Hermeneutical Foundations for Islamic Social Sciences

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Some scientists seem to support the idea of the islamisation of knowledge and some have evolved into considering hermeneutics as a possible solution.
But which sciences could be transformed through the hermeneutics process? Which source would the scientists use in the process? What are the sciences and the frameworks in which transformation would be possible?
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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.

1. Introduction: The Project of Islamic Social Sciences

A number of Muslim authors have advocated the development of Islamic Social Sciences. Sometimes, this is seen as a part of a general Islamization of knowledge, while others focus on the social sciences and humanities as being particularly biased by assumptions contrary to Islam. The term "Islamization of knowledge" was first introduced in 1978 by Syed Muhammad Naquib al- Attas. His discussion of the islamization of knowledge is worth reviewing, since he brings together the ideas:

(1) that the sciences as developed in the West are biased in a manner that is unacceptable from an Islamic point of view;

(2) that this bias is particularly prevalent in the human sciences; and

(3) that this bias occurs because of flaws in interpretation.

Al-Attas argues that knowledge imported into the Muslim world from the West is "infused with the character and personality of Western culture and civilization and moulded in the crucible of Western culture.."[1] He continues that the elements and key concepts of Western culture need to be identified and isolated.

These elements and key concepts are mainly prevalent in that branch of knowledge pertaining to the human sciences, although it must be noted that even in the natural, physical and applied sciences, particularly where they deal with interpretation of facts and formulation of theories, the same process of isolation of the elements and key concepts should be applied; for the interpretations and formulations indeed belong to the sphere of the human sciences.[2]

Finally, the Islamization of knowledge is to be achieved, according the Al- Attas, by replacing the

Western elements and key concepts by Islamic ones, so that the sciences may be remolded "in the crucible of Islam."

According to the nephew of Al-Attas, Farid Alatas, the approach taken by his uncle was influenced by the Sufi tradition, and emphasized the need for proper inspiration (ilham) to inform one's research.

We are really talking about what my uncle once told me: it is the Islamization of the mind. The way I understand it, the discussion is about the way Islam provides the metaphysical and epistemological basis for knowledge. Those concerned are not interested in creating an Islamic sociology or an Islamic physics, but what they say is that, whatever your discipline, there is a particular metaphysical and epistemological framework that is provided by Islam.[3]

Al-Attas insists that Islamization is not merely a matter of taking Western sciences and adding some Islamic decorations. He proposes a much more thorough and profound reworking. Nevertheless, it is by no means clear that his aims could be achieved by a replacement of elements and key concepts, or how this replacement could be carried out.

Some understanding of how Al-Attas sought to carry out the project can be gained by examining the manner in which he directed the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). Alatas explains that this institute "was created specifically to Islamize knowledge, not only to teach the various branches, but also to provide that metaphysical and epistemololgical basis that should be infused by all scholars and teachers, whatever the discipline."[4] As currently organized, however, ISTAC has no philosophy department, and without one, it is difficult to see how the metaphysics and epistemology that Al-Attas viewed as the basis for islamization might be provided.

As Farid Alatas understands the Islamization of the social sciences, we should not expect an islamicized sociology, economics, or political science to rival secular versions of these sciences, rather researchers who are well grounded in the Islamic epistemology and metaphysics should use concepts drawn from them to provide a framework in which to carry our empirical research.

The only way in which Islam can be brought into closer alignment with knowledge is if people start to do empirical work. And that takes me to my own understanding of these matters. I think that, rather than to talk about Islamizing knowledge, one should actually look at Islamic traditions as sources of concepts and ideas, and do actual research with that.[5]

Alatas goes on to explain that he proposes that historians, sociologists, and other social scientists should look at work done by classical Muslim thinkers, such as Biruni, extract key ideas from them, "and undertake empirical historical research with these ideas."

A rival approach to the Islamization of knowledge was initiated by Isma'il Faruqi in 1982.[6] This approach was integrated with several other goals, including the reform of Islam, the salvation of the West, and a substantive view of how the modern sciences were to be Islamized. In order to carry out this program,

Faruqi participated in the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in 1981.

Faruqi proposed to adopt the best of Western science and technology, but to base it on Islamic principles and values that would guide the further development of the sciences. He agreed with Salafi ideas of the need to return to a pristine original Islam, but he considered this original Islam to be fundamentally rational, and open to dialogue with non-Muslims. He found inspiration in both Abd al-Wahhab and in Muhammad Abduh.[7]

His program for the Islamization of knowledge was ideological and advocated the strengthening of Islamic identity. According to Faruqi, the Islamization of knowledge is to "recast knowledge as Islam relates to it., I.e. to redefine and reorder the data, to rethink the reasoning and relating of the data, to reevaluate the conclusions, to reproject the goals-and to do so in such a way as to make the disciplines enrich the vision and serve the cause of Islam."[8]

At the heart of his vision was the Islamization of knowledge. He regarded the political, economic, and religiocultural malaise of the Islamic community as primarily due to the bifurcated state of education in the Muslim world with a resultant lack of vision. He believed that the cure was twofold: the compulsory study of Islamic civilization and the Islamization of modern knowledge.[9]

Faruqi's program of Islamization is summarized by Ibrahim Ragab as having three main components:

1) Mastery of modern disciplines, and the critical assessment of their methodologies, research findings, and theories within the Islamic perspective.

2) Mastery of the Islamic legacy, and the critical assessment of Islamic scholarship against :

a) a pristine Revelational perspective

b) current needs of the Ummah, and

c) modern advances in human knowledge.

3) Creative synthesis of the Islamic legacy and modern knowledge; a creative leap "to bridge over the gap of centuries of non- development"[10]

The work of IIIT has been subject to much criticism[11] for being rhetoric without substance, for poor quality of IIIT publications, and for the conceit that the true meaning of knowledge is privy to those working in accordance with its own ideology. Although these criticisms have been raised against the Islamization of knowledge project, in general, IIIT seems to have borne much of the brunt of it.

Kalin faults Faruqi's project for using Islamic labels that obscure deeper philosophical issues involved in the current discussions of science, and for focusing on the social sciences to the exclusion of the natural sciences, despite the fact that his original project aim at Islamizing all the knowledge imported from the

West. Kalin observes two outcomes of Faruqi's project and the work of IIIT: an over-emphasis on social sciences and constituting "knowledge"; and neglect of the secularizing effects of the modern scientific worldview.

