

Islamization of Knowledge: A Methodology

By 'Imad al Din Khalil. Herndon, VA & London, UK: IIIT, 1991, 28 pp., Occasional Papers Series.

This well-written book comprehensively outlines the basic precepts on which a concept and a program of Islamization of knowledge must, according to the author, rest. In his attempt to outline these directions, the author first defines the concept of Islamization as "... practising (i.e., discovering, compiling, piecing together, communicating and publishing) intellectual activity based on the Islamic concept of the universe" (p. 5). He further states that "'Islamization' covers everything within the realm of the true belief in the existence of Allah (SWT)" (p. 5). This definition is enhanced by Khalil's unequivocal reference to the Sharī'ah and fiqh, the derivative of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as being the principal background for the Islamization process.

Another important aspect of Islamization, according to the author, is the absence of dualism in this framework. He says that in the quest for establishing the Islamic dimensions of belief in the diversity of human acquisitions, all "that might lead to dualism between the Divine orientation and its absolute knowledge and the conflicting relativism of human efforts" (p. 6) must be avoided.

The author correctly points out that Islamization must be carried out on both the theoretical (normative) and the practical (positive) aspects of the sciences. It is here, however, that a series of questions arise and which, in turn, lead to a critical analysis that seemingly does not support the author's thesis on the modus operandi and worldview of Islamization. Internal inconsistencies within the arguments presented also lead to several difficulties. In my analysis of some of these problematic points, I will use the *tawhīdī* precept that centers the Islamization process.

Islamizing the Natural and the Social Sciences

Khalil says that the natural and the social sciences are not amenable to the same degree of Islamization. In his view, the social sciences will be Islamized before the natural sciences: "... sciences such as civil engineering, algebra, trigonometry or mathematics in general, as well as other disciplines like statistics, chemistry and possibly geology, may not be related to the process" (p. 7).

In regards to the above-mentioned approach, it is clear that the mechanistic aspects of these disciplines are seen to shield them from any Islamizing cause and effect. But are such sciences really independent of the hard-core essence of Islamization? To answer this question, two possible epistemological matters must be considered. First, it is necessary to investigate whether the Western precepts of the sciences were free of the fundamental concept of material dualism. When Kant outlined his principle of mathematical logic, it was made dependent upon the epistemological precept of reason alone—the a priori condition of the mind that lends itself to reason alone. Kant expressed this argument as follows: "Now it is easy to show that there actually are in human knowledge judgements which are necessary and in the strictest sense universal, and which are therefore pure a priori judgments. If an example from the sciences be desired, we have only to look to any of the propositions of mathematics..."¹ On this a priori epistemological basis, Kant separated the a priori reason premise from what he claimed to be the empirical and unsubstantive basis of the a posteriori. Thus dualism became inherent in the foundation of mathematical logic in Western philosophy.

The consequence of this dualism was felt in the treatment of finite and infinite mathematical systems. Hilbert held that all mathematics must describe measurable systems. This principle gives his system the mathematical condition of boundedness and measurability.² Meanwhile, Gödel argued that the mathematical system is incomplete.³ Thus the boundedness of Hilbert spaces, similar to ideas presented by Whitehead and Russell,⁴ become open systems of topological "covers," each supplementing the other through infinite sequences of evolutions.⁵ Which of these two conceptions of mathematical foundations represents unique truth? In Euclidean and Cartesian geometries, Hilbert spaces would apply as approximation. However, in Minkowski, Relativistic, and higher dimensional spaces, Gödel's theorems become more profound.⁶

Let us turn to the *tawhīdī* precept that centers the Islamization process and examine it in the light of the above-mentioned dualistic concept of mathematics. Khalil correctly states that Islamization must mean the purposeful

¹I. Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason," in *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. C. J. Friedrich (New York: Random House, 1977).

²R. Rucker, "Robots and Souls," in *Infinity and the Mind*, ed. R. Rucker (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

³K. Gödel, *The Consistency of the Continuum Hypothesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940).

⁴B. Russell and A. N. Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1910-13).

