Past and Present of Psychology of Religion in Turkey

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Introduction

Science has a cumulative and progressive structure; thus a scientist needs to know the history of her/his field, scientists in that field, what kinds of studies have been done, and which academic activities have been completed. Taken collectively, these topics form a specific scientific tradition. This collection of phenomena is termed as a “paradigm” by Kuhn (1962) and as “research traditions” by Laudan (1993, p. 83), who emphasizes that a scientist is a member of a certain scientific society and a scientific perspective. Besides the academic activities carried out, publications and scientific meetings in a discipline, bibliography specific to the field, and history and literature studies are very important to form a specific culture and tradition. With regard to the development of psychology of religion, Schaub (2012, p. 379) states: “Those who are conversant with its history look forward with confidence to its future.” From this point of view, those kinds of studies, which can present an overview of a field, are very important. Such studies contribute to the shaping of an academic environment particular to the field at a specific point in time and history.

The psychology of religion, in any ‘modern’ form, has existed in Turkey for about 60 years. Because of that it is ambitious to say that this relatively new field has a scientific tradition in Turkey. Since the early 1900s there have been some publications, which can be attributed to the field; and after 1950, when the field officially obtained its academic position, scientific studies increased. Since that time, studies have increased substantially and literature studies have begun to contribute to a scientific culture and tradition. Most of the descriptive studies of the field are authored by Koç (2004, 2005, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) and Yenen (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Yenen & Sezen, 2008; Sezen & Yenen, 2009). While these texts investigated the field of psychology of religion from a certain perspective, the most recent study of Koç (2012) introduces the field in general terms. In his study, Koç describes the historical development of the field in Turkey and discusses some of the academics, publications, theses, dissertations, and scientific meetings that have comprised the field. In the present
study our aim is to portray psychology of religion’s historical progress in Turkey, compare the past and present, identify some present concerns and draw conclusions on how best to address them.

History

As a modern discipline, psychology emerged in the late 19th century, primarily in the West. But both in ancient history and the medieval age, it is possible to identify thinkers who expressed ideas that can be considered as contributions to modern psychology. In ancient times, Herodotus, Aristotle, Plato and other philosophers had ideas about the individual and his soul. In the medieval age – especially in the Islamic world – scholars were also interested in subjects like soul, mental health, personality, perception, senses, and thinking. According to Haque (2004), early Muslim scholars (from the period of Prophet Muhammad to the 10th century) presented ideas about human psychology that were noted within philosophical articles. In this period a discipline emerged called *Ilmu’n-Nafs* (the science of the self-psychology) that dealt with psychological issues. According to Hökelekli (2006), Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857) is the first Muslim psychologist and he used the word “nafs” (self/soul) for the first time in a psychological context. Later al-Kindi (d. 866), who is accepted as the first Muslim philosopher, and other Islam philosophers and thinkers – like at-Tabari (d. 870), al-Balkhi (d. 934), Farabi (d. 950), Abu Bakr ar-Razi (d. 925), Avicenna (d. 1037), Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 1108), Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030), Gazali (d. 1111), Ibn Tufail (d. 1185), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1351) and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) – presented their ideas and works about nafs. These scholars, along with their original contributions, can be regarded as the pioneers of ‘modern’ psychology within an Islamic context. After the 15th century, while science and art in the West began to develop rapidly, the Islamic world could not keep up with Western developments. Thus it is difficult to report important developments in psychology in the East. However with the influence of Westernization movements in the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire, modern psychology began to appear in the Western style in Turkey.

In the Ottoman Empire, students in religious education for their bachelor’s degree were trained in Madrasahs, schools giving traditional Islamic education. With the intention to establish institutions, which would adjust religious education appropriate to the modern era, Hoca Tahsin Efendi attempted to create for the first time a modern faculty of theology in the middle of the 19th century. Therefore and with the leadership of Hoca Tahsin Efendi, some of the first lectures, that lacked institutional affiliation, were hosted in a variety of