

Beyond Ritual Formalism: Islamic Existential Pedagogy and The Ontology of Care

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Abstract

This study reconstructs the ontological foundation of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Al-Ma'un Theology through Martin Heidegger's concept of Sorge (care) and draws out implications for contemporary Islamic education. The starting point is a real problem: Islamic education has drifted toward ritual formalism and cognitivism, shedding its transformative purpose along the way. Using phenomenological hermeneutics, the study argues that Al-Ma'un Theology is not simply a philanthropic doctrine but a structure of authentic existence. Dahlan (1868–1923) treats amal (social action) as the primary way Muslims care for the world — what Heidegger would call Being-in-the-world — and as the only meaningful alternative to anonymous conformity (Das Man). Three implications follow for Islamic education: educators need to be repositioned as facilitators of disclosure rather than gatekeepers of texts; curriculum must shift from textual mastery to social praxis; and educational success should be measured by whether students actually engage with and respond to human suffering. This study concludes that Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian pedagogy is a humanizing education realized through concrete action in the world.

Keywords: ahmad dahlan, martin heidegger, sorgen, al-ma'un theology, islamic education

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1. Introduction

Contemporary Islamic education has a problem that Sahin (2018:339) names with some precision: a “foreclosed mindset” the perpetuation of rigid, antagonistic cultures rather than transformative religiosities (Sahin, 2018). This manifests in “religious alienation,” where understanding remains confined to cognitive dimensions and ritual formalism, severed from the transformative-social imperative constituting authentic Islamic praxis. Scholars (Ali, 2016; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016; Vanessa & Monk, 2015; Zembylas, 2013) have documented the same gap (Ali, 2016; Vandeyar & Swart, 2016; Vanessa & Monk, 2015; Zembylas, 2013): education that produces piety but not conscience, compliance but not care. This is what makes K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un worth revisiting.

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923) is usually called an educational reformer, but Ali (2017) reads him more precisely as a “practical ontologist” who reconceptualized Islamic faith as inseparable from concrete action (Ali, 2017). His dictum that “compassion and assistance are not merely expressed through words, but must be actualized through deeds (*amal*)” challenges what al-Attas (1979:157) identifies as the false dichotomy between intellectual and spiritual knowledge a division resulting in what recent scholarship terms the “colonization” of Islamic epistemology (Ali, 2019; Cook, 1999; Lumbard, 2024). Dahlan's teaching practice shows what this meant concretely: he refused to advance students to the next Qur'anic verse until they had actually fed the poor. Textual engagement became existential commitment rather than cognitive accumulation.

The connection between Dahlan's critique and Martin Heidegger's existential phenomenology is not obvious, but it is real. Heidegger asserts that “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontologically

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distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (Heidegger, 1962). Authentic existence requires breaking free from *Das Man* the anonymity in which “everyone is the other, and no one is himself” (Heidegger, 1962) which is essentially what Dahlan was diagnosing in the religious formalism of his time.

What links them is care (Sorge). Heidegger defines Dasein's fundamental structure as Sorge: “the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)” (Heidegger, 1962). Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un translates this care into faith's theological prerequisite. When Dahlan repeatedly taught Surah Al-Ma'un until students provided for the destitute, he was performing what Heidegger calls *Aletheia* — unconcealment — pushing students out of anonymity and into direct encounter with human suffering.

Existing scholarship on Dahlan stays within historical, sociological, and practical frameworks (Maraulang, 2025; Marlina Fakhurazi, & Shofiyah, S., 2024; Mohamed Shohib, M. W., Rahmawati, L. E., & Mahmudhassan, 2024). The ontological foundations of his *amal* have not been examined through existential philosophy. Elias argues for “embodied existentialist epistemologies” that conjoin binary oppositions like mind-body and revelation-reason (Elias, 2023). Yet the intersection between Heidegger's phenomenological ontology and Dahlan's theology of praxis remains largely unexplored.

The gap matters because Islamic education's difficulties are partly ontological. Institutions struggle with the “colonized mind” paradigms grounded in epistemologies foreign to Islamic worldviews (Ali, 2025; Lumbard, 2024). Sahin reveals that contemporary pedagogy conflates education with dogmatic instruction or memorization, failing to cultivate transformative capacity (Sahin, 2018). While phenomenological hermeneutics and Heidegger's existential analytics offer theoretical tools, these remain underutilized in rethinking Islamic educational foundations. Comparative analysis reveals that while studies examine Muhammadiyah's institutional innovations, they rarely excavate the existential-ontological premises undergirding Dahlan's pedagogical revolution a missed opportunity to reconstruct Islamic education integrating transformative action with theological conviction.

