

**RETHINKING CULTURE,  
RENEWING THE ACADEMY:  
*TAWHIDI PERSPECTIVES***

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social theory is conventionally addressed from within the dominant tradition of inquiry. Rarely is it subject to a critical reflection from beyond its own ken. This is a pity, for the subject matter and scope of social theory go beyond the confines of any exclusive tradition, while its reach and influence in the global context of our times merely reinforce its extended compass. Given the fact that the ambitious claims made by social theorists about the universality of their project are hardly borne out by the reality, any pretensions to exclusivism or hegemony would be as anachronistic as they are morally reprehensible. The gap between the legitimate ambitions for a universally relevant social theory and the reality of a field grounded in its historical constraints and cultural prejudices can only be filled by a critical and constructive initiative taken from within the profession to constitute a candid, open and reflexive self-encounter. The opportuneness for such an initiative is enhanced by its urgency: the discrepancies which follow on the ineptitude of our social knowledge can only raise doubts about the relevance of our science to our social condition. In deploring the resulting ineptitude and irrelevance, it is possible to do so in the voice of a generalized Subject, the universal "I," for surely this is one of the areas of convergence where scholars from different traditions could agree. The measure of this agreement can only be gauged by remembering that "a science for the study of society" originally went beyond its grounding in scientific reason to its justification in moral reasoning. And here too, regardless of the grounding of that morality, we find another significant area of convergence for scholars working in different traditions. Whether we come to the field from an Islamic perspective which we strive to recover and reconstruct, or from a diffuse Western perspective with its overlapping currents, the need is admittedly for a framework of inquiry and for new directions, and above all for a more salubrious ethos to inform our social knowledge. The test of the new science of society would lie in its ability to accommodate the universality of a realm of human experience, demonstrated in the range and versatility of social phenomena and social activity, and the specificity that accrues to such experience, as indeed it must, in consonance with the principle of temporality and inherent diversity. It would also be found in the possibility of the new science recovering, or more aptly renewing, its moral mandate to be exercised as a profession with a conscience and experienced as knowledge with a vocation. For various reasons, some of which are addressed in this essay, the recovery of social theory cannot come from within the prevailing traditions of inquiry, which at the very least call for a radical restructuring. The elements for this recovery will have to be sought from "without," although clearly one of the structuring premises in the reorientation of social theory will must call into question the autonomy and boundaries of the "traditions" in question.

In the first essay which follows below, the tone is set for a systematic probing into the necessity, the possibility, and the prospects of an alternative mode of discourse in the context of its implications for contemporary social theory and cultural creation. Such a probing is a requisite for grounding and orienting sensibilities in a reshaping globe where the search for a more viable and ethical world order proceeds. Given the shifting sands in which the knowledges bequeathed us by modernity are mired, there is a need to rediscover a center from beyond its confines and appropriate it as a point of reference, direction, and regeneration in this quest. The theme launched below overviews and abstracts from an ongoing project drawing on the *tawhidi* (unitary) episteme. It projects a critical Muslim prospectus on the dominant paradigm of knowledge which structures the relations of power and culture, and it contours the elements of an alternative which draws on hitherto neglected Islamic sources and precedent. The fundamental proposition is a theocentric humanist one, which takes the belief in the Unseen both as the structuring premise for a humanity that is one and as the criterion for evaluating/validating human knowledge and civilization. It sees the schisms which fracture humanity and subvert worldly accomplishment as essentially superfluous and attributable to the misappropriation of human faculties and endowments. This is an abuse which begins with a double misappropriation of human reason and volition: the twin facets of a divine trust. One can further extrapolate on a fundamental Qur\_anic conception of human nature that assumes an individual's capacity to choose between the two highways to immortality, and a predisposing ability to discern the one from the other that is the test of human morality. It follows from the one assumption and the other about human potential and its deflection that there are two kinds of knowledge and attitudes to knowledge which are possible among humanity. Depending on which configuration prevails at any time, or on the proportion between the one and the other, the quality of human life - and that of civilization - is in the balance.

The dominant mode of knowledge in our times grows out of an agnostic egocentricity. It produces a certain type of culture, identified with the abuses and excesses of modernity, that calls for rectification. Given the oneness of humanity and the globality of modernity, the reappropriative discourse invites the participation and responsibility of all. Given their relative marginality to modernity on the one hand, and their authentic share of Revelation on the other, Muslims join in this discourse with the realization that they have something unique to contribute. This anticipatory relationship is inverted in the case of the Roman Christian West, whose centrality to modernity was bought at the expense of an ambivalence to Revelation. Ironically, modernity itself constitutes the stimulus for recovering the light of Revealed Knowledge and for discovering its enduring relevance to the human condition. By providing the infrastructure for bringing humanity physically closer, and by exposing the vulnerability of its moral wellsprings, modernity provokes a critical reappraisal of the grounds of knowledge and being. The domain for this critique is that of the human and social sciences, which comprise the contemporary projections, as well as the self-sustaining breeding ground of an evasive and cynical, but all-pervasive, secularized and secularizing moral philosophy.

To be more specific: What is the contribution Muslims can bring to this critique, and what are the grounds for assuming both the nature of this contribution and its inevitability? The fact that Muslims are heirs to a Civilization of the Book as well as repositories of Divine Scripture provides the cornerstone to this assumption. Historically, Islamic Civilization was inspired by the kind of knowledge that grew out of the Book to foster its matrix of humanist learning and scientific inquiry. It is the *hadarat al-bayan* (culture of speech, elucidation), *al-kitab* (script, the book), *al-qira\_atain* (the two readings)<sup>1</sup> and *al-qalam* (the pen). These are all the symbols of human learning and the instruments of instituting and preserving a civilization conceived in its generic sense as a cumulative tradition of human culture. As Muslims recover their historical presence and become a part of modernity, they cannot but bring to it elements of that tradition of integrated knowledge that will reflect on its course. To do so, however, they will need to become conscious of their potential, sufficiently articulate and sufficiently audible. Only then can their voice carry the irrefutable weight which attends all moral authority, and check the effects of the coercive and seductive power associated with modernity.

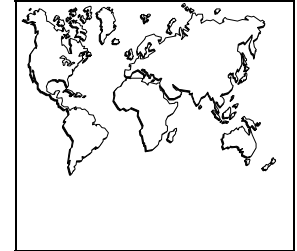
Contrasting Epistemics is taken as the framework and strategy to accessing this potential Muslim role. The "contrast" highlights the alternative modes of knowledge and emphasizes the God-centered humanist vantage point, epitomized in *tawhid* (unity), for reappraising modernity through

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<sup>1</sup> *al-Qur\_an*, 96:1-7. These were chronologically the first verses revealed, commanding two kinds of reading: one in creation and one to be acquired through the pen, both readings being in the name of the Lord as Creator and as Source of all knowledge and learning, the Bountiful One "Who taught man that which he knew not." When it is recollected that this was the substance of the Message from the outset, and that the command was given to a prophet who was illiterate, in a setting where literacy was the exception, and when it is further realized that this message was reinforced throughout the next twenty-two years of the *wahy* (Divine Revelation), with the numerous occurrences of the root word for knowledge and its derivatives (*\_ilm*) reinforced by a similar incidence of the root for reason (*\_aql*) and its synonyms, it is hardly to be wondered that this should have been reflected in the Muslim legacy where learning, its traditions, instruments, channels and perpetrators were edified into a venerable devotional institution to produce "The Civilization of the Book," Z. Sardar, *Inquiry/Afkar* (May 1987); see also F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) and J. Pederson, trans., *The Arabic Book* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984).

its theoretical accomplishments. The instrumentality of the contrast is consummated and vindicated when a new plane of inquiry is reached where the area of overlap in a critical and reflective discourse opens outward onto a new synthesis of perceptions and attitudes. In the meantime, as the elements of the new level of cultural exchange are sought and as the new idiom of inquiry takes shape, Muslims find themselves engaged in the dynamics of an archetypal *ijtihadi* (involving endeavour) situation.

*Ijtihad* (endeavour) presumes acquiring the knowledge base and cultivating the skills to use it effectively: the convergence of *\_ilm* (knowledge) and *fann* (art) on a cornerstone of *taqwa* (piety). Its purpose is *ihsan*, i.e., the attainment of a station of moral excellence that radiates its beauty on every spot it illumines. This *tawhidi* resonance of essence and meaning finds its expression in every vernacular and across all cultures, because it addresses universal categories that appeal to a common humanity. To emphasize the shaping discourse as one where Truth, Morality, and Beauty are dimensions of the same reality, we preface our exploratory foray into a Contrasting Epistemics.



## ISLAMIZATION AS A FORCE OF GLOBAL CULTURAL RENEWAL

Islamization constitutes a major force of renovation on the contemporary world scene. A little over two decades ago, the mid-seventies witnessed a heightened awareness of Islamic cultural identity among the *Ummah* (the Community of Believers) worldwide, an awareness which was projected in the spate of activities and events which marked the fifteenth centennial of the Islamic Hijri calendar. One of the more auspicious developments on this occasion was an emerging trend that is distinctly novel among Muslims; namely, a growing appreciation for the importance of coordination and organization reflecting on a passion and quest for institutionalization. The Muslims of the modern world, it seems, had at last come of age as they sought to transform the festivities of the day into a more enduring and effective enterprise. Islamization is a concrete expression of these concerns. It was born as a wide-ranging cultural movement which essentially sought to recover the vitality of the community by recovering the vitality of its heritage. As such, it received its first sustained impetus and its systematic articulation in the efforts to give effect to the resolutions of the various maiden conferences of the period.

The focus of this paper will be limited to exploring one aspect of this movement, namely, the potential of Islamization as a force for cultural renewal and direction. The context of the discussion will be more general, taking the contemporary cultural setting for its framework and making it clear from the outset that the implications of Islamization have a universal bearing. The heuristic level of the discussion is intended to open up the forum to debate and to suggest areas of more in-depth inquiry and research in an attempt at extending and consolidating the terrain for a new kind of scholarship.

The main argument in the following pages can be summed up here in a few salient points. Islamization provides a credible and viable response to our vital needs today. The pervasive cultural disarray characteristic of our times acts as a corrosive force on contemporary civilization. The credibility and viability of this Islamizing response inhere in the message of Islam itself. The relevance, however, of this message to the immediate context as an instrument of rehabilitation and renewal will need to be developed by a scholarship capable of bridging the rift between cultures to the benefit of all. The field of such a scholarship must necessarily impinge on some of the following issue-areas: the implications of culture for civilization, the centrality of the episteme to both, and the principal characteristics of the Islamic mode of knowing and its effective consequences. Finally, some suggestions are made with regard to the operational and substantial requisites for activating the momentum of cultural revival. Clearly, each of these aspects is a topic of investigation in its own right. The purpose of the presentation at hand, however, is to do no more than outline in barest form a pattern of relationships in order to draw attention to its central thesis on

Islamization as a potential force of effective global cultural renewal.

### THE CASE FOR CULTURAL REHABILITATION

The need for cultural rehabilitation is a common need, which grows in urgency with the multiplying anomalies of our times.<sup>2</sup> These anomalies are not confined to any one culture or system of thought to the exclusion of another. If we are to classify cultures in terms of their relations of power, we shall see that neither the subordinate cultures around the globe nor the hegemonic culture of the West escapes the afflictions of a pervasive state of cultural disarray. The specific sources of this malaise may differ from one case to another and diagnostics vary. In the case of the Muslim *Ummah*, there is a growing consensus that this state is to be attributed to an intellectual inertia and decrepitude which is projected to its detriment in every moment of its historical presence. In the case of the West, beneath a deceptive veneer of elusive dynamism and pulsating vitality, morbidity lurks. In the words of a perceptive and typically scathing analyst, "the hangover of civilizational atheism and secularism" is finally taking its toll on the Western psyche, and everywhere the symptoms of an acute identity crisis prevail.<sup>3</sup> The roots of this crisis lie in a deep ontological/epistemological morass. Having renounced God, Western man rendered himself impotent in the face of the problems of knowledge and power. The "death of God" theology brought with it, together with the inevitable darkness of the human soul, an imminent blankness in the human mind resulting in a sense of loss of meaning and direction.

The consequences of the aberrations of the hegemonic culture are, by definition, not confined to the generative culture. Instead, they become the benchmarks of "modernity" and come to set the standards for the scramble among the subordinate cultures, whose members now brace to catch up on their dooms race. In this way the cultural disarray endemic to the West comes to be grafted onto the other cultures, and adds confusion to inertia and morbidity to senility. But all is not necessarily gloom and doom.

Indeed, it is our contention here that the depths of global cultural disarray and disorientation are matched by potentially inexhaustible expanses of "life-chances" for cultural renovation and for the sanification of the basis of our global civilization.<sup>4</sup> These chances are anchored in an accessible

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that the vast corpus of literature on this aspect is sometimes flippantly referred to as "prophecies of doom and gloom" does not detract from its quality and relevance. It is by no means a homogeneous body of writing. Its caliber, sources, direction and scope varies, but its temper and its basic message is the common denominator. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (1926), is probably the forerunner to this genre. But so are the little known works of authentic critics like the French philosopher and mystic, Rene Guenon, writing in the 1930's, whose incisive insights in the *Crisis of Modernity* and *The Reign of Quantity* anticipated the ideas of his compatriot, and spiritual fellow-traveller, four decades later in his manifesto for the Presidential campaign. See Roger Garaudy, *Appel aux Vivants* (Paris, 1976). Better known perhaps are the documented reports by teams of experts like the Club of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> See the excellent review article by Parvez Manzoor in *The Muslim Book Review (MWBR)* 7, no. 2, (1987). This journal belongs to a pioneering cluster of emerging forums for cultivating a new breed of scholarship, and Manzoor, of Pakistani parents, educated in the West and Swedish by residence, is one of the most able and promising examples of this breed.

<sup>4</sup> See the collection of essays by Ralph Dahrendorf, former E.E.C. Commissioner and notable Professor at the London School of Economics, which provide an interesting summation of reflections on a career immersed in the Continental sociological tradition.

fund of structured resources which remain to be "discovered" - in the Kuhnian sense - appropriated, integrated, and related to the relevant operational contexts. This discovery brings in its train a recovery - in the dual sense of the term. The "structured resources" refers to the *tawhidi* paradigm of knowledge and action embedded in the Qur\_anic *Weltanschauung*. Its recovery in the context of our times simultaneously spells a recovery from the malaise of the times.

In the event, *Islamization* becomes that process of reforming and revalorizing the current underlying structures of thought and perception by means of their exposure to a radical critique in the light of an integrated set of cognitive, affective, and symbolic values derived from the Islamic Tradition. Invoking the latter as the source for developing and making operational the new critical evaluative apparatus calls for qualifying our statement on the universality, or the ubiquity, of the prevailing state of cultural disarray.

The commonality of the "plight of modern man"<sup>5</sup> both in East and West, in the subordinate and the "hegemonic," the "peripheral" and mainstream cultures, should not obscure the differences. For the origins and the causes of this affliction are not identical. While the elements of human folly abound on all sides, yet, it is fair to maintain that in the one case the onus lies more in the situational contingency, which includes the conventional cultural reserves available to the community as a whole, while in the other it lies more with the element of human endeavour and responsibility.<sup>6</sup> This has its implications for our argument, in so far as it is necessary to distinguish between the Muslims as the moral agents and repositories of a culture, and Islam as the source for that culture. To deplore the state of the Muslim *ummah* is at the same time to call attention to a fundamental incongruity as to how Muslims relate to their heritage. Effectively, Muslims have come to relate more to the civilization of modernity, even if they do so only in a marginal capacity. For they remain by and large, "consumers of civilization," in the sense used by Malek Bennabi, or, to invoke a suggestive metaphor, they constitute another layer and encrustation in the swelling ranks of a cultural proletariat.<sup>7</sup> As such, they have come to partake of "a civilization of countless means that knows naught of any single cause." Meanwhile, the search continues for those in the vanguard who refuse to stand idly by and bide their ebbing fortunes. In the process, it generates a frantic cult of method-consciousness, a "methodomania," characterized by an abundance of refutations and counter-refutations in the hope that, somehow in the progression of cumulations, the Cause will crystallize and produce, for some a truth, for others the Truth.<sup>8</sup> While the profusion of energies so

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<sup>5</sup> In *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Longman, 1975), Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr provides a mystical interpretation of the situation of contemporary Western man caught between the "axis and the rim," as well as of the "dilemma of the modern day Muslim." He eloquently pleads for a new affirmation of the principles of the Islamic Revelation that would draw on the different branches of the Tradition in order to check the corrosive influences of modernism and break out of its confines.

