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Dimensions of Education in Islam and its social impact

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Abstract

The remarkable impetus that the spirit of Islam gave to the knowledge came direct from the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet of Islam. The three Arabic words for 'education' provide a useful starting point for the analysis of Islamic education. Tarbiya comes from the Arabic root raba^ḥ (to grow, increase) and it refers to the development of individual potential and to the process of nurturing and guiding the child to a state of completeness or maturity. Ta'di^b comes from the root aduba (to be refined, disciplined, cultured) and refers to the process of character development and learning a sound basis for moral and social behaviour within the community and society at large. It includes coming to understand and accept the most fundamental social principles, such as justice. The third term, ta'li^m, comes from the root 'alima (to know, be informed, perceive, discern) and refers to the imparting and receiving of knowledge, usually through training, instruction or other form of teaching. The different emphases of these three terms suggest a possible analysis of Muslim education in terms of (i) aiding individual development, (ii) increasing understanding of society and its social and moral rules and (iii) transmitting knowledge, though of course such an analysis is by no means exclusive to Islamic thinking. What creates a distinctively Islamic view of education is the application to these three dimensions of the principle that no aspect of a Muslim's life can remain untouched by religion. Thus, whereas the liberal educationalist will discuss individual development in terms of the development of personal and moral autonomy, in Islam it will be discussed in terms of the balanced growth of all sides of the individual's personality, including the spiritual and moral, leading to a higher level of religious understanding and commitment in all areas of life. These three dimensions provide the three basic objectives of Islamic education. In practice, they may not be found in a pure form in many Muslim countries, because of the pervasive influence of western ideas. But, insofar as this paper is concerned with underlying principles of education that are distinctively Islamic, it is worth looking more closely at each in turn.

Key words: Tarbiya, raba, Ta'dib, aduba,ta'lim

Introduction

The paper begins by exploring the problematic nature of philosophy in Islam. The second section examines the resources that are available for a systematic exploration of the principles of Islamic education. The third section discusses three dimensions of education in Islam, one focusing on individual development, one on social and moral education and one on the acquisition of knowledge. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of differences between Islamic and liberal ways of understanding education and of the possibility of future dialogue with western philosophies.

Philosophy and education in Islam

Western readers may be surprised at how little has been written over the years on Islamic philosophy of education. After all, Islam has had a rich tradition of education going back some 1300 years (Shamsavary *et al.*, 1993). Islamic scholarship led the world for hundreds of years in virtually every known academic discipline, there was a wide range of schools throughout the Islamic empire and the greatest Islamic universities predate western universities by several centuries (Kinany, 1957).

So why the apparent reluctance (apart from a few exceptions, notably Tibawi, 1957; al-Attas, 1980; Azher, 2001) to develop a distinctive philosophy of education? The answer appears to lie in the ambivalent attitude of Muslim scholars towards the term. While from a western perspective the phrase 'philosophy of education' may seem innocent enough, from a Muslim perspective it comes with all sorts of cultural baggage which leaves many Muslims feeling uneasy. In fact, both elements of the phrase, 'philosophy' and 'education', are problematic from a Muslim point of view, but for different reasons. Let us look at each in turn. Philosophy (known as *falsafa* in Arabic) was an early import into Islam. The rapid expansion of Muslim Arab civilization in the 100 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad brought the faith into close contact with Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Syrian and Indian cultures, and certain elements of those cultures became incorporated (sometimes in adapted form) into Islamic thought (Fakhry, 1997). The translation of many Greek classics into Arabic in the early Islamic era was accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the Aristotelian tradition of the pursuit of truth with the help of human reason. As a result a number of intellectual developments occurred in the Islamic world, including structured theology (*kalam* in Arabic), the rational theology of the Mu'tazilites and the more systematic philosophy of al-Kindi (who asserted the supremacy of reason over revelation in matters of morality), al-Farabi (who asserted the insufficiency of revelation and the priority of philosophy over religion in many areas of knowledge) and others, including al-Razi, ibn Sina ('Avicenna') and the Ikhwan al-Safa ('Brethren of Purity'). Many of these included thoughts on education in their philosophical writings (see, for example, Langgulung, 1988, on the educational thought of Ibn Sina). Some of this early Islamic philosophy has been praised by contemporary western philosophers for its independence of thought. O'Hear (1982), for example, wrote approvingly of the Mu'tazilite belief that reason should be used 'to assess the claims of revelation' and suggested (perhaps somewhat fancifully) that the Mu'tazilites would 'presumably not be opposed to the intellectual freedom striven for in a liberal education' (p. 13).

