

Typology of Human Values Making: Challenges and Dilemmas in Making Value-systems

Typology of Human Values Making: Challenges and Dilemmas



Abbas Ali Shameli

Al-Islam.org

Author(s):

[Abbas Ali Shameli](#) [1]

Typology of Human Values Making: Challenges and Dilemmas in Making Value-systems

This paper deals with the issues and challenges of making a conscious values system that helps to do a professional job in the field of values education. Prophetic education is a way to help people to construct a functioning and healthy values system as it aims at the establishment of social justice and self-development hand in hand. The roots, however, extend wards to individual purification and self-development.

The author analyses the position of Shahid Allamah Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr that approaches this issue from an Islamic perspective, consults some of the Quranic verses for his dialog to argue for three types of values making and their consequences and comes into conclusion that his model could be utilized in helping young students in their task of values making and should be analysed by educationalists and educators and applied in all our schools.

[Get PDF](#) [2] [Get EPUB](#) [3] [Get MOBI](#) [4]

Topic Tags:

[Education](#) [5]

Typology of Human Values Making: Challenges and Dilemmas in Making Value-systems

Abstract

“In The Name of Allah”

In this paper, I have dealt with some key questions that normally arise when someone faces the task of making a value system. Discovery of these answers empowers us to do a professional job in the field of values education. Along with having a belief system, making a values system is the second important and crucial job for a Muslim who decides to practice Islam in his/her everyday life. What do we mean by the term ‘values’? How could we help our children to come up with a sound values system? Is there any link between values system and our world view?

Shahid Allamah Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, a great Muslim thinker, approaches this issue from an Islamic perspective. He provides a triple classifying model for human values making. He consults some

of the Quranic verses for his dialog to argue for three types of values making namely: contextuality and traditionalism, pathological generalization and transcendentalism. Allamah Al-Sadr also tries to explain why making a value system could happen both in two different forms, namely a normal or a pathological way. Human beings initially run in an avenue to arrive at a destiny through an inevitable journey.

To make a conscious values system is indeed a way to make this journey conscious and willingly. Utilizing a qualitative and analytical research method, I have attempted to re-build and formulate Al-Sadr's explanation of human values-making. In my review, I have targeted an exploration of Al-Sadr's discoveries in this field with the hope to find a way through which we could enable our children to make a sound & healthy Islamic values system.

Key terms: Values-making, ideals, metacognitions, contextuality and traditionalism, pathological generalization and transcendentalism.

Introduction

Several questions and dilemmas emerge when one discusses values education. What do we mean by the term 'values'? Are values private or public? Are they built subjectively or do they exist objectively? Furthermore, do we recognize values as absolute concepts or do they change relative to various circumstances, cultures, ages, nations or other variables? The widely divergent answers to these questions reflect the fundamental philosophies, schools of thought and worldviews of the men and women who author them. Western societies, influenced mainly by individualism and positivism, often side with subjectivity and relativism, Halstead argues (Halstead 1996, 4–6). It is, nonetheless, vital to note that the Western approach is not a single coherent school of thought. Numerous approaches have emerged in the West to deal with values education. It is difficult even to find an inclusive list of these approaches.

The liberal democratic model (Halstead 1996), Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Morris 1994), character education (Lickona 1993a), the post-modern approach (Tappan & Brown 1996), and religious moral education (Moran 1989) are only a few examples of theories in values education. Superka and his colleagues in an older study have provided another list of other approaches in values education. Their typology includes inculcation, analysis, clarification and action learning as the current approaches in values education (Superka et al., 1975). Even a brief discussion of these varying approaches requires an independent study, and clearly falls beyond the scope of the present work. I only enumerate these approaches to show the difficulty of entering the domain of values education as an avenue for self-development.

Societies with idealistic or realistic, secular or religious approaches follow other perspectives. Answers then are not formulated in an either/or dichotomy. They depend on our philosophy of life and the way we view the world of human beings and their relations to the whole universe.

Despite the explicit disagreement of scholars over the definition of the term “values”, I prefer to quote Halstead. His definition, I suppose, is closer to what Ayatullah Al-Sadr has envisaged in his values discussion. Halstead states: “Values refer to principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behavior or as points of reference in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs or actions and which are closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity” (Halstead 1996, 5). Al-Sadr also refers to values¹ as directing ideals which derive from our world views and influence our life’s goals through their impact on our thinking and decision-making discourses (Al-Sadr 1979, 146). Values in this view are regarded as the criteria of our entity both in present and in future. This is, as Desaulniers states, because values are ontological in their nature. They refer to “what one will be, instead of merely what one will have” (Morris 1994, xix, quoting from Desaulniers 1982).

Regardless of differences in the domain of values, societies more or less follow a common pattern of values and standards of behavior. Values education is an avenue to empower individuals to make their own healthy and sound values systems. Values education can be described, in my understanding, as a way to help individuals explore common standards and internalize them. Secularity and religiosity play an important role in determining common values. The former prepares individuals for proper citizenship and active participation (Halstead 1996, 8–9), while the latter advocates religious standards and ideals to facilitate self-construction. The result will influence human life both in this life and in that of the hereafter (Misbah Yazdi 1997, vol. 1, 100–2). Al-Sadr takes a religious approach in his discussion of values. He attempts to discover a Qur’ānic set of common values as a necessary requirement for self-development. He consults various Qur’ānic verses to elaborate on the typology and formation process of a human value system.

Allamah Al-Sadr emphasizes that values education and individual self-development will lead to social change if they encompass the majority of the population in a given society. Their impact on only a few people is insufficient as a means of creating social change (Al-Sadr 1979, 141–42).

