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# HOW CAN PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE DENIAL OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE?

**Mahdi Ganjvar\***

*University of Isfahan, Faculty of Theology and Ahl Al-Bait Studies, Department of Islamic  
Philosophy and Theology, P.O. Box, 8174673441, Isfahan, Iran*

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to reveal the capacity of children's philosophical education in their spiritual development and its efficiency in promoting peace and the denial of religious violence. While analysing the model of philosophical education, this article briefly examines its principles, goals and methods. It then investigates the impact of this educational program on improving children's peaceful behaviours and enhancing their communicational skills with others in order to reduce violence. Field studies have shown that failure in self-expression, inability to self-control and self-restraint, low level of tolerance, imposition of radical and monopolistic ideas, dogmatism and weakness in reasoning are the most significant causes of religious violence in children. Therefore, one of the essential missions of the educational system should be to create a friendly and safe environment where the grounds and causes of violence are not possible. One of the most significant functions of philosophical education is to strengthen skills such as open-mindedness, critical-reasoning thinking, empathic thought to promote a culture of tolerance and teaching an aesthetic view of existence that leads to the love of God and His creatures. The findings show that the development of these skills through philosophical education can improve their relationships with fellow human beings in an empathetic and rational atmosphere and thus, reduce religious tension and violence.

*Keywords:* empathetic, thinking, tolerance, Caring Thinking Skill (CTS)

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## **1. Introduction**

In today's global situation, the issue of living together in peace and harmony is increasingly crucial and has become a challenge for all, including the education sector. "Studies have revealed that anger and juvenile violence are among the common issues faced by teachers and school psychologists." [1] Human history has indicated numerous atrocities of humanity against each other, the main origins of which have been religious bigotry, misapprehension, flawed religious education, and lack of rationality. We have experienced a terrible example of religious violence in our age in the Middle East region. In these acts

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\*E-mail: m.ganjvar@ltr.ui.ac.ir

of violence, which took place in the name of religion and implementation of divine precepts, many people were killed, and numerous women and children were violated and enslaved [2]. Of course, there is no denying the anthropological fact that “violence is potentially present in every human being. Violence is part of human nature” [3]. For this reason, in order to deny violence in human societies, we must first institutionalize a culture of peace in them. As emphasized in the UNESCO World Directory of Peace Research and Training Institutions: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” [4].

Hannah Arendt indicates how ordinary people commit violence with the temptation to do evil things. Her research on wartime atrocities illustrates that ordinary people are capable of horrid and violent acts [5]. However, it is a fact that religion in human history has always been one of the most powerful forces in society for either war or peace [6]. Even today, its effects on war and violence between nations are undeniable. Thus, as Huddleston points out, “it would be a grave mistake not to take it [religion] seriously as a major potential factor for peace or for war” [7]. Today, the spread of violence among children with religious orientations is growing. This rampant prevalence of violence has caused concern among parents and educational and social officials. Occasionally a number of young people fall victim to or engage in interpersonal ideological conflicts. These acts of violence are not only perpetrated on children by adults but also occur in many cases among children and adolescents themselves and cause substantial physical and mental injuries to the individual, the effects of which continue into adulthood [8]. The prevalence of verbal violence, the humiliation of religious minorities, and physical violence among students are becoming increasingly worrying [9]. Violent and bullying students tend to dominate and control their weaker peers. They employ different methods to achieve their objectives; their aggressive behaviours range from slander, ridicule and hideous gossip to threatening more vulnerable children. They use various ways to achieve their goals; their aggressive behaviours range from slander, insult and hideous gossip to threatening more powerless children. Around the world, approximately 160,000 students stay home from school each day because they are afraid of being bullied. An estimated half a million students nationwide are marked absent every 30 days because of such bullying and acts of violence [10].

Other studies indicate that approximately 30% of children and adolescents will experience a violent behavioural disorder during their lifetime, but 70 to 80% of them will not receive appropriate intervention. These disorders lead to dysfunction in various family and educational contexts and ultimately cause academic failure or violent and delinquent behaviours [11]. Scholars who have investigated the problems of school violence from different perspectives have found that bullying and behavioural violence have several short-term and long-term effects on the physical, psychological, social and emotional domains of the bully (perpetrator of violence), the victim and the spectator [12]. For example, these three categories can grapple with a range of problems from depression, low self-esteem, and psychosis to suicide and violence against non-coreligionists [13].

Even these problems extend to adulthood. The ages at which students engage in increasing levels of anger, attention deficit disorder, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem [14]. The problems mentioned are only part of the psychological-behavioural consequences of violence among children.