This study reinterprets Al-Ma'un theology through Heidegger's Sorge ontology. Central research questions include: (1) How can Dahlan's *amal* be reinterpreted as Heideggerian Sorge? (2) What ontological structure underlies Al-Ma'un theology through existential phenomenology? (3) What implications arise for contemporary Islamic education regarding educator roles, curriculum orientation, and educational outcomes?

The study addresses two connected problems: the epistemological disconnect between Islamic education and genuine Islamic worldviews, and the pedagogical failure to produce students who are transformed rather than merely informed. By demonstrating that *amal* represents not philanthropy but a fundamental mode of Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), this research offers philosophical foundations for reconceptualizing Islamic education beyond information transfer. Authentic Islamic education, through the Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian synthesis, becomes existential disclosure where in learners emerge from anonymity to authentic engagement with others' suffering, realizing their potential as beings-who-care responding to Elias's call for embodied epistemologies and Sahin's vision of compassionate transformative pedagogy (Elias, 2023; Sahin, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Method

2.1. Heidegger's Ontology of Sorge (Care)

In Heideggerian phenomenology, human existence is designated as *Dasein* (Being-there), fundamentally distinguished by its capacity to question its own Being. Heidegger articulates: “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontologically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (Heidegger, 1962). Unlike objects merely present-at-hand, Dasein exists as *In-der-Welt-sein* (Being-in-the-world) never isolated but always situated within meaningful contexts.

Central to these analytics is Sorge (Care), constituting Dasein's primordial structural totality. Heidegger defines: “The Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in- (the world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term 'Care'” (Heidegger, 1962). This tripartite structure consists of: (1) existentiality (projection toward possibilities), (2) facticity (thrownness into a given world), and (3) fallenness (absorption in everyday concerns). Miller elucidates that care is “a priori structural totality” lying “before” every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation,’ “making possible all specific acts whether theoretical or practical (Miller, 2022).

Sorge distinguishes authentic from inauthentic existence. Inauthentic existence manifests as *Das Man* where “everyone is the other, and no one is himself” (Heidegger, 1962) conforming to anonymous public norms. Authentic

existence requires “anticipatory resolution,” confronting finitude while owning one's own most possibilities. Care summons Dasein from dispersed everydayness to authentic potentiality-for-Being.

2.2. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un

K.H. Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un transforms Islamic orthopraxy by grounding faith validity in existential engagement with suffering rather than ritual correctness. Based on Surah Al-Ma'un (Q.S. 107:1-7), which identifies “deniers of religion” as those who “repel the orphan” and fail to “encourage feeding the poor,” this theology challenges ritual formalism. Dahlan's pedagogical praxis refusing student advancement beyond Al-Ma'un until they fed the destitute embodies “transformative repetition.”

Dahlan stated, “Humans need to and are obliged to apply and carry out their primary knowledge, not just treat it as mere knowledge” (Mulkhan, 1986:10). He also said, “Most people's leaders have not been willing to sacrifice their wealth and lives” (Hadjid, 2013). His dictum, “...has not truly become a Muslim unless he really practices Islam,” (Hadjid, 2013), represents an ontological claim: religious knowledge attains validity only through embodied praxis.

Dahlan's method performs “enforced disclosure,” compelling perception of concealed suffering through pedagogical epoché suspending ordinary consciousness to reveal originary phenomena. This resonates with phenomenological reduction, reorienting religious subjectivity from textual abstraction to lifeworld engagement.

2.3. Research Methodology

This study employs phenomenological hermeneutics, treating both Dahlan's theology and Heidegger's ontology as texts requiring interpretive engagement. Following Camilleri and Varlik, who argue philosophical hermeneutics productively engages Islamic thought by allowing “different interpretive traditions to illuminate each other,” the methodology is comparative-syncretic seeking convergences without subordinating traditions (Camilleri & Varlik, 2022).

Data sources include: (1) Primary Heidegger's Being and Time (1962) and Dahlan's practices (Hadjid, 2013; Mulkhan, 1986); (2) Secondary scholarly literature on phenomenology and Islamic education. Analysis follows three stages: thematic identification (Sorge/amal, Aletheia/kashf), structural comparison of ontological architectures, and synthetic reinterpretation generating dialogical insights.