This leaves the Muslim social scientists, the ideal- types of the Islamization program, with no clue as to how to deal with the questions that modern scientific knowledge poses. Furthermore, to take the philosophical foundations of modern, natural sciences for granted is tantamount to reinforcing the dichotomy between the natural and human sciences, a dichotomy whose consequences continue to pose serious challenges to the validity of the forms of knowledge outside the domain of modern physical sciences. [12]

IIIT has responded to the criticism by reformulating the program as first conceived by Faruqi in a series of papers. [13] Faruqi's plan was seen as too "mechanical" and alternatives are proposed that aim at greater flexibility, and propose drawing on the ideas about the Islamization of knowledge that have been drawn up by others. [14]

Yet another call for the Islamization of knowledge may be derived from the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, although he calls his project one of reviving the sacred sciences, rather than Islamization, and emphasizes the idea that the religious traditions of the world share a perennial wisdom opposed to the cultural and intellectual trends that emerged from European modernity. [15]

Nasr calls for a return to sacred science in a number of his writings, most prominently in his Khowledge and the Sacred (1981) and The Need for a Sacred Science (1993), although his position is stated in his earliest work on Islamic science. [16] Nasr does not limit his criticism of modern science to the social sciences, but takes the modern scientific revolutions in the natural sciences to have ushered in a worldview that is incompatible with and dismissive of sacred science.

In recent reflections on his life, Nasr writes:

...many people have made claims to be the originator of one of the most important intellectual exercises that is taking place in the Islamic world today and which they call the "Islamization of knowledge," the effort to incorporate Western knowledge into the Islamic framework. I have never liked the usage of this term, but the fact is that I spoke about this integration in 1957/58 when I wrote my book Science and Civilization in Islam parallel with my Ph.D. Thesis, although this book was not published until a few years later. It was then 1957, at least ten, fifteen years before other people such as Isma'il al-Faruqi and Naquib al-Attas, who are now known for this project, came to the fore that I wrote about the integration of all knowledge into the Islamic worldview. [17]

Nasr argues that the modern science that emerged with the scientific revolutions of the 17th century is a direct challenge to the traditional worldview, particularly as developed in Islamic civilization. Hence, modern science and technology are not to be considered as value-free. It imposes a value system inimical to Islamic civilization. Nevertheless, modern science is not to be simply abandoned. Muslims

should master the modern sciences, but critically. It is the responsibility of Muslim scientists to formulate a critique of modern science based on the Islamic intellectual tradition.

On the positive side, the work of Nasr on sacred science has the great merit of showing how sacred sciences must be integrated with ecological concerns, and with Islamic ethics, more generally.[18] On the negative side, it is not clear how the positive gains made by the modern sciences are to be integrated in sacred science.

There are many other Muslim thinkers who have tackled the problem of Islam and modern science. My purpose is not to survey all the views, but only to introduce the discourse about the problem in order to highlight the importance of interpretation in how we understand the relation between Islam and science. However, we do well to consider the words with which Muzaffar Iqbal concludes a survey of Muslims' views of the relationship between Islam and modern science.

What is needed is a major intellectual revolution in the Muslim world that would recover the lost tradition of scholarship rooted in Islam's own primary sources. This would lead to the emergence of a new movement helping Muslims to appropriate modern science and technologies like the movement that digested an enormously large amount of scientific and philosophical thought that entered the Islamic tradition during the three centuries of the earlier translation movement.

Only such a recasting of moderns scientific knowledge has the hope of germinating the seeds of scientific thinking in the Muslim mind that is not laden with scientism. Only such a revolutionary change in thinking can liberate the Islam and science discourse from its colonized bondage and produce genuine Islamic reflections on the enterprise of modern science–an enterprise that looms large in all spheres of contemporary life and society.[19]

In sum, we find that the project or projects for developing Islamic social sciences are interwoven with a number of related issues.

1) Which Islamic school of thought is to provide the framework for the development of Islamic social sciences: Traditionalism, Salafism, Sufism, modernism? In other words, proposals for the Islamization of the social sciences have been made from specific ideological perspectives, and developments of Islamic social sciences need to clear the hurdle of ideology if they are to have any chance at success. No science can develop if practitioners are condemned on the basis of ideology rather than scientific contribution.

2) Is the development of Islamic science to cover all the sciences or is it to be limited to the social sciences and humanities? Are we to expect Muslim mathematicians to develop a modern Islamic mathematics, for example, that rejects the existence of transfinite numbers because of the rejection of actual infinities in classical Aristotelian/Islamic mathematics?

3) Will Islamic social science reject the methods and findings of modern Western social sciences, or will

it reinterpret them and offer a critique? More generally, what exactly is to be the relation between the Islamicized sciences and the modern Western sciences?

4) To what extent can modern Western science be separated from scientism? Some philosophers of science, such as Richard Dawkins, insist that modern science is essentially atheistic, while many others, such as Alvin Plantinga, claim that it is not modern science that rejects any transcendent reality, but only the scientistic assumption that there is nothing in existence that cannot be investigated and described by the methods of the modern sciences.

My hypothesis is that the question of interpretation is crucial to finding a solution to all these issues, and that since the study of interpretation is hermeneutics, we should examine the issues of hermeneutics in relation to the social sciences in order to understand how best to approach the issues mentioned above and others.

1. Al-Attas (1993), 162.
2. Al-Attas (1993), 162.
3. Alatas (2008).
4. Alatas (2008).
5. Alatas (2008).
6. Faruqi (1982).
7. See Esposito and Voll (2001), 29.
8. Faruqi (1982), 15.
9. Esposito and Voll (2001), 32.
10. Ragab (2005).
11. See, for example, Stenberg (1996); Abaza (2002); Kalin (2002); Alatas (2008). A more general criticism of Islamization, from an Iranian émigré's postmodernist perspective, with more sarcasm than substance, may be found in Shayegan (1992).
12. Kalin (2002), 61.
13. See Sulaiman (2000).
14. See Sulaiman (2000); Bennet (2005); and especially Iqbal (2008), who provides a detailed analysis of the views of Nasr, among others.
15. For criticism, see Legenhausen (2002).
16. Nasr (1978), based on his Ph. D. dissertation (Harvard) completed in 1958.
17. Nasr (2010), 78.
18. See, especially, Nasr (1996), and Nasr (1993), Ch. 8 and 9.
19. Iqbal (2008), 188.

2. Hermeneutics

To begin with, we need a working understanding of hermeneutics, and this is itself a rather contentious issue, for the term is used both for a discipline and for a school of thought. In ancient Greece, the term was used in a general way for problems of interpretation and understanding.[1] In the Middle Ages, the term was used for Biblical exegesis. It is generally agreed that hermeneutics remained tied to the issue

of textual exegesis until the 19th century and the work of Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Dilthey (1833–1911).

Following the Romantics' idea that all understanding is interpretive, Schleiermacher and Dilthey (especially the latter) expanded the notion of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher, for the first time, offered a general hermeneutics for the interpretation of any text, not just the Bible and ancient texts. Dilthey takes us beyond the understanding of texts, to the interpretation of history and society.

