



Foundations of Moral Education According to Imam Muhammad Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqı: Emphasis on the Training of Soul

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 27 February 2023 Revised: 18 July 2024 Accepted: 27 December 2024 Online: 07 October 2025	The victory of the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s led to a renewed interest in historical educational traditions and a re-examination of the perspectives of Muslim educators within academic circles of the Iranian field of education. Building upon this renewed reading, the present study aims to examine the foundations of moral education according to Imam Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqı, with an emphasis on the cultivation of the self. The findings indicate that Ghazali, by emphasizing the composite nature of the human self, proposes strategies such as the necessity of safeguarding the self, ensuring the clarity of self, maintaining deliberateness and consistency of the self, acknowledging the responsibility of self, promoting the integration of reason and self, and facilitating the teachability of the self. Ghazali draws upon rational argumentation from Sharia, mysticism, and ethical counsel to guide the cultivation of the self. Naraqı assigns extraordinary importance to self-cultivation, referring to it as "spiritual medicine". Both thinkers emphasize the composite structure of the self, the necessity of understanding it, its developmental potential, and its capacity for education and cultivation. It is recommended that educational philosophers in Iran pay systematic attention to the issue of educating the composite self and strive to introduce its multiple dimensions to learners through specialized workshops and educational initiatives.
KEYWORDS Educational Philosophers Moral Education Muslim educators Self Imam Al-Ghazali Molla Ahmad Naraqı	

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1. Introduction

The Islamic Revolution in Iran caused the foundations of education to transition from predominantly liberal and somewhat eclectic frameworks to a structure firmly grounded in Islam, as these foundations are shaped and influenced by the prevailing philosophy of governance. Regardless of how precisely this transformation occurred and how it was implemented, the movement toward an Islam-centered approach to education, even if partially realized, represented a significant step in the educational process. In Islamic education, educators can utilize the ideas of Muslim thinkers whose discussions are explicitly based on Islam, along with the Quran and other Islamic texts, and apply their insights in educational practice. Moral education has been recognized as highly important in the contemporary world, to the extent that some scholars of education in the Western world have referred to the twentieth century as the “century of moral education.” In religious societies, moral education has also been considered a significant factor in individual and social well-being, and numerous studies have been dedicated to this process. The need to confront issues of human identity compels contemporary humans to focus on teaching ethical values (Farhadian & Serajzadeh, 2019).

While in the modern era, as a result of transformations in human life, the source of morality has increasingly been determined according to the principle that “human-centered criteria govern all things” (Hosseini, 1995:152–153), within the intellectual frameworks of Muslim educators and philosophers, moral education has traditionally been evaluated from the perspective of “the relationship of humans with God.” This tradition continues to persist in Muslim societies such as Iran (Liravi, 2016). Reviewing and reexamining the perspective of prominent educators such as Imam Muhammad Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqı concerning the concepts of moral education in general and self-cultivation in particular, with attention to the two pillars of knowledge and reason, is essential for precisely identifying the components of self-cultivation and reapplying them in Iran’s educational system.

Ghazali is among the philosophers who placed immense value on the cultivation of the self, a theme extensively addressed in his seminal works, including *Kimia-ye Sa’adat* (Alchemy of Happiness) and *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences). Similarly, Molla Ahmad Naraqı, in his renowned book *Mi’raj al-Sa’adah* (Ascension of Happiness) emphasizes the necessity of understanding the self in moral education and considers the human self as the essence of human existence. He also regards self-knowledge and self-awareness as the key and prerequisite for knowledge of God, ethical refinement, and personal development (Naraqı, 2010).

Although the perspective of Muslim thinkers cannot be directly implemented in an Islamic framework in every context, the ideas of scholars who derive their intellectual foundations from Islam and have systematized and applied them through philosophical methods can provide valuable insights. For example, the Prophet of Islam considered his mission to be the completion and perfection of moral teachings; within this context, Muslim thinkers who engage with these issues based on Islamic principles can offer explicit and implicit guidance on moral education.

2. Research Method

The present study employs a qualitative research design, with the first phase adopting an inferential analytical approach. In the second phase, a comparative method was utilized to examine points of convergence and divergence, and, ultimately, synthesis was conducted according to the Fairclough method. The Fairclough method comprises a six-stage process, encompassing critical discourse analysis, identification of the research problem, formulation of research questions, selection of data, implementation of textual material, and systematic data analysis (Mohseni, 2012). Data were collected from documentary sources and through keyword searches in international and Iranian databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Magiran, and ISC, identifying primary sources (the original works of the two educators) and secondary sources (books and articles). For data analysis, content analysis was employed using rational-analytical approach, and the findings were presented through three-stage of Fairclough procedure, comprising description, interpretation, and explanation. The research questions are formulated as follows:

- What are the foundations of moral education, with an emphasis on self-cultivation, from the perspective of al-Ghazali?
- What are the foundations of moral education, with an emphasis on self-cultivation, from the perspective of Molla Ahmad Naraqı?
- What are the points of similarity in the principles of self-cultivation between al-Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqı?
- What are the points of divergence in the principles of self-cultivation between al-Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqı?

3. Findings

Phase One: Description

Research Question 1: The Principal Foundations of Moral Education According to Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali

From the perspective of Imam Muhammad Ghazali, the foundations of moral education, with an emphasis on self-cultivation, are as follows:

a. Recognition of the Powers of the Self (Composite Nature of the Human Essence)

al-Ghazali asserts that to achieve education, self-knowledge is essential. He maintains that for humans to attain true perfection and happiness, they must first become acquainted with the dimensions of their existence, which enables them to recognize God. This self-knowledge pertains to the external dimensions and the internal, intrinsic reality of human existence. According to Ghazali, the self constitutes essence and core of the human being. (al-Ghazali, 1982). In Ghazali's perspective, the self belongs to the category of immaterial entities, is a divine gift to humanity, and lacks any material aspect; its existence can be affirmed through rational and religious proofs:

"The self is a pure, immaterial essence with a divine origin and in no way belongs to the material world or its accidents. It can be proven through rational and religious argumentation and those who consider the self as a corporeal or accidental entity are profoundly mistaken" (al-Ghazali, 1982:17).

al-Ghazali assigns specific duties to this essence, which include enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, urging humans to safeguard themselves against satanic temptation, discerning right from wrong, and attaining insight. These practices, necessary for human perfection, are not physical in nature:

"The self refers to the essence of a complete individual whose function is limited to awareness, preservation, discernment, and perception" (al-Ghazali,1997: 6).