Values education then should play the central role in educating people overall. Education, of course, has a wider meaning than schooling. Various social elements must then participate in values education. To bring about any significant change, educators must begin by identifying appropriate values and changing those that have become pathologically fixed. Al-Sadr maintains that self-development begins with values and ideals change (Al-Sadr 1979, 145). Although values education in its both formal and informal meanings could begin when students enjoy an acceptable level of abstract thinking skills of values understanding; yet this job could be done in an earlier age if we utilize proper educating technics. The main concern of the researcher in this project is to elaborate on the influential methods of values education from an earlier age.

Values (Halstead 1996), ideals (Al-Sadr 1979), myths (Keen & Valley-Fox 1989), or gods and goddesses (Keen 1989 & Postman 1995) are just some of the themes proposed by various thinkers in an

attempt to show the inner influencing elements in human lives. Sam Keen asserts that the impact of unconscious myths in shaping our recent history is as important as the impact of conscious science. Sigmund Freud's theory of mythic struggles between Ego and Id within the individual psyche as well as racial, national, religious and political myths had tremendous impacts in creating sacred "isms" both in the East and in the West. Witnessing these values struggles as a part of the politics of modernity, humankind has become frustrated by the fear that history may end either with a bang or with a whimper (Keen 1989, x). Therefore, it is crucial that we take a step backwards into ourselves and try to include self-development in the process of social and economic development. This in my view is one of the decisive results out of value making dialog.

Values and Ideals Formation: A Forgotten but a Crucial Task

Sometimes internalized myths and gods unconsciously influence our thinking and direct our behavior. Sam Keen assigns an effective credit to living myths. He observes: "The dominant myth that informs a person or a culture is like the "information" contained in DNA or the program in the system disk of a computer. Myth is the software, the cultural DNA, the unconscious information, the meta-program that governs the way we see "reality" and the way we behave" (Keen 1989, xii). This is why Al-Sadr asserts that any self-development must begin with values and ideals formation; what Keen calls myths.² Myths and values can be creative or destructive, healthy or pathological. People need to be educated to handle them constructively. The challenge of re-matching gods and ideals with the ever-changing realities of life is another story. We invest our myths with a sacred character, giving them the same unquestioning credit that we offer to the seasons of the year. This allows them to perform the same functions as gods.

If the root of inner change is values and ideals, then we must examine the ways in which these ideals are formed and how they change. Values and ideals, as Al-Sadr points out, depend on our world views. They are, indeed, the outcome of our philosophy of life. This philosophy fashions the way that we give meaning to life, ourselves, society and the universe. The amount and the quality of psychological energy which move us towards the objectives of our lives result from our ideals and values (Al-Sadr 1979, 145-46). As well as one's world view, the pattern of "humanology" that each person follows influences the formation of values system and ideals.

By humanology, I mean a selected pattern by which each person explains his/her humanity, included potentialities and the way of actualizing them (SAMT 1995, 518). Our values system influences the goals we choose in our lives and the methods that we select to obtain them. The Qur'an calls these ideals and values "god/ilah or gods/alihah." People can choose various gods. The impact of gods and ideals in human life is so influential that they direct our behavior like God. Each of us may decide to follow God, a god or gods (Al-Sadr 1979, 147). Therefore, the most important task is consciously to examine both gods and values. We must choose our myths and values if we are going to behave autonomously.

Quoting Santayana, Keen pushes us to compose a conscious, active feedback to our myths: "Those

who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it.” Even though this statement referred originally to culture, Keen utilizes it to provoke awareness about choosing myths. Keen states: “If we do not make the effort to become conscious of our personal myths gradually, we become dominated by what psychologists have variously called repetition compulsion, autonomous complexes, engrams routines, scripts, games” (Keen 1989, xiv). To go through this process, I propose that we re-examine both our world view and the specific elements that have motivated us to choose certain values and myths. At this point people may build their relationship with God. Other myths and gods function limitedly. They urge us to engage in a continuous revision. I argue that even personal, consciously selected myths, as Keen proposes, are not good tools for building co-existence. We need commonalities and common values if we are to get rid of individualism and relativism.

However, when choosing gods, we choose them as metanarratives which convey sufficient credibility, complexity, and symbolic power to enable us to organize our lives around them, Postman maintains. We have all witnessed, heard or read narratives about communism, fascism and Nazism in modern life as gods and myths which have called their adherents to fight for the establishment of a heaven on earth. Several other gods have captured the hearts and minds of many other people (Postman 1995, 6). Interestingly, Postman introduces us as the god-making species (Postman 1995, 7). At this point we should note that the Qur’an warns us not to be too caught up in gods we produce ourselves (see Q. 37:95 & 7:71). Innately we look for gods and metanarratives that give meaning to our lives and guide us to a more prosperous future. This process must be accomplished through an explanatory method, but we build our gods all the same. God, the Creator, can be the true ideal in our lives but we normally choose to follow the created god or gods.

Although the production of gods happens inside us, it reflects the realities of concrete life which are represented to us by major thinkers. In the age of the discovery of inductive science, figures such as Descartes, Bacon, Galileo, Kepler and Newton pioneered ideas which transformed human perceptions of God from a sacred religious God to a scientist God. This narrative was then replaced by the science-god which proved more beneficial, as it gave people a measure of power and control over their lives. It was, nevertheless, revealed as inadequate to explain any knowledge other than that of the present. It does not provide satisfactory answers for the beginning and the end of our existence. Science gave birth to a supposedly paradise-making son known as technology (Postman 1995, 8–10).