Although attention to child behavioural disorders has increased in recent years and scholars have made many valuable achievements, there are still considerable shortcomings in violence prevention. Therefore, research on different methods of prevention and treatment of behavioural violence in children is very critical. Meanwhile, research in the field of philosophical education of children is more advantageous due to the lack of side effects of drugs. Some researchers believe that the model of philosophical education for primary school children can improve their abilities and reduce students' behavioural problems [15]. It is suggested in this educational program that classrooms become circles or communities in which friendship and sympathy are welcomed for positive interactions and participation in the training environment and society. This friendly atmosphere and empathetic interaction replace the competitive and semi-hostile environment prevalent in many educational spaces of early childhood. In general, one can regard philosophical education as a program for the instruction of creative thinking in the field of philosophical themes for children, focusing on moral principles, including self-reformation, justice administration, judgment based on trust in criteria, and respect for the opinions of others [16]. Among other specific features of this educational model that express the role and impact of this program in intellectual-social maturity and strengthening communicational skills in children, one can refer to the following: non-hostile reflection and contemplation, common perceptions based on dialogue, inclusiveness, partnership, impartiality, reasonableness, the celebration of diversity, and challenging as a procedure [17].

Given my professional experience as an academic instructor of children's philosophy, emphasizing these moral components in philosophical education can lead to the development of rationality, correction of beliefs, improvement of behavioural interactions and the denial of religious violence among students. Nevertheless, although philosophical education has had a tendency toward social ethics and spirituality since its inception and even in the works of its designers, this point has been emphasized [18], the impact of this educational program on reducing religious violence, despite its paramount importance, seems to have been neglected by prior scholars in this field. However, I believe that one of the most fundamental functions of Philosophy, especially in ideological communities, is to strengthen spirituality and morality in order to promote peace and the denial of violence in childhood and adolescence. Thus, the present paper seeks to analyse the epistemological geometry of philosophical education and explain the role and impact of this program in the promotion of peaceful coexistence and the denial of religious violence.

Accordingly, the essential question of this research is as follows: what is the role and effect of children's philosophical education in promoting peace and denying religious violence? To put it otherwise, what are the most influential

factors in children's religious education and the improvement of their nonviolent behaviour with others based on the model of philosophical education?

The purpose of this paper is to answer these questions, which while solving some theoretical problems in the field of education, can be used by educators and scholars as one of the practical goals of children's philosophy.

## **2. Methodology**

In the present article, I have used a descriptive-analytical method with an inferential approach; in the sense that I have first explained the philosophical education program, its theoretical bases, and objectives. Then, referring to the works related to children's philosophy, I have extracted and analysed the socio-spiritual components required to promote a culture of peace and the denial of religious violence in today's world. The inferential method is a non-experimental, rational, and analytical approach by which the researcher discovers the justified and logical relationship between theoretical foundations and educational implications.

This method can be used both for theorizing in the field of education and for critical evaluation of theories in the area of practice and life. For this reason, the author has employed this method to reconstruct the model of philosophical education in order to promote peace and non-violent interfaith coexistence.

## **3. Research objectives**

This article seeks to demonstrate that through philosophical education to students, we can strengthen intellectual and behavioural skills - such as open-mindedness, tolerance, the power of judgment, empathy with others, and caring thinking - in the educational environment to reduce the occurrence of religious tensions and violence. This goal can be achieved through raising a child in three areas:

- (1) Strengthen the power of reasoning and critical thinking in children to prevent selfish dogmatism and promote wise and conscious religiosity. For according to the history of Theology and religions, dogmatic religious interpretations are the primary source of religious violence.
- (2) Teaching an aesthetic view of the Universe and God as Creator of the world and man: Such love-based theism will result in nothing but the realization of justice, humanity and respect for the rights of other human beings of all religions and faiths. In philosophical education, we must teach children that the love of God requires the love of people. Enmity and violence against people as God's family is not pleasing Him.
- (3) Creation of peaceful social space in schools through solutions such as encouragement of children to engage in positive and social behaviours, promotion of individual and social skills (like free-thinking, empathy, tolerance, caring thinking, etc.), reduction of factors stimulating hostility in

the educational environment, and promotion of children's awareness of various forms of violence [19, 20].

#### **4. Epistemological geometry of philosophical education**

In this part of the paper, I first analyse the epistemological aspects of the philosophical education program, namely its theoretical foundations, objectives, and methods. Then, in the final section, I will infer and explain the educational components of this program to promote peace and the denial of religious violence. Regardless of the differences of opinion in expressing the nature of philosophy, in summary, one can say that the definition of this knowledge at its dawn and during many centuries has been as follows: the most comprehensive type of knowledge of Nature, the world, and the human place in the world [21]. At first glance, this definition seems accurate and consistent with the children's philosophical education model. In contrast, the analysis of the concept of 'philosophy' - in this model - indicates a kind of reductionism. After years of experience in the philosophical education of children, I am convinced that philosophy in this model has reduced to the "method of rational and critical thinking" [16, p. 27].

