

## Human Nature, Ethics, and Moral Education: A Philosophical Reading of Murtadha Muthahhari's Thought

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the paradigm of moral education in the thought of Murtadha Muthahhari by situating his ethical vision within broader debates on human nature, moral formation, and educational purpose. Responding to contemporary conditions marked by ethical fragmentation and the instrumentalization of education, the article explores how Muthahhari conceptualizes morality as an intrinsic dimension of human existence rather than a socially constructed or externally imposed norm. Through qualitative library research and conceptual analysis, the study investigates the philosophical foundations of Muthahhari's educational thought, particularly his integration of ontology, ethics, and spirituality. The analysis highlights his understanding of the human being as a morally responsible agent endowed with reason, freedom, and an innate orientation toward transcendence. By examining key themes such as fitrah, moral agency, rationality, and ethical responsibility, the article demonstrates how Muthahhari offers a coherent framework for moral education that resists both moral relativism and rigid dogmatism. The findings suggest that his perspective provides a meaningful alternative to contemporary educational paradigms that prioritize technical competence over moral formation, proposing instead an educational vision oriented toward ethical consciousness, human dignity, and social responsibility.

**KEYWORDS:** *Moral Education, Murtadha Muthahhari, Ethical Anthropology, Islamic Educational Philosophy, Human Nature*

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary societies increasingly encounter ethical uncertainty manifested in the erosion of moral consensus, the instrumentalization of human values, and the weakening of ethical authority within public and educational life. In many modern contexts, education has gradually shifted toward functional efficiency and technical competence, often at the expense of moral reflection and existential orientation. This shift has contributed to a form of ethical dislocation in which individuals are equipped with skills and information yet lack a coherent moral framework through which meaning, responsibility, and purpose can be articulated (Arifin et al., 2019: 452-455).

Within Muslim societies, this condition assumes a distinctive complexity. Educational systems operate at the intersection of inherited religious traditions and modern epistemic paradigms that frequently marginalize metaphysical and moral dimensions of knowledge. As a result, education is often caught between formal religiosity and value-neutral rationalism, producing fragmented pedagogical orientations. Moral education, in such circumstances, risks being reduced either to normative instruction devoid of critical depth or to ethical relativism detached from spiritual grounding (Irwansyah, 2014: 84).

These tensions have prompted renewed attention to thinkers who sought to articulate ethical frameworks capable of engaging modern challenges without abandoning metaphysical coherence. Among them, Murtadha Muthahhari occupies a distinctive position. His intellectual project reflects an effort to rearticulate ethical and educational thought through an integrative vision that affirms both rational inquiry and transcendental orientation. Rather than approaching modernity as a rupture, Muthahhari conceptualizes it as a field of engagement in which moral meaning must be critically rearticulated rather than abandoned (Mir & Anjum, 2019: 3).

Central to Muthahhari's thought is the conviction that morality is inseparable from the ontological structure of the human being. Ethical values are not contingent social constructs but expressions of humanity's intrinsic orientation toward perfection (*kamāl*). From this perspective, moral formation cannot be reduced to behavioral regulation or social conformity; it is instead a process of actualizing latent human potential. Ethical life, therefore, emerges from the alignment between reason, conscience, and spiritual awareness (Naibin, 2020: 105).

This ontological grounding carries significant implications for education. Education is not conceived merely as the transmission of knowledge or the cultivation of competencies, but as a formative process shaping moral consciousness. Muthahhari consistently resists educational models that privilege technical rationality while neglecting ethical depth. Such models, he argues, risk producing individuals who are intellectually proficient yet morally disoriented, capable of action but uncertain of purpose (Irwansyah, 2014: 83).

Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognizes the limitations of value-neutral pedagogy. Studies in Islamic education indicate that the erosion of ethical orientation is often linked to curricula that emphasize performance metrics while marginalizing character formation and moral reflection (Arifin et al., 2019: 453–456). Within this context, Muthahhari's perspective offers a conceptual vocabulary for rethinking education as a moral enterprise rather than a purely instrumental one.

His critique of modern ethical thought further deepens this perspective. Muthahhari challenges ethical frameworks that detach morality from metaphysical foundations, arguing that such detachment renders moral norms contingent and unstable. When ethical judgment is reduced to subjective preference or social convention, it loses its capacity to guide human action meaningfully. In contrast, a moral framework grounded in a coherent vision of human purpose provides both direction and depth (Naibin, 2020: 109).