Humans can consciously and voluntarily cultivate self-knowledge through repetition and disciplined practice (*riyazat al-nafs*), demonstrating that the human self is known and capable of education. Moral development, in Ghazali's perspective, fundamentally involves the supervision and care of the self (Zarrinkoub, 1974). Ghazali conceives of education as the management and vigilant observation of the self through moderation of its faculties and desires via knowledge (Farahani, 2008). He emphasizes three essential pillars of education: the self, ethics, and knowledge, asserting that human happiness depends upon careful attention to the self, moral refinement, and the acquisition of knowledge.

For al-Ghazali, the primary goal of moral education is the recognition of the true essence of the self, and the ultimate aim of human existence is nearness to God and the pursuit of happiness in this world and the Hereafter (Farahi, 2015).

" al-Ghazali, based on his philosophy of life, identifies the ultimate goal of human existence as attaining eternal happiness in the Hereafter and consequently perspective ethics through this perspective" (Kaviani & Fasihee, 2012: 101).

According to al-Ghazali, happy individual is one who has achieved self-knowledge and self-stability, experiences eternal pleasure free from suffering, maintains joy without attachment to worldly sorrows, possesses genuine wealth, attains absolute perfection, and enjoys self-respect and dignity (al-Ghazali, 1997: 19). Ghazali classifies the powers of the human self into three categories: vegetative, animal, and rational (human). According to him, the animal and rational selves are most closely related to moral education. The necessity of controlling and supervising these two aspects of the self for moral cultivation arises from the potential of satanic temptation, which may lead the animal self toward negative impulses it requires careful observation and deliberate training. al-Ghazali explains:

"The animal self is composed of two faculties: the motivational (harakah) and the perceptive (idrak). The motivational faculty functions as the engine of movement and power, initiating actions toward the goals that the human being seeks to achieve" (al-Ghazali, 1982: 23–24).

b. Purposeful Introspection

al-Ghazali emphasizes the value and essence of moral education, noting that one-quarter of the Qur'an addresses ethical matters and that in Islamic education, nothing is more important than moral cultivation (Naqibzadeh Jalali, 2004). For al-Ghazali, moral education is specifically the purposeful cultivation of the self, with the ultimate aim of purifying the inner self, attaining absolute felicity, and achieving proximity to God. He identifies the goal of ethical education as the refinement of the human soul toward truth and the attainment of divine closeness and intimacy (Farahani, 2008; Movahedian Attar, 2016). Moral education, according to al-Ghazali, entails the correction and moderation of the three primary faculties—desire, anger, and reason—through knowledge, disciplined practice (*riyazat*), and consistent effort to achieve divine proximity (Kaviani & Fasihee Ramandi, 2012; Malazai, 2011; Afzali, 2010). Ghazali states:

"The human self possesses two faculties: the rational faculty (al-quwwah 'alimah), which is responsible for understanding intelligibles and distinguishing beneficial behavior from evil, and which receives its influence from the higher realm; and the practical faculty (al-quwwah 'amilah), which is the origin of motions directed toward desirable actions" (al-Ghazali, 1997: 32–34).

c. Safeguarding the Self

The journey of moral and spiritual development is central in Ghazali's framework. He defines the *salik* (spiritual traveler) as one who engages in reflective contemplation, avoids pitfalls along this critical path, and practices asceticism to attain perfection. The spiritual traveler must proceed with deliberation and steadfastness, traversing a disciplined life to perfect the self, thereby achieving knowledge of God, divine love, and the highest blessings in this world, culminating in the vision of God in the Hereafter, contingent upon divine guidance, growth, and confirmation (al-Ghazali, quoted in Hanna al-Fakhuri, 1988 : 60). Moral education requires human attention to preserving the self and avoiding tendencies toward corruption (Ranjpour Azarian, 2000; Malazai, 2011). Ghazali asserts that physical discipline is a prerequisite for spiritual cultivation under the protection of the self (Sa'adati, 2010), and he emphasizes that the soul is the primary agent of nearness to God (Farahi, 2015).

"A human being must resolve to commit themselves to virtuous actions and practice them with such perseverance and insistence that these behaviors become habitual, ingrained, and an enduring disposition" (al-Ghazali, 1982: 75).

The aim of striving against the self (i.e., the *greater jihad*) is not the eradication of carnal desires, but rather their moderation (al-Ghazali, 1989: 54–55). In the safeguarding of the self, the emphasis is not solely on change, but also on correction and refinement.

"The human self is continuously engaged in a struggle between its rational and animal faculties. Human perfection and virtue lie in the moderation of wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice. The ultimate goal of the self is to attain perfection, and this perfection consists in nearness to God and eternal felicity" (al-Ghazali, 1997: 32–34).

al-Ghazali regards ethical moderation as a prerequisite for personal development (Sa'adati, 2010). In this context, he emphasizes that the child is a divine trust entrusted to the parents, and moral education from birth constitutes one of the most important responsibilities.

"The pure heart of a child is a precious gem, cleansed and free from any imprint, capable of receiving any form, and inclined toward whatever good or evil is taught to it. The educator and teacher share responsibility for the child's happiness and misfortune in this world and the Hereafter, for God has said: 'O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire.' Protecting the child from the fire of this world and the Hereafter is achieved through moral education" (al-Ghazali, 1989: 52).