<sup>6</sup> "All civilizations have decayed; only they have decayed in different ways; the decay of the East is passive and that of the West is active....The fault of the East in decay is that it no longer thinks; the West in decay thinks too much and it thinks wrongly...The East is sleeping over truths; the West lives in errors." F. Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, p.22, quoted in *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, *op cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> See *La Vocation de L'Islam* (1949) for one of the earliest systematic analyses from an Islamic perspective of the plight of the *Ummah*. In view of the originality of his ideas, Malik Bennabi, (1905-1973; Constantine, Algeria) deserves to be identified as a key figure in the Islamic intellectual revival.

dispensed creates the illusion of productivity, dynamism, and creativity, a cyclical regression is in fact entrenched. Truth remains as evasive as ever, not on account of its absence, but because it lies outside and beyond the purview of the closed circuit in which the quest proceeds. The growing cynicism does not gain the pervasive cultural disarray any more coherence, and the loss of meaning and direction persists.

In consequence, method apart from Truth becomes "Method against Truth."<sup>9</sup> The only way to reconcile method to truth is to break out of the closed circuit and, in the discourse of a contemporary and unconventional political philosopher, to opt for an "Openness to the Transcendental."<sup>10</sup> To become at all meaningful culturally, however, this openness to the transcendental must have some aspect of the temporally "concrete;" it needs to be rendered accessible and intelligible beyond the purely subjective plane and, in the more familiar sociological jargon, it needs to be "objectified." It is in this context that the relevance and the salience, the opportuneness and the uniqueness, of the Islamic Tradition come into evidence. "Tradition," in the sense of "that which binds to the Origin through a message, revelation, or manifestation which comes from the Ultimate Reality," provides a structured medium to the Transcendental. This function is assumed by the channels of transmission which keep the Tradition alive. To the extent that the former remain intact and accessible, the Tradition remains a living one and retains its potential for rejuvenating the culture and civilization to which it gives rise.

Historically, of all the Traditions rooted in a Divine Message, Islam constitutes the only such Tradition where the channels of transmission have retained their integrity and where the sources remain accessible to an informed human endeavour and a reformed understanding. It is this accessibility which enables us to speak of a fund of "structured resources" that is available for cultural renewal. Moreover, granted that it is ostensibly in the nature of all living Traditions to provide the wellsprings of cultural renewal, as the advocates of the traditionalist perspective seem to suggest, then the particular potential for rejuvenation and renewal which inheres in the Islamic Tradition on the one hand, and its specifically all-embracing nature on the other, lend significant credibility to Islamization as a force of global cultural renewal. Islam, the carrier of the Primordial Tradition, the *din al-fitra*, is also historically the harbinger of a universal tradition that is equally

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<sup>8</sup> It is significant that linguistically the term "Truth" does not lend itself easily to the plural form, unlike "facts" and even "realities," which have for the past century conditioned the mind-set of modernity and its brand of scholarship so much so that we have become attuned to speaking in terms of the many "truths." The importance of a work like Gadamer's *Truth and Method* lies as much in its terminology as in its thesis, for having opened up another vista of inquiry in the "social sciences" today.

<sup>9</sup> This is the title given to an excellent bibliographic review article on "Orientalism and Qur\_anic Studies," which speaks to the astuteness of its author. See *MWBR* 7, no. 4, (1987), 33-49.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Voegelin's political theory is currently witnessing a revival as his works are being reprinted, and more of the German originals are being translated into English and explored, thanks to his students. His magnum opus, *Order in History*, 4 volumes, is of doubtless originality and merit; and his ideas, though difficult to communicate, are relevant to any innovative scholarship which is critical of mainstream currents. For a recent, general overview see Barry Cooper, *The Political Theory of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 27, Toronto Studies in Theology (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). Also see an earlier avant-garde study by Dante Germino, *Beyond Ideology, The Revival of Political Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). Currently, an assessment of contemporary trends in Western Political Theory from an Islamic perspective is among the works in progress at IIIT.



distinct and unique. Expansive as it expands, it accommodates the differences as it embraces the diversity, and it protects the other traditions while it prevails over them. As such, Islamization, which seeks to derive and develop its critical cognitive apparatus from the sources of this Tradition, constitutes a challenge to Muslims as much as to others concerned with the prospects of contemporary civilization. Its poignancy lies in the relevance of its message of rehabilitation and renovation. It is destined, if it succeeds, to play a major role in giving meaning and direction and, accordingly, in reorienting and renewing our global civilization. Projecting the role and mission of Islamization in these terms is perfectly justifiable.

### **THE MAKING OF A DISCOURSE**

When thinking assumes a critical stance, there must clearly be a good reason which impels it in this direction. To question the status quo already supposes some kind of access to an alternative through an awareness of the possibility of things being different. Occasionally, a critical note will be sounded without there necessarily being a clear apprehension as to what might constitute its betterment. More often, there will be some utopic ideal or counter-ideal which inspires the critique. In the case of a Muslim's disaffection with the status quo, it is likely to run the gamut of that which inspires any other intellectual of a similar disposition observing the setting of a high modernity. Only here, this disaffection is likely to be complicated by the tensions attendant on a legacy of power inequities in a world presumed to be post-colonialist. This might bring a Muslim reflection closer to a pervasive third world critique. Yet, the divisions between the first and second worlds on the one hand, and the third world on the other, do not exhaust the panoply of encounters in world history. Beyond power politics and beyond the economic divisions that demarcate zones of cultural fermentation, there is an autonomous divide which transpires through the other divisions, but which should not be reduced or conflated with them. This is the civilization/culture divide, which transcends individuality to community and society to temporality. To the Muslim, as much as to many others, a historical and communal self-consciousness constitutes the primary zone for mapping the projections of history and society: and simply for measuring reality.

### **THE PRIMACY OF CULTURE**

In this zone of differentiating spheres, the elements of authenticity and distinct forums of morality are sought. Through it, each people in history has the scope to affirm its moral qualities and to develop its communal identity in a world of created diversity. To that extent, there is an inbuilt element of rivalry and competitiveness among groups and individuals to attain a quality of excellence: a superlativeness in the human order. Where the race is impelled by a moral design, competitiveness does not spell conflict.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the converse of is true. However, wherever diversity is the rule and competition flourishes without there being an operational ideal of morality, this competition degenerates into a scramble for power, and the excellence of virtue subsumed in the human potential is subverted and replaced by a dialectic of vice. This unmindful scramble is literally the undoing of all effort, and reflects on a general moral depravity which begins with the individual.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For the Qur\_anic ideal of *al-sabq fi al-khair* (the priority of, competition for, the good), see *al-Qur\_an al-Karim*, 2:148; 5:48; 23:61; and 56:10.

<sup>12</sup> See 16:92; 95:5; for a negative form of *sabq*, see 8:59; 29:39.

Obviously, because it is of the nature of the human element to justify and rationalize all human activity, morality can be invented and subverted into an instrument of power, and even the devil can be induced to proclaim his own morality.<sup>13</sup> This is why the need arises for some external criterion to which all rational beings can defer in terms of their essential humanity. All systems, with the possible exception of modernity, have invoked a higher order of morality whether in terms of a divine order or a natural one. Any claims for humanity are ultimately made in terms of the one or the other. For Muslims, this higher order is assumed by the *shari\_ah* (Divine Law), which is the source and perfection of the Abrahamic Code. It is distinguished from other referents in terms of its universality, its comprehensiveness, and its "tangibility." Its rulings carry ethics into legality, and the latter is anchored in an ethical as well as in a belief system. But this is another matter. The point here is that the constituency for the drama of history is the same as that for any particular society: It is a human constituency, which is informed and shaped by the same impulses which come to reflect on the collective setting. These impulses incline it, like its individual constituents, to virtue as well as to sedition (90:10), so that history and society become equally realms for morality - beyond power and expedience.<sup>14</sup> On this account, no version of social theory or philosophy of history is complete without its premise in an understanding of human nature and in a metaphysical account of reality.

### **THE BOUNDARIES RECONSIDERED**

This is where a prevalent modern distinction between the humanities and the social sciences seems all too fatuous, and the questioning it provokes is the only sensible reaction. What has actually happened is that along with the resurgent interest in the debate on the philosophy of science and its extension to the human social and historical sciences, the surge in interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies has also been attended by a re-orientation to the fact/value dichotomy. This was the misconceived watershed between modern and pre-modern attitudes to knowledge and intellectual inquiry. The factual was credited to the scientific, and values were relegated to a species of philosophical and literary activity consigned to relativity, subjectivity, and ultimately to marginality. The questionable division which rendered value a disposable category and denuded facts of meaning ushered in an era where knowledge was reduced to information and wisdom to data-banks. It also foreshadowed the persistent ambiguities in the status and evolution of the social and historical sciences. Above all, it left them without a moral basis which would assure their relevance to a sane society or a meaningful history.

The dubious condition in contemporary social theory and its practical implications is a case in point.<sup>15</sup> Either social theory is irrelevant to society and the human condition which structures it, or

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<sup>13</sup> For the notion of using language to deceive and confuse, see 6:112.

<sup>14</sup> In this sense, God directs us to take lessons from history (i.e., *\_ibrah*), by investigating the actions of those who have gone before and their consequences (*\_aqibah*), that we may disengage the norms that pattern human action and responsibility. (And that was how historiography became an authentic field of inquiry in Muslim civilization!) Unlike the signs of God in the universe and in the physical creation (*ayat al-khalq*), which appeal to the mind and heart to reinforce the belief in the Creator and the truth of the unseen, the "laws" that pattern history refer to the domain of conduct and mortal/moral responsibility (*al-Qur\_an*, 6:11; 27:69; 29:20; 30:42).

<sup>15</sup> This is the subject of an essay in the Contrasting Epistemics series: "A Critique of Contemporary Social Theory: *Tawhidic* Perspectives." See below.

else the latter categories are meaningless mutations in time. The same modernity which in the past alerted reason to causality has now become instrumental in provoking a diffuse sense of the absurd. At the heart of the continuing interest in the philosophy of science is a focus which permeates the questioning in social theory: namely, what are the parameters of human rationality?<sup>16</sup> And is this to be inferred solely from physical and biological evidence, or is there another, transcendental source for human culture without which all such inferences would remain incomplete? If rationality points beyond itself, so does morality.

### **HISTORY AS A SOURCE OF MORALITY**

History may be brought to the fore to reinforce the reality of diversity and persistence in human culture. History relativizes in the very instant it temporalizes, and at the same moment that it creates the testimony of the past, it constitutes a significant pointer to the future and to a self-transcendence beyond its own immanence in the here-and-now. It is in this sense that history sensitizes to categories and dimensions without which it is not possible to apprehend the human condition, whether at the level of individual fates or of the evolution and destiny of social aggregates. If power is the handmaiden of history, judgement presides in its antechambers.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the rationality or logic of a text and its context, the question of right action is invoked. Decisions made at a sequence of situational junctures, and conduct pursued in the stage that is the life-world, call for a standard of rulings that implicates morality. Here too, the question arises: Can these be solely inferred from the accumulated reserves of human experience in time? Or is there a necessity to supplement our knowledge and interpret these very reserves in light of what we might learn from an external source of authority? Only such a transcendental source can relate that which is ineluctably relative to its referential absolute, and in doing so provide it with a gravitational center and direction to assure the radius and circumference of a dynamic in history. It may be compared to the way the magnetic field assures a coherence to a physical universe in orbit, from the miniscule electrons and neutrons to its galactic constellations. Or, again, notwithstanding its non-determinate character, the very options for human conduct, which are not infinite, are subject to some elementary code, even if it does not operate in an identical manner to the genetic code which structures and modulates the generation of life. Freedom is the domain for morality, not anatomy. A shaping cultural discourse would need to take the parameters of rationality and morality into account.

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<sup>16</sup> "Cultural Parodies and Parodizing Cultures" takes up this theme briefly in the context of the Muslim intellectual legacy, while "What can a *Tawhidi* Episteme contribute to Contemporary Social Theory?" addresses rationality more in a social science context. Both essays are part of the present serialized discourse. See below.

<sup>17</sup> The Oscillating and the Median Culture-types are also used for historical classification and reinterpretation, as another essay in the series demonstrates. See below.

### TRANSCENDENCE: ITS RELEVANCE

It has been the practice in modern Western thought to leave such questions to theologians and moral philosophers, and to pursue a critical reflection in the social and practical domains independently of any ultimate awareness as to consequences or responsibilities. This might have been a normal reaction in modern Europe against a disposition in classical and, more especially in medieval Western, thought to indulge in the pursuit of its obverse and where the proper study of mankind and his universe was neglected. The Muslim legacy too is not without its set of practices and deviations which carried it away from its own norms. Its sources, however, ensure it the standards which incline it towards a certain "medium" and which foster a general consensus wary of indulgence.<sup>18</sup> This left an impact on the civilization that developed under its aegis in the past, and is bound to affect the shaping of its future revival. There is much to be learned from that legacy that could enrich a discourse between cultures and infuse it with the balance that assured a worldly dialogue of its practical and theosophical perspectives.

At present, one can hardly address the intellectual and cultural pursuits of Muslims, for they have little cultural autonomy in the modern world, and where strains of originality persist they may be lacking in vitality. (This might be a sweeping generalization which hardly does justice to the reality, but it is deliberately invoked here to stimulate Muslims out of their complacency.) The Islamic sources, however, remain a common and open heritage that is not exclusive to any sector of a humanity which musters the curiosity and the urge to learn. Their invocation calls on a context where the lessons of history and the findings and exploits of scientific reason can be referred back to the knowledge that has been revealed through a legacy of prophethood. In this way, the context of the cultural encounter that has been forced onto a shrinking globe will bring to the fore the elements of a tradition that will be counter-posed to the harvest of modernity in one great shaping conversation that can set the tone for the moral evolution of the future.

### THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTER: ITS RANGE AND DOMAIN

The humanities and the social sciences constitute primary domains and influences for this development as they themselves are restructured and reformed in its light. Religion is expected to be an even more potent influence in this evolution, if it is understood in terms that go beyond theological doctrine to practical purport. There are good reasons which carry it beyond the confines of theologians, dogmaticians, and priesthoods. Religion is that elemental force in the human experience and tradition which anchors morality and life to its transcendental origins and destiny. As intellectuals and social reformers come to relate the precariousness in the modern condition to its marginalization, they are likely to show a greater interest in its sources, and to see whether its abuse in the history of some great nations in the past was not on account of a confusion in these sources.

At the same time, in light of the lessons of modernity, there is a growing urge for an outlook which balances the calculus of gain and loss in a radically new perspective. Modernity brought with it the surfeit of a material abundance for some, and their enslavement by its dearth for others. The perspective it now exacts is one which takes into account a scale of values that relates immanence to

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<sup>18</sup> Characteristic of the *ummata wasatan* (the middle-most community), advocated as the paragon community, is the inculcation of an ethos that upholds moderation and deprecates all excess, including religious excess, (for the concept of *al-ghilou fi al-din*, see 5:77). It is ironic that a Muslim's adherence to his faith should be interpreted among non-Muslims as "fanaticism."

transcendence, and the here-and-now to a hereafter. A religion which combines these perspectives will lay strong claims for a cognitive appeal and affective allegiance. Such perspectives will, however, need to be articulated and formulated in a manner which takes them beyond the parameters of faith to an epistemic level, where others who are not adherents of the faith can still relate meaningfully to them.

The discourse on such values at an inter-cultural level, i.e., among partisans of different human traditions and histories, must remain wary of conflating meaning with power. Otherwise, the discourse will be subverted. Where power is imperative to history, as no doubt it is, then it must be aligned to the principle that secures the freedom necessary within and beyond its orbit to allow the cultural interchange and the discourse on values and the praxis of morality to proceed uninterrupted. (For the moment again, we shall suspend any Foucaultian assumption about the pervasiveness of power.) But admitting this idea of a principled power will need to be included on the agenda in a conversation that must itself be steadily expanded in scope and extended to others - beyond its present monopolistic and exclusivist tendencies.

### ... SELF/OTHER

It is clear from the above reflections that the range of a discourse in the making will have to observe certain standards if it is to achieve its purpose. It will have to be inclusive, universalist, deliberating on means and ends, and reverent of an innate human spirituality and dignity that must be acknowledged in its ultimate Source and Referent. It will need to develop the language and terms that will foster communication and mutual dependencies beyond the range of exploitation and power interest. This calls on the resources and aptitudes of a variety of human skills and sciences.

