Authority, autonomy and selfhood in Islamic education - A philosophical approach

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Room GS1, Donald McIntyre Building, Faculty of Education, Cambridge

This paper investigates the philosophical tensions between secular-liberalism and Islam, and reviews Islamic conceptualisations of knowledge, personhood and education, in order to conceptualise shakhsiyah Islamiyah as an authentic and credible form of personal agency within an Islamic worldview. It begins by examining the liberal critique of Islamic education and explores notions of authority and autonomy in Islamic educational theory. It proposes that these tensions exist to varying degrees in all educational practice. Some theoretical work to develop an Islamic understanding of personal autonomy as selfhood is presented and translated into a concept of shakhsiyah Islamiyah. Finally, the possibility of understanding shakhsiyah Islamiyah as a dialogical Muslim-self is explored.

Farah Ahmed is Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. She co-convenes the ‘Cultural, religious and philosophical traditions in educational dialogue’ strand of the Cambridge Educational Dialogue Research group. Her current project is: Rethinking Islamic education for British Muslim children: a philosophical investigation of dialogue in Islamic educational theory and an empirical study trialling dialogic pedagogy in UK madrasahs (supplementary schools). Farah has published widely on philosophies, pedagogies and practices in contemporary Islamic education and is founder and Director of Education at Islamic Shakhisiyah Foundation; where she works on developing research informed curricular resources and teacher professional development. She is also Founding Fellow and Council Member of the Chartered College of Teaching.

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