Importantly, this does not entail a rejection of rationality. On the contrary, Muthahhari affirms reason as an essential faculty for ethical discernment, provided it operates within a horizon of meaning that acknowledges transcendence. Reason, in this sense, serves not as an autonomous arbiter of value but as a means of apprehending moral truth. Such a view allows ethical reflection to remain intellectually rigorous without collapsing into relativism or dogmatism (Mir & Anjum, 2019: 13).

This integrated understanding of reason and morality acquires particular relevance in pluralistic and rapidly changing societies. The cultivation of ethical discernment, rather than mere compliance, becomes essential for navigating moral complexity. Education thus assumes a formative role in shaping individuals capable of reflective judgment, moral responsibility, and social engagement. In this respect, the ethical vision articulated by Muthahhari resonates with contemporary calls for education that nurtures the whole person rather than isolated competencies (Nuraripah, Layyinah, & Rahman, 2020: 470).

The broader historical context further illuminates the significance of this perspective. Early twentieth-century reformist discourses within the Muslim world emphasized the necessity of reconciling faith with reason in response to colonial and intellectual challenges. These movements laid the groundwork for later thinkers who sought to articulate ethically grounded responses to modernity. Muthahhari's work can be understood as part of this continuum, offering a philosophically mature articulation of moral education rooted in both tradition and critical reflection (Alhijri et al., 2023: 1939–1943).

Despite its philosophical richness, Muthahhari's educational thought has often been approached in a fragmented manner, with emphasis placed on theological or ideological dimensions rather than its broader pedagogical implications. This has

limited its potential contribution to contemporary educational discourse, particularly in contexts grappling with moral ambiguity and cultural pluralism. A more integrative engagement with his work reveals a conception of education that seeks to cultivate moral agency, intellectual integrity, and spiritual awareness as interrelated dimensions of human development.

Viewed through this lens, moral education emerges not as an ancillary component of schooling but as a central axis around which educational purpose is organized. The ethical vision articulated by Muthahhari offers a framework in which knowledge, values, and meaning converge, enabling education to function as a transformative rather than merely instrumental practice. Such a perspective invites a reconsideration of how educational goals are defined and how moral formation is understood within contemporary societies.

In bringing these considerations together, this study situates Muthahhari's thought within broader debates on education, ethics, and human development. Rather than presenting a prescriptive model, it seeks to illuminate the philosophical contours of a moral vision that remains deeply relevant to contemporary educational concerns. Through this engagement, the discussion opens space for reimagining education as a domain where intellectual rigor, ethical depth, and human flourishing are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design based on library research to examine the paradigm of moral education in Murdadha Muthahhari's thought. Qualitative inquiry is considered appropriate because the research aims to reconstruct meanings, concepts, and normative structures embedded in philosophical and educational texts rather than to test empirical hypotheses. Primary data consist of Muthahhari's writings on ethics, anthropology, and education, while secondary data are drawn from scholarly works discussing his ideas and related themes in Islamic moral education. All texts are treated as intellectual data and analyzed systematically through close reading and thematic interpretation, following the principles of qualitative library research (Zed, 2014: 3-5).

The analytical approach of this study combines hermeneutic-conceptual analysis with a critical perspective inspired by Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. Hermeneutic analysis is used to interpret Muthahhari's texts within their historical and intellectual contexts, while conceptual analysis serves to clarify key notions such as moral education, human nature, *fitrah*, and ethical agency. Habermas's framework is employed to strengthen the critical dimension of the analysis, particularly his critique of instrumental rationality and his emphasis on moral communication as the basis of ethical understanding. In this study, Habermas's theory functions as an interpretive lens to highlight the ethical-dialogical

orientation of Muthahhari's educational thought, especially in contrast to modern educational paradigms that tend to marginalize moral reasoning (Habermas, 2007: 112-115). Through this combined approach, the study seeks to articulate a coherent and critically grounded paradigm of moral education within Islamic philosophical discourse.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Biography of Murtadha Muthahhari

Murtadha Muthahhari occupies a distinctive position within the intellectual history of contemporary Islamic thought. His life and scholarly trajectory reflect a sustained engagement with the philosophical, ethical, and educational challenges posed by modernity, particularly within Muslim societies undergoing profound social and ideological transformation. Born in 1920 in Fariman, a small town near Mashhad in northeastern Iran, Muthahhari emerged from a religious milieu that was deeply rooted in traditional Islamic learning while simultaneously exposed to the intellectual ferment of the early twentieth century. This dual exposure would later shape his ability to articulate a synthesis between classical Islamic scholarship and modern philosophical inquiry.

