A Philosophical Reconstruction of Ibn al-Haytham's Moral Educational Objectives

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Abstract

Ibn al-Haytham is widely recognized for his pioneering work in optics, yet he also exerted a significant influence on moral philosophy. This dual background makes his ideas particularly worthy of investigation, particularly with respect to Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq and the aims of moral education it promotes. This article aims to reconstruct and analyse the objectives of moral education in that treatise and to clarify their philosophical foundations and pedagogical implications. Employing a qualitative design that combines content analysis and textual analysis of primary manuscripts and relevant classical biographical sources, the study identifies, codes, and systematises Ibn al-Haytham's formulations of moral aims. The results reveal that these goals coalesce around the notion of insān al-tām (the complete human being), articulated through three main clusters: self-formative aims (self-examination, governing desires and anger, and ascetic detachment from wealth), social-relational aims (affection for others, empathy, generosity, and waqf), and transcendental aims (eschewing outward and inward vices and repudiating tamalluq). The paper argues that Ibn al-Haytham offers an inclusive theory of moral educational ends—cognitive, affective, and spiritual—that closely aligns with contemporary formulations of Islam-oriented moral education.

Keywords: *Educational Objectives; Ibn Al-Haytham; Islamic Ethics; Moral Education; Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq.*

Abstrak

Ibn al-Haytham dikenal sebagai ilmuwan optik, namun juga memiliki kontribusi penting dalam bidang etika. Kekhasan ini menjadikan pemikirannya menarik untuk dikaji, khususnya terkait tujuan pendidikan akhlak dalam Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi tujuan-tujuan pendidikan akhlak dalam karya tersebut serta menjelaskan dasar filosofis dan implikasi pedagogisnya. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis isi dan analisis teks terhadap naskah primer dan sumber biografis klasik yang relevan, dilanjutkan dengan kategorisasi dan integrasi konseptual atas rumusan tujuan akhlak Ibn al-Haytham. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, seluruh tujuan itu berporos pada cita-cita insān al-tām (manusia paripurna) yang diwujudkan melalui tiga gugus utama: pengokohan diri (muhasabah, pengendalian syahwat dan marah, zuhd terhadap harta), pembentukan keutamaan sosial (cinta

sesama, empati, kedermawanan, dan waqf), serta pemurnian dimensi transendental (menjauhi aib lahir–batin dan menolak sikap tamalluq). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Ibn al-Haytham menawarkan model tujuan pendidikan akhlak yang integratif dan relevan bagi pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan akhlak Islam kontemporer.

Kata kunci : Etika Islam; Ibn al-Haytham; Pendidikan akhlak; Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq; Tujuan pendidikan moral.

I. Introduction

The science of ethics (ʿilm al-akhlāq) occupies a central position in Islamic thought and practice. It is intimately linked to the Prophetic mission—which is described as the completion of noble character—and to Qurʾanic teachings that place piety, justice, and compassion at the heart of religious life (Gade, 2009; Sachedina, 2022). Morality thus functions not as a peripheral aspect of Islam, but as the foundation that gives coherence to its legal, theological, and spiritual teachings (Gade, 2009; Mohammed, 2013).

Today, in the contemporary educational context, the importance of character building is evident, as moral problems become increasingly intense at both the individual and social levels (Park & Peterson, 2009; Young et al., 2013). According to Islamic education experts, the most profound crisis is not scientific or technological shortcomings; rather, it is the failure to cultivate individuals with sound character who can control their desires, maintain themselves, and assume social responsibilities (Mahmud et al., 2023; Shuhari et al., 2019). Family relations, the media, and sociocultural environments often exacerbate the crisis, thereby weakening the moral resilience of future generations (Chambers, 2013; De Frias et al., 2021).

Although morality is central to Islam, no other period has been as prolific in ethical theory and moral education as the formative period. This point is noted, as an example, by Nasim al-Hawwārī when commenting on Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq: "scholars have less thoroughly pursued ethics than many other studies" (al-Haytham 2020). As a consequence, it highlights the need for renewed engagement with Islamic ethical thought in developing contemporary conceptions of moral education.