Both Schleiermacher and Dilthey bring philosophical reflection to hermeneutics. Dilthey, however, also limited the range of hermeneutics by making a sharp distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences or Geijtejwijjenjchaften, and between explanation and understanding. He held that the natural sciences explain nature, while the human sciences seek to provide understanding (Verjtehen) of historical life. The goal of hermeneutics, according to Dilthey, is understanding, not explanation.

Although Dilthey's firm distinction between the natural sciences and the social and other human sciences became entrenched in most subsequent discussions of hermeneutics, we can ignore this controversy, since our concern here is with the social sciences. Suffice it to say that there is a growing recognition that the natural sciences depend on interpretive assumptions no less than the humanities, and that the relation of explanation and understanding is closer than Dilthey imagined. It is through explanations that one gains understanding, and the ability to explain requires understanding.

With the publication of Heidegger's Sein und Zeit in 1927, hermeneutics takes what is called an ontological turn. Heidegger considers human existence, Dajein, to be essentially interpretive. In earlier thinkers the "hermeneutic circle" was understood as the mutual dependence of the understanding of the whole of a text and its parts, and also the mutual dependence of the understanding of a tradition and the texts that constitute it. In Heidegger, another form of hermeneutic circle arises in the recognition of the mutual dependence of an understanding of the world and self–understanding.

.[B]ecause Dasein is fundamentally embedded in the world, we simply cannot understand ourselves without the detour through the world, and the world cannot be understood without reference to Dasein's way of life. This, however, is a perpetual process. Hence, what is precarious here is not, as in the earlier hermeneutic tradition, the moment when we are able to leave the hermeneutic circle, where our interpretative endeavors culminate in a lucid, clear, and indubitable grasp of the meaning of the text. What matters, Heidegger claims, is the attempt to enter the circle in the right way, with a willingness to realize that the investigation into the ontological conditions of my life ought to work back on the way in which my life is led.

With this turn towards ontology, the problems of philology become secondary. Hermeneutics now deals with the meaning–or lack of meaning–of human life: it is turned into an existential task.[2]

As Ramberg and Gjesdal go on to explain, after Heidegger, the most important development of hermeneutic theory comes with Gadamer's Wahrheit und Methode (1960). Gadamer accepts

Heidegger's ontological view of hermeneutics, but delves further into how hermeneutics may serve as a basis for the Geijtejwijjenjchaften. For Gadamer, the reader and the text are in a mutually dependent relationship that is his version of the hermeneutic circle.

Through the dialogical interrelation between the reader and a textual tradition, a "fusion of horizons" may be achieved through which understanding takes place. In order to explain how an effective engagement with texts is possible, Gadamer refers to Aristotle's views of practical reasoning (phronesis), and Kant's theory of judgment. There is no set method that can be applied to every text, but rather the reader must develop sensitivity and appreciation of the texts that are to be engaged.

Gadamer's theory has given rise to much criticism. Some have argued in favor of a more classical approach to texts, as in the tradition of Schleiermacher. Others, like Habermas, have argued that Gadamer's theory gives too much authority to tradition. However, the greatest criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics is the charge of relativism. Gadamer has responded to the charge, as have others on his behalf, and these responses have elicited further criticism. It is not my purpose to review the debate, although I will say that the criticism seems more fittingly applied to certain interpretations of Gadamer's work, like Rorty's, than to Gadamer's own views.

A number of further developments in hermeneutic theories are also not directly relevant to the purpose of our inquiries, such as the debate over communicative ethics, and the relation between hermeneutics and genealogy. Gadamer retains Dilthey's distinction between the natural sciences and the Geijtejwijjenjchaften, while a number of more recent hermeneutical studies have convincingly argued that the natural sciences are as much involved in interpretation as the social sciences.[3] What is relevant to the project of Islamic social sciences and the more general sacralization of the sciences, is the application of hermeneutics to the social sciences.

Just as the project of the Islamization of the sciences is contentious because it is associated with rival ideological positions among Muslim thinkers, so, too, hermeneutics is contentious because of the rival political and broadly philosophical positions taken by its advocates. It is my purpose to try to bracket such issues as much as possible in order to consider how what Al– Attas called "elements and key concepts" of Islam may form a basis for interpretation to be employed in the social sciences. So, I will use the term hermeneutics in the very general sense of the study of interpretation, whether or not this study conforms to the views of Schleiermacher, Gadamer, Ricoeur, or anyone else. Furthermore, the thinking of the major contributors to hermeneutic theory is also a matter of some controversy, especially in the case of Gadamer. I will assume in what follows that various points made by Gadamer in the development of his hermeneutic theory may be accepted without accepting the pernicious forms of relativism that have been attributed to him.

1. This is suggested by Aristotle's work, Ilepl 'Epμ1vsim; or Peri Hermeneias, known by its Latin name, De Interpretatione.
2. Ramberg and Gjesdal (2009).
3. See Ihde (1999).

3. Applications of Hermeneutics

Gadamer has taught us that interpretation is based on presuppositions. This would lead to relativism if presuppositions were taken to be equally justified although arbitrary. Gadamer denies this. A valid interpretation has to be guided by its object, not imposed on it; dynamic, not fixed.

Another way to blunt the edge of relativism is to take up the project of making presuppositions explicit. Presuppositions become usefully serviceable when they are made explicit, even if in a very general fashion. So, if some assumption, A, is discovered that stands behind an author's support for a theory, T, and if A is itself a matter of dispute, so that there are those who reject A and favor A', and they use A' to buttress their support for T', we could still seek to achieve greater objectivity by claiming not that T (or T') is the best theory, without qualification, but merely that given A, T is the best theory, and that given A', T' might be the best theory. This is not to say that such claims are asserted absolutely, without any interpretive assumptions. Whether T is best given A might be subject to dispute between those who base an affirmative answer to this question on the basis of further differing assumptions.

So, one might explicate: according to assumption B, T is the best theory under assumption A. If this is disputed one may argue that according to assumption C, it is the case that according to assumption B, T is the best theory under assumption A. The regress is only potentially vicious, as when one faces a dialogue partner like the Tortoise, in Lewis Carroll's famous story.[1] In practice, dialogue partners are not so obstinate.

According to Gadamer, in order to understand a text or an event, we need to reach an understanding (Verständigung) with our speech–partners. How can this occur for the social sciences if one group of researchers takes a positivistic approach to science while another aspires to a sacred science or to an Islamized science? There would appear to be no way for there to be any "fusion of horizons," since the assumptions that inform the rival views of social science are contradictory.

The place to look for a fusion of horizons in such circumstances may be found through the explicit hypothesizing of assumptions. Even the materialist should be willing to grant that on religious assumptions a theory T might be judged superior to rival theories. Likewise, one need not be an intuitionist to discover theorems of intuitionist logics. Generally speaking, one need not accept assumption A in order to reach an understanding with those who do accept the assumption about how such assumptions might influence judgments about the merits of theories.

