

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND THE PROJECT OF MORAL RETRIEVAL A COMPARISON OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND DEWEY

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the challenges of developing an authentic Islamic educational philosophy in a Western secular-liberal context. It argues that for various reasons Islamic educational institutions in the West often lack the theoretical underpinnings that are grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition. A shortage of well-trained Islamic educational practitioners and teachers and a lack of insight into Islamic educational theory has resulted in educational practices that could arguably be said to be more “Islamicate” than Islamic as such. Through the framework of a “project of moral retrieval” we might productively explore Islamic moral resources to ground a contemporary Islamic educational philosophy. The author makes an integral and contrastive comparison of key concepts in educational philosophy between the paradigmatic educational thinkers al-Ghazālī and John Dewey, subsequently analyzing Islamic and western conceptions of human nature, child and learning, the goals and aims of education, the role of the teacher and teacher-students relations. Through this analysis the author evaluates how educational thought in Islam and the West overlaps and diverges in an attempt to explore a more authentic expression of Islamic educational philosophy that might fruitfully function in the Western context.

Keywords: Islamic education, al-Ghazālī, John Dewey, human nature, learning, aims of education, teacher-student relations

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The presence of a large plethora of Muslim communities in the West, as with any religious community establishing itself in a cultural environment different from their own, inevitably brings the question of how to maintain, develop, and even advance, their civilizational and religious heritages for future generations. The field which perhaps most manifests this desire is the field of Islamic education, as it is catered towards training new generations of Muslim youth both intellectually and spiritually. Islamic schools in the West however, experience great challenges. Not only because of the difficult task of operating in an environment that is increasingly xenophobic and islamophobic, but also because of the lack of a coherent view on what Islamic educational philosophy should look like when operating in a context that is by-and-large secular.¹ Lack of insight into the rich Islamic intellectual tradition and a scarceness of well-trained Muslim staff and teachers often result in educational practices that do not correspond with a genuinely Islamic outlook. What's more, many of these schools — consciously or unconsciously — adhere to secular educational practices as prevalent in the West, occasionally inserting some “Islamic” aspects into the curriculum for good measure, such as a weekly lesson on the Islamic religion, the opening of the day with a Muslim prayer, and the occasional religious feast. The result is a type of education that, to use a term from Marshall Hodgson, could be said is more “Islamicate” than Islamic as such.²

When analyzing the state of research in the field of Islamic educational philosophy from a distinctly Islamic framework one finds that very little advances have been made in this regard. The one study I am familiar with that provides us with an overview of Islamic scholarship on the issue presents the field as being in a deplorable state.³ My own recent literature research — since this author describes the state of art of the field only up until 1998 — provides us with a situation that has not much improved.⁴ I am not aware of any recent study on contemporary Islamic educational philosophy that has had any lasting effect on the field. Therefore it seems of utmost importance to pursue a preliminary study into this subject.

1 Islamic communities in the West have been trying for the past thirty years to incorporate the Islamic world view into the national secular curricula of countries as diverse as Britain, the United States, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, albeit without an awful lot of success. See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130.

2 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume I: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 1974. For his discussion on the term “Islamicate” see 57-60.

3 Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1998). For Daud's survey of Islamic educational philosophy see 21-31.

4 Notable exceptions can be found in the works of the Islamic scholars and thinkers such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

In this paper I want to delve into the question of what an authentic and comprehensive Islamic educational philosophy could look like, by comparing two paradigmatic thinkers of respectively Western and Islamic civilization, namely John Dewey (d. 1952) and Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Although a comprehensive comparative analysis of these sophisticated thinkers cannot be made within the scope of this paper, an attempt will be made to compare certain key elements of their educational thought. This paper will start with a further elaboration on the project of moral retrieval, followed by an explanation of why a comparison of specifically these two thinkers might be a fruitful endeavor for our particular purposes. The rest of this paper will deal with the educational thought of our thinkers, subsequently discussing their ideas on human nature, children and learning, the goals and aims of education, and teacher-student relationships.

I. EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROJECT OF MORAL RETRIEVAL

Before turning to al-Ghazālī and Dewey we need to address the theoretical approach of this paper. When thinking about an educational philosophy that is grounded in the Islamic intellectual and moral tradition, one could easily be accused of some kind of nostalgia, the idea of having a sentimental yearning for the past. The importance of grounding Islamic education in the Islamic tradition in this paper however is not concerned with a longing for by-past glory of times when Islamic civilization was at its peak. As Alasdair MacIntyre has convincingly showed in his seminal work *After Virtue*, it is possible to effectively use the moral recourses of an alternative tradition to face contemporary challenges, and indeed they *must* be used when a prevalent world view seems to fall short of providing viable solutions.⁵ MacIntyre, as a pronounced Catholic philosopher, obviously pursues his project of moral retrieval by drawing from the Christian tradition as promulgated by Thomas Aquinas. Muslims however possess their own rich tradition from which they may draw to face, as Wael B. Hallaq aptly puts it, “the challenges of the modern project, a project that has proved incapable of solving even

5 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Wael B. Hallaq's pursuit of an authentic Islamic political philosophy is equally based on MacIntyre's outlook, and therefore in line with my thinking in this paper as it pertains to Islamic educational philosophy. See Hallaq's *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

those problems of its own making.”⁶ What follows from this reasoning is a large domain of opportunity where Muslim thinkers could draw from the rich tradition of Islam to formulate a genuine contemporary philosophy of Islamic education.

This is important because one must always consider that an educational philosophy itself is based on a particular metaphysical world view and cosmology. As such, the types of educational philosophies implemented in the West are based on an outlook that is secular-liberal, even if the practitioners of education implementing these philosophies in educational curricula are not always conscious of it. Islamic schools in the West are in no way an exception to this. The world views that form the foundation of education (*any* education) functions as a paradigm from which permeates the educational practice. In that way the secular modern project of the Enlightenment is paradigmatic for most educational philosophies found in the West, based on thinkers ranging from Voltaire and Rousseau to Spinoza and Kant, amongst others. The treatment of these thinkers in relation to educational philosophy, however interesting, does not fall within the scope of this paper. It suffices to state that in view of recent critiques of the modern secular liberal project in the West, as formulated by scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Wael B. Hallaq, and many others, various alternative ways of being modern could be formulated. And it is therefore legitimate to, as Hallaq puts it, “invoke any central domain of the moral, from past or present, that may provide us with a resource of moral retrieval”, and that a project of retrieval based on thinkers working within the paradigm of the rich Islamic tradition is “as plausible and legitimate a project as invoking Aristotle, Aquinas, or Kant”.⁷

II. THE RELEVANCE OF A COMPARISON BETWEEN AL-GHAZALĪ AND DEWEY

In the West the educational system was tremendously influenced by the educational philosophy of John Dewey (d. 1952), whose ideas are still current and relevant in our contemporary times. His influence even extends to the Muslim world, when he was invited by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to visit the newly established Turkish Republic in 1924 to advise

the Turkish state on educational policy.⁸ Dewey championed the idea of the liberalization of education, which entailed a clean break with tradition. Dewey explicitly criticizes those people who fall back on tradition. Conservatives, according to Dewey, would be opposed to the current educational system because they are not conscious of the changing times, and therefore would be against modernism and progressivism. Dewey thus stands for educational reforms that are wholly new, a complete break with tradition.

Dewey’s critique of conservatism does not differ much from similar modernist and progressivist critiques on conservative approaches in intellectual thought, or rather more broadly, those approaches that value and appreciate tradition. It is in line with what we call the “charge of nostalgia” mentioned above. This paper however, following MacIntyre’s project of moral retrieval, argues that there are two approaches to tradition. The first one entails a type of blind following of the achievements of earlier generations, very much the type of conservatism Dewey seems to have had in mind, and indeed the type I also believe would not be very helpful. A second and alternative approach though would be to build a new vision on enduring and lasting key principles that underlie a tradition, and are in a sense universal. This approach does not aim to blindly keep tradition alive, while it has lost its currency and relevance, but uses the time-proven principles of a tradition to seek for answers where modern answers fall short to address the questions at hand.

Dewey’s educational philosophy becomes problematic when taken as a “paradigmatic recommendation for an educational policy of developing societies moving towards modernity” when that specific form of modernity, a secular-liberal modernity, is taken as the only way forward without taking into account the civilizational alterity of Islamic civilization.⁹ In the West the educational system is based on a secular world view that traces its roots, through Dewey, to Enlightenment thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (d. 1778). In a Western educational system that has its shortcomings in the area of Islamic education, and one of whose founders do not represent the moral values and metaphysical world view that is necessary for the establishment of a comprehensive Islamic philosophy of education, an alternative approach to education is paramount. An approach to tradition in terms of a “project of moral retrieval” does not represent an intellectual standstill or setback or a nostalgic longing for a bygone past, but aims to use tradition as a source of inspiration to create new ways of being

⁶ Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 1-19.

⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁸ Ernest Wolf-Gazo. “John Dewey in Turkey: An Educational Mission”, *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 3 (1996), 15-42.

⁹ Ibid, 15.

and for finding more authentic forms of alternative modernities. Educational reform can be progressive without being secular-modernist. For even if texts are hundreds of years old, if they provide answers to contemporary questions, they are current and relevant.

In this paper we explore al-Ghazālī's thought as a possibly fruitful alternative, by comparing him with John Dewey. One does not have to look very far for the ingredients of establishing an educational philosophy that is based on the Islamic outlook. Many scholars of Islam have been very much concerned with the question of education, such as Ibn Sīnā, the Brothers of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Safa'*), and the thinker we are concentrating on in this paper, namely Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud stated very aptly in his useful study on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' Islamic educational philosophy that "[a] great thinker does not necessarily have to rediscover a master idea but has to *rediscover* and to affirm a true but forgotten, ignored or misunderstood master idea and interpret it in all the diverse aspects of thought not previously done, in a powerful and consistent way, despite surrounding ignorance and opposition".¹⁰ Now I would not dare claim anything of such nature, as such a project would be more deserving of a book-length research. But I do believe studying Imam al-Ghazālī could give us some sense of what a contemporary Islamic educational philosophy could look like, while at the same time directing us to the right direction for further research.

Al-Ghazālī is rightly considered as a paradigmatic thinker in Islamic civilization, who has been accredited with playing a major role in the formation of Islamic orthodoxy in the twelfth century. His books, most famously his magnum opus *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* or "The Revival of the Islamic Sciences", are still widely read by Muslims today and form a standard part of many *madrassa* curricula throughout the contemporary Muslim world. Frank Griffel in his groundbreaking study of al-Ghazālī argues he was responsible for synthesizing various intellectual trends in Islam that had up until then been at odds, namely theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafa*) and mysticism (*tasawwuf*).¹¹ He also played a decisive role in the naturalization of the Greek sciences into the discourse of Islamic theology, promoting the integration of Aristotelian logic into the *kalām* tradition, while stressing the merits especially of syllogistic logic.¹² Considering his lasting effect on Islamic intellectual thought, it is no more than logical to turn to al-Ghazālī's works when in search of an authentic Islamic philosophy on education.

10 Daud, 16.

11 Frank Griffel. *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

12 Ibid, 7.

When pursuing the treatment of al-Ghazālī's thought on educational philosophy one must keep in mind that al-Ghazālī did not write a specific work on the topic, as opposed to Dewey, who was an educational philosopher and practitioner in the modern sense of the word, who wrote specifically on this topic. Al-Ghazālī's ideas on education are to be found scattered throughout his vast oeuvre, making it a demanding task to formulate a complete picture of his educational philosophy. I shall base my findings on a limited amount of literary works that are known to contain some of his ideas on education, such as his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* and *Ayyuhā'l-Walad*, as well as on several studies that have been done on al-Ghazālī that contain aspects of his educational thought, most notably the work *Şahsiyet Terbiyesi ve Gazâlî*, by Mahmut Çamdibi¹³ and the work *İslâm'da Eğitim* by Bayraktar Bayraklı.¹⁴

III. AL-GHAZALĪ AND DEWEY: AN INTEGRAL COMPARISON ON KEY EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

An integral comparison of key educational ideas is needed to show us relevant starting points for the development of an authentic Islamic philosophy of education. Many things could be said about al-Ghazālī and Dewey's educational philosophy, and the limited scope of this paper presents a far from complete treatment of this vast subject matter. It does however present, I believe a reasonable selection of key themes the thinkers share, albeit drawing different conclusions based on their respective world views. This paper thus will be limited to several themes that could form a point of departure for a more elaborate and comprehensive formation of an Islamic educational philosophy. This list of recurring themes is far from exhaustive, given the extent of al-Ghazālī and Dewey's literary output. But they suffice to give us a sense of what an Islamic educational philosophy could be grounded upon. In order of sequence I discuss al-Ghazālī and Dewey's views on human nature in the form of the Islamic concept of *fitra*, how a child acquires knowledge, how a child's education should be approached, the end-goal of a child's education, and some final comments on the relationship of the teacher and the student.