Thus, according to Ghazali, moral education is contingent upon knowledge of the self and the struggle with it, which constitutes the very essence of self-preservation.

d. Purity and Clarity of the Self

Ghazali presents the human being at birth as an educable entity, morally neutral and pure, capable of being trained but not yet cultivated.

"Humans are born neither good nor evil, but their self is pure" (al-Ghazali, 1982: 60).

The self is created imperfect yet capable of perfection, which can be attained through moral refinement, ethical cultivation, and intellectual nourishment (Research Institute of Hawzah and University, Philosophy and Education, p. 300). Ghazali maintains that the foundation of moral education lies in striving to keep the self-free from corruption humans possess the potential to remain as pure as they are at birth. As Movahed, Bagheri & Salahshouri (2008:16) concluded:

"The focal point of moral education in Ghazali's perspective is the purification of the self and the rectification of the spiritual nature from ethical corruption and vices."

al-Ghazali considers moral virtues and ethical refinement to be acquired and educationally cultivated traits (Avani, 2009). His conceptualization is reminiscent of the English philosopher John Locke's notion of the *tabula rasa*, according to which the human mind is like a blank slate, shaped through interaction with the environment and peers. Likewise, for Ghazali, education is gradual rather than instantaneous, with the environment playing a crucial role (Farhadian & Serajzadeh, 2019). In this context, Ghazali identifies one of the principal objectives of education as instilling virtuous character in the child (Karami Hoseinabadi, 2013). Supporting the maintenance of this innate purity of the self is the responsibility of parents and educators. Ghazali asserts that virtuous disposition is a divine gift, as all humans are born with good character by God's will:

"Good character is a source of happiness, which originates in innate disposition, a divine endowment and grace" (al-Ghazali, 1982: 75).

In other words, humans are born with a pure nature, reflecting God's benevolence toward His servants. Individuals naturally display virtuous traits, such as generosity, humility, and good temperament (Farahi, 2015). However, being born with good character is not sufficient; the essential matter is to *remain virtuous*. This, according to Ghazali, constitutes ethical transformation, or more precisely, the conscientious cultivation of the purity of the self.

The child is a trust in the care of the parents. The heart of the child is pure, the essence precious, simple, and free of any imprint, receptive to any form, inclined toward whatever it is guided. If habituated to virtuous actions, these qualities will develop, leading to happiness in this world and the Hereafter, and the parents and educators will share in the reward; if habituated to

vice and abandoned like an animal, the child will fall into misery and perdition, and the guardian bears the responsibility for this failure (al-Ghazali, 1989).

Thus, the result of the self's purity is moral rectification. Parents and educators must seek guidance from the Lord of the Worlds in this endeavor. The ethical responsibility of educators in education is to reform themselves and others according to their inner disposition, relying upon divine assistance; such rectification cannot occur except within the framework of virtuous ethics (Rahmati, 2011). Ghazali equated rectification with guidance or in other words, with moral education, as he writes:

"Now I desire to reform myself and others I ask God first to correct me and then make me a means for the rectification of others; to guide me and then make me an instrument for guiding others."(al-Ghazali, 1989).

Gradual and Continuous Formation of the Self (Progressive Moral Development)

As has been stated, the human being is an educable creature; however, the human soul does not grasp abrupt or instantaneous training, but rather accepts gradual formation. In other words, education becomes effective only under the condition of persistence and continuity. Gradual progression is considered a divine law and tradition (al-Ghazali, 1982: 88). In this regard, Farhadian & Serajzadeh (2019) wrote Ghazali believes that in moral training no achievement can be attained at once; he emphasizes the gradual nature of moral education. Ghazali further maintains that it is unreasonable to expect a child, who is at the beginning of the moral development process, to comprehend the higher stages of moral growth (Karami Hoseinabadi, 2013). Moral education has an essentially gradual, continuous, and sustained nature, which requires observance of its stages to reach its intended results (al-Ghazali, 1954).

Discipline, Habit Formation, and Responsibility of the Soul

From al-Ghazali's perspective, since God has created human beings as free agents, the individual must learn in the course of moral education to detach from the world and attach to the Creator—a process he calls "spiritual discipline" (*riyādat al-nafs*). Ghazali also emphasizes that moral education requires certain prerequisites, among which the following are notable: first, since the human being has a sworn enemy named Satan, one must always remain vigilant over the soul, and this vigilance is realized only through hardship, reliance upon God, and inner striving; second, the individual must actively desire to be educated, and with the help of the will and free choice

granted by God, cultivate the eagerness necessary to endure the pain of resisting selfish desires; third, once this habit is formed, it becomes possible to preserve and repeat it. On the role of habit in shaping character, Ghazali states that all virtues are the fruit of habituation and perseverance in a single path; morals arise through habit and association with those who already possess such virtues (Farahani, 2008). *al-Ghazali* (1982: 63) explained:

“Good morals are acquired through discipline and effort, and after habituation, they are performed with ease. This occurs through repetition, vigilance, eagerness for good deeds, aversion to evil, and abstinence from them. Whoever becomes accustomed to righteous conduct will develop good character. The secret behind the command of the Sharia (or Shari‘ah) to practice righteous deeds is precisely this: that the heart may be transformed from an ugly state to a beautiful one”.

In *Kimia-ye Sa‘adat (Alchemy of Happiness)*, Ghazali insists:

“Since the essence of man is at the beginning of creation deficient and base, it cannot be elevated from this deficiency to the degree of perfection except through struggle and treatment” (al-Ghazali, 1982: 56).

Accordingly, *al-Ghazali* asserts a direct relationship between purifying the soul and moral education, which necessarily occurs through willpower and enduring hardship rather than ease. As Avani (2009, p. 19) notes: “*al-Ghazali* explicitly states that through discipline one can purify the soul and refine morals.” For *Al-Ghazali*, purification of the soul is among the ultimate aims of moral education (Ranjpour Azarian, 2000; Kaviani, & Fasihee, 2012: 97). He also holds that good character is acquired (*iktisābī*) and achieved through habituation. The outcome of the inclination toward virtuous action is the cleansing of the soul from impurities. As he writes in *Kīmiyā-yi Sa‘ādat* (*al-Ghazali, 1982:11*).