The natural sciences after the 17th century were formulated in a language that sought neutrality with regard to all human meanings and values. This was the basis of their claim to objectivity. Today, however, because of advances in the history and philosophy of science, it is generally recognized that the practices of modern science are based on their own norms; and a growing number of scholars admit

that these norms are neither unquestionable nor unique.

In the case of the social sciences, dependence on Western cultural norms and values is more conspicuous than it is in the natural sciences. The problem of ethnocentrism in the social sciences is fairly widely recognized. For example, different cultures often bear conflicting views of human nature that are so deeply ingrained that researchers cannot simply suspend them at will in order to produce a more universal social science. What they might be able to manage, however, would be an investigation into how human nature is seen in another culture, and how this would influence views about the issues studied by social scientists. This exercise will heighten awareness of the researcher's own suppositions at the same time as it focuses attention on the alternative sets of suppositions that are to be found in other cultures.

Once such suppositions are identified, two sorts of evaluations may be made: first, the plausibility of the basic assumptions may be considered; and secondly the merits of various alternative theories based on these assumptions may be debated with regard to accuracy, explanatory value, depth, range, cohesion, and other theoretical virtues. One should certainly not be content to take cultural biases as arbitrary givens, for this would indeed be to surrender to a more pernicious relativism than that which comes with the admission of some perspectivalist theses, and one that Gadamer goes to some pains to avoid.

As Charles Taylor analyzes Gadamer's position, pernicious relativism is not to be avoided by aspiring to the ideal of neutrality with regard to assumptions about metaphysics, human nature, etc., but by (1) allowing for change and development in the horizons; and (2) aiming for the most comprehensive fusion of horizons; although this aim is a regulative ideal that will never reach complete universality. As Taylor sees it, comprehensiveness is:

....an important ideal both epistemically and humanly: epistemically, because the more comprehensive account would tell us more about human beings and their possibilities; humanly, because the language would allow more human beings to understand each other, and to come to undistorted understandings.[2]

If by comprehensiveness Taylor merely means an account that fuses together incompatible perspectives, it is unlikely that the epistemic and human advantages he seeks will be achieved. It is not a mixing of perspectives that is wanted, but a standing back from perspectives so as to be able to compare them and understand the differences in views that will result from different underlying assumptions once these are, however vaguely, identified. The identification of underlying assumptions in another culture not only will help one to understand that culture, but it will also assist in the identification of features of one's own worldview that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Gadamer uses the term "horizon" for the general framework through which one views a topic. Horizons include what Al-Attas calls "elements and key concepts" as well as prejudices, assumptions, habits of thought, attitudes and dispositions to various emotional reactions and judgments. It includes the affective and cognitive aspects of one's outlook. Horizons change, evolve, atrophy, weaken and strengthen, both

individually and socially, and in this regard horizons are comparable to languages, especially when we speak of specialized languages, such as the language of modern rights theories, the language of internal medicine, the language of the mass media in China, and so on.

The comparison of conceptual frameworks to languages can also be found in Alasdair MacIntyre's works, especially in Whose Justice, Which Rationality?[3] MacIntyre admits a deep indebtedness to Gadamer, although he addresses some specific disagreements with him.[4] While Gadamer concentrates on how speakers of different languages can come to an understanding, MacIntyre highlights the conflicts that can occur between languages and the ways that languages are in internal conflict. Epistemological crises occur when it is found that one's own language does not have the resources needed to translate important ideas from another language. When this happens, one's language will adapt and expand its capacities, or it will prove impotent and be displaced by the stronger linguistic tradition.

Something similar occurs in a scientific revolution, as understood by Kuhn and Lakatos; and Kuhn has stated that incommensurability may be understood as untranslatability.[5] Problems arise that cannot be adequately handled with the concepts that have been developed in the research programs of some normal science. Revolutionary science is developed with terms that enable it to propose solutions to the problems, and, as Sellars has emphasized, that are able to explain why things behave in accordance with laws to the extent they do, and why they deviate from laws.[6]

To extend this idea to a comparison between theories, we may say that T will be considered superior to T' when T can explain why T' was as successful as it is, and why, in some cases, it fails. Sellars, it may be noted, also uses the terms "language" and "conceptual framework" as if they were synonymous.

When crises arise, if they are overcome, they are overcome through a translation process, and through the work of reason. Reason cannot be applied directly to adjudicate between differences when these differences are expressed in languages that may not be commensurable. Hence, the work of translation is a prerequisite for reason's examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments to be found for each competing view. This is a common thread that runs through the works of Gadamer, MacIntyre, and Sellars.

Translation alone, however, is not enough. Explanations need to be formulated if there is to be any advance in understanding. Either outstanding problems are solved with the aid of the language of a new paradigm, into which the language of the previously dominant theory is translatable, or the users of the language of the previous paradigm are able to translate the new ideas into their own idiom, and offer similar explanations.

Even if we reject the sharp distinction between natural and social sciences and accept the notion of an "expanded hermeneutics", there are levels of interpretation in the human sciences that are distinctive[7] (although present to some extent in animal sciences, too).[8]

When a group of researchers, R, undertake inquiry about some set of objects, O, there will always be a

set of interpretive concepts, frameworks, or a "horizon", H, applied by R to O in order to formulate some account or theory about O, T. It is in terms of these concepts that R will attempt to justify T. Secondly, there generally will be rival groups, Ri ,...Rj, such that they will each use their own horizons, Hi ,...Hj, to inquire about O, and produce their own accounts or theories. R will have to take into account the research of Ri ,...Rj, which will require some understanding of Hi ,...Hj. This will result in modification of H, except in cases in which Hi ,...Hj, ––or elements of Hi ,...Hj that differ from H–– are rejected. In cases of this sort of rejection, R must either justify the rejection by showing the superiority of H over its rivals, or by showing that the assumption of H leads to a better account of O than the accounts based on the rival horizons.

In the case of the human sciences, there will be the additional complication of trying to understand all that is involved in the agency of the human phenomena constituting O, whether this is economic activity, the history of some military campaign, a text, or a work of art. In other words, when O is a human phenomenon, it will come with its own horizon, HO; but the relation of H to HO will be much different than the relation between H and Hi ,...Hj. Hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Gadamer has focused on the relation of H to HO. When O is a human phenomenon, what is sought by the researcher is an account of the reasons behind O. An understanding of HO is sought through a fusion of horizons in order for R to come up with T about O.

