

An Introduction to Islamic Psychology

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An Introduction to Islamic Psychology

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Foreword

All too often, the psychological study of religion is explored by methods that need not take into consideration the differences between religious and scientific worldviews in general or attended to what may be *sui generis* about a specific religion. Mohammad Khodayarifard and his co-authors are competent psychologists of faith who present the case for a new paradigm for the psychology of religion. The paradigm does justice to both scientific and religious worldviews, but most important it presents what is *sui generis* about the new paradigm, Islamic psychology.

Part of the justification for the new paradigm is that modern psychology demands theoretical and methodological exclusion of the transcendent. It confines itself to the constraints of natural science. While experimental methods, operationalization, and measurement serve the physical and other natural sciences well, this scientific positivism is inadequate to a psychology of religion in general and to the Islamic paradigm in particular. Islam has never been opposed to science but neither has it succumbed to a psychology that denies the spiritual nature of individuals nor their creator. Terms as *amal*, *fitrah*, *nafs*, and *wahy* cannot be reduced to definitions that exclude transcendence. The inclusion of transcendence demands a dialogue between a psychology open to the transcendent and to ontological realities inherent in religious worldviews. This proposal for an Islamic paradigm takes its ontological claims seriously. It also demonstrates the rich diversity that is possible within this new paradigm.

The absolute *sui generis* truth claim fundamental to the Islamic paradigm is that Qur'anic truth is eternal and unchanging. However, it does not follow from this absolute truth claim that diversity is not possible within this new paradigm. Qur'anic truth must be interpreted and understood. This is a uniquely human act. Factual truths of the natural world have long been accepted in Islam as capable of empirical investigation. One would be foolish not to accept as true the best approximation to reality that science can provide. However, the collective scientific understanding unfolds over time. While Qur'anic truth does not change, our scientific understanding of the scientific truths does as humans advance in their understanding of the created world.

A second point is crucial to a proper understanding of the diversity possible within the proposed new paradigm. Transcendent truths are always open to interpretation. Persons have wide freedom in interpretation and can dialogue and debate differences of sincerely held opinions within the new Islamic paradigm. Since interpreted truths are not absolute, their discussion further justifies reference to the diversity possible within Islamic psychology.

Finally, there exist what can best be described as pragmatic truths. These include instinctive human concerns with ethics, the use of technology, and the economic and political organization – all, which represents lived human existence. These involve truth claims either derived from scientific (factual) or from transcendent truths and thus exhibit great diversity among the faithful in Islam that nevertheless remain unified in terms of one absolute *sui generis* Qur'anic truth.

The authors are respectfully mindful that other paradigms have been proposed based upon different faith traditions such as Buddhism and Christianity. How could we not welcome this call for an Islamic psychology?

Ralph W. Hood Jr

Preface

Contemporary psychology is influenced by scientific naturalism and positivism. Psychological studies attempt to have the best possible control over variables and to have the experiments as close to physical and experimental studies as possible; they provide operational definitions for completely subjective constructs and concepts so as to make them more tangible. They also make use of the most complicated statistical methods and techniques in order to reach the most objective conclusions. Such an attempt is admirable in natural sciences because it has led to a better life, but it cannot be the sole path for sciences related to human nature – especially psychology – to study the mental processes and behavior of human beings. According to Islamic teachings, human beings have an eternal soul, God-seeking *fitrah*,¹ sick/reassured soul and heart, and a life purpose coordinated with the physiological body. What is the place of these concepts in methodology and consequently in present knowledge of contemporary psychology? Regarding the study of human beings' mental processes and behavior, one may ask the question of whether it is basically possible to ignore them all under the pretext that presenting an operational definition of them is not possible or whether it is possible to pay attention to just the parts that can be studied through today's operationalization and experimental method. Such a view limits contemporary psychology to just a supporter of the knowledge gained via experience and deprives it of more qualitative sources of knowledge such as *wahy*.² It is clear that today's experimental psychology has discovered and presented numerous aspects of change, cognition, feeling, emotion, and harms with regard to human beings, which are really acceptable, usable, and continuously applicable. However, one must admit that seeing human beings without any look at their Creator, disregarding the ongoing sovereignty of God over human beings after Creation, ignoring *wahy* as a source of knowledge, mere emphasis on experimental and operationalized aspects, and inability to move toward the subjects which have metaphysical assumptions are the most important challenges faced by the experimental psychology. Obviously, the outcome of such a viewpoint is the description of human beings within only the framework of experimental and natural processes. Is such a description really a comprehensive one?

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- 1 *Fitrah* refers to the human nature and inner predispositions in the state of perfection and uprightness according to which Allah created it.
 - 2 *Wahy* is the Arabic word for revelation. In Islamic belief, revelations are God's Word delivered by chosen individuals – known as Messenger prophets – to mankind.

The experimental approach to psychology, despite all of the mentioned challenges and limits, has lots of proponents; the bias in favor of positivism has moved so forward that the history of experimental psychology has been presented in an unreal, positive, and illusionary fashion. In an interesting study, Harris (1997) compared the main outcomes of classical psychology studies with that of their rewrites in different books. According to most of the present psychology books, in the study conducted by Watson and Raynor (1920), little Albert's phobia of rabbits developed easily, and he then generalized it to all furry white objects. However, in the main study, Albert's phobia developed difficultly, was temporary, and did not have a significant relationship with color or coverings of objects.

The present book includes four parts. In part one, after that, a general definition of psychology is presented, philosophical foundations and modern psychology challenges are reviewed from an Islamic standpoint. Then, the establishment of a kind of Islamic psychology has been suggested in order to face these challenges. In this regard, the possibility, foundations, and characteristics of Islamic psychology have also been introduced. In part two, after that, the research paradigms in the social sciences are introduced, research methods based on the Islamic paradigm are concisely elaborated. To familiarize readers with basic concepts of psychology from an Islamic perspective, parts 3 and 4 have dealt with personality, mental disorders, and psychotherapy. In part 3, both structural and trait approaches to personality have been taken into consideration from an Islamic perspective. At first, the structure of personality has been discussed through an Islamic framework; then, within a trait approach to personality, positive character traits such as kindness, humbleness, and justice and negative character traits such as arrogance and hypocrisy have been noticed based on Qur'anic sources. In part 4, mental disease and health and also the therapeutic methods related to them are introduced from the perspective of Islam.

In the end, we hope readers find this work informative and useful. All professors, scholars, psychologists, and students are welcome to put forward their comments and suggestions on this book so that we would take them into account in our future works.

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