Reflections on the Possibility of an Islamic Psychology

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In 1993, *Din Psikolojisi* [Psychology of Religion] by Hayati Hokelekli appeared. In the foreword, the author, who is one of the pioneering scholars in the field in Turkey, says:

Along with its common laws and principles, human psychology has special lines that vary from one culture to another. One should view it as normal that most of the views addressed and the studies involved in the psychology of religion as a discipline of Western origin belong to the Western scholars, for no scholarly tradition has formed yet in this field in Turkey or other Muslim countries, nor has adequate scholarship yet been produced. We, however, attempt in this book to bridge our indigenous addition, we have made a special effort to keep Islamic concepts and values in the foreground and associate the psychological findings and analyses with the accounts occurring in Islamic sources.

The final sentence in the above quote seemed noteworthy to me, having been newly introduced into the field of psychology of religion. Further, it inspired the writing of this article on Islamic psychology, which has been the subject of hot debate in academic circles of Turkish psychologists of religion.

Hokelekli’s views on the negative impact of the Western tradition of science are shared by many Turkish scholars of religion. As a matter of fact, these views are parallel to the positions of the non-European and non-American scholars who are opposed to the Anglo-Saxon philosophy and tradition of science. One may observe that many studies have been done both in the Muslim world as well as in many other non-Western countries that discuss the matter of indigenousness, holding that it should be taken into consideration as an important determinant in explaining human behaviours.

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Psychology is a science of Western origin. The Western tradition of psychology has played a major role in the foundation and development of psychology as a social discipline in non-Western countries. However, problems have arisen in some non-Western cultures, as the values and priorities do not overlap with the Western tradition of psychology. Further, new perspectives have been suggested by non-Western scholars, giving priority to the indigenous cultural values as a reaction to the present structure. Studies from Muslim countries in general, and Turkey in particular, consider the outcome of such reactions and Islamic sensitivities. Researchers include Ozcan (1975), Kutub (1973), Yegin (1996), Kasapoglu (1997), Necati (2000), Aydin (2001), Senturk (2005), Etoz (2008) and Hokelekli (2009). Though the number of those studies categorized under the general rubric of Islamic psychology increases each year, no in-depth study has been done to deal with the epistemological foundations of Islamic psychology, i.e., its nature, sources, and scope. This study is intended to focus on the interrelationship between religion and science and the possibility of Islamic psychology as a nascent social discipline.

Indigenous Psychologies and Islamic Psychology

This article has already pointed out that scholars of religious and social sciences in Turkey raised criticisms against the negative impacts of the Western tradition of science in general and against psychology as a discipline developed within this tradition in particular. A look into the related literature shows that similar criticisms have also been voiced by the scholars from non-Muslim, non-Western countries.

Lagmay (1984), for example, holds that the introduction of American-centred psychology in the Philippines is a case of cultural expansion, influencing the psychological studies in the country in parallel to the general cultural trends in areas such as language, education, and the judiciary system. For him, during the 50 years of American colonialism, the Western scientific and cultural concepts impacted the thoughts and discourses of individuals through education and by implication, the language, methods, and hermeneutics employed in social sciences.

On the other hand, Salazar (1984) of Venezuela argues that psychology is an important commodity similar to automobiles, computers and aircraft, and part of the developing countries’ problem of socio-economic dependence. In contrast to Lagmay, however, Salazar is hesitant as to whether the Western influence as a whole has transformed the indigenous culture and whether the