The agents involved in O are not required to have an account or theory of their own conduct, however, and if they do, they incidentally become another group of rival researchers. The relation between H and Hi ,...Hj, is between the horizons, languages, or conceptual apparatuses or frameworks used to construct or formulate alternative accounts or theories of O; while the relation between H and HO is between an interpretative horizon and a horizon in which reasons are given. When we claim that agents in a society believe, know, act and have intentions (to cite a famous passage in Sellars), "we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says."[9]

In conclusion, we may say that all science is to some extent interpretive, and that the social sciences are especially so. Furthermore, interpretation is essentially a normative enterprise, that is, it involves considerations of what are to count as good reasons for holding beliefs and performing actions. Finally, understanding in the social sciences will require the researcher to be able to come to an understanding of the agents that are the objects of investigation by learning to recognize what they take to be appropriate reasons for their beliefs and actions, and this will require a fusion of horizons. This fusion of horizons, however, does not require the researcher to agree with targets of inquiry.

There is a difference between agreement and empathy, and between empathy and understanding. One may learn the language of Calvinism, for example, without becoming a Calvinist; one may learn to recognize the reasons for the moves players make on a soccer field without ever playing the game. What is required for understanding is to gain the ability to negotiate the space of reasons that constitutes

a horizon, to recognize the elements of a horizon that contribute to the way in which reasons are given and requested, and in so doing, to identify the similarities and differences with one's own way of looking at things.

In addition to identifying the factors that may contribute to understanding, an effective application of hermeneutics to the social sciences must also be cognizant of factors that lead to misunderstanding, to which we will turn in our discussion of Islamic Hermeneutics.

1. Carroll (1895).
2. Taylor (2002), 135.
3. See MacIntyre (1988), especially ch. XIX.
4. See MacIntyre (1994a), MacIntyre (1994b), and MacIntyre (2002).
5. Kuhn (1994), 161.
6. Sellars (1963), 121
7. See Taylor (2002).
8. See MacIntyre (1999), 21 ff., for issues of normativity with regard to animals.
9. Sellars (1963), 169.

4. Islamic Hermeneutics

Now we can turn to the question of whether we should expect an Islamic hermeneutics to be governed by any distinctive principles of its own. We might begin with the idea of a religious or "sacred" hermeneutics, and then try to narrow this down further to an Islamic and then a Shi'ite hermeneutics. Most writing on religious hermeneutics is about how to interpret religious texts or other phenomena. Thus, we have, for example, the work on hermeneutics and theology of Rudolf Bultmann, which attempts to "demythologize" our interpretation of religious texts and events.

The demythologizing program proposed by Bultmann is designed to show how a plausible reading of scripture can be given that strips away from it what a modern sensibility would find incredible.[1] A diametrically opposed view of how to interpret scripture is proposed by Alvin Plantinga, who favors an interpretation based on principles of faith, and argues that this need not involve one in any fallacious question begging.[2]

In addition to advice about how to read scripture, however, both Bultmann and Plantinga also offer suggestions about the proper manner in which to interpret things, such as history and other cultures, in accordance with religious beliefs, which we might call "religious hermeneutics."

Bultmann follows Heidegger and suggests an existentialist hermeneutics in which one's own existence is risked through the activity of interpretation. By risking one's existence, what Bultmann seems to have in mind is to allow oneself to be affected by what one interprets in unforeseeable ways. Hermeneutics is

seen as a way of questioning the object of inquiry, whether a text, a work of art, or historical events. To operate with a religious hermeneutics is to allow oneself to be guided by religious ideas when one poses questions,

....as when one asks, for example, about "salvation," or about the "meaning" of one's personal life or of history, or about the norms of moral action and of order in human community, and the like.. The point, then, is not to eliminate the preunderstanding but to risk it, to raise it to the level of consciousness, and to test it critically in understanding the text. In short, in questioning the text one must allow oneself to be questioned by the text and to give heed to its claim.[3]

Of course, Bultmann speaks here of interpreting texts, but the point applies generally to interpretation, and the quoted passage is immediately followed by a discussion of historical understanding. Bultmann argues that any understanding of texts or historical phenomena will rely on our presuppositions, but this is no threat to objectivity, since the result of the inquiry is not presupposed but left open. Bultmann describes his conception of a religious hermeneutics as follows:

.understanding reports of events as the act of God presupposes a preunderstanding of what in general can be called God's act–as distinct, say, from the acts of human beings or from natural events.. Unless our existence were moved (*consciously or unconsciously*) *by the question about God., we would not be able to recognize God as God in any revelation. There is an existential knowledge of God present and alive in human existence in the question about "happiness" or "salvation" or about the meaning of the world and of history, insofar as this is the question about the authenticity of our own existence.*[4]

For Bultmann, and, following him, for van Fraassen, the development of a religious hermeneutics is not a matter of how the world is to be described in theories or beliefs, but in the attitude with which we approach the world and how we relate to our experiences.[5]

Plantinga, on the other hand, questions the view of science developed in the works of Bultmann and van Fraassen, and in so doing, he offers an alternative religious hermeneutics (although he does not call it that). According to Plantinga, objectifying inquiry, as described by Bultmann and van Fraassen, operates within the confines of methodological naturalism. Methodological naturalism is not ontological or philosophical naturalism.

The latter holds that nature, the object of inquiry in the natural sciences, is all there is. Methodological naturalism, on the other hand, is neutral about the question of supernatural existence, but maintains that in the practice of science, one should proceed as though there were no supernatural entities. This means that a scientific account of some phenomenon cannot appeal to such things as the will of God, divine attributes, or angels. There are a variety of ways that methodological naturalism can be elaborated. Some, for example, hold that it requires the banishment of final causes or teleology from scientific discourse.[6]

However characterized, Plantinga proposes the development of a Christian way of interpretation and of

doing science that rejects the requirement of methodological naturalism, at least for some parts of science; and his suggestions indicate that the rejection of methodological naturalism would be most appropriate where hermeneutics is most needed, that is, where questions of interpretation are at issue.

What the Christian community really needs is a science that takes into account what we know as Christians. Indeed, this seems the rational thing in any event; surely the rational thing is to use all that you know in trying to understand a given phenomenon. But then in coming to a scientific understanding of hostility, or aggressioin, for example, should not Christian psychologists make use of the notion of sin? In trying to achieve scientific understanding of love in its many and protean manifestations, for example, or play, or music, or humor, or our sense of adventure, should not we also use what we know about human beings being created in the image of God, who is himself the very source of love, beauty and the like? And the same for morality?[7]

These "religious" ideas might take place in our science by way of explicitly entering various hypotheses. They might also play other roles: for example they might be part of the background information with respect to which we evaluate the various scientific hypotheses and myths that come our way.[8]

Plantinga considers various arguments in favor of methodological naturalism, and concludes that although some areas of science may best be conducted in accord with methodological naturalism, there are a number of areas in which methodological naturalism should be rejected.

