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## INVITED ESSAY

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# Naturalistic and Islamic Approaches to Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Religion: Metaphysical Assumptions and Methodology—A Discussion

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### THE DISCUSSION

The present discussion arose from the work on the Tehran Congress Report (Khalili, Murken, Reich, Shah, & Vahabzadeh, this issue). Knowledge of that report is helpful for better understanding this exchange between the present two authors, especially Shah's exposition of Islamic psychology and psychotherapy. This article aims at presenting the two approaches, their commonalities and differences, and above all, the possibilities for collaboration despite these differences. The discussion begins with a long initial statement by each author. These are followed by a

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section that presents the remarks of both authors, formulated and interspersed after taking into account the responses of each author to the initial exchanges.

### SEBASTIAN MURKEN: OPENING REMARKS

I have set out my basic views in my earlier report (Khalili et al., this issue). In a specifically naturalistic and secularized model of Western epistemology, society is conceived as being the result of interacting subsystems, each with its own structure and internal logic—for example, economics, politics, science, and religion (e.g., Luhmann, 1995). Religion, in this case, has no privileged position. In contrast, in a model of religion-based epistemology, religion is not one cultural subsystem among others but is instead the basis and framework of everything else, in particular, in the context of the present discussion, of doing research in Islamic psychology.

My intention is to propose a bridge that can be accessed from either side and that acknowledges either approach. Irrespective of culturally based truth claims, such a bridge could be constructed by formulating common scientific and methodological standards which could include the following:

1. If at all possible, studies should use a control group in their design in order to avoid hermeneutic circular reasoning in the sense of self-fulfilling prophecies.
2. Studies should be based on hypotheses that can be tested and thus potentially falsified. Without the formulation of hypotheses the theoretical understanding of phenomena remains limited. A statistical correlation is not a theory. And, to put it unambiguously: Theological doctrines are no falsifiable theories either.
3. When interpreting the results, one should be aware of one's own truth claims. It would be helpful to reflect these and to make them transparent.

To ask the same questions of people living in different cultures and having different religions seems to be a promising way to understand cultural biases and to work through them, providing that it is done as just outlined (e.g., Hood et al., 2001).

### Epistemology

As a basis for discussion, here is a summary of the change in epistemology in the 20th century, as I understand it. Thanks to the work of Norwood Russell Hanson (1958, 1971), Karl Popper (1935, 1963, 1972), Thomas S. Kuhn (1970), Imre Lakatos (1970, 1978), Paul Feyerabend (1975, 1978, 1981), Larry Laudan (1990) and others, the conceptual foundations of science have undergone a marked change in the second part of the 20th century. Taking the cue from Helmut Reich (2002, pp. 35–37), I see this change as follows. The earlier classical realism rests on the assumptions that

(1) there is a reality independent of human ideas and theories; (2) scientific theories and the theoretical entities contained in them purport to refer to those real entities, processes, or structures existing independently of the theories; (3) hence, scientific theories can be judged to be true or false in some sense larger than merely that “they allow one to describe, predict, and organize the experimental data.” The latter could be called “epistemic truth” whereas the former is “ontic truth.” (Kitchener, 1988, p. 17)

Thus, the scientific theories assumed by classical realism involve ontic truth, not just the epistemic truth of theories “merely” aimed at describing, predicting, and organizing empirical data.

*Foundationalism* follows from the purported ontic truth of scientific theories. Laudan (1990) enumerates the resulting foundational epistemological program as

(1) a search for incorrigible givens from which the rest of knowledge could be derived; (2) a commitment to giving advice about how to improve knowledge; and (3) the identification of criteria for recognizing when one had a bona fide claim. (p. 134)