A root re-orientation in fundamental attitudes to the concept of the Self/Other postulate will be at stake here, although it will need to be evolved in the course of the discourse itself and not simply assumed at the outset as the condition for its engagement. The Self/Other postulate is a formula which spans the range and altitudes of a pervasive bond and relationship, and it structures an ontic human/cosmic reality. It has been echoed in the various traditions and cultures in the past, and has inspired some of the more sublime theosophies. A Muslim perspective would see the lode of this relationship in the very nature of the human/*insan*, as that companion-seeking creature who is at the same time ever-forgetful and ever-returning to his Creator. From the very outset, the Other was created of the Self by a benevolent Providence who engaged the testimony of his creation in a grand cosmic theophany. The Self/Other may have been reduced to less than its due proportion in contemporary Anthropology, but it is by no means a recent discovery of a modern discipline, nor should it be reduced to its projections to that field.

### A NEW IDIOM OF INQUIRY:

A Muslim perspective, joining the intellectual discourse at this late hour of day, would strive to recover for it the missing dimensions of this ontic formula by contributing to an evolving hermeneutic in the field of a cross-cultural encounter. It comes with its own idiom of inquiry to enrich, to interact, and to disengage the elements for the architectonics of a discourse. It is inspired by the *tawhidi* vision and reality, which far from foreclosing a field opens it to dialogue and transaction. Its beginning will have to be situated at the heart of the dominant paradigm.<sup>19</sup> From there, it will contribute with others from within and without to breaking a monopoly and clearing the space for a new field of opportunity at a higher plane of action and reality. A "Contrasting Episteme" is proposed here as a strategy for laying the foundations of a discourse that seeks to reintegrate Self and Other without violating the intrinsic identity and worth of either. It is also proposed as a framework of inquiry into aspects relevant to contemporary social theory and, in a more general way, to historical/civilizational interests. As a strategy, it calls for techniques and rules of procedure, as will be discussed below. As a conceptual premise for the discourse, though, it presupposes certain principles and precepts, even its own philosophical anthropology. Some preliminary queries will need to be addressed.

### THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

Historically, Islam has served as a catalyst for renewing culture and civilization. Indeed, where the foundations for such renewal were weak or eroded, Islam provided the ligaments and consolidated the grounds for the requisite human and social development. The records are replete with accounts of peoples who, upon their accession to Islam, virtually came to make it into history.<sup>20</sup> The legendary breakthrough of the Arabs will perhaps continue to provide the most illustrious example of such a people who, out of a chronic state of anonymity and marginality, rose to the pinnacle of glory and achievement. Within the space of decades, the Arabs had outgrown the phase of tribal parochialism to become the uncontested masters of empire and the heralds of an open and expanding world community. But this illustrious example was not confined to the history of the Arabs. It was repeated in the case of Berbers, Turks, Mongols, Persians, Indians, Malays and the kingdoms in West and East Africa. The cultural florescence of the Iberian and Mediterranean cities which came into contact with Islam is another case in point. Despite the dense "cultural barrier" provided by the virulently anti-Islam crusading spirit in the medieval West, it was the contact with "Islamdom" that, ironically enough, contributed to the birth of "Christendom" as a self-conscious and culturally unified entity, a counter-culture in search of its political expression. It was the commercial, cultural and intellectual currents which followed in the train of the Crusades that steadily came to disperse the shrouds of the European "Dark Ages" and to usher in the Renaissance.<sup>21</sup> In each and every case, once the biases are discarded and the records are set straight, Islam may be confirmed in retrospect as a vital civilizing agent and a force of renewal and regeneration.

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<sup>19</sup> See "Paradigms in Political Science Revisited: Muslim Perspectives and Critical Options," *AJISS* 6, no. 2, Supplement (September 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Arnold's classic *The Preaching of Islam* was precisely given to an investigation into the history of 'the birth of this missionary zeal, its inspiring forces and the modes of its activity as Islam spread in the different parts of the world; it remains in its endeavour an objective presentation exemplary of the more benign strand of Orientalist scholarship. In his *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*, the late Professor Arberry spoke of the phenomenal spread of Islam in terms of "one of the greatest cataclysms in the history of religion,"

In each place, Islam acted as an agent of regeneration and renewal because in every case it acted upon the moral and the spiritual foundations of society. It did so by channelling and orientating its latent energies into positive outlets and constructive venues. In the case of those who accepted Islam as a religion and a way of life, the change was intrinsic, as it grew out of the remoulded psyche, personality, affinity, identity and aspirations. The channelling and reorientation here may be seen to have essentially sprung out of the human element to condition and encompass the social environ.<sup>22</sup> In the case of those who came as individuals and communities to live and to develop within the Islamic ecumene,<sup>23</sup> the *dar al-Islam*, Islam provided the setting and the congenial framework for achievement and self-development. In other cases, the Islamic agency influenced the Other by way of the model or the example it provided, and by the stimulus it gave to activating the impulses to self-betterment and excellence in the Other.

In the context of our immediate concern with Islamization, it is important to recall that Islam acted on the level of the perceptions of the community. It served as a rationalizing influence upon the epistemological matrix within which the so called "structure of scientific revolutions" evolves.<sup>24</sup> It is against this matrix that the social organization and the political institutions in a society also take shape.

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and attributed it to the "religious impulse," which he qualified as "still the most vital and enduring" (quoted by Abul-Fazl Ezzat in *An Introduction to the History of the Spread of Islam* (London, 1978), which itself constitutes a commendable work in an emerging corpus of Muslim scholarship in a field where much remains to be done).

<sup>21</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson's work, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vol. (Chicago, 1974) constitutes one of the more challenging attempts to develop a conceptual framework to comprehend Muslim history within the civilizational perspective. The concepts, though not the analysis in point, belong here. See the Introduction and Book One in Vol. 1: "The Classical Age of Islam." For the process of cultural exchange, see Norman Daniel, *The Cultural Barrier* (Edinburgh, 1975), esp. Ch. 9: "A Cultural Filter in the Middle Ages."

<sup>22</sup> Far from a deterministic view of history, Islam emphasizes human agency. A theory of social change taking its cue from a Qur\_anic conception would challenge much of the established canon on revolutionary doctrine. For an overview, see Mazheruddin Siddiqi, Ch. 1, *The Qur\_anic Concept of History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1975). A significant attempt at conceptualization may be found in the work of the Mosuli scholar Imad al-Din Khalil. See translated excerpts of "The Qur\_anic interpretation of History" in Yvonne Y. Haddad, Appendix G, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (New York: SUNY, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> The term is used here in its original etymological sense, which corresponds to the Arabic *al-ma\_murah*, literally the inhabited part of the globe. Consider also the derivatives *\_imarah* and *\_umran*, as in Ibn Khaldun's innovative usage of *\_ilm al-\_umran al-bashari* for what in effect is the Sociology of Human Culture and Civilization. An Islamic influence is clearly discernible in Hodgson's revival of the Greek root *Oikoumene* as he relates culture-patterns to geography, though nowhere does he confess to such an influence, op cit.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Kuhn speaks of a scientific revolution in terms of "a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world," *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Second Edition, Enlarged (The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 102, and invokes a changing visual *Gestalt* in the shift of paradigms (p. 85 \_). Although the focus in this pathbreaking essay is the growth of scientific knowledge, the language of discourse, its referents, and categories easily lend themselves to the point we are making here.

## ON THE EPISTEMIC MATRIX OF CIVILIZATIONS

Historically, every civilization has its basic foundations and the characteristic parameters within which it grows. Yet, the quality of a civilization, its caliber, will invariably vary in both relative and absolute terms. Relatively, Islamic Civilization may fluctuate, experiencing its ebbs and flows, and other rival configurations may be at a conspicuous advantage over time. In absolute terms, however, there may be deemed to be a measure of intrinsic superiority in a civilization which is derived from Islamic sources, or in one which evolved within their parameters. By ascertaining the characteristic epistemic matrix generated by the *tawhidi* paradigm of knowledge it becomes evident why this is so.

In contrast to the secular paradigm of knowledge, with its multiple spin-offs contending against its ever shifting sands, the matrix in the *tawhidi* paradigm is a fundamentally stable one, integrally coherent, cohesive and whole. It is a matrix that originated in and is sustained by the pivotal and equilibrating role of a historically and generically incorruptible source. While accessible to the human cognitive circuit, this source originates beyond that circuit, and at the same time that it indubitably relates to it, indeed penetrates it, it retains its genuine integrity and particular self-sufficiency. It is the only case where the idea of maintaining the wells of truth "untainted beyond the city walls" is promoted from a hypothetical construct to a historical plausibility.<sup>25</sup> In this source, the medium of transmission and the message-content, the act and the deed, converge to crystallize in the cosmic event of the *wahy*, or the *tanzil*, more commonly known as "Revelation."<sup>26</sup>

In this context, it should be briefly pointed out that those terms defining the extra-human, transcendental dimensions of communicating knowledge are strictly Qur\_anic terms which have retained their specificity as such and which have, consequently, been spared the contaminations of the vernacular. In the same way as the term "Qur\_an" has been exclusively preserved to denote that specific Reading which was brought down to the Prophet (pbuh) by the medium of the archangel Gabriel, so it is with the terms *wahy* and *tanzil*, which have similarly retained their exclusive connotation to indicate that which has been historically revealed to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and that which has been recorded and preserved in the Qur\_an. In this way, there is no equivalent to this terminology in a vernacular which is an essentially "humanized" and "sociologised" construct subject to all the constraints of relativism. In the Traditionalist perspective, all language contains something of a divine essence, and the need is to restore that metaphysical dimension which has been eroded in the process of "secularization" and "desacralization." Advocating Qur\_anic terminology here is more for the sake of consistency, to avoid ambiguity and to promote an understanding across cultures, for it does not need to be "resuscitated" in this latter sense. The question is whether to use these preserved concepts in their original when discoursing in a language other than Arabic. Clearly, the argument for doing so on the grounds of enriching the

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<sup>25</sup> See the editorial preface to Ernest Gellner's *Relativism and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> In the experience of this writer, usage of the conventional equivalent "Revelation" in public discourse among non-Muslims only adds confusion to ambivalence. It is best to define one's concepts and apply them, rather than drop them out of deference to the norms of the dominant culture, especially when such concepts are highly impregnated culturally, and when the purpose is to pave the way for a cognitive breakthrough.



other languages is doubly reinforced when the purpose of the discourse is the expansion of the cognitive horizons.<sup>27</sup> The issue, however, is one that goes beyond semantics to substance.

In the Islamic paradigm of knowledge, the human intellect interacts within a cognitive setting which takes this integral, Transcendental Source for its starting point and pivotal center. The circle of consciousness thus comes to operate within a setting where the subjective is bounded and embraced by an unbounded and infinite sense of the objective. Whatever forms and directions such a consciousness may then take, it retains a qualitative distinctiveness which sets it apart from the circuit of consciousness operating without a similar referent. The latter will wallow in utter "subjectivity," which is only compounded by the efforts to disclaim it in the name of various scientific rejoinders of "objectivity." With no conceivable means of relating to an Absolute, the human mind will inevitably indulge in its own self-created measure of "absolutes," which, to resolve a contradiction in terms, can only disintegrate into the fragmented and fractured prism of infinite and infinitesimal relativities. It is this misconceived self-sufficiency on the part of the modern mind-set that has cut it off from an elemental source of human knowledge and rendered scepticism the dominant streak in our contemporary epistemic heritage.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In this context, the question goes well beyond a matter of distortion through transliteration to that of distorting concepts through their translation, and the later Professor Ismail Faruqi was perfectly justified in impressing the need of importing Qur\_anic terminology into the English. See the Introduction to *Toward Islamic English*, Islamization of Knowledge Series, No. 3, (New Era Publications, 1986). Muslims whose mother tongue is not Arabic and non-Arabic speakers may completely miss the point at stake and come up with some surprisingly banal "refutations."

<sup>28</sup> "An epistemology that aims relentlessly at control rules out the possibility of transcendence in principle" provides the qualifying clue to this "mind-set." For an engaging and translucent analysis of "What the Modern Western Mind-Set Is," see Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 134 \_.)

## THE MEDIAN CULTURE

The only paradigm of "knowing" compatible with the requisites of all "being" would appear to be one that could accommodate the elements of the intellectus with those of the rational and the empirical modes of knowing.<sup>29</sup> Historically, the Islamic paradigm of knowledge has proved congenial to the different modes of knowing. The legacy of the Birunis, Ibn al-Haythams, al-Ghazalis, Ibn Rushds, al-Razis and Suhrawardis is a monument to this capacity to integrate and accommodate the diverse modes or traditions within what is more of a synthetic rather than a syncretist whole.<sup>30</sup> When one goes beyond the sectarian squabbles and the pedantic hairsplitting to the roots of the Islamic heritage, it is only fair to maintain that there was no essential contradiction or inherent and necessary antagonism between the experimental, the rational, and the "sufi way." Theosophy, Philosophy, and Science could cohabit within the crucible of the *Median Culture*, which is effectively the only logical and natural culture consistent with the temper and the structure of the *ummatan wasatan*.<sup>31</sup> The designation "median" here, it should be pointed out, does not derive from the Aristotelian idea of the "mean," suggesting a middle ground arrived at by the elimination of extremes, or an aggregate amounting to a moderate stance. For the middle ground conceived along such lines would always be shifting and defined, moreover, in terms of the other positions, not of any intrinsic characteristics. Rather, the Median Culture, rooted in the *tawhidi* paradigm of knowledge and deriving its elements from the transcendental sources provides a stable, integral core which serves in itself as a point of departure and a referent for defining and qualifying other positions, and not the reverse. In this way, it constitutes an intrinsic core and it provides a vertical axis, or a spinal component around which the diverse elements and modes of knowledge in the circuit of consciousness can cohere.

The unique capacity for synthesis characteristic of the Islamic episteme was no accident of history. It is embedded in a distinct world-view which engenders the frame of mind and the psychic disposition inculcated by the *wahy*. The only source of tension which could arise in such an epistemic clime, and one which did arise from time to time in Islamic intellectual spherics, was

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<sup>29</sup> For a brief, knowledgeable, and enlightening discussion of the Islamic concepts in a comparative perspective with their equivalent usage in Western intellectual history, see S. N. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: 1978), 30 ff. The origins, development, and consequences of secularization in the West provides the context of this discussion.

<sup>30</sup> In *The Majesty That Was Islam* (Praeger, 1974), Montgomery Watt's reflections on Islamic intellectual scholarship in terms of a "tension between Semitic intuition and Greek reason," is typical of the constraints which inhibit Orientalist scholarship in coming to grips with the Islamic heritage. It has always been the "mosaic" pattern, never the whole, which has been the object of interpretation from the subjective viewpoint of the hegemonous culture. Edward Said (1978) merely developed Foucault's central thesis on the relationship between "power" and "words," and brilliantly applied it to the Orientalist context, thus opening the door for a new wave of critical scholarship of varying acumen. See A. Hussein, R. Olson, and J. Qureshi, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamicists* (Amana, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> See Fazlur Rahman's usage of the term "median community" in his *Major Themes of the Quran*, Ch. 8 (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). This concept has been initially developed in an earlier essay, Mona Abul-Fadl, *Towards Conceptualizing the Notion of Ummah in Islam* (Cairo, 1983). If the term *al-Ummah al-Qutb*, used in the Arabic version, is to be explicated in a single sentence, Charles le Gai Eaton's remark comes closest to defining it: "In the midst of a humanity polarized between East and West, North and South, Islam-(the *Ummah*) - represents both a connecting link and a centre of gravity." (*Islam and the Destiny of Man*, 26).

indulging in the hubris of excess, which threatened to undermine the very matrix of the supporting culture. But the Qur\_anic *Weltanschauung* favours an integral culture, one that is not given to excesses, and can, in the discourse of Sorokin, be contrasted to both the "Sensate Culture" and the "Ideational Culture."<sup>32</sup> This is the domain of the Median Culture. At its apogee, the Median Culture provided the optimum medium for a thriving civilization combining enlightenment, openness, and dynamism, together with meaning and direction. Its legacy is embossed in the relics and the monuments of Islamic Art and Islamic Science, where function and purpose, utility and meaning/value, form and content, are consistently harmonized. The rediscovery of its elements today is vital for a global cultural recovery.

