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Human Beings, Education, and Institutions Within the Knowledge–Will–Action–Order Framework

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Abstract

This study proposes a feedback-based model that explains the individual and social formation of the human being through the relationship among knowledge, will, action, and order. The primary aim of the study is to demonstrate that conceptions of knowledge are not confined to the intellectual or epistemological sphere; rather, they influence human choices, actions, social practices, and institutional structures, while institutions, in turn, reshape individuals' epistemic horizons through education, curricula, norms, authority, and mechanisms of legitimation. Within this framework, knowledge is understood not as a cause that necessarily determines the will, but as a field of possibilities within which volitional choices take place. The actualization of the will is defined as action; the continuity and recurrence of similar actions as a social pattern; and the structuring of such patterns through norms, roles, authority, and sanctions as institutional order. Accordingly, the feedback of individual action into knowledge through experience is distinguished from the feedback of institutional order into knowledge through education and processes of legitimation. Drawing on conceptual analysis and a comparative review of the literature, the study examines Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī's distinction between awwalī and kasbī knowledge in classical Islamic thought, Ibn Sīnā's theory of cognition, and discussions of will, choice (ikhtiyār), and acquisition (kasb) within the tradition of kalām. It also evaluates, within the framework of the proposed model, rationalism, empiricism, Kantian epistemology, and approaches that emphasize the social and historical conditions of knowledge. The descriptive model of the study is methodologically distinguished from its normative assessments grounded in an Islamic worldview. The study concludes that human self-realization depends not only on factual and technical knowledge, but also on a moral orientation that enables knowledge to be directed toward and employed for proper ends.

Keywords: Knowledge, will, action, social pattern, institutional order, education, *ta'dīb*.

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1. Introduction

The human being constitutes a fundamental field of inquiry that has continually been debated with respect to human nature, knowledge, will, and social existence. Starting from Descartes's thought, it may be said that all the sciences are directly related to the human being (Timuçin, 1976, p. 43). Beyond this, the human being is the direct or indirect addressee of almost every activity carried out on earth. Both the services provided in everyday life and scientific research are ultimately directed toward human beings and humanity. A world from which the human being is entirely excluded would, to a great extent, lose its meaning. Within this framework, the aim of the study is, after setting out the ways in which human beings acquire knowledge, to explain the process of self-realization through the relationship among knowledge, will, action, and order; to evaluate the relationship of individual change to the processes of education, socialization, and institutionalization; and to propose a holistic conception of the human being in contrast to the fragmentary conceptions advanced by modern theories. The study also seeks to emphasize the need for a moral sense of direction in the human being as shaped under the influence of epistemological transformations.

At the same time, a methodological distinction is drawn between the descriptive-analytical claims of the study and its normative evaluations. The knowledge–will–action–order model does not, by itself, establish the epistemic or normative authority of revelation. Its primary purpose is to explain how the domains of knowledge and meaning possessed by human beings interact reciprocally with choices, actions, social structures, and institutions. The study also addresses normative evaluations concerning education, morality, and the ultimate end of the human being within the conception of being and knowledge in Islamic thought, which is grounded in the God–world–human being relationship and accepts revelation as a legitimate source of knowledge and value. Accordingly, the references to revelation and prophetic guidance in the following sections should be understood not as necessary logical consequences of the preceding descriptive analysis, but within the explicitly stated normative-philosophical ground of the study.

Accordingly, the theories of knowledge and cognition developed by al-Jurjānī and Ibn Sīnā in classical Islamic thought, and rationalism, empiricism, Kantian epistemology, and certain social-constructivist or related epistemic approaches in modern thought, will be examined comparatively. The effects of these approaches on conceptions of human knowledge and education will be evaluated within the framework of the knowledge–will–action–order model developed in this study. The study does not claim to encompass all epistemological traditions; it is limited to selected approaches that have had significant effects on theories of knowledge and educational thought. It further seeks to make visible, in a holistic manner, the distinctive human capacity to construct the self, social structures, and institutions, and to evaluate human activities as an integrated whole rather than in fragmented form.

The originality of the model does not rest on a claim to have identified for the first time each of the processes of agency, institutionalization, or the social reproduction of knowledge. These processes have been addressed on different planes in different intellectual traditions and theoretical approaches. While the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī traditions emphasize human volitional choice and moral responsibility, approaches to institutionalization explain how individual actions are transformed into social patterns and institutional structures, whereas social and historical approaches to knowledge explain the effects of institutions, language, and social conditions on the production and transmission of knowledge. The distinctive contribution of this study is to relate these levels within a non-deterministic feedback model of knowledge–will–action–social pattern–institutional order–knowledge and, within the same analytical framework, to make visible both the mediating mechanisms between individual epistemic transformation and institutional knowledge production and the distinction between individual and institutional feedback.

The knowledge–will–action–order relationship proposed in this study is not a deterministic causal model according to which changes in conceptions of knowledge necessarily produce social and institutional consequences. Rather, its central claim is that the human epistemic horizon constitutes a field of meaning within which volitional choices become possible; that actions arising from these choices can, through repetition, develop into social patterns; and that social patterns can, as they acquire continuity, norms, and sanctions, become institutional order. Institutional order, in turn, reshapes the epistemic horizons of subsequent generations through education, curricula, criteria of legitimacy, conceptual classifications, and mechanisms of knowledge transmission. The model thus describes an open structure that proceeds, at the individual level, from knowledge–will–action to social patterns and from social patterns to institutional order, and from there feeds back into the domain of knowledge, with historical, cultural, and political conditions mediating at every stage.

The explanatory power of the model derives not merely from asserting a relationship among these elements, but from distinguishing the transformations that occur at different levels. The feedback of individual action into the domain of knowledge takes place through experience, self-reflection, success, or failure, whereas the feedback of

institutional order into the domain of knowledge occurs through curricula, education, authorization, classification, expertise, norms, and the mechanisms by which institutions produce legitimacy. Individual feedback and institutional feedback are therefore related, but they should not be treated as the same process.

