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Ghazali on Education
Contemporary Practical Applications from an Enduring Legacy

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Both Dīn and Dunyā: Reviving the Moral in Modern Education Through Ghazalian Ethics

Modern education in the West is experiencing a crisis of morality. Pre-modern Western civilization historically enjoyed an intellectual tradition of holistic education and pedagogy, which incorporated all levels of human existence (body, mind, and soul). Modern education – through a process of secularization and industrialization – is increasingly focused on knowledge production and professional formation. As a result of these (and similar) social processes, moral education has been on a decline in the West. Moral education – education of the soul – came to be seen as mere backward religiosity; not in tune with the modern scientific worldview. The focus on societal productivity and social engineering produced a new secular-liberal ethics of citizenship education, which focused on the formation of subjects of the state. As a result of this shift in paradigms, modern education essentially became 'soulless'. Muslim scholar and pedagogue al-Ghazali (d. 1111), in his magnum opus Revival of the Islamic Sciences (Ihya ulum al-din), provides a potent remedy for the modern crisis of morality in modern education. Through an in-depth analysis of key passages in Ghazali's classical work in Islamic educational and pedagogical thought, this paper offers a critical analysis of the modern human condition and its lack of attention for the human soul; as one of the main dimensions of human existence. Instead, al-Ghazali offers a holistic approach to human existence and the different spheres of human life, representing both worldly (dunyā) and heavenly (dīn) aspects of human formation. Al-Ghazali argues, for example, that the human character is malleable and thus capable of transformation (Mizan al-Amal, 247; Ihya 3:129-30). In this context, he talks about different phases of moral formation. Each phase – from child to adult – has appropriate approaches to moral education (Mizan al-Amal, 92; Ihya 3:11). In doing so, al-Ghazali develops a theory of moral character and a system of personal pedagogy (tarbiya) that is both holistic and comprehensive. He combines academic and professional education (ta'līm) and spiritual education (tazkiyya) with a special focus on the ethics of teacher-student relations. This paper also discusses – through the lense of Ghazalian ethics – the potential of not only being an active and caring citizen, but also a complete and morally formed human being (al-insān al-kāmil).

Key words: Ghazali, crisis of modern education, moral formation, character building, soul, tazkiyya, Ghazalian ethics, dīn and dunyā, al-insān al-kāmil