##### **4.1. Theoretical foundations**

This program has taken form under the influence of the philosophical foundations of pragmatism, analytical philosophy, critical thinking and the dialectical method of Socrates. Its ontological foundations are limited to the Cosmos and the material world and do not include the supernatural and metaphysics. As experts have pointed out, children's metaphysical questions do not have the character of objectivity. Because of the generality and the abstractive nature of these types of questions, one is unable to answer them [22]. The realm of the supernatural and metaphysical questions is vast and inaccessible. Such notions are not tangible and objective for us, and we cannot utilize them [23].

On the one hand, the world is philosophically a complex, mysterious phenomenon full of ambiguities and problems. This ambiguity and complexity have aroused the philosophical astonishment of children [17, p. 18]. On the other hand, the world is unstable and constantly changing. Therefore, the cultivation of creativity in order to create change and innovation in children to face the changeable and unstable world has been emphasized in the philosophical education of children [24].

Based on these foundations, raising metaphysical problems and abstract philosophical questions to correct children's insights and behaviour will not be desirable and helpful. For this reason, the philosophical education of children is more focused on socio-moral issues or various topics of daily life, which are both sufficiently objective and practical.

In addition to the ontological foundations, the children's philosophical education program is based on significant anthropological bases such as a positive attitude toward human beings, emphasis on respect for individual rights,

simultaneous attention to the individual and social identity, belief in human free will, and transformability of human individuality.

#### **4.2. Program method**

The usual method in philosophical education is the Socratic dialectic approach associated with the analytic and critical method used for conceptualization and dialogue with such themes as thinking, nature, language, and ethics, in the form of a 'community of inquiry' for students. Some experts call the education method in this program 'Philosophical Unlocked [Free] Dialogue' [25]. In such a friendly educational environment, the students become acquainted with their roles and the structure of society through the method of intellectual dialogue and the creation of conscious relations [26]. In my opinion, using this method in philosophical education can be influential in improving communication behavior and non-violent coexistence.

#### **4.3. Program goals**

Explanation of the objectives of philosophical education is another epistemological dimension of this educational model. Philosophers of education have considered various goals for this program and have expressed them with different interpretations. The most important goals, in a nutshell, are:

a) ***Cognitive objectives***

- dynamics of the mind through challenge, disciplined thinking, and structured interaction [27];
- equipping children with independent thinking skills through the cultivation of the critical spirit of questioning and inquiry [22, p. 53];
- transformation of children into permanent observers and skilled explorers [28];
- teaching students the democratic decision-making process [22, p. 12];

b) ***Behavioural objectives***

- making fundamental changes in students' various biological, personal, social, intellectual, and emotional dimensions [22, p. 59];
- solving children's individual and social problems through philosophical dialogues [29];
- the cultivation of a democratic spirit and tolerance of others [30];
- strengthen communication and interpersonal skills such as the development of individual self-awareness and resilience [22, p. 12], the ability to listen (Active Listening), increase empathy and emotional attentiveness, and refrain from speaking while the other person is talking [22, p. 53].

In addition, in the model of philosophical education, students learn to understand others and to react logically to them through free collective dialogue. They appear more confident and ready to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions. They also learn to manage their emotions and behaviours peacefully and non-violently in controversial issues such as conflicts of opinion and religious

differences. Basically, one of the serious impediments to the realization of peace in human societies is the departure of individuals from the state of moderation and, consequently, the exercise of violence under the pretext of adherence to religious creeds, especially against those who oppose their ideas.

To put it in a nutshell, this educational model, with its cognitive-behavioural goals and functions, can positively affect students' thoughts and lifestyles. It also can affect their moral development, strengthen their social relationships, and ultimately pave the way for peace and non-violent coexistence [31].

## **5. Philosophical vs. religious education**

In order to clarify the issue, it is necessary to explain the difference between philosophical and religious education. Before entering the discussion, it is essential and helpful to reflect on the following questions: how does a religious thinking/tradition receive the value of critical thinking? Is philosophical education effective in relation to religious education? The answer to these questions requires an analysis of the nature of religious education and its relation to critical thinking.

In the pedagogy system of ideological societies, formal religious education is often institutionalized instead of philosophical education. In this educational system, it is instilled that the decisive condition of religiosity is to have a density of information and memorized stocks of religious knowledge.

In such a situation, the process of religious education is one-sided (monologue) and based on the transfer of knowledge and information about religious propositions and issues to students. In this way, there is no opportunity for questioning, discussion, critical thinking, and paying attention to the mental challenges of students about religion. The large volume and abstractive, obscure, dry and dull contents of religious instruction books, especially in high school, do not have the necessary effect on the education of students.

Contrary to philosophical education, religious education is not theologically neutral [32], but it induces a kind of moral-religious orientation in individuals.