⁵I. Maddox, *Elements of Functional Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁶K. Gödel, "A Remark on the Relationship between Relativity Theory and Idealist Philosophy," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher Scientist*, vol. 2, ed. P. Schilpp (New York: Harper and Row, 1959).

unification of the relationships between God, humanity, and nature. Substantively, this must mean that the divine laws guiding our understanding of the epistemological domain (a priori) must be one with the sensed domain (a posteriori or ontological). This integrated concept of mathematics must exist in order to explain how the unique *tawhīdī* law translates itself into the reality of understanding, say, with regards to the mathematics of evolutionary infinite spaces (*tawhīdī* space in the sense of Gödel's incompleteness theorem) as bounded contractions, to use a topological concept.⁷ Here, we find the same open correspondence of *tawhīd* at once explains reality in the cosmic order as well as in the limited domain of sensed phenomena.

If such a continuity does not exist in the domain of mathematical conception, it would be tantamount to asserting that the *tawhīdī* precept remains neutral in some areas of mathematics, sciences, and technology, that is, in some prehensions of knowledge.⁸ This invalidates the very foundations of universality, continuity, and unification, all of which constitute the *tawhīdī* reality in the Islamization process. Such an argument reveals a basic flaw in the author's characterization of a differentiated disciplinary emphasis which he holds must be placed on the Islamization of the natural and the social sciences. Consequently, there exists a misunderstanding in his following statement: "We shall realize that the different branches and subjects of these sciences are all linked in one way or another with the Qur'an's flexible, comprehensive view, which is broad enough to accommodate all different aspects of science including aims, methodologies, facts and application. However, ... we must recognize that the humanities ... will be the first in line of Islamization." The above criticism with respect to the author's discussions on Islamization of the sciences, renders much of pages 7-10 hard to accept.

Directions for the Islamization of Knowledge

This conception of Islamization has led Khalil to state that "the Islamization program cannot start from scratch..." While this is certainly meaningful as regards preserving "sharī'atically" acceptable facts over time, such facts must be sifted from any mistaken leaning on taqlid.⁹ Conceptions on science, even those offered by Islamic scholars and those conceived under the human understanding of the *tawhīdī* precept, are bound to change. Such changes will bring about revisions, redundancy, and even the rejection of earlier doc-

⁷I Maddox, *Elements*.

⁸A. N. Whitehead, "The Categorical Scheme," in *Process and Reality*, eds. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

⁹Tāhā J. al 'Alwānī, "Taqlid and the Stagnation of the Muslim Mind," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 8, no. 3 (December 1991).

trines. For instance, the idea of the roundness of the earth's topography and the orbiting of celestial bodies, as established by the Qur'an, could only dawn gradually on the human mind. Such scientific dialectics, as well as those perceived by our *tawhīdī* understanding, does not render the *tawhīdī* law refutable over time. The incompleteness of our understanding of the *tawhīdī* precept means the incremental furtherance of human volitions in this direction.

It is thus a misnomer to view any phase of history, be it Islamic or otherwise, as a final determinant of established knowledge, even though these may be based on certain momentary Islamic understandings of *tawhīdī* law. An example here is the way in which such *mutakallimūn* as al Ghazzālī, al Rāzī, al Kindī, and Ibn al 'Arabī defined and conceptualized *tawhīdī* reality or, for that matter, the questionable Islamic basis of *'ilm al kalām* (i.e., Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and al Farābī). The author's prescription of negating a start from scratch leaves a regimentative note that may have serious consequences to the otherwise open-ended limits of inquiry that must be left to the human mind in the Islamization process.

Furthermore, it is my view that the intellectual legacy of Islam has not been resolved over time. In fact, there are still great gaps of irreconciliation and misunderstanding between the intellectual traditions coming predominantly from Shi'i thought and the legal traditions coming mainly from Sunni thought.¹⁰

The above treatment of the investigative question in Islamization leads to two conflicting statements by the author. He states: "As a general principle it should be clear to us that we must avoid accepting one of the two following generalizations: (a) The entire Islamic legacy expresses the Islamic concept of the universe, the world, life and man, and (b) The Islamic legacy does not necessarily represent an extension of this concept" (p. 11).