Be that as it may, it is clear that at a popular level there was a continuing suspicion of philosophy as a ‘foreign importation [that] was inimical to Islam’ (Fakhry, 1997, p. 63). There have always been Muslim scholars (even highly conservative contemporary scholars like Syed Ali Ashraf) who have seen common ground between the ancient Greeks’ understanding of reality and Islamic beliefs about God and who have therefore been willing to accept that ‘by Islamizing the Greek concept of good, and by reinterpreting their hierarchical scheme of knowledge’, this could ‘give a certain pattern and order to education’ (Ashraf, 1985, pp. 35–36). But popular Muslim opinion has tended to the view that anything outside the divine truth of the Qur’an is at best superfluous (there being enough in the Qur’an to constitute a perfectly balanced education) and at worst dangerous, since the study of philosophy and other non-Islamic sciences could lead believers astray from the true path (cf. Leaman, 1996, p. 311).

Until the time of al-Ghazali (1058–1111), the debate was fairly evenly balanced between the philosophers and rationalists on the one hand (who believed, among other things, that rationality was separate from religion and indeed could be used to provide objective, independent support for religion) and the more orthodox theologians (commonly known as al-Ash’ariyya, who believed that rationality is valid only within the boundaries defined by religion) on the other. Both groups supported the study of natural laws and causality, but the former would see this as a domain of study independent of religion, while for the latter its value lay solely in the insight

it provided into God’s creative power. With the advent of al-Ghazali, however, the philosophical and rationalistic schools of thought lost ground. Al-Ghazali reasserted the dominance of religion over reason and gave superior status to revelation as a source of knowledge (Ashraf, 1985, pp. 27–32). In *The incoherence of the philosophers* (al-Ghazali, 1963) he argued that it was impossible for the rational faculties to attain to certainty without the help of revealed knowledge and spiritual understanding. Al-Ghazali’s influence on all subsequent Muslim thinking (and hence thinking about education) has been immense, and a degree of uneasiness about philosophy is still found today among Muslim traditionalists. In the case of ‘philosophy’, as we have seen, some Muslims took the foreign word into the Arabic language and then struggled (ultimately unsuccessfully) to render the alien concept compatible with Islamic teaching. In the case of ‘education’, on the other hand, the problem is not that the word does not exist in Arabic, but that the central meaning of the term in Arabic does not correspond very closely with the central meaning of ‘education’ as expounded by liberal philosophers of education in the west. As we shall see below, there are in fact three words in Arabic that are normally translated as ‘education’; one emphasizing knowledge, one growth to maturity and one the development of good manners. There is a significant area of overlap between the three words, however, and at the heart of the Muslim concept of education is the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behaviour and a strong knowledge of and commitment to the faith.

However, the Arabic language does not allow for any of the distinctions between education, schooling, teaching, training, instruction and upbringing that have been made much of by western philosophers of education working in the analytical tradition, for the words for ‘education’ in Arabic carry all of these

meanings. Independence of thought and personal autonomy do not enter into the Muslim thinking about education, which is more concerned with the progressive initiation of pupils into the received truths of the faith. Ashraf defines Islamic education as an education which trains the sensibility of pupils in such a manner that in their... approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam. They are trained and mentally so disciplined that they want to acquire knowledge not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or just for material worldly benefit but to grow up as rational, righteous beings and to bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of their families, their people and mankind. Their attitude derives from a deep faith in God and a wholehearted acceptance of a God-given moral code. (Husain & Ashraf, 1979, p. 1)

The goals of education are laid down by revealed religion and therefore have an objective quality; they do not vary according to individual opinion or experience. It follows, therefore, that the curriculum should be designed in accordance with the Islamic understanding of the nature of knowledge and the nature of human beings, especially their spiritual nature. Such an approach also has important pedagogical consequences, as we shall see below.