Muthahhari's early education began in traditional religious institutions, where he studied foundational Islamic sciences including jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalam*), logic, and philosophy. His formative intellectual development took place in the seminary of Qom, one of the most influential centers of Shi'i scholarship. There, he studied under prominent scholars, most notably Allama Tabataba'i, whose philosophical rigor and engagement with both Islamic and Western thought left a profound imprint on Muthahhari's intellectual orientation. This period was crucial in cultivating his commitment to philosophical depth, conceptual clarity, and ethical seriousness as essential components of religious scholarship (Mir & Anjum, 2019: 3-5).

Unlike many traditional scholars whose intellectual engagement remained confined to classical texts, Muthahhari demonstrated an early awareness of the intellectual challenges posed by modern ideologies such as materialism, secular humanism, and Marxism. He regarded these ideologies not merely as external threats but as intellectual systems that required careful philosophical engagement. This orientation distinguished him from more defensive approaches to religious thought and positioned him as a mediator between tradition and modernity. His engagement with Western philosophy was neither imitative nor dismissive; rather, it was characterized by critical appropriation, guided by a commitment to preserving the metaphysical and ethical foundations of Islamic thought.

Muthahhari's intellectual biography cannot be separated from his pedagogical vocation. Teaching was not merely an occupation but a central mode of intellectual practice through which he articulated and refined his ideas. He taught in religious seminaries and later at the University of Tehran, where he interacted with students from diverse ideological backgrounds. This exposure deepened his awareness of the moral and intellectual crises confronting modern youth and reinforced his conviction that education must address existential and ethical questions, not simply transmit technical knowledge. His pedagogical engagement thus became a laboratory for the development of his moral philosophy.

Central to Muthahhari's intellectual project was the conviction that Islam possesses an internally coherent philosophical anthropology capable of addressing modern concerns. He rejected both reductionist materialism and uncritical traditionalism, arguing that each failed to account for the full complexity of the human condition. Human beings, in his view, are not merely biological or social entities but moral agents endowed with intellect, will, and a capacity for transcendence. This anthropological vision served as the foundation for his reflections on ethics, education, and social responsibility (Naibin, 2020: 104–106).

Throughout his career, Muthahhari emphasized the inseparability of knowledge and morality. He consistently criticized educational models that prioritized technical efficiency or ideological conformity at the expense of ethical depth. For him, education devoid of moral orientation risked producing individuals who were intellectually capable yet ethically disoriented. Such a condition, he argued, was particularly dangerous in societies undergoing rapid modernization, where technological advancement often outpaced moral reflection (Irwansyah, 2014: 83–84).

His intellectual engagement extended beyond theoretical discourse into public life. Muthahhari was actively involved in addressing contemporary social issues, including questions of social justice, gender, and cultural identity. His writings on women's education, for example, sought to challenge both patriarchal misinterpretations of religious texts and uncritical adoption of Western feminist paradigms. He argued for an understanding of women's education grounded in ethical dignity and moral agency, rather than mere functional equality. This approach later influenced scholarly discussions on Islamic education and gender, as reflected in contemporary analyses of his thought (Alhijri et al., 2023: 1939–1943).

Muthahhari's intellectual orientation was also shaped by his engagement with revolutionary discourse in Iran. While he supported social transformation grounded in ethical and religious principles, he remained critical of ideological absolutism. He warned against the reduction of religion to a political instrument, emphasizing instead its moral and spiritual dimensions. This nuanced position distinguished him from both secular revolutionaries and religious dogmatists, positioning him as a

thinker concerned with the ethical foundations of social change rather than its ideological expressions.