However, the impact of the work begun by Hanson (1958) has convinced most contemporary philosophers of scientific knowledge that foundationalism can no longer be justified (e.g., Laudan). Indeed, by now it has become clear that (a) all observations are theory-laden, i.e., influenced by pre-knowledge; (b) scientific theories are underdetermined by facts, for example, several theories may explain a given data set “equally well;” (c) verification or falsification of a theory is more complex than thought previously (the *experimentum crucis* is an exceptional occurrence); and (d) the underlying assumptive framework, perhaps unwittingly chosen, provides an influential hermeneutic context for one’s research (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

If this conceptualization is adopted, one can no longer refer to the only true and best theory, but one can still make comparisons according to the following criteria: The approach, model, or theory considered more effective, would—each time compared to its rival—(a) explain broader ranges of different kinds of phenomena, (b) have been tested in more areas, (c) already have led to more unexpected discoveries or applications, (d) yielded more precise results, (e) be more dependable, (f) possibly be the only candidate that offers a satisfactory explanation for certain phenomena. When making the comparison between the rivals, it is understood that no criterion from (a) to (f) is individually sufficient for a ranking but that all criteria count jointly for a preference, even though it can be changed later. In other words, the preferred approach, model, or theory wins a relative victory, not an absolute one; and in case the comparison is repeated after further work on a nonpreferred competitor, it may well become the dominant view. The basis and results of such comparisons can be agreed interindividually, and thereby gain scientific credence.

## Methodological Issues

Science implies that we lack knowledge about certain things. The scientific process should be designed to make us more knowledgeable about questions so far unanswered. For this we eventually need a theory, not just correlational studies, which indicate the strength of a relationship between variables, but not the nature of that relationship. Scientific methodology demands that the testing itself leaves the result open. For instance, if one wants to explore the interrelation between religion and depression, a hypothesis could be about (a) religion-induced depression, such that thinking that everything is in God's hands makes one feel powerless and helpless, which might therefore sustain depression. One could test this by assessing religiosity, locus of control, and level of depression, and by then comparing the results with those from a control group. Another hypothesis could be about (b) religion-induced resilience, such that religion prevents depression through the possibility of referring problems to a Higher Power, which can be supportive within life's demands. This second hypothesis could be tested in a way similar to the first one. Constructing a theory built on either hypothesis, or on alternative ones, would be supported by whichever evidence is better. This is obviously not possible if the issue has been preempted by working with a single unfalsifiable assumption.

Many of the studies presented at the Tehran Congress and elsewhere in the field of Religion and Health lack a theory. For the most part they only explore associations between various measures of religiousness and mental health. I suggest some caution in interpreting the significance of the effect of religion on mental health determined in this way. As far as I know the literature, the largest positive effects of religiosity hardly ever explain more than 5 or 6 % of variance of the mental health criteria. To understand the place of mental health in people's lives, it is therefore important not to rely on religion as the sole variable, but to include other relevant variables like degree of physical health, socio-economic status, self-esteem, social support system and so on. If we understand mental disorders exclusively in religious terms, for example as a punishment for the nonobservation of religious laws, we might miss important alternative explanations such as those proposed for the worldwide problem of the increase in depression.

### ASHIQ ALI SHAH: REPLY TO MURKEN

I wish to make some remarks about Murken's comparison of a purely naturalistic and an Islamic religion-based epistemology. I agree to some extent with the juxtaposition of the two approaches regarding their pros and cons in the inquiry of human behavior. However, I do not agree with his conclusion that the methodology adopted by both approaches should be based on theory-based hypotheses and that it

should follow a hypothetico-deductive approach. In my opinion, this is the major problem with the so-called scientific approach using empirical methods. These scientific theories are reductionist fallacies of the human mind that view a human being in terms of specific proportions or percentages; they are not universal. The limitation of these theories to only certain classes of people makes their assumptions and blind application to other cultures unacceptable. For example, a handful of patients with mental disorders from Viennese bourgeois society were studied by Freud to formulate his assumptions of psychoanalysis. In the history of the so-called scientific psychology, this is an example of gross overgeneralization concerning human behavior on the basis of an unrepresentative sample. The data on behavior of rats, cats, pigeons, monkeys, and U. S. students were the basis of the theory of behaviorism obtained via logical inference. Such practices in psychology have stripped human beings of their consciousness, freedom, emotion, values, virtue, and most importantly, their soul.