Following El-Bizri's phenomenological approach avoiding historical reduction while maintaining textual rigor, this employs “existential-ontological reading” interpreting Dahlan's practices as manifestations of implicit commitments (El-Bizri, 2022). As Akbar (2021:587) demonstrates with Gadamerian-Qur'anic dialogue, cross-traditional engagement generates “new insights” while respecting distinctive horizons (Akbar, 2021). Authentic understanding emerges through Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” productive encounter transforming both traditions through mutual engagement.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Amal as Manifestation of Sorge

For Heidegger, Dasein's fundamental structure is care — Sorge — not a psychological emotion but an ontological constitution that defines what human existence is. “The Being of Dasein is Care (Sorge)” (Heidegger, 1962:230) position care not as one characteristic among many, but as the very structure making human existence possible. This ontological priority means every mode of relating to the world presupposes and operates within care's structure. Without Sorge, human existence would collapse into mere presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*).

Heidegger defines Sorge's tripartite structure as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)” (Heidegger, 1962), capturing Dasein's temporal ecstasy: projecting toward future possibilities (existentiality), already thrown into factual situations (facticity), while absorbed in everyday concerns (fallenness). Blattner clarifies this structure means Dasein is never static substance but dynamic unfolding characterized by “issue-taking” relationship to its own Being (Blattner, 2023). Care structures all human commitment — from routine tasks to the most serious decisions — enabling Dasein to encounter entities as things that actually matter.

Sorge's existential significance emerges in distinguishing authentic from inauthentic existence. Inauthentic existence Das Man (the They) represents conditions where “everyone is the other, and no one is himself” (Heidegger, 1962). Dreyfus explains Das Man constitutes not actual people but the “dictatorship of the public” prescribing how things are

done, what is valued, and who one should be (Dreyfus, 1990). Inauthentic Dasein seeks “tranquilization” in conformity, finding comfort in following what “one” does yet this hides a deeper failure: avoiding responsibility for one's own most fundamental possibility. Carman argues that while Heidegger claims descriptive neutrality regarding authenticity, his language frequently turns normative, suggesting inauthentic existence represents self-alienation where Dasein is “not itself” but dispersed, tranquilized, fundamentally disowned (Carman, 2003).

This is where Ahmad Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un comes in. When Dahlan commanded students, “Find the poor, bring them home... bathe them, feed them” (Muhammadiyah, 2020), he was making an ontological intervention — shifting the very structure of religious existence. This pedagogy's revolutionary character lies in rejecting “ritual formalism” reducing Islam to performative acts divorced from existential engagement. Dahlan's insistence that students couldn't progress beyond Al-Ma'un until concretely feeding the destitute represents radical redefinition: understanding (*fahm*) reconceived not as cognitive mastery but embodied transformation manifesting in compassionate action.

In Dahlan's framework, *amal* (righteous action) is not faith's accessory but the mode through which authentic Islamic existence is realized. This mirrors Sorge's ontological status: just as care is not something Dasein has but what it “is”, *amal* in Dahlan's thought is not something Muslims do but how Muslims authentically “exist”. The parallel holds at the level of inauthenticity. Heidegger's Das Man is Dasein living by public norms without owning its choices; Dahlan's ritual formalism is the Islamic equivalent — following prescribed practices without the existential commitment that would make them authentic faith. Singer, studying charity in Islamic societies, observes charity has functioned throughout Islamic history not merely as social welfare but as “performative validation of faith” means through which theological commitment becomes existentially real (Singer, 2008).

There is a further parallel: what might be called the “crisis of presence” in both thinkers. For Heidegger, authentic individuals must confront anxiety (*Angst*) not fear of specific entities but unpredictable revelation that the significance of totality ultimately rests on nothing. Dahlan's pedagogical method instantiates parallel confrontation. By forcing direct poverty encounter seeing, touching, feeding the destitute he creates “pedagogical anxiety” shattering textual religion's comfortable anonymity. Students cannot hide behind ritual correctness or doctrinal knowledge; they confront suffering demanding responses that cannot be delegated to “what one does” but must be owned as authentic commitment.