“Whoever becomes habituated to righteous deeds, good character will manifest in him; and the reason Sharia (or Shari‘ah) commands righteous acts is that the aim is the transformation of the heart from ugliness to beauty.”

Necessity of the Interaction or Struggle between Reason and the Soul (Malleability of Morality)

al-Ghazali describes the soul as living and dependent on the body, yet distinct from it. He views the human being as a compound of body, spirit, and soul, and thus grounds his approach to moral education in the multidimensional nature of the human being (Avani, 2011; Farhadian & Serajzadeh, 2019). For al-Ghazali, the true essence of man is the soul, which is self-subsistent and independent, not requiring the body for existence or survival; the annihilation of the body does not entail the annihilation of the soul. Death, then, does not mean the non-existence of man but the severing of the soul from the body, depriving it of the senses, movements, and physical faculties. al-Ghazali considers body and soul mutually dependent: the body ensures material life, while the soul opens the path to the spiritual domain. He regards moral education of body and soul as essential. He further emphasizes the changeability of the human soul and its receptivity to counsel and admonition. If character were immutable, then exhortations, moral guidance, and discipline would be meaningless and false (al-Ghazali, 1982).

al-Ghazali holds that in resisting sensual desires, man must employ reason as a valid criterion; the greater one's use of reason to govern the animal soul, the more trained and morally developed one becomes. Good character is realized when the bodily faculties submit to the authority of reason. If the faculty of thought is properly educated, wisdom arises; if the faculty of desire is trained, chastity emerges; if anger is brought under control, courage is formed; and in general, when the powers of the animal soul are directed by reason and instruction, the virtue of justice is attained (al-Ghazali, 1989).

For Al-Ghazali, moral education is complete when morality becomes part of the trainee's nature, such that the individual instinctively avoids immoral behavior (Rafiee, 2016). He likens committing sin to eating soil—something unnatural for the body—and practicing virtues to consuming nourishing food (al-Ghazali, 1989). All-Ghazali considers the rational person to be one who, in aspiring to happiness, must undergo training, and such training consists in listening to the call of reason and reflecting upon the Sharia (or Shari'ah). While al-Ghazali recognizes reason and Sharia as determinants of virtues and vices, he places Sharia above reason. As Avani (2009, p. 5) writes: "In moral issues where Sharia and reason diverge, al-Ghazali gives priority to Sharia." The implication is that All-Ghazali presents reason and Sharia as two complementary instruments—two wings—for acquiring virtue and avoiding vice. Yet, Avani (2009) asserts:

“In al-Ghazali’s thought, ethics is individual-centered, but he does not regard it as an end in itself, for the perfection of character lies in submitting one’s will to the Sharia.” al-Ghazali insists that one cannot identify virtues and vices through reason alone; divine law must be sought for guidance (Movahed, Bagheri & Salahshouri, 2008).

al-Ghazali thus integrates moral education with the Sharia, maintaining that without Sharia, morality has no meaning. In his perspective, morality is religious in essence, and he regards Sharia as the standard and criterion of ethics (Avani, 2009). The ultimate goal of moral training, according to Al-Ghazali, is to revive the Prophetic Sharia (or Sharī‘ah) (Ranjpour Azarian, 2000). al-Ghazali identifies four cardinal virtues—wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice—each representing a mean between extremes. He holds that from the refinement of desire arises chastity; from the refinement of anger arises courage; from the refinement of reason arises wisdom; and from the harmony of all three emerges justice. Thus, when the faculties of the human being remain balanced, the soul is healthy; otherwise, it is diseased and deprived of felicity. Al-Ghazali states that within man there exist four fundamental forces knowledge, anger, desire, and justice and unless equilibrium is established among them, morality cannot emerge (al-Ghazali, 1989).

Educability of the Soul

Human is by nature an interactive being, inclined toward social adaptation: he is influenced by his environment and in turn influences it (Farahani, 2008). Human beings are created in such a way that they cannot live in isolation, and must engage in social relations (al-Ghazali, 1982). However, such interactions must be with those whose company enhances one’s moral virtues. According to al-Ghazali, good companions and righteous brothers are indispensable, since human nature inevitably absorbs good and evil from the character of others (Farahani, 2008). He not only acknowledges but also emphasizes the formative role of a suitable environment in establishing morality within individuals. As al-Ghazali (1989:89) stated:

“Association with those who possess noble character and righteous deeds necessarily engenders good character in a person, even if he is unaware of it himself.”

al-Ghazali considers the influence of the environment and peer groups to be crucial in moral formation, and since the human being is by nature an interactive and social creature who requires engagement with others, he argues that if a person, in the course of moral education, follows moral exemplars, his moral development will occur more rapidly. The process of learning from virtuous

models contributes substantially to this formative process. He asserts that noble character may emerge as a result of observing the deeds of virtuous individuals and participating with them in commendable actions. Human nature, whether consciously or unconsciously, tends to emulate the disposition of others. If a person spends a period of time in the company of righteous individuals and partakes in their actions, he will, even without intention, follow certain virtuous practices of theirs, while at the same time learning other matters from them consciously. In the absence of such companionship, the study of the lives of these moral exemplars may also cultivate a similar inclination toward righteous conduct (al-Ghazali, 1982). al-Ghazali emphasizes the significance of childhood, the necessity of shielding children from corrupt companions and peers, and the importance of fostering cooperation and friendship (Afzali, 2010).