13 Mahmut Çamdibi. *Şahsiyet Terbiyesi ve Gazâlî*, 4th edition (Istanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2014).

14 Bayraktar Bayraklı. *İslâm'da Eğitim*, 9th edition (Istanbul: Bayraklı Yayınları, 2012).

A. HUMAN NATURE

An educational philosophy is always based on a certain metaphysical world view. These ideas determine the form education will eventually take on. A metaphysical world view deals, first and foremost, with the question of how to view the world, creation, and human beings. The nature of human beings is a fundamental part on which an educational philosophy is built. It is therefore important to understand how these two thinkers understood human nature, and how these ideas shaped their educational theory and practice.

According to al-Ghazālī a child is born in a natural state (*fiṭra*), and that it is only through the influence of their social environment that children form their initial beliefs. He mentions in his work *Mizān al-ʿAmal* (quoting a tradition from the Prophet) that every child is born with an Islamic *fiṭra*, and if the parents are Christian it will become Christian and if the parents are Jewish it will become Jewish.¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī seems to point here to an inherent inclination towards Islam in human nature. In other places, however, al-Ghazālī mentions that knowledge in human beings is *not* inherent, rather children are born with a blank slate, akin to the idea of a *tabula rasa* as found in both Aristotle and Ibn Sina, who was greatly influenced by the former.¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī mentions in his *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* that man's essence "in his original condition, is created in blank simplicity without any information about the "worlds" of God Most High".¹⁷ To illustrate a point of comparison, al-Ghazālī starkly differs here from another group of Islamic thinkers who extensively wrote on Islamic educational philosophy, namely the Brothers of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafa'*). According to the epistemological stance of the Brothers of Purity knowledge is inherent in the soul of human beings, it is "the abstraction of the knowable in the soul of the knower through the aid of a teacher".¹⁸ In terms of their theory of knowledge the Brothers of Purity seem to show a striking similarity with the Platonic concept of *anamnesis*, the idea that human beings possess knowledge from earlier incarnations and that learning entails a process of "remembering" that is already inherently in

15 As cited in Bayrakli, 134.

16 On Ibn Sina see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 132-136. Al-Ghazālī uses the term *fiṭra* in various, sometimes seemingly contradictory, ways, although the second usage seems more prevalent in his thought. See also footnote 196 in al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, rendered into English as *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error*, trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2006). As a matter of fact the idea of the central concept of *fiṭra* in al-Ghazālī's thought has been given relatively little attention, and deserves a more thorough exploration. For an excellent recent attempt see Frank Griffel's "Al-Ghazālī's Use of "Original Human Disposition" (*fiṭra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna", *The Muslim World*, 102 (2012).

17 See al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh*, op. cit., 59.

18 M. M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 1: 307.

them, an idea not uncommon with other Neoplatonists the Brothers of Purity were familiar with.¹⁹

John Dewey's view on human nature differs significantly from those of al-Ghazālī. In line with Dewey's secular-modernist critique of religious conservatism he targets Christian traditional values and morality, especially in relation to controlling human nature. It must be kept in mind though that Dewey aims his critique at a specifically Christian conception of human nature as inherently evil, which is very different from the human conception as exemplified through al-Ghazālī above. In one of Dewey's main works on the theme, *Human Nature and Conduct*, he complains that "[t]heologians have doubtless taken a gloomier view of man than have pagans and secularists."²⁰ The perception of human nature as evil, the way Dewey imagines (Christian) theologians conceptualize human nature, does not correspond to the Islamic conception, which sees human nature (*fiṭra*) as essentially pure and uncorrupted. Dewey is of course aware that social conditions also play a major role, as was al-Ghazālī. However when Dewey says "[m]orality is social", in other words determined by society, one can recognize the moral relativism that is steeped in his philosophy.²¹ While al-Ghazālī recognizes the effect of social influences in the learning process of children, he does not go as far as to base his moral principles in society. In fact, his morality is firmly based in an Islamic epistemology, accepting the truthfulness of the Qur'an and the Prophetic message, rejecting any form of relativism.