Psychology is certainly not a science by any minimal scientific criterion. The psychological variables such as depression, motivation, arousal, anxiety, emotions, phobia, sociability, to name a few, are so complex that psychologists do not even agree about a precise definition of these variables, let alone their control. Unlike hard sciences, psychology could not arrange its subject matter in a homogeneous hierarchical manner in which elementary facts and theories lead logically to the next ones. We have mostly a jumble of independent components of knowledge, some of which do not even recognize the authenticity of others. Denmark (1995) argued that psychology simply cannot be treated as a science in the same manner as the natural sciences.

Kuhn (1970) dismissed the claim of psychology to be a science; this on the basis of his discussion of paradigm and paradigm shift. According to Kuhn, developed sciences have paradigms whereas psychology does not. He argued that in developed sciences a paradigm shift results in a new paradigm that overthrows and replaces the old one. In psychology and other social sciences new paradigms, if we call them so, generate much enthusiasm and plenty of followers, but old ones continue to survive and sometimes flourish again after the passage of a few years. Starting from Freud's unconscious through classical and operant learning and on to the humanistic and cognitive revolution, all these approaches to explaining human behavior are flourishing and claiming to represent scientific truth despite their mutual antagonism. Once famous and absolutely dominating the stage of psychology, psychoanalysis and behaviorism claimed to explain everything through the tunnel vision of their specialization. None of the psychological theories could be refuted, or to say it in empiricists' terminology, falsified. The truth value of Murken's (this issue) assertion that "theological doctrines are not falsifiable scientific theories" could be best juxtaposed with the "pseudofalsificationism" being practiced in scientific psychology. This is due to the self-fulfilling nature of the positivistic paradigm.

In contrast, an inquiry within the Islamic framework has a different meaning and constitutes a distinct approach to the search for truth. The Islamic framework of inquiry has four levels. In descending order they are: (a) knowledge derived from Qur'an; (b) the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW<sup>1</sup>), his words, deeds, and practice; (c) the *Ijma*, consensus of opinion of competent, pious Muslims; and (d) *Qiyas*, analogical deduction within the framework of Islamic law, based on human reasoning. This fourth stage of inquiry, a lower stage in the Islamic framework, is the only stage of so-called scientific inquiry.

There is another large difference in the methodology of investigation. In the Islamic approach, the prototypical researcher who acquires data and collects information is not just any academically trained individual studying college students or ordinary people, but is an intellectual and scholarly person who, nourished by the Qur'an and Sunnah, derives meanings and generates new knowledge via *Ijma* (consensus of opinion) and *Qiyas* (analogical deduction, an extension of the commandments of the Shari'ah by going from an original case to a new case and/or to new circumstances). In contrast, secularized individuals serving as prototypical researchers in the West use pure scientific empiricism. The consequences of this have included gay and lesbian marriages, older persons confined to old-age homes, premarital sex, children with unmarried parents, and crushing the weak and exploitation of others—the synonym for competition. From an Islamic point of view, this reflects unacceptable moral degradation.

The differences in the significance of religion in the West and in the Islamic world, and the unresponsive attitude of the West toward the offer of an in-depth understanding of Islam, has led to the treatment of Islam as a religion closely comparable to Judaism and Christianity. The truth of the matter is that Islam is a way and code of life, of which religious practices are only one component (cf. Figure 2 in Khalili at al., this issue). On the contrary, in Western societies religion is regarded as a practice of specific rituals that are confined to the church and to specific moments (cf. Figure 1 in Khalili at al., this issue). Even the history of religion and scientific inquiry in the cases of Christianity and Islam are different. The scientific culture in the West emerged as a revolution against the authority of the church, a revolution that has among its martyrs the scientists who opposed the traditional teachings of the Church, women accused of witchcraft, and other victims of the infamous inquisition set up by the Church. Christianity stressed that a human being has an immortal soul yet is born in sin. There have been times when it was taught that salvation could only be achieved by blindly following the rigid uncompromising injunctions of the Church and its philosophical and scientific teachings, even when rationality and empiricism fail to support it. Hence, psychology with its various schools had to challenge these conceptions by giving their theories

