

7. Concluding Reflections

A number of Muslim writers have suggested that the modern sciences or modern scientism are incompatible with Islam. This claim is more plausibly made about scientism than about the sciences themselves, although it must be admitted that the distinction is sometimes blurred, as when researchers present theories interwoven with presumptions contrary to religious belief. It has been suggested that there should be a revival of "sacred science" or an Islamization of the sciences. This project requires the undertaking of scientific research and theorization within a religious or Islamic conceptual framework. The need to carry out this project is felt especially urgently with regard to the social sciences, in which values and worldview play a particularly prominent role.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and understanding. Although, unfortunately, this study has sometimes been associated with perniciously relativistic views, there is nothing about hermeneutics in the general sense outlined here that requires this. The project of nurturing sacred or Islamized sciences is essentially a hermeneutical project, for it requires the reinterpretation and renewed understanding of the sciences from a religious or Islamic perspective.

The idea of an Islamized science will face the objection that the introduction of religious and metaphysical principles and values is incompatible with science. Science is objectifying inquiry, it will be argued, and this requires science to be free from the interference of religion, metaphysics, and value judgments. To this objection, there are two replies.

First, even the natural sciences are not as neutral as they are advertised to be. Secondly, objectivity does not require neutrality, but only a commitment to the ongoing task of making assumptions explicit.

In this paper, I have suggested three grades of religious hermeneutics that may be employed to cultivate sacred sciences: (I) religious understanding at the subjective level; (II) a rejection of methodological naturalism with regard to (a) the description of phenomena, (b) the evaluation of theories, and (c) theory construction; (III) the positive integration of successful theories into a coherent religious worldview.

Muslim scholars can only hope to develop religious hermeneutics along the lines suggested here through the recovery of the Islamic intellectual sciences, the conscious rejection of the scientific

worldview, and an engagement with the sciences aimed at wisdom. For the wisdom thus sought to have depth, it is essential for researchers to consider the multiple layers of meaning to be found in the texts and other phenomena that serve as objects of inquiry.

A hierarchical stratification of levels of meaning that begins with the exterior/interior (zahir/batin) division will take shape, in sha' Allah, through dialogue with the secular sciences as researchers draw on the Islamic intellectual traditions to elaborate hermeneutical foundations for Islamic social sciences.

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