

RECENT WORK

BOOK REVIEW ON
METHODS, METHODOLOGIES, AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ISLAMIC STUDIES A CRITICAL RATIONALIST INTERPRETATION

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ICAS (The Islamic College) Press in London latest publication of Ali Paya's book presents the first comprehensive introduction to methods and methodologies in humanities and social sciences in general, and Islamic Studies in particular, from a critical rationalist point of view. Also, the author intends to cover all the major methodologies in humanities and social sciences and those developed by Muslim scholars to study the classic Islamic sciences, and it is a theoretical and practical guide to topics that it introduces, underpinning itself on the reading materials which are recommended in the book freely available on the internet. Simultaneously, underlying the fact that all the methods presented in this book are applicable to Islamic studies, as well as that it in some way provides an excellent balance between theory and practical application in humanities and social research helping researchers understand the nuances of particular approaches comparable with another book, *Research Methodologies An Islamic Perspective* by the IIUM Press published in 2016 by several Malaysian authors, presenting the most necessary aspects for conducting research including Islamic perspectives on research and providing research students a comprehensive and complete view of research process and material to begin research with an exclusive webpage for the copyrighted materials of the book, which are available to the readers of the book with additional note that Islamic Studies is a subfield within the wider field of the humanities and social sciences (HSS), and Units

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* Ali Paya (2022), *Methods, Methodologies, and Perspectives in the Humanities and Social Sciences: With Particular Reference to Islamic Studies A Critical Rationalist Interpretation* (London: ICAS Press), xxi + 730 pages, ISBN: 978-1-907905-52-0 (paperback).

8, 9, and 10, are dedicated to such methods and methodologies.¹

Ali Paya is a professor of philosophy at the Islamic College (affiliated with Middlesex University, London)² and an adjunct professor of philosophy of science at the National Research Institute for Science Policy (Tehran); he has 56.700 results at the movement, according to Google Scholar, while advanced search results at Academia.edu found 22.983 papers containing his name, which testifies that this proponent of themes of critical rationalist perspective, or a Popperian (critical rationalist) approach to religion, Islamic democratic discourse and the transdisciplinary approach as a theoretical framework is a prolific author. His most recent publications include, among others, *The Misty Land of Ideas and the Light of Dialogue: An Anthology of Comparative Philosophy: Western & Islamic*, which he personally edited (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2013), 387 pp., and that presents him as one of our interlocutors in a dialogue of the type relevant to comparative philosophy and our Journal filling the important gap in the literature.³ Especially this book, through its different chapters and by highlighting the views of thinkers from the East and from the West, shows the reader how interconnected the two philosophical traditions, the Islamic and the Western, are.

The book under review is divided into eleven units (Preliminaries; Critical Rationalism; Positivism and Phenomenology; Hermeneutical Approaches; Some Models of Rationality; Situational Analysis and Methods; Semiotics, Cultural Studies, QM; Qualitative Methods for Islamics; Using IT for Research (1); Using IT for Research (2); Research Projects & Dissertations) - each further divided into five sections, including Bibliography and Index, to maximize the pedagogical benefits of a self-sufficient textbook helping the readers to hone in their own critical skills and develop their own knowledge of various methods as well as methodological frameworks “in their own journey towards mastery of various research tools in the HSS and Islamic Studies” to quote the author himself, because from this, “it follows that all methodologies and methods used in HSS can, with appropriate adjustments, be used in the field of Islamic studies” (page 5).

The book is at once a book on the structure of a number of methodologies, methods and philosophical perspectives, as well as a second-order critical and philosophical assessment of the shortcomings of those methodologies, methods and perspectives.

The potential reader need to study the book with care to realise why the practice of 'justification' despite the widespread use of this term and concept, not only in philosophy but in almost all other disciplines as well as in a commonsensical use, is actually misguided for two reasons: the logical procedure of 'justifying a knowledge

¹ See Asadullah Shah, Sayed Inayatullah Shah & Abdul Salam Shah (2016), *Research Methodologies An Islamic Perspective* by (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press), 250.

² For further info about Ali Paya, see <<https://islamic-college.ac.uk/about/academic-staff/professor-ali-paya-2/>; <https://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CV-2021-04.pdf>>.

³ See Nevad Kahteran (2016), “Ali Paya (ed.): *The Misty Land of Ideas and the Light of Dialogue. An Anthology of Comparative Philosophy: Western & Islamic*”, *Synthesis philosophica* 31.2: 461-464. <<https://doi.org/10.21464/sp31218>>.

claim' is impossible (the reasons of this are discussed in the book), and, secondly, contrary to the majority of the philosophers from Plato onward, knowledge is NOT justified true belief.

The task of philosophy is to help us understand (by means of rational explanations) those aspects of reality to which empirical means cannot reach.

Students and researchers can be assured that they will find a good deal of true philosophical engagements with the material introduced in various parts of the book, and our journal of comparative philosophy is a very good venue for reviewing this book. This is because it examines the topics under discussion from various philosophical points of view.

In *Unit 1*, some important foundational problems concerning methods and methodological perspectives were discussed. While “methodology” is part of epistemology and therefore belongs to a higher-order knowledge category, 'method' is an instrument and therefore a kind of technology.