The Father science and the Son technology promised human progress if we proved to be a technological species. The problem then was that science and technology, produced to serve people, proceeded to enslave them. The result of this frustration was a psychological polytheism. One god is not and cannot be enough. We then look for multiple gods. Democracy, cultural pluralism and multiculturalism are other solutions which attempt to resolve the problem of the present generation of Western intellectuals (Postman 1995, 13–17). Yet the question remains: In a non-melting-pot society which provokes the co-existence of people with various cultures, myths and gods, what will give meaning to life and motivate people towards a promising future? The cultural and values borderlines that

divide us will continue to do so unless human beings arrive at one God, the uniting absolute ideal. This is what Al-Sadr calls it al-mathal al-A'ala (the highest ideal) in comparison with other invented ideals (1979, 145–7). The following section describes his explanation about the process of human values and ideals making. He aims at providing a triple model of values making and also two lines of pathological and normal ideal and values making.

Typology of Human Values & Ideals-Making

Human beings are values and ideals³ makers. They never stop making values. They cannot live without values. Our typologist argues that we have to learn to deal with values qualitatively. He provides his own typology of human values-making in a tripartite model. For him, the provision of this typology of values-making helps people to know how they choose values and how they can recognize the vulnerable points. Al-Sadr's model functions, in my view, as a pathological instrument in the process of values and ideals formation. As an educationalist I assume that this typological explanation can be used as a yardstick to help students to build a healthy and sound values system.

I believe that values are the most meaningful and the most effective ideals of our past. Values are metacognitions which are consciously constructed by us. They give meaning to our present lives and influence our goals in future. To construct ideals and values people usually take one of the three following avenues, Al-Sadr observes. Contextualism, pathological generalization and transcendental values-making are the three major avenues that people often follow in their values-making, Al-Sadr hypothesizes. In his evaluation of the quality of human values and ideals Al-Sadr attempts to go deeply to the roots of this process. He proposes the three possible ways that people normally follow in making values and ideals. He then emphasizes the role of prophets in educating people to make a healthy and stable pack of values & ideals. This prophetic model could be utilized to enable students to come up with a better values making process. According to Shahid Al-Sadr some people choose their values from the existing context of their daily lives. The Qur'an narrates examples of this values selection. The reaction of most people in past generations to the invitations of the prophets has been: Let us follow what our ancestors have done. Why should we abandon the practices of our ancestors? (Al-Sadr 1979, 148–9). (See, e. g., Q. 2:170, 5:104, 10:78, 11:62, 14:10 and 43:22)

In our analysis of this type of ideals-making we could discover that people usually follow this model when they tend to be sense-centered and exclusively pragmatic. This values-making process happens through a hidden pragmatism. People are happy with a values system which helps them to enjoy the present situation and preserve the joy of pragmatic values system. They are reluctant to change values which support the existing social pattern and power relationships. These people are stuck with their present promising context and cannot get rid of it. Therefore, they cannot even think of another possible situation. They do not see horizons beyond the present context. These values and ideals are extracted from the existing social context and are returned to it to direct their followers to the future. Therefore, they are repeated ideals. The future here is nothing more than a repetition of present and past (Al-Sadr

1979, 148–50). This repetitious process of values making will lead them to a pathological values system and entails values disease. People who follow this avenue in their values making suffer from a diseased values system.

Roots of Contextuality in Values-Making

An important task of prophets in their prophetic values education is to educate people to exchange their gods for one God. Two main parameters, psychological and political, usually intervene in this process. When the people of a society become used to ideals and values that they have lived with for years, they internalize those values, which then become a part of their personality. Psychologically it will be too difficult, therefore, to change these established values. The difficulty intensifies if they are formed within a luxurious and pleasing environment in their daily lives (Al-Sadr 1979, 148–9). People realize that chosen gods and values are positively effective and promising. There is no reason therefore for them to change their effective gods. Yet we need to realize a psychological fact here that values which are derived from a god or gods make human life repetitious and boring. In this case certain gods wear the dress of absoluteness. Since gods have a limited capacity to attract people and give meaning to their lives, they are finite in nature. Therefore, people have to create change in them and give them newness to maintain their permanent effectiveness. People must then change the form of values and follow them repeatedly. New cycles of value changing will lead people to the same starting point. Despite the apparent newness of gods and ideals, a single essence is repeated through various supposedly new forms.

Another element in refuting prophetic values instruction relates to social forces and the impact of power holders, Al-Sadr maintains. To keep the top–down pattern of social structure, the power holders create and afford new gods and ideals. They attempt to impose decisions on people or sometimes make decisions for them, both actions which shape their value system. Sometimes power holders themselves become the god and ideal of a society. The Qur'an uses Pharaoh as an example of someone who asserts godliness (see Q. 28:30) (Al-Sadr 1979, 151–52). Al-Sadr calls this a political element which influences the social values system. Besides these two elements there are other factors. Socio–political forces are not, I believe, limited to political elements. Propaganda, mass media, written culture, social celebrations and above all the formal and informal educational system in each society are among the other factors which influence our values making process. They can be misused by power holders to foster a preferred type of values system.

Al-Sadr observes that gods and ideals can be elevated to play the role of religion in human life. They wear the dress of sacredness, as the Qur'an calls them gods (aliha) (see e.g., Q. 18:15). Because of their sacredness people are reluctant to set them aside. The sacred ideals are usually taken as gods. People then tend to worship them. To Al-Sadr, religion is nothing more than the relationship between a worshiper and the worshipped. According to the monotheistic point of view, in addition to revealed religions, some religions are man-made. These religions are elaborated from internalized gods and

ideals. Since these gods and ideals are not absolute or self-generating, they do not last forever. They are, in fact, expressions of the realities in human past and present life and cannot direct him/her towards new horizons beyond. To show the difference between these two types of religions, Al-Sadr maintains that monotheistic religions are a uniting force since they direct people towards one absolute ideal. Those religions which are elaborated from the created gods are disintegrative and fragmenting.