The moral dimension of education occupies a central place in Muthahhari's intellectual legacy. He viewed moral education not as the imposition of external norms but as the cultivation of inner awareness and responsibility. This process required an educational environment that encouraged critical reflection, self-discipline, and moral sensitivity. For Muthahhari, genuine moral education fostered freedom rather than obedience, guiding individuals toward self-regulation grounded in ethical understanding rather than coercion.

This emphasis on internal moral development resonates strongly with contemporary concerns regarding the instrumentalization of education. In contexts where education is increasingly evaluated in terms of economic productivity or technical competence, Muthahhari's thought offers a counter-narrative that re-centers human dignity and moral purpose. His vision suggests that education should cultivate individuals capable of ethical judgment and social responsibility, rather than merely producing skilled labor for economic systems (Arifin et al., 2019: 454–456).

Muthahhari's legacy extends beyond his written works to the intellectual tradition he helped shape. His students and interlocutors carried forward his commitment to philosophical rigor and ethical reflection, contributing to ongoing debates within Islamic thought. This legacy underscores the enduring relevance of his ideas, particularly in educational contexts seeking to balance tradition and modernity without succumbing to either dogmatism or relativism.

In retrospect, Muthahhari's biography reveals not merely the life of an individual thinker but the trajectory of a broader intellectual struggle to articulate a morally grounded vision of human development in a rapidly changing world. His synthesis of reason, revelation, and ethical concern continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions on education, morality, and human flourishing. By situating his thought within its historical, philosophical, and pedagogical contexts, one can discern a coherent vision of education as a moral enterprise—one that remains deeply relevant to current debates on the purpose and direction of education in both Islamic and global contexts.

### **Ethical Anthropology and Human Nature**

At the core of Murtadha Muthahhari's moral philosophy lies a distinctive understanding of human nature that serves as the foundation for his ethical and educational thought. His ethical anthropology is grounded in the conviction that the human being is not a morally neutral entity shaped solely by social conditioning or biological impulses, but a purposeful being endowed with inherent moral capacities. This conception challenges reductionist interpretations of humanity prevalent in both positivist and materialist traditions, which tend to interpret human behavior

through mechanistic or utilitarian frameworks. For Muthahhari, such approaches fail to account for the depth of human moral experience and the intrinsic orientation toward meaning and transcendence. Ethics, in this sense, is not an external code imposed upon human life but a direct expression of the inner structure of human nature itself.

Human nature, in Muthahhari's view, is structured around a dynamic interplay between instinct, reason, and spiritual consciousness. These dimensions are not hierarchically opposed but integrative, forming a unified moral subject capable of growth and self-transcendence. Moral development is neither the negation of instinct nor the uncritical indulgence of desire, but a process through which human impulses are guided by reason and oriented toward higher ethical ends (Naibin, 2020: 104–106). He conceives the human being as a dual yet unified reality, composed of material body and immaterial soul. While the body situates humans within the natural and social world, the soul originates from a higher metaphysical order and carries an intrinsic tendency toward truth, goodness, and the Absolute. This ontological duality explains why humans experience moral tension: they are simultaneously drawn toward lower desires and higher ideals. Moral life, therefore, emerges from the struggle to actualize the higher dimensions of the self over the lower impulses (Muthahhari, 2007: 65).

Central to this anthropology is the concept of *fitrah*, understood as an innate moral disposition embedded within human nature. Muthahhari interprets *fitrah* not as a fixed set of behaviors but as an intrinsic orientation toward truth, goodness, and justice. This orientation provides the ontological basis for moral responsibility and ethical learning. Because humans possess an innate capacity to recognize moral value, education becomes a process of awakening and cultivating what is already potentially present rather than imposing external norms. Moral deviation, accordingly, results from the distortion or suppression of this disposition rather than its absence (Rusliawati & Al Walid, 2022: 2–3). Self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) occupies a pivotal position within this view, functioning as the gateway to moral consciousness and the prerequisite for genuine ethical action (Muthahhari, 2005: 83).

The presence of *fitrah* does not imply moral determinism. On the contrary, Muthahhari emphasizes human freedom as an essential condition for ethical life. Moral agency presupposes the capacity to choose, reflect, and assume responsibility for one's actions. Without freedom, concepts such as virtue, accountability, and moral growth lose their meaning. His understanding of freedom diverges from modern liberal notions that equate freedom with unrestricted choice; freedom attains its fullest meaning only when oriented toward truth and moral purpose, avoiding both authoritarian moralism and relativistic permissiveness (Mir & Anjum, 2019: 12–13). This perspective underscores that education must foster autonomy and critical reflection rather than mere obedience or compliance.

