

# Al-Jāhīz and the Poetics of Teaching – A Ninth Century Muslim Scholar on Intellectual Education

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Al-Jāhīz's prolific life and scholarship very much reflect the ideal of a lifelong pursuit of learning. This ideal is a characteristic of Islamic piety and underlies the concept of education in Islam in general.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, al-Jāhīz's literary and scholarly work is a sophisticated and elegant embodiment of the humanist concerns of classical Arabic-Islamic education as epitomized by the term *adab*,<sup>2</sup> that is, the expression which signifies the very notion of a general or 'liberal' education within the framework of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the classical European tradition, Socrates (469-399 BCE), "the model teacher in European thought," is credited with making a lifelong pursuit of learning pivotal to the philosophy of education [see also Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg (ed.), *Philosophers on Education* (London: Routledge, 1998), 15 and 27].

<sup>2</sup> Initially, the concept of *adab* related to the customs and codes of conduct as inherited from one's ancestors. From about the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE on, it stood for the ethical and practical rules of proper conduct deemed praiseworthy in the medieval Muslim world. Additional connotations of *adab* included the knowledge necessary for a certain profession; good breeding (proper upbringing of children, their morals, and their good behavior); courtesy; etiquette, and refined manners; aristocratic learning; and urbanity. *Adab*, however, also designates the main form of classical Arabic *belles-lettres*, which explicitly aims at both the education and the entertainment of the reader. See I. Lapidus's important article on this topic [Lapidus, I. M., "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action. The Classical Muslim Conception of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam" in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. B. D. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)] and, furthermore, P. Heath's contribution to this volume.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'education' refers to both (a) the action and process of educating or of being educated (including a stage of such a process), and (b) the knowledge and development resulting from an educational process. The term 'liberal' here is meant to allude to the *artes liberales* with the double meaning inherent in this term. The *septem artes liberales* or canon of seven topics to be taught dates back to antiquity. There, however, *ars* did not mean 'art' in the modern sense of the word. Instead, it referred to the 'technique,' 'ability,' or 'branch of knowledge' and 'scholarship.' The *artes* were qualified as *liberales*, because they were appropriate of the "free man's" (*homo liber*) attention and efforts. In the Middle Ages, *liberalis* was also derived from *liber*, book, thus implying the meaning of 'book knowledge' in general.

The *septem artes* of antiquity include three branches of scholarship dealing with language (the *trivium*, triple path), and four dealing with numbers (the *quadrivium*, quadruple path), thus aiming to represent the harmonic order of God's creation. The *trivium* consists of (1) grammar, (2) rhetoric, and (3) logic and dialectic; the complimentary *quadrivium* comprised (4) arithmetic, (5) music, (6) geometry (including geometry in its modern understanding, but also drawing and representation of the earth in maps, along with description of countries and people; in other words, what we call geography today), and (7) astron-

Al-Jāḥiẓ did not leave behind a philosophy of education as such or any definite outline of his educational concepts. Rather, we find issues in intellectual, moral, and religious education discussed at numerous places in the works of his encyclopedic literary and scholarly *œuvre*.<sup>4</sup> These issues are to be found therein in diverse thematic contexts which, for al-Jāḥiẓ, constitute the framework of the complex question of education. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the prominent sections in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*The Book of Animals*)<sup>5</sup> and *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (*The Book of Eloquence and Exposition*), which impressively promote 'the book' as an indispensable tool of learning.<sup>6</sup> Several more passages in these and other of his writings deal with the education of princes, the social status of educators and tutors, virtues, character and habit formation, and even with the etiquette to be observed when attending literary salons, to mention just a few topics. One of al-Jāḥiẓ's literary essays, however, is expressly devoted to pedagogical and didactic issues: it is his *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn* (*The Book of Teachers*). This essay offers much insightful information on the means and ends of Islamic education, the order of studies, the nature of learning and teaching, and the curriculum. It is an important source for our knowledge of al-Jāḥiẓ's views on intellectual or 'liberal' education, with the latter taken here to mean its humanist definition as propounded by Plato (427-347 BCE): the improvement of the mind through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which is accomplished through a lifelong process that begins in youth and continues in later years.<sup>7</sup>

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omy. As will be shown later, al-Jāḥiẓ indicates these topics also as components of the course of study within an Islamic framework.