Question 2: Foundations of Moral Education (the Soul) according to al-Naraqī

From Molla Ahmad Naraqī's perspective, the anthropological foundations of moral education (the Soul) consist of the recognition of the faculties of the soul and its composite nature. Naraqī holds that the human being is a composite of body and soul. He describes the body as material and external, while the soul is identified as an immaterial and spiritual substance belonging to the realm of the immaterial, which he also refers to as spirit, life, intellect, and heart. Every human being is created from two components: the physical body, which is composed of flesh, skin, bones, veins, and sinews and belongs to the perceptible, corporeal world that can be seen by the outward eye, and the soul, which is also referred to as spirit, life, intellect, and heart, and which is a simple substance belonging to the metaphysical realm (Naraqī, 2009).

Nevertheless, he asserts that knowledge of the soul is exceedingly difficult and requires exercise and perseverance. He writes that although understanding the soul is arduous, when one engages in research and contemplation, the matter becomes manifest and evident to him, for the human being possesses the capacity for all sciences and arts, and through them he attains knowledge of the realities of things (Naraqī, 1992). To uncover the truth of the soul, he proposes several methods: purifying the depth of the heart and soul from the stains of materiality, distancing oneself from animal impulses and fleeting worldly desires, striving for inner purity, struggling against inner devils, retreating into solitude with loving devotion to the Creator, practicing sincerity of intention, and engaging in deep reflection on the signs of God. He writes that whoever cleanses the heart of the dust of worldly attachments, distances himself from animalistic desires, polishes the mirror of the heart from the rust of this world, occasionally closes his heart against corrupt distractions, devotes himself in solitude to the True Beloved, directs his presence with a sincere

heart toward the world of lights, occupies himself with prayer and supplication to God with pure intention, and sometimes reflects on the kingdom of creation and the majesty and might of the Almighty, will inevitably attain an illuminating state and intellectual joy, by which he realizes with certainty that his essence is not from this corporeal world, but belongs to another, higher realm.

Thus, according to Naraqı, the soul constitutes the true essence of human existence, which does not belong to this world, serves as the basis of human superiority over other creatures, and is of the same substance as the angels. While it remains closely connected with the body, it has been created with purpose, and its ultimate goal is to lead the human being to perfection (Naraqı, 1992, 2003). In other words, he considers the human soul to be more fundamental and prior to the body, the true essence and distinguishing feature of the human being, with a nature different from the material body, which merely functions as an instrument of the soul, while the soul itself is the foundation of moral education. Between body and soul, primacy belongs to the immaterial spirit; the essence of humanity lies in its spiritual dimension, which serves as the basis for his anthropological foundation of moral education (Naraqı, 2009). As he states, since every human being is composed of body and soul, it must be understood that the true essence of humanity and the reason for man's superiority over other animals is the soul, which is of the same substance as the holy angels, while the body is a borrowed entity, serving merely as a vehicle for the soul (Naraqı, 2008).

For the purpose of introducing and explaining the faculties of the soul to his audience, Naraqı classifies them into four categories: the appetitive, the irascible, the imaginative, and the rational. The first three represent the material dimension of the soul, while the fourth expresses its spiritual aspect. He acknowledges that human beings share the appetitive and irascible faculties with animals, but the imaginative and rational faculties are unique to human beings. He regards the rational faculty as the one that leads the human being to perfection, provided that the active faculty is in complete obedience to it. He states that the perfection of the active faculty lies in its submission and obedience to the rational faculty in the exercise of the other faculties in virtuous deeds (Naraqı, 2003).

Naraqı considers the morally educated individual to be one who possesses the capacity to overcome his lower self by listening to reason. He writes that the human being must constantly be vigilant about his actions and reflect upon every deed before performing it, so that nothing contrary to good character arises from him (Naraqı, 2003). Such an individual is capable of maintaining moderation among his faculties. From Naraqı's perspective, the essence of humanity lies in the balance of the faculties of the soul and the capacity of the soul to attain true perfection (Karimi,

2010). He regards absolute inclination toward material faculties as vice, whereas orientation toward the rational faculty, along with the maintenance of balance and avoidance of excess and deficiency, constitutes moral virtue. He writes that the cultivation of the aforementioned faculties produces virtues and commendable morals, while excess or deficiency in them results in moral vices (Naraq, 2008).

For Naraq, the key to happiness in the material and immaterial worlds lies in knowledge of the soul, which he regards as the prelude to knowledge of God. He declares that the key to happiness in worlds is self-knowledge, since knowledge of oneself leads to knowledge of one's Creator (Naraq, 1992). From his perspective, moral purification, asceticism, piety, the acquisition of virtues, the elimination of vices, and the attainment of perfection are the most significant outcomes of self-knowledge. He also maintains that self-knowledge inspires the desire for the pursuit of perfection and the refinement of character, and motivates persistent effort in the elimination of moral vices.

The acquisition of moral virtue depends upon self-knowledge, the purification of the soul from impurities, and ultimately, the knowledge of God as the apprehension of spiritual delights. The purpose of moral education is the recognition of the Divine Essence, the attainment of discernment between good and evil, which is achieved through the path of self-knowledge and, indeed, through awareness of the principles and foundations of moral education that is facilitated by association and companionship with specialists in this field. The soul, through its movement toward perfection, attains satisfaction and experiences spiritual delight, and thus knowledge of the soul constitutes the prelude to the knowledge of God, self-discipline, and the purification of the soul (Ashouri Langaroudi, 2002). The ultimate aim of moral education is the recognition of the Divine Essence, and the attainment of this ideal goal of education is realized only through a more immediate goal, namely, the knowledge of the soul (Hosseini, 1995). For the knowledge upon which eternal life and everlasting felicity depend requires the elimination of base morals and reprehensible traits and the acquisition of noble dispositions and sacred attributes, which is not possible except through the recognition of vices and virtues, the ability to distinguish between them, and the understanding of the remedial methods that the science of ethics prescribes for the refinement of the soul (Naraq, 2008).