Unit 2 discusses some of the most important aspects of critical rationalism (CR),⁴ which is presented as a philosophical perspective as well as a methodological framework, i.e., a philosophical-methodological approach that guides the discussions in all subsequent units and provides a benchmark for assessing the strengths and shortcomings of other methodological frameworks introduced in other units, and the application of CR to Islamic Studies. Here we are facing with two problems of rationality: the problem of induction and the problem of demarcation, and while the problem of induction is about *how* we learn through experience, the problem of demarcation is about *what* we learn from experience. This unit offers a good grasp of Popper's theory of the Three Worlds, the critical rationalist approach to knowledge and the unity of science, as well as the differences between critical rationalist and other critical approaches to the study of Islam, i.e., the ways in which it can be used in Islamic Studies.

Unit 3 deals with positivism (and its more modern variants, logical positivism and logical empiricism), and some of various types of phenomenology, Husserlian and Heideggerian approach to phenomenology (namely existential, empirical and hermeneutic phenomenology), including the ways on which these two are used in Islamic Studies (some positivistic and phenomenological approaches were critically examined). In 3.5b *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*, mentioned by the author, is professor Schimmel's approach,⁵ but here is a missing (page 157), equally important contribution of the late Professor Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka (d. 2014), a Polish philosopher, phenomenologist, founder and president of the World Phenomenology Institute, and editor (from its inception in the late 1960s) of the book series, *Analecta Husserliana*.⁶

⁴ Critical rationalism (CR) is a school of thought introduced in the twentieth century by Karl Popper (d. 1994) and was further developed by some of his students and colleagues.

⁵ Schimmel, Annemarie (1994), *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University Press of New York).

⁶ See Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka (ed.) (2003), *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming* (Dordrecht), 251.

Unit 4 deals with hermeneutical approaches of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, as well as Gadamer's philosophical and Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics and the hermeneutical methods and principles used in Islamic scholarship with a critical assessment of some hermeneutic rules used in Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Of course, with a critical understanding of the development of hermeneutics in 19th and 20th centuries.

In *Unit 5*, the author discusses a number of the most influential models of rationality that have had a remarkable impact on many trends of thought in the field of HSS, in last century and beyond (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas Samuel Khun, Paul Feyerabend, Imre Lakatos, Rom Harré and their methodological implications for the HSS and Islamic Studies) – with a critical understanding of the role of reason with direct relevance to research in Islamic Studies.

The aim of *Unit 6* is to introduce situational analysis and overarching methods as all-encompassing methods, as well as to show how they can be used in Islamic Studies (multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches). According to the author, all the overarching methods and approaches can be used in the realm of Islamic Studies.

Unit 7 introduced semiotics, cultural studies and some qualitative methods in the HSS, including the application of the above methods to Islamic Studies (content analysis, textual analysis and critical discourse analysis). I am delighted with the fact that the author mentioned our Bosnian colleague, the late professor Fikret Karčić, on the pages 308, 324, and 687 among the reading materials as the example of its in depth understanding and its application to Islamic Studies.

Unit 8 discusses some qualitative methods developed by Muslim scholars for Islamic Studies like *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Hadith Studies, Tafsīr (interpretation of the Qur'an, its exegeses), *usūl al-fiqh*, the study of history, philosophy, *kalām* and *irfān*, i.e., a number of indigenous methods and methodological frameworks developed by Muslim scholars in the field of "the classical Islamic sciences".

Unit 9 discusses using information technology (IT) and other useful tools for research in humanities and social sciences in general, and Islamic Studies in particular, including some of the more important ethical implications, i.e., research ethics code of conduct and the importance of using IT in research in Islamic Studies.

Unit 10 deals with some important aspects of the literature review in Islamic Studies and major resources in this field of study, introducing some quantitative and qualitative methods and one methodological framework for research in the HSS and Islamic Studies (online books, dictionaries and encyclopaedias & databases on Islamic Studies).

Finally, *Unit 11*, deals with some of the most important practical and theoretical aspects of designing research projects and developing successful master's thesis, including the issue of plagiarism and the ways to avoid it through good understanding of essay-writing techniques for the HSS and Islamic Studies.

This book contains a large selection of fully worked out review activities and review questions, in addition to topics for further discussion: Feedback on research activities is included (507-575), answers to review questions (577-631), topics for

discussion (633-647), contributions to discussion (649-670), and a quite impressive Bibliography at the very end (671-707) with Index (709-730).

This format is devised to maximise the pedagogical benefits of self-sufficient textbook, which is a relatively new addition to the enumerated fields of studies in academia, and the author was more than successful in undertaking this amazing project for which he unreservedly deserved to be applauded, because the importance of the task undertaken by this comparative philosopher becomes more evident in this reviewed volume, which deals with issues which are of contemporary importance simultaneously showing the compatibility between the two accounts, in the HSS in general, and Islamic Studies in particular as a large and diverse subfield within the wider field of the HSS. Once more again, Ali Paya confirmed that “the comparative philosopher is an interpreter, a commentator, a critic, a connoisseur of good philosophical arguments and interesting ideas, an educator, and a communicator. The last characteristic pertains to the role the comparative philosopher plays vis-à-vis contemporary and future audiences.”⁷

⁷ Paya 2022, 14.