2. The Relationship among Knowledge, Will, Action, and Order in the Individual Human Being

One of the fundamental characteristics that distinguishes the human being, who comes into the world with the capacity to know and apprehend, from other living beings is that, by virtue of this capacity, the human being is created with an educable nature (fiṭra). As a being who knows, learns, and transmits what has been learned to subsequent generations, the human being constructs both individual and social life through knowledge. The individual's capacities for acquiring knowledge are the innate faculties of knowledge acquisition described as primary (awwalī) or certain (yaqīnī), including sensory, introspective (wijdānī), and self-evident (badīhī) knowledge (Cürcânî, 2011, p. 90). The fact that these innate capacities enable the human being to attain knowledge acquired later demonstrates that the transmission of knowledge and education are not merely individual activities, but are also necessary for cultural continuity.

As stated in the Introduction, the relationship between knowledge and will is understood not as a linear causal relation in which knowledge necessarily determines the will, but as one in which knowledge shapes the field of possible choices available to the will. Discussions of the nature of the will in the classical kalām tradition likewise show that there are distinct stages between knowledge and action. Indeed, theories that explain the will in terms of knowledge, inclination, or an independent attribute show that knowledge or belief concerning whether an act is beneficial or harmful is not identical with the act itself and that mental and volitional processes such as inclination, intention, resolve, purpose, and choice intervene between knowledge and action (Türker, 2019, pp. 94–101).

One of the most developed conceptualizations in classical kalām of this volitional interval and flexible, non-linear connection between knowledge and action is found in Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī. Al-Māturīdī directly relates will to ikhtiyār (choice), grounding the act of willing in the rejection of external compulsion and unintentional action. This approach shows that, in acting, the human being is not merely a passive recipient of knowledge or an impulsive agent; rather, the human being makes choices with intention and purpose while being conscious of his or her own freedom (Pessagno, 1984, pp. 180–183). Similarly, al-Ashʿarī distinguishes involuntary motion (ḥarakat al-iḍṭirār) from voluntary or acquired motion (ḥarakat al-iktisāb), which is attributed to the human being through kasb, and argues that the agent knows the difference between these two kinds of motion through consciousness (Abrahamov, 1989, pp. 210–212). By demonstrating that there is a sphere of volitional choice and responsibility between knowledge and action, these distinctions provide a classical kalām basis for the knowledge–will–action model defended in this study at the level of the individual.

Attributing an act to the human being here does not mean that the human being is the ontological creator of the act or an agent independent of divine creation. What this study draws from the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī discussions is the possibility of relating the act to moral responsibility insofar as the human being is a subject endowed with will, choice, intention, and purpose. Accordingly, 'action' in the model does not refer to an ontologically independent act of creation by the human being, but to an act that can be attributed to the human being with respect to will, choice, and purpose and that is therefore a subject of moral responsibility.

To clarify the general relationship among knowledge, will, action, and order as specifically human phenomena, the outward manifestation of the will will be termed 'action'; the recurrence among persons of similar or mutually complementary actions that generate shared expectations and practices will be termed a 'social pattern'; and the acquisition by such patterns of continuity and the capacity to generate sanctions will be termed 'institutional order.' In this way, a meaningful relationship extending from the individual to the institution can be established, and when changes occurring at the individual level become patterns, their reflections in institutions can be considered holistically.

Although there is a direct relationship among knowledge, will, and action at the individual level, this relationship is not unidirectional but reciprocal, because the social patterns or institutional orders created through people's volitional actions can themselves once again become objects of knowledge.

This relationship, which begins at the individual level, becomes visible at the level of social structures and institutions. Institutional order may be understood as a relatively stable structure emerging from the interaction of knowledge, volitional choices, social patterns, and historical-political conditions. Education, in turn, is regarded as the systematic mechanism through which this feedback is transmitted. At this point, the discussion focuses on how human beings acquire knowledge and how changing conceptions of knowledge transform individual

actions, social patterns, and institutional structures.

Volitional choice does not occur in a wholly contentless vacuum; the alternatives available to the subject are related to the existing conceptual, experiential, and value horizon. Educational institutions are therefore among the principal structures that systematically introduce knowledge into the human conceptual field. In this respect, education emerges as a fundamental element not only of individual learning but also of social and institutional order. Education therefore requires separate consideration. Before turning to education, however, it is appropriate to clarify the structure through which human beings acquire knowledge.

Although the human being is biologically limited, the capacity to think, conceptualize, and generate meaning makes it possible to transform both self and environment. The distinctive human position within being derives less from corporeal existence than from mental and symbolic capacity. In classical philosophy, the process of self-realization of the human being, defined as a rational animal, is explained primarily through thinking and meaning-making. In the classical logical tradition, human thought is generally analyzed through the distinction between conception (taṣawwur) and assent or judgment (taṣdīq). Taṣawwur is the mind's apprehension of the form or essence of something without containing any judgment. For example, thinking of the concepts 'human being,' 'sun,' or 'tree' on their own and representing them mentally is an instance of taṣawwur. No affirmation or negation is involved here (İbn Sînâ, 2017a, pp. 11–14). Taṣdīq, by contrast, is the act of judging by connecting one concept to another affirmatively or negatively. Propositions such as 'The sun is bright' or 'The human being is finite' are instances of taṣdīq. By its nature, taṣdīq involves believing that something is so and assenting to it (İbn Sînâ, 2017a, pp. 11–14). This distinction is important for analyzing the process by which human beings acquire knowledge of being.

Discussions concerning the methods and processes by which human beings acquire knowledge have continued for centuries. The ways and methods of attaining knowledge are also among the principal topics of debate in Peripatetic philosophy and kalām within the traditions of Islamic thought. To explain the sources available to the individual in acquiring knowledge, the study takes as its basis the ways of knowing systematized by Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī in Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, a work that may be situated at the intersection of philosophy and kalām (Cürcânî, 2011, pp. 71–152). According to al-Jurjānī, knowledge is divided into two main categories: knowledge that is innate or primary (awwalī), and knowledge acquired later, that is, acquired (kasbī) knowledge. Primary forms of knowledge are explained on the basis of sense perception, inner awareness (wijdān), and self-evidence (badāha), whereas acquired knowledge is obtained through education, experience, and inquiry. Primary knowledge also provides the ground for other forms of knowledge. In Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, moreover, the scope and limits of knowledge are treated in their broadest form within the framework of the God–world–human being relationship.