Beyond the cognitive merits of the *tawhidi* paradigm of knowledge lies an ethical imperative which reinforces the renovating potential of the Median Culture. For here again, unlike the secular paradigm, knowledge in the Islamic episteme is anchored to morality, not independent of it, neither by way of indifference, nor of autonomy.<sup>33</sup> The notion of *\_ilm* (knowledge) invites its corollary in the category of *\_amal* (acting), and the synthesis of both lies in the conception of *\_ibadah* (worship). Just as it requires a conceptual leap beyond the contemporary dominant paradigm to apprehend the different connotations of reason and rationalism (*\_aql*) in the Islamic episteme, so too this leap is necessary if we are to overcome the constricting dichotomy which opposes the "theoretical" to the "practical," "understanding" to "praxis," and "Philosophy" to "Ideology." Value in the Islamic episteme is an integral dimension of Cognition, and the demonstrable superiority of the latter, drawing on the uniqueness of its sources, is matched by the excellence of a Moral Code which is derived from the same sources. Here, the transcendental core is aptly projected in an Authority which does not emanate from any individual segment of humanity, but indiscriminately encompasses all. It is this Authority which upholds a binding standard of morality that, independent of any particular historical configuration, is all-embracing in the scope and reach of its universal compatibility. The *tawhidi* paradigm is grounded in this code - a fact which makes for a knowledge qualified by its intrinsic morality and its inner predilection, or "bias," to Truth and Justice. Knowledge here is not amoral, neutral, and is certainly not a vacuous ideal in itself.

The significance of this observation lies in the context of assessing the epistemic matrix of modern civilization and ascertaining the need of its radical recharting. It is not enough to be aware of the flaws and to conceive of an alternative, but this cognitive enlightenment must be accompanied by the resolve to act in the direction conceived. Only a paradigm which conceives "knowing" and "being" as integral and complementary facets of one reality can ensure the coordination of Will and Knowledge. This is where the moral dimension of the *tawhidi* episteme enhances the renovation potential of the Median Culture.

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<sup>32</sup> Pitrim Alexander Sorokin (1889-1968), an eminent sociologist of Russian stock, emigrated to the United States in the twenties. In view of his pronounced culture/civilization orientation, he never became part of the mainstream American tradition. For an overview of his works see, T. K. N. Unnithan, ed., *Sociological Theories of Pitrim A. Sorokin* (Bombay: 1973).

<sup>33</sup> See S. N. Al-Attas, "Religion and the Foundations of Ethics and Morality" in Altaf Gauhar, ed., *The Challenge of Islam* (London: 1978).

## PRELIMINARIES

Contrasting Episteme's intrinsic merit may be seen to lie in the way it assures a place for the Other in any ongoing discourse. It subsumes the postulate that for every conception of reality there is another possibility, which is more than its counterfoil, and as such merits investigation in its own terms. This outlook has a particular advantage when this articulation comes from a submerged layer in the conversation. The only guarantee that this perception will not be forgotten or simply overlooked is to integrate it structurally in the framework of the discourse. "Contrasting" is effective to the extent that it accommodates diversity. It is not that kind of reflexivity which proceeds in terms of deprecating the one as a measure of inflating the other, for it is not cast in the mirror image of Self/Other. Power might be a zero sum game; but culture, which is the domain of meaning and value, is not. Admittedly, there will need to be some inbuilt assumptions and mechanisms which pre-empt any such devaluation of culture and abuse of contrast and it can be demonstrably argued that the *tawhidi* episteme provides such safeguards.

Conversely, it might be asked: Is a Contrasting Episteme a leveler's strategy aimed at a parity for all regardless of virtue? Does it simply say that every view is equivalent to every other, and infer the right of a hearing to the merits of the opinion? Where would this differ from a relativizing culture, which is as questionable as any arrogant and absolutizing culture could be, for ultimately it could lead to a trivializing of value and a mockery of justice.<sup>34</sup> Here we might caution against assuming that a parity in hearing is a parity in judgement. Nor is this parity afforded in anticipation of the view expressed, but in deference to its speaker. Rather, the assumption is that a fair hearing is the enabling condition for cultivating a discerning judgement in a context where no judgement is absolute, and where all cultures defer to an external standard to which the respective positions might be relegated, related - and judged. The point of a Contrasting Episteme is to provide an opportunity for shaping a discerning opinion that is not constituted of partisan interests or split down ethno-cultural lines and prejudices. Creating a ground for a reasoned and a reasonable consensus can be promoted by pointing to the sources of the different traditions.

It might be further asked: How can a discourse aiming at universality, openness, and self-transcendence, and which claims to question the very postulates of alteriority inherent in a conventional Self/Other conception, begin with an emphasis on "Contrasts?" Is this not simply an accentuation of difference, and eventually a denial of any possibility of recovering a center where the discourse could converge? This line of reasoning is vitiated once our venture is related to the anthropological principles which inform it. These may be briefly outlined here.

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<sup>34</sup> See *al-Qur\_an*, 35:14; 6:51; 39:9; and 40:58.

**BEYOND DIFFERENCE:  
ANTHROPOLOGY OF A CULTURAL DISCOURSE**

Duality and alterity are principles in creation, just as unity is its essence and fount head, and diversity its natural form. God is the absolute "Other" in relation to his creation, where the "self" (*nafs*) is the individual human constituent (39:6). We shall refer to the juxtaposition of "Self/Other" at this fundamental ontic level as the axial plane of alterity. This plane must be seen in a context which emphasizes unity: the Oneness of God and the unity of humankind. And it is in this context that the essential bond between man and God on the one hand, and men and one another on the other, is posed (21:92). Creation itself is the site and scope for an ontic dualism (*mabda\_ al-zawjiya*) which in the bio-species guarantees life: its generation, procreation, and propagation (42:11; 39:6). The emphasis, however, remains on the unity of origin and end (31:28), lest difference be taken as a pretext between the Children of Adam for arrogating misconceived privilege. Emphasizing unity before a potentially divisive and multiplying self is a means of asserting a basic human identity, affinity, and dignity, which transcends gender and ethnicity, and which becomes the subject and repository of a universal ethical code of reciprocity and mutual responsibility (4:1). Beyond that, the principle of multiplicity and diversity conditions being and constitutes the premise and dynamic for society, culture, history. Group aggregation, organization, and action are *fitric* (natural) dispositions, inculcated in human creation to achieve a moral purpose which is subsumed in *khilafah* (vice-regency) (2:30; 35:39; 7:74; 27:62) and *imarah* (civilization) (11:61; 30:9; 9:18). These are two categories which structure the web of man's relatedness to God, to the world, and to others. Through observing a moral code assured in *din*, *shari\_ah* and *minhaj* (religion, Divine law, and proper practice), this relatedness is given meaning, direction, and purpose.<sup>35</sup> Whence, then, comes the impetus to evil or to wrong? This occurs where the moral code is subverted, abandoned, or distorted, i.e., where the *najdain* (90:10), the two highways of conduct open to the human option, are externalized and projected with a routine of *fasad* (corruption) prevailing over one of *islah* (reform).

Modern anthropology is oblivious to the axial plane of alterity and this has its practical consequences for all theoretical discourse. Yet, the cultural discourse proposed here begins by engaging the dominant paradigm and will frequently use its current idioms, prominent among which in our present context is the Self/Other construct. The background of how we use this construct will thus need to be briefly stated. Rather than Self and Other being deflected from the proper perspective in an essentially moral economy, what we have is a world of many, where the center is transcendent beyond any ego-centric self, and the many are of the dynamic circumference which encompasses the whole. On this plane of empirical observation, the selves are a replicate of the self, and alterities abound to subsume a related and relational self in a changing world of the many and the diverse. The self here can be transposed to the group level in recognizable communities and identities cemented by various solidarities. The theme of unity and diversity, which has conventionally been used as a designate for Islamic civilization, provides an equally credible matrix of anthropological and sociological inquiry. In this plan of mortal profusion, value and worth are not a function of an identity or an individuality, but of a sustained activity and of its projections of morality. This becomes the subject of the divine test, the *ibtila\_*, of the human will at

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<sup>35</sup> One of the most competent and engaging works in this field is Merryl Wyn Davies' pioneering study, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell, 1988). She develops and relates these categories in Ch. 4.

the individual and the collective level, for morality encompasses and binds both levels (5:48; 6:165; 67:2; 11:7; 76:2). It also constitutes the challenge to social theory and social organization, as well as to cultural discourse and cultural exchange.

In this cultural anthropology, the many are not confrontational isolates, or gangs banding in a hostile and senseless jungle. Rather, they come to "know one another" in the course of their interaction and intermingling in a world that is primarily structured by meaning and purpose (49:13). In the course of their encounter, they are also bound to discover the areas in their divergent experiences that overlap and converge, as they also come to perceive the differences that accentuate their complementarity and ultimate solidarity (30:22). It is one of the ironies of the modern world that technology has created the infrastructure which emphasizes interdependence, and the more the developing countries have sought to develop and enhance their independence, the more dependent they have become. The problem in a world of created diversity is how to assure the ethos which structures this interdependence and prevents its abuse to the advantage of power. A cultural discourse assumed in the Contrasting Epistemic would orient to these dimensions, just as a critique of contemporary social theory would do.

### **A LOGIC AND A RATIONALE**

The premises of a Contrasting Episteme ensure a that it should end up reinforcing the bonds that bridge without dissolving the identities that build. In dispelling the myths and distortions which obscure a mutual understanding, it removes the obstructions to constructive interaction in-so-far as the obstacles lie in the domain of cognition rather than will. The latter calls for a moral crusade, not an epistemic venture.

Summing up the philosophy of a Contrasting Episteme can be sought in the logic of a discipline conceived in the crucible of Islamic Civilization. The genius of an Algebra developed by al-Khawarizmi, for example, is postulated on a simple and creative dynamic of *al-jabr wa-al-muqabala*. *Muqabala* refers to a system of equations or covalences; *jabr* to a process of reconciling the fractions, or metaphorically speaking, to a system of healing" the constituent "fractures" and restoring them by a reintegration to the whole. In its conception, and within the parameters which define its scope, a Contrasting Epistemics at its most effective could provide what such a logic would endorse: the framework for a cultural dynamic and for a vital discourse which can set the momentum for a process of illumination and reconciliation of a stalled moral economy. To the extent that enlightenment can change attitudes and perceptions in the cultural encounter, the cognitive venture will have achieved its end.

### **PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

At the outset of our presentation, Professor Ralph Dahrendorf's metaphor of "life-chances" was extended to account for the prospects of overcoming the civilizational impasse. In the above exposition on the *tawhidi* epistemic as an alternative to the dominant paradigm, some of the features of the "structured resources" for global cultural renewal were outlined. It remains to be seen whether the opportunity for activating these resources does exist, and what their activation entails. The potential contribution of Islamization to a global cultural renewal is the function of our reading of the prospects and the opportunities for its realization.

Today, possibly at more than any other time in the past, there is a historical opportunity for an

intellectual rapprochement between East and West. Here "East" is taken to imply the fount of Tradition, and to invoke the sapiential perspective.<sup>36</sup> "West" is used to convey Modernity with all its accouterments of a secular heritage of rationality and empiricism. Sapiential knowledge draws its validation from an inner dimension which is denied the rational and the empirical enterprise. In the meantime, rationality and empiricism have combined to produce an imposing civilization which, for all its ambiguities, holds out immense promise for mankind. There is, however, an inner dimension to all being, a dimension which is integral and cannot be ignored. In its absence, as noted earlier, all material achievement is stripped of meaning, direction, and purpose. A vicious sense of futility becomes pervasive, and an elemental and insidious cynicism takes over. It is this substantial dimension which lies outside and beyond the scope of the empirical and the rational. At the root of this predicament is a fundamental misconception of the essence of civilization which results in a fatal ambivalence and a flagrant contradiction: "... the attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity."<sup>37</sup> In the resulting void, the tensions and anomalies inherent in modernity undermine its own achievements and, indeed, come to threaten all prospects of planetary survival.

The growing awareness of these anomalies has had its practical implications for research and public policy, as well as for general institutional and cultural trends. Special institutions have been set up to promote an ethical awareness of public policy issues, while existing institutions have established special programs given to the investigation of ethical dimensions.<sup>38</sup> The outcome of these efforts may be gauged in a gradual but perceptible and steady shift toward a new centre of gravity, characterized by wholeness, balance and integrality: in short, by a global drift in the direction of an "integral culture." However, like the notion of an "openness to the transcendental," the ideal of the Integral Culture is likely to remain just as vacuous, unless it too is substantiated. In the absence of a concrete model and guidelines, the steering process will inevitably flounder, for typically the modern culture may be astute at providing the mechanism and the devices for the steering, but not

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<sup>36</sup> For a perceptive elaboration of this perspective in a comparative and relevant account, see S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: 1981).

<sup>37</sup> Frithjof Schoun, *Understanding Islam*, (Allen and Unwinn, 1963), 33. Like Guenon, Schoun's original and inspired writings provide an example of the critique of modernity from within the sapiential perspective.

<sup>38</sup> The Ethics and Public Policy Center (Washington D.C.), presided over by E. W. Lefever, is given to examining public policy issues, including global affairs, in the context of a developing Christian social ethic. Other institutions include the prestigious think-tank, The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, which projects itself as a "non-profit, international organization" focusing on evolving a "human-centered point of view to deal with interrelated issues of society;" its programs include one on "Science, Technology and Humanism," designed to mobilize leaders of public action, business leaders, and members of the scientific and engineering community towards the humanistic issues of science. See Sidney Hyman, *The Aspen Idea* (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1975). "The Ethics Program at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford" is another influential locus working on an ambitious project, exploring new dimensions in a theory in human culture along lines conceived in upcoming French and continental anthropological scholarship. Other global trends include the "inter-faith" and "cross-cultural" dialogues sponsored by various organizations and eminents. A specialized organ, *Science, Technology, Human Values*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons), adopts a quote of Einstein's for its motto: "A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive." This is an area which lends itself to original Islamic scholarship. See Z. Sardar, "Quest for a New Science."

the direction and the measure. Only in recovering the elements of the Median Culture can the ideal be substantiated. This brief recapitulation aptly invokes the imperative and the opportuneness of embarking on a discovery of the Islamic episteme.

At present, the Islamic paradigm of knowledge has lapsed into the recesses of human history. Yet it remains a dormant potentiality. The elements which generated and alimented it are impervious to the corruptibility inherent in all temporality, and attendant on all the artifacts mediated through human agency. It is part of the Divine economy, however, to provide the seeds for a cultural regeneration and to leave it to human endeavour (*jihad* and *ijtihad*) to sow and to reap. The need is for a new brand of scholarship.

### THE REQUISITES FOR REVIVAL

In laying the foundations for the Median Culture, Muslim scholars are called upon to exercise a decidedly moral responsibility. In Muslim intellectual circles today there is a growing consensus on the need to adopt a "vocational" as opposed to a purely "professional" perspective. A vocational scholarship is a scholarship that is dedicated to the actualization of an ideal.<sup>39</sup> One of the most patent features of the emergent Muslim scholarship has a direct bearing on our immediate context. It is a scholarship that is deeply imbued with the civilizational ethos.<sup>40</sup> Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable trend to promote the intellectualization, the professionalization, and above all the "vocationalization" of Muslim scholarship. The late Faruqi, Professors Ismail and Lamia, were among its most tireless and ardent advocates by way of word and deed.<sup>41</sup> Invoking the vocational ideal is indeed the natural corollary of any authentic Islamic scholarship. Muslims should keep in mind the fact that they are heirs to a rich and vibrant tradition of scholarship - of *fiqh*, *ilm*, and *hikma* (of jurisprudence, science, and philosophy) - which originally grew out of the well-springs of *Tawhid*. As such, it was a self-transcending scholarship which reached beyond itself and carried within it the imprint of its transcendental origins and aspirations. In this sense, Islamic scholarship is by definition a vocational scholarship par excellence.

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<sup>39</sup> As one of the earlier works of Bennabi, *La Vocation de l'Islam* can be interpreted in this light and contrasted with his later writing which directly addresses the image of the Muslim intellectual. Also, *Histoire et Destine* provides one of the best single compact sources for Shari\_ati's relevant reflections and his own introspection as an intellectual with a calling. Each in his own way attributed the civilizational debacle of the Muslims to a "subverted" and "alienated" intellectual elite, and part of their enduring contribution to the current revival lies in their efforts to conceptualize this blight.