In this tradition, a special place is occupied by the work Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq—on ethics attributed to Ibn al-Haytham. While Ibn al-Haytham is commonly recognized in the literature as an optics genius and an early thinker on scientific methodologies, his biography also records his engagement with ethical and philosophical concerns (Ishaq & Daud, 2017b). Jalel Dridi (2017) discusses morality and happiness, while Ibn Turky al-Samir (2024) examines his efforts to establish methods of scientific inquiry. However, these studies reveal an apparent hiatus: the goals of moral education in Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq have not been systematically reconstructed and analyzed as an organized plan. This article attempts to bridge the gap by providing a philosophical reconstruction of Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq's objectives of moral education and considering their relevance for Islamic education today. In particular, the study has the following objectives: (1) to

determine and order the moral-educational goals presented in the text; (2) to understand their philosophical and anthropological background; and (3) suggest a conceptual model connecting these goals with contemporary directions for Islamic moral education.

The novelty of this study is the way it (systematically) reconstitutes Ibn al-Haytham's 'order of moral educational values' into a tripartite model (self-formative, social-relational, and transcendental-moral), something that has not been explicitly done in early works on his thought. While narrowing attention to Ibn al-Haytham's moral philosophy rather than his other scholarly pursuits, this work aspires both to provide a richer picture of the philosopher and scientist himself and to reveal that classical Islamic moral thought remains intellectually valuable for addressing contemporary moral dilemmas.

II. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative design that combines content analysis and textual-philosophical analysis of works attributed to Ibn al-Haytham. Content analysis is employed to identify, code, and categorise textual units in Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq that explicitly or implicitly articulate the objectives (ghāyāt) of moral education. Textual and philosophical analysis are then used to interpret the conceptual structure, anthropological assumptions, and ethical arguments embedded in those passages. This approach is appropriate for examining the thought of a classical Muslim scholar and for extracting an internally coherent framework of moral educational objectives from a premodern ethical text.

The primary data source of this research is the ethical treatise Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, attributed to Ibn al-Haytham, as edited and discussed by Nasim al-Hawwārī (Al-Haytsam, 2020)the analysis, several other works, and biographical references are utilised, including Thamarah al-Ḥikmah, biographical entries in Uyūn al-Anbāʾ fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbāʾ, and modern studies on Ibn al-Haytham's life and intellectual profile (Ishaq & Daud, 2017b). Secondary literature on Islamic ethics and moral philosophy is also consulted to situate Ibn al-Haytham's ideas within the broader tradition of Islamic virtue ethics (Makmudi et al., 2019).

The analysis was performed in four steps. Selected texts from Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, covering the sections on aims of training of character (maqasid-i tarbiyat-i akhlāq), control of appetites (muhabbat'ha-yi hamdañat), social virtues, and leaving vices, were chosen. Second, to analyze repeated moral themes and expressions of educational goals, there was a process of open coding. Third, axial coding was performed to group these themes into higher-order categories, yielding a structured list of thirteen core objectives of moral education. Fourth, these objectives were integrated into a hierarchical conceptual model centred on the ideal of insān al-tām (the complete human being), which

then formed the basis for the philosophical and pedagogical reflection presented in the discussion.

III. Result and Discussion
A. Biography of Ibn Al-Haytham

1. Life, Intellectual Profile and Significant Works

Al-Ḥasan Abū ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Haytham (d. ca. 430/1039), well known in the Latin tradition as Alhazen, was a polymath who made significant contributions to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. Biographical data indicate that little is known about his early life. However, there is consensus that his intellectual formation occurred within a rich and flourishing scientific environment that emerged after the Arabic translations of Greek, Syriac, and Indian texts. Institutions such as Bayt al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad were founded (Al-Damardasy, 1969).

