

Philosophies of Islamic Education: Historical Perspectives and Emerging Discourses

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Unlike many edited volumes, this one is not a hodgepodge of case studies and tenuously related research papers but a carefully curated and thought-out volume. However, like all edited volumes it can be hard to realize how it all links together. The editors have given obvious thought to how this book should and does offer a valuable intervention on current work on Islamic education, and not just an opportunity for showcasing current scholars' reflections. The book is divided into four parts, with sixteen chapters, so it is not a short foray into the field. The contributing authors are a mix of academics in history, education studies, philosophy, and theology, many of who are practitioners in the field of Muslim education. This adds a refreshing reality check to what would otherwise be a very abstract philosophical collection.

Coeditor Mujadad Zaman starts the volume off with a scholarly and expansive introduction on the nature of Islamic education and what this collection can add to the field. Zaman argues, as is increasingly the case among specialists, that Islamic education be treated as its own subfield rather than an outgrowth of other disciplines such as history and theology.

Zaman posits that the field is loosely divided into "a number of 'research streams' . . . that suggest, albeit imperfectly, trajectories for the study of Islamic education including but not limited to, 'classical' orientalist scholarship, 'historical' case studies, and 'contemporary-social' approaches" (p. 6). The book "attempts to position itself both 'within' and 'outside' the literature. With regard to the former, it sits well within present literature and is, for example, 'orientalist' in the manner that it appreciates the importance of classical works/ideas on theology and pedagogy as enunciating values motivating Islamic learning, 'historical' with reference to accumulated practices of education and seeking their relevancy today, whereas it is 'contemporary' in that it engages with the unique challenges (both social and 'philosophical') facing Islamic education" (p. 6). Despite the nod to the contemporary, the book self-consciously avoids the social scientific literature on Muslim education that over the last two decades has produced plenty of valuable sociological and ethnographic case studies of Muslims

in education on the ground, and what this could add to a conception of an Islamic philosophy of education.

Zaman works with a refreshingly pragmatic, rather than idealistic, understanding of what “Islamic education” could be, thus opening up a varied horizon, delivered to the reader as the book unfolds. “Though not promulgating any one form of Islamic education, it [the book] is also ‘outside’ of these debates seeing itself as part of an evolving discourse of practice that cannot be limited to academic debates alone” (p. 6). He offers up the collection as not providing “definitive statements regarding the unresolved intellectual inquires” in the field but rather “a propaedeutic text on Islamic educational thought . . . as a means for further investigative work appealing to educational theorists, academics, and practitioners alike” (p. 8).

Part 1 of the volume, entitled “Theology and the Idea of Islamic Education,” is concerned far more with theological origins of Islamic thought, educational or otherwise. The first chapter is a wide-ranging interview with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on a variety of historic, philosophical, and social trends that effect the matter of education in the Muslim psyche and the reality of Muslim modern life.

The second chapter, “Education as ‘Drawing-Out’: The Forms of Islamic Reason,” by Tim Winter, is erudite in depth and almost poetic in style. It reads more as theological inquiry into the state of Muslim thought past and present than educational analysis as such. Winter is a theologian, but also comes into this debate as a visionary practitioner who has established an Islamic seminary in Cambridge, England. As many a Muslim educationalist before him, he focuses on the emphasis on *aq̄l* and reason in Islamic tradition, but his conclusions on what this means for Islamic education are far-reaching.

The third chapter, “Islamic Philosophical Traditions: Knowledge and Man’s Path to a Creator,” by David Burrell, another philosopher-theologian, takes the reader on an expansive albeit whirlwind tour of Islamic philosophy. The chapter is very tenuously related to understandings of education, classical or modern, and only lightly interrogates concepts of knowledge, reason, and a “creator-human” relationship. The chapter self-consciously describes the intervention as the philosophical backdrop to some of the foundational debates in Islamic philosophy of education; however, the backdrop is a little more like a faraway landscape.

Part 2 of the volume, “Positioning Knowledge Between the Student and Teacher,” begins with a chapter by Abdullah Trevathan entitled “Spirituality in Muslim Education.” By the time the reader arrives to this chapter

it is revitalizing to engage with the work of an educationalist whose musings are more solidly grounded in the practical implications of his ideas. Trevathan explores the concepts of *adab* and *ikhlas* (and to a lesser extent *akhlaq* and *ihسان*) as key concepts that can make an Islamic outlook in education distinct. Through this he intervenes on long-standing educational debates about how far moral and spiritual education is possible, and about the moral component of being educated. His use of a classroom example grounds the argument, making the theoretical thrust more connected to current reality. His argument that many Muslim schools enact the need for spirituality purely by upholding salah might be lacking because spirituality is far more than ritual prayer, and ultimately “education has come to be dominated by modern management systems, that this by necessity is at odds with any spiritual development, and that the antidote to the rationalism of our times lies within the spiritual and mystical” (p. 68).

The fifth chapter, “Your Educational Achievements Shall Not Stop Your Efforts to Seek Beyond: Principles of Teaching and Learning in Classical Arabic Writings,” is a real gem. The author, Sebastian Günther, is an intellectual historian of the Islamic world and does a superb job of what would otherwise be a dense slog for many a reader. This chapter is an illuminating and accessible overview of classical Islamic thought on different aspects of education, with valuable analysis of key thinkers such as, Abu Hanifa/Al Samarqandi, Al Jaziz, Ibn Sahnun, Al Farabi, Miskawayh, and Al Ghazali, among others.