<sup>40</sup> "Scholars here tend to see Islam not just as a religion and a culture, but as a civilization... with its civilizational apparatus intact and waiting to be rediscovered." For an instructive overview of the modernist intellectual movement in Turkey, see Ziauddin Sardar, "Refloating the Intellectual Enterprise of Islam," (February, 1986), 32-37. In fact, wherever the Islamic movement is carried beyond the practical power political plane and is intellectualized, it tends towards a civilizational perspective. The intellectualist turn in the Tendance Islamique movement in Tunisia is an interesting case in point. See the collected articles of Rashid alGhannoushi, *Maqalat* (Paris: Dar al-Karawan,1984).

<sup>41</sup> "The Role of Muslim Scholars in the West" was the theme of the keynote banquet address delivered on July 5, 1985, at Plainfield, Indiana, by Professor Faruqi at the annual session of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists. In retrospect, it was his timely testament and farewell to a body he had co-founded fourteen years earlier. For echoes of this plea, see the text of a previous address in Amman, Jordan: "Our Reckoning with the



However, it is not sufficient to understand vocational scholarship in terms of a pursuit that is animated by purpose, anchored in a vision, and oriented towards the realization of an ideal. Given the civilizational stakes of the pursuit, vocational scholarship must also be conceived in terms of an effective scholarship or not at all. The challenge is to devise the means that can match the ends. If the ends entail the revalorization of the Islamic episteme as an integral part of the living global culture as a premise for its own renewal, then effectiveness calls for the capacity to stimulate, activate, and galvanize the prevailing intellectual inertia to ensure the resources needed for a cultural take-off. It also calls for the capacity to generate a sustained momentum in a comprehensive and systematic goal-oriented scholarship. It is essential to change the ideal of a vocational scholarship from an intermittent and scattered pursuit of some inspired and isolated luminaries into an entrenched and accelerated current that constitutes its own mainstream. In short, vocational scholarship must be institutionalized. This can only be secured if it is "routinized"- in the Weberian sense of the term. A master-plan is needed to orchestrate the diverse and varied efforts and to marshal them into an encompassing, self-sustaining, and viable structure which can ensure the continuity, dynamic, and orientation of the pursuit. Only a unified design can integrate, command, and propel the augmenting resources, some of which already exist, but most of which can be expected to be generated in due by course building on an accelerating momentum. This is the process which we have referred to as the "architectonics of cultural transformation."<sup>42</sup>

The premise and the condition for fulfilling this task is to understand the culture we hope to transform and, at the same time, to master the principles of the transforming culture which we seek to put into effect. It is in this spirit that the project for the assessment of the contemporary heritage of modernity, essentially the Western heritage, is currently being critically reviewed and upgraded at the International Institute of Islamic Thought. It is firmly believed that the prevailing secular paradigm of knowledge which underlies modern culture has maintained its ascendancy more through default than account of an inherent superiority or for reasons of any standing validity. Project **RECTOCC**, or the **Project for the Critical Evaluation of the Cultural Occident**, sets out to substantiate this observation as a matter of fact. The initial work in this field has provided some promising indicators which suggest the feasibility of a strategy for reviving the Islamic paradigm of knowledge that, in addition to the quintessential task of ploughing the Islamic sources, draws on the critical assimilation and the discriminate evaluation of the dominant secular paradigm itself.<sup>43</sup> This strategy accommodates the perspective of a "contrasting epistemics" as it pursues a two-tiered approach to the Western heritage. In the first instance, it understands the culture from within, on its own terms. In the second instance, it delineates it from without, in terms of an Islamic perspective. Exploring the characteristic features of the respective paradigms - the secular and the Islamic - against each other, the one highlighting the other brings out the characteristic features of both to the benefit of an accelerated dual process. In due course, the ground is cleared, and simultaneously the

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University Scholars," *al-Muslim al-Mu\_assir*. For Lamia Lois Ibsen, aesthetics became suffused with the ethics of *Tawhid*, as music and the arts were sublimated into a medium for regenerating an Islamic cultural sensibility.

<sup>42</sup> This was the theme of a lecture delivered at IIIT in a public lecture series on August 29, 1987.

<sup>43</sup> For an original conception, see the Islamization Workplan in the maiden version of *The Islamization of Knowledge* (1981). The Arabic version has since been revised and enlarged (1986). Work on "Islamization 2" as a sequence to the initial Workplan is currently in progress.

foundations for a new paradigm are laid. In this way too, in working towards the recovery and the reconstruction of the Islamic cultural identity, Muslims would be contributing to a global cultural renewal.

As a nascent intellectual current, and as a potentially sweeping cultural movement, the Islamization of knowledge cannot be restricted in its appeal to the Muslim *Ummah*. While it is only natural that the *Ummah* should constitute its kernel and its most immediate protagonist, in light of the above exposition, it is equally evident that it provides a beacon on the receding horizons of our planetary community. In its call to integrate and synthesize, our knowledge and being are reconciled around a reconstituted episteme: the *tawhidi* episteme. As such, it ought to become a common cause and general concern for everybody with a stake in the moral well-being of a sane society and a sober civilization. To this wider audience, Islamization so defined is more than just another alternative in the quest for a new point of departure. Its merits lie in a historical credibility anchored in a superlative synthesis: a foundation that combines a cognitive certitude, a moral authority, and an irrevocable spiritual authenticity. These are the indispensable ingredients for any effective paradigm for regeneration. Needless to say, the regenerative paradigm is at the heart of a movement set on global cultural renewal.

#### **AN ALTERNATIVE IN VIEW: INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS**

In this vein, we may recapitulate on some of the assumptions which make it plausible to question the dominant modes of thought as they shape and perturb contemporary social theory, as much as other area which contaminated by the modernist affliction.<sup>44</sup> As these assumptions underlie and are an implicit theme throughout this essay in Contrasting Epistemics and social theory, it might be useful to spell them out briefly and to add some nuances specific to this context.

The first assumption is that contemporary social theory, which is Western social theory, has for some time been in a state of disarray: a crisis from which it does not show signs of an easy recovery.<sup>45</sup> In fact, modern social theory was conceived as a panacea to a society in crisis, such as

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<sup>44</sup> See M. Abul-Fadl, "Islamization as a Force of Global Cultural Renewal," *AJISS* (December 1988); also "Paradigms in Political Science Revisited: A Convocation," *AJISS* (September 1989).

<sup>45</sup> For different interpretations of this crisis, see Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (London: Heineman 1971), and the Introduction in Raymond Boudhon, *The Crisis in Sociology*. The classical vindication of positivism in American social science is found in Harry Barnes, H. Becker and F. Becker, eds., *Contemporary Social Theory* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1971). Ch. 1 provides a useful survey from this perspective on developments in Sociology. A more recent reflection on crisis and an apology of Weber is Franco Ferrarotti's *Max Weber and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (Duke University Press, 1987). Specific or extended debates between contending views are sometimes launched on a substantive level. See, e.g., "Positivism vs. Humanism Debate in Sociology," *Sociological Inquiry* 52 & 54 (Summer 1982 and Winter 1984). Self-conscious Christian points of view among Catholic and Protestant scholars are also gradually seeking to take form. A good example is M. Elaine Botha's "Objectivity under Attack: Rethinking Paradigms in Social Theory" in *Social Science in Christian Perspective*, edited by Paul Marshall and R. Vandervennen (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1987). The book appears in a series, "Christian Studies Today," co-published by UPA and the Institute for Christian Studies, and the titles provide a good representative sample of their kind.

was the case in a European society undergoing the pangs of transition to modernity.<sup>46</sup> Although it began bold and optimistic, earnestly seeking to understand "significance"<sup>47</sup> and confident of its ability to predict and control, it soon became warped in its own hubris. Instead of peddling its superior wares, it ended up contracting the ailments it was supposed to remedy. The now chronic crisis affects both wings of the Great Divide which has structured a century of social dis/course, and on the eve of the 21st century it is conceivable that the rivalry between the liberal and the socialist variants of modernity has outreached itself.

Efforts at resolving the antinomies at a pragmatic level are rife, and much radical questioning takes place within the different schools and, above all, the search for a synthesis which could save the modern project is afoot. Yet the attempts made to this end are of dubious merit. The fault lies in the epistemological foundations of the project, and is not to be confounded with, or confined to, its varying expressions as social theory. On the other hand, the commitment to save modernity from its own excesses is waning before the persistent assaults that are determined to go beyond modernity, whether through an appeal to the past or through anarchic and utopic plunges into a future sustained only on the flimsiest of grounds, such as the ungrounding and "ungrounded hope" proposed by Richard Rorty.<sup>48</sup>

It is this groundlessness which suggests that the underlying crisis in the episteme might currently be more serious than the recurrent bouts of doubt to which social science has been susceptible from its

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<sup>46</sup> It is hardly surprising that the great philosophical debates on the status and role of the social sciences should continue in Germany to this day, as it was there that they took root within an explicitly philosophical context. A typical excursus into the field may be found in Husserl's phenomenological approach to a meta-science and the Frankfurter School's critique of it; between them, they constitute a forum for shaping a critical self-consciousness of modernity and its meaning for the human sciences - the *Geisteswissenschaften*. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. D. Carr, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970); Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, trans. Willis Domingo, (Camb. Mass: MIT Press, 1983). Still, the persistent and comprehensive "professional" overviews which articulate an unwavering faith in the promise of the new sciences occupy front stage here; they express the essence of the American flair for scientism, as it is seen at its best in the classic field accounts by H. Barnes and others, op cit.

<sup>47</sup> Echoes of Weber's essay on "Objectivity" readily come to mind: "The social sciences that we want to promote is a science of actuality. We want to understand the surrounding reality of life in which we are placed in its uniqueness - ... the relationship and cultural significance of its individual appearance in its present configuration, and, on the other hand, the basis of its being historically so and not having become otherwise." (Cited in Lawrence Scaff, *APSR*, op cit.). As the last of the great positivists, Weber was far more staid than some of the earlier "prophets," whether his immediate antecedents like Auguste Comte, or the more buoyant generation of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, like Proudhon, Condorcet and the Encyclopaedists. Historical, philosophical, and sociological insights on the New Faith abound. Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise and Fall of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967) is a classic expression which speaks of the "recovery of nerve." Karl Lowith, in his seminal interpretation, *Meaning in History*, (1949; reprint, 1955) refers to the religion of progress. Voegelin's interpretation is not without its significance, as he retraces in his way the advancing regression of gnosticism. Aron's overview might be taken as the more "neutral" version of the standard philosophical account: *Les etapes de la pensee sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

<sup>48</sup> Paul Roth, "Politics and Epistemology: Rorty, MacIntyre and the ends of Philosophy," *History of the Human Sciences* 2, no.2 (June 1989).

inception. Admittedly, the epistemological debate is a technical and abstract one, which is generally confined to the narrow bounds of an elite on the fringes of society. Indeed, such an elite constitutes a minority within the academy. Yet, the significance of a crisis at that level of consciousness within society at any moment has practical implications for the existential as well as the social predicament in the society at large. Consequently, to see the crisis in the episteme from the vantage point of social theory is an ideal tangent to address some of these practical concerns which ultimately reflect on the well being of the individual and society in a global community, just as the disruption in the latter is reflected in contemporary social science.<sup>49</sup>

The corollary to this assumption is twofold: In the context at hand, my interest in the theoretical and abstract issues is motivated by a practical concern for a common fate in a global but all too fragile temporal order. Social theory and the philosophy of knowledge are not ends in themselves. On the other hand, contrasting the dominant secular paradigm with the *tawhidi* paradigm is not intended to be cast in a dualistic Self/Other perspective. Rather, the former is as much a part of the global setting regardless of its historical provenance; while the *tawhidi* mode of perception has as much claim on the allegiance of the historical *ummah* as it has on every other community. This latter mode is a common heritage to which all are entitled, if not morally obligated, to apprehend, and any historical prerogative which might accrue from its association with one group rather than another is solely contingent on a voluntary access.

The key to this *tawhidi* position is immortalized in the Qur\_anic account of the encounter between the Queen of Saba\_ (Sheba) and Solomon, the Prophet of his time who was also sovereign in his kingdom. Solomon had invited his royal peer, who was a sun-worshipper, to accept *tawhid*, the self-surrender to the One and Only God. The message was prefaced: "In the name of God the Compassionate, the All-Merciful." It took the proud and skeptical, but wise and prudent, Queen the counsel of her advisors and a fact-finding visit to Solomon's court before she could decide for herself on the credibility of the offer and the integrity of its representative. When she conceded its truth, it was to God Almighty, the only true and ultimate Sovereign, that she then humbly confessed her error and submitted herself together with Solomon.<sup>50</sup> The point lies in the main difference which distinguishes the two paradigms: one is imposed, the other can only be freely accepted. The secularist paradigm conveys a pervasive domination, an imposition; the *tawhidi* paradigm evokes an imminent persuasion. The practical concern of a contrasting episteme, and the spirit which informs it, account for the general tenor of our approach. Our selectivity in addressing aspects and abstracting dimensions in contemporary social theory and cultural and intellectual trends, which might not be the most prominent or the most conventional, is conditioned by this factor.

The second assumption is that Islam provides a viable and promising alternative source for reconstructing the cultural and social matrix of modernity. Islam is conceived in two ways. First, it is a revealed religion which addresses man in this world and has a comprehensive life-affirming perspective which explicitly subsumes the virtues of social being. This makes it especially more pertinent to a temporal economy than an otherwise more strictly salvific religion or history, as a

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<sup>49</sup> Consider the following comment by Charles Taylor: "The strains in contemporary society, the breakdown in civility, the rise of deep alienation, which is translated into even more destructive action, tend to shake the basic categories of our social science." P. Rabinow and W. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretative Social Science*, (1979; reprint University of California Press, 1987), 70.

<sup>50</sup> *al-Qur\_an*, 27: 23-44.

*Heilsgeschichte* would tend to be.<sup>51</sup> Second, as a corollary to this pertinence, epistemological and sociological perspectives would do well to conceive of Islam as a valid historical model of a culture and a civilization that developed within the parameters of divine revelation. Its uniqueness in particular is assumed for two reasons. One is the abundance of documentation and the methodological scruple, or the overdeveloped sensitivity to issues of methodological integrity in the Islamic tradition of learning.<sup>52</sup> This point is relevant and significant to the extent that the domain of social science is largely a factual/empirical one, and its concerns with issues of methodology are obvious.<sup>53</sup> Another aspect of this uniqueness derives from the conscious efforts, which have been systematically undertaken within different Muslim communities throughout history, to apply and adapt the normative standards derived from its revealed code to widely divergent situations and social settings. This practical instantiation of a moral order was first launched with the example of the formative Muslim community under the Prophet (pbuh). The legacy of Islamic Civilization is a measure of the standing appeal and realizability of its practical norms. Its distinctive socio-cultural parameters and structures had found their common denominator in an ethico-legal system rather than in any claims on ethnicity or an ethnic genius. The example of an enduring rational/objective moral order which has retained allegiance throughout different epochs and among different peoples, and the attempts which it saw in the past to make it operational and those it continues to evoke at present, lend it a historical validity that merits investigation in its own terms, beyond any fictive and ideological inquiry.

Unlike a philosopher or a theologian, the political sociologist and the cultural theorist are generally assumed to be dealing with workable propositions and practical realities. In turning to historical

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<sup>51</sup> It is in this context that the secularization of Christianity proceeded with its apogee in the Hegelian appropriation of the Incarnation and the trinity to the unfolding *Geist* heralding the end of history. Of course, interpretations of Hegel abound, and range from those who would save him by throwing out the metaphysical baggage, and others who would insist on a strictly Christian theological understanding to grasp the essential coherence of his ideas. See Paul Lakeland, *The Politics of Salvation: The Hegelian Idea of the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984). There has been no dearth of sacred histories of some substance, but not without ambiguity: Reinhold Niebuhr's is perhaps one of the more representative in America today. This is not to be confused with the Christian vision of history or interpretation of civilization, as with Toynbee, or the less controversial works of Christopher Dawson. One can sympathize with the more recent attempts to provide a Christian grounding for politics, although they remain mired in ambiguity and paradox, as with Glen Tinder's projection of the "prophetic stance" for a basis of an enlightened and compassionate skepticism, *The Political Meaning of Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> In English, George Makdisi's original work *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinb. University Press, 1981) identifies the religious sources and impetus to the formative attitudes in this domain. In fact, had it not been for the wealth of Arabic original sources on the subject, which is a testimony to that tradition of learning, work by Makdisi, Creswell, Weiss, and a host of Orientalists working on Islamic humanism would not have been possible, although the point we stress here is hardly made there out of considerations of "objectivity." See A. H. Green, ed., *In Quest of an Islamic Humanism* (Cairo: The American University Press, 1984).