Resources for exploring the principles of Islamic education

One result of the reluctance among many Muslims to use the term 'philosophy of education' is that the long-standing tradition of respect for education within Islam (cf. Halstead, 1995, p. 25) has never been matched by a clear and thorough-going enunciation of the principles on which such education is based. Wan Daud (1998) makes a similar point: while there has been 'admirable commitment and enthusiasm' among Muslims both in Muslim countries and in the west to establish Islamic schools and colleges, these are often not based on a strong theoretical foundation (p. 26). Particularly in the west, such schools have frequently been established in response to perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling and they have been happy to contribute to the preservation of Muslim identity and help children to take pride in their religion, without giving serious thought to the nature of the distinctive education they provide nor to the way they should deal with the philosophical and epistemological problems posed for Muslims by modern secular scientific knowledge. Much contemporary discussion on Islamic education, Wan Daud (1998) maintains, betrays 'weak theoretical foundations, simplistic interpretation, and intemperate application, which do not do justice to its true ideals and heritage' (p. 24). This section is concerned to clarify what resources are available for someone wishing to embark on a more systematic explanation and justification of the features of Islamic education.

First, there is the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an is full of exhortations to pursue knowledge (e.g. Q. 20:114); it proclaims the superiority in God's eyes of those who have knowledge (e.g. Q. 58:11 and 39:9), but also emphasizes wisdom and guidance rather than the blind acceptance of tradition (Q. 2:170, 17:36 and 6:148). The pursuit of knowledge, it seems, is a religious duty. This, of course, raises the question, 'what sort of knowledge?' Muslim scholars have been at pains to emphasize that this does not license the pursuit of *any* kind of knowledge. Knowledge in Islam is subject to two major constraints. The first relates to its religious origin. The Holy Qur'an makes it clear that knowledge is a characteristic of God Himself and that all

knowledge comes from Him (Q. 35:28). This applies whether the knowledge is revealed (*naqliyya*) or humanly constructed (*'aqliyya*) and it means that knowledge must be approached reverently and in humility, for there cannot be any 'true' knowledge that is in conflict with religion and divine revelation, only ignorance. The second relates to its purpose. There is no notion in Islam of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out that in Arabic 'to know' ultimately means 'to be transformed by the very process of knowing' (quoted in Eaton, 1982, p 141). Ibn Khaldun pours scorn on the man 'who knows about tailoring but does not know tailoring' (1967, p. 354 ff.) and al-Ghazali says, Be sure that knowledge alone is no support. ...If a man reads a hundred thousand scientific subjects and learns them but does not act upon them, his knowledge is of no use to him, for its benefit lies only in being used. (quoted in al-Taftazani, 1986, p. 70) Like money, knowledge is not to be accumulated for its own sake but must be put to use. And the appropriate use for knowledge from a Muslim perspective is to help people to acknowledge God, to live in accordance with Islamic law and to fulfil the purposes of God's creation. Knowledge which does not serve these purposes may be considered useless. All this implies a concept of knowledge that is very different from dominant western concepts. Secondly, the traditions (*ahādīth*) of the Prophet Muhammad provide further insight into Islamic education. One *hadīth* (in al-Bukhari's collection) reminds believers that 'seeking for knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman', another (in the collections of Tirmidhi and Darimi) says that 'he who goes forth in search of knowledge is in the way of Allah till he returns', while others (of less certain authenticity, but quoted, for example, by Bahonar, 2004) say 'Seek knowledge, even as far as China' and 'Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave'. Some of these sayings have far-reaching implications: learning is a lifelong matter, it can be pursued outside the Islamic world and it is an equal obligation for men and women. Thirdly, though little of it could strictly be called 'philosophy of education', there was a substantial amount of writing in the high period of Islamic civilization that discussed educational issues generally. Both Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Akhlag-i-Nasiri* and Ibn Maskuya's *Taharat al-A'arag* contain detailed discussions of moral education and other educational issues. Al-Ghazali's *Fatihah al-'Ulu'm* is perhaps the closest to an early introduction to educational theory. In *al-Muqaddimah*, the great historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun outlines the aims of education, the curriculum and the skills of teaching and also provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of Islamic knowledge. He follows the by now standard bifurcation of knowledge into that which is revealed (*naqliyya* or transmitted sciences, such as theology and jurisprudence) and that which is discovered (*'aqliyya* or intellectual sciences, such as medicine and mathematics) (cf. Cheddadi, 1994). Other texts, including *Siyasat-Namah* by Nizam-al-Mulk and *Ghulistan* and *Bustan* by Sa'di, examine topics like education, teaching, learning, youth, love and devotion. The Treatises (*Rasa'il*) of the Ikhwan al-Safa include discussions of psychological and philosophical issues that are of particular interest to educators (cf. Tibawi, 1959). This list, though far from complete, indicates something of the breadth of interest among Muslims in educational principles and practice. The tradition of broad scholarship exemplified in these writers has continued up to the present day. Within the last 50 years