Dewey was probably not aware of the fact that a "positive respect for human nature", as in regarding human nature positively and taking into account its potentiality vis-à-vis a negative approach that considers human nature as evil and in need to be controlled, has very much in common with the positive way al-Ghazālī approached *fiṭra*.²² While critiquing the tendency of some moralists to control human nature, Dewey most probably is correct in saying that "[t]he Puritan is never popular, not even in a society of Puritans".²³ But a more "theological" or traditional perspective does not necessarily need to be "puritan", as the case of al-Ghazālī proves. It becomes clear from the writings of al-Ghazālī such a negative perception of human

19 Fakhry, 170.

20 John Dewey. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1922), 1. Dewey mentions both the Catholic Church and Protestants as the "[p]rofessional guardians of morality", see, 5.

21 John J. McDermott, ed. *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press), 1981 (two volume edition), 712-723.

22 Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 4.

23 Ibid, 5.

nature is not maintained in the Islamic world view. Al-Ghazālī would probably agree with Dewey's position that human nature is changeable, when he mentions that “[i]f human nature is unchangeable, then there is no such thing as education and all our efforts to educate are doomed to failure. For the very meaning of education is modification of native human nature in formation of those new ways of thinking, of feeling, of desiring, and of believing that are foreign to raw human nature.”²⁴ But if certain ideas about human nature contradict the Islamic world view they cannot suffice for a concept of Islamic education. A Ghazālīan alternative is thus warranted.

B. CHILDREN AND LEARNING

What follows from al-Ghazālī's conception of the child being born with a blank slate, is that it is particularly receptive during its early stages of education. Al-Ghazālī makes clear that the education of a child is as engraving into a stone, an engraving that will never get lost.²⁵ This analogy alludes to the fact that what a child learns at a young age has lasting effects and thus should be treated with great care, as the purity of the child's heart at a young age is very prone to being influenced.²⁶ Because of this al-Ghazālī elsewhere mentions that in its essence the child was created with the ability to be morally formed and thus is capable to learn and accept the difference between good and evil, which forms the basis of Islamic moral education.²⁷

Dewey also wrote extensively on moral education, although when he writes on this topic he is mainly aiming at a form of education that is morally justified, and not an education (or curriculum) that is designed to produce moral people.²⁸ Dewey's position, as a secular thinker, is of course understandable, as in his world view he does not adhere to any “ultimate authority” and as such is not particularly concerned with the question of good and evil. Al-Ghazālī however *was* very much concerned with the question of good and evil, and the conception of “enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong” (رَفْعُ الْمَلِئِ نَعْيِ وَيَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَوْهِرِ الْجَمَلِ ابْرَمَ أَلَا) is a recurring theme in the Islamic revelation. Many verses of the Qur'ān that al-Ghazālī subscribes to stress the high status of morally upright people saying they will attain felicity in the Hereafter and are the best of people (see for example verse 3:104 and 3:110).²⁹ An authentic

Islamic philosophy of education would thus be equally interested in both an education that is morally justified (i.e. in the Islamic world view) *and* in producing moral people that can contribute positively to society.

Another interesting idea he mentions is that human beings differ in nature, and that some would accept education and ethical upbringing more easily than others, which could form a basis of differentiated or adaptive education, based on the need of the individual student.³⁰ In relation to this al-Ghazālī also mentions the different stages a child goes through during its education, and that a child should receive a type of education that befits its age.³¹ Dewey in this regard agrees with al-Ghazālī, believing that “children differ in their interests and capacities; they have inclinations towards both good and evil; they are active, social creatures whose worthy interests should be identified, encouraged, and guided”.³² This seems to be a typical example of how an Islamic educational philosophy could positively benefit from Dewey's thought, as a “project of retrieval” does not aim to discard Western approaches to education wholly. There needs to be a mutual intellectual dialogue that might further help inform their distinctive approaches. Al-Ghazālī and Dewey seem to agree on the importance of differentiation in education, and I'm not aware of any extensive works in this regard on part of Islamic philosophers. Since Dewey was both an theorist and an educational practitioner who heavily depended on empirical research, an Islamic educational philosophy might benefit from the methods developed in Dewey's intellectual framework.³³ But this is an endeavor of secondary nature and has no bearing on the contents of this paper, which is primarily concerned with laying the groundwork for the fundamental principles on an authentic Islamic educational philosophy. Only after establishing this groundwork an “applied” educational philosophy, including its methods and curriculum, could be developed.