This changes how we understand religious praxis. Taylor and Al-Bawwab, examining “obligated voluntarism's” paradox in Islamic charity, argue that while “zakat” appears to eliminate voluntarism, it actually “induces a virtuous cycle of voluntarism and generosity” by cultivating dispositions transcending mere calculation resonating with Heidegger's notion that authentic resoluteness is “letting-oneself-be-summoned” to one's own most possibilities (Al-Bawwab, 2023; Taylor, 2025). Dahlan's *amal* operates similarly: obligatory (grounded in Qur'anic mandate) yet becomes authentic only when owned as response to suffering's call.

Dahlan's theology enacts what Heidegger calls *Aletheia* — unconcealment. Dahlan's insistence on direct poverty encounter operates as disclosure event. Poverty, concealed beneath abstraction layers, is brought into unconcealment. Students undergo a “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*) temporal ecstasies where past (concealed suffering), present (immediate encounter), and future (ongoing response demand) converge with existential urgency.

Read through Heidegger, this cuts past the classical Islamic theological debate about whether charity is constitutive of *iman* (faith) or merely its consequence. Charity is neither external to faith nor merely its consequence; Rather, it constitutes the mode in which faith exists authentically. Just as Sorge structures Dasein's Being, charity constitutes faith's authentic realization in the world. Religious existence, viewed through this Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian synthesis, is reconceived as fundamentally characterized by “being-toward-others-in-need” not ethical addendum to vertical (human-divine) relationship but the very structure through which divine-human relationship is authentically realized.

Deconstructing “Das Man” through the Courage to Act (Amal)

Heidegger's Das Man (the They-self) describes the condition in which individuals lose themselves by following the mass current. In this condition, “everyone is the other, and no one is himself” (Heidegger, 1962). Individuals practice religion simply because their environment does, without understanding the underlying meaning. Dreyfus & Wrathall articulate that inauthentic Dasein “lets her life be 'lived' by the common-sense ambiguity of that publicness in which nobody resolves upon anything but which has always made its decision.” (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2018) This inauthentic mode represents existential abdication where in Das Man assumes responsibility for choices, leaving “indeterminate

who 'actually' chooses.” Religious existence becomes precisely such abdication performing rituals mechanically, inhabiting faith as inherited costume rather than owned commitment.

Ahmad Dahlan confronted the Das Man of his era: a society that practiced religion by habit and inheritance, not by choice. Contemporary society considered Qur'anic memorization sufficient proof of piety, embodying Dasein “dispersed into the anyone into the tasks that one is expected to perform” (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2018). Dahlan (Muhammadiyah, 2020) shattered this anonymous comfort through provocative questioning: “Do you understand this verse? If you understand it, implement it!” By forcing students toward unconventional concrete action organized orphan care Dahlan propelled them toward authentic individuality achieved when someone courageously separates from the “heedless crowd” becoming a “caring person.”

Heideggerian resolution makes sense of what Dahlan was doing. Rowan elucidates the resoluteness involving Dasein “acknowledging the need to take responsibility for itself” and “realizing it has to become the very author of its life.” (Rowan, 2016) When Dahlan refused advancement beyond Al-Ma'un until students fed the destitute, he facilitated the “call of conscience” the summons from inauthenticity's dispersal toward authentic self-ownership. This call emerges from Dasein's own most possibility confronting its thrownness. Dahlan's pedagogy creates conditions where students hear this call: poverty's reality summons them from anonymous conformity toward resolute response.

Critically, resolution does not constitute world escape but authentic engagement. “Resoluteness does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it as free floating ego” (Heidegger, 1962). Dahlan's students, feeding the poor, engage reality profoundly not through anonymous charity but owned commitment emerging from disclosed understanding. Grene clarifies that for Heidegger, authenticity does not entail existential rebellion that overcomes entanglements in a conformist world (Grene, 1952). Rather, it involves 'appropriation,' primordial recognition of our own historical past. Thus, the authentic Muslim does not abandon Islamic tradition but appropriates it taking it over individually rather than receiving it passively.

This kind of appropriation through charity speaks directly to the “courage crisis” in contemporary religiosity. Igwe notes that giving excuses for not choosing — out of fear of responsibility — is itself a form of inauthenticity. We are running away from ourselves (Igwe Ekemezie, I. B., 2025). Ritual formalism represents precisely this flight: maintaining religious identity's appearance while evading existential commitment. Feeding poor is easy when done anonymously as social custom; it becomes existentially demanding when undertaken as individual response to disclosed suffering. Dahlan's pedagogy transforms charity from Das Man conformity into authentic resolution “choosing to choose,” wherein Dasein “takes without reservation as much responsibility for itself as allowed by its finitude” (M. A. (Ed. . Wrathall, 2021).