- <sup>4</sup> The difficulties in studying al-Jāḥiẓ's educational views within the framework of his encyclopaedic *œuvre* are pointed out by al-Qazzāz [al-Qazzāz, Muḥammad Sa'īd. *Al-Fikr al-tarbaḥī fi Kitābat al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1415/1990), 9]. For certain works on moral education, which appear, however, to have been wrongly attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ, see Pellat, Charles, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ: Translation of Selected Texts*, transl. from French D. M. Hawke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 23-24.
- <sup>5</sup> For the view of *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* as a 'religious' book, see Pellat, *The Life*, 21-22. Maṣṣūr suggested rendering this title as "The Book of Life" [cf. Maṣṣūr, Sa'īd, *The World View of Al-Jāḥiẓ in Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, Ph.D. thesis, Montreal (Alexandria: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977), 300-301].
- <sup>6</sup> On this issue, see also al-Jāḥiẓ's insightful passage on "The Best Way of Preserving Documents" [trans. in Pellat, *The Life*, 209-211]. See also my article "Praise to the Book! Al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba on the Excellence of the Written Word in Medieval Islam" in *Franz Rosenthal Memorial Volume, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006).
- <sup>7</sup> In more general terms, Plato's ideal of (higher) learning includes also religious education, along with education in the arts and sciences, both for youth and older people;" see Jowett's remarks in the introduction to his translations of Plato's *Republic*, a work Jowett calls "the first treatise on education" [Jowett, B. *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), iv-v; furthermore, see Shrivastava, K.K., *Philosophical Foundations of Education* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2003), 9-11].

### 1. *The teachers*

It seems that al-Jāḥiẓ was compelled to write the essay about teachers by the often unfair treatment of professional teachers which he both observed and may even have experienced firsthand when working as a teacher in Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> This might help us to understand why, in this work, al-Jāḥiẓ not only defends, but champions schoolteachers and stresses their superiority over all other categories of educators.

In the introductory passage of the *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn*, he emphasizes the fundamental impact writing has had on human civilization as a means of preserving and communicating knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Without writing, we would have "lost track of the happenings of the past and not have known much about the generations preceding us."<sup>10</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ points to the key role that teachers have played in providing humankind with the knowledge of writing. Writing and calculation, he says, are God-given, as are the teachers themselves, for God made them available to us, and entrusted them with teaching the knowledge we have today. He argues that our gratitude to our teachers should be exceeded only by our gratitude towards God, who brought the written word into existence. By means of this powerful metaphor, al-Jāḥiẓ projects in the reader's mind the image of teachers acting as God's tools. Thus, he is creating an appreciative attitude towards the teaching profession. The grounds for this appreciation are then developed in the *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn* in various ways. Teachers are described as knowledgeable, diligent and hardworking people. Moreover, they are characterized as passionate about their profession and as people who suffer along with their students when the students do not progress as expected. Parents should not, therefore, blame teachers when a child is slow in education. Instead, parents should look at the intellectual capacities of their offspring.<sup>11</sup> Yet, al-Jāḥiẓ does not praise all teachers alike. In the *Kitāb al-Bayān*, for example, the image of teachers who do not meet the stan-

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ was a teacher in the broad sense of the word, despite the fact that he himself reports that the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) wanted to entrust him with the education of his children, but later changed his mind apparently because of al-Jāḥiẓ's ugliness [Pellat, Charles, "al-Djāḥiẓ", in *El<sup>2</sup> = Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, II: 385-388, here 385; Qazzāz, 27].

