

Bridging the ‘unserious’ gap between critical and confessional Islamic education: Islamic Critical Realism

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The aim of this paper is to make the case for a contemporary educational philosophy of Islam to help young Muslims to transcend the conceptual obstacles that prevent the integration of their faith with the intellectual conditions of post-modernity. These obstacles include a philosophically ‘unserious’ and dangerous gap between ‘disenchanted’, rationalist, critical, non-denominational religious education, such as academic Islamic Studies, and ‘enchanted’, sometimes literalist, confessional education-in-Islam that young Muslims are prone to receive in mosques, madrasas and elsewhere.

The paper argues that the philosophy of critical realism at its original, dialectical and meta-real moments so fittingly ‘underlabours’ for the contemporary interpretation, clarification and conceptual deepening of Islamic doctrine, practice and education as to suggest and necessitate a distinctive branch of critical realist philosophy, specifically suited for the purpose of bridging this ‘unserious’ gap. I call this philosophy Islamic critical realism (ICR).

At the level of original Islamic critical realism, the paper argues that the philosophy of critical realism is uniquely well-placed to help revitalise Islamic praxis and education due to its sharing basic core metaphysical values with Islam: ‘underlabouring’ and ‘seriousness’.

The paper then explains how the Islamic critical realist intellectual fulcrum of ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality and the dialectical critical realist framework of MELD provide a coherent and enriching interpretative framework for articulating an authentically Qur’anic world-view and for understanding the life of Muhammad in such a way that which enables young Muslims to retain both a confessional commitment and a critical distance from their own traditions of faith and to study and learn from those of other faith traditions and none.