Based on empirical research, there is a valid claim to the idea that to believe religious education teaches something like systematic theology at a child-friendly level completely bypasses and ignores the diversity of the reality of a child's and adolescent's life. Such an educational system builds a static stock of propositional knowledge that leaves out the inner attitude and reality of the life of children and adolescents [33].

On the other hand, the strict imposition of religious beliefs without questioning and criticism inflicts a kind of forced and borrowed religiosity on students. Such an approach to religious education can lead to prejudice, narrow-mindedness, intolerance of others and radicalism in people who act only based on unprocessed sacred habits and spiritual knowledge. However, there is no doubt that a particular religious thought/tradition, such as Islam, can appreciate the value of critical thinking. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, explicitly advises people to hear and criticize the words/opinions/beliefs and choose the best of

them: “So give thou good tidings to My servants who give ear to the Word and follow the fairest of it. Those are they whom God has guided those they are men possessed of minds.” [34]

The Holy Prophet of Islam has also emphasized evaluating and criticizing words without bias: “Take the truth from the people of falsehood, but do not take the falsehood from the people of truth, and always be critical of words/opinions/beliefs” [35].

Based on this evidence, it is possible to use complex critical thinking in religious education, provided that educators are aware of this point: critical thinking should not make a person fall into moral and religious relativism [36].

Therefore, philosophical education can be fruitful as a practical model for religious education with its logical and intellectual components. Inspired by the model of critical thinking in philosophical education, teachers can reform the defective model of religious education. During religious education, they should seek to provide conditions and an educational environment based on ‘questioning and criticism’ so that during the dialogue between the teacher and the student, as well as the students with each other, religious comprehension and knowledge are dynamically formed. It is only in this way that religious education can lead to developing Youths’ Attitudes by flourishing their talents and calm their restless souls when facing problems [37]. Proper religious education produces individuals who, regardless of religious differences, try to solve their problems with respect and tolerance by focusing on common values. “For the majority, it is more important that their children are well-educated, well-behaved, and good people than whether they prefer Christianity or Islam.” [38]

Furthermore, critical thinking is described as ‘social practice’ because it must happen in an active learning environment where students are engaged in: (1) the formulation of questions and problems and (2) self-directed learning, both of which are the antithesis of rote learning [39].

To put it in a nutshell: critical thinking in religious education is a skill that develops only in practice and interaction with fellow human beings. This intellectual skill, which starts with a question and reaches an answer/conclusion after going through various stages of analysis and criticism, can be a suitable method for students to acquire a ‘stable religious identity’. Strictly speaking, adherence to religious beliefs is stable when it is the outcome of individual effort relying on theoretical and practical exploration (critical thinking).

## **6. Components of the philosophical education model in the promotion of non-violent coexistence**

As mentioned earlier, schools can empower children with the help of philosophical education to experience a peaceful and non-violent lifestyle. I underline the idea of philosophical education as a fundamental means to promote a culture of peace and the denial of violence, inspired by Gandhi’s statement: “If we are going to bring about peace in the world...we have to begin with the children” [A.J. Ward, *Developing a culture of peace and non-violence through*

*education*, Gandhi Research Foundation, 1998, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/peace4.htm>, 16.09.2020]. Of course, just reminding children of the advantages of peace is not enough to develop this human culture, and repeating the consequences of violence is useless [40]. Basically, the institutionalization of moral and social values such as peace and tolerance is not achievable except through practice and application in life [40, p. 130]. On the other hand, the denial of religious violence in the world requires moderate citizens who have achieved a kind of equilibrium and harmony from within. As some scholars have argued “inner harmony is reflected in social harmony” [41]. Achievement of inner and social harmony is a critical mission we can accomplish through philosophical education for children. For this reason, some education experts have claimed that “the core aim of education is to feature the all-around development of a child” [42].

In addition, the emphasis on practical reason in this educational model (instead of focusing on theoretical and abstract issues) provides the basis for the practice of tolerance and non-violent encounter with others. Because, as philosophers argue: “a human is a social creature” [43]. Hence, human children instinctively - by their *fitrah* (innate natural disposition) - tend to build relationships with their fellow human beings and understand others. The findings of an academic study reveal that appropriate spiritual education, in the circles of philosophical inquiries, provides the basis for the growth of this primordial talent, namely, the development of children’s cognitive, social and emotional skills [44]. In short, we can lead students to their proper maturity in the light of philosophical education to understand and avoid violence and develop their innate talent for empathy and non-violent coexistence with others. In this regard, in the continuation of the discussion, I will try to deduce and analyse the most significant ethical components and communication skills in interaction with fellow human beings using the epistemological and practical capacity of the philosophical education model.