Read through Heidegger, Dahlan's Al-Ma'un theology shows charity as the mode through which authentic Islamic existence is realized. Those claiming faith yet refusing compassionate action remain in undifferentiated everydayness, neither authentically nor inauthentically existing but “falling” inherited into patterns. Rowan notes anxiety revealing existential truth “happens to Dasein” involuntarily, yet continuing to be authentic does indeed require choice (Rowan, 2016). Dahlan's repetitive Al-Ma'un teaching creates pedagogical anxiety repeated poverty confrontation until students cannot avoid choosing: either own this reality and respond, or explicitly refuse to acknowledge chosen inauthenticity.

This structure instantiates “anticipatory resoluteness” integrating Being-toward-death's individualizing force with resoluteness's commitment to ownmost possibilities. For Heidegger, anticipatory resolution is the link between humans and the world. Dahlan's students, repeatedly encountering poverty while studying Al-Ma'un, undergo integration: theological understanding (verse commands compassion), existential awareness (I'm thrown into the world with suffering), resolved action (I choose to respond) coalesce into stable disposition. This is not a one-time decision but ongoing “repetition” the process in which the original potential of a received form of thought or existence gets released anew (Watts, 2021).

This ownership constitutes “existential jihad” not warfare but struggle against inauthenticity's gravitational pull. Das Man exerts constant pressure: “everyone memorizes the Qur'an this way,” “that's how we've always practiced Islam.” Authentic existence means resisting that pressure — not by rejecting the tradition but by taking ownership of it. Guignon notes authenticity is a matter of achieving and expressing the openness that is the defining potential of Dasein as such (Guignon, 2008). Yet this is not narcissistic individualism but responsibility-taking: authentic Muslims answer divine summons rather than social expectations.

Practical implications for Islamic education are decisive. If religious inauthenticity manifests as conformity to “what one does” praying because everyone prays, fasting because community fasts then authentic religious education must facilitate movement from inherited to owned faith. This cannot occur through intellectual persuasion alone; it requires

enforced encounter with reality demanding response. Students confronting actual poverty cannot remain neutral; they must choose. This choice, repeatedly made, cultivates resoluteness what Igwe describes as finding oneself, achieving “spiritual equilibrium of the dictates of Being.” (Igwe Ekemezie, I. B., 2025)

Rowan observes that even after anxiety discloses existential truth, “Dasein would easily forget the truth it had disclosed to itself (Rowan, 2016). It is more probable that Dasein simply avoided facing this truth either by ignoring or by denying it – by immersing itself in the business of its daily life or by accepting other interpretations about its Being.” Dahlan's repetitive method combats this forgetfulness. Courage emerges not dramatically but cumulatively through “numerous and repeated moments of resolution where students may recognize true self over time.”

The ongoing work of forming authentic religious subjectivity is Al-Ma'un theology's real contribution. In a contemporary context where Muslims confront identity crises torn between secular modernity and fundamentalist reaction Dahlan's model offers a third path: authentic appropriation of Islamic heritage through resolved engagement with contemporary realities. Muslims who feed hungry today because Al-Ma'un demands it has neither abandoned tradition nor frozen it; they have taken it over through courageous action witnessing that faith without charity is Das Man religiosity conformist performance lacking existential substance. This is Islamic existence liberated from anonymity not through individualist rebellion but through determined commitment to inherited yet personally owned religious identity.

3.2. Education as Aletheia

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's educational method, read through Heideggerian phenomenology, is Aletheia — truth as unconcealment. This concept reconceptualizes truth not as correspondence (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*) but as primordial event wherein beings emerge from concealment into presence. Wrathall clarifies unconcealment represents “the analysis of the ground of propositional truth,” (M. A. Wrathall, 2011) addressing ontological conditions making truth-as-correctness possible. Heidegger's etymological recovery of *aletheia* (a-letheia, “un-hiddenness”) emphasizes truth fundamentally involves a struggle against concealment (*lethe*) a “robbery” wrenching beings from hiddenness into intelligibility's light.

