

Book Reviews

Epistemological Integration: Essentials of an Islamic Methodology

Fathi Hasan Malkawi

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Nancy Roberts' translation of Fathi Malkawi's most recent study represents the latest addition to the corpus of literature dealing with the Islamization of Knowledge project. The author's core argument is that a truly Islamic approach to the study of any phenomenon, whether biological, physical, or social, is definitively characterized by its inherent ability to incorporate both the advances made in scientific theory as well as those made in applied science by any person. However, there is one caveat: these advances cannot be founded upon any underlying principles that contradict the only sources of knowledge available to humanity: divine revelation and physical, psychological, and social reality. This book, which falls squarely within the branches of epistemology that deal with education theory and knowledge assessment, strives to go beyond mere academic discussion into practical application for all major fields of scientific inquiry. It is primarily addressed to Muslim scientists and educators, regardless of discipline, who seek a coherent set of principles and a clearly delineated foundational worldview, inspired by the Qur'an and Sunnah, from which to ignite intellectual and material progress within contemporary Muslim society.

One of the work's most salient features is its focus on training via exercises, activities, and problems to be dealt with in training seminars. The appendix provides clear instructions on organizing such events in order to teach the methodology of epistemological integration as explained by Malkawi. One also finds charts and diagrams that present the relationships between the sources of knowledge and the means of interpreting this knowledge, as well as the connections among epistemology, methodology, and worldview interspersed throughout the text and then presented again at the end for convenience.

The first chapter, "Concepts of Relevance to Epistemological Integration," presents the concept of *tawhīd*, God's singular uniqueness as defined in the

Qur'an, hadith, and scholastic theological treatises on monotheism, as the core principle underlying any Islamic methodological approach. In this examination of how Islam's core message influences a Muslim's worldview, the ideas of Ismail al-Faruqi (d. 1986) dominate. Here, as well as throughout the remaining chapters and to the reader's great benefit, one finds clearly laid out the main ideas of such important contemporary Muslim philosophers and legal minds as the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abd al-Rahman and legal theorist Ahmad al-Raysuni, the Iraqi jurist Taha Jabir al-Alwani, and the Saudi scholar Abdul-Hamid AbuSulayman. Also included among the innovative thinkers whose ideas are to be integrated within an Islamic theory of knowledge are non-Muslim philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn (d. 1996). Pre-modern thinkers whose work provides Malkawi's Islamic methodology with the springboard upon which to launch itself include Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 1388), and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406).

Chapter 2, "Method and Methodology," seeks to clearly define these two terms that correspond to the Arabic *minhāj/manhaj*, as found in the Qur'an, and *manhajīyah*. According to Malkawi, while the former refers to "research procedures," the latter denotes "the science that concerns itself with these procedures" (p. 46). It is this second term, its denotations as well as connotations, that should command the attention of those readers interested in theories of knowledge, for it exemplifies the most significant subject of debate in Islamic intellectual history. Malkawi points out that the concept of methodology most closely resembles that which has been historically labeled the "science of logic" (p. 47). Shafi'i's "principles of jurisprudence" (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and al-Ghazali's "scientific standard" (*mi'yār al-'ilm*) or "investigative criterion" (*mi'yār al-nazar*) all refer to the same core concept, but from within discipline-specific discussions.

This is easily relatable to another very important work that has yet to receive the attention in English-language scholarship that it deserves: the late Egyptian cultural critic Mahmud Muhammad Shakir's (d. 1997) *Abātīl wa Asmār (Lies and Idle Chatter, 1972)*. Shakir presents a four-part division of the meaning of *dīn*, commonly translated in English as "religion," that has strong parallels with the four types of Islamic universals developed by Ahmad al-Raysuni and thoroughly discussed by Malkawi in this chapter. Raysuni's first universal relates to doctrine, the second to the higher aims and intents of Islamic law, the third to morality, and the fourth to legislation (p. 67). The universals of doctrine, morality, and legislation correspond respectively to Shakir's *i'tiqādāt wa 'ibādāt* (creedal beliefs and acts of worship), *adāb wa akhlāq* (virtues and ethics), and *shar'* (the body of laws).

Interestingly, paralleling Raysuni's universal of *maqāṣid* (the higher intents or goals of the law) we find Shakir's *istinbāt*, which broadly means a method of investigating a problem. Shakir states that this aspect of *dīn* has offered the greatest challenge to earlier thinkers by causing the historical rivalry between the *ahl al-zāhir/ahl al-ḥadīth* (textualists) and the *ahl al-ra'y* (speculative rationalists). I would argue, as Shakir did, that it remains the issue of the day and is the very same one that Malkawi and others are grappling with in terms of the Islamization of Knowledge. It is inherently linked with the *maqāṣidī* discourse as developed by al-Shatibi in Andalusia, al-Tahir ibn Ashur (d. 1973) in Tunisia, and the Moroccan Allal al-Fasi (d. 1974), and that continues to be developed today by scholars like Ahmad al-Raysuni, Jasser Auda, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, and Taha Jabir al-Alwani.