Naraq regards the subject matter of ethics as noble, identifying it with the study of the rational soul of the human being. He maintains that whoever masters this discipline will find the path to becoming godlike, distancing himself from the commanding soul, journeying toward the tranquil soul, and reaching a station in which he turns his attention to nothing and no one except

his Creator, thereby embodying the phrase: "Man reaches a point where he sees none but God." For, as he states, the nobility of each science lies in the nobility of its subject, and the subject of ethics is the rational soul of humanity, by means of which man ascends from the baseness of animal existence to the heights of the angelic realm.

From Naraqı's perspective, the recognition of moral virtues or real ethical attributes for which the human being has been created provides the grounds for happiness, yet such recognition, though necessary, is not sufficient; sufficiency lies in the human effort to strengthen these virtues. He regards the other side of perfection as the recognition of false, transient, and vicious traits, the abandonment of which is likewise indispensable. Without the purification of the soul and the cleansing of the heart, outward acts of worship are of no effect and bodily devotions bear no fruit; for what benefit accrues to adorning the outward form while the inward remains deficient? Since the knowledge upon which eternal life and everlasting felicity depend requires the elimination of base morals and reprehensible qualities, and the acquisition of noble virtues and sacred attributes, and since this cannot be realized except through the recognition of vices and virtues, the discernment of good and evil among them, and the knowledge of the remedies that the science of ethics prescribes for the refinement of the soul, the dignity of this science surpasses that of all other sciences, and its fruit and benefit are more abundant (Naraqı, 2008). For ethics is the science through which the path to felicity and the means by which the soul is either saved or destroyed are understood (Sobhani Nejad et al., 2018).

Naraqı considers the study of ethics beneficial, introducing it as the purification of the soul from vices and referring to it as the "refinement of character." He states that the fruit of ethics is the cleansing of the soul from blameworthy traits and adorning it with noble virtue, which is described as "refinement of character," and whose result is the attainment of eternal felicity. He emphasizes that absolute happiness is not realized unless the tablet of the soul is, at all times, completely free from all vices and wholly adorned with all virtues (Naraqı, 1992). He says that "excellent morals" can only be achieved after moral purification. He defines excellent morals or, in other words, perfect morals as attainable through the purification of the intellect as the most important instrument of knowledge and the manifestation of wisdom, the purification of volitional faculties and the establishment of true justice, the regulation of anger resulting in the manifestation of courage, and the resistance to carnal desires leading to the emergence of chastity and purity. He writes that following the purification of the rational faculty, the attribute of "wisdom" is obtained; from the purification of the active faculty, the disposition of "justice" appears; from the purification of the irascible faculty, the quality of "courage" emerges; and from the purification of the appetitive

faculty, the virtue of “chastity” is realized—these four constituting the fundamental categories of excellent morals.

Naraqı divides the science of ethics into two parts, identifying it with the acquisition of virtues and the elimination of vices, and he designates it as “spiritual medicine.” He states that ethics is divided into two sections: one concerning the acquisition of virtues and the other concerning the elimination of vices; this science is called “spiritual medicine” (Naraqı, 2003). He advises his audience that the secret of human felicity and perfection lies in the refinement of the soul, in adorning it with beautiful attributes and qualities, and in distancing it from ugliness and impurity—something that becomes possible through acquaintance with the teachings of moral education. He emphasizes that the fruit of ethics is the cleansing of the soul from vices and adorning it with virtues, a process described as the refinement of character, whose result is the attainment of eternal felicity, and that absolute happiness is not achieved unless the soul is at all times entirely free from all blameworthy qualities and wholly adorned with all commendable ones.

From Naraqı’s perspective, if the human being accords greater attention to the spiritual aspect of the soul, he surpasses the angels, and it appears that God’s command for the angels to prostrate before man was on account of this very aspect of the human soul. He writes, “Indeed, the human species possesses an expanse of possibility: its beginning is lower than the world of beasts, and its end is higher than the realm of angels” (Naraqı, 2003). If a man becomes immersed in his carnal desires, he falls lower than the animals. Naraqı states, “Therefore, you must seek the truth of self to know what you are, who you are, from where you have come, and to where you shall return, and for what purpose you have been created, and why these limbs and faculties have been given to you” (Naraqı, 1992). He holds that the soul ultimately returns to the place from which it originated: “O soul, return to your Lord, just as you first came forth from Him, exalted be He.”

a) The Purity of the Soul (Fitrah):

According to Naraqı, humans are inherently theomorphic creatures because God has breathed His spirit into them; however, since they exist in the material world, they are exposed to defilement, which is precisely when they face trials and testing, making them prone to error. The human soul can become godlike when freed from carnal impurities and returned to its origin. Naraqı maintains that human nature is beneficial and evil (Ghanbari, 2016; Naraqı, 2008). He writes that man possesses a divine nature. When his soul is purified from the defilements of the natural world and freed from passions and attachments, he develops an intense longing for his kindred in the celestial realm. Naraqı’s profound and insightful perspective rests upon the principle

that the human being is created with the principle of dignity (aşl-i karāmat) and possesses a pure and immaculate essence (nafs), endowed with a God-like nature. Preserving human dignity is regarded as the fundamental basis of moral education.

b. Preservation of the Soul (şiyānat al-nafs)

Naraqı considers the human being a creature endowed with volition, and he identifies the preservation of dignity as one of the primary goals of moral education. In his philosophical foundations, he interprets will (irāda) as an intermediary concept situated between determinism and complete freedom. From his perspective, the human being is not only rational and contemplative but also volitional. He places the cultivation of rationality and reflective thinking at the highest stage of moral education. Naraqı presents the human being as situated between compulsion and freedom, obliged to preserve the soul, fulfill religious duties, and ground values in the prescriptions of the Sharī'a. It contends that, although human beings possess full discretion to act according to personal will and inclination, they are also bound by reason to act rationally and adhere to logical principles. The struggle against base desires must be undertaken through the exercise of one's own will. Naraqı stated: "Man is free and compelled; free in the performance of duties, noble deeds, and evils, yet compelled in other aspects of life. The human being occupies a position that is higher than absolute compulsion but lower than absolute freedom.