Let us examine these statements critically. For this purpose, let me designate the set in which (a) belongs as set A, and the set in which (b) belongs as a subset, B. The complement of A means the set comprehending the statement "the entire Islamic legacy expresses a non-Islamic concept of the universe." Equivalently, this statement can be restated as "none of the Islamic legacy expresses the Islamic concept of the universe." Let this complementary set to A in the "universal set" be denoted A'. Then, clearly $A \cap A' = \emptyset$, while $A \cup A' = \text{"universal set."}$ However, since A and B are mutually exclusive, as the author implies, then $A \cap B = \emptyset$. Hence B must be a subset of A'. This leads to a contradiction in terms of Khalil's above-mentioned statement. There must therefore exist a unique way of realizing the Islamization process. This is simply to retain condition (b), subject to contin-

¹⁰A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1989).

uous *tawhīdī* investigation over time. Thus there is a fundamental error in the author's conceptualization and presentation of the modus operandi of the Islamization process.

System of Priorities

By negating Khalil's statements on the directions of Islamization, his suggested stereotyping of priorities also turns out to be unacceptable. If there remains no particular significance for starting from scratch, then there must not be any need to give any priority to the Islamization of specific disciplines. In a broader sense, there should not be any regimentation in disciplines and programs of Islamization. The process of Islamization must be left to individuals and groups of committed Muslims, acting in accord with their own interests and successes gained, when guided by Islamic institutional consensus on such fronts. For instance, an overconcentration and priority on Islamic economics as a branch of the Islamization of knowledge has yielded less-than-acceptable results as regards making this discipline paradigmatically different from mainstream economics. At best, it is only tempered by certain Islamic values within the broad mainstream framework.¹¹ For this reason, Khalil's suggestions for a greater regimentation of the Islamization process appears to be out of place.

The author also remarks that writing on specific issues should be left to groups of authors specialized in the given disciplines (p. 20). In addition, he remarks that "To begin with we must draw the broad outlines (or basic plans) for the methodology of the Islamization of each discipline. These basic plans should be the work of one or more academics who possess the qualities ..." (p. 22). He then suggests that such a regimented Islamization plan be delivered to and through relevant teachers.

These are directions that would seriously undermine, rather than enhance, the Islamization process. Regimentation in academic inquiry is a time-honored and unwelcome element that takes away individual and group initiative and freedom to investigate. However coordination—as opposed to regimentation—in intellectual inquiry can be an important facet of development. This would involve bringing about the coordination of understanding and efforts within groups of researchers and across disciplines. It would also take the form of appropriate coordination within the framework of academic institutions in the light of the strengths, impress, and successes of specific disciplines without giving priority to any particular discipline.

Such types of paradigmatic shifts would rest on the formulation and im-

¹¹V. Nienhaus, "Epistemology, Methodology and Economic Policy: Some Thoughts on Mainstream, Austrian and Islamic Economics," *Humanomics*, 5, no. 1 (1989).

plementation of a unique methodology. Khalil refers to this important topic, but it appears to him as distinct in the sciences. He writes, "... the methodologies, orientations, materials, conclusions, nature, etc. of each of their disciplines will differ from those of all the other disciplines" (p. 12). Such a differencing of methodologies at the basic and advanced levels of scientific pursuit is mistaken. The *tawhīdī* law, on the other hand, presents a unique methodology that binds all domains of knowledge together. It is only the mechanics of application and particular modes of analysis in different disciplines that lend themselves to varied types of investigations. For example, there is now a keen analytical relationship between economics and mathematics. But while the process of mathematical logic is mostly discursive and value-free, economics remains a value-laden inquiry. The use of mathematics in economics should therefore sharpen the value-laden as well as the analytical contents of the latter. For this to happen, mathematics must have a methodology of a value-laden analysis in an Islamic perspective. Such a unique methodological orientation could be established between economics and mathematics by using the *tawhīdī* continuity and universal correspondence, as discussed above. The concept of methodology in the Islamization of knowledge must therefore be a uniquely unifying one and also be clearly differentiated from discipline-specific analytical methods, goals, and applications. Khalil fails to note and clarify this important difference between concepts at all levels of a discipline's development (pp. 12-7).

Conclusion

In conclusion, three points may be noted. First, this book does not contribute anything new to the Islamization of knowledge. Second, it does not go deeper to critically examine some of these accepted views in order to present dynamically new ones for realizing the Islamization process. Third, although many of the points made by Khalil appear to be controversial ones as analyzed above, they still must be recognized as important contributions in the evolutionary phases of Islamic knowledge to which we all belong, and in which this review must also be placed. In this sense, the book is to be considered as a contribution to the literature on the Islamization of knowledge.

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