In chapter 3, "Methodological Awareness and Methodological Defects," Malkawi cites AbuSulayman's three conditions for renewal and reform: mental strength and courage, sound thinking, and "a clear worldview whose aim is to bring benefit to all" (p. 98). One of the points to take away from this final condition is that an Islamic approach to scientific thought must be characterized by its humanism and not by religious chauvinism. Al-Alwani's theory of the dual readings of the Qur'an and the created universe are then cited as the means by which these three conditions can be met. Malkawi argues that so long as the analyst emphasizes the "historical logic of change" (p. 99), today's reformers can avoid repeating the tired old debates that inspired Ibn Rushd's seminal work on the harmony between rational philosophy and revelation, his responses to the Ghazalian critique, Ibn al-Salah's reactionary declaration that logic was religiously prohibited, and Ibn Taymiyyah's innovative development of an Islamic alternative to the Aristotelian syllogism.

I would add that a fuller view of the historical development of Islamic legal reasoning and its dialogue with Aristotelian philosophy will show that al-Ghazali's critique, in actual practice and as urged on by his reading of Ibn Hazm's work on the subject, amounted to a reconfiguration of the jurist's methods of analogical reasoning in order to conform to the rigors of the categorical syllogism and a desire to yield the type of epistemological certainty that it was thought to produce.

In chapter 4, "Evolution in the Concept of Method in Islamic and Western Thought," Malkawi recounts the major developments in humanity's understanding of method, pointing out the many contributions of Muslim scientists and philosophers such as Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040) "known for his precise and thorough formulation of the experimental scientific method based on observation, experimentation and proof," and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) whose "emphasis on the importance of practical, concrete experience (empiricism) for

acquiring an understanding of the defining characteristics of things, social laws, and principles of causality” (pp. 144-45) predates early modern Europe’s foregrounding of empirical research.

In this same section, Malkawi identifies a distinction between Muslim historians’ method of evaluating texts of the Prophetic Sunnah and the historical critical method of Orientalists “with the Islamic method being founded upon religious faith, and the Western method being based on a secular, materialist critique of history” (p. 145). However, there is another way of looking at the differences between the two from a perspective squarely grounded in epistemology. The issue at hand has to do with the philosophical problems of testimony and its role as a means to acquire belief at a high level of probability and the production of certainty in knowledge. The distinction between the Islamic method of hadith verification and the historical critical method can be explained as more than just a matter of religious faith; it also has a great deal to do with early modern Europe’s adaptation of the empirical model of Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn Khaldun. The historical sociological work of Steven Shapin, particularly his *A Social History of Truth* (1994), would be very useful in further teasing out these philosophical and methodological differences.

Chapter 5, “Schools of Islamic Methodology,” introduces four equally valid schools in that they adhere to the *tawhīdī* (unifying) methodology as explained by Malkawi: the rationalist-scholastic-philosophical school, the experiential-Sufi school, the scientific-empirical school, and the juristic-*uṣūlī* school. These schools are defined by the nature of the knowledge they seek and the tools they use. From the first school, which Malkawi presents Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Ḥazm (p. 155) as having advanced the most balanced approach to reason and revelation. It is noteworthy that all three could equally be placed in the fourth school, that of the jurists, and even in the empirical school. This is particularly true of Ibn Ḥazm, whom Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) mentioned in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought* as a pioneer in this regard. Among the leading thinkers of the juridical school, Malkawi highlights al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam (d. 1261), Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, and Muhammad al-Shawkani (d. 1839) for advances made in legal theory with respect to the primacy of public welfare and independent legal reasoning (pp. 172-73). It should be noted that each of them was heavily indebted to the three philosophers mentioned above, as is readily apparent to anyone who has studied their works.

Chapter 6, “Sources and Tools of Methodology,” emphasizes the relations between the two sources of knowledge (revelation and the created world) and the two primary tools for acquiring knowledge (human reason and the senses). Malkawi presents an interesting discussion of principles and patterns of conduct or practice in research (p. 203). The reader of this section would benefit from

examining these ideas in tandem with a reading of Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of conduct in *The Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Polity Press: 2004).

Chapter 7, "Methodological Principles and Values," presents the three primary goals of Islam as developed by Taha Jabir al-Alwani: *tawhīd* (unity), *tazkiyah* (purity), and *'umrān* (civility). Malkawi identifies Ibn Khaldun as the founder of "*ilm al-'umrān*: 'the science of human development and prosperity,' 'the science of civilization' or what we now know as sociology" (p. 266). Khaldunian sociology is only starting to receive the attention it deserves, with the most recent example of such attention being the publication of Syed Farid Alatas' *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology* (Routledge: 2014) as part of the Routledge Advances in Sociology series. Malkawi considers Ibn Khaldun's science as the key discipline for those "present-day advocates of reform and change in Muslims societies to study the laws that govern change... the knowledge it might yield of natural laws and patterns would then form the basis for reform efforts" (p. 269).

This book is useful for scholars of epistemology and education as well as for those interested in curriculum design and the construction of foundational principles of thought based upon one's religious identity. I must highlight one of the author's final points in his "Concluding Remarks": a "preoccupation with reviving the Islamic heritage by, for example, editing, annotating and abridging manuscripts for publication... is not a substitute for the establishment of new disciplines derived from the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah" (p. 278). This is most certainly true in the case of the Arab, South Asian, and Turkish Muslim communities, for the bulk of the last century was dedicated to just such an enterprise. However, this may not equally apply to the burgeoning American and western Muslim intellectual community, many of whom do not have access to these texts in the original languages.

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