The first type of primary knowledge found in the human being is knowledge acquired through the five senses and concerning, from the human perspective, entities in the external world. Sensory knowledge serves as a basis in the sciences and is among the forms of knowledge that can be presented as evidence to others (Cürcânî, 2011, p. 90). The senses, which convey information into the human conceptual field, begin to function when the individual's interaction with entities in the external world that lie beyond his or her will (that is, bodies in the physical realm) becomes manifest in the mind. Yet what the five senses convey from the physical world to the human mind is not the entity itself, but its form (ṣūra). In its lexical sense, ṣūra means 'shape' and 'form,' while in its philosophical sense it refers to a form not separate from matter or to the essence of a thing (İbn Sînâ, 2017b, pp. 75–82).

It follows that the human being perceives the physical world through the five senses; yet this process of perception does not remain merely an external act, but becomes cognition through the operation of the internal senses. The reason internal senses enter the account of human cognition is that, in classical philosophy, the human being is defined as a being possessed of a soul (nafs). According to the theory of the soul, the human body is governed by two powers of the immaterial soul, the acting faculty (ʿāmila) and the knowing faculty (ʿālima); these powers form the basis of human activities of knowing and doing. The external and internal senses are likewise explained as faculties employed by the soul in these activities (İbn Sînâ, 2026, p. 104). In this way, the perceptions of the five independent external senses are processed through the internal senses and transformed into understanding.

In Ibn Sīnā's system, mental processes take place through a hierarchical cooperation extending from common sense to the cogitative faculty (mufakkira). The process begins when data received from the five sense organs are combined in common sense and transformed into the unified form of an object. These forms are then retained in the imagination and continue to exist in the mind even when the sense organs are no longer in contact with the object. The estimative faculty (wahm) then apprehends not only the object's shape, but also meanings that cannot be directly perceived by the senses, such as its

being 'beneficial' or 'harmful'; these meanings are retained in memory. The compositive imagination (mutakhayyila), in turn, operates on the forms and meanings in imagination and memory by combining and separating them. When this faculty works together with the human rational faculties, it is called the cogitative faculty (mufakkira): in its capacity to analyze and synthesize data it enables rational thought, and in its orientation toward understanding the truth of being it makes possible the apprehension of spiritual realities (İbn Sînâ, 2026, pp. 114–118). Thus, although the human being's contact with the sensory world is physical, it is simultaneously a level of meaning formed through the activation of the soul's internal processes.

The second type of necessary knowledge is introspective (wijdānī) knowledge grounded in the human being's inner experiences. Hunger, thirst, fear, joy, and pain belong to this domain. Such knowledge does not rest on sensory representations of objects in the external world; the person experiences these states directly. In other words, unlike sensory conceptions of external objects, introspective knowledge arises as forms of awareness grounded directly in lived experience. Moreover, such knowledge does not possess the status of general and shared evidence in scientific inquiry and, for the most part, cannot be presented as proof to another person (Cürcânî, 2011, pp. 90–91).

The third type of necessary knowledge is self-evident (badīhī) knowledge. Because its truth is evident, such knowledge does not require further inference. In the literature of logic, propositions such as 'The whole is greater than its part' and 'A thing cannot both exist and not exist at the same time,' as well as a person's knowledge of his or her own existence, may be given as examples. Self-evident knowledge constitutes the fundamental basis of thought and reasoning and has the status of conclusive evidence for others. Sensory knowledge, by contrast, may constitute evidence for another person depending on the conditions and causes under which it arises (Cürcânî, 2011, pp. 90–92).

3. New Approaches to Knowledge Emerging in the Historical Process and Their Transformative Effects

Although the human capacity to acquire knowledge rests on certain relations, what is to count as legitimate knowledge and from which sources knowledge is to be derived have been defined in different ways throughout history. From the standpoint of the ontological framework, what changes is not truth itself but human interpretations of knowledge, hierarchies of sources, and criteria of legitimacy. In this respect, different conceptions of knowledge have affected the individual's will, social order, sociological structures, and educational institutions in different ways (Berger & Luckmann, 2008, pp. 96–117).

The previous section stated that human beings carry out the activity of knowing through the primary faculties possessed by creation and through acquired (kasbī) knowledge obtained by effort. Nevertheless, because knowledge within the knowledge–will–action–order relationship is open to different interpretations, the human relationship to being has been defined differently by various philosophical schools in different periods. Distinct conceptions of knowledge have accordingly emerged. New interpretations of knowledge and assumptions concerning its limits have changed the human mental world and conceptual field; through the will that chooses within this field, such change has been translated into action. As actions arising from choices are repeated, social patterns emerge; as these patterns acquire continuity and become norms, institutional order is formed. Viewed from this perspective, many debates in the history of thought can be seen to have taken shape around different interpretations of the sources, limits, and legitimacy of knowledge. It should be emphasized once again that knowledge, rather than exerting an influence that necessarily directs the will toward action, changes the human capacity to govern one's own motives. In other words, when the epistemic horizon changes, the way the individual evaluates possible actions and the capacity to manage motives also change, thereby making different choices possible.

The need to redefine knowledge may arise from various factors, including changes in religious beliefs and interpretations, individual volitional choices, transformations of social structures, and decisions of authority. At the same time, changes in the conception of knowledge can, within the framework of the knowledge–will–action–order relationship, be translated into new forms of action through the powers of inclination and choice exercised by the individual within his or her epistemic limits; as these actions become widespread, new social patterns may emerge. Changes in action at the individual level may, over time, also prepare the ground for the transformation of social order. Different examples of this relationship can be observed when changes in historical and contemporary social structures are considered. It is therefore necessary to clarify, in general terms, which approaches to knowledge emerged in the historical process and what kinds of changes they produced. The conceptions of knowledge discussed below may be regarded as transformations of knowledge, will, action, and order that influenced the cultures, intellectual movements, and even the processes of civilizational formation of the periods in which they emerged.