C. THE GOALS AND AIMS OF EDUCATION

An end-goal determines the route to take towards a destination and which values play a role of significance in this journey. It is therefore important to understand the goals and aims

24 John Dewey. *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men* (Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1956), 190-191.

25 Çamdibi, 227.

26 Ibid, 227.

27 Bayraklı, 107, also 135.

28 Nel Noddings, “Dewey's Philosophy of Education: A Critique from the Perspective of Care Theory” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, ed. Molly Cochran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 282.

29 What still may be considered as a very reasonable introduction into this important Islamic concept is Michael

Cook's *Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003.

30 Bayraklı, 131.

31 Ibid, 144.

32 Noddings, 266.

33 On the significance of empirical research for educational philosophy see for example Dewey's essay “The Relation of Science and Philosophy as the Basis of Education” in *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men* (Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1956), 164-179 (originally published in 1938). Of interest is also his work on education as a science, Ratner, 631-654.

of education according to al-Ghazālī and Dewey. For Dewey the end-goal of education is to provide children with essential know-how to be able to participate in society and to contribute to it as an active member. Al-Ghazālī however, based on his religious world view, does not only take society into account. For him the essence and end-goal of education is to come to know God and to prepare the child for the life of the Hereafter. For al-Ghazālī the end-goal of education is to take away doubt from the heart and protect the child from the Hellfire.³⁴ Al-Ghazālī explains the verse in the *Qurʾān* that obliges the believers to protect themselves and their families from the Hellfire as entailing the upbringing and education of the child, which in turn would protect the child from both the evil of this world and the Hereafter.³⁵ Protecting a child means, according to al-Ghazālī; purifying the child with education, teaching it the value of good character and morality, and protecting it from the influence of bad friends and a bad social environment.³⁶ He also mentions that protecting a child means to not let the child remain in a state of continuous pleasure, and to not teach it love for wealth and luxury, because if it were taught to love wealth and luxury it would spend its life in pursuing these matters.³⁷ Here we can thus observe a stark difference in the approaches of Dewey and al-Ghazālī.

D. TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The teacher-student relationship is another aspect stressed by al-Ghazālī. This relationship had always been important since the inception of Islamic education. The teacher-student relationship would be characterized as very intimate and would often entail a close personal and intellectual relationship over long periods of time. This central pedagogical and social institution in Islam was also called *ṣuḥba* or “companionship” which in fact was modeled after the example of the Prophet and how he associated with his Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*).³⁸ A teacher would not be merely teaching a subject in a technical way, but the teacher would also be “an educator, a companion, a supporter and a moral mentor”.³⁹ Al-Ghazālī would continue this pedagogical tradition, as exemplified in the many works he addressed to his students, most notably his famous educational treatise *Ayyuhāʾl-Walad* (loosely translated as “O my beloved son”) that he wrote for a student, containing not only practical advice on the path

of learning but also spiritual and moral advice. Indeed, al-Ghazālī considers the teacher to be of the same importance in the life of a child as its parents are.⁴⁰ In his *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* al-Ghazālī enumerates that the tasks of a teacher entails; first and foremost, to teach the child how to get closer to God, then to show compassion and affection to the child and conceiving of it as his or her own child, and also that the teacher should follow the example and model of the Prophet and to lead by example by being a model Muslim, and to not openly point at the faults of a child but to do this in an implicit and subtle way, and finally to provide education that is fitting to the capacity of the child.⁴¹

Now, in al-Ghazālī’s time education, as with all Medieval education, was to a large extent informal. Al-Ghazālī in fact lived in a time of institutionalization. But this type of institutionalization is not in any way comparable of the formalized and state-orchestrated mass-education of the modern world after the Era of Industrialization, where teachers are by-and-large considered as “intellectual laborers” amongst other workers in society. While modern-day teachers undoubtedly may be motivated by lofty ideals, they in no way have the role of the custodians of a tradition, and guides in both an intellectual *and* spiritual sense as they are conceived of in Islamic civilization. Dewey concerns himself thus more with the questions of laborer rights, the social organization of teachers, academic freedom, and such themes.⁴²