Ibn al-Haytham is best known for his Kitāb al-Manāẓir (Book of Optics), which had a significant impact on subsequent developments in optics and visual theory; in particular, the work was translated into Latin in the Middle Ages (Nabi, 2000). He wrote numerous treatises in mathematics, natural philosophy, and medicine, and modern research estimates that at least 61 of his works survive in manuscript form, scattered across libraries throughout Europe and the Middle East (Ishaq & Daud, 2017a). Moreover, scientific biographical and bibliographical studies indicate that he also wrote on ethics and philosophy (amongst other works), including Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq (Refinement of Character) and Thamarah al-Ḥikmah (The Fruit of Wisdom) (Al-Haytsam, 2020; Ishaq & Daud, 2017b). Despite continued scholarly debate over the precise attribution of Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, philological examination by Nasim al-Ḥawwārī has favoured Ibn al-Haytham's authorship (Al-Haytsam, 2020), based on stylistic and biographical evidence attesting to his authorship of a single work of ethics.

2. Teachers, Scholary Standing and Praise

Very little is known about the teachers who shaped Ibn al-Haytham's intellectual development, despite his prolific authorship. Musthafa Nadzif explicitly points out this lacuna, testifying that although Ibn al-Haytham acquired knowledge of many sciences and schools of thought, historians did not mention the names of his masters (Nadhif, 2008). As a result, we know little about his education beyond the works and the testimony of later scholars, who say nothing about his early education.

Classical and modern scholars alike have praised Ibn al-Haytham's intellectual acuity and methodological rigor. Tafsīr al-Shaʿrāwī credits him with overturning the pre-Islamic misconception that vision occurs through rays emitted from the eye, recognising instead the role of light entering the eye and thereby transforming the science of optics (Al-Sya'rawi, 1991). In Tārīkh al-Islām, al-Dhahabī describes him as one of the most

intelligent individuals among the descendants of Adam, unmatched in mathematics, ascetic in lifestyle, and deeply engaged with the works of Galen and Aristotle. (Al-Dzahabi, 2003). Western historians of science have also recognised Ibn al-Haytham's stature; some even describe him as "the greatest natural philosopher of the medieval world," given his foundational impact on optics and natural philosophy (El-Bizri, 2024; Elkholy, 2020). These testimonies underscore both the breadth and depth of his scholarship and situate him as a pivotal figure in the history of science and philosophy.

3. A Significant Episode with al-Ḥākim, further works, and death

One of the most frequently cited episodes in Ibn al-Haytham's life concerns his remarks about the Nile River and his proposal to regulate its waters for the benefit of Egypt. Ibn Qifṭī relates that al-Ḥākim bi-Amrillāh al-Fāṭimī, the Fatimid caliph, heard of Ibn al-Haytham's reputation and of his claim that, were he in Egypt, he would undertake a project on the Nile that would secure benefit in times of both high and low water levels. This statement prompted al-Ḥākim to summon him to Egypt. After the caliph's death, Ibn al-Haytham is reported to have lived for about eighteen years in a room near the Jāmiʿ al-Azhar Mosque, devoting himself to scholarship and research. During this period, he composed his monumental Kitāb al-Manāẓir (Abi Usaiba'ah, 1996).

Ibn al-Haytham is described as leading a modest life, supporting himself by copying and selling scientific manuscripts, with Ibn Qifṭī noting the exceptional quality of his handwriting and his deep understanding of the texts he transcribed (Abi Usaiba'ah, 1996). Modern estimates suggest that he wrote at least 182 works, of which around 61 have survived and are now dispersed across libraries in Germany, Egypt, France, Rome, Leiden, the Netherlands, Turkey, and other centres (Ishaq & Daud, 2017a). According to Musthafa Nadzif, Ibn al-Haytham died in Egypt at the end of 430 AH or in the early part of the following year, corresponding approximately to late 1039 CE (Nadhif, 2008)

B. The Objectives of Moral Education From Ibn al-Haytham's Perspective

From a general standpoint, the purpose of moral education is to equip learners with knowledge, awareness, and habits that enable them to distinguish between right and wrong and to embody virtuous conduct in daily life. In the broader Islamic tradition, this purpose is often expressed as preserving the fiṭrah (innate disposition), purifying the soul from vices, cultivating noble character, and directing all activities toward worship and ultimate happiness in this world and the hereafter (Makmudi et al., 2019).