Prominent approaches in the history of epistemology have produced major lines of thought that differ with respect to the source, possibility, and criteria of verification of knowledge. Foremost among these is rationalism. Rationalism grounds the primary source of knowledge in reason and thought. While this approach acknowledges that the senses may be deceptive, it maintains that reason has the capacity to attain necessary and universal truths. In modern philosophy, Descartes (Descartes, 2019, pp. 49–56) and Leibniz (Çevikbaş, 2006, pp. 62–77) are among the leading representatives of this orientation, while the Platonic conception of truth in the earlier philosophical heritage may also be regarded as one of the historical antecedents of rationalist thought (Platon, 2022, pp. 186–216). Mathematics and logic are generally the principal constitutive elements of rationalist knowledge. The ways in which individuals who adopt a rationalist conception of knowledge think and act also change accordingly.

From the perspective of the model, the capacity of rationalist epistemic priorities to elevate the epistemic status of logic, mathematics, and theoretical disciplines in educational programs may be regarded as an example of the translation of epistemic preferences into the institutional level. Accordingly, educational models shaped by a rationalist conception of knowledge can be said to assign relatively greater epistemic value to reasoning, logic, mathematics, and theoretical disciplines.

Empiricism, which developed on an axis opposed to rationalism, explains the source of knowledge on the basis of the senses and experience. According to empiricist thought, the human mind is not furnished with ready-made innate knowledge; knowledge arises from observation, experience, and the relationship established with the external world. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are regarded as among the most important representatives of this approach (Zelyüt, 2012, pp. 47–108). Locke emphasized the experience-based formation of knowledge, Berkeley the relationship between perception and existence, and Hume the connection between impressions and ideas. In this respect, empiricism developed a critical alternative to the reason-centered stance of rationalism by emphasizing the decisive role of experiential contact in the formation of knowledge. The empiricist conception of knowledge brought to the fore sensory and experimental capacities that the rationalist approach did not sufficiently emphasize and transformed the forms of knowing and acting of individuals influenced by this conception. From the perspective of our model, this change can be explained, as in the discussion of rationalist knowledge, this time through an empiricist process of knowing. Educational approaches influenced by this orientation have accordingly given greater importance to experiment, observation, laboratory work, and practice.

Epistemological debates, however, have not been shaped solely around the axis of reason and experience. Theological approaches occupy a distinct place in the history of epistemology as modes of thought that seek the ultimate foundation of knowledge in revelation and divine truth. Theological knowledge, however, has been evaluated in different ways depending on whether the monotheistic character of divine revelation is preserved and on the condition that revelation has not been corrupted. Taking the unity of religion as fundamental despite the plurality of beliefs, Islamic thought developed different models of knowledge in which revelation, reason, and sense perception operate together; the traditions of kalām, philosophy, and Sufism developed their own distinctive methods within this framework.

In medieval Christian thought, thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas sought to ground the source of knowledge on a transcendent plane by discussing the nature of the relationship between revelation and reason. According to al-Attas's interpretation, the doctrine of the Trinity in Western Christianity altered the understanding of revelation's transcendence over matter and of its character as a divine command; consequently, within the Western Christian conception, the revelation–reason relationship developed less along the axis of the relation between the divine and the material than along the concrete–abstract relation within the material itself (Al-Attas, 2019, pp. 40–61). This approach produced an epistemological framework of its own. Under this interpretation, Western Christian thought has been regarded, over a long historical process, as one of the elements shaping scholastic thought, conceptions of the human being, educational institutions, and social structures.

In the modern period, various approaches foregrounding the social, historical, and discursive conditions of knowledge were developed, and new conceptions of knowledge emerged. Although the thinkers under discussion do not represent the same epistemological school, it may be said that, when measured against the most comprehensive form of knowledge, their approaches are reductionist. Some of these approaches are described as social constructivist. Within this framework, Berger and Luckmann focused on the processes through which everyday reality and social institutions are produced within human activity, objectified, and internalized by subsequent generations. Vygotsky emphasized that thinking and learning develop through language, cultural tools, and social interaction (Mercer & Howe, 2012, pp. 12–15; Vygotsky, 1998, pp. 17–26). Foucault, in turn, examined formations of knowledge through the suspension of given unities,

discontinuity, and the archaeological method (Foucault, 1999, pp. 50–60). Evaluated from the God–world–human being-centered epistemic framework adopted in this study, these approaches largely treat the epistemic field along the human-human axis and foreground particular dimensions of the total human potential.

These approaches have shown that social interaction, language, discourse, and historical conditions play determining roles at different levels in the formation of knowledge. The value commitments and institutional structures of scientific communities likewise make visible the social dimension of knowledge production (Politi, 2021, pp. 7–9, 18–20). Nevertheless, from the God–world–human being-centered epistemic framework adopted in this study, it may be argued that the relationship with the fundamental and transcendent grounds of knowledge is weakened in these approaches. Their reflections in education have appeared in the growing prominence of collaborative learning, social context, and language.

Among these different epistemological orientations, Kant's approach occupies a distinctive position. Kant developed a synthesis intended to overcome the longstanding tension between rationalism and empiricism. According to him, knowledge is derived neither from sensory data alone nor solely from the internal structure of reason; rather, it arises through the organization of sensory material by the mind's a priori forms and categories. Knowledge thus depends both on experience and on the constitutive operation of the mind (Kant, 2022, pp. 15–22). Kant's approach made the active role of the subject in the production of knowledge more explicit in modern epistemology and exerted a profound influence on subsequent philosophical debates. At the same time, Kant regarded time and space as a priori forms of sensibility and limited the capacity of theoretical reason to produce certain knowledge of metaphysical entities beyond possible experience. In educational thought, Kant's philosophy was reflected in the foregrounding of the subject's constitutive role, intellectual autonomy, and critical thinking.