<sup>9</sup> This idea is also evident in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Hayawān* [Maṣṣūf, 286]. For al-Jāḥiẓ's view on the significance and merits that the Qur'an grants to writing and to the written word, see al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, IV parts in two vols., 5th ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Khānī, 1405/1985), I: 79-80; and Pellat, *The Life*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn* in *Kitābān li-l-Jāḥiẓ: Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn wa-Kitāb fi l-radd 'alā al-mushabbihā*. Two Essays by al-Jāḥiẓ: "On Schoolmasters" and "Refutation of Anthropomorphists", ed. Ibrahim Geris (Ibrāhīm Jiryis), 57-87. First edition, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Srugy-Acco (also: 'Akkā: Maṭba'at al-Surūjī), 1980), 59-60.

<sup>11</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 60, 63; Qazzāz, 228.

dards of knowledge and performance expected of them serves him as a topic to entertain the reader. There, bad schoolteachers are portrayed as foolish and stupid; they are comic figures, of the sort found in most Greek comedies.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. *The curriculum*

The curriculum is a key issue in intellectual education, and al-Jāḥiẓ is well aware of it. In the *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn* he suggests an impressive variety of topics to be taught. These include both topics to be studied within the framework of formal school instruction and also subjects to be studied informally. This conclusion can be drawn despite the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ does not make a clear-cut distinction between curricular and non-curricular topics; nor does he specify the places where education is to take place. He does, however, determine, for example, that children of the lower classes need to be instructed in certain crafts, including farming, trading, construction, goldsmithing, sewing, weaving, and dyeing.<sup>13</sup>

For the primary level of education, al-Jāḥiẓ specifically enumerates the obligatory topics to be taught in the following sequence: writing, arithmetic, law, the religious duties, the Qur'an, grammar, prosody, poetry, and history. He stresses that priority is to be given to teaching the essentials of these topics. In particular, this is true in the case of grammar, of which pupils must know only what is necessary for correct verbal communication and for writing.<sup>14</sup> Arithmetic, however, requires special attention, because accuracy is even more important here than it is for writing.

At a more advanced level, al-Jāḥiẓ recommends physical training and exercise by suggesting the involvement of adolescents in hunting and sports, including instruction in the use of light arms. These areas are mentioned next to astronomy (that is "the knowledge of the stars"), music (*luḥūn*; including how to play various musical instruments), medicine, and geometry.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ puts great emphasis here and in several other places on teaching advanced students to express themselves in a way that is understandable to people without the need for additional interpretation and comment. Teachers, therefore, should make their students familiar with the arguments of good writers and their

<sup>12</sup> *Bayān* I: 248-249; Mez, Adam, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Repr. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 177.

<sup>13</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 66.

<sup>14</sup> This may sound surprising since al-Jāḥiẓ's hometown, Basra, is considered to be the birthplace of both the Mu'tazila (one of the earliest and most important schools of speculative theology in Islam, which placed reasoning and dialectic at the center of its doctrine) and Arabic grammar [Pellat, *The Life*, 1-2].

<sup>15</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 66. An interesting note of al-Jāḥiẓ's on practicing music and playing various instruments, even in the strict society of Medina, is translated in Pellat, *The Life*, 53. For more detailed information on al-Jāḥiẓ's views on music, see H. Kilpatrick's contribution to this volume.

eloquent use of clear words. Moreover, they are obliged to make students understand that content has priority over style.

Furthermore, it is advisable that the students should also be taught what “the well-trained government clerks and the scribes in chancelleries” (*kufāt al-sultān wa-kuttāb al-dawāwīn*) need to know; this knowledge “is more useful” for them than that of “editors and penmen”.<sup>16</sup> The two main goals of learning, however, are that the students acquire a broad, general education and specialize in two or three branches of knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Education as a process and the methods of learning

Al-Jāḥiẓ is highly interested in the nature of learning and in the methods and means of imparting and absorbing knowledge. While he advances some of his pedagogical principles in this regard in a plain and straightforward manner, he communicates others in a more subtle, literary way, that is, via anecdotes or stories, for example, through which he invites his readers to draw their own conclusions.