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<sup>1</sup>SAW [or SAAS/SAWS]; Salla Allahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam: May the blessing and the peace of Allah be upon him; English abbr.: Pbuh.

and practices a scientific coating. That is why the majority of Western psychological theories have based themselves on a well-defined alternative, nonreligious conception about the nature of human beings.

If one wished to construct hypotheses in psychology of religion, how would one proceed on the basis of simple universal Islamic religious teachings? One would begin with these teachings: (a) Believe in one God, the only God; (b) remembrance of God is the best protection against fear and anxiety; (c) help people in distress; (d) do not drink alcohol as its harms outweigh its benefits; (e) give charity regularly to the needy; (f) do not lie; (g) do not cheat; (h) usury is the height of transgression.

These are some of the examples of religious teachings. Is there any need to construct a theory in these cases? If yes, would that theory be more complete than these universal truths? And most important overall: Is there any need for a control group? Any sensible person will not boggle his or her mind too long over the validity of these principles. The Islamic approach does not have any set of variables to inquire about the psychology of these truths. Rather, it examines the impact of following these teachings on the mental health of people. In fact, I am not against the use of a control group in principle but I am against its generalization, especially in a context where it is highly inappropriate. For example, in order to study the mediating effects (if any) of fasting or prayers, use of control groups is considered unethical and un-Islamic. There are many Muslims, however, who do not regularly pray or fast. They may serve as a control group, but they may not in fact constitute a real control group. Their not practicing the rituals might have become a habit.

The assertion that religious variables do not explain more than 5% of the total variance in any study follows from the studies in the secular framework. One may ask at this juncture about the proportion of variance explained by other contemporary psychological theories that focus only on a tiny aspect of human beings. For example, what is the contribution of learning theory in explaining the total behavioral variance when only focusing on the observable phenomena, and ignoring cognitions, feelings, emotions, physiological processes, and transcendental aspects? To be more specific, analysis shows that personality variables derived from contemporary personality theories do not account for even 5% of the total variance.

In the Islamic approach to psychology, religious and spiritual beliefs are helpful in caring for the needs of individuals. The rituals are the source of spiritual development that makes a major contribution to the psychological stability of people. Many studies in the Muslim world have indicated a tremendous role of religion in the behavior and mental health of individuals. A European psychiatrist, Schmidt (1987), reported his findings of using Islamic religious techniques in treating drug and alcohol addicts in Brunei-Darulssalam at the Third Pan Arab Congress on Psychiatry in Amman, Jordan. He tried all the methods he had learned during his training as a psychiatrist with the Muslim clients but he was unsuccessful. In the last resort he took the addicts to a camp outside the city and subjected them to a rigorous program of Is-

lamic and physical activities involving prayers, talks, and video shows. The response of the addicts was very encouraging and they benefited much.

There are many other examples that indicate the effectiveness of Islamic beliefs and practices in managing the problem of alcoholism (Badri, 1976) and other psychological problems where other psychotherapies and psychiatric drugs failed (Badri, 1996). A number of Western psychologists and psychiatrists are becoming quite vocal about the spiritual aspects of human beings (Benson, 1996; Peck, 1990). Benson (1996) claimed that faith and belief in God are firmly embedded in human genes, that humans are literally programmed with a need for faith. It seems that he proposed a biological dimension for the Islamic concept of *Fitrah*. Ajmal (1986) argued that no systematic theory in psychology can be formulated without assuming a definite posture toward metaphysics. He believed that formulating metaphysical assumptions in psychology is especially important today, because quite a few persons are afflicted by (a) an acute dispersion into multiplicity and (b) distancing themselves from religion and God, considered as equivalent to mental disease.