### ***6.1. Equipment of children with the power of reasoning and critical thinking***

One of the essential characteristics of philosophical education is its emphasis on free-thinking and critical-logical thought. This cognitive skill component prepares students for self-revision, modification, replacement and reformulation of opinions. Peace education and the denial of religious violence depend on students’ autonomy and freedom in three fundamental areas: thought, action and speech [45]; because from the point of view of natural rights, “the child shall have the right to freedom of expression” [46]. Education experts believe that philosophizing also requires that assumed boundaries and freedom of thought and action in children be recognized [27, p. 42]. During the process of philosophising (critical thinking), “a culture of peace cultivates a mind-set characterized by the transition from the use of force to the reasoning, of conflict and violence to dialogue and peace” [1, p. 184]. Thompson’s field research indicates that conflict resolution education - in the process of philosophical

training - can improve students' skills in problem-solving, critical thinking and decision making. It also can improve social skills such as respect for diversity, empathy, cooperation, exploration, and expression of feelings [1, 46].

To strengthen the power of reasoning and critical thinking as an influential component in denying violence through philosophical education, I propose using Haynes's method designated 'Circle Time' in primary schools [27].

In the Circle Time method, the emphasis is on free-thinking, establishing healthy and constructive relationships in the classroom, and providing conditions for students can ask their questions freely and solve them effectively. In this education method, teachers encourage students to manage their behaviour and emotions, listen to each other's words and speak in turn. By this approach, they try to encourage children to think logically and critically and to express their opinions freely. In this learning process, students address a question from various points of view to collaborate and interactively think about making the question clear, not about reaching a consensus with each other. "Motivation is about seeking the truth, not decision-making and convergence of ideas. Differences and divergences are normal and expected." [27] Thus, adopting such a method by underlining 'innate truth-seeking' in the philosophical education program strengthens the spirit of acceptance of adversaries, creates intellectual independence in children, and provides a basis for reducing tension and denying religious violence. When we equip children with the power of reasoning and critical thinking through philosophical education, they naturally avoid selfish prejudice and dogmatism and instead experience a kind of wise religiosity. Undoubtedly, the influence of doctrinal bias, dogmatism, and religious decrees in the occurrence of religious violence is hidden from readers.

## ***6.2. The induction of empathetic thinking and behaviour***

One can consider the transmission of empathetic thinking skills to children and, consequently, tolerant treatment of non-coreligionists as one of the strategies to deny religious violence, according to the system of philosophical education. By empathetic thinking, I mean that, as much as possible, we put ourselves into another situation and experience her/his emotions as if they belong to us [17, p. 256]. We can achieve empathy by resorting to moral imagination. Moral imagination is especially significant when we put ourselves in the role of people who act violently and immorally and can understand their evaluation to have better reasons for our judgment. "As such, the importance of the term is primarily ethical. That is, one way of caring is to step out of our own feelings, perspective, and horizon and imagine ourselves instead as having the feelings, perspective, and horizon of another." [17, p. 269] Some experts in philosophical education have considered empathic imagination as the principal activity by which we are able to inhabit a more or less common world; a world of shared gestures, actions, perceptions, experiences, meanings, symbols, and narratives [47]. Therefore, if in the process of philosophical education, while teaching the pupils critical and logical thinking, the culture of empathy with the audience is also transmitted to

them, they will analyse opposing ideas with more tolerance. According to Jonathan Glover, a philosopher of contemporary education, moral-oriented education for children who think critically and rationally can cultivate their spirit of impartiality and tolerance towards the audience and increase their sensitivity toward the baseless and wrong ideologies. He has conducted in-depth investigations on violence and atrocities committed by human beings worldwide throughout the twentieth century. According to him, societies in which despotism, torture, and crime are prevalent are mostly those that have nurtured a spirit of bigotry and, in his words, ‘benign rebellion’ in their children [48].

The model of philosophical education emphasizes empathetic and tolerant behaviour away from violence and hostility towards the audience and peer group. In this model, the educator acquaints the children’s minds with moral concepts such as peace, justice, fairness, compassion, love, etc., by asking questions. By teaching this rational-moral principle that ‘the end does not justify the means’, he directs their behaviour toward empathy and tolerance with others, both coreligionist and non-coreligionist. Therefore, we do not exaggerate if we consider transmitting a culture of peace and non-violence against others as one of the fundamental goals of philosophical education.

I reiterate that in teaching this humane and moral culture to students, simply reminding them of the advantages of peace and the unfortunate consequences of violence is not enough, and repeating it is fruitless. We must help students fully understand and engage with what happens in the development of peace and tolerance and reduction of violence and aggression. They should not suffice to blind emulation of what we say to them [40, p. 12]. Basically, the transmission of a culture of peace and moral and social values such as empathy and tolerance is not possible but via rehearsing and imagining them in life [40, p. 130]. Undoubtedly, one of the obstacles to peaceful and non-violent interaction with others, especially with non-coreligionist, is bigotry and prejudice-based defence of religious beliefs, rituals, and figures.