To Al-Sadr it is impossible for human beings to create a god which directs them to a horizon beyond the limitation of their understanding (Al-Sadr 1979, 155–59). People replace them with new gods to provide meaning to human life when they become meaningless. Despite this continuous ideal renewal, gods will lose their effectiveness at some point. The society will have to put them aside. It means that the society will lose its integrative and uniting ideal. When there is no such ideal, each individual concentrates on him or herself. Instead of concern for social benefit each person works for his/her own interests (Al-Sadr 1979, 158–61).

A society with citizens who follow this type of ideal problem is vulnerable to one of the three following crises. Al-Sadr indicates that society at this level is ideally diseased from within. He believes that society in this situation is not a real being. It is a shadow of society. Social disintegration is the first crisis that threatens a society with contextual values-making. If, for instance, the society faces an external threat, it will easily disintegrate and lose its integrity. The reason is that the society in this manner is not more than a combination of citizens each of them striving for his/her own interests. The disintegration of Islamic civilization at the middle of the seventh century of the Islamic era, when Muslims interfaced the Mongol invasion, is an experienced example. A similar disintegration happened at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Ottoman empire could not guarantee the continuity of the Islamic civilization.

The second crisis could be a complete assimilation into a non-Islamic ideal when the society has lost its own identity. A third possibility is an inner attempt from those Muslim thinkers who have still a strong feeling about the effectiveness of Islam at various ages. They try to renew those ideals which seemingly proved to be ineffective. Many Muslim thinkers and Muslim reformists attempt to discover a version of Islamic ideals which could remain effective in face of tremendous social changes. Explaining the second and the third possibilities Al-Sadr observes:

When Muslims confronted the age of colonialism they reacted through two different ways. One avenue directed Muslim nations to assimilate themselves to a foreign (Western) ideal. Some of the Muslim rulers applied this policy in their countries. Reza Khan in Iran and Kemal Ataturk in Turkey attempted to apply the ideal and values of Europeans which had won the campaigns in many aspects. When the Islamic ideals could not attract Muslims they applied an ideal which has proved to be effective. Muslim thinkers at the beginning of the colonial age and at the end of the disintegrating age (*awakhir al-fatrah*) which was prior to the age of colonialism strove to apply the third alternative. They wanted to give a new life to Islam. They attempted to provide the Islamic ideals in a new language and to renew Islamic ideals in a way that could meet the new needs of Islamic societies. A shadowy nation interfaces one of these three

alternatives Shahid Al-Sadr observes (1979, 163).

Pathological Generalization

Our thinker then switches to the second type of values and ideals selection. For some people, values-making is a process which must not only fit in with their present life but should enable them to meet their future needs. Such people are able to see beyond their existing circumstances, and choose ideals and values which can direct them to a better, and more promising future. They can foretell future needs, and are not overwhelmed by their existing life context. The problem, nonetheless, is that human cognition is limited. People cannot foresee all aspects of their future. Human beings are unable to conceive of the absolute ideal.

Usually we perceive a side or a dimension of that absolute ideal. A hidden vulnerability in human cognition is the fact that people never consider a limited fact as limited. They attribute absoluteness to what they have perceived. Generalization and absolutization⁴ are psychological mechanisms that people use to enlarge the limited gods and ideals. These mechanisms are nonetheless psychological. Realities will challenge them. The absolutized gods will inevitably become inadequate in practice. Since human beings are constantly moving towards a true type of perfection and these limited ideals cannot provide that answer, these ideals will become an obstacle. They will become the ideals of the first type when they have lost their functionality for the future (Al-Sadr 1979, 164–6).

Absolutization in Values & Ideals-Making

Two kinds of invalid generalizations usually take place when people choose the second type of values or ideals, Al-Sadr asserts. People who are concerned about their future usually form ideals which meet future needs. Since these ideals are related to the future, they are more inclusive than those ideals which are taken from existing situations. They nonetheless convey only some aspects of the values that human beings are looking for. Overwhelmed by the Church authorities' insistence on certain religious and (erroneous) scientific ideas and exhausted by an oppressive economic system which had stratified society into elite and workers, Westerners, for instance, chose to follow the ideal of freedom and democracy. This ideal selection was partly the result of the religious Reformation which took place in the Western Church in the sixteenth century. Although the Reformation began as a religious movement, it had political, social and economic overtones as well (Enc. Britannica, vol. 19, 1970, 37). People who were tired of the intolerable pressures of the owners of wealth, power and authority refused to follow the authoritative patterns of social order. Al-Sadr describes this situation as follows:

Europeans who pioneered the age of the Renaissance and Reformation wanted to be free from all traps, including those of Church and of feudalism. They wanted to be free to do what they wished. They wanted to think with their own minds and not with the minds of others. They wanted to have their own concerns. They did not want to have stereotypes that others produced for them. (1979, 167)

The Renaissance and Enlightenment were especially associated with ideals and values which included a re-crediting of human individual freedom (Schaeffer 1968, 33). People could no longer tolerate the existing socio-political and economic context of that period. Freedom was a value that promised a better future for all citizens. Yet the problem was that they took the instrument as their goal. Democracy and freedom can create an environment where people have a voice and power. This free and democratic context requires a motivating ideal. When people are free, they can decide about their ideals. But they are stuck with the value of freedom, if they stop at this point. Re-crediting individual freedom –although it is one step towards the future after having been stuck with present and past burdens– is not the ultimate ideal. The future is more extensive even than this ideal. Al-Sadr calls this generalization “horizontal generalization.” By horizontal generalization, he means that people may choose freedom or other ideals to rid themselves of oppressing and unsatisfactory existing circumstances for a better and more promising future.