<sup>53</sup> A Symposium on "Islam and the History of Religions," held in January, 1980, illustrates a more promising direction taken by a "contemporary orientalism" in search for "healthier, richer, more synthetic studies," which attempt to take Islamic sources more seriously in their own terms rather than by imposing an outmoded and discredited perspective upon them. See the Review Essay by the late Professor Fazlur Rahman in the volume edited by Richard Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona, 1985).

Islam they will encounter in it a relevant repertoire of precedents in ideal-substantiation, and they will be compelled to review some of their conceptual presuppositions on the basis of the concrete evidence in the field, if they are to be true to their scientific vocation.<sup>54</sup> One of the direct implications of this logic would be to review the traditional fact/value dichotomy. Although the internal meta-theoretical critique prompted by the post-positivist climate of opinion has seriously undermined it, yet it has not been entirely abandoned. The recourse to the Islamic tradition could provide some substantial re-orientation in the midst of the welter of new controversies that have emerged in this area. After all, post-positivism has not only failed to resolve the tensions of modernity which are echoed in the consciousness of the modern disciplines, rather, it has added to them.

The third assumption provides for a retrospective link between the first two. Counterposing the secularist model and the Islamic *tawhidi* model is nothing new. In the past, Islam played a historic role at the interface of axial epochs by conserving and developing the heritage of antiquity and providing the essential modes and material that launched the modern era. There is no reason to assume that it has exhausted its potential in this regard. Given the intactness of its modal sources and, consequently, the integrity of its epistemic nucleus, there is every reason to assume the contrary. To break out of the "iron cage" of pervasive skepticism and sociological prejudice characteristic of modernity, however, it would do well to recall two basic facts which underlie this postulate of renewed relevance to the future. The first lies in the proposition that "institutionalizing and socializing religion in society remains always an open system interacting with and subject to the Islamic ideal."<sup>55</sup> The other presupposes the tangible dimension in this ideal in the historical example of community-building and in its related legacy of practical models and situations as mentioned earlier.

How, it might be asked, does the *tawhidi* episteme provide that integrating core to a system which still remains open and adaptable? This is a question which others have lucidly addressed at some length, and some have even taken it up as a point of departure in elaborating sophisticated models of regenerating the *ummah* and its institutions.<sup>56</sup> To recapitulate on an essence: A *tawhidi* model projects the multi-dimensional ontic, epistemic, and metaphysical implications of an intact, coherent, and integrated belief system and world-view as provided by the *wahy*. *Wahy* refers to the concrete and objective revelation of the Divine Will as it has been revealed and preserved in the

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<sup>54</sup> The trouble, of course, is that Islam remains insulated from the wider academy, banished to its narrowly professional enclaves in departments of religion and Middle Eastern Studies, and outside mainstream intellectual currents in the West. Whether such currents are qualified to understand and appropriate it is another matter.

A recent work in constitutional jurisprudence advocating the case for group rights in a liberal polity could have avoided some of its blatant gaffes if it had had access to a rich Islamic precedent on the score, instead of drawing on the example of Apartheid in South Africa.

<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Knowing One Another*, 65 ff.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Ziauddin Sardar's pioneering study in Futuristics, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), esp. Chs. 4 & 5; S. M. Naqib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978), esp. Ch.5 and the sequence of illustrations showing a schema for reforming the Islamic University. For a synopsis of a regenerative polity paradigm which was developed in courses at Cairo University between 1980 and 1984, see "Towards a Conceptual Framework for the Study of Muslim Polities," presented at the Annual Meeting of Muslim Social Scientists, Plainfield, Indiana, July 5-7, 1985.

Qur'an and the authenticated *Sunnah* (the way, example) of the Prophet (pbuh). These are accessible and readily appropriable sources, at whichever level they might be sought. In these sources, the individual and the community have a paradigm which can be appropriated both in a methodical and systematic manner (as with the *shari'ah* and its tradition) or, subjectively, at the level of individual piety. Whatever the level of generality, or the degree of interiority, this core retains its dynamism, meaning, relevance, and consequential impetus. Cognition and action evolve around that core and are shaped in its light, in much the same way as the history of the early Muslim community was conceived in the crucible of a dynamic interaction engaging a dialectic between Revelation and events. In short, *tawhid* binds a conscience and projects a morality that has its communal as well as its eschatological dimensions. A consciousness shaped by it and a life perceived in its "devotional grid" is clearly bound to affect the life-world at a level which becomes the logical concern of the socio-cultural and historical disciplines.<sup>57</sup>

To commit the folly of confusing the Islamic ideal contingent on this nucleus with Muslim realities would be to deny contemporary social theory the benefit of an opportunity it can ill afford to waste.<sup>58</sup> Yet this is precisely what conventional anthropology and sociology are prone to do. Both are equally constrained on account of their positivistic and subjectivist biases, are disdainful or incognizant or both of all interiority, and are further hampered by an Orientalist legacy when it comes to dealing with Islam. In varying degrees perhaps, both deny any significance to the Islamic ideal, let alone admitting to its reality, and where its relevance is grudgingly conceded, it is more likely to be distorted beyond recognition.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, the canon of objective inquiry does not stop at the modern disciplines, and recently studies by qualified and competent authors, Muslims and others, have sought to draw a distinction between empirical conditions in the Muslim world and a historically relevant normative core. As this distinction is developed between elements that are characteristically and invariably Islamic and those which are variably Muslim, it becomes possible to discern the shaping of the new lines of sociological/historical inquiry. Throughout, the nuclear integrity of an intact, objective, and accessible core has been central.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See M. Abul-Fadl, Chs. 1 & 4, *Alternative Perspectives: Islam From Within* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1990); S. N. al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Future* (London: Mansell, 1985); and esp., Ismai'l Raji al Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1402 AH/1982).

<sup>58</sup> Not even Arab sociologists in their contemporary initiatives to "indigenize" are fully aware of the methodological implications at stake. In its heuristic "paradigms," Arab sociology continues to be a graft off its Western template, unable as yet, or unwilling, to make the break - which accounts for its own crisis of identity as a filial discipline. G. Sabagh and I. Ghazalla, "Arab Sociology Today: A View from Within," *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1986), 373-99.

<sup>59</sup> This is particularly evident in studies on Women in Islam, where the challenge is at a methodological and epistemological level, not simply at the "ideological" level as Keddie and others assume. A constructive example of addressing a related sociologic topic holistically see Hammuda Abdel Ati's work, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977). See esp. his "Conclusion and General Discussion" for an authoritative and pointed critique on the limitations inherent in contemporary sociology in its approach to Muslim societies.

<sup>60</sup> It is this awareness of an effective core and the ability to relate it to contemporary moral, social, and political conditions which make an existing collection of authoritative and well-written essays invaluable. See *Islam and Contemporary Society*, published in association with the Islamic Council of Europe, (London and New York: Longman, 1982). The contrasting perspectives underlying some of the essays add to their value

More generally, this distinction has meaningful implications for refloating the theoretical enterprise in the social sciences and for promoting new ways of institutional and cultural interaction within and across societies. The opportunity to benefit from it, and to take the epistemic assumptions identified with the Islamic core seriously, is contingent on a number of factors which can be reiterated here. First, it requires a new pedigree of scholarship combining the imagination to conceive of alternative modes of culture and venues to culture, the courage to depart from established conventions, and the creativity and acumen to chart new terrain. These are qualities which are not beyond a growing number of able scholars of integrity in the West, as well as among a few pioneering Muslims. Second, and more to the point, it calls for recognizing the Islamic Revelation and its implication for the understanding and study of Muslim civilization. Once this occurs, the shift is effected from the current mode of discourse, where such a level has no validity, to a *tawhidi* conceptual framework, which opens reality to a higher plane of meaningful inquiry.<sup>61</sup>

This is the crux of the shift required in the dominant episteme to pave the way for new perspectives which could lead contemporary social theory - and practice - out of its current impasse and futility. It is a shift, however, that will need to be steadily edged toward through the very concepts and approaches that are current in social and intellectual discourse. The shift cannot be forced or imposed, but must validate itself in the process of setting up an example of a more credible mode of discourse as an alternative. Contrasting Episteme is conceived in this perspective.

The upshot of the above assumptions and their corollaries is that a strategy to reach out across different world views and experiences is the preliminary condition for bridging paradigms. Fortunately, the controversy triggered by the original thesis of the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has, in the course of its acclimatization in normal social science circles, carried the debate there beyond issues of incommensurability. While the syntax of paradigm and paradigm shift still primarily evokes the dimensions of discontinuity, it is now also possible to approach it from other perspectives without violating the canons of conceptual integrity. On the other hand, while it is clear that no cultural discourse can be immune to the relationship between power and knowledge, and while clearly no paradigm shift at the level of perceptions can occur without having its implications for power, yet we will deliberately bracket out this dimension from our present inquiry. The intercultural domain calls for a reflexive and critical scholarship that is open, and which focuses on meaning and value rather than on provoking the closure and defensiveness attendant on a power/ideology focus. Ours might be a scholarship of advocacy, but it is not one of militancy.

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and relevance in a context which seeks to make operational our abstractions on the respective Culture-Modes and Constructs. See esp. the two contributions by A. K. Brohi: "Islam: Its Political and Legal Principles" and "Human Rights and Duties: A Philosophic Approach;" and the contribution by Prof. Ismail al-Faruqi, "Islam as Culture and Civilization."

<sup>61</sup> Davies, op cit., p. 66.



**A CONTRASTING EPISTEME**  
**Redefining the Parameters**

“Contrasting Epistemics” has thus far been taken up both as a theme in itself and as a framework of inquiry that may conveniently be located in the field of cultural hermeneutics. The latter is a fast growing field which, not surprisingly, bears a close affinity to a revival in theology and philosophy; it draws on and feeds into a multi-disciplinary array of literature in linguistics, criticism, culture, art, history, psychology, and society. This has led to considerable enrichment and variety in the literature on the subject, regardless of the specialized interests of its original thinkers and architects. A glance through some of the recent publications would indicate this.<sup>62</sup> Conceived in the present context, the objective of a Contrasting Episteme is to contribute to a conceptual framework which would make it possible to study and compare cultures within their respective civilizational parameters with the purpose of understanding and communicating across and among cultures, i.e., intra- and inter-culturally. As such, it opens on a wide forum of dialogue, whether along the lines of an East-West encounter, or in more specific political and inter-faith dialogues.<sup>63</sup> Significant about our initiative here is the attempt to carry the encounter to grounds of epistemology and social theory: a perspective which is brought to the fore by the dawning cultural and intellectual revival in the Muslim hemisphere signaled in by those who sought to relate the principles of their faith to the basis of their worldly knowledge and activity, and to put an end to a breach in faith and life itself by reintegrating their world view to their world. Those were the advocates of an “Islamization of Knowledge.”<sup>64</sup> The other, more significant, aspect of novelty lies in the distinctive point of departure and assumptions which inform the attempt.

Extending the field of cultural discourse and renegotiating its terms is a necessary condition for evolving a new synthesis that could validate a responsive and responsible social theory. Such a theory is required to meet the needs of a global moral economy, and it needs a thorough

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<sup>62</sup> *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia and Faith* (Berkeley, Calif.: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976); *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, edited by Patrick Gallacher and Helen Damico, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in post-modern Culture*, Jon Snyder, trans., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988); W. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book, 1988); *C. G. Jung and the Humanities: Towards a Hermeneutics of Culture*, K. Barnaby and P. D’Acierno, eds., (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); C. Tilley, ed., *Reading Material Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> See Guy Amirthanayaqam, ed., *Writers in East-West Encounter: New Bearings* [1982]; and F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* and *The Taming of the Nations*; also Norman Daniel’s *The Cultural Barrier*; D. Hopwood, ed., *Euro-arab Dialogue: the Relations Between Two Cultures* (English Version of the Acts of the Hamburg Symposium, April 1983); and the initiatives in inter-faith dialogue by R. Marston Speight, *Christian Muslim Relations*, (1983; reprint, Hartford, Connecticut: Office on Christian Muslim Relations, The National Council of Churches, 1986).

<sup>64</sup> *The Islamization of Knowledge: Objectives and Principles*, 1982; reprint, (Herndon, Va.: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1988).

mobilization of the moral human reserves to achieve it. Modernity presupposes an inclusiveness, rather than an exclusiveness. There is neither room for uniformity nor autarchy in an essentially pluralist world constituted of a diversity of cultures. Yet, this diversity will need to subsist and thrive within a dominant order or a "chessman" of some kind. The search is for the rules which can equitably structure this order without sacrificing accommodation to dominance, and without ceding the grounds to anarchy. The prevailing episteme is necessarily of a global order, and the required social theory that is compatible with it will have to go beyond meeting formal organizational demands to effectively addressing the moral challenges of a global and technological age. It will have to be a theory with a strong penchant for praxis. To conceive of a paradigm which can assure the framework and animus in which such a social theory can develop will need a new and dynamic medium of cultural discourse and intercourse. This is where the idea of a Contrasting Episteme fulfills a need and projects a principled path for novel attitudes, perceptions, practices, and patterns of cultural dealings.

A Contrasting Episteme which starts off by exploring the differences does so within parameters and with given ends in view which preclude its being bound to cultural insularities. We shall recap on the preliminaries outlined above and add other dimensions which add to the urgency of refining a reflective and critical discursive strategy. This episteme is predicated on the affirmation of the essential unity of mankind in its creation, nature, and destiny, and on its fundamental diversity, multiformity, and complementarity in consequence of its createdness and imminence. Against this, it maintains the alterity of its Creator and Sustainer, who is the Absolute in Oneness, Self-Subsistence, and Transcendence. The alterity of Transcendence is qualitatively on another, incomparable plane to alterity within the created order, which is one of interdependence and complementarity postulated on human want as opposed to God's self-sufficiency. Because the divine economy is one of mercy, compassion, and benevolence, man is equipped with all the faculties and provided with all the bounties and conditions which assure him the satisfaction of his human needs. But it is of the nature of this satisfaction to be imperfect, for perfection belongs to the realm of the Absolute. This want of perfection becomes the dynamic for a continued growth and an urge for self-betterment. God is the absolute of all of qualities and faculties, and in His divine providence He provides man with all the qualities and faculties needed to sustain him in his earthly sojourn. Pre-eminent among these is the faculty to reason: to discern, to discourse, and to deliberate on the elements of our global civilization which affect us all. We should be able to do so in a language and on terms that are accessible to all, and which are developed along the lines of a hermeneutic of mutuality. This is the only ethos compatible with the anthropology outlined above and which, at the same time, is realistic enough to address the needs of a global moral economy. In emphasizing the elements of transcendence and the axial plane of alterity, we do so with another purpose in view, relating to the instrumentalities of our analytical framework and the conceptual distinctions implicit in its archetypal constructs.

Implementing a Contrasting Episteme calls for its own semantic field and relevant modes of expression. The task of abstraction, which is inherent in all social theory, is at hand. The mental constructs necessary to provide a medium for articulation and representation were developed as a response to this need.<sup>65</sup> Such constructs are designed to broadly convey those characteristics and

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<sup>65</sup> This observation refers to "The Architectonics of Cultural Transformation," which was originally conceived as a template for reconceptualizing the Working Plan for Islamization. Its idea was primarily conceived to take off from a critical reconstruction of the Muslim ecumene, before it could influence by example. In the meantime, the Muslim intellect cannot isolate itself pending the reconstruction, but must be prepared for the pressing eventuality of a cultural dialogue. This was where the discourse with the West, and

dispositions which are likely to be encountered in the different cultural traditions, and which I refer to as "culture-modes." They serve as reference points and intelligible channels or media for accessing the issues that emerge in a common discourse. At one level, this mental construct could be approximated to the Weberian Ideal-type analysis. Schematically projected in our field, it yields some preliminary insights into two basically distinct and different ways of knowing and being as they are flashed through their respective lenses: the one is identified as the Oscillating Culture, and the other as the Median Culture. They take their impetus from their respective bearings, which are defined in relation to the Transcendent and to the place of Revealed Guidance in their epistemic matrix. In knowledge conceived predominantly within the framework of a horizontal axis, the axial plane of alterity retains an ambiguity which in practice marginalizes its impact on the operational culture.