As to methodology, Murken criticizes the approach of some of the papers presented at the Congress, especially those showing a relationship between religiosity and mental health. The major criticism is directed toward the correlational approach adopted in a number of empirical papers. It is argued that correlational findings might not intimate a causal relationship between religious practices and mental health because they could obscure the possible role of a third or moderator variable.

Methodologically, the coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) assesses the extent of common variance among the variables. Also, some relationships exist among the variables that can only be examined with the help of a correlational approach and not with another method. It is naive to generalize about the weaknesses of correlational studies without considering the specific studies and the nature of their variables. The same criticism also applies to a view of scientific psychology that is too narrow. The entire disciplines of personality and of mental ability testing are founded on correlational approach since the times of Galton.

One might argue that methodological refinements could be brought about by adopting a regression approach. For example, multiple variables may be entered in a hierarchical regression to see the impact of the variables of interest on the criterion. However, the limit for the number of variables to be employed may remain controversial.

Major criticism directed at the studies seems to be relevant only in the ethnocentric–reductionist paradigm of Western psychology; but it cannot qualify as a universal syllogism, just as the claim of Western psychology, a product of laboratory experimentation with the rats and dogs, to be scientific and universal has been rejected by many psychologists (Denmark, 1995; Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Kim, 2000; Koch, 1974; Moscovici, 1972; Yang, 2000). Ajmal (1986)

termed the flight of psychologists into the laboratory as an indication of their fear and the resulting wish to escape serious encounters with humans as individuals and groups, and with themselves. It may be an illusion to argue that psychological self-restriction to deal with different truths in the society is a nonreductionist scientific endeavor.

Let me end with a testimony to the scientific reliability of the Qur'an. Those researchers who are working on the scientific aspects of the Qur'an have found about 1000 verses that pertain to the scientific discoveries of our time. Just to give one example, from 1925 Edwin Hubble (1929) provided the observational evidence for the expansion of the universe. Later Stephen Hawking, author of *A Brief History of Time* (1988), explained theoretically that the universe was not static as had been previously thought but was expanding. However, this has been revealed 1400 years ago in the Qur'an: "And the firmament, We constructed with power and skill and verily We are expanding it" (Ad-Dhariyat 51: 47, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989). In 1512, Copernicus placed the sun motionless in the center of the solar system with all the planets revolving around it. Modern science later discovered that the sun too is in motion and not stationary. The following verse of the Qur'an indicated this: "It is He who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, all [the celestial bodies] swim along, each in its orbit with its own motion" (Al-Anbiya 21.33, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989). In other words, what was scientific for the adherents of religion of Islam 1400 years ago has now become scientific for the secular mind.

#### SEBASTIAN MURKEN AND ASHIQ ALI SHAH: FOLLOW-UP EXCHANGES

*Sebastian Murken:* Your considerations clarify the Islamic perspective, and that is an enrichment. In particular, I accept your criticism that psychology sometimes meddles with anthropology and unjustifiably claims that the resulting conceptualization of human beings is universal and the only acceptable one.

But there are a few points with which I do not quite agree. Here are my questions:

(1) On the basis of your explanations, how do you see the possibility of a joint research project? Is it possible at all to collaborate with researchers who do not share the Islamic framework? For instance, could we conduct the "same" study with Muslims in Malaysia by Islamic psychologists and in Germany by Western psychologists, and then compare the results?

(2) Accepting your methodology, how is one to research a question such as, "What is the most effective manner for teaching mathematics to a number of students of differing characteristics and backgrounds so that they all benefit most?" To my way of thinking, bringing in theories about cognition, motivation, learning,

etc. helps us to work out potentially fruitful hypotheses that can be tested in the field. Which alternative do you see in this particular case?