Freedom however cannot be the absolute ideal. Although freedom is undoubtedly a prerequisite for human development, it is not the whole story. Freedom is without any content or ultimate ideal. To develop themselves, people need not only freedom, but a goal, an ideal and a safe path toward that ideal, that absolute ideal. If people cannot choose an everlasting ideal, they will be self-alienated. Freedom provides a good context, but people need a motivating goal and a meaningful content. This goal cannot be something limited. People innately look for everlasting absolute ideals.

Al-Sadr challenges that the problem in Western values selection is that people who favor it have forgotten the needed goal and content in their free and democratic context (Al-Sadr 1979, 166–68). Islamic societies therefore avoid allowing themselves to be swept up in this and try instead to fill a free and democratic context with the revealed content and ideal.

The above-mentioned pathological generalization has happened occasionally in all nations. Al-Sadr alludes to another type of generalization which may be traced from the beginning of human history right up to the present time. This invalid generalization that has affected people throughout history is to corrupt ideals on humanity as a whole. Al-Sadr maintains that human social life began with the nuclear family. It has been extended to tribes, clans, groups and nations. During each period, people have sided with a particular ideal related to that specific stage. Those living at a certain period, make and accept values and ideals that are taken and extracted from that period. Tribalism, racism, fascism and loudmouthed nationalism are examples of this type of values-making which have taken place in various periods of human history. These ideals were then passed on to subsequent generations (Al-Sadr 1979, 168–9). Human beings then attempted to make their values system based on these inherited ideals.

The major problem in our values-making is the fact that we are usually narrow-sighted, Al-Sadr observes. It is not therefore healthy for us to form values and ideals that are disintegrated from prophetic education. If we stand in a vast field or to a vast desert and try to see the farthest horizons, we achieve only a limited view. This, however, does not mean that the end of our sight is the end of the real world,

too. But we do imagine that our perceived horizon is the end of the world. The same problem overwhelms us when we try to choose values and ideals. Values and ideals are the horizons of human life. By choosing a limited ideal, we assume that this will be an everlasting and ever-motivating ideal. Al-Sadr claims that seemingly everlasting horizons cannot be our real values and ideals, but only finite horizons (Al-Sadr 1979, 168–70).

Considering this limitation, Misbah Yazdi provides a supporting argument here. He observes that because of the complexity and multidimensionality of human potentialities, the deep interactions between these potentialities, and above all else (since human life in this world is an introduction to his/her permanent life in the hereafter), Muslim moral educators must insist on the necessity of using the content of revelation as another tool in understanding and determining a values system (Misbah 1997, vol. 1, 105). Revelation is a complementary tool when human beings are ambiguous about the impact of their behavior in this world on their life in the hereafter. A believer is assured that the revealed religions provide him/her with a secure life-style which will lead to the development of a whole perfect person (*insan-i kamil*). This is because the content of revelation is from God, the creator of humankind.

If a reader approaches the Qur'an from this angle he/she will find out that the Qur'an warns us that all gods which we internalize and replace with God are only empty names. These created gods are nothing but figments of our imaginations. Although both God and gods are known to us through mental forms, the former represents a real being. Created gods are nothing but mental forms. They do not convey a true meaning but rather encourage humankind to chase after a mirage. When we reach it, we find it is nothing (see, Q. 53:23 & 24:39). Other verses provide other metaphors. They warn us that submission to gods and ideals other than God is like dwelling in a spider's web. This is undoubtedly a pleasing dwelling for a spider but a dangerous one for human beings (see Q. 29:41). The resemblance is due to the fact that gods and man-made values cannot give a reliable lasting meaning to human life.

The Qur'an considers ideals and values which are replaced by God as mirages, erroneous perceptions of reality, and as spiders' webs if people take refuge in them (see Q. 24:39 & 29:41). Usually these ideals develop into the first type, contextual ideals, when they are interrelated with a positive, easy-going life-style. They will become a part of real life. People get used to them and enjoy them (Al-Sadr 1979, 171). At this stage people again go back to the present and past and keep the associated ideals and values.

Transcendentalism

The third type of ideals and values-making is what Al-Sadr calls transcendental. This type is centered around a core element, Allah. Values and ideals must be unlimited and everlasting in this approach. What we create inside us is overwhelmed by the limitations which govern our existence and our cognitive narrowness. The Islamic values system is based on a world-view which relates human beings to an absolute ideal, Allah. People relate their limited being to an unlimited ideal if they choose Allah as

their final ideal. Allah is not the product of our minds. He is an absolute being outside of us but related to us. He is introduced by the monotheist religions as the source of absolute power, knowledge, justice and beauty (Al-Sadr 1979, 176).

An essential conflict will be resolved if we decide to follow this absolute ideal. Although as Muslims we always create ideals in our minds, what we worship and take as the highest ideal is Allah. Allah is an independent ideal beyond our conception. Worship and self-development is towards Allah, not towards what we create in ourselves. Personal self-conception is a tool to direct us toward a real independent God. There is a difference between a humanely invented name or mental form or an image that we create as an ideal in our mind and an ideal which exists beyond us. In Islamic ideology we are encouraged to distinguish between our mental form about God and the real independent God (Al-Sadr 1979, 176–7).

The Qur'an warns us not to choose names as values and ideals (see Q. 53:23). Submission must be directed to the real God. As among ourselves, we have a name (ism) and a named (musammā) someone who named by a name. Our mental forms ascribed to God are nothing more than some names. Names and imaginations always represent an external reality. God's names and the named (God) are characterized by two different attributes. Names are limited but the named is absolute. This absolute being is our ultimate ideal which could direct our lives (Al-Sadr 1979, 177). We are able to make a stable and a lasting values system if we attempt to arrive at this third level of transcendental values making. This job is in need of an active transfer from the two previous types of values to the third everlasting and transcendental one.