These statements are consistent with some of the claims reviewed earlier about the Islamization of the sciences, and suggest steps for the development of a religious hermeneutics. Religious hermeneutics may make various religious assumptions explicit, on the basis of which it will offer its interpretations. Secondly, religious hermeneutics may make use of religious background information in order to evaluate hypotheses and theories. Plantinga's work also suggests that there may be cases in which the description of the object of inquiry may be best understood in religious terms.

A third approach to religious hermeneutics is that proposed in the writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The position taken by Nasr is more extreme than that of Plantinga. Plantinga does not reject secular hermeneutics tout court as Nasr does. He merely reserves the right of the religious researcher to bring religious beliefs and attitudes to bear on the interpretation of texts and other phenomena. Nasr, on the other hand, sees modern science as infected by atheistic presuppositions.

Modern science is to be replaced by a sacred science that is integrated with a Traditionalist view of metaphysics and epistemology, so that it will offer a unified view of humanity, the world, and divinity, integrated with such metaphysical principles as the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, ontological hierarchy (what Arthur Lovejoy called "The Great Chain of Being"[9]), teleological principles, and much else that would be thoroughly rejected as unscientific by those who consider science bound to methodological naturalism.

This is not the place to adjudicate the conflicts between the views of Bultmann, van Fraassen, Plantinga,

and Nasr. By considering how they treat issues pertaining to interpretation, however, we may suggest three grades of religious hermeneutics.

I. Religious hermeneutics that is exclusively at this level does not allow one to make pronouncements about objective facts, the description and explanation of which are to be left to objectifying inquiry. Religious hermeneutics is concerned with the subjective dimension of the phenomena, of how they are taken to be related to one's own life and existence.

II. Religious hermeneutics operates on several levels in which there may be occasion to suspend the methodological naturalism that normally governs objectifying inquiry:

a) the description of phenomena may be irreducibly religious;

b) religious background information and other principles may be used to evaluate competing hypotheses or theories;

c) irreducibly religious language may be used in the construction of the theories used to explain phenomena, and irreducibly religious concepts and presuppositions may be used to provide an understanding of texts and phenomena.

Specific religious principles, concepts, and other elements may be used as an organizing basis for the development of a "sacred science", which will become a part of a coherent and integrated religious worldview.

In the above sketch of three grades of religious involvement in hermeneutics, there is no intention of suggesting that the first grade is a watered down version of religious hermeneutics to be superseded by the subsequent ones. The grades are distinguished by the extent to which they (potentially) oppose the findings of objectifying inquiry or the dominant modern science. The question of which grade of religious involvement is appropriate may well differ from one area of interpretive activity to another. It may also turn out that the sort of religious involvement that will have the furthest reaching impact on the direction the sciences will take will be that proposed by Bultmann; but this issue cannot be pursued any further here.

Specifically denominational hermeneutics will be species of the generic religious hermeneutics sketched above, although the most revealing classifications of such hermeneutics may not be along denominational lines. For example, a hermeneutics based on a Christian view that presupposes Biblical literalism may be more akin to a Salafi hermeneutics, than to other varieties of Christian hermeneutics.

Further refinements of Islamic hermeneutics can be found through the examination of the works of a number of scholars who have sought to understand Islamic intellectual traditions and authors, and to apply them to contemporary debates about science, ethics, politics, society, and other areas. Here I will only very briefly mention two examples, each of which has its own particular importance: Leo Strauss

and William Chittick, both of whom make points that must be taken into consideration in order to avoid misunderstandings.

In a number of books and articles, William Chittick has advocated the recovery and development of an Islamic understanding of God, world, and man.[10] Chittick draws heavily on Traditionalist literature, but is not content with nostalgia and condemnation of the moderns. By way of example, he provides a list of principles gleaned from the Islamic intellectual tradition upon which interpretation and understanding can be based. While prevented by limitations of length from considering these points in detail, several of the claims Chittick makes deserve emphasis.

First, an Islamic hermeneutics will only develop through the recovery of Islamic intellectual sciences. The exclusive focus of Muslims on the transmitted sciences and on a politics of Islamic identity has inhibited the ability of Muslims to think for themselves and apply their intellects to finding the haqq of things in the world and in themselves.[11]

Second, an Islamic hermeneutics must be based on the awareness that the sort of understanding provided by its interpretations is no mere accumulation of facts whose aim is control over objects; rather, its aim is wisdom, and wisdom goes beyond what is considered knowledge in the prevalent scientistic worldview. The rejection of scientism and the recognition that one's understanding cannot be simply taken over from some textual source by imitation are also characteristic of the hermeneutic tradition.

It is important to distinguish scientism from modern science. We might have criticisms of how modern science is conducted, of the institutions that support and direct scientific research, or of the way that research is evaluated, but the accusation that modern science claims that no knowledge is legitimate except that which meets the standards of modern science misses the mark.

Modern science makes no claims about the legitimacy of metaphysical principles or of beliefs based on knowledge by presence or on the sensus divinitatis. Such claims about the legitimacy of various sorts of philosophical propositions require argumentation that goes beyond the theories and research findings of the sciences themselves. To his credit, Dr. Nasr has been careful to make this distinction:

You know that I have always criticized Western scientism, but I have never said that we have the choice of not mastering the modern sciences. I have said that we have to absorb Western science within our own worldview and try to criticize it and also integrate and digest it within our own culture and intellectual tradition.[12]

Leo Strauss developed a hermeneutics that he sought to apply to the texts of Plato, Farabi, Spinoza, and a number of other philosophers. In his hermeneutics, Strauss attempted to defend a classical philosophical understanding of society and politics against what he took to be the misunderstandings of various modern thinkers. Strauss and Gadamer were on friendly terms, although they disagreed on a number of points, as well.[13]

One of the points emphasized by Strauss and conceded by Gadamer was the importance of recognizing how a text may contain a hidden message. Strauss took the presence of contradictions in a text to indicate that the author had a hidden message that conflicts with the outward one the reader would be expected to obtain from a superficial reading of the text. Gadamer objects that the presence of contradictions may indicate other things, such as, that the subject discussed cannot be expressed within the confines of logic. Be this as it may, it is certainly to the credit of Strauss to point out the importance of layers of meaning that may confront the reader of texts in the Islamic tradition, since this implies that an Islamic hermeneutics must be ready to offer multiple interpretations of the objects of its study, whether texts or social phenomena.

1. See Bultman (1985), passim. It is important to recognize that Bultmann's program of demythologizing is not to be confused with a secularization of textual interpretation. See van Fraassen (2002), 187–189.
2. See Plantinga (1998).
3. Bultmann (1985), 84.
4. Bultmann (1985), 87.
5. van Fraassen (2002), 194.
6. For more detailed development of the varieties of methodological naturalism, see Plantinga (2009), and Plantinga (1996).
7. Plantinga (1996), 192.
8. Plantinga (1996), 193.
9. See Lovejoy (1936). This survey makes it clear that the sorts of principles that Nasr would use as a basis for sacred science are themselves subject to diverse interpretations.
10. For example, Chittick (1998) and Chittick (2007).
11. Chittick (2007), 46.
12. Nasr (2010), 115–116. The writer of the introduction to this volume, Terry Moore, is not so subtile, as he writes of "the totalitarian claims of modern science." Nasr (2010), xiii, see also xxvi.
13. See the appendix to the second addition of Wahrheit und Methode, Gadamer (1993), 414– 424; Gadamer (2004), 529–537; also Gadamer (1984), and Strauss and Gadamer (1978).