Muthahhari also rejects deterministic views that portray human beings as passive products of biological drives or social structures. While acknowledging the influence of material and social factors, he emphasizes moral agency and freedom as defining features of human nature. His theory of causality distinguishes between material causes and spiritual-moral causation, asserting that ethical choices possess real efficacy in shaping personal destiny and historical outcomes (Izzuddin et al., 2022: 25). From this standpoint, morality is inseparable from responsibility, and education must cultivate ethical agency rather than moral compliance.

Another key dimension of Muthahhari's ethical anthropology is the inseparability of individual and social existence. Human beings are inherently relational; their moral identity is shaped through interaction with others and participation in communal life. Ethical development cannot be understood in isolation from social contexts because moral virtues such as justice, compassion, and responsibility acquire concrete meaning only within social relationships. Education as a social institution plays a decisive role in cultivating these virtues by shaping interaction, communication, and shared values (Sulfan & Mahmud, 2018: 271). This relational anthropology resists collectivist models that subsume the individual under social norms as strongly as it resists individualistic models that disregard communal obligations.

The ethical anthropology articulated by Muthahhari also entails a critique of modern educational paradigms that prioritize technical proficiency over moral formation. When education is reduced to the acquisition of competencies detached from ethical purpose, it risks producing individuals who are intellectually skilled yet morally disoriented. This tendency, he argues, reflects a misunderstanding of human nature that treats knowledge as value-neutral while neglecting its moral implications (Irwansyah, 2014: 83-84). By contrast, an education grounded in ethical anthropology recognizes knowledge as a morally charged activity that shapes character and social responsibility.

Muthahhari's emphasis on moral intentionality further underscores the role of consciousness in ethical development. Actions acquire moral significance not merely through their external effects but through the intentions that animate them. Education must therefore cultivate moral intentionality by fostering self-reflection and ethical awareness. Within this framework, the educator is not merely a transmitter of information but a moral agent whose character and conduct exert formative influence. Moral education is conveyed through example no less than instruction (Muthahhari, 2005: 83), reinforcing the relational nature of moral formation.

In synthesis, Muthahhari's ethical anthropology presents a vision of the human being as a morally responsible agent endowed with innate moral orientation, guided by freedom, shaped within social life, and capable of ethical self-transcendence.

Morality is not an artificial addition to human existence but the unfolding of human essence toward its divinely intended perfection. This conception offers a robust philosophical foundation for moral education—one that resists both moral relativism and biological determinism while affirming the dignity, responsibility, and ethical vocation of the human being.

### **Implications for Islamic Educational Practice**

Murtadha Muthahhari's ethical anthropology leads to a reconceptualization of Islamic educational practice as a holistic process of human formation rather than a mere system of knowledge transmission or behavioral regulation. Education, in this perspective, must be grounded in a clear understanding of human nature as moral, spiritual, and responsible. Learners are viewed as subjects endowed with *fitrah*, moral freedom, and ethical consciousness, not as passive recipients of externally imposed norms. Consequently, Islamic education should prioritize the cultivation of moral awareness, self-knowledge, and inner responsibility over coercive disciplinary methods. Moral values are not to be instilled through fear-based compliance or mechanical habituation, but through conscious engagement that allows learners to recognize ethical principles as expressions of their own deepest nature. This orientation reshapes pedagogical goals, positioning moral formation as the core objective around which intellectual and technical learning must be organized.

Furthermore, Muthahhari's insistence on the unity of knowledge and morality has profound implications for curriculum design and instructional methodology. He rejects the modern tendency to separate intellectual excellence from ethical purpose, arguing that knowledge divorced from moral orientation can easily become a tool of injustice and domination. Islamic educational practice, therefore, must integrate ethical reflection into all fields of study, ensuring that intellectual development is continuously connected to questions of meaning, responsibility, and social impact. This integration requires pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and reflective dialogue, rather than rote memorization or unquestioning obedience. Teachers, within this framework, play a decisive role not only as transmitters of knowledge but as moral exemplars whose integrity and character significantly influence students' ethical development. The credibility of moral education thus depends as much on the educator's personal embodiment of values as on formal instruction.