Nevertheless, the limits of Kant's theoretical epistemology should be distinguished from the normative possibilities of his philosophical system as a whole. The restriction imposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* on claims by theoretical reason to knowledge beyond possible experience does not mean that Kant rejected moral normativity. On the contrary, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant systematically treats the moral law, freedom, and the autonomy of the will on the basis of practical reason (Kant, 1996a, pp. 133–272; Kant, 1996b, pp. 37–108). In this respect, Kant's philosophy shows that the problem of theoretical knowledge and the practical-normative question 'What ought I to do?' should not be evaluated on the same plane. Similarly, Kant's conception of education is not limited to intellectual autonomy and critical thinking. In *Lectures on Pedagogy*, discipline, cultivation, civilization, and moralization are treated as distinct dimensions of the educational process, and one of the ultimate dimensions of education is the human being's capacity to exercise freedom in accordance with the moral law (Kant, 2007, pp. 434–485). Studies of Kant's moral education likewise show that his pedagogy is closely related to autonomy, moral reasoning, and the formation of moral character (Giesinger, 2012, pp. 775–784; Moran, 2009, pp. 475–483; Surprenant, 2010, pp. 165–173). The criticism advanced here should therefore be understood not as the claim that Kant's moral theory is inadequate, but as the claim that epistemology, qua epistemology, does not by itself constitute a complete theory of ultimate normative good and evil.

In Kantian moral pedagogy as well, knowing moral principles intellectually at the theoretical level is not by itself sufficient to produce moral character, for moral action is a volitional victory that must be won anew each time in the struggle between consciousness of duty and natural inclinations. After the theoretical teaching of the principles of virtue, Kant regards repeated practices, which he calls 'ethical gymnastics' and which involve a volitional struggle against natural impulses, as necessary for the formation of moral character. Through these practices, the individual realizes autonomy not through external compulsion but by becoming aware of the constitutive power of his or her own reason, and begins to love morality for the sake of personal freedom and development. Although this process of ethical gymnastics does not fully explain the normative thesis defended by our study at the individual level, namely, that knowledge does not translate directly and causally into action and that moral orientation requires a process of purifying and educating the will (tazkiya), it displays a structural parallel (Surprenant, 2010, pp. 165–173).

In the modern period, the conception of knowledge increasingly shifted from the 'known object' to the 'knowing subject,' and the legitimacy of knowledge came to be discussed primarily in terms of experiment, method, and verifiability (Duralı, 2013, p. 94). In this process, secular regimes of knowledge became determinative in educational institutions, while revelation-based epistemologies moved away from the center of the public epistemic order. Modern educational institutions thus came to be shaped within an epistemic framework based largely on principles of scientific and rational verification. This transformation became one of the fundamental factors determining the knowledge, curricula, and conception of the human being embodied in modern educational institutions.

In conclusion, the approaches that have emerged in the history of epistemology have offered different answers to the questions of what knowledge is, how it is acquired, and by which criteria it is verified. By foregrounding different sources of knowledge such as reason, experience, revelation, intuition, and social context, these orientations have profoundly affected not only philosophical debates but also the ways in which human beings understand themselves, the world, and truth. The historical trajectory of epistemological approaches is therefore of central importance for understanding the fundamental orientations of human thought, conceptions of education, and institutional structures.

The effects of the theories of epistemic transformation discussed above can be made concrete, as an example of the operation of the knowledge–will–action–order model, through the transformation that took place in the Ottoman educational structure during the period of modernization. Rather than treating this transformation as a simple and linear replacement of a traditional-religious educational system by a secular one, it is more appropriate to understand it as a multilayered process in which criteria for the legitimacy of knowledge, the needs of the state, and educational institutions mutually transformed one another. As noted in the course of the discussion, authority is one of the factors that influences the transformation of knowledge. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, alongside new bureaucratic, military, and technical needs, the institutional value of modern scientific and professional knowledge increased; this change occurred together with the emergence of new school forms such as the rüşdiye, idadi, and specialized schools, as well as the restructuring of the educational bureaucracy. It should also be kept in mind that the epistemological transformation of late Ottoman education cannot be read as an uninterrupted and conflict-free process of secularization; traditional and modern conceptions of knowledge continued to compete in curricula and textbooks (Açıkgöz, 2016, pp. 557–568; Açıkgöz, 2017, pp. 1–9; Gündüz, 2009, pp. 191–203).

When this historical process is analyzed through the proposed model, the stages of the chain become clearer. At the level of epistemic transformation, the values of legitimacy and utility attributed to technical, administrative, and modern scientific knowledge increased. At the individual and social levels, preferences and demands for these forms of knowledge grew stronger, especially within bureaucratic, military, and educated circles. This does not mean that the will of broad segments of society changed homogeneously and simultaneously. Rather, the preferences of particular groups of actors, the political and administrative needs of the state, and transformations in educational institutions interacted with one another and, over time, contributed to the formation of a new social and institutional pattern. The institutions that were established did not remain merely outcomes of the existing conception of knowledge; through the students they trained, the textbooks they used, the fields of expertise they defined, and the professional career paths they created, they enabled new epistemic preferences to be reproduced in subsequent generations. The institutional outcome thus became, in turn, a cause within the domain of knowledge, completing the feedback cycle (Açıkgöz, 2017, pp. 6–20; Gündüz, 2009, pp. 197–216).

It should also be emphasized that an epistemic change does not, by itself, necessitate a single institutional outcome. Volitional choices, power relations, economic possibilities, the resistance of traditional structures, and historical conditions mediate between epistemic possibility and institutional outcome. The knowledge–will–action–order model therefore does more than advance the simple claim that 'new knowledge necessarily creates a new institution'; it also identifies the mediating processes through which epistemic change can produce social and institutional consequences.