5. Applied Islamic Hermeneutics

For Bultmann and van Fraassen, there is no ultimate contradiction between science and religion because science is objectifying inquiry while religion speaks to the attitude one takes toward one's existence in all its subjectivity. On this view, it would be a mistake to try to apply a religious hermeneutics to the social sciences, for the social sciences, as sciences, are a part of objectifying inquiry while religious hermeneutics requires us to take a stance toward social phenomena that falls outside the realm of science. In dealing with historical phenomena, however, Bultmann insists that we cannot limit ourselves to objectifying inquiry. Hence, there will be a specifically religious understanding of social phenomena, but no specifically religious social sciences, although there is a specifically religious hermeneutics of social phenomena.

For Plantinga, on the other hand,

It would be excessively naïve to think that contemporary science is religiously and theologically neutral.. Perhaps parts of science are like that: the size and shape of the earth and its distance from the sun, the periodic table of elements, the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem– these are all in a sensible sense religiously neutral. But many other areas of science are very different; they are obviously and deeply involved in this clash between opposed worldviews. There is no neat recipe for telling which parts of science are neutral with respect to this contest and which are not, and of course what we have here is a continuum rather than a simple distinction. But here is a rough rule of thumb: the relevance of a bit of science to this contest depends upon how closely that bit is involved in the attempt to come to understand ourselves as human beings. [1]

For Nasr, there will certainly be a sacred form of hermeneutics that is informed by the principles of perennial philosophy. Everything is to be understood in terms of a grand perennial system of principles. Our understanding of all phenomena and texts is to be governed by and integrated into the Traditionalist worldview.

For Bultmann, Plantinga, and Nasr, the application of a religious hermeneutics will require considerable work. It is not a matter of simply taking note of religious assumptions and cosmic principles and carrying on from there.

The work that these thinkers require for a religious hermeneutics may be compared with what Paul Ricoeur called "the hermeneutics of suspicion". Ricoeur used this term for the ways in which Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche understood (or misunderstood) religion.[2] While hermeneutics in the tradition from Schleiermacher through Gadamer has sought to understand the other in a sympathetic way, trying to understand, to the extant possible, how the other looks at issues, gives reasons, and offers justifications, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche sought to find reasons for religious views and behavior of which those who display them are unaware. If we ask the religious person why he or she believes in God, answers may be given in terms of religious experience, intuitions, or proofs for the existence of God. To the contrary, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche argue that what lies behind religious belief is a projection of the idea of the father, or propaganda to keep the working classes from revolting, or a tendency for the weak and sheepish to deny to themselves the power of their own wills. This sort of attempt to rely on a psychological, sociological or economic analysis to ferret out underlying causes of thought and behavior of which agents are not consciously aware is also called genealogy.[3]

Thomas Nagel has suggested that the genealogical method might be applied not only to find the underlying reasons for religious phenomena, but also to discover the underlying factors behind atheism.[4] This would provide for a hermeneutics of suspicion in reverse, as it were. Indeed, the suspicion that the effects of sin are behind what on the surface seem to be reasons for heretical beliefs may be found in various religious traditions. In Calvinism, reason itself becomes an object of suspicion.[5]

Ricoeur proposes a hermeneutics of recollection to enable the researcher who has passed through the gauntlet of the hermeneutics of suspicion to emerge with a more profound understanding of the original intent of the religious texts to be examined. This approach has been criticized as being apologetic. D. Z. Phillips has proposed a hermeneutics of contemplation in order to avoid interpretive programs with fixed ends–either the undermining or defense of religion.[6]

The hermeneutics of contemplation shares some affinity with the ideal of the philosophical life championed by Leo Strauss, a life of free intellectual inquiry into the truth of things. Phillips, like Strauss, is also more concerned with the task of understanding religious texts, texts that offer theological or philosophical discussions of religious beliefs, and other religious phenomena, rather than with the task of understanding from a religious point of view.

The religious point of view is explored in Westphal's study of the hermeneutics of suspicion.[7] Westphal's aim is to show how religious thinkers might benefit from the insights of atheists without accepting the atheism on which their thought is based. He uses religious language to reinterpret Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, not as they intended to be understood, but as exposing how religion can be falsified when used to satisfy projections of our own needs, or to placate those who are exploited, or to allow the weak willed to feel self–righteous.

In calling Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche the great secular theologians of original sin I have suggested that the hermeneutics of suspicion belongs to our understanding of human sinfulness. The self– deceptions they seek to expose, like those exposed by Jesus and the prophets, are sins and signs of our fallenness.[8]

Westphal's work suggests how a hermeneutic of suspicion may be transformed into a religious hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of suspicion operates by observing that the reasons that inform the self–understanding of religious agents may be rationalizations that serve to hide baser motives. Westphal transforms this into a religious hermeneutics through the observation that the reasons that appear to support religious behavior may hide a perversion of religion. The recognition of this phenomenon is also suggested in the following surah of the Qur'an (n. 107):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

{أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ 1}

1. Did you seen him who denies the Retribution?

{فَذَٰلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ 2}

2. that is the one who drives away the orphan,

{وَلَا يَحُضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ 3}

3. and does not urge the feeding of the needy,

{فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ 4}

4. so, woe to those who pray,

{الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ 5}

5. -those who are heedless of their prayers,

{الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ 6}

6. those who show off

{وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ 7}

7. but deny aid.

Here we find a clear example of an apparently religious phenomenon, prayer, that hides a non-religious motive, showing off. The criterion that shows that the prayer is not genuine is the denial of aid. This hardly constitutes a hermeneutics of suspicion, however, since it does not presume that apparently religious phenomena are always caused by hidden factors, but only that under circumstances of sinfulness, they can be.

The application of an Islamic hermeneutics cannot take the route of suspicion, recovery, or contemplation as a general rule for all cases, if these are taken to mean suspicion with respect to apparent motives, recovery of the original message given in a text or phenomenon, or a philosophical neutrality with regard to these issues. Instead, good judgment needs to be applied to each case, keeping in mind that it may be necessary to posit multiple levels of meaning in order to provide the best religious interpretation of the object of inquiry.