Based on an analysis of Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, particularly Chapter Four, Ibn al-Haytham identifies at least thirteen objectives of moral education. The foremost goal is to become a complete human being (insān al-tām)—a person who does not fall short in virtue and is not corrupted by immoral traits. He then elaborates thirteen concrete objectives, ranging from continuous self-examination and the cultivation of knowledgeable, reflective readers, to the regulation of desires, the development of generosity and zuhd,

the wise management of wealth, the control of anger, love and care for other human beings, love of goodness and waqf, and finally the avoidance of all forms of vice, disgrace, and tamalluq (insincere flattery and self-aggrandizement).

Table 1. below summarises the thirteen objectives as explicitly stated in Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, along with their locations in the text.

No	Objective	Page
1	Becoming a person who consistently reflects on their own character	86
2	Becoming a knowledgeable and well-read individual	86
3	Minimizing indulgence in carnal desires	87
4	Avoiding base desires and forsaking disgraceful pleasures	88
5	Cultivating the habit of generosity	88
6	Practicing asceticism toward material wealth	89
7	Using wealth wisely and responsibly	90
8	Abandoning anger	92
9	Loving and caring for fellow human beings	92
10	Loving goodness and engaging in charitable endowments (*waqf*)	93
11	Avoiding all forms of immoral behavior, both visible and hidden	94
12	Completely distancing oneself from all disgraceful traits	95
13	Rejecting the tendency to seek attention or praise	97

These thirteen objectives can be understood not as isolated virtues but as elements of a coherent moral project. When examined through content analysis, they cluster into three major groups that collectively converge on the ideal of insān al-tām. First, the self-formative cluster includes objectives that consolidate the inner self: systematic self-examination, regulation of desires, abandonment of disgraceful pleasures, ascetic detachment from wealth, prudent management of property, and control of anger. Second, the relational-social cluster encompasses objectives directed toward others: loving and caring for fellow human beings, cultivating generosity, and striving for universal goodness through practices such as waqf. Third, the transcendental-moral cluster covers objectives related to one is standing before God and one's ultimate moral accountability: avoiding all outward and inward vices, distancing oneself from disgraceful traits, and rejecting tamalluq.

In what follows, each of these objectives will be examined in greater detail, with particular attention to Ibn al-Haytham's terminology, conceptual nuances, and their implications for contemporary Islamic moral education

C. Explanation of the Objectives of Moral Education According to Ibn al-Haytham

By listing the thirteen goals of moral education in Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq, this section further elucidates the individual objectives articulated by Ibn al-Haytham. Comments are given according to the order in which they are followed by text, and each of these purposes is placed into one of the three clusters previously mentioned: autodirective, relational-social, and transcendental-moral. Thus, the analysis not only explains what

individual virtues are but also their place in the larger process of becoming insān al-tām (the perfected human).

1. Self-Examination of One's Character

One of the significant achievements Ibn al-Haytham envisioned to be realized through moral education is that learners develop into persons ready and able to reflect on all dimensions of their own character. On this aspect is based his expression al-taffaqqud li-jamīʿ maʿāyibihi (to scrutinize all one's defects).

The term al-taffaqqud derives from the verb tafaqqada–yatafaqqadu, meaning to search for or inspect something absent with precision and care. Lexicographical sources such as al-Qamus al-Wasīṭ (Al-Fayruzabi, 1301) and Muʿjam al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah al-Muʿāṣirah (Umar, 2008) also connect this root to the idea of attentively assessing the condition of a community or situation. Ibn al-Haytham employs this term to emphasise that a person should not merely glance superficially at their own character, but should conduct a thorough and continuous moral audit—identifying which virtues are lacking and which vices persist.