Naraqı views the purification of the soul from impurities as the foundation for perceiving truth, illuminating the heart, bestowing inner serenity, cultivating a beneficial character, and advancing proximity to God. The extent of this closeness is determined by the degree of purification, which necessitates vigilant self-discipline and constant vigilance over the rebellious soul. The fruit of such purification, according to him, is the attainment of true knowledge not superficial learning, but genuine sciences grounded in insight, vision, and certainty. He asserts:

"Through purifying the soul of ignoble attributes, the realities of all possible beings are unveiled; the soul attains clarity and illumination, the mirror of the heart is cleansed of worldly rust, and it becomes increasingly worthy of nearness to the Divine. Whoever walks the path of felicity and monitors his states will receive, according to his preparedness, divine blessings and graces. In this way, through purification and refinement of the soul, one comes to grasp the sciences of true knowledge, not the sciences of practice, but the sciences of reality" (Naraghi.2010: 40).

c. Gradual Progress and Continuity of the Soul's Constitution (takāmul-i tadrijī-yi shākila)

According to Naraqī, the acquisition of moral virtues does not occur suddenly or instantaneously; rather, it requires the passage through stages that unfold gradually over time. Just as the growth of the body is progressive, so does the refinement of the soul demand time for its adornment with lofty moral qualities? Part of this process lies in human control, while another part depends upon divine will. Naraqī stated:

“Know that for acquiring virtuous qualities and noble dispositions, there is an appropriate order that should not be transgressed. For it is certain that in every transition from one stage to another, movement proceeds from before the subsequent; and the actions that elevate a thing from deficiency to perfection are sometimes beyond our power and choice, in which case they are called ‘natural motions’”(Naraghi,2003:76).

He further maintains that God’s expectation of His servants in this process is commensurate with their individual capacities and aptitudes, noting that the science of ethics, as the knowledge of the maladies of the soul and its perfections, is an individual obligation (wājib ‘aynī) upon every person in accordance with their endurance and talent. Hence, achieving the perfection of the soul requires repetition, practice, and genuine perseverance so that virtues are transformed into what Naraqī calls “firmly established dispositions (malakah-i rāsikah). The human being, born with a pure nature, cannot attain the angelic state of the soul without sustained effort and discipline. As he explains:

“Know that every soul, at the beginning of creation and the time of infancy, is free of all qualities and dispositions, like a blank tablet devoid of form or image. The acquisition of qualities and the realization of dispositions occur through repeated acts, each act leaving an impression upon the heart, which grows stronger with repetition until it becomes firmly rooted as an established disposition” (Naraghi,1993:44).

Naraqī proposes a set of practical strategies, the implementation of which requires vigilance and constancy. These include self-monitoring, reflection upon one’s deeds, inner purification, cultivation of insight, and self-contemplation. However, he acknowledges that such practices are arduous and demanding, and that the majority of people neglect them due to self-love, worldly attachments, and the insatiable demands of the soul. He observes:

“Whenever a person watches over his states, reflects upon his actions and deeds, opens the tablet of his heart, and contemplates it with the eye of insight, he perceives the qualities and dispositions that have become entrenched therein. Yet most people, preoccupied with attachments and worldly concerns, remain heedless of the inscriptions upon their souls” (Naraghi,1993:44).

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Moral Education Thought: al-Ghazali vs. Molla Ahmad Naraqı

Imam Muhammad Ghazali asserts that the ultimate aim of moral education is attaining nearness to God	Molla Ahmad Naraqı contends that the goal of education is the cultivation of knowledge of God and divine lordship, achieved through the predominance of reason over material concerns.
<p>Foundations: Recognition of the faculties of the soul, acknowledging its composite nature.</p> <p>Principles: Education must consider all of the human attributes in their entirety.</p> <p>Methods: Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; compelling the individual to exercise vigilance over oneself against the temptations of Satan; discerning between right and wrong, or the pure and the impure; and attaining insight.</p>	<p>Foundations: Recognition of the faculties of the soul, acknowledging its composite nature.</p> <p>Principles: Education must take into account all human attributes in their entirety.</p> <p>Methods: Purification of the depths of the heart and soul from the rust of materialism; distancing oneself from the animalistic dimension, transient emotions, and worldly desires; focusing on inner purity and struggling against the inner demons; engaging in intimate seclusion with the Creator; maintaining sincerity of intention; and engaging in profound reflection on the divine signs.</p>
<p>Foundation: Preservation of the self.</p> <p>Principles: Education should not only bring about change but also reform and moderation of the self.</p> <p>Methods: Practice and disciplined education.</p>	<p>Foundation: Preservation of the self.</p> <p>Principles: Human beings should be educated in such a way that they are morally capable and able to overcome the self with the guidance of reason.</p> <p>Methods: By establishing a balance between determinism and human agency, that is, enforcing action while retaining the role of individual volition.</p>
<p>Foundation: Purity of the soul. Human beings are born neither inherently good nor inherently evil, but their souls are naturally pure.</p> <p>Principles: This innate purity must be preserved.</p> <p>Methods: Maintaining this state of a pure soul is the responsibility of parents and educators.</p>	<p>Foundation: Purity of the soul (fitrah). Naraqı views human beings as inherently divine in nature.</p> <p>Principles: Material resources should serve the soul and its elevation.</p> <p>Methods: Daily activities should become a ladder for spiritual and moral development, utilizing learners’ everyday tasks purposefully and intelligently.</p>
Gradualness and continuity of the soul	Gradualness and continuity of the soul

