

The Psychology of Spirituality

by Hossein B. Danesh. Paradigm Publishing, Victoria, and Nine Pines Publishing, Manotick, ON, 1994, 270 pages.

reviewed by Rhett Diessner in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1995)

Realistic idealism and constructive optimism make this text uplifting to read. It does not shy from concrete, difficult human problems; rather, it casts them from the perspective of the eternal nobility of humanity. *The Psychology of Spirituality* maintains a dialectic between aptly described, real case studies, which keep the reader grounded in everyday reality, and a lofty vision invoking the philosophy of psychology and the essential mysticism of true religion.

The book is divided into six major parts, the first entitled “Beginnings” offers three sections: “Basic Questions,” “In Search of Meaning,” and “Towards a Psychology of Spirituality.” The last section points out that some psychologists are philosophic materialists who only see material causes in human behavior. Other psychologists focus entirely on the spiritual or psychological, claiming that objective reality can be fully explained from that perspective. The author takes the middle road:

As we will see with the psychology of spirituality, there is no dualism at the level of the living human being. The living person is one, as there is total unity and integration between the two distinctive expressions of reality, i.e., the material and the spiritual. The psychology of spirituality, therefore, perceives human nature as an integrated and unified human reality with three fundamental powers: to know, to love, and to will. (19)

One of the most refreshing aspects of the author’s text is his iterative referencing to the power of the will. Nearly all modern textbooks on psychology give some mention to affect (a variant of love), and nearly all deal with knowing as cognition, but few (other than the humanist/existentialist texts) even recognize the existence of human will.

Part Two of the text deals with issues regarding the “Self and Soul,” and Part Three ranges across the “Fundamentals” of “Being and Becoming” to “Integration of Knowledge, Love and Will.” Part Four, entitled, “When Things Go Wrong,” is a unique and engaging exploration of psychopathology as disorders of knowledge, disorders of love, and disorders of will. Part Five is developmental, both individually and socially, and called, “From Adolescence to Maturity.” The last major partition of the text concerns “Spiritual Transformation” and is proactive in assisting the reader in “Becoming an Integrated Person.”

As a text in the discipline of psychology, this work is reflective of a background in psychoanalysis, with the majority of the citations to neoFreudian psychological works. The author’s focus on the “big picture,” dealing with issues of the purpose of life, transcendence, and human will, also aligns him with the tradition of the great existential psychologists.

In the context of Bahá'í Studies, his text is a building block in setting the stage to develop a “Bahá'í psychology,” a “scientific” approach to understanding the soul from within a Bahá'í paradigm. Just as it is common, however, to point out that we do not yet have Bahá'í music or Bahá'í art, that these will emerge as the Bahá'í world culture develops, so too does this qualification apply to social science (and perhaps natural science as well). From a Bahá'í theological standpoint, this reviewer wonders why the author has chosen “knowledge, love, and will” (“main human powers”) and “self, relationships, and time” (“primary human concerns”) as the fundamental categories of human psychology. He does make a clear case that they all are critically important to human psychology. On the one hand, one can ask, based on Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, are these the most generative and fundamental categories of human psychology? On the other hand, one of the best qualities of an exposition is to leave the readers thirsting for more knowledge and inquisitive of further truth.

Overall, I highly recommend the reading of *The Psychology of Spirituality* to a wide and diverse audience. It is so clearly written and well illustrated with case studies as to make it accessible to the lay readership. Yet it is profound and deep enough to share with professors and clinicians in the fields of social science. I look forward to further works from this author.