In essence, this objective calls for an internalisation of systematic muhāsabah (self-accounting). Through regular self-examination, an individual becomes aware of moral deficiencies, recognises areas for improvement, and develops a sense of responsibility for personal moral growth. From the perspective of contemporary Islamic education, this concept has practical implications: it suggests that schools and educational institutions should incorporate structured practices of reflection—such as guided journals, spiritual mentoring, and ethical study circles—that help learners evaluate their conduct beyond formal academic assessments.

2. Becoming a Knowledge and Reflective Reader

A second key objective in Ibn al-Haytham's conception of moral education is the formation of individuals who are not only avid readers but also capable of understanding and internalising what they read. He makes this explicit in his recommendation that one should direct one's ultimate purpose toward the study of the "true sciences" (al-ʿulūm al-ḥaqīqiyyah) and aim at comprehending the essences of things and uncovering their causes and reasons. In his words: "That he should direct his ultimate purpose toward the study of the true sciences, and make it his aim to encompass the essences of existing things and to uncover their causes and reasons."

This goal consists of two interrelated dimensions. First, Ibn al-Ḥaytham promotes the study of the ʿulūm al-ḥaqāʾiq (sciences of truth), which include fields that present reality in a demonstrative manner. Secondly, he insists that reading should be referred to as iḥāṭah bimāhiyyāt al-umūr—understanding the essentialities of things —an attempt to unveil causes and go beyond the phenomenon.

In actual reading, Ibn al-Haytham urges that one should commence by reading ethics, biography, and political wisdom night as well as day, in the Ancients' style, "and apply themselves to construing their scholars' practice, and the teaching of sages". He also advises attention to adab al-lisān (verbal etiquette), eloquence (balāghah), and refined speech, indicating that literacy and communication skills are integral components of moral character. For rulers and leaders, he proposes a different path: surrounding themselves with advisors known for integrity, knowledge, wisdom, and proximity to scholarly circles, thereby ensuring that sound counsel shapes their decisions.

From an educational perspective, this goal implies that moral education is not independent of intellectual formation. Curricula should accommodate the reading of texts such as codes of ethics, scholars' biographies, and wisdom literature. They should prompt students to reflect on meanings and engage them in critical reflection on texts and on the world beyond as well (too often they are viewed as fodder for rote learning). Indeed, "reading shapes the intellect and morality.

3. Minimising Indulgence in Carnal Desires

A third objective, according to Ibn al-Haytham, is the prevention of passion and discipline of desire, so that an individual can make use of his actions in fulfillment of bodily desires without exceeding necessary limits (e.g., eating when hungry and drinking when thirsty) or underachieving and coming short of satisfaction (eating lightly due to poor appetite or thirst for wealth). Desire as such is not to be eliminated, which would neither be practicable nor consistent with human nature. However, desires must learn to keep themselves in check and subject themselves to the constraints of justice and expediency.

Ibn al-Haytham's description here indicates his understanding that "people er" and the desire to desire are built into Allah's design for human nature. In this context, he aligns with the Prophetic teaching that "Every child of Adam sins, and the best of those who sin are those who repent," (Al-Haytsam, 2020) indicating that the central issue is not the existence of desire itself, but how it is managed and redirected.

This objective resonates closely with contemporary notions of self-regulated behaviour. Within the framework of Islamic moral education, it implies the need for pedagogical strategies that help learners recognise their impulses, delay gratification, set moral boundaries, and understand the consequences of their actions. Educational programmes could, for example, incorporate training in emotional and behavioural self-monitoring, enabling students to track patterns of desire, develop awareness of triggers, and practise concrete techniques for restraint. By doing so, Ibn al-Haytham's emphasis on moderation in desire becomes an operational component of character education rather than merely an abstract ideal.