Moreover, Dewey very much stressed in his writings the importance of individuality and critical thinking, the idea of liberating or emancipating individuals from authority.⁴³ Now Islamic intellectual life is certainly not opposed to critical thinking, as can be observed in many of Islamic civilizations most enduring literary works, but it does seem to allocate to the teacher a more central and more far-ranging role than Dewey does in his educational philosophy. A teacher is not merely a facilitator of the learning process, but takes an active part in the learning process by teaching through example and by being not only an intellectual companion, but also a moral mentor. This is not to say Dewey had no concern for teacher-student relationships, nor that he was not aware of the importance and authority of the role of the teachers; his philosophy is much too sophisticated for that. He mentions for example that “[s]ince the teacher has presumably a greater background of experience, there is the same

34 Bayraklı, 231.

35 Ibid, 135.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Wael B. Hallaq. *Shariʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 137.

39 Ibid.

40 Çamdibi, 227.

41 Ibid, 234-235.

42 See Dewey, *Philosophy of Education*, 70.

43 See Joseph Ratner, ed. *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey’s Philosophy* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), 605-630.

presumption of the right of a teacher to make suggestions as to what to do.⁴⁴ But at the same time Dewey did much to undermine the authority of teachers in his writings, which I think is an unfortunate aspect of his educational philosophy.

CONCLUSION

In this paper many important themes in education have been left undiscussed. Both Dewey and al-Ghazālī were systematic, but also complex and sophisticated, thinkers. Not to mention the tremendous literary output they had. A more extensive research is needed to do justice to both these two thinkers and a systematic and analytical comparison of the two. Additionally, some themes have been left undiscussed that are very interesting to education as an academic field of inquiry (one could think of curriculum development, teaching methods, or school organization), but which are of only of secondary interest to the main purpose of this paper, which is to lay the groundwork of an Islamic philosophy of education.

That being said, we can draw some preliminary conclusions from this initial integral comparison between Dewey and al-Ghazālī. First of all, Dewey's critique of traditional perspectives on human nature as being evil does not apply to al-Ghazālī's Islamic conception of *fitra*, which approaches human nature positively, viewing the child in its early stages as particularly receptive to education and being morally formed. Morality seems to have a more central place in an Islamic conception of education. Dewey is not so much interested in developing a form of education that is designed to produce morally upright people, whereas Islamic education is very much concerned with this question, stressing the concept of "enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong". Both Dewey and al-Ghazālī seem to have in common a concern for differentiation in education, based on the differences in character, ability, and inclination of various children, as well as the particular stage a child is in. Dewey as an educational practitioner who stressed the use of empirical educational research to inform and strengthen educational practices could benefit the framework of an Islamic educational philosophy, since it is in harmony with basic Islamic principles. The goals and aims of education in the thought of Dewey and al-Ghazālī differ greatly, based on their specific world views. Dewey, a secularist, takes an instrumentalist approach which stresses the importance of learning skills that enable children to participate in society. Al-Ghazālī's ideas on the aims

and goals of education go beyond society, and even beyond this profane world, taking into consideration a concern for salvation in the afterlife. Another stark difference is the great importance al-Ghazālī allocates to the role of the teacher and teacher-student relationships, which entails that the teacher is not simply someone who "passes on knowledge", but also an intellectual companion and a moral mentor.

To conclude, Islamic civilization has a rich intellectual tradition that is both comprehensive and holistic. For an educational philosophy to be genuinely Islamic, it must be grounded in the metaphysical worldview and cosmology of Islam, which entails that it accepts the ultimate reality of the Divine Being and the life of the Hereafter. Islamic education, according to al-Ghazālī, should be catered towards a moral and intellectual upbringing that protects the child and equips the child for the life of this world, as well as for the life that is yet to come. Imam al-Ghazālī, being a master of Islamic education and pedagogy, with a keen insight into moral philosophy and moral psychology, provides us with a helpful set of tools that could be further expanded upon, including various possibilities for differentiated and adaptive education, based on the nature of a child, its level and ability, as well as its stage in life. It also puts in the forefront the essential importance of moral education, which starkly differs from many modern secular educational philosophies, such as Dewey's, that tend to focus on the technical education of specific educational subjects. Dewey's work as a modern philosopher of education and a practitioner of education, however, is important and Muslims can learn from those aspects that do not contradict the Islamic world view, but rather benefit and even advance universal Islamic educational principles.

44 Ratner, 624.