These culture-types may be summed up here as the temporal refractions of two essential outlooks on the life-world, both potential and actual; although, at the present time the one dominates and the other is seemingly on the defensive as it presses for its self-articulation and instantiation. The fact, however, is that this defensiveness is only surface gloss, for the resilience and persistence of *homo religiosus* and his matrix of reality has defeated all contrary wills. The first culture-type is expressed in the secularist and materialist vernacular and is embedded in a cult of autonomy and finitude; ostensibly, it promotes a positivistic and objectivist ethos which, however, remains intrinsically and distinctly subjectivist to the core.<sup>66</sup> The other type embodies the culture mode and life-affirming ethos generated by the belief in the oneness of God, as the creator and sustainer, life-principle and ultimate guide and source of direction for a universe and a humanity that is essentially one.

In borrowing we relate, while in cultivating we enrich. This is the dynamic and structure underlying the historical process of cultural formation and renewal. It also underlines the continuities - and discontinuities - in a universal legacy of human civilization. If one were to borrow the categories developed by the Russian-born, American naturalized, sociologist Alexander Sorokin, and apply them to the two culture modes which promote and engender the respective world views, one could compare the ideational-integral culture type to the Median: or the "middle-most medium" representing the *tawhidi* episteme. On the other hand, the Oscillating Culture, with its compulsive pendular momentum, is the ideal breeding ground for harboring alternating and synchronizing versions of the two other "moments" which are frequented in the temporal ecumene, namely, the "sensate" and the "ideal" cultures.<sup>67</sup>

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articulating a representative and self-conscious Muslim reading of modernity, was conceived. Paper delivered at the IIIT Seminar on August 29, 1987.

<sup>66</sup> This subjectivity is a key in defining "modernity," although one suspects that this might be more conspicuous in the retrospective wisdom of a "post-modernity." "The essence of the modern, is above all psychologism ... the experiencing and interpretation of the world according to the reactions of our inner selves ... the dissolution of stable contents in the fluid elements of the soul," echoes Georg Simmel in his recognition of an emergent *Gefuhlskultur*, as Lawrence Scaff points out, "Fleeing the Iron Cage: Politics and Culture in the Thought of Max Weber," *American Political Science Review* 81, no.3 (September 1987), 737-755.

<sup>67</sup> For a compact overview of Sorokin's work and contributions, see T. K. N. Unnithan, ed., *Sociological Theories of Pitrim Sorokin* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1973). Ch. 5 gives a compact overview of his socio-cultural systems. A useful bibliography of the major writings of Sorokin is provided in the Appendix to the book. Not surprisingly, Sorokin's work would have a global appeal, particularly among those interested in the fate of the East-West encounter, for Sorokin's philosophy of history and interest in civilizations gave his sociology a breadth untypical of both its Eurocentric antecedents and contemporary

Historically, no human collective is immune to the pushes and pulls of these culture-types at any given moment of its development. Obversely, no culture-type is the preserve or birthright of any historical community. Yet, for the purpose at hand, we maintain that the conditions which give rise to any one version and foster it over another can be located in certain pre-disposing human matrices, both moral and physical, cognitive and structural. Abstracting from these conditions is the object of our concern in considering the possibility and merits of a strategy of contrasting epistemics. It is these predisposing matrices which we identify as "epistemes," or as self-defining cognitive and evaluational charts. These can then be projected into culture-modes on a temporal-spatial axis to provide the signs, symbols, and the defining parameters of a cultural discourse among its different partisans.

### ISLAM AND THE WEST RECONSIDERED

In this sense, we will be looking at "Islam and the West," not as mutually exclusive constellations that are so destined, but as historically differentiated instances in a span under review and in terms of these contrasting culture modes. In fact, the very terminology used here is questionable, from whichever perspective we might choose to approach it. It has been current in contemporary circles of a critical anthropology and social science to seek the concrete and the particular by denying meaning or relevance to such broad categories of generalization. Which "Islam," it is asked, and which "West?" While the origins of such skepticism might be partly justified, given the empirical surface bias of the horizontal axis of inquiry, yet it would be folly to deny a potential validity to distinguishing categories of historical affinity and identity at some level of generality. The problem is with the use or abuse of such categories, and not necessarily with their initial conception/misconception.

The *Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths* is a valid instance of one such level of generality. It was an ingenious initiative at the conceptual level to integrate the three monotheistic faiths and to proceed systematically to dislodge the misconceived barriers between the "Judeo-Christian" and the "Islamic." The identification of the Jewish with the Christian in that conventional formulation was itself a deceptive trope, confounding identities to the disadvantage of the outsider. In drawing on the Qur\_anic ethos that denied any exclusivity to the legacy of Abraham, and turned the "friend of God" from a tribal patriarch to the progenitor of *tawhid*, the interfaith dialogue was to be elevated to a higher plane of discourse. That was an effective strategy, not only for reforming one domain of the Islam/West encounter, but it would have effectively launched a spreading momentum to this effect, had not "faith" itself been an embattled and insular forum in the dominant paradigm. In our present framework of Contrasting Epistemics, as we draw on the same spirit which initially inspired the Abrahamic triologue, we strive at a mode of discourse and a level of generality which takes us beyond the dominion of dominance, and allows us to address the prevailing episteme without being bound to its strictures.

Within our conceptual framework, the relationship between culture-mode and historical actor remains essentially one of contingency, not necessity. It is this which further enables us as Muslim

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American mainstream. A compact volume by Sorokin, *The Basic Trends of our Times*, written in the early sixties, illustrates this versatility and, indeed, contemporaneity. The work includes an analysis of the prospects of East-West relations (Ch. 2) and a reading into the moral and religious polarization of our times (Ch. 4).

intellectuals to open out to the Other and invite dialogue with an end to deliberating on the structure of an essentially common discourse and history. Otherwise, on the eve of the twenty-first century, "East" and "West" may be conveniently consigned as anachronisms. We venture to make this remark notwithstanding the cultural lag and the persistent residues of a sordid medieval legacy which continues to this day to cast its shadows on the prospects of dialogue.<sup>68</sup> Our purpose, however, is not to nurture this lag but to bridge it. Viewing these conventional terms with expedience and foresight, we take them as a starting point that is subject to redefining, without assuming them as ultimate referents or ends. In doing so, we defer to common perceptions as a step to changing them, and rely on the framework we use to attain this objective.

From this perspective, East and West are potentially inclusive categories/totalities deflecting in time from misplaced centers towards a higher unified field/vision of reality. This should make it possible to identify terms of mutual intelligibility which can become the common referents for all those who see the reason and have the will to subscribe to them. Ultimately, the goal is to transcend the arbitrary and exclusive mode of ego-centricity bred of a confrontational dialectic. But first, the need is to understand the mishaps and the consequences of its persistence. Only then, can a critical consciousness applied to the conditions of human cultural diversity be transformed into an instrument for transcending the constraints which inhere in the forces of repulsion and allow for appropriating the elements of a "concentricity." A slight elaboration is due at this point.

"Repulsion" or repelling evokes a semantic field of the Arabic root word *d-f-* and its derivatives. It connotes an active urge and momentum to push, to push off, to push away, to strive towards, to ward off, or to fend for. The term is conceived here in the light of the Qur\_anic discourse on a cosmic dynamic which, extended temporally, encompasses events and human actions. It conveys the idea of a providential tension which assumes a purpose and morality in the clash of wills, not in a nihilistic or romanticist strain, but in the sense made explicit in the verses cited below:

And if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another,  
corruption would surely overwhelm the earth...

*(al-Qur\_an, 2:251)*

and:

For if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries,  
churches, synagogues, and mosques - in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled - would  
surely have been destroyed...

*(al-Qur'an, 22:40)*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The classical scholarship in the field demonstrates this legacy. See R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Camb., Mass: Harvard, 1962), and J. Waardenburg, *L'Islam dans le Miroir de l'Occident* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963).

<sup>69</sup> This is Muhammad Asad's translation. Yusuf Ali's translations, in its revised edition (Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1989) read: "... And did not Allah check one set of people against another the earth would indeed be full of mischief: But Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds," and "... Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another surely there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is mentioned in abundant measure." Note that in both translations, the essential meaning is rendered, but the full range latent in the term *dafa-* - which Ibn Khaldun used in his sociology of power - is lost.

With this dynamic in view, the differences among the players in the episodes, which in time come to shape the distinct cultural identities, can be measured in terms of degrees of nearness or distance from a common center. They are not measured in terms of mutually exclusive universes, which would constitute an incommensurability. In a transcendental epistemology like that assumed in *tawhid*, the divine will is projected in the plane of creation and human agency at the level of morality. The common center in the cultural encounter can be rendered in terms of apprehending morality. Each individual, and each group, strives to an appointed goal (2:148), and ultimately the goal is One (16:60). Instead of "expropriation" and distancing, there would be a dialectic of appropriation (*nasaba*) and proximation (*qarraba*). But for this to be achieved, there is a compelling need to lay the groundwork for self-understanding and for understanding the other, i.e., to establish a modular reciprocity. This is the process metaphorically alluded to above as the algebra of restoring the part to the whole, the enhancement of the merits of each and the value of the whole. It constitutes the ultimate end of a Contrasting Episteme, and it provides the impulse and the reason for seeking out and redesigning the principles for a code of cultural logistics. We refer to this effort and its intent as "the architectonics of a cultural discourse," which is admittedly an element and a prerequisite for any restructuring at the global level.

### FROM LOGIC TO LOGISTICS

In the light of the foregoing, the idea of bridging paradigms is best seen as an exercise in mutual self-understanding. The potential meanings in the one case are brought into relief by those in the other. This is where a Contrasting Epistemics may be dynamically applied, more than as a matter of style, or an analytical approach, to connote a strategy of communicating across cultures. The condition for doing so is to go beyond what cultural anthropologists call "empathy," in the attempt to identify with the Other and to be in a position to interpret the experience or the consciousness of the Other from within, without denying the Other the prerogative of understanding and interpreting his own culture. This suggests going beyond the Weberian *Einfühl* and Clifford Geertz's account of the Balinese cockfight.<sup>70</sup> The challenge is to communicate with the Other by presenting/projecting one's own experience and culture in terms which can be made meaningful, or can be meaningfully related, to the Other without disfiguring the Self. This presupposes new methodological and conceptual vistas to break out of the constraints inherent in conventional approaches and to divest such approaches of their tendentious power structures and orientations. Orientalism is a case in point.<sup>71</sup> Its alternative is a hermeneutics of mutuality.

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<sup>70</sup> This was originally published in *Daedalus* (Winter 1972) and recently reprinted in P. Rabinow and W. Sullivan, *Interpretative Social Science: A Second Look* (University of California, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> Despite some extreme stances taken by Edward Said in his pioneering work on the subject, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978), as the controversy died down there remained much of substance in his initial statement to suggest that rather than a mode of knowledge, Orientalism was more of a mode of apprehension and perception based on the litany of the Orient, (Aziz Azmeh). For a representative collection of critical essays, see the volume edited by Asaf Hussain, Robert Olson and Jamil Qureshi, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Amana Books, 1984); for a more tendentious critique of the critics, see Chapter 5 in Emmanuel Sivan's *Interpretations of Islam* (Darwin Press, 1985), extended specifically to the social sciences, it has been used by Talal Asad and others. For a compact, recent contribution of his, see, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown U., 1986); it follows up on a critique started earlier in the seventies at about the same time when Brian Turner pioneered his critical reflections in both *Weber and Islam* and *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (George Allen and Unwin, 1978). The precursor to this debate may be found in a little known tract on English speaking Orientalists delivered by A. L. Tibawi at

The point in a strategy of Contrasting Epistemics is to carry the encounter between different culture modes outside the framework of domination/subjugation or a domineering and exclusivist ethos, to one that is "co-substantialist." The mystical and theological overtones of this term in a medieval Thomistic litany are clearly not intended here. The only possible connotation would be one that conveyed the idea of reconciling the parties to a discourse, and of overcoming the alienating impulses attendant on egocentricity. More specifically, this concept is applied in the present context with special reference to articulate and articulated literary/discursive traditions. Wherever there is a tradition of learning, which is transmitted down the generations and which is accessible to other traditions, then it is incumbent on the interlocutors to defer to the standards set by those traditions. Observing the discursive mode of the tradition in question constitutes the first step in grasping the import of a Contrasting Episteme.

A hermeneutic substantiating that tradition entails the proof or evidence on the nature and integrity of the tradition as it has shaped the culture and life of its adherents. In the event of an encounter between two divergent and distinct modes of understanding, with their respective modes of thought and action, it is important to access each alongside the other, in its own terms, before endeavoring to relate them to each other. This will be referred to as a co-substantiating mode, which remains an open and self-transcending concept. Ultimately, an engagement in mutuality, and a renunciation of imposition, calls for an alternative set of standards, or a frame of reference, to effect the possible bridging across traditions. "Bridging" thus refers to a meaningful understanding of diversity and individuality that would enhance the dominant mode/s of rationality to the benefit of the community/ies involved in the exchange. In this context, co-substantiality could be translated at different levels: at its lowest common denominator, it would still operate within a dualistic mode of Self/Other, i.e., the standard renderings of "the West" and "Islam." But as the search for the relative terms proceeds objectively, this ego-centrism would gradually be displaced by distinctions that are more objectively realized and realizable. This would entail a kind of progression of mutually comprehensible standards achieved at higher planes of convergence.

In the co-substantiating mode, knowledge is a means for gaining or imparting insight and wisdom into substantive issues that are commonly held, and which can eventually be deferred to for mutual betterment. The span of interest moves from denigration, distortion, or negation as the ego-centric premises of the Self/Other divide are transcended. Unlike the empathy of cultural anthropologists, this mode makes no claims to represent the Other, as others are legitimately admitted to speak for themselves, and are presumed free to communicate their terms to disengage a common ground in the process. The presumption/qualification is a function of the enabling structures in a given situation. Knowledge of the Other in any other framework produces cultural parodies, much as it also reflects parodied cultures. This is at the source of certain critiques of Orientalism which question its reliability as a sound scholarly tradition.

As long as scholars in the West continue to read Islam in terms developed outside of and inconsistent with its epistemic assumptions, and without regard to an understanding from within, such as is implicit in the idea of co-substantiation, the violation of the integrity of the Other will

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the Islamic Center in London in the early sixties and later published in *The Muslim World* 53, no. 4 (Oct. 1963). Beyond its outspoken eloquence, it was remarkable for its scholarship and moderation; both elements have sometimes been lost in the heat of more recent debates. Rana Kabbani's insightful critique deserves mention, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

continue and a moral violence will be perpetuated. The Other is here conceived as an integral socio-cultural entity, claiming its own traditions, and entitled to its identity as such. This violation is ultimately a loss to its perpetrators as well as its victims. It does not necessarily depend on the domination/subjugation matrix, but it is equally contingent on inherent cultural/structural constraints. Comparing the parables, metaphors, aphorisms and symbols in the different literary traditions provides a fertile field for exploring these implications. The question goes beyond the subjects approached to the techniques used. Reconstructing the parameters of discourse beyond the abstract philosophical or the narrowly technical may prove a fruitful technique in tapping the communication resources and unleashing the latent reserves for mutuality in the human psyche.

Abstraction is one of the conditions for an effective contrasting epistemics, and is not to be confused with a vulgar stereotyping. It does, however, entail elements of reduction, oversimplification, and generalization. Given the clearly pluralistic and heterogeneous character of the cultural setting at any given moment, it would appear spurious to subsume it under a proposed mental construct or culture-type and thence proceed to analyze it as a unity. Yet, as long as these culture-types designate trends and underline recurrent themes which prevail, they serve a useful analytical and heuristic purpose. They point to a logic without which an isolated episode, attitude, preference, or reaction might not be understood. They alert to patterns and point to areas of resistance to change in a given setting, as well as to areas of vulnerability or promise. As with all theoretical constructs, their utility is ultimately a function of their use. Indeed, they become the only way to make operational a strategy of contrasts and even to work toward convergences through identifying a dialectic of overlaps within, across, and beyond empirical culture-modes. This is consistent with the premised discursive anthropology and epistemic philosophy indicated at the outset. These comprise assumptions which counteract a latent insularity often implicit in the very idea of culture. The metaphors used above in discussing a strategy of operating a framework of inquiry, like "bridging" and "crossing," would suggest that a Contrasting Episteme consciously seeks to develop inbuilt mechanisms which can incorporate these assumptions at a practical level.

To offset the effects of abstraction, a Contrasting Episteme should also be sensitive to detail and invoke elements of the specific and concrete in a culture. This too is something which can be brought out by a skillful resort to relevant strains in the respective literary and discursive traditions. In doing so, it should not be too deferential to established modes of discourse and analysis. In short, it should be expected to improvise with a view to effectively communicating the essence of a tradition or devising/revising the points of convergence between traditions as they might arise.