A Conscious or Unconscious Inevitable Journey

Human beings are willingly and unwillingly moving towards God. Q. 84:6 reveals: "O you humankind! Verily you are ever toiling on toward your Lord – painfully toiling, – and you shall meet Him." Al-Sadr comments that this verse informs us of an inevitable, exhausting progress towards God with no respite from humankind. This journey is both continuous and infinite. We have started this journey from Allah and we go back to Him again. People, nonetheless, could proceed along this road differently. Some are aware of the progress and lag it behind consciously. This group undertakes their journey faithfully and responsibly. Believers and worshipers of God are among this group.[5](#)

They are moving towards the status of nearness to become a perfect and actualized being. Believers behave in their lives as God's responsible vicegerents on earth. Muslim moral educators believe that nearness is the ultimate goal of prophetic values education. The universe, including human beings, is ontologically related to God. Human beings exist because God has given them the light of existence. Nearness is the result of a conscious intuition and awareness of this link. According to the Islamic teachings, people can obtain this divine consciousness through faith and corresponding religious actions (SAMT 1995, 519).

Unbelievers are negligent or pretend to be negligent about this journey. They feel no responsibility towards God, even though they are also proceeding towards Him. Shahid Al-Sadr observes that this process is not a geographical or a physical journey towards God. It is an ontological and an existential journey. Nor is Allah, like a geographical goal, a final point at the end of that voyage. When we travel, we normally aim to reach a specific point. This is because we are performing a geographical journey. Allah is however with us at all points in our spiritual journey. This is because He is absolute and our journey is existential. In this journey we are extending our beings. We aim to actualize our potentialities in this voyage. This existential actualization is indeed a type of ontological extension. Although Allah is the aim and the final ideal, He is with us at every stage of our lives (Al-Sadr 1979, 181–83).

Our presenter also maintains that an important difference between a person who chooses God as an ideal and the one who submits to other values and ideals is that the former choice changes our movements and behaviors both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative consequence makes our journey infinite. While our ultimate ideal is Allah, we never reach a point where to a stopping point. Al-Sadr upholds that the continuous challenge between monotheistic religions and other gods and ideals is an expression of humankind's attempts at relating to an absolute ideal.

Qualitative change is identical with a feeling of responsibility if the absolute ideal is chosen consciously. Due to a bipolar construction, namely the soul and the body, human beings are all involved in an inner conflict. Our bodies direct us toward earthly desires but our souls invite us to reach for heavenly attributes, for Godly attributes such as absolute knowledge, power, justice, compassion, generosity and revenge. This conflict will be only resolved when human beings feel responsible before God (Al-Sadr 1979, 184–9).

Responsibility is real only when we have to bear it before someone who has the right to ask us about our behavior. God is an ideal beyond us who has created us and has sent prophets to teach us the true way of life. We therefore feel responsible towards an independent ideal who can ask us about His gifts. The ideals and values which we create inside us do not have the same impact. Consciously or unconsciously we know that they are our products. People avoid self-invented values if they can find ways to escape them. Evidence for this distinction is to be found in the sacrifices recorded in the history of prophecy. In this history we never find a single example of a prophet who was tired of his mission or felt doubtful. Prophets never wavered in their mission. This is because the impact of an absolute external ideal directed them in their purpose (Al-Sadr 1979, 186–88).

The Link Between Values Systems and Islamic World-Views

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section of article, a values system, according to our model developer, is always influenced by one's world-view. In the above section, Al-Sadr distinguished between two types of proceeding in an inevitable journey. For him a conscious and responsible journey is possible when we are equipped with a clear and energetic world-view. To me a world-view is a

general cognitive pattern that people use to give a specific meaning to what they perceive.

Al-Sadr makes a distinction between God and other ideals based on the feeling of responsibility. Here he verifies the link between the values system and world view. He points out that choosing Allah as an ideal implies belief in a monotheistic ideology. This ideology is comprised of three main elements. Muslims have chosen Allah as the highest ideal if they rise from a cognitive stage to a belief in one God. The latter is the result of cooperation between mind and heart (Misbah 1997, vol. 1, 171–2).

There is a difference between knowing God and having faith in Him. The latter is a choice that happens both in mind and heart. Faith in God implies faith in His attributes. Since God is chosen as the highest ideal, believers attempt to proceed towards Him. This means that they attempt to become conscious of their inevitable ontological journey towards Him. Nearness (Qurb) to God requires a process of self-development from us which makes us resemble Him in terms of our own characteristics. Belief in God and His attributes within Islamic ideology is completely different from the world-view found in Greek philosophy. Greek philosophers view God's attributes and more precisely the world of ideas⁶ as independent facts lying beyond us in the metaphysical world.⁷ Islamic ideology has an educational message when it invites us to resemble God (Al-Sadr 1979, 192–3). Belief in God and our conscious efforts helps us to overcome the inner conflict inside us. The resolution of the inner conflict means we could enter and stay on the line of piety. Piety could be translated as a skill of God-centered self-control which make us a God-like traveler.

Yet we need a certain psychological energy and a sense of responsibility. Belief in the hereafter is the second element of the Islamic world-view which produces this energy. If we believe in the day of resurrection, we have realized that our life-span is not limited to this world. We are creating a new life in the hereafter by behaving either correctly or badly in this world. This realization links our life in this world to the permanent life in the hereafter. Belief in the hereafter functions as a supporting and guaranteeing element. People therefore behave, as they are responsible for their behavior. This is because they have realized that they are not entitled to behave as they wish.