4. Human Beings, Society, and Institutions in the Context of the Relationship between Knowledge and Education

The discussion thus far has addressed the individual position of the human being within the relationship among knowledge, will, action, and order, as well as the effects of changing conceptions of knowledge throughout the historical process. This section considers the conceptions of the human being, understandings of education, social structures, and institutional changes produced by these epistemic transformations in order to explain the nature of education, what an education compatible with human nature should be, and the effects of education on social life and institutional structures.

Defining education merely as 'desired behavioral change' (Ertürk, 1972, pp. 12–13) may explain the observable outcomes of the educational process, but it does not adequately encompass the human search for meaning, truth, value, and virtue. A broader conception of education must attend not only to human behavior but also to the epistemic horizon, moral orientations, and the relationship established with being. For human self-realization, one fundamental condition is that the God–world–human being relationship, as the most general form of knowledge, remain open to the human being without being subjected to restriction. By contrast, a significant part of modern educational approaches has defined the human being primarily along the axes of nature, society, or behavior and

has relegated the metaphysical and moral dimensions of education to the background. Education, however, does more than produce behavioral change; it also addresses the human relationship of meaning with being.

Educational institutions are institutional structures that select, organize, and transmit to new generations the accumulated knowledge of societies. In this respect, they do not merely store knowledge; they also determine which knowledge is to be regarded as valuable. Curricula, methods, discipline, and forms of assessment are among the principal instruments of this institutional influence. The effects of educational institutions on individuals and society should therefore be examined not only through the content they transmit, but also through institutional design.

4.1. The Nature and Aim of Education

Within this framework, education should be understood as a process that develops the capacities with which human beings are endowed by creation and brings them toward maturity in knowledge, character, conduct, and morality. The concepts of ta'līm, tarbiya, and ta'dīb may be used analytically to distinguish different functions of education. Ta'līm denotes the teaching of knowledge and the function of epistemic transmission; tarbiya refers to the developmental or cultivational dimension associated with the growth of human talents and aptitudes; and ta'dīb denotes the comprehensive normative order that enables recognition of the proper places of knowledge, action, value, and the hierarchy of being. The distinction among ta'līm, tarbiya, and ta'dīb employed here is the analytical classification of this study; it is not advanced as an equivalent tripartite model of education attributed to al-Attas. In al-Attas's approach, ta'dīb is a more comprehensive concept of education that also includes the appropriate meanings of ta'līm and tarbiya (Al-Attas, 1980, pp. 15–16; Al-Attas, 2018, pp. 24–30). This reading has also been treated in detail in the contemporary literature (Ahmed, 2018, pp. 788–793; Noaparast, 2012, pp. 151–152, 164–169).

Within this framework, ta'dīb is of particular importance for the knowledge–will–action–order model. While ta'līm broadens the individual's epistemic horizon, tarbiya is related to the individual's acting in accordance with volitional choices by drawing on this expanding horizon and thereby acquiring competence. The question of for what purpose and in what place knowledge should be used, however, extends beyond the direct scope of ta'līm and tarbiya. Ta'dīb seeks to bind the relationship of knowledge to will and action within a normative order, so that the knowing subject also becomes a responsible agent. Ta'dīb may thus be understood not as a moral principle externally added between knowledge and action, but as an integrative educational principle that enables knowledge to be used in the proper place and for the proper purpose.

It may be argued that the approaches to knowledge discussed in broad terms throughout the text, and the educational content generated by these approaches, are insufficient to realize these dimensions of education jointly and functionally. When considered as epistemologies, these approaches do not by themselves provide the ultimate normative grounding of good and evil. Although scientific production and technical progress may alleviate material problems, global crises such as migration, poverty, and injustice require conscientious responsibility and a sense of justice that extend beyond technical knowledge. These problems demonstrate that technical and scientific knowledge alone is insufficient to generate normative orientation and moral responsibility.

4.2 Human Nature and Education

The first condition for understanding the problem of education is to understand the human being correctly. Education takes the human being as its subject and rests on certain assumptions concerning the capacities with which human beings come into the world, the vulnerabilities to which they are open, and the ends toward which they ought to be directed. Although the human being is a living being with biological needs, the human being is also a cultural being who seeks meaning, produces values, creates language, remembers, interprets, and encompasses the lived world through symbols. The fundamental characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other living beings is not only the ability to learn, but also the capacity to transform what is learned into a worldview, an order of life, and a conception of civilization. Education is therefore the process of directing, developing, and leading human potential toward perfection, alongside cultivating the aptitude for attaining meaning that inheres in human nature (Topçu, 2017, pp. 51–64).

Human nature, however, does not consist only of positive possibilities. The human being is also limited, forgetful, fallible, and susceptible to the influence of desires and passions. Human beings may seek truth, yet they may also fall into error. They may turn toward the good, but they may also deviate toward evil. They may establish order, but they may also produce oppression. This dual-sided structure of the human being makes education necessary, because what the human being can become is as important as what the human being is.

Education is thus confronted not only with the question of 'what the human being can know,' but also with the questions of 'what the human being ought to do with what is known' and 'toward which ends the human being ought to be directed.' The first question is epistemological, whereas

the second and third are directly normative. An account of the sources of knowledge and the conditions of truth does not by itself determine which human end is ultimately good. Every conception of education therefore rests, explicitly or implicitly, on a conception of the human being and an understanding of the good life. In the Islamic worldview, the normative horizon concerning the ultimate end of the human being is not limited to human experience and reason; revelation is also accepted as one of the constitutive sources of knowledge in this domain. Accordingly, the claim that prophetic guidance is needed is not a universal conclusion necessarily derived from the descriptive model, but a philosophical conclusion defended within the ontological and normative premises adopted by the study.

At this point, the human need for prophetic and divine guidance may be considered. Human reason is immensely valuable; it offers a powerful capacity for understanding the world, establishing relations, producing solutions, and developing methods. Yet reason cannot always, by itself and with complete clarity, determine the ultimate good, the purpose of human existence, or the limits within which human beings ought to exercise the power they possess. Human beings therefore need a sense of direction as well as knowledge.