(3) You highlight—I believe quite well, at least historically—the benefits of Islam to mental health, science and research, etc. What about negative effects? Do they exist? Specifically, does Islam cause suffering to any person or group of persons?

(4) You blame the positivistic worldview in the West for a number of social ills. Are not societal and social issues generally too complex to be explained monocausally? And is not behaviorism largely passé except for the theory of learning, where the stick and the carrot have a long tradition? What good does it do to accuse and blame, as opposed to finding and proposing solutions? I can understand that each of us accumulates a certain amount of frustration and even anger, feels the need to eventually get rid of it, and uses upcoming opportunities to do so. Hopefully, frustration and anger thereby get out of the nervous system, and a more peaceful exchange can then take place.

*Ashiq Ali Shah:* I thank you for your questions, which allow me to explain some of my views in more detail. I respond to your questions one by one.

(1) I do not see any problems in that I have worked with many colleagues in the West. We are not within the Hindu system where some are untouchables. In the first place we are psychologists. We have to agree on a common strategy for any future cooperation; that is all.

*Sebastian Murken:* Well, I appreciate that. Maybe we can indeed set up a plan.

*Ashiq Ali Shah:* (2) I do not understand this question in the context of our current discussion. We are talking about religion and mental health, not mathematics. For the teaching of mathematics we have to adopt a corresponding strategy. I see this not only like the teaching of mathematics, but as much more. If the purpose of education is only to learn some specific worldly material in order to later find a job, then the methods of so-called scientific psychology are the relevant ones. On the other hand, if education is also to care for the moral and spiritual development of the child in order to prepare him or her to become a good person in this world and to be successful in the hereafter, then mere hypotheses testing may be inadequate.

(3) To answer this question I start with another question. Do you know for a fact that any divine, revealed religion harms people? I would be very interested to know about it. More specifically, I would be interested to know what you have in mind about Islam causing harm to a person or a group of people.

*Sebastian Murken:* You might know that I have been working as a psychotherapist for many years. I specialize in treating people with religious problems. Many of them have problems with anxiety, guilt and shame, sexuality, or their relationships partly as a result of their individual understanding of Christianity. Christianity does not prescribe harm, but still there are people who are suffering. As an

example, I have discussed this in detail for the psychological processing of milleniaristic ideas (Zwingmann & Murken, 2000).

So I was wondering if there exists something similar in Islam. For example, I could imagine that certain aspects of religious teachings might cause harm to individuals, such as might occur if a woman is barred from higher education for religious reasons. As a psychologist I think that we have to look at people's actual lives and not only at religious ideals, which, I agree, are mostly very benevolent.

My suggestion is, therefore, that we understand the effects of religion and religiosity in their cultural context and the unique interaction between individuals and their own religious understanding. I hope you can agree that even people who live a very religious life might have mental problems. I have treated too many priests and clergy to believe anything else.

*Ashiq Ali Shah:* The answer to the point you raised is two-fold. First, it is a matter of one's worldview about religion and one's anchoring in it. Second, it is a matter of where one looks for the answer to the problem that is, the problem of causal attribution for mental problems.

First, regarding one's worldview about religion, Figures 1 and 2 (Khalili et al., this issue) describe these two worldviews. Just to mention it once again, Islam is not merely a religion, but a code of life. On the one hand, it establishes a relationship between the individual and his or her Creator and, on the other hand, it postulates one's relationship with the community and this world. The phenomenal self of human beings is hedonistic and is easily attracted toward the worldly lust. How one views religion and its practices will determine whether or not religion will lead to certain psychological problems. If one regards religion as a means to a successful life and as benevolent, then the person would not face such problems. Alternatively, if one thinks that religion is restrictive regarding some aspects of life and would like to follow one's own desires, then one might face problems. A preoccupation with individual interests in the West often conflicts with the religious teachings when individual interests are put above the collective and religious interests. Many problems are the result of this conflict between the individual and the collective interests. Islam emphasizes welfare of the individual within the social and religious context. In order to avoid these problems, one's own likings are subservient to the teachings of Islam. The message of Islam is straightforward. Allah (SWT<sup>2</sup>) says in the Qur'an:

O ye who believe!  
 Enter into Islam whole-heartedly; And follow not  
 The footsteps of the Satan  
 For he is to you An avowed enemy (Al-Baqarah, 2:208, The Holy Qur-An,  
 1410/1989).