Prophet-hood is the third functioning element which facilitates our divine education. Prophets teach us to know God (the absolute ideal), our inevitable journey and our destiny. They watch out for us and direct us so that we do not lose our way. They are teachers of humankind, but they teach us to choose correct and ever-lasting ideals and values. Prophets function as mediators between belief in God and belief in the hereafter as the final destiny (Al-Sadr 1979, 194–5). As human history reveals, prophets were never entirely successful in directing their followers to the absolute ideal. There were challenges and conflicts between prophets and those who supported other misleading ideals. Prophets were often forced to act as imams as well and to lead campaigns against oppressors. For Al-Sadr, from the time of the Prophet Noah onwards prophets were always both prophets and imams. Imamate, in Al-Sadr's view, stands for leading a prophetic campaign for the establishment of social justice.

Periodizing human history from a Qur'anic point of view, Al-Sadr divides it into three major periods: the

Custodial period (dawr al-hidanah), when Adam and Eve were in heaven under the special care of angels; the period of unity and integration (dawr al-wahdah), when the early generations of human beings were living cooperatively; and the period of disintegration and conflict (dawr al-tashatut wa al-ikhtilaf), when they contested on earth for obtaining more benefits. From this period which, according to Al-Sadr, must have begun from the time of the Prophet Noah when human co-existence was jeopardized. The conflict was so harsh that humanity needed a social leader who could resolve conflicts even by leading huge campaigns. Al-Sadr proposes an Islamic theory which explains the formation and the characteristics of each of these periods. Imamate is accordingly a position that belongs to the third period of human history when there have been unsolved conflicts (Al-Sadr 1979, 241 & 1982a, 151-80).

After the Prophet Muhammad, according to Shi'i Imāmi belief, this institution was looked after by the twelve Imams.

Then there is the attribute of justice, an attribute emphasized in Shi'i and Islamic ideology. Although justice is included in God's attributes, it is of particular importance in Shi'i Imami thought since it carries a tremendous social impact. Social development according to our thinker is in need of social justice. Belief in justice, Al-Sadr argues, implies an important educational message. If the society is proceeding towards a just ideal, this ontological nearness necessitates the application of social justice in a Muslim society. God's attributes, including justice, must not be viewed only as a handful of metaphysical facts which are disconnected from human life (Al-Sadr 1979, 195-7).

This explanation could be what Al-Sadr means when he speaks about the assumed relationship between values systems and world-views. In this way Al-Sadr attempts to correlate the five principles of the Islamic (Shi'i) world-view with the selection of an absolute ideal. Misbah Yazdi another Muslim thinker maintains that the big difference between an Islamic moral values system and a non-Islamic moral system is that the former depends on its world-view in determining moral values. The belief in one God as the only creator, owner and educator, and belief in the hereafter and its impact on our present life direct us to have a distinctive religious values system (Misbah 1997, vol. 1, 100-2). It may also be the reason why all Muslims believe in an ideology which consists of three pillars⁸: belief in the Oneness of God, belief in the day of resurrection and belief in prophet-hood. In a Muslim society, Allah is elevated to the center of all ideals. He is the creator, the owner, the goal and the educator of human beings.

The selection of secular and none divine ideals and values has led to striking calamities in human history, Al-Sadr asserts. Values-making, though it is a personal choice, always affects human collective and social life. The emergence of Hitler and the Nazi movement and the consequent problems of modern times reflects the results of a values system derived from a god or gods. These ideals disconnected human beings from the one absolute God. A more recent example, I believe, is reflected in the experiences recorded in the former Soviet Union. Marxism and communism ruled the country for decades. The disintegration of the USSR indicates the end point of one ideology and one god.

Other countries that have experienced this god are also looking for an alternative. This is the reason why

prophets throughout human history have attempted to replace gods with God. I assume that Al-Sadr believes that the center point and nucleus in the Islamic values system is Allah. Values beneath or around that core are formed through prophetic values education. Prophets educate people to learn to relate to God, to themselves, to nature and to society. These relationships are influenced by internalized values. These values are all God-centered. Al-Sadr maintains that God is absolute and that values related to Him create new horizons for human life. These values direct human behavior to resemble as much as possible God's attributes (Al-Sadr 1979, 148-9).

Concluding Remarks

Inspired by certain Qur'anic verses (e.g., 8:53 & 12:11) which discuss the roots of social change, I have discovered a possible link between social- and self-development. As in the natural and physical domain, the socio-historical aspects of human life are normative, I assume. The more we know the norms, the easier and the more active will be our treatment of a particular domain. The Qur'an teaches us the norms which govern our social and individual lives in order to facilitate a conscious and active way of living.

Shahid Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr points out that social reconstruction in each society begins with the values development of individuals. Values and ideals are inner elements which influence our consciously selected goals. Our values system will have an impact on the goals we aim at and on the amount of psychological energy which motivates us to attain those goals. According to a Qur'anic perspective, values will be more effective and more sufficient only when they derive from a world-view which links us, in heart, to our Creator. Self-alienation, pathological and repetitious ideal-making, compulsory absolutization and social disintegration are a few examples of how people fail to construct a divine world view and a reliable values system.

Educational Implications

In this paper, I have examined the false process of values-making which has engaged human minds and hearts throughout history. As the Qur'an reveals, human beings initially run in an avenue to arrive at a destiny through an inevitable journey. To make a conscious values system is indeed of a way to make this journey conscious and willingly. I have accordingly come to know that prophetic education is a way to help people to construct a functioning and healthy values system. As I have articulated, Shahid Al-Sadr proposes an explanation for an inner conflict as the foundation of human values-making.