4. Avoiding Base Desires and Forsaking Disgracelful Pleasures

The next objective of moral education, according to Ibn al-Haytham, is to avoid base desires and to abandon disgraceful pleasures. The Qur'an itself acknowledges the attractiveness of various forms of desire—such as for women, children, wealth, livestock, and cultivated land—as adornments of worldly life (Āl ʿImrān 3:14). Classical exegetes like Ibn Kathīr informed that these desires are not per se blameworthy, rather could even be worthwhile to strive for if pursued with due piety and within legitimate boundaries--like the desire for a chaste spouse or the pursuit of wealth to maintain one's family as well as to afford charity (Katsir, 1988).

Consistent with this view, Ibn al-Haytham does not censure desire in general but differentiates between the legitimate desires that can be elevated to acts of worship and the vile, degrading pleasures that result in humiliation and punishment. The objective of moral education, therefore, is to train learners to differentiate between commendable and blameworthy desires and to consciously turn away from those pleasures that are inherently disgraceful or lead to moral degradation. In pedagogical terms, this calls for curricula that help students critically evaluate their wants, understand the ethical status of different types of pleasure, and internalise criteria for deciding which desires should be followed, restrained, or abandoned.

5. Cultivating the Habit of Generosity

Another important objective in Ibn al-Haytham's framework is to cultivate generosity (al-karam), understood as the disposition to give with ease. According to al-Jurjānī, al-karam is to give freely. He emphasizes spontaneity and lack of hesitation. (Al-Jurjani, 1983). Ibn al-Haytham demonstrates this through simple, quotidian actions, such as not eating alone and regularly inviting others to share one's food and drink.

This pedagogical choice is significant. Moreover, by beginning with modest concrete acts, such as sharing meals, he shows that generosity is most effectively fostered through repeated small, accessible habits that we can learn from a young age. As these habits become established, greater opportunities arise for more significant acts of giving. For Islamic education today, this suggests that schools should embed structured opportunities for sharing and cooperative activities in daily routines and co-curricular programmes, thereby turning generosity from a mere concept into a lived and habituated virtue

6. Asceticism Toward Material Wealth.

Ibn al-Haytham also lists cultivating asceticism (zuhd) toward wealth as a fundamental aim of moral education. Moreover, this is particularly important in the age of consumerism and the idolization of material success. He aims, through this, to rectify common misconceptions of zuhd as involving the neglect or willful scruffiness of one's appearance. For Ibn al-Haytham, zuhd is about "keeping things in perspective" (places wealth as a means to the greatest ends), humbling it, and devaluing it (to just a possible

element/means) while appreciating that the virtue regarding wealth does not reside in possession per se, instead in purpose and use (Al-Haytsam, 2020).

Therefore, zuhd does not mean abandoning wealth altogether, but rather not idolising it or taking it as an ultimate goal in life. Educationally, the aim here may be to function as a countercultural instrument, developing learners who are not beholden to goods or status symbols of wealth. Teachers can apply this in the classroom through simple activities, such as encouraging students not to buy things they do not need and to use fewer branded products, thereby introducing a more critical dialogue about both flexing culture and conspicuous consumption. So zuhd is connected with self-discipline, moderation, and independence of material goods.

7. Wise Management of Wealth

Closely related to zuhd is the objective of wise management of wealth (ḥusn al-taṣarruf fī al-māl). Ibn al-Haytham emphasises that moral education should not only teach learners to detach themselves from excessive love of wealth, but also to acquire and spend it in lawful, responsible, and beneficial ways. Wealth is to be acquired through lawful means and spent in ways beneficial to the owner, enabling him to satisfy his needs, support his family, strengthen social ties, and perform acts of worship and charity that benefit the public.

In a modern educational context, the primary distinction of this goal is the need to integrate Islamic financial literacy into moral education. Schools can create learning opportunities that enable students to discern between needs and wants, model honest and fair transactions, and rehearse handling small allowances with authenticity and sensitivity to our social fabric. By doing so, wealth management is part of character education: students must learn that money is a tool entrusted to them, not an end in itself, and that ethical concerns have implications for how it is both earned and spent.