Prophetic and divine guidance responds to this need for direction. This does not mean excluding reason, but rather recognizing its limits and situating it within a broader horizon of truth. In this respect, education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge, but a process of making the human being open to truth. Only through education of this kind can human beings correctly read the meaning of things, life, and their own soul; distinguish good from evil, justice from oppression, and wisdom from utilitarianism; and orient themselves accordingly. Education appropriate to human nature should therefore not be limited to instruction, but should also include the dimensions of tarbiya, ta'dīb, and tazkiya.

In this context, tazkiya is not employed as a fourth category of education parallel to ta'līm, tarbiya, and ta'dīb. More specifically, tazkiya denotes the process through which a person morally purifies and transforms the soul (nafs), orientations, desires, and inner inclinations that give rise to behavior. From the perspective of the knowledge–will–action–order relationship, tazkiya may be said to be connected particularly with the dimension of will. Knowing what is right does not mean that a person will necessarily choose what is right. Desire, inclination, intention, character, and the orientations of the nafs mediate the transformation of knowledge into action. It is precisely in this intervening domain that tazkiya denotes the education of the volitional and moral orientations of the knowing subject (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025, pp. 2–4; Hussain, 2007, pp. 301–303).

Accordingly, in this study ta'līm may be associated with the acquisition and transmission of knowledge; tazkiya with the purification of the inner orientations that affect the will; and ta'dīb with situating knowledge, will, and action within proper ends and order. Such a distinction makes more visible the character of education as a process that not only transmits knowledge but also transforms the knowing subject into a volitional and moral agent (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025, pp. 15–16; Noaparast, 2012, pp. 168–169).

One of the fundamental problems experienced in education throughout history has been the incorrect or incomplete definition of the human being. As noted in earlier sections, the differentiation of epistemological definitions is an important reason for this. Changes in paradigms of knowledge have at times treated the human being merely as a rational individual, an economic actor, a technical producer, or an element bearing a social function, and have shaped educational systems in accordance with these assumptions. Under such approaches, education ceases to be an activity of formation centered on wisdom and virtue and becomes a mechanism centered on efficiency, adaptation, and performance.

When the relationship between human nature and education is considered in its historical course, the following conclusion emerges: in accordance with the model developed in this study, as the conception of the human being changes under appropriate conditions, the conception of education also changes. Accordingly, approaches that regard the human being as a cultural being and as a subject in need of guidance treat education more holistically, whereas approaches that regard the human being as a mechanical or functional entity, or as a being limited solely by social needs, narrow the scope of education.

4.3. Social Life and Education

One of the sources of individual human formation is the society into which the person is born by nature. Human birth, growth, learning, protection, production, and self-realization become possible within a network of relations with other human beings alongside the relationship established with being. From the perspective of the model, social life is a network of patterns through which the knowledge–will–action–order relationship is carried from the individual to the social level. At this level, feedback occurs through domains such as family relations, neighborhood life, school curricula, the functioning of the marketplace, law, tradition, and politics. Education is therefore a fundamental element that ensures social continuity as well as individual development. Human beings need education because they are social beings, and social life

can continue only through the intergenerational transmission of forms of knowledge, value, and conduct. Yet the continuation of social life is not secured merely by people being together. Determining how people are to live together is as important as their coexistence itself. It is precisely at this point that morality enters. Morality is neither an ornament of social life nor merely a sphere of individual preference; it is the body of principles necessary for the continuation of human life. In other words, morality means that the will is directed toward the normative good as well as toward epistemic truth. Law cannot endure without justice, commerce without trust, the family without compassion, politics without responsibility, or education without truthfulness. If people do not respect one another's rights, honor what is entrusted to them, recognize limits, and refrain from making self-interest their sole criterion, social order cannot be sustained for long. Morality, therefore, is not merely a list of virtues belonging to the human inner world, but a fundamental condition of social existence (İbn Miskeveyh, 2013, pp. 51–52; Topçu, 2018, pp. 189–200).

From this point, the question of the ground on which the relationship between the human being and society rests becomes important. This relationship cannot be explained solely in terms of utility, contract, or a balance of power. Interest is variable, utility is relative, and power often has the capacity to undermine justice. A deeper foundation is needed if social life is to be enduring, comprehensive, and just. It is at this point that morality emerges as a constitutive principle of social existence. Principles such as justice, truthfulness, compassion, trustworthiness, patience, equity, mutual assistance, and responsibility are not merely values belonging to the customs of a particular society; they are fundamental principles that make the relationship between the human being and society sustainable. Within the normative framework adopted by the study, the divine origin of these principles prevents morality from remaining dependent solely on the will of the majority, temporary interests, or political power and gives it a higher source of legitimacy (Kınalızâde, 2014, pp. 194–224).

The decisive role of education becomes apparent at this point. Human beings do not come into the world morally fully formed, but with a nature (fiṭra) disposed toward morality. The maturation of this disposition is possible through education. Education does not merely enable human beings to acquire knowledge; it also enables them to distinguish good from evil, learn the norms of living together, and become persons who bear social responsibility. If education is reduced solely to the functions of providing technical knowledge, preparing individuals for occupations, and producing performance, the moral memory of society is weakened. In such a situation, knowledge may increase and expertise may develop, yet social trust and justice may erode. The relationship between social life and education should therefore be understood not merely as adapting the human being to society, but as cultivating the human being within a moral social order. The continuity of social life depends on an educational order that enables moral principles to be internalized.

