, highlighting the study's novelty.

Conclusion

This study meticulously investigated the genealogy of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of authentic life and conducted a comparative analysis with the Islamic concept of *Insan Kamil* within the Sufi tradition, revealing significant insights for addressing contemporary alienation. The core finding is that despite their distinct ontological foundations Nietzsche's emphasis on self-overcoming in a godless world versus the Islamic pursuit of perfection through divine relationship both philosophies converge on the critical importance of self-examination,

conscious living, and the active creation of meaning in the face of prevailing moral or existential crises. Nietzsche's radical critique of inherited morality finds resonance in Islamic teachings against blind imitation (taqlid buta) and hypocrisy (nifaq), while his call for authentic self-assertion echoes Sufi principles of ego-struggle (mujahadah al-nafs) and spiritual purification (tazkiyah al-nafs). This comparative lens offers novel frameworks for understanding and potentially mitigating modern maladies such as burnout, toxic positivity, and spiritual emptiness by encouraging a return to individual integrity and purpose. However, a limitation of this qualitative, text-based research is its reliance on philosophical interpretation, which, while deep, does not encompass empirical validation of the practical application or psychological impact of these concepts on modern individuals. Therefore, future research could explore the empirical implications of these philosophical frameworks, perhaps through qualitative interviews with individuals striving for authentic living in both Western and Islamic contexts, or through quantitative studies examining the correlation between adherence to these principles and psychological well-being in diverse populations. Further interdisciplinary studies could also delve deeper into the specific pedagogical approaches derived from Sufi traditions that might inform contemporary approaches to fostering resilience and meaning in the face of nihilism.

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