8. Abandoning Anger

Another purpose for which Ibn al-Haytham aims is mastery over anger, so that one can be capable of "eliminating harmful hostile forces. Let me clarify: anger is a natural human reaction, but when not tempered by reason and moral judgment, it can pose a serious threat to personal integrity and social relationships. Ibn al-Haytham cautions that unbridled anger brings a person down to the level of an animal, as it undermines rational judgment and impels one toward passion-driven, destructive behaviour (Al-Haytsam, 2020).

For him, the key is not to deny the existence of anger but to subject it to the guidance of the rational soul (al-nafs al-nāṭiqah). In educational practice, this objective calls for integrating emotional literacy into moral education: learners should be taught to recognise the signs of rising anger, to delay responses, to remain silent when necessary, to seek physical and spiritual calming strategies—such as ablution (wuḍūʾ) and

temporarily leaving the source of conflict—and to reflect afterwards on what triggered their reactions. Such strategies help to embed the virtue of ḥilm (forbearance) as a practical, trainable skill rather than merely an ideal.

9. Loving and Caring for Humanity

Love and compassion for others are also a chief goal of moral education, according to Ibn al-Haytham. He uses several terms to describe this counterpoint—maḥabbat al-nās (love of people), tawaddud ilayhim (loving attachment to them), taḥannun, raʾfah, and raḥmah—and we observe a scale ranging from mere emotion or kindness to compassion and mercy. Lexical discussions like those of al-ʿAskari indicate that the differences between maḥabbah and mawaddah are subtle, maḥabbah is based on nature as well as wisdom, and mawaddah is more strongly connected to natural affection (al-ʿAskari 1412 H.).

The aim is particularly valuable in the present context of individuality, social competition, and a loss of empathy. In educational language, it means that curricula should intentionally develop "empathy literacy" through activities that train emotional understanding, active listening, cooperative learning, and social care. Learners need to be guided to value others for their intrinsic human dignity rather than for utilitarian or instrumental reasons. By doing so, love for humanity becomes a structured part of character formation, not merely a rhetorical ideal.

10. Loving Goodness for All People

A further objective, closely related to the previous one, is to love goodness for all people and to seek to benefit them through enduring contributions. Ibn al-Haytham formulates this aim as follows: "That he should make goodness toward all people his constant concern, and spend whatever surplus of his wealth on that which will leave him a noble remembrance after his death" (Al-Haytsam, 2020). He thus combines an inner orientation—making goodness toward all people one's constant concern—with a concrete practice: spending surplus wealth in ways that yield a lasting good name after death, such as through charitable endowments (waqf). Here, moral education is not confined to individual piety but expands to social responsibility and intergenerational benefit.

For contemporary Islamic education, this suggests that programmes should encourage learners to adopt "goodness for all" as a life orientation that transcends religious, ethnic, and social boundaries. Practical initiatives—such as student waqf schemes, regular charity projects, and community service—can help embed this objective, while also introducing students to the concept of ṣadaqah jāriyah (ongoing charity) from an early age.

11. Abandoning Both Overt and Hidden Vices

Another objective of Ibn al-Haytham's moral education is to train individuals to abandon all forms of vice, whether outwardly visible or inwardly concealed. He offers a striking theoretical insight: those who genuinely seek perfection must firmly believe that no flaw or disgraceful act remains hidden from others, even if the perpetrator strives to conceal it. This conviction, he argues, should deter a person from engaging in shameful behaviour, knowing that sooner or later it will be known to others and, more importantly, to God (Al-Haytsam, 2020). This objective centres on murāqabah—a constant awareness of being observed and held accountable—which extends beyond social surveillance to divine oversight. In educational practice, this means that moral evaluation should not be limited to observable behaviour; it must also address inner maladies such as hypocrisy (riyāʾ), envy, rancour, and deceit. Pedagogical tools such as narratives, case studies, and role-play can be employed to help learners reflect on hidden intentions and internalise values like honesty, trustworthiness (amānah), and integrity.