4.4. Institutional Life and Education

In addition to the other characteristics possessed by the human being, the human being is also an institution-building being. An institution is a structure that brings order, continuity, and legitimacy to otherwise dispersed human relations. Within the knowledge–will–action–order relationship, institutional order is one of the principal levels of feedback that affects the social legitimacy of knowledge and reconstructs an epistemic horizon for the individual. The relationship between the individual and the institution is therefore not one-way. While individuals' knowledge, values, and preferences give rise to social practices and institutions, the language, norms, roles, education, authority, and criteria of legitimacy produced by institutionalized structures reshape the individual's field of knowledge and value. Türker's (2019, pp. 140–141) analysis, which treats individual morality as both a cause and an effect of social structure, clearly demonstrates this reciprocity. Institutional feedback is therefore not the same mechanism as an individual's learning from the consequences of his or her own actions. The former occurs through education, norms, language, and institutional order; the latter through experience, self-reflection, and individual learning. The family, school, waqf, law, market, state, and religious structures are among the clearest examples. Human beings establish these institutions while simultaneously being shaped within the institutions they establish. Institutions are therefore not mechanical structures external to the human being, but civilizational forms that make human life reasonable, orderly, and sustainable (Berger & Luckmann, 2008, pp. 117–151).

Human beings need institutions because no single person can carry the entirety of knowledge, sustain justice alone, or preserve social memory. Institutions preserve the knowledge, values, experience, and habits accumulated across generations. In this sense, an institution is a structure that sustains social patterns and carries social memory. At the same time, it is a normative order that removes conduct from arbitrariness by binding it to shared principles (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, pp. 329–334). Institutional life is therefore one of the most concrete manifestations of civilization. Great ideas acquire permanence only when they

are transformed into institutions.

Education is both the constitutive and the sustaining center of institutional life. The principal activity that prepares the human being for institutions, teaches the grounds of institutional legitimacy, and transmits institutional memory to new generations is education. A person receives the first tarbiya in the family, learns method and discipline at school, and subsequently assumes various roles in professional and social institutions. The educational institution is therefore not only a place where lessons are taught, but also a concrete expression of the knowledge and values through which a society carries itself into the future.

The existence of institutions alone, however, is not sufficient; the ends they serve also matter. For institutional life to be reasonable does not mean merely that it functions in an orderly way. Reasonable institutional life is one capable of establishing a balanced order among fundamental human needs, rights, responsibilities, and ultimate ends. At this point, the framework of maqāṣid al-sharīʿa is of great importance. Together with the conception of intention as the orientation of the will toward action for the purpose of attaining God's pleasure and with an understanding of wise conduct, the maqāṣid approach, in its classical form, places at its center the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property. In broader interpretations, justice, human dignity, freedom, and social order may also be added to these purposes (Erdoğan, 1990, pp. 107–117).

The maqāṣid perspective makes it possible to evaluate institutions not only in terms of their functional structures, but also as structures that preserve and develop the fundamental values of human life. Within this framework, the family serves the preservation of progeny and personality; law secures life and rights; the economy serves the legitimate circulation of property; and education develops the intellect and equips it with wisdom. What makes institutional life reasonable, therefore, is not only that institutions function efficiently, but also the fundamental purposes according to which they protect and develop the human being. Viewed from another perspective, institutions become a source that produces new knowledge for the individual. Accordingly, if institutions transmit epistemic truths but fail to cultivate the normative good in individuals' characters and moral orientations, the human capacity for becoming good remains incomplete.

The educational institution occupies a central position at this point. Preserving the intellect does not mean merely transmitting knowledge; it also includes developing the capacity to think correctly, distinguish, reason, and use knowledge with wisdom. When education moves away from the axis of maqāṣid, it becomes a narrow structure that produces only technical skills. Such an educational system may be efficient, yet it remains insufficient for bringing the human being toward perfection.

The relationship between institutional life and education is not merely sociological; it also has a moral and civilizational character. Good education is a precondition for good institutions, and good institutions provide the necessary ground for the cultivation of good human beings. When this relationship breaks down, society either loses its institutions or, even if it keeps them standing, loses their spirit. If the school becomes merely a structure that distributes diplomas, law merely one that produces procedures, the economy merely one that increases consumption, and the family merely one that ensures biological continuity, the form of institutions may be preserved while their meaning is lost. Reasonable institutional life, by contrast, is a life capable of preserving form together with spirit, means together with ends, and structure together with value (Topçu, 2018, pp. 13–35, 89–110).

Conclusion

Human nature, social life, and institutional life are three intertwined and inseparable dimensions of the question of education. Human nature shows why education is necessary: the human being is a cultural being, possesses various potentials, and is in need of guidance. Social life shows why education must have a moral character: the human being is necessarily a social being, and social life can be sustained only through moral principles. Institutional life, in turn, shows why education is a civilization-building activity: human beings make life reasonable by constructing institutions, and the legitimacy of these institutions acquires meaning within an order that protects fundamental human purposes.

Ultimately, according to the model proposed here, the knowledge–will–action–order relationship is understood not as a one-way causality in which knowledge directly determines social outcomes, but as a mediated process of formation operating across different levels. The epistemic horizon shapes the field of possibilities that human beings can see, evaluate, and choose; the will forms an orientation within this field; the actualization of choices produces individual action; the continuity of similar actions at the social level produces patterns; and the acquisition by such patterns of norms and structure produces institutional order. Institutions then reshape the epistemic field by influencing, through education, curricula, and mechanisms of legitimacy, which forms of knowledge are transmitted to subsequent generations. The cycle proposed in this study therefore operates as knowledge–will–action–social

pattern–institutional order–knowledge. The model's claim to originality derives not merely from asserting the existence of these elements, but from explaining within a single analytical framework the mediating mechanisms between individual epistemic transformation and institutional knowledge production.

Education is therefore not merely a system that transmits knowledge, but a formative process that directs the human being toward truth, equips the human being with morality, prepares the human being for social life, and gives meaning to institutional structures. Genuine education helps human beings become successful, productive, or adaptive; at the same time, by developing the innate human capacities to know and to act volitionally, it enables them to become just, responsible, wise, and civilization-building agents at the social and institutional levels.

Without such a conception of education, human nature cannot be properly understood, social life cannot be sustained in a healthy manner, and institutional life cannot be made reasonable and just. A sound conception of education, therefore, is one that not only equips human beings with knowledge but also enables them to establish a meaningful unity among truth, morality, society, and institutions.

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