This explanation suggests that unless we could overcome our inner conflict, we will project it at the social level in forms of unjust oppressive social patterns. Prophetic teachings play a complementary role in helping people to solve their inner conflicts. Class tensions, national and international clashes, gender conflicts and other types of social challenges are expressions of an unresolved inner conflict. Prophetic education aims at the establishment of social justice and self-development hand in hand. The roots,

however, extend wards to individual purification and self-development. Reviewing Al-Sadr's explanation on typology of human values making as a student of values education, I have realized that his model could be utilized in helping young students in their task of values making. My proposal for educationalists and educators in this paper is that we need to re-understand the process of values education in our schools.

As I have discovered, values education should be coin-sided with the task of values making in young students when they have arrived the age of abstract thinking. Before this age any attempt for values education must be focused on indirect training and concrete teachings of students about good and bad which is compatible with the stage of their cognitive and emotional development.

Therefore, values educators need to be careful enough to empower students firstly with a healthy and sound process of values making. This empowerment necessitates teachers and educators to inform students about the significant role of values in their daily life. Values give meaning to our lives and provide us motivating or attracting goals. Yet their role is hidden since they are our metacognition rather to be cognitions.

The next step is to show students the way they could come up with a world view and a sound belief system. In our third step, we need to afford criteria for the formation of healthy and sound values system. Warning students about the damaging impact of contextuality, wrong absolutization or false generalization and ultimately enabling them about transcendental values making are needed educational steps in the process of values making. Educators are in need of empowering students to be able to detach themselves from two types of pathological values making and enter the road of transcendental values making.

Values making and ideal selection is a challenging job that is in need of a sound world view, a strong philosophy of life and an awareness about human ontological journey from God to God. Making a healthy values system is almost impossible if someone fails to overcome his/her inner conflict. The victory in this campaign requires a powerful self-knowledge and a reliable world-view.

Bibliography

(SAMT) Sazman-i Mutala'ah va Tadvin-i Kutub-i 'Ulum-i Insaniy-i Danishgah-hi (Organization for Research and composition of University textbooks in the Humanities). (1995). An Introduction to Islamic Education: Philosophy of Education. Qum: Hawzeh-University Co-operation Center.

Al-Al-Sadr, M.B. (1979). Al-Madrasah al-Qur'aⁿiyah (The Qur'anic School of Thought). Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf li al-Matbu'at.

Halstead, J.M. (1996). "Values and Values Education in Schools." In: J.M. Halstead, & M.J. Taylor, eds. Values in Education and Education in Values. London: The Falmer Press. 3-14.

Keen, S. (1989). "Preface." In: S. Keen, & A. Valley-Fox, eds. *Your Mythic Journey*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher. ix-xix.

Lickona, T. (1993a) "The Return of Character Education." *Educational Leadership*. 51(3), 6-11.

Misbah Yazdi (Misbah), M.T., (1997). *Akhlaq dar Qur'an (Ethics in the Qur'an)*. M. H. Eskandari, ed. 2 vols. Qum: Mu'assasah-i Amuzishi va Pazuhishi Imam Khomeini (Imam Khomeini Institution of Teaching and Research).

Moran, G. (1989). *Religious Education as Second Language*. Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press.

Morris, R.W. (1994). *Values in Sexuality Education: A Philosophical Study*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

Ozmon, H.A. & S.M. Craver. (1995). *Philosophical Foundations of Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Merrill.

Postman, N. (1995). *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Schaeffer, A. F. (1968). *Escape from Reason*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, Downer Grove.

Superka, P. D. & L. P. Johnson. & C. Ahrens. (1975). *Values Education: Approaches and Materials*. Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Education Consortium Inc.

Tappan, M. & L. Brown. (1996). "Envisioning a Postmodern Pedagogy." *Journal of Moral Education*. Vol. 20. 101-10.

[1.](#) Although Al-Sadr prefers to use the term ideals (al-muthul) instead of values (al-qbyam), his explanation and the characteristics he attributes to ideals approach Halstead's definition of values. Therefore, in my opinion, the discussion of ideals in Al-Sadr's approach is identical with or similar to the discussion of values. This understanding is supported by Al-Sadr's intermingling of ideals to values in his discussion of typology of ideals. (See Al-Sadr 1979, 166).

[2.](#) It seems that Keen attributes an unconscious role to myths. This role distances myths from ideals and values which are usually conscious. The significant impact of myths, nonetheless, motivated me to place them in the same basket where values and ideals are found. My major concern in this discussion is to review those influencing inner elements at a conscious level.

[3.](#) I have already mentioned that according to Al-Sadr ideals are almost identical with values. In this paper these two terms have been used interchangeably.

[4.](#) Absolutization is my proposed translation for Al-Sadr's explanation of a process of false generalization. As I have discussed in this section, people sometimes consider a limited ideal as absolute. A limited value or ideal may be deemed as something absolute and self-generating. Al-Sadr argues that this psychological willingness to derive absolute ideals from a limited fact could be a type of false generalization. Absolutization and generalization, in my view, are interchangeable in this context. They represent a process in which we consider a limited fact as an absolute or general. In this situation we consider a perishing and limited fact as continuing and lasting.

[5.](#) Worshipping ('ibadat) God in Islamic jurisprudence is indeed a responsible and conscious process of this path when the believers are consciously related to the absolute ideal (Al-Sadr 1979, 181).

6. Augustine, one of the fathers of Roman Catholic Church called Plato's notion about the world of ideas as the World of God. (See Ozmon & Craver 1995, 5)
7. See Ozmon & Craver 1995, chapter 1 "Idealism and Education".
8. The two other pillars, namely, justice and imamate, are only ascribed to by Shi'i Imāmis.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/typology-human-values-making-challenges-and-dilemmas-making-value-systems-abbas-ali-shameli>

Links

- [1] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/abbas-ali-shameli>
- [2] <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/84418>
- [3] <https://www.al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/84418>
- [4] <https://www.al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/84418>
- [5] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/education>