12. Avoiding Disgrace in its Entirety

Closely linked to the previous objective is the aim of avoiding disgrace (qabāʾiḥ and ʿuyūb) in all its forms. Ibn al-Haytham expects that, after being exposed to the foundations of moral education, learners will develop a strong aversion to any behaviour that leads to public or private dishonour. This includes not only explicit immoral acts, but also subtle patterns of conduct that gradually erode one's reputation and spiritual standing. Educationally, this objective underscores the importance of helping students recognise potential moral pitfalls before they fully manifest in action. Schools can, for example, foster routines of daily or weekly self-evaluation in which learners reflect on their behaviour, identify areas for improvement, and formulate concrete steps for change. Leadership training—such as roles in student councils, dormitory supervision, or class representation—can also be designed to integrate principles of moral leadership, making students aware that positions of responsibility magnify both virtues and vices.

13. Detesting Flattery and Insincerity (*tamalluq*)

The final objective of moral education in Ibn al-Haytham's list is cultivating a strong aversion to flattery and insincere behaviour, referred to as at-tamalluq. Linguistically, tamalluq denotes expressing love, gentleness, or praise with the tongue while lacking sincerity in the heart (Al-Fayruzabi, 1301). Ibn al-Haytham considers this trait highly reprehensible, especially for Muslims, and insists that anyone who values noble character should not only detest this behaviour but also disapprove of those who practise it (Al-Haytsam, 2020). The educational implication is that learners must be taught to prioritise the pleasure of God over superficial image-building for the sake of others. Classrooms can become training grounds for this objective by encouraging honest yet courteous expression of opinions, rather than rewarding mere conformity or attempts to please the teacher. Teachers can also model openness to constructive criticism, creating a climate in which sincerity is honoured and tamalluq is gently but firmly discouraged. In this way,

moral education helps form individuals who are truthful, courageous in expressing principled views, and resistant to the temptation of insincere praise and opportunistic behaviour

IV. Conclusion

This study has shown that the ethical vision articulated in Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq centres on the formation of the insān al-tām—the complete human being—through a structured set of moral educational objectives that regulate desire, refine character, and orient the individual toward the good of others and ultimate accountability before God. Although Ibn al-Haytham enumerates diverse aims—ranging from self-examination, deep reading and intellectual formation, regulation of carnal desires and anger, generosity, zuhd, and wise management of wealth, to love for humanity, love of goodness, social beneficence, avoidance of disgrace, and rejection of tamalluq—all of these converge upon the single overarching goal of producing a person who knows himself, manages inner impulses, and becomes genuinely beneficial to others.

Conceptually, the thirteen objectives can be organised into three interrelated clusters: self-formative aims (such as muhāsabah, regulation of desires, zuhd, and control of anger), social-relational aims (such as love and empathy for others, generosity, and waqf), and transcendental-moral aims (such as avoiding outward and inward vices, shunning disgrace, and detesting flattery and insincerity). This structure reveals that, for Ibn al-Haytham, morality is not merely outward conformity to rules but a harmonious integration of cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions—linking knowledge, inner states, and external actions into a coherent process of character formation.

The findings of this research reaffirm the relevance of Ibn al-Haytham's objectives for addressing contemporary moral challenges, including the erosion of self-control, the weakening of integrity, the dominance of materialism, and the normalisation of moral falsification. By reconstructing his objectives into a hierarchical model and situating them within the broader tradition of Islamic virtue ethics, this study shows that Ibn al-Haytham offers not only a normative ideal but also practical pedagogical directions: cultivating self-awareness and emotional regulation, integrating deep reading of ethical literature, fostering generosity and social responsibility, and nurturing sincerity while rejecting tamalluq. In sum, the purpose of moral education, from Ibn al-Haytham's perspective, may be described as cultivating human beings who are knowledgeable, virtuous, socially engaged, and inwardly purified of both visible and hidden vices—thereby preserving and elevating human dignity.

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