In philosophical education, students learn from the experience of others to look at issues from both ‘self’ and ‘other’ perspectives and evaluate their own views and opinions. Of course, this requires open-mindedness, empathy, mutual respect, and avoidance of prejudice. Philosophical education enables students to promote their own non-biased assessment with impartial reasoning. It is unreasonable to expect them to be inherently realistic and unbiased. Educators should provide some situations in which the students can contemplate their problems impartially and neutrally and engage in dialogue. In my opinion, the experience of impartiality is an effective achievement in the denial of religious violence that children can achieve through philosophical education.

In addition, a considerable proportion of the occurrence of religious violence is due to spiritual narcissism, inability to manage emotions, anger control, lack of empathy, weakness in social communication, and incapability to understand the audience’s feelings deeply, all of which are related to ‘emotional intelligence’ [49]. Therefore, strengthening empathy and tolerance towards the audience - as one of the ways to deny religious violence - is not possible without

cultivating emotional intelligence. Various studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence - in the sense of “growth of sympathy and empathy with the audience and management of feelings in social relations in children”- has been strengthened after participation in the circles of philosophical exploration [50]. In these courses, students learn to understand their own and others’ feelings better, establish an empathetic relationship with them and manage the difference of opinions and arguments in the best form [51]. Hymer has shown in his research that developing empathy as one of the components of emotional intelligence is an essential social skill that students achieve in the philosophical education process [52]. Students with more powerful socio-emotional skills, such as empathy and tolerance, are less likely to experience behavioural disorders and peer conflict [53].

Interestingly, one of the most significant advantages of the program of philosophy for children is the intensification of empathy, better understanding of the views of others, and sensitivity towards other individuals in society [54]. Relying on the component of sympathy and altruism in emotional intelligence, Schertz argues that an educational system should provide an atmosphere of curiosity and exploration for the students in which they can share their own opinions and support each other. According to him, the community of philosophical inquiry can be a determining tool and an appropriate paradigm to increase the development of sympathy [20].

The P4C program also highlights this socio-ethical principle: Children need to develop sensitivity, compassion and concern for the well-being of others. As well as being able to make defensible moral judgments, they need to be aware of their feelings and those of others. “They need to know the part that feelings play in the acceptance or rejection of a particular belief. This means they have to pursue the tricky business of self-management. They need to learn what to do with feelings and how to learn with them or in spite of them.” [27, p. 38] Being emotionally intelligent enables students: firstly, better understand and manage their emotions; secondly, to have more successful relationships with their peers because of more useful social skills; thirdly, it can help prevent crime or deviant behaviour [55]. In this way, numerous studies have revealed that philosophical education, by strengthening children’s emotional intelligence, learners them how to better adapt to their environment and not resort to violence in tense situations. To put it in a nutshell, one of the necessary skills for children of our time - which now more than any other time requires peace and tranquillity than ever - is to have the power of empathy and tolerance as communication skills can control their emotions. In this way, they can listen to the opinions and beliefs of others, tolerate their opponents, and coexist peacefully with them without tension and violence.

### ***6.3. Teaching an aesthetic attitude to the Universe (as creature of God)***

As mentioned earlier, human history is replete with many religious atrocities that stem from dogmatic faith and a sense of responsibility to God. The

perpetrators of this violence commit countless brutal crimes and brutally kill many innocent people in the name of religion and the implementation of divine precepts. So Masango has not exaggerated the claim that “Some religious rituals provoke violence among believers” [56]. What is even more catastrophic is that religious people are able to justify their acts of violence in the name of God [56]. Reflecting on this unfortunate historical fact, the importance of philosophical education in correcting children’s attitudes and behaviour to deny violence becomes apparent. In the process of philosophical education, we must engage children’s minds with these philosophical questions:

- How does a merciful God consent to bullying and violent acts by His servants?
- Can faith in the ‘God of Peace and Love’ and a sense of responsibility to Him actually lead to such acts of violence?
- Can faith in God and a sense of responsibility to Him really lead to such violent and brutal behaviours?
- Can obedience to God, the source of tranquillity and all perfection and beauty, necessarily lead to such harsh and cruel consequences?

The primary source of hostility and massacre in the name of religion and God is ignorance and religious deviation. Similarly, the way out of these violent situations is to rely on reason and rationalism in faith [57]. Those familiar with the history of philosophy are well aware that Philosophy is inherently opposed to violence and seeks the realization of ‘maximum peace and good’ for all human beings. Pacifism and the love of people have been consistently among the central concerns of the Muslim sages.