Heidegger is clear that Dasein is where disclosure happens. “Being-true ('truth') means Being-uncovering” (Heidegger, 1962), indicating truth is not statements' static property but Dasein's active existential mode. Fundamentally, Dasein's Being-in-the-world already constitutes an “opening” (*Lichtung*) a clearing where entities show themselves. Saad demonstrates aletheia emerges through logos as “the hermeneutical operator which accomplishes unconcealment,” signifying entities in the “how” of their uncoveredness (Saad, 2020). Disclosure always involves interpretation; entities present within horizons of significance constituted by Dasein's projects. However, disclosure is perpetually incomplete. Heidegger's phenomenology acknowledges “methodological humility” recognizing “what shows itself is not exhaustive, comprehensive, or absolute” (Saad, 2020). Incompleteness is ontological necessity: finite, situated Dasein's disclosures remain partial, perspectival, vulnerable to covering-over.

Dahlan's practice does this — what we might call “pedagogical Aletheia.” When Dahlan repeatedly taught Surah Al-Ma'un refusing student progression until they'd fed the destitute, he performed disclosure operations forcing poverty ordinarily concealed beneath social abstraction, geographical distance, ideological rationalization into unconcealment. Students undergo Heideggerian “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*), temporal ecstasy where in past (hidden suffering), present (immediate encounter), and future (ongoing response demand) converge with existential urgency.

This form of disclosure connects to contemporary “transformative pedagogy.” Sahin argues for models grounded in *Tarbiyah* (compassionate transformation) facilitating “religious identities formation” through “critical and dialogical approaches” rather than dogmatic transmission (Sahin, 2018). *Tarbiyah*, signifying nurturing growth toward wholeness, resonates with Heideggerian disclosure insofar as both reject static knowledge-as-possession favoring dynamic becoming processes. Research demonstrates transformation involves “navigating epistemological tensions” and “transformation of authority relationships” while maintaining “spiritual and cultural authenticity” (Karwadi A. R., Setiawan, A., Ferdi Hasan, M., 2025). This parallels Dahlan's negotiation between Qur'anic authority and experiential learning, where the text doesn't merely tell students about obligations but shows them through enforced encounters.

Dahlan's pedagogy works through “pedagogical epoché”: suspending ordinary consciousness to create conditions for seeing anew. Students cannot rely on abstract knowledge or secondhand reports. They must confront poverty directly, suspending comfortable distance everyday consciousness maintains. This shatters Heideggerian “tranquilization” the illusory sense of existence is managed by following what “one” does. Students experience what Saad describes as “universal design for being corrected on a merely formal level, without any positive demonstration of truth which

allows us actually to see our falsehood.” (Saad, 2020) Dahlan provides precisely this positive demonstration: not lectures about poverty's wrongness but encounters disclosing it as intolerable.

This framework responds directly to contemporary Islamic education's documented failure: the reduction to “ritual formalism” or “teacher-centered approaches emphasizing memorization” that “limit students' capacity for critical inquiry and social transformation” (Karwadi A. R., Setiyawan, A., Ferdi Hasan, M., 2025). Effective reform requires “transformation of authority relationships” where educators facilitate rather than dominate learning. Dahlan's methodology embodies this: rather than positioning himself as sole knowledge source, he creates conditions where in students discover compassionate action's urgency through direct suffering encounters. Authority shifts from teacher's pronouncements to disclosed reality itself poverty demanding response.

Dahlan's method resonates with what Sodikin identifies as essential: “strengthening critical thinking” through “global social issues” engagement while “implementing Islamic values.” (Sodikin, 2025) Dahlan resolves how to cultivate independent, critical engagement without abandoning Islamic ethics through what Sahin conceptualizes as integrating “critical reflection” with “spiritual foundations.” (Sahin, 2018) Students feeding poor after Dahlan's instructions aren't merely obeying authority; they've experienced disclosure wherein poverty's reality and Qur'anic imperative mutually illuminate each other.

What this means for Islamic education is significant and concrete. If authentic education is *Aletheia* concealed realities' disclosure pedagogical practices must be evaluated by realities disclosed, not information transmitted. This assessment shifts from measuring cognitive retention to evaluating existential transformation: Has students' world been announced a new? Have previously concealed dimensions suffering, injustice, interconnection become visible? Have students moved from inauthentic conformity (Das Man) to authentic Islamic identity ownership as those responding to suffering?