scholars such as F. Rahman, S. H. Nasr, S. N. al-Attas, S. A. Ashraf, Zaki Badawi and I. R. al-Faruqi have given high priority

within their wide-ranging writings to the need to think seriously about education. One particular recent initiative is the Islamization of knowledge. In an important paper delivered to the First World Congress on Muslim Education held at Mecca in 1977, al-Attas maintains that it is 'confusion and error in knowledge' that is the ultimate cause of the contemporary problems facing Muslim society, including social injustice and inadequate leadership (1979, pp. 2–9). He argues that since knowledge exists *in minds* (things that exist *out there* being merely *objects of knowledge*) the nature of the knowledge depends on the spiritual, moral and intellectual qualities of the mind or soul that has received or created it (Wan Daud, 1998, p. 306). Modern western knowledge is thus infused with western secular values and is inappropriate for Muslims because of its secular associations. However, he maintains that 'in the minds of good Muslims... every bit of information [or] idea from any source whatsoever, can be Islamized or put in its right and proper place within the Islamic vision of truth and reality' (Wan Daud, 1998, p. 309). Islamization is therefore a key process in countering the influence of western secularism and purging Muslim institutions of insidious western influences. The term itself is said to have been

coined by al-Attas (Ashraf, 1989, p. 2; Mohamed, 1993b, p. 27), although it was shortly to be taken up by al-Faruqi and developed into a major scheme for the reconstruction of Muslim thought (al-Faruqi, 1982). The concept of Islamization has been criticized because it accepts western classifications of knowledge as unproblematic and thus pays inadequate attention either to the sources of knowledge established in Islam or to the methodology followed by eminent Muslim thinkers. Other critical discussions of the 'Islamization of knowledge' thesis are found in Rahman (1988), Choudhury (1993), Mohammed (1993a,b), Shafiq (1995), Bugaje (1996), Maiwada (1997) and Ali (1999).

Three versions of education

The three Arabic words for 'education' mentioned earlier provide a useful starting point for the analysis of Islamic education. *Tarbiya* comes from the Arabic root *raba* (to grow, increase) and it refers to the development of individual potential and to the process of nurturing and guiding the child to a state of completeness or maturity. *Ta'dib* comes from the root *aduba* (to be refined, disciplined, cultured) and refers to the process of character development and learning a sound basis for moral and social behaviour within the community and society at large. It includes coming to understand and accept the most fundamental social principles, such as justice (cf. al-Attas, 1979, pp. 2–4). The third term, *ta'lim*, comes from the root *'alima* (to know, be informed, perceive, discern) and refers to the imparting and receiving of knowledge, usually through training, instruction or other form of teaching. The different emphases of these three terms suggest a possible analysis of Muslim education in terms of (i) aiding individual development, (ii) increasing understanding society and its social and moral rules and (iii) transmitting knowledge, though of course such an analysis is by

no means exclusive to Islamic thinking. What creates a distinctively Islamic view of education is the application to these three dimensions of the principle that no aspect of a Muslim's life can remain untouched by religion.