In *The Book of Animals*, for instance, al-Jāḥiẓ generally notes that learning at school emerges from the interaction between teacher and student. More specifically, he suggests that for learning to take place, the teacher, as a rule, must ensure that his students are both motivated and dedicated to learning. This is because only “the one whose heart is exclusively preoccupied with learning will [actually] learn”.<sup>18</sup> On a different note, in his treatise *On Jest and Earnestness* (*Fī l-jidd wa-l-hazl*), his fondness for humor and irony is obvious when he says that studying is an “advantageous enterprise,” because “it keeps people from gossiping, frivolous amusements, scandal-mongering and coveting other people’s goods. [This alone is already] of great value and prime importance in the realm of religion and religious duty.” Then, speaking more seriously, he maintains that studying is also “of great significance for improving character and inculcating good habits.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, learning should be a pleasant experience, because when it becomes a burden, “the soul grows weary and nature shrinks from it.”<sup>20</sup>

As for methods of teaching, one can deduce from al-Jāḥiẓ’s *Kitāb al-Mu’allimīn*, first, that it is part of the teachers’ duties to introduce the students

<sup>16</sup> *Mu’allimīn*, 73-74.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣṣī, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, 7 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938), I: 59-60; Pellat, *The Life*, 132.

<sup>18</sup> *Ḥayawān* V: 542.

<sup>19</sup> *Majmū‘ Rasā’il al-Jāḥiẓ, wa-hiya rasā’il lam tunshar li-Abī ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Bāwl Krāws (Paul Kraus), Muḥammad Tāhā al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1943), 75; Pellat, *The Life*, 211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

properly to the topics discussed in class;<sup>21</sup> second, the teachers should choose topics for teaching which are of major relevance to the students;<sup>22</sup> and, third, select ideas that are not shrouded in complexities or scattered throughout a long discourse.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Jāhīz repeatedly advocates that words need to be used carefully in class. They must be chosen in due consideration of both the situation of teaching and the audience to be addressed.<sup>24</sup> In addition, teachers must take the intellectual capacities of their students into account and use a language understandable to them. It should be language that is neither too complicated nor too simple, and by no means vulgar.<sup>25</sup>

More key issues in education are insightfully illustrated in a short account given in the *Bayān*. This account lets us picture a father who gives his son's instructor directions regarding the ways in which he wishes his child to be educated. As for the emotional and moral dimensions of the teacher-student relationship, we learn from this text, first, that children tend to imitate their teachers in terms of their habits, behavior, and character. Teachers, therefore, need to be very careful about what they say and do. Moreover, they should pay due attention to their own appearance, cleanliness, and the gestures they make. This is because taking care of yourself is the first step towards taking care of the child entrusted to you. Second, as regards the nature of teaching and learning, teachers must know that they should not move too quickly from one subject to another. A topic first needs to be adequately understood by the students and given time to take roots in their minds before another is begun. "Be [to your students] like a physician who does not hasten to give treatment before knowing the [nature of the] ailment," al-Jāhīz says. Finally yet importantly, teachers and educators should know as well that the more the student learns, the greater their financial reward will be.<sup>26</sup> It is also in the *Bayān* that the teachers are given two more particularly remarkable pieces of advice: "teach ... and learn at the same time" and "make your teaching a studying lesson [for yourself]."<sup>27</sup> This idea seems to echo the Qur'anic command which reminds the "masters [in the Scripture]" and "followers of the Lord" of their twofold obligation: to teach and to continue studying.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75; see also Qazzāz, 239, 275.

<sup>24</sup> *Bayān* I: 138-39.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* I: 136, 144.

<sup>26</sup> See the detailed instructions that 'Utbā b. Abī Sufyān, a member of the élite in early Islamic society, gave to his son's tutor [*Bayān* II: 73-74].

<sup>27</sup> *Bayān* I: 273-274.

<sup>28</sup> *Kūnū rabbāniyyīna bimā kuntum tu'allimūna l-Kitāba wa-bimā kuntum tadrusūna* [Qur'an, 3:79]. For a discussion of this verse in an educational context, see my article "Teaching", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols., ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006), V.

