## Creative Thinking: An Islamic Perspective

*Jamal Badi and Mustapha Tajdin*
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Growing out of a course that the authors have taught jointly since 1996 at
the International Islamic University Malaysia ("Creative Thinking and
Problem Solving"), this book is designed for use as an undergraduate text-
book on these issues from an Islamic viewpoint. Since Muslims generally

deplore their own community's lack of creativity and desperately need to reverse their technological and scientific dependence on other countries, the authors seek to present a realistic strategy to help them regain the innovative spirit that characterized classical Islamic civilization. Drawing on cognitive psychology and related disciplines in western academia, they begin with the assumption that creativity is a learned skill, rather than the personal endowment of an elite corps of humanity. The book then develops their second assumption: Islamic values and perspectives can be enriched through a dialogue with western social sciences.

The first part is devoted to Islamic civilization's contribution to human civilization: *tafakkur* and other Qur'anic words calling for people to think creatively (chapter 1); applying secular "thinking styles" literature to the Qur'an, including the inquisitive, objective, positive, hypothetical, rational, reflective/contemplative, visual, metaphorical, analogical, emotional, perceptual, conceptual, intuitive, scientific, and wishful thinking styles (chapter 2); analyzing the concept of *ijtihad* and its vocation to constantly adapt Islamic law to changing circumstances and find creative solutions to persistent socioeconomic and political challenges (chapter 3); and summarizing Muslim contributions to science, philosophy, and medicine (chapter 4).

The rest of the book (less than a third) interacts with western thinking on the subject of creativity: discussing the literature (chapter 5) on psychology (they quote from two encyclopedias), philosophy (two books on creativity theory), pedagogy (how to impart creativity to students), and business and management (the lion's share of the chapter, mainly because the material is eminently practical and seeks to train people to become creative in their thinking and apply it to their work); and attempting to integrate philosophical language, mind, and thought (chapter 6). The last two chapters (7 and 8) begin with various definitions of reasoning and argumentation from western textbooks, offer a typology of arguments (with a short conclusion in chapter 7 on *qiyas* [analogical reasoning in Islamic law]), and, finally, list some common fallacies in logical reasoning (chapter 8).

Besides the laudable intention of encouraging a revival of Muslim creativity, however, there is, in fact, little integration between western research on creativity and Islamic teaching. For the most part, the sacred text's call to creativity boils down to meditating on God's wondrous creation and how these wonders (*ayat*) teach us about His attributes and to reflecting on God's dealings with people, prophets, and nations before us, so that we may respond correctly to His message in our own lives. These are the primary purposes behind all of the verbal roots related to thinking and reasoning. On

the other hand, most of the religious material that the authors point to as urging Muslims to act creatively concerns those hadiths dealing with the *ijtihad* of the Prophet and that of his Companions and Successors. Their chapter adds nothing new to an already abundant literature on the subject. Of all the Muslim authors cited who have recently turned to the theme of creativity and invention, only Malik Bennabi seems to offer a fresh perspective that is not tied to *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* (pp. 17-18).

Nevertheless, leaders of the Muslim ummah built an empire in the very first generation and, in doing so, freely innovated in countless areas either by borrowing from the achievements of those they conquered or by improvising solutions to new problems as they arose. The same kind of creativity and freedom permeated the scientific and literary communities of the Abbasid Empire at its height, the Andalusian Empire, and others as well. It is more difficult, however, to pinpoint exactly what elements of Islamic teaching contributed to this flourishing of civilization.

I am inclined to see more promise in the authors' short allusions to God's creation of humanity as God's representatives entrusted with the mission of civilizing Earth (p. 1). Human beings, given their gift of language and reasoning (the "names" taught to Adam), are able to further their knowledge of science and develop literature and the arts (pp. 189-90). In my view, this is the creation doctrine that supports their statement that "today's Western progression (*sic*) in science and technology is nothing but the culmination of human achievement which is universal and global in nature" (p. 237). Indeed, civilizations build upon one another and human knowledge grows in a cumulative fashion. This is the main argument of Akbar S. Ahmed's book *Islam Under Siege* (Polity: 2003). Particularly today in our globalized world, Muslims must regain the paradigm of "the scholarship of inclusion" that characterized the apex of their civilization. Badi and Tajdin are moving in that direction, but they need to articulate that theological point far more.

Above all, a book should be judged by its stated purpose – this one is presented as an introductory college textbook. As I see it, it falls short but does have some potential. In order to reach this potential, however, the authors need to improve the book's grammar, spelling, and ease of expression, as well as adopt a consistent formatting style for headings, lists, footnotes, and the bibliography. These shortcomings are regrettable, in view of the topic at hand. One hopes that a second edition will do justice to an important study.

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