Thus, whereas the liberal educationalist will discuss individual development in terms of the development of personal and moral autonomy, in Islam it will be discussed in terms of the balanced growth of all sides of the individual's personality, including the spiritual and moral, leading to a higher level of religious understanding and commitment in all areas of life. The liberal educationalist will see the most justifiable form of society as an open, pluralist, democratic one, whereas in Islam the best society is one that is organized in accordance with divine law. The liberal will argue that no one set of religious beliefs can be shown to be objectively true and that critical openness and free debate provide the most rational means for advancing the pursuit of faith. Islamic educationalists, on the other hand, although they as much as liberals claim to be engaged in the quest for truth in all things, do not accept that there can be any discrepancy between 'revealed' and 'acquired' knowledge. There must be a place for both equally in any kind of educational provision.

These three dimensions provide the three basic objectives of Islamic education. In practice, they may not be found in a pure form in many Muslim countries, because of the pervasive influence of western ideas. But, insofar as this paper is concerned with underlying principles of education that are distinctively Islamic, it is worth looking more closely at each in turn.

Individual development

A fundamental aim of Islamic education is to provide children with positive guidance which will help them to grow into good adults who will lead happy and fruitful lives in this world and aspire to achieve the reward of the faithful in the world to come. To know what precisely is meant by 'good adults' requires an understanding of the Islamic concept of the human being. Briefly, the goodness of human beings on an Islamic view lies in their willingness: (a) to accept the obligations of divine stewardship; (b) to seek to take on the divine attributes such as *hikma* (wisdom) and *'adl* (justice) which have been clarified through divine revelation; (c) to strive for the balanced growth of the integrated personality, made up of the heart, the spirit, the intellect, the feelings and the bodily senses; (d) to develop their potential to become *insan kamil* (the perfect human being); (e) to allow the whole of their lives to be governed by Islamic principles, so that whatever they do, however mundane, becomes an act of worship. The purpose of education is to guide children towards these goals. People do not achieve their potential automatically, for by nature they are forgetful and open to the influence of injustice and ignorance; it is through education that they develop the wisdom and faith which help them to take pleasure in doing good and never lose sight of their relationship with God. This view of individual development has profound consequences for what is to be taught in schools and how it is to be taught.

Social and moral education

Education, like religion, can never be a purely individual affair; this is because individual development cannot take place without regard for the social environment in which it occurs, but more profoundly because education, in that it serves many individuals, is a means for making society what it is. Education may thus be

a vehicle for preserving, extending and transmitting a community's or society's cultural heritage and traditional values, but can also be a tool for social change and innovation. The sense of community in Islam extends from the local level of the family to the worldwide community of believers (*umma*). What binds the community together is the equality of all believers in the eyes of the divine law (*shari'ah*). In Islam, social existence has exactly the same goal as individual existence: the realization on earth of divinely ordained moral imperatives. Indeed, the spiritual growth of the individual (*tariqa*) can take place only within the *shari'ah*. Muslims walk together along the broad highway of the divine law, which sets out God's will for people in both their private and their social life and helps them to live harmonious

lives in this world and prepare themselves for the life to come. The social and moral dimension of education in Islam is therefore eventually a matter of coming to understand and learning to follow the divine law, which contains not only universal moral principles (such as equality among people, justice and charity), but also detailed instructions relating to every aspect of human life. The *shari'ah* integrates political, social and economic life as well as individual life into a single religious world view. In Islam, therefore, there is no question of individuals being encouraged through education to work out for themselves their own religious faith or to subject it to detached rational investigation at a fundamental level; the divine revelation expressed in the *shari'ah* provides them with the requisite knowledge of truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and the task of individuals is to come to understand this knowledge and exercise their free will to choose which path to follow. From a liberal perspective, the notion of free will in Islam is thus an unsophisticated one, involving simply the choice to accept or reject the complete package of beliefs, and contrasts sharply with the liberal notion of personal autonomy. The Islamic ideal, according to which there is no separation of religion and state, could of course only be a reality in a Muslim country. Where Muslims are in the minority, their consciousness of being a community bound together by a shared faith may be combined with a desire to enjoy equal rights and share similar responsibilities with all other citizens of the country where they live (Islamic Academy, 1987). The social dimension of education for British Muslims would therefore seem