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<sup>2</sup>SWT; Subhanahu Wa Ta 'ala: Allah is purified of having partners or a son.

This verse of the Qur'an explains that submission is total, not partial. Many Muslims do not fulfill this criterion. As you mentioned, psychological problems arise as a result of one's understanding of Christianity. Many Muslims face the same problems because of their own understanding of Islam. If one misinterprets the Forgiveness and Mercy of God to have the liberty to commit sins and consequently encounters social and psychological problems, then it is not the religion but one's "bounded rationality" that is the perpetrator of the problems. The teachings of Islam emphasize that the human being is free and has been shown the right and the wrong through revealed guidance from time to time. Hence, each of us is responsible for his or her actions. The problems that you mentioned, that is, guilt, anxiety, shame, sexuality, and so forth, have connotations in Western psychology that are different from that in Islam. In the framework of Western psychology they pertain to the psychological problems and the aim of Western psychology is to liberate humankind from these neuroses (psychological terminology) by ridiculing religion (which refers to them as sin). In Islam, guilt, shame, and anxiety are regarded as an indicator of one's acknowledgement of wrongdoing and, therefore, are motivational in nature (i.e., motivation to reflect on and ponder over one's behavior); to ask for the Mercy and Forgiveness of God and to correct oneself. Religion has instilled the emotions of guilt, shame, and anxiety in people in order to motivate them to correct themselves—and this is for their betterment—whereas secular psychology terms them as "abnormal" in order to free the individual from every moral restriction in a sense of *liberation therapy* (Rice, 1996). These emotions lose their pathological character and become part of one's life if one follows religious teachings in letter and spirit and not according to one's own understanding and liking. These teachings are to safeguard people from such problems. The following verses of the Qur'an highlight this from different aspects.

Nay,- whoever submits  
 His whole self to Allah  
 And is a doer of good,-  
 He will get his reward With his Lord;  
 On such shall be no fear,  
 Nor shall they grieve.(Al-Baqarah, 2:112, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989)

We send the Messengers  
 Only to give good news  
 And to warn: so those  
 Who believe and mend (their lives),- upon them  
 Shall be no fear, Nor shall they grieve  
 (Al-An'am, 6:48, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989)

Behold! Verily on the friends/ Of Allah there is no fear,/ Nor shall they grieve;  
 (Yunus, 10:62, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989).

The protection from psychological vows mentioned in the above verses is contingent upon the condition laid down in the aforementioned verse of Al-Baqara (2:208, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989).

Second, we have our own preconceived schemata to look for answers to the problems without having any clear insight, or at best having some knowledge of the subject matter and the context. I too work as a psychotherapist and have clergy as my clients. My experience shows that when their subjective values or the sociocultural circumstances conflict with the religious teachings, the problems arise as you indicated, that is, by one's individual understanding of religion—and I would like to add, “and by preoccupation with one's self by falling into a wishful circle of desires.”

As to the question that you raised related to the education of females in the Muslim societies, one has to differentiate between the religious teachings, one's understanding of it, and the sociocultural context. You have mentioned that restrictions on the higher education of women in Islam (your understanding or attribution) might cause psychological problems for women. You might be surprised to know how much importance has been given to education and knowledge in Islam. There are Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet, SAW) and the verses of the Qur'an about it. In one of the Hadith, the Prophet (SAW) says “one must acquire knowledge if he or she has to travel to China” (China was regarded as the farthest country at that time). The second Hadith says, “the best ornament of a woman is education.” Allah (SWT) has indicated the importance of education and knowledge many times in the Qur'an. Another Hadith says, “an illiterate cannot know even his Creator.” It was Islam that opened the doors of education for everybody. There are no restrictions on women's education in Islam. Islam gave women equal rights as human beings during the dark ages when a woman was regarded as personal property. For your information, before the advent of Islam, Arabs used to bury their baby daughters in order to safeguard their pride and honor as fathers of sons. Islam termed it an act of murder and it was prohibited despite severe opposition, and gave women dignity and honor like men. There are verses in the Qur'an that highlight this. The following verse describing the day of judgment mentions:

