

Abstract

A brief review of some of the major proposals for the project of Islamic social sciences are given. It is observed that in all of these proposals, interpretation and understanding are crucial. Hermeneutics is introduced in the broad sense of the study of interpretation and understanding, and a brief review of its developments is given, with an emphasis on the work of Gadamer. Some of the problems of the application of hermenteutics are discussed along with suggestions about the rational evaluation of competing views that may be formulated in initially incommensurable languages.

The idea of religious hermeneutics is next developed with reference to the positions that have been taken by Bultmann, Plantinga, and Nasr; and on this basis three grades of religious hermeneutics are distinguished. An attempt is made to overcome some problems for an Islamic hermeneutics with reference to proposals by William Chittick and Leo Strauss. Problems with the application of an Islamic hermeneutics are reviewed and solutions offered.

The view that the objectivity of science precludes religious science is rejected in favor of the view that objectivity does not depend on neutrality but on articulation, the process of making assumptions and presuppositions explicit and to formulate them with ever greater precision (where this is appropriate).

Complications that arise for the application of an Islamic hermeneutics for the social sciences are surveyed, and it is proposed that the application of an Islamic hermeneutics for the social sciences must be developed in a dialectical relationship to the scientific traditions whose secularity gave rise to the calls for sacred science, and in particular for Islamized social sciences.

Keywords: hermeneutics, sacred science, Islamized science, interpretation, understanding, philosophy of the social sciences, Bultmann, Gadamer, Nasr, Plantinga.

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