The sixth chapter, “Disciplinary and Islamic Education,” by Omar Anwar Qureshi, takes us through some of the historic debates on categorizing knowledge in the Islamic tradition. Unlike modern academia, where disciplines have little mutual knowledge or understanding of each other, kalam/theology stood as the basis of all other branches of inquiry in Islamic philosophy. He surveys the different ways in which the sciences have been conceived and classified in the Islamic intellectual tradition, with insights into the work of Al-Farabi, al-Taftazani, al-Ghazali, and Ottoman-era scholars Tashkubri-Zadah and Al-Mar'ashi.

The seventh chapter and the final section of part 2, by Talal Al-Azem, explores the concept of *adab* (proper conduct) and how pervasive and ubiquitous a pedagogical necessity it was considered. He argues that “[f]rom the earliest centuries, one kind of knowledge was identified as both a condition and an end of the educational enterprise; namely, the transmission and inculcation of *adab*” (p. 112). Though historical, the chapter engages more thoroughly practical pedagogical treatises from the Islamic tradition.

Part 3 of the volume is entitled “Schools, Universities, and Pedagogies,” and this section is not as tightly curated as the rest of the book. The first chapter brings us finally to the modern era in Abdul Mabud’s exploration of the historic First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Makkah in 1977. Now we finally hear about the likes of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Isma’il Raji Al-Faruqi, key twentieth-century thinkers in this field. The chapter gives a detailed historic overview of the event, and some of the debates at the time, without much attention to the wider socio-historic forces.

In chapter 9, “Diverse Communities, Divergent Aspirations? Islamic Schooling in the West,” Nadeem Memon gives us an insight into the phenomenon of Muslims schools as an educational alternative for Muslim children and young people in the West, more specifically the United States and UK. He explores the growth of the phenomenon with a comparative examination of mission statements, Islamic orientation, spiritual development, curriculum approach, and accreditation.

In chapter 10, “An Olive Tree in the Apple Orchard: Establishing an Islamic College in the United States,” Omar Qargha focuses on Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, as a case study of Islamic higher education in the United States. Although Zaytuna does not claim to be a proponent of the Islamization of knowledge agenda, he uses the theory to assess the college’s success in combining a self-consciously “traditional” approach to Islamic training and an American institutional culture. It is a well-chosen example, as it is difficult to underestimate the effect Zaytuna and its teachers have had upon Islamic discourse in the Anglophone world. Despite some gratuitous uses of the words “modern” and “traditional,” Qargha’s intervention is a rigorous and worthy study of Zaytuna’s negotiation of tradition, be it in the shape of the Greco-Roman liberal arts heritage or the Islamic sciences.

The eleventh chapter, “The ‘Hadith of Gabriel’: Stories as a Tool for ‘Teaching’ Religion,” by Steffen Stelzer, stands out a little and may seem to not fit the section. This intervention examines the use of storytelling in Islamic texts as a pedagogical tool. Though sitting uncomfortably in this part of the book, the chapter is a fascinating content analysis of *hadith* text, and by extension an incident in the Prophet’s life, and how a “teachable moment” becomes a key teaching for believers.

Part 4, “Contemporary Debates,” begins with “Principles of Democracy in American Islamic Schools,” in which authors Douglas and El-Moslimany focus a micro lens on the Islam and democracy debate, applying it to Muslim

schools in the United States. Democracy as a key American cultural-political tenet provides a prism through which to understand the integration of these schools into American culture as well as their own approach to Islamic plurality.

In chapter 13, “Religious Pluralism and Islamic Education: Addressing Mutual Challenges,” Sarfaroz Niyavoz offers a foray into the important question of pluralism and how it is understood, applied, and experienced in Muslim schooling and by Muslim teachers, with Canada as a contextual backdrop. The chapter raises wider questions for Muslim educationalists about the limits of both pluralism and Islamic-oriented education.

In chapter 14, “Islamization and Democratization of Knowledge in Postcolonial Muslim-Oriented Contexts: Implications for Democratic Citizenship Education,” Yusef Waghid and Nuraan Davids breathe new life into the Islamization of knowledge debate with a two-pronged analysis of the process of both Islamization and democratization in Islamic education, with brief insights from the Muslim-majority world and more detailed case explorations from South Africa. They contend that it is the conditions not the theory itself that have failed to allow for Islamization to unfold.

With the final chapter, “Teaching Islam: Are There Pedagogical Limits to Critical Inquiry?,” the book closes with a unique exposition of the teaching of Islam and critical thinking through insights into two London-based Islamic educational case studies. Authors Farah Ahmed and Ibrahim Lawson are both philosopher-educationalists and practitioners in the field, but with different contexts. While Ahmed is founder of the Islamic Shakhshiyah Foundation, a “Muslim school,” Lawson has been teaching philosophy at a Deobandi-inspired Islamic seminary (which was one of my own research field sites). Both have worked on training Muslim teachers and come from a philosophy background. Inevitably their chapter is philosophically informed and analytically reflective but lacks in empirical grounding where it had intended otherwise. As an anthropologist I would have liked to see more direct ethnographic evidence to illustrate their arguments, and in this sense it does seem like a missed opportunity.

This edited volume benefits as much from its breadth of expertise as the depth that each contributor offers. This collection of expertise and disciplines definitely gives the book an essential place in the literature. As a scholar whose work has endeavored to combine the theoretical and empirical, I find the book does not do that. It is most definitely weighted toward the theoretical, through the prism of history, theology, philosophy, primarily though not exclusively. The volume draws heavily on scholars in

the Anglophone world, thus missing out on some important debates elsewhere. Parts 3 and 4 would have benefited with the inclusion of more case studies or examples from the Muslim-majority world. There is a conspicuous absence, too, of any thorough engagement with key thinkers in modern Islamic educational thought such as Al-Attas. And for this reason I am not certain it can be regarded as a “propaedeutic text,” as Zaman asserts. Rather than an introductory text I would argue it lies more in the genre of reader or primer on the field, with a very strong bent toward philosophy and theology.

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