(progressive development of its structure): Education is effective through sustained and continuous effort. Principles: Continuity must be maintained in moral education.	(progressive development of its structure): Just as physical growth occurs gradually, human beings require time to cultivate their souls in accordance with higher moral qualities. Principles: Education must take place continuously over time
Foundation: Spiritual discipline (riyādhah). Principles: In the process of moral and spiritual development, given the adversary named Satan and the allure of worldly pleasures, it is essential to cultivate habit through consistent effort and endurance. Methods: Practicing virtuous actions repeatedly until they become habitual.	-
Foundation: Habit formation and responsibility of the soul, shaped by environmental conditions.	-
Necessity of the interaction or struggle between reason and the soul (reflecting the modifiability of moral character). Principles: The body and soul are mutually necessary for the continuity of material life and for progression toward the spiritual realm. Methods: Integrating reason-centered physical education with intellectual education that incorporates purposeful movement.	-

As can be observed, God-centeredness is regarded as the ultimate aim of education in thinkers. In their foundational principles of education, it is evident that al-Ghazali, with a more particularistic emphasis and frequent reference to declarative (*ist-dār*) and propositional (*khbarī*) statements concerning human beings, has sought to provide a more comprehensive understanding and description of the human nature. Despite numerous similarities, their principles and methods articulate the realization of a divinely-oriented education with somewhat different phrasing or expressions. Nevertheless, the spirit of divinely-oriented formation is apparent in the instructional guidance of scholars. This is because emphasize the composite nature of the faculties of the soul, the necessity of gradualness and continuity in education, and the inherent purity of the soul. This issue is elaborated further in the third question.

Question 3: Similarities in the Foundations of Moral Education According to al-Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqī

In his educational discussions, Naraqī, following al-Ghazali, places greater emphasis on the individual dimension of moral education, including the refinement and purification of the soul, the processes of *takhliyah* (emptying) and *tahliyah* (adornment) of the self, the malleability of moral character, the influence of education on ethical disposition, methods for remedying moral deficiencies, the cultivation of virtuous habits, and techniques for moral transformation. In the works of al-Ghazali and Naraqī, one can observe a shared focus on: the recognition of the faculties of the soul (acknowledgment of its composite nature); the innate purity of the soul (*zalaliyat al-nafs*); the preservation of the soul (*ṣiyānat al-nafs*); and gradualness and continuity in the development of the soul (*takāmul-i tadrijī-yi shākila*). Philosophers identify the ultimate goal of moral education as the attainment of true felicity under the satisfaction of God.

Question 4: Differences in Foundations of Moral Education According to al-Ghazali and Molla Ahmad Naraqī

al-Ghazali places substantial emphasis on asceticism, habituation, and the soul's sense of responsibility (influenced by external conditions), as well as on the necessity of the integration or conflict between reason and the soul (reflecting the malleability of character and the educability of the soul). In contrast, these elements are less prominent in Naraqī's pedagogical thought. The ethical system of Imam al-Ghazali is goal-oriented, rational, and grounded in the principle of the mean, with clear moral prescriptions of duty and prohibition. Naraqī's ethical system, while also goal-oriented and rational, integrates philosophical reasoning with religious, mystical, and literary dimensions. Through rational argumentation, while drawing on Shari'a, mysticism, and ethical counsel, he addresses issues of servitude ethics and remedies for spiritual maladies.

4. Conclusion

In al-Ghazali and Naraqī, the spirit of divine orientation (*rūḥ-i rubūbiyyat*) and proximity to God (*qurb ilā Allah*) in education is evident, reflecting the centrality of God in their pedagogical frameworks. All-Ghazali emphasizes four principal virtues—wisdom (*ḥikmat*), courage (*shajā'ah*), chastity (*'iffah*), and justice (*'adālah*)—each situated at the mean between excess and deficiency. For al-Ghazali, ethics encompasses rational, religious, and acquired knowledge, with Shari'a holding primary importance.

Based on the findings outlined in response to first question, the most important foundations of moral education according to al-Ghazali include: recognition of the faculties of the soul (its composite nature), preservation of the soul, the innate purity of the soul, gradualness and continuity in the development of the soul, asceticism, habituation, and the soul's sense of responsibility (influence of conditions), and the integration or conflict between reason and the soul (reflecting the malleability and educability of character). Naraqı views moral education as providing the necessary conditions for transforming potential virtues into actualized qualities, which is achieved through the purification and refinement of the soul. The principal foundations of moral education according to Naraqı include: recognition of the faculties of the soul (its composite nature), the innate purity of the soul, preservation of the soul, and gradual and continuous development of the soul's constitution. Naraqı's ethical system is goal-oriented, rational, and founded upon the principle of the mean and moral prescriptions, but it also incorporates philosophical, religious, mystical, and literary dimensions.

In contemporary society, which, according to Ayatollah Khamenei, faces cultural intrusion, the cultivation of the human being, and particularly the refinement of the human soul, is imperative. The most effective and resilient defense against pervasive cultural aggression is self-knowledge, followed by raising awareness of these incursions. The proper response lies primarily in self-cultivation through the training of the soul, and subsequently, in fostering the development of virtuous individuals by providing appropriate educational conditions—through awareness rather than coercion, threat, or indoctrination. Practical strategies in this regard include fostering self-knowledge, safeguarding the soul, striving to live a pure life, and maintaining purity through gradual development of the soul's constitution, guided by reason, Shari'a, and ethical and mystical norms, alongside an understanding of the limits of divine compulsion and human free will. These elements also represent the shared perspectives of al-Ghazali and Naraqı.

Despite the existence of Islamic foundations and the insights of Muslim thinkers in Iranian education, their teachings remain underutilized. Contemporary pedagogical discourse often emphasizes gradualness, yet this concept is frequently interpreted through Rousseauian or post-Rousseauian frameworks. Concepts such as innate purity or gradual formation of character are present in the works of al-Ghazali and Naraqı and offer a more comprehensive Islamic perspective. When proximity to God is the central aim of moral education, the principles and methods of pedagogy should, as far as possible, be derived from Islamic texts and thought. The integration of non-Islamic ideas may enrich the educational process, but coherence and efficacy are best achieved

when the principles and methods of education align with the objectives and foundations inherent in Islamic scholarship.

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