This framework challenges the prevalent separation between “religious knowledge” and “worldly engagement.” Sahin *Tarbiyah* commentator integrates spiritual formation with critical social awareness, rejecting *ukhrawi/duniawi* knowledge dichotomies (Sahin, 2018). Dahlan's pedagogy instantiates this integration: Surah Al-Ma'un engagement is simultaneously Qur'anic study and social praxis, spiritual discipline and political awareness. Disclosure is holistic revealing divine command and human suffering, theological mandate and practical responsibility. Education becomes disclosure rather than accumulation, transformation rather than possession — not knowing-that but being-toward-others in authentic care.

3.3. Implications for Islamic Education

Reconstructing Al-Ma'un theology within Heidegger's *Sorge* framework requires real change in Islamic educational practice — in how curriculum is designed, what educators do, and what education is actually for. This responds to what Memon identify as urgent need for “faithful praxis” the “integration of faith-informed principles and pedagogy, or purposeful interaction between educational theory and classroom practice.” (Memon Abdalla, M., & Chown, D., 2024)

First: repositioning educators as facilitators of disclosure. Heideggerian pedagogy is not about knowledge transfer but about what Heidegger calls “letting learn” (*Lernenlassen*) — creating conditions in which students find their own relationship to truth. Islamic education requires radical repositioning: educators become *Aletheia* facilitators rather than sole textual gatekeepers. As Dahlan embodied through bringing students into direct encounter with the destitute rather than delivering prolonged lectures, authentic pedagogical authority emanates from disclosed reality itself. Educators create situations where students uncover (*aletheia*) social suffering and respond authentically.

Memon argue Islamic education's aims cannot be achieved “in the absence of Islamic Pedagogy” wherein “curriculum, pedagogy, assessment” avoid being “solely unidimensional cognitive (absent of moral, spiritual, relational, imaginative).” (Memon Abdalla, M., & Chown, D., 2024) The educator-as-facilitator model puts this into practice: designing encounters where cognitive understanding, spiritual awakening, and moral commitment can happen together. This represents Azzami et al (2024) necessary “madrasah system revamp,” requiring educators creating transformative learning environments integrating “modern teaching practice” with “professional development.”

Teacher education must shift from textual mastery toward facilitative competencies: designing experiential encounters, recognizing revealing moments, guiding students through anxiety (*Angst*) accompanying authentic suffering confrontation (Herman, Sultan, & Suardi, 2025; Herman, Sultan, Suardi, et al., 2025). Research demonstrates effective pedagogy requires “transformation of authority relationships where educators facilitate rather than dominate learning” (Karwadi A. R., Setiyawan, A., Ferdi Hasan, M., 2025).

Second: praxis-existential curriculum integration. Islamic education has long maintained a separation between religious knowledge (*'ilm ukhrawi*) from worldly sciences (*'ilm duniawi*). Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian reinterpretation demands

curriculum reconceptualized through praxis knowledge authentically exists only when enacted. Curriculum must transcend “what is known” (essence) toward “how one exists” (existence). Akrim et al. (2022) demonstrates Islamic pedagogy must resist “western-based models” alienating students “from religious and cultural norms” while engaging contemporary realities through “modern information technology” and “cultural diversity.” (Akrim Setiawan, H. R., Selamat, S., & Ginting, N., 2022)

Every Qur'anic verse or hadith engagement requires phenomenological social reality analysis (Espihani et al., 2025). Learning zakat demands field observation of economic inequality, direct poverty encounter, actual wealth redistribution. This resonates with Memon curriculum renewal framework emphasizing “establishing explicit connections to Islamic canons, living tradition” while foregrounding “contemporary issues like digital learning, racism, social justice.” Synthesis occurs through receiving curriculum itself as praxis where textual study and social transformation become mutually constitutive (Memon Abdalla, M., & Chown, D., 2024).

This addresses persistent calls for “curriculum change to transform teaching and learning” (Amzat, 2022). Transformation required is structural reconceptualization: curriculum becomes disclosure architecture, evaluated by realities disclosed and transformations catalyzed. Research demonstrates effective education requires “holistic development” bridging “traditional Islamic education and modern demands” while fostering “critical thinking, collaboration, digital competencies” alongside “reinforcing religious values through practical engagement” (Taufikin, 2025).

Third: action-reflection pedagogical cycles. Dahlan's “transformative repetition” was always opposed to meaningless memorization — Das Man pedagogy. The contemporary implication is a cyclical praxis: (1) Existential Observation consciousness of suffering inhabiting world; (2) Theological Reflection dialoguing problems with divine revelation; (3) Authentic Action concrete response embodying care (Sorge). This spiral ensures religious study returns to lived reality.