When the female (infant)/ Buried alive is questioned,/ For what crime She was killed;/ (At- Takwir 81:8-9, The Holy Qur-An, 1410/1989).

The confusion of Non-Muslims about Islam is due to their mixing of Islam with the social customs and tribal values. The deprivation of women from higher education or even basic education is not because of Islam but because of the local customs, tradition, and social values. There are many Muslim tribes all over the world who, in their ignorance to Islamic teachings, adhere to their customs and traditions as a matter of honor for them. These customs emphasize one's family's and the tribe's honor and pride. If honor and pride are lost, then everything is lost accord-

ing to these customs. These customs, and not the Islamic teachings, are impediments in the way of women's education. Accordingly, the honor and pride of the family is lost if a woman moves in the society freely. The situation of women's education is very different among Muslim countries. Take the examples of Middle Eastern countries and some Asian and African countries where the literacy rate for women is low. In contrast, in South East Asia, for example, Malaysia and Indonesia have a high rate of literacy among women. It may be something new for you to know that the majority of the students in the Malaysian universities are women. This high ratio of women in the universities was recently a matter of concern for the education minister. It may be surprising for you to know that in the most conservative state in Malaysia, Kelantan, women virtually dominate the small and medium size businesses.

The approach to a problem affects its understanding. We will find an answer according to the way we will look at a problem with our own schemata. I think that revealed guidance provides an objective criterion for a comparative analysis.

*Sebastian Murken:* Thank you for this analysis of mental health and psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective. I especially agree with your (often neglected) point that psychotherapy and psychotherapists operate from a specific understanding of human nature, religion, and the world. This, of course, is value-laden and should be made transparent.

I also appreciate your distinction between Islam and culture. What I learned from our discussion is not only that my understanding of the scope of religion (Islam) is more limited than yours (cf. Figure 1 vs. Figure 2 in Khalili et al., this issue) but also my understanding of science.

I see the scope of science and the scientific process quite limited. Science will never be able to answer ultimate questions or to tell us about human nature as such. But it is an instrument to answer questions of a smaller scope.

*Ashiq Ali Shah:* (4) I am not blaming anybody. I am just expressing my view. This is not the first time that I have been critical of the dominance of Western psychology and its relative irrelevance to other cultures. I have been doing it since 1985. It is quite surprising that, being a product of Western education and mostly positivistic in my own research, I am that critical. I simply see both sides of the coin.

In conclusion, you are right that we should try to find solutions and not blame others. I rarely blame others for what they do, unless it is a matter that does not personally concern me. Perhaps, you got a false impression of my critique (perhaps I am wrong), as if it was directed at you. However, I have talked generally about the nature of an approach. In some cases I have to be specific or must quote in order to make my point. I would regret it if this conveyed offense.

I personally appreciate your in-depth analysis of the academic and other activities of the conference. You have taken extra pains to highlight many issues that others simply ignored or were not attentive to at all. I would appreciate having further constructive dialogue with you. This would be a good opportunity for me to learn more. I thank you for your contributions.

*Sebastian Murken:* Thank you for your compliments. I look forward to the publication of this important discussion and hope that it will stimulate others to join the effort of bridge building.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Dr. K. Helmut Reich for his generosity of mind and his unceasing and selfless efforts to coordinate and edit this article. His constructive ideas and persuasive criticism were instrumental in bringing the article to its current form.

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