Finally, Muthahhari's emphasis on moral agency and social responsibility expands Islamic education beyond individual piety toward active ethical engagement in society. Moral education is incomplete if it remains confined to personal virtue while neglecting justice, compassion, and responsibility toward others. Educational institutions are therefore tasked with preparing learners to confront social and moral challenges with ethical clarity and courage, viewing moral action as an integral part

of worship and human vocation. At the same time, Muthahhari's critique of materialism and moral relativism calls Islamic education to resist cultural paradigms that equate success with material achievement alone. Instead, educational practice should foster inner excellence, spiritual depth, and ethical integrity as enduring measures of human flourishing. In this way, Islamic education becomes a transformative force that harmonizes intellectual advancement with moral and spiritual purpose, remaining responsive to contemporary realities while firmly rooted in its ethical foundations.

### **Conceptual Framework of Moral Education in Murtadha Muthahhari's Thought**

Murtadha Muthahhari's conceptualization of moral education emerges from a comprehensive philosophical vision that integrates ontology, anthropology, ethics, and spirituality into a coherent educational framework. Rather than treating morality as an auxiliary component of education, he situates it at the core of human development, grounding it in a metaphysical understanding of the human soul and its orientation toward God (Rusliawati & Al Walid, 2022: 2). For Muthahhari, education is fundamentally a process of becoming—an ontological journey through which the human being actualizes inherent potentials toward moral and spiritual perfection. This understanding distinguishes his thought from instrumental educational models that prioritize utility, efficiency, or behavioral conformity over ethical formation.

At the anthropological level, Muthahhari conceives humans as moral agents endowed with intellect (*'aql*), will, and an innate orientation toward transcendence. This anthropological vision rejects reductionist accounts that define humans merely in biological, psychological, or socio-economic terms, emphasizing instead a multidimensional nature where rationality, spirituality, and moral consciousness form an integrated unity. Thus, moral education cannot be confined to external regulation or social conditioning; it must address the inner structure of the human person (Naibin, 2020: 104–106). The soul originates from a metaphysical realm and bears an intrinsic longing for transcendence, producing existential tension that cannot be resolved through material achievement alone (Rusliawati & Al Walid, 2022: 4). Consequently, moral education must guide the soul toward self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) as a gateway to ethical awareness and spiritual maturity.

Within this framework, morality is not an imposed construct but emerges from the cultivation of moral awareness rooted in human nature. Muthahhari consistently argues that ethical values are expressions of objective moral realities aligned with the teleological orientation of human existence. Moral education is understood as a systematic process of self-formation (*tahdhīb al-nafs*), enabling individuals to discipline desires, cultivate virtue, and align conduct with higher ethical principles (Muthahhari, 2005: 83). Since moral values possess an objective foundation

grounded in divine reality, God functions not as a theological abstraction but as the ultimate guarantor of moral meaning (Rusliawati & Al Walid, 2022: 2). As a result, education assumes the task of awakening moral consciousness rather than merely enforcing behavioral norms.

Central to Muthahhari's educational philosophy is the synthesis of reason, spirituality, and morality. He rejects the dichotomy that positions reason and faith as opposing forces, asserting instead that reason is an essential instrument for ethical discernment. Rational reflection allows individuals to understand the meaning and implications of moral values, avoiding blind conformity and dogmatic adherence, while simultaneously operating within a metaphysical horizon that gives direction and purpose. This synthesis preserves intellectual rigor without collapsing into relativism or utilitarianism (Mir & Anjum, 2019: 11-13). Muthahhari deepens this approach through the integration of *irfan*, distinguishing between *irfan nazari* (theoretical gnosis) and *irfan amali* (practical gnosis). Authentic moral development requires both dimensions, since knowledge without practice fosters arrogance while practice without understanding degenerates into hollow ritualism (Sabara, 2016: 147-148).

Muthahhari's critique of modern moral thought reinforces the necessity of metaphysical grounding. He observes that contemporary ethical systems often detach morality from its transcendent foundations, replacing them with subjective preference, social consensus, or pragmatic utility. While flexible, such orientations lack normative depth and risk ethical disorientation in educational contexts that prioritize value-neutral competence over character formation (Irwansyah, 2014: 83-84). For Muthahhari, moral education counteracts this fragmentation by aligning intellectual cultivation with ethical refinement, where knowledge acquires meaning only when oriented toward the good. This alignment is not achieved through indoctrination but through reflective engagement, critical inquiry, and ethical self-awareness.