This embodies what Memon term “action research” providing “educators agency to be exemplary educators” enabling transformative pedagogy implementation even within constraining institutional contexts (Memon Abdalla, M., & Chown, D., 2024). It operationalizes “faithful praxis” where “theory is enacted, embodied, realized” through ongoing experimentation with “Islamic pedagogical concepts, principles, themes as emergent theories.”

Fourth: redefining educational outcomes. Islamic educational metrics have typically privileged academic performance or ritual compliance. The Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian synthesis shifts the measure toward “existential authenticity”: students succeed when they move out of Das Man's passive anonymity and become genuinely caring subjects. Educational output becomes individuals courageously bearing responsibility, recognizing without care, faith remains conceptual abstraction. This transforms Islamic education into “humanity laboratories” spaces where students learn authentic existence through compassionate engagement.

This aligns with scholarship emphasizing holistic outcomes. Amzat (2022) argues transformation requires moving beyond conventional metrics toward “effective solutions to educational problems” cultivating “lifelong learning.” The existential authenticity framework gives concrete assessment questions: Does student demonstrate increased awareness of social suffering? Have they moved from passive consumption toward active response? These measure ontological transformation.

Contemporary research supports assessment transformation. Taufikin's study demonstrates when goals shift from “unidimensional cognitive” toward “holistic development,” students develop “critical thinking, collaboration, digital competencies” alongside “moral entrepreneurship, improved student agency.” (Taufikin, 2025) When Islamic education prioritizes existential transformation over information accumulation, it produces graduates both spiritually grounded and socially engaged.

Practical implication is comprehensive assessment redesign: portfolio documentation of community engagement, reflective journals tracing spiritual-moral development, action research projects addressing local social problems (Apriantoro et al., 2024). As Heidegger emphasized humans must “dwell” (*wohnen*) authentically, Islamic education through Al-Ma'un spirit invites students dwelling Islam through grounding values in compassionate action producing

tangible welfare reconceived as existential formation — where learning is transformation from inauthentic religiosity toward authentic Islamic existence grounded in both Heideggerian Sorge and the Qur'anic imperative to serve humanity.

4. Conclusion

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Theology of Al-Ma'un is deeper than social-philanthropic doctrine. Through the Heideggerian phenomenological framework, charity (righteous action) manifests as Sorge (care) a fundamental structure enabling Dasein to exist authentically. Dahlan successfully transforms religious texts into a mode of Being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein), where faith becomes embodied through active engagement with human suffering.

The reading offered here yields three distinct contributions. Philosophically, charity constitutes not merely reward accumulation but humanity's effort to reveal truth (Aletheia) and escape anonymous conformity (Das Man). Charitable action is the ontological event through which authentic existence becomes real — through courageous appropriation of inherited religious identity. Theologically, Al-Ma'un theology represents an “Ontology of Action” positioning social care as an absolute prerequisite for authentic Muslim existence. This transcends classical debates regarding whether charity constitutes or follows from *iman* (faith), revealing compassionate action as the very mode through which authentic Islamic Being-in-the-world is actualized. Pedagogically, Islamic education must be redefined as a “reality disclosure” process. Educational success is measured not through cognitive knowledge accumulation but through students' courage to assume existential responsibility manifested in transformative action.

Islamic educational institutions should shift from textual-formal toward praxis-existential approaches. Curriculum design must integrate theological study with phenomenological social reality analysis. Assessment frameworks should incorporate community engagement portfolios, reflective journals tracing spiritual-moral development, and action research addressing social injustices. Programs preparing Islamic educators must cultivate facilitative competencies beyond content mastery. Educators require training in creating disclosure-enabling environments, recognizing existential anxiety as pedagogical opportunity, and guiding transformation from passive consumption toward active engagement. The educator's role shifts from knowledge transmitter to Aletheia facilitator. Future research should empirically test Al-Ma'un-Heideggerian pedagogical models across different Islamic educational contexts. Comparative studies exploring how diverse cultural settings appropriate this synthesis would be especially productive.

What this reconceptualization envisions is Islamic education as a space — a kind of humanity laboratory — where students discover authentic selfhood through compassionate service. Islam stops being a subject studied and becomes a reality lived: divine compassion actualized through human agency, the Qur'anic imperative met through Dasein's ontological structure as care (Sorge). Learning becomes transformation from inherited religiosity into an authentic Islamic existence that humanizes the humans who inhabit it.

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