Liberal education, in general, is characterized by such distinct ideas as the instruction of students in critical thinking (for example, by having them examine apparent contradictions in literature); training them in correct, effective and persuasive verbal expression; and having them acquire skills in ways of reasoning that make good judgment possible.<sup>29</sup> In the *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn*, al-Jāhīz deals in various ways with questions of this kind. He does so, for example, in a lengthy discussion of memory and memorization, topics of principal concern to education, including the methods of teaching. Interestingly enough, al-Jāhīz stresses that the independent thinkers and researchers of the past disliked memorization. Relying on it makes "our minds disregard distinction" and neglect thinking. People with good memories are tempted to rely simply on what their predecessors achieved, without attempting to reach conclusions of their own. He says:

The leading sages, masters of the art of deductive reasoning and [independent] thinking (*aṣḥāb al-istinbāṭ wa-t-taḥkīm*) used to be averse to excellence in memorization, because...the one engaged in memorization is only an imitator, whereas deductive reasoning is that which brings the one engaged in it to calculated certainty and great confidence.<sup>30</sup>

Still, he also says that a good memory is needed and valuable for the process of studying. Otherwise, the results of any study would be lost and the fruits of research would not last.

... when (the student) neglects rational reflection, ideas do not come quickly to him, and when he neglects learning by memorization, [these ideas] do not linger in his mind or remain long in his heart.<sup>31</sup>

Naturally, ideas of this kind are very significant in the context of learning and intellectual inquiry. They clearly display al-Jāhīz's Mu'tazilism and may be a reference to his great work *Kitāb al-Tarbī wa-l-tadbīr* (*The Circle and the Square*), in which he campaigns against mere servile imitation and makes great "efforts to stimulate thought and win the reader for the Mu'tazilite cause," as Charles Pellat stated.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Care for the students facilitates learning

In several of his writings, al-Jāhīz emphatically calls upon teachers to treat students gently and in a most loving manner. In the *Kitāb al-Mu'allimīn*, for example, he advises them to reach their students' hearts when it comes to the subject matter taught, since learning is greatly facilitated by love. In fact, he concludes

<sup>29</sup> I am referring here, in particular, to the ideas promulgated in the late fifth century BCE by the Sophists, especially those of Protagoras (480-411 BCE) [Rorty, *Philosophers*, 25-26].

<sup>30</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 62-63.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Pellat, *The Life*, 21.

this book with a moving passage on the merits of treating students kindly and responsibly:

I am of the opinion that you should not force (the student) [to learn] and so make him dislike good manners and education. [Also,] do not neglect him, lest he get used to wasting [time] in amusing activities.... Devise artful means to make yourself more lovable to him than his mother; ... bring out his innate affection with righteous words and the offer of financial [assistance].<sup>33</sup>

Finally, he strongly advocates the idea that the students are our future. He addresses the teachers – and us readers – directly, saying that the students are those

[who] will take your place amongst your people and will take care of [and continue] what you have left behind....<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Ample evidence in several of al-Jāhīz's works suggests, first, that for this ninth century Mu'tazilite theologian and man of letters, education is generally concerned with the vocation of the human being. It aims at preparing humans in thought and action for their purpose and station in life so that they are properly equipped in this life to decide their future lot in the hereafter.<sup>35</sup> Put differently, for al-Jāhīz, education is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

Second, al-Jāhīz's views on intellectual education profoundly reflect both his Mu'tazilite stances and his essentially dialectical intellect. This is why for him learning means not merely training the mind, but also applying it.

Third, for al-Jāhīz education is not a process that (certain, privileged) humans are born to undertake. Rather, it refers to the achievements and results of the individual efforts of human beings. This makes al-Jāhīz's philosophy of education an inclusive rather than exclusive one, with its perhaps most noticeable feature being al-Jāhīz's stance towards the social classes and groups in society that he considers to be in need, worthy and capable of formal instruction. In fact, much of his educational advice seems to be directed to the general Muslim public, expressly including to some degree the lower classes. Yet, the proposal to instruct certain social groups in various crafts or professions also indicates that al-Jāhīz, like Plato,<sup>36</sup> believed that society is best served when its citizens have been educated in accordance with their needs and interests so that they eventually be-

<sup>33</sup> *Mu'allimīn*, 86; Günther, Sebastian, "Advice for Teachers: The 9<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim Scholars Ibn Saḥnūn and al-Jāhīz on Pedagogy and Didactics", in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. S. Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 89-128, here 124-25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Gimaret, D., "Mu'tazila," in *EP<sup>2</sup> VII* (1990): 783-793.