necessarily to involve an understanding of the principles and values that lie behind the notion of British citizenship. However, if Muslim children are to learn the values on which British citizenship is based in total isolation from the religious values which underpin their membership of the worldwide Islamic community, then a fragmentation begins to enter into the educational process which is totally alien to the fundamental Islamic principle of *tawhid* (unity). To Muslims, there would be a danger in putting the teaching of citizenship before the teaching of religion. The only approach to social education that would appear to be compatible with Islamic

principles is to put the religious values at the heart of the educational process for Muslim children, but then to build into the process whatever else they need in order to learn to live, for example, as full British citizens (cf. Halstead, 2003). As al-Attas points out, it is more fundamental in Islam to produce a good man than a good citizen, for the good man will also no doubt be a good citizen, but the good citizen will not necessarily also be a good man (al-Attas, 1979, p. 32).

Acquisition of knowledge

Much work remains to be done on Islamic epistemology, though as we have seen, al-Ghazali, ibn Khaldun and others have made significant contributions (see also Halstead, 2005). However, three central points are clear enough. First, although knowledge may be derived either from divine revelation or from the activity of the human intellect, it cannot be divided into two classes, one religious and the other secular. All knowledge has religious significance and should ultimately serve to make people aware of God and of their relationship with God. Revealed knowledge provides an essential foundation for all other knowledge and people are free to pursue any branch of knowledge only insofar as they remain loyal to the divine injunctions contained in the Qur'an and the *shari'ah*. Indeed, any pursuit of knowledge may be viewed as a form of worship in Islam so long as it is undertaken within the boundaries defined by revelation. The educational consequences of this are clear: religion must be at the heart of all education, acting as the glue which holds together the entire curriculum into an integrated whole. This means that the autonomy of the subject or discipline, at least as understood in liberal thinking, is excluded, for all subjects and all knowledge need the guiding spirit of religion to give them purpose and direction. Thus, food technology must take account of Islamic laws on food and sex education and sport must not contravene Islamic rules on modesty and decency. At a deeper level, a considerable amount of theoretical work has already been done on ways to bring other subjects into line with Islamic beliefs and values; these include natural science (see Mabud, 1988; al-Attas, 1989), social science (Ba-Yunus & Ahmad, 1985), history (Qutb, 1979) and literature (Ashraf, 1982). What is involved in this process is not merely grafting an Islamic component onto modern western knowledge, but the reconstruction of the entire discipline in accordance with Islamic principles.

Secondly, as already noted, knowledge is not seen as valuable in itself or for, say, liberation, but is valuable only insofar as it serves to inculcate goodness in the individual and in the whole community. The pursuit of knowledge should stimulate the moral and spiritual consciousness of the student and lead to faith (*īmān*), virtuous action (*'amal ṣālih*) and certainty (*yaqīn*), which are constantly emphasized in the Qur'an (e.g. Q 103:3 and 15:99). Certainty may sometimes be achieved through an acceptance of the authority of the teaching of the *'ulama'* (the learned) about the Qur'an and the Prophet. Islam therefore encourages an attitude of respectful humility towards such legitimate authority and trust in the truth of the knowledge that it hands down. The implications for education are that the cultivation of faith is an essential part of education and that there is no justification for encouraging children to question their faith. This does not mean that religion should be used to hinder human invention or scientific enquiry (cf. Badawi, 1979, p. 117), but simply that it provides boundaries within which Muslims can pursue their studies with confidence.