Therefore, in the philosophical education of children, while emphasizing rationality in the field of religiosity, we must present to them an aesthetic image of the Universe and the Creator. Such an image merely bears the fruit of peace and love for the servants of God, not malice and violence against them. For example, the political philosophy of Farabi and Avicenna is based on peace, justice-seeking, support of justice-seekers and the denial of oppression and violence against human beings [58]. In Avicenna’s philosophy, not only reverence for humans and philanthropy have been simultaneously underlined, but love for fellow human beings is also highlighted: “he is ordered to his neighbour by justice and peace” [59]. Farabi also, before Avicenna, at the end of his ‘Essay on Acquisition of Prosperity’ (*Tahsil al-Sa’adah*), has examined these issues that a philosophy that is not based on honesty, justice-seeking, support of justice-seekers and denial of oppression to humans is a baseless philosophy [58].

Undoubtedly, this peaceful and just approach of Muslim philosophers, which ensures humanity and respect for the rights of fellow human beings, is rooted in their aesthetic view of existence and God, the Creator of this world. Accordingly, in the process of philosophical education of children, their understanding can be elevated to this transcendent level – ‘an aesthetic view of existence and a loving faith in God’ - by the following argument:

- A true man of faith loves God.
- Love of God requires the love of His effects.

- Humankind is a particular and chosen effect of God.
- Conclusion: therefore, the true man of faith loves humankind. Anti-human violence, then, conflicts with true love and belief.

#### **6.4. Further explanation**

In the perspective of Islamic philosophy, when we reach the love of God through His knowledge of beauty as well as his majesty and magnificence, which is His mercy and grace, love for people is inevitable. Here Mulla Sadra has an aesthetic rule: “love of everything is associated with the love of its effects” [60]. Accordingly, the love of people is the same as the love of God, given that they are the effect and creature of God. The meaning of Mulla Sadra’s remarks is that the love of God is not separated from the love of His effects. All creatures, including humans, are created by God. Therefore, if someone loves God, he cannot lack the love of people and all human beings. Thus, “care and compassion towards people are among the effects of the love of God” [2, p. 4]. In his interpretation of the Quran, he describes the love of creatures as a function of the love of God and considers the love of people to be a sign of true mystics [57, p. 260].

Obviously, someone who shows compassion to people through divine love will never cause violence and resentment to them. There is no doubt that a philosophical education based on such a peaceful and aesthetic foundation cannot accept anti-human religious violence. In my opinion, the simple and unaffected minds and the pure nature of children are effortlessly receptive to subtle and attractive philosophical themes such as beauty and love. The description of God as a beautiful and perfect truth, the source of all the beauties of the universe, is undoubtedly the responsibility of philosophical education for children. Belief in such a beautiful and perfect God has different stages, the highest of which is a love-based sense of humbleness before Him. Humility and surrender to such a Being lead to love in him and his effects. In other words, love in God leads to love in people. Such Love, which is associated with a sense of responsibility and effort to realize the rights of people, has no result other than compassion, peace, and the denial of violence.

#### **6.5. Development of Caring Thinking Skill (CTS)**

Care is one of the dimensions of thinking in the ‘philosophy for children’ curriculum presented by Lipman. He considers care as an emphasis on something we respect and value [61]. When we think ‘caringly’, we think about the valuable things, the things we care about, the things that are asked of us and require our contemplation and attention [23]. “Without caring, thinking is devoid of a values component...If thinking does not contain valuing or valuation, it is liable to approach its subject matters apathetically, indifferently, and uncaringly.” [17, p. 270]

Apart from instilling information, knowledge, and critical thinking, some scholars believe that “caring elements should be attached to contemporary education because they are crucially needed to reflect the internalisation of ethics and values” [62].

Accordingly, caring and committed thinking is one of the effective practical skills in denying religious violence that children can learn in philosophical education. The model of caring thinking, along with ‘creative thinking’ and ‘critical thinking’, constitutes the third dimension of thought. At the core of this way of thinking are emotions and feelings. The epistemological slogan of the founders of this type of thinking is: “Think with your heart, not just your head!” [63].

In this fundamental skill, children realize the actual value of anyone and everything, regardless of moral or ideological worth. For example, they distinguish between the identity of individuals and their beliefs from every religion and creed and value only the existential identity of people and not their acquired beliefs. It is interesting to note that Islam has been promoting the elements associated with the concept of caring thinking in its agenda of producing a well-balanced and successful ummah [64].