An essential dimension of this educational paradigm is freedom and responsibility. Muthahhari maintains that moral value presupposes freedom; actions deprived of choice lack ethical significance. Thus, educational environments must cultivate autonomy and critical judgment rather than demand unreflective compliance. Yet freedom is inseparable from responsibility, since ethical agency entails accountability for actions and their social consequences. This balance differentiates his position from authoritarian models that suppress individuality and relativistic models that dissolve moral orientation.

The social dimension of moral education further anchors Muthahhari's thought. Individuals are not isolated moral subjects but beings embedded within networks of social relations. Moral development unfolds through engagement with others and participation in communal life, positioning education as a space where

personal virtue and social responsibility converge (Arifin et al., 2019: 454–456). Society itself is a dynamic moral organism shaped by the ethical quality of its members (Sulfan & Mahmud, 2018: 270–271). Consequently, moral education must prepare individuals to act ethically within society as responsible agents capable of upholding justice, compassion, and human dignity.

Muthahhari's reflections extend to historical and existential agency. Human destiny is shaped not only by material causes but also by spiritual and moral causality; moral choices shape individual and collective history (Izzuddin et al., 2022: 25). Moral education thereby empowers individuals to recognize their agency and responsibility rather than adopt fatalistic interpretations of divine decree. In this respect, moral education functions as both cultural resistance and social transformation, countering ethical disintegration produced by materialism and nihilism (Rusliawati & Al Walid, 2022: 3).

In contemporary contexts marked by moral pluralism and ideological fragmentation, Muthahhari's approach offers a principled yet dialogical pathway. By grounding moral education in universal human capacities while remaining open to cultural and religious particularities, his framework avoids both absolutism and relativistic indifference. This orientation re-centers education on the cultivation of ethical subjectivity, providing an alternative to outcome-based models that prioritize measurable performance while neglecting deeper aims of character, integrity, and moral judgment.

Taken together, these elements form a cohesive conceptual framework in which moral education is a dynamic interplay of ontology, epistemology, ethics, and spirituality. Moral development is neither accidental nor externally imposed but emerges through intentional engagement with values grounded in a coherent vision of human nature. As such, moral education becomes an integral process of humanization, enabling individuals to navigate modern life with ethical clarity and responsibility. By situating moral education at the intersection of reason, spirituality, and social responsibility, Muthahhari offers a model that remains relevant to contemporary educational discourse—critiquing dominant paradigms while presenting a constructive vision for reimagining education as a moral enterprise capable of nurturing ethically grounded and socially engaged human beings.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored Murtadha Muthahhari's conception of moral education as an integrated philosophical project rooted in a comprehensive understanding of human nature. By situating morality within the ontological structure of the human being, Muthahhari advances a vision of education that transcends functionalist and instrumental approaches. His emphasis on *fitrah*, moral

freedom, and ethical intentionality underscores the view that moral education is not an external imposition but a process of actualizing inherent human potential. Through this lens, education becomes a formative endeavor aimed at cultivating moral consciousness, self-awareness, and responsibility rather than merely transmitting knowledge or enforcing behavioral conformity.

The analysis further demonstrates that Muthahhari's ethical framework offers a critical response to contemporary educational challenges characterized by value fragmentation and moral relativism. By integrating reason, spirituality, and ethical reflection, his thought provides a conceptual alternative to paradigms that divorce knowledge from moral purpose. Moral education, in this perspective, functions as a unifying axis that connects intellectual development with ethical orientation and social responsibility. Such an approach affirms that education must address not only what individuals know or can do, but also who they become as moral agents within society.

Ultimately, Muthahhari's vision contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of education in shaping humane and ethically grounded societies. His emphasis on moral agency, freedom, and responsibility invites a reorientation of educational practice toward the cultivation of character and ethical discernment. In a global context marked by moral ambiguity and rapid social transformation, his framework offers a philosophically grounded and pedagogically relevant model for rethinking education as a moral enterprise—one that harmonizes intellectual growth with spiritual depth and social commitment.

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