Thirdly, since teachers have a special responsibility to nurture the young and develop their spiritual and moral awareness, their personal lives, beliefs, character and moral integrity are as important as their academic expertise. Muslims have long recognized that students' education is as likely to occur 'through imitation of a teacher and personal contact with him' (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, p. 426) as through instruction. Although the teacher, as transmitter of (religious) knowledge, is considered an authority figure worthy of respect (and

therefore not generally open to challenge by students), there is no reason in principle why interactive learning methods should not be used. Indeed, Badawi (1979) has shown that traditional Muslim education had a number of characteristics that may seem progressive even today. There was a natural integration of the curriculum and a close personal relationship between teacher and taught, elitism was discouraged, undue attention was not paid to examinations and pupil grouping was less rigid. Above all, traditional Muslim education was not an activity separated from other aspects of society; it was rooted in the community it served, responding to its needs and aspirations and preserving its values and beliefs.

Conclusion

From a western liberal perspective, the Islamic educational principles outlined in this paper are riddled with difficulties. To define knowledge as 'the acquisition of certainty' is immediately problematic, the more so when this certainty is a matter of religious belief, for it excludes the possibility of subjecting these beliefs to rational critical investigation, which might erode their certainty. It does not allow for knowledge (at least 'revealed' knowledge, although of course the very categorization is problematic) to be open to revision when new evidence comes to light that

challenges its reliability. The effect of this is to play down the importance of certain skills within education, such as questioning, verifying, criticizing, evaluating and making judgements, in favour of the uncritical acceptance of authority. Islamic education is thus open to accusations of indoctrination in that ultimately from a liberal perspective it implies a lack of respect for persons by denying them 'independence and control over their own lives' (Kleinig, 1982, p. 65). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the huge gulf that exists between Islamic and western liberal conceptions of education is 'ultimately unbridgeable' (S. Hussein Nasr, quoted in Eaton, 1982, p. 144). Al-Attas writes that 'there exist such profound and absolute differences between Islam and western culture that they cannot be reconciled' (quoted in Wan Daud, 1998, p. 72). Safi (1997) writes rather more wistfully of the need to 'understand why the revealed secures the respect of the intelligentsia in one religious tradition while it becomes a source of embarrassment in another' (p. 50). All this makes life difficult for Muslims living in western democracies, and equally difficult for western authorities searching for a form of education which is appropriate for their Muslim minorities. If Muslims live as citizens in the west, they are living in a society where the split between the secular and the religious is regarded as fundamental, yet to treat the former as a public and the latter as a private matter offends against the cherished Muslim belief in the unity of knowledge (*tawhīd*) and the centrality of religion. Muslims are dependent on the explosion of western knowledge because of the comparative intellectual stagnation in the Muslim world (Bugaje, 1996, p. 58), but if they allow their children to receive an education based on western epistemology and liberal values, they must wave goodbye to any hope of restoring to divine revelation the 'authority to furnish the ontological and ethical foundations' of all other areas of knowledge (Safi, 1997, p 39). However, if Muslims in the west seek to insulate themselves from the broader society, this means that they are unable to enjoy full citizenship and unable to influence the way that western society develops. Yet they may feel that they have much to

contribute here, particularly in the spiritual and moral domain and in restoring a sense of the sacred in everyday life (Nasr, 1993).

What remains to be explored is whether Muslims may find dialogue easier with philosophical traditions other than liberalism, particularly Continental and other non-foundationalist philosophies. Al-Zeera has led the way with her ground-breaking discussion of interpretive and constructivist approaches to knowledge and her support for naturalistic methods of enquiry such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, heuristics and narrative enquiry, which she argues are appropriate within an Islamic framework for 'the production of Islamic knowledge' (2001, p. 104). There is plenty of other fertile ground for dialogue between Muslims and European philosophers, including: Fichte's emphasis on the unity of knowledge and his belief that striving towards unification with God is the ultimate explanation for all knowledge and action (Fichte, 1971); Hegel's view that the philosopher is not so much an active judge of truth as a passive follower who allows the truth to unfold itself to him (Hegel, 1977); Schopenhauer's discussion of intuitive knowledge (Schopenhauer, 1969); Buber's distinction between the realms of I-thou (a direct form of knowing through a relationship with God) and I-it (an indirect and symbolic form of knowing) (Buber, 1958, 1988). It is not impossible that, through creative interaction with philosophers such as these, Muslims may find new ways, more accessible to western thought, of expressing what they perceive to be the fundamental, unchanging principles and essential values of Islam.

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