1. Plantinga (1996), 178.
2. See Ricoeur (1970).
3. From Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. For a critical analysis, see MacIntyre (1990); also see Westphal (1998), and Leiter (2004).
4. See Nagel (1998) and the review: Legenhausen (2003).
5. See Wainwright (1995).
6. Phillips (2004).
7. Westphal (1998).
8. Westphal (1998), 288.

6. Islamic Social Sciences

The task of applying an Islamic hermeneutics to the social sciences is complicated by several factors. First, there is the old question about whether there can even be such a thing as social science.

If science is objectifying inquiry, and the interpretation of social phenomena cannot be an objectifying inquiry, it would seem that any social science would be impossible, and, hence that there could be no Islamic social science. Our suggestion is that the objectivity of interpretive inquiry can be preserved through the articulation of the assumptions upon which one's interpretation is based.

The idea that any hermeneutics must begin from one's own perspective does not imply that this perspective cannot itself be articulated and subject to critical examination. Second, if we grant that there can be social sciences, and that hermeneutics will play a significant role in them, would a religious hermeneutics not compromise the scientific nature of the sciences?

The hermeneutical foundations of the social sciences, however, will not be any more scientific for being value neutral or free from religious ideas as long as the values and religious principles that inform the hermeneutics are confessed from the outset. It must be admitted that all of the factors that determine judgment in interpretation may not be transparent to the interpreter; but efforts can be made to set out these factors to the extent possible, develop greater awareness of them, and to examine them critically. This can take place gradually through a dialectical process in which inquiry and interpretation are undertaken.

Further complications arise because of the history of the relations between theology and the social sciences in the past. Although this history is about the attitudes taken by Christian theologians to the social sciences as well as the attitudes prevalent in the nascent social sciences toward Christianity, and a concept of religion generalized from Christianity, it is essential for Muslims to become aware of how the topic of religion and the social sciences has played out in the West if they are to effectively advance a study of the social sciences in accordance with Islam that is able to avoid some of the foibles that continue to occur in other contexts.

Richard H. Roberts outlines five strategies employed by Christian theologians to develop relations between theology and the social sciences.

First, the fundamentalist option involves the repudiation of modernity and concomitant patterns of regression; second, theology can tend towards reductive absorption into the social scientific perspective (*Ernst Troeltsch*)*; third, the theologian may draw upon and use sociological categories as part of his or her essentially theological project* (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, H. R. Niebuhr*)*; fourth, theological and sociological categories can be regarded as coinherent aspects of an integral 'form of life', 'life-world' or 'phenomenology of tradition'* (*Edward Farley*) *which subsists at a remove from the question of modernity; fifth, the theologian may repudiate sociology as heretical secular thought and posit the persuasive option of commitment to the Christian cultural-linguistic practice* (*JohnMilbank*). [1]

After a survey of the five mentioned types, Roberts observes that Christian theology's engagement with modern sociology has been marked by discontinuity, if not incoherence. To the five views mentioned, we might also add Roberts' own view, although he describes it as closest to that of Bonheoffer, which emphasizes that the social sciences should be counted among the human sciences, and as such are to be engaged in by the theologian with the aim seeking a "new and active fusion of the human sciences together with the articulation and admission of the human right, following the example of Bonhoeffer, to express a self-transcending identity."[2]

The project of developing Islamic social sciences cannot succeed unless it is understood that this project will have at least as much of an effect on Islamic theology as it will on the social sciences. Roberts writes:

The fact that theology or metaphysical philosophy may once have provided the basis of coherent identity and legitimation does not now sanction regressions into a mythic past or the invocation of a utopian futurity when we are faced with the challenge of secularisation and modernity. On the contrary, other means have to be found through which tradition(*s*)*, Enlightenment and critical reflexivity may be creatively coordinated anew.* [3]

There are various dangers associated with the project of the Islamization or sacralization of the sciences, only some of which are suggested by Roberts' discussion. If beginnings are made toward Islamic social sciences, regardless of how exactly such sciences are understood, these beginnings will be followed with the erroneous idea that it is these new Islamic social sciences that should be studied in the universities of the Muslim world and not the secular atheistic social sciences of the corrupt West.

This would be a grave error because it will be essential for any Islamic or sacred science to stand in a dialectical relationship with the secular sciences. Islamic social science will not be able to flourish without the study of secular social science any more than Islamic philosophy would have been able to flourish without the study of the Greeks. By relying on an Islamic hermeneutics as sketched above, however, it may be hoped that a suitable foundation for Islamic social sciences may be nurtured that will contribute

to a sacred science that has sufficient confidence to engage with the modern sciences in fruitful dialogue.

1. Roberts (2001), 194–195.
2. Roberts (2001), 211.
3. Roberts (2001), 210–211.

7. Concluding Reflections

A number of Muslim writers have suggested that the modern sciences or modern scientism are incompatible with Islam. This claim is more plausibly made about scientism than about the sciences themselves, although it must be admitted that the distinction is sometimes blurred, as when researchers present theories interwoven with presumptions contrary to religious belief. It has been suggested that there should be a revival of "sacred science" or an Islamization of the sciences. This project requires the undertaking of scientific research and theorization within a religious or Islamic conceptual framework. The need to carry out this project is felt especially urgently with regard to the social sciences, in which values and worldview play a particularly prominent role.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and understanding. Although, unfortunately, this study has sometimes been associated with perniciously relativistic views, there is nothing about hermeneutics in the general sense outlined here that requires this. The project of nurturing sacred or Islamized sciences is essentially a hermeneutical project, for it requires the reinterpretation and renewed understanding of the sciences from a religious or Islamic perspective.

The idea of an Islamized science will face the objection that the introduction of religious and metaphysical principles and values is incompatible with science. Science is objectifying inquiry, it will be argued, and this requires science to be free from the interference of religion, metaphysics, and value judgments. To this objection, there are two replies.

First, even the natural sciences are not as neutral as they are advertised to be. Secondly, objectivity does not require neutrality, but only a commitment to the ongoing task of making assumptions explicit.

In this paper, I have suggested three grades of religious hermeneutics that may be employed to cultivate sacred sciences: (I) religious understanding at the subjective level; (II) a rejection of methodological naturalism with regard to (a) the description of phenomena, (b) the evaluation of theories, and (c) theory construction; (III) the positive integration of successful theories into a coherent religious worldview.

Muslim scholars can only hope to develop religious hermeneutics along the lines suggested here through the recovery of the Islamic intellectual sciences, the conscious rejection of the scientistic

worldview, and an engagement with the sciences aimed at wisdom. For the wisdom thus sought to have depth, it is essential for researchers to consider the multiple layers of meaning to be found in the texts and other phenomena that serve as objects of inquiry.

A hierarchical stratification of levels of meaning that begins with the exterior/interior (zahir/batin) division will take shape, in sha' Allah, through dialogue with the secular sciences as researchers draw on the Islamic intellectual traditions to elaborate hermeneutical foundations for Islamic social sciences.

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