In Islamic philosophy, this kind of caring thinking is explained in the context of love in human beings as God's particular creatures. In this model of thought, love for people is not merely an emotional and moral love and affection; in this love, there is a kind of benevolence associated with a sense of responsibility before people, regardless of nationality, race, gender and religion. Caring and responsible thinking require the defence of the rights of people before those who commit evil actions and violently trespass on the rights of individuals [60, p. 107]. Theoretically, caring thinking can prepare students’ minds for a peaceful and non-violent lifestyle; so that, in the process of philosophical education, they compare everything to its ideal state (what it could be). A theoretical discussion about the following philosophical questions can be a reasonable practice for this non-violent way of thinking and living:

- What world would we prefer to live in: a world full of peace and tranquillity or replete with violence and insecurity?
- What makes life worthwhile: violent thinking and behaviour or peaceful coexistence with fellow human beings?
- In which meaning is humanity more relevant: selfish violence or altruistic compassion?
- Do we have the right to disrespect and commit violence against non-coreligionists as God’s family? (In Islamic thought, there is a piece of advice about caring thinking from the Prophet of Islam, who said: “All people are the family of God, and the most beloved of them to God are those who bring more benefit to his family out of compassion” [65]. That is, people should be safe from his harm and violence).
- How can I take care of myself and control my emotions and reactions in stressful situations?
- What are the effects and consequences of human violence against others?

Students will not be able to achieve the status of ‘other-perception’ and understand the values based on other-caring unless they internalize and objectify concepts such as the lovable world, peace, tranquillity, violence, humanity, compassion, altruism, self-caring and the like. These educational achievements for children can only be achieved by reflecting on these philosophical questions. Similarly, as long as children do not develop other-caring skills, they will not achieve spiritual maturity, the culture of ‘respect for dissent’, and avoidance of religious violence.

According to Lipman, one of the dimensions of care in thinking and learning is affective thinking: “the educational approach to the teaching of thinking has to include affective thinking” [17, p. 266].

In caring thinking, our affection is part of our argument. For example, if we are looking for a justified reason for the anger that the awareness of child abuse creates in us, we can say that the abuse of the oppressed is immoral. In such a position, affective thinking argues that violence should not be committed against the oppressed.

Consequently, children achieve self-evaluation and self-reform in the process of philosophical education and the acquisition of theoretical and practical skills. In this way, they not only see themselves as responsible for their thoughts and beliefs but also as responsible for their behaviour and actions. With the development of caring and responsible thinking along with other dimensions of thought in the light of the correct implementation of the philosophical model in the educational system, we can expect the occurrence of destructive phenomena such as violence and bullying to be minimized in schools.

## **7. Suggestions for future research**

This paper proposes the following potential issues and scopes for further research direction in the future:

1. critical analysis of philosophical education in the contemporary world: a comparison of divine and secular philosophical systems as the foundation of education;
2. reconstruction and presentation of the model of ‘world peace’ based on Islamic philosophy;
3. the impact of philosophical education on the meaning of life and solving the crisis of absurdity and Nihilism in the young generation;
4. the effectiveness of philosophical education in encountering children with the fundamental challenges of life such as sexual maturity crisis, choice of field of study, selection of a job, criteria for choosing a life partner, etc.

## **8. Conclusions**

In a general description, philosophical education can be considered as a program for teaching creative thinking to understand philosophical issues for children by the emphasis on some socio-ethical principles such as self-reform,

justice, fair treatment, judgment based on trust in criteria, and respect for other's opinions. Hence, the orientation of philosophical education at its dawn has been toward social ethics and spirituality. However, the research gap in the analysis of the effectiveness of this educational model in denial of religious violence is very evident, despite its great necessity and importance. While in my opinion, one of the most basic functions of Philosophy, especially in ideological communities, is the reinforcement of spirituality and morality in order to promote peace and the denial of violence in childhood and adolescence. In these societies, the prevalence of verbal violence, the humiliation of religious minorities, and physical brutality among students are becoming increasingly worrying. This rampant outbreak of violence has caused concern among parents and social and educational officials.

Sustainable development of peace requires a global effort based on educational principles to change individuals' attitudes and behaviour towards a peaceful and non-violent culture. Since war and violence begin in the human mind, the defence of peace and the denial of violence must also be constructed in their minds, especially from childhood.

This paper is a partial effort and an effective step to promote the culture of peace and the denial of violence in the world, using the epistemological and practical capacity of the philosophical education program. Here, in explaining the epistemological geometry of this program, I have tried to reveal that it is a suitable educational model to promote a safe and non-violent lifestyle, both in terms of theoretical foundations and in terms of objectives and methods.

The model of philosophical education, or any similar approach based on intellectual dialogue, proposes educational-operational strategies within which schools can decrease violence and bullying behaviour through cultivating open-mindedness, empathy, tolerance, respect, and compassion for fellow human beings. As long as children do not develop a spirit of acceptance and other-caring skills via the process of philosophical education and caring thinking, they will not achieve the spiritual maturity necessary to respect dissent and avoid religious violence.

In philosophical education, while emphasizing rationality in religiosity, schools should also provide students with an aesthetic image of existence and the Creator; Teaching such an aesthetic attitude can result in peace and love for God's servants, not malice and violence against them. Intellectual educators should fertilize children's minds with the philosophical-Islamic doctrine that the love of God requires the love of people, for the love of God, is inseparable from the love of His effects. Hostility and violence against people as God's family are not pleasant to the Merciful Lord.

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