<sup>36</sup> Ellis, Arthur K., John J. Cogan and Kenneth R. Howey, *Introduction to the Foundations of Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 67.



come engaged in endeavors meaningful to them. If this notion were seen from a different perspective, it would also mean that, although al-Jāḥiẓ understands learning as a private endeavor and a matter of making personal effort, he also recognizes and stresses its public purpose and far-reaching impact on Muslim society.

Fourth, a number of al-Jāḥiẓ's pedagogical premises and principles are particularly striking. They include:

- (a) the key role teachers and educators play in the process of efficiently transferring a well-defined body of knowledge to students, and in facilitating their quest for intellectual development and the acquisition of certain useful skills;
- (b) the virtues teachers need in their profession, such as modesty, patience, and a passion for working with youth;
- (c) education understood as 'guidance' rather than 'correction' of youth; and
- (d) the teacher-student relationship viewed as an attentive, caring, and even loving one.

The latter is an educational concept that is known from the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle (348-322 BCE), with whose works al-Jāḥiẓ was particularly familiar. Yet it also seems to anticipate the idea of the father-son relationship between teacher and student, which becomes an issue of major significance in the mystical writings of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) and in educational books of later medieval Muslim scholars such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), Ibn Jamā'a (d. 1333) and al-<sup>c</sup>Almawī (d. 1573).<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the preceding points indicate, first of all, that in al-Jāḥiẓ's opinion intellectual education is more than merely the sum of its occupational parts, such as following a certain curriculum, managing the educational environment, assessing students' learning, etc. In fact, he seems to view education in a holistic way that draws together intellectual, aesthetic, and moral dimensions, and that brings to the fore how much the educational process is an endeavor that can enrich the life of both the student and the teacher. Second, they also show that al-Jāḥiẓ's refined and highly aesthetic-literary pursuit of several essential qualities of learning not only allows him to engage in questions of the structure and nature of teaching, but also to actually communicate these insights to his readers and, thus, to encourage them to learn. Hence al-Jāḥiẓ presents himself as a scholar who not only promotes learning and teaching but also actually advances an idea

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<sup>37</sup> See my article "Education: Islamic Education", in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), II: 640-645, here 644. In the Western literary tradition, it is above all the courtesies between the Roman poet, Virgil, an epitome of human knowledge, and Dante (d. 1321) in the *Divine Comedy*, which present the most eloquent picture of affection between teacher and student, master and disciple.

that one could call, in the Aristotelian sense, a 'poetics of education.' He does so, for example, when he aims at human development by drawing together aspects of 'art' and 'inquiry,' and by fusing 'reason' and 'emotion' to make education become a kind of "interpretive lens of human conduct."<sup>38</sup> He further achieves this when addressing in his different literary and scholarly works issues pertinent to the main fields of learning, which are commonly known as the "three broad constituents" of Aristotelian education; that is: (a) training for the body, (b) habituation for the appetites and emotions, and (c) instruction or "education through reason."<sup>39</sup>

While some of these latter aspects are certainly worthy of further exploration, we need no further inquiry to appreciate al-Jāhīz as one of the very earliest Muslim scholars theorizing on education and, importantly enough, a 'liberal' Muslim educator whose pedagogical ideas indeed have universal appeal and significance.

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<sup>38</sup> Hansen, David T. "A Poetics of Teaching", in *Educational Theory* 54/2 (2004): 119-142, here 122.

<sup>39</sup> Rorty, *Philosophers*, 54.

**Al-Jāhīz:**  
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