The question which has been implicitly posed and answered throughout this essay remains to be squarely addressed: Can people from different historical cultures meaningfully communicate? Are the barriers that are time and again erected of cognition or volition? The answer to both these questions lies in grasping the ecology and ecumenology of our imminent globality. It raises a dimension of opportunity, beyond that of contingency and necessity. Indeed, the very possibility of a dominant paradigm or a prevailing episteme presupposes this potential for mutuality and reciprocity across time and space. It is an awareness of the opportunities of a shared space in time which underlies the sensibility of those who have shown an interest or expressed some concern for a meeting of East and West, although many who have doubted its possibility are ultimately constrained by self-imposed conceptions about the range and limits of this meeting. Heidegger is a case in point. He is unable to transcend the exclusiveness of the closed circle that draws the wedge between Self and Other in the same way as he is unable to go beyond the logistics of Identity to that of the Project itself. This is unfortunately true, notwithstanding the sensible proposition that some



have made about how the West has first to recover within itself that which would make possible a meeting of East and West. To note, with a veteran commentator on both traditions:

No genuine meeting of West and East is possible on the level of present-day thought - i.e., in the form of the meeting of the most vocal, most glib, most superficial representatives of the most superficial period of both West and East. The meeting of both East and West can only be a meeting of the deepest roots of both.<sup>72</sup>

The question here, however, should not be whose paradigm, but which paradigm. The merits are ultimately to be determined in terms of access and volition, not of coercion and dominion. Morality embraces; brutishness coerces and debases. To take up the metaphor in passing, there can be no compulsion in the meeting of cultures, but it must be a meeting of convictions and mutual recognition. This is the level at which discoursing in terms of a Contrasting Episteme is directed. While it defers to the concrete and the particular, it essentially goes beyond history and geography to appeal to modes of thought and codes of conduct which could be defended and contested in terms of the universal and the general.

The dominant paradigm at present happens to be historically identified with the West. It also coincides with Modernity as the twentieth-century world has come to experience it. Modernity and the historical Occident identify with the Oscillating Culture under different guises, whatever the ideologies and philosophies. What is at fault with the dominant paradigm is not its provenance in the West, but rather its affinity with a culture-type and the way in which it has come to be imposed and transposed on the globe. The inadequacy we discern is an intrinsic one, and the objections raised are fundamentally of a moral order. As social scientists and students of culture, we fear that the implications for social theory are particularly devastating. And, to the extent that social theory ultimately deals in a human constituency that is both associational in form and that is the repository of historical sense and sensibility in substance, the situation commands attention and responsibility. This responsible attention, or attentive responsibility, is of the essence of the vocationist.<sup>73</sup>

It will be duly suggested that some of the problems in contemporary social theory as it is construed in the dominant paradigm may find the elements for their resolution in the event of a minor shift in the direction of a *tawhidi* episteme. However, it will first be necessary to contour the elements of a new discursive mode and to demonstrate its significance in a practical context. Before a Contrasting Episteme can be used to transcend a dichotomy, it will be used to illumine that dichotomy and to dissipate some of its attendant illusions and misperceptions. This means that it will be used to critique the dominant paradigm. In the course of that critique, it will be making the case for superceding what is currently taken for granted, and it will contour the lines and directions to this end. The prospects of effectively deploying a contrasting episteme in a dialectic of deconstruction and reconstruction depends on a conviction of the necessity of that exercise. The grounds for such a persuasion have already been summed up in the above-mentioned assumptions. The task of its elaboration however lies ahead.

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<sup>72</sup> Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in T. Pangle, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago University Press, 1989) 43 ff.

<sup>73</sup> See "Contrasting Epistemics: The Vocationist, *Tawhid* and Social Theory," *AJISS* 7, no. 2 (March 1990). See also below.

Working out a proposition takes diligence and calls on a steady and cumulative endeavour. Its implications will need to be explored and tested as the work itself advances. As a start in this direction, writings in the field of epistemology and social theory are expected to constitute an integral feature of the Western Thought Project as it is currently sponsored by the International Institute of Islamic Thought. In this endeavor, the idea of a Contrasting Episteme can initially provide a unifying focus in this elaboration. It might be observed in passing that on a more general plane this idea is already an operational construct implicitly structuring and orienting perspectives in contemporary Muslim circles. As the debate on modernity, authenticity, and the imperatives and requisites for the cultural renewal of the *ummah* becomes more sophisticated, a deepening methodological self-consciousness, together with an enhancement in discursive strategies and competence in communication, may very well be expected.

CONTRASTING EPISTEMICS:  
*TAWHID*, THE VOCATIONIST AND SOCIAL THEORY

RATIONALE AND CONTEXT

The idea of a Contrasting Episteme is suggested as an approach to grounding the matrix of inquiry in the social sciences in a new spatial zone of conceptual affinities.<sup>74</sup> By carrying the debate in the disciplines to its epistemic foundations, and by conceding the possibility of divergences within these foundations along the lines of basic types, it becomes possible to postulate alternative, valid conceptions of social science compatible with different intellectual traditions of inquiry. In the field of the Islamization of knowledge, a critical awareness of such alternatives is all the more necessary for partisans and skeptics alike. Given the critical reconstructionist orientation of that movement, it is important to know what it finds objectionable in a given system of knowledge (and its products), and on what basis it justifies its claims to an alternative system, as well as to define the contours of such an alternative.

The claim that the prevailing intellectual tradition which conditions the various disciplines of social and humanistic studies is anaemic in values, or that it is contested simply in terms of value-incompatibility, is too facile to justify a movement for cultural reconstruction on the scale envisaged. It leads to the naive contentions that all that Islamization requires is to add a dose of Islamic values (which ultimately constitute a universal and general ethical code) to whatever exists to produce the desired orientation. Thus, an Islamic Sociology, an Islamic Anthropology, or an Islamic Economics is simply a compound of the existing discipline plus the values designated "Islamic" as an additive. Some have identified this with a positivistic current in Islamization.<sup>75</sup> Others have warned against the temptation of subscribing to "double-barrelled" terminologies and have cogently argued the need for a sounder conceptualization in the field.<sup>76</sup> Quite apart from ignoring and misconstruing the socio-cultural and organic dimensions of disciplines of human inquiry, this view overlooks the structural dimension of a given system of knowledge and, while fending for values as components of the system, it underestimates their role in its structuring.

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<sup>74</sup> The present essay is adapted from a monograph on the same subject due to appear under the title *Disencumbering Social Theory*. The approach was first presented in a seminar at the Institute in August 1987, and was accompanied by a visual presentation at the AMSS Annual Conference in Plainfield, Indiana in October of that year. Subsequently, the idea was further developed in the course of preparing for an International Conference on Epistemology and Social Theory sponsored by the Institute of Humanomics and held at the University College of Cape Breton, October 7-9, 1989. Another paper, "The Implications of a Shift to the *Tawhidi* Episteme for Contemporary Social Theory," was written in this context.

<sup>75</sup> See my synopsis of "Trends in Islamic Social Science," published as a Call for Papers for the AMSS Annual Conference in *AJISS* 5, no. 2 (December 1988). Some earlier reservations on the Islamic Workplan were argued in these terms. See Z. Sardar, "Islamization or Westernization," *Inquiry/Afkar*, and his compact overview in "Islamization of Knowledge: State of the Art Report," in *An Early Crescent: The Future of Knowledge and Environment in Islam*, Ziauddin Sardar (ed.), (London: Mansell, 1989) 27-56.

<sup>76</sup> See Meryll Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell, 1988), where she addresses the issue in terms of changing internal paradigms within the discipline (Ch. 1) and develops it in the specific context of naming and classification in an Islamizing discourse (Ch. 6, esp. pp. 142-150).

It is here that the idea of a Contrasting Episteme is developed to integrate knowledge systemically, by assuming a holistic view of culture and relating knowledge to a given culture. However, because cultures are historically evolved, and as such they are contingent, there is an equal danger of foundering on the reef of a self-defeating cultural relativism and abrogating the incontestably universal premises which the Islamization movement must on principle endorse. Hence, "Islamization" is not something exclusively destined for Muslims and Muslim societies on the assumption that, culturally speaking, East is East and West is West, and that what is good for the West is not necessarily the ideal for the East. Such might be the conventional folk wisdom in both East and West, but it is not our position here. Rather, the assumption is that Islamization has affinities with a culture-type that is historically compatible with a variety of settings and peoples, and that can be contrasted with another culture-type which may be equally reproducible in multiple contexts regardless of historical origins. What do we mean by culture-types?

For didactic purposes, culture-types are postulated as intellectual constructs which are invested with their relevant properties, and seen in terms of their consequences for knowledge and action, for disciplines and society. Thus, while a Contrasting Episteme is aware of the historicity of culture, it also subscribes to elements of commonality within cultures. It seeks to devise an index for assessing contemporary knowledge in select domains based on abstracting these commonalities around two basic nodes. These become generic to the human condition, irrespective of particular histories or socio-cultural settings. The convergence and divergence which arises around each node is a matter of conceptual affinity, not historical identity. This formulation should assure the culturalist approach a dimension of universality and offset its particularistic associations. What follows is essentially an elaboration of this theme in the context of a more general concern with reviewing the premises of contemporary social theory and instituting a discourse in the field from an Islamization of knowledge perspective.

### **INITIAL PROJECTIONS**

The task of a Contrasting Episteme is to delineate the culture-types in a manner that would generate a momentum of cross-cultural exchange which goes beyond the us/them dialogues. As such, it is more than a normative approach to engaging different cultures in a common discourse.<sup>77</sup> It is also taken up as a critical strategy for probing dimensions of knowledge and knowing in a dynamic social context where the awareness of Self and Other develops in a problematic historical setting. It is innovative enough to open up new perspectives of inquiry, yet it is familiar enough to be adopted and adapted with ease to different challenges. Above all, it appropriates an idiom of inquiry which attempts to transcend the conventional confines of arbitrary and historical dualisms. This last consideration underlies the necessity of a transition from discussing modes of knowing in the abstract, as objective categories, to such modes as they are incorporated in cultural and historical models, i.e., as they are historically institutionalized and as they come to constitute the conventions for social discourse. As social theory is ultimately shaped in this kind of discourse, the link between episteme and society is evident. Crossing the barriers to understanding between different conventions of social discourse is a condition for discoursing intelligently and intelligibly on some of the common problems of contemporary social theory. The importance of a Contrasting Episteme as a strategy of inquiry derives from its potential contribution to this end.

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<sup>77</sup> This is a theme which is developed in my paper, "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme: *Tawhidi* Perspectives on Social Theory" (forthcoming), where the implications of different orientations are examined in the context of cultural borrowing/diffusion.

A Contrasting Episteme is predicated on a distinction between two different outlooks which structure a world-view and are projected in its adjuncts in the social world. These are referred to as "culture-modes." Culture-modes are seen to cluster around two basic types, which may for the purpose at hand be designated as the nodal poles of the cultural spectrum. The one nodal pole is conceived to take its bearings from a *horizontal axis*, the other from a *vertical axis*. The one refers to a flat bearing, as of a plain; the other to a spherical bearing or conical optic, as with a lens. The one is *uni-dimensional*; the other is *multi-dimensional*. The one is postulated on the *autonomy of human reason*; the other places this autonomy beyond human reason. *Divine revelation* is axial to the latter mode, and the circuit of human consciousness operates within its framework; unlike the case in the former, where divine revelation is incidental or marginal and is itself made to be contingent on human consciousness. In the one mode, that of the horizontal bearing, the phenomenal/visible world, the life-world and society, is a *self-sufficient, self-subsistent entity* which begins and ends with itself in the here-and-now. In the other mode, that of the vertical bearing, the life-world exists in time and points beyond itself: history is only a fraction of an extended temporal zone which spans the hereafter and relates it to the here-and-now. These are a few of the salient features which may stand out in a crude initial plotting of the epistemic chart with a general distinction which can be made between the secular and the *tawhidi* paradigms.

To understand the promise, as well as the challenges, of a strategy deploying a Contrasting Episteme, and to be able to grasp its implications for social theory, two questions should be asked. First, in what way does this strategy assure us a new perspective on knowledge and human understanding? Second, how can this strategy be effectively related/integrated to contemporary social theory in a manner that would be likely to affect its premises and its practice? To answer the first question, it will be necessary to reconstitute our understanding of the chart of human knowledge, and in doing so address some of the issues relating to commensurability between sources and means of knowledge, as well as to types of knowledge and aspects of belief and verification. This will be approached at a basic level and with the purpose of providing a *tawhidi* projection of the subject in view.

In the language of some contemporary thinkers, though in a very different context, the current chart could be divided into two areas of thought, the "thinkable" and the "unthinkable." Given the medium of the dominant positivist culture, the *tawhidi* projection falls in the gray area, or the unthinkable. Charting the episteme from a *tawhidi* perspective would thus constitute the first major stride to filling out the blank and restoring a missing dimension to the modern mind. This dimension would secure it elements of a holism and a sense of proportion which it currently lacks. The idea, however, is to further locate the profile of a culture-type associated with this epistemic matrix and to relate it to alternative possibilities for understanding social theory. The nexus to this alternative is structured around a "vocationist" perspective on social science. The assumption here is that a *tawhidi* matrix of inquiry, identified as it would be with a given culture-mode, converges with the conception of social science as a vocation and with its practice as such.

Once the vocationist perspective is assumed in social science, it reinforces the critical sensibility in favor of a stance that is at once more disinterested and more engaged. This may be qualified as a posture of an enlightened engagement. The problems with contemporary social theory here come to be seen against a perspective which enhances the prospects for their resolution at a higher plane of activity. The *tawhidi* matrix provides promising accesses to this plane, and the new practice of social science as a vocation assures the motivation needed to explore these accesses. This,

however, leads to other aspects of the inquiry into a Contrasting Epistemics which will be developed elsewhere. In the presentation which follows, the discussion will be confined to two principal topics: charting the episteme, and introducing the thematic of social science as a vocation.

### CHARTING AN EPISTEME

There are fundamentally two ways of learning about the world and ourselves: one is by relying on direct observation and discursive reasoning or contemplation; the other is indirect, by relying on the authority of transmitted knowledge. The instruments of knowledge, on the other hand, are common to both sources: in the one case, we literally rely on our eyes to see that which can be seen or observed; in the other, we rely on our ears to hear that which can only be heard or passed on orally; and in both cases, we take recourse to Reason, to infer from what we observe, or to reflect upon the meaning of what we hear. The Qur'an identifies these instruments, and points to a sequence as well as a relationship among them in a context involving a reasoned and responsible faith. "Oh you who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand! Pay heed to God's message:"

For it is He who has endowed you with hearing, sight, and minds yet how seldom are you grateful!

And:

Say: It is He who has brought you into being, and has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and hearts: yet seldom are you grateful.<sup>78</sup>

In all cases too, the natural inclination is to learn *about* something, in order to *act* upon it, a further intimation of moral responsibility. One mode and posture involves us in an active mood, so that we go out to observe the natural/phenomenal world in order to learn what we can, that we may then apply what is learnt to our life in this world; the other presupposes the passive stance, where we receive knowledge, that we may then observe it in our conduct in the life-world. Yet, even that latter type of knowledge, acquired through hearsay, is contingent on an active orientation, or a kind of attuned disposition, which is the condition of all learning and the *sine qua non* for all doing.

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<sup>78</sup> *al-Qur'an*, 23:78; 67:23; see also 16:78 and 32:9.

## KNOWLEDGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Knowledge and action raise the issue of responsibility. This too is invoked in the divine instruction in both a positive and a negative sequence. One of the favored supplications, which echoes in the heart of every believer, is: "O my Cherisher and Sustainer, make me of those who listen and follow the best of what I learn."<sup>79</sup> Conversely, one of the foremost admonitions meted out to believers is: "Whence-forth say thee that which ye do not observe in your action!"<sup>80</sup> In all cases, the supplication and the admonition are enjoined in a context that makes the faculties of hearing, sight, and reasoned understanding an explicit responsibility.<sup>81</sup> Morality is born in the course of a choice to listen and to observe in the one case, and in the other it consists of learning the facts about the phenomenal world and applying them to the "good end." This is the process of discovering the laws of the universe, the "natural laws" which recur throughout the Qur\_an as *sunnat allah fi al-khalq*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See *al-Qur\_an*, 39:18.

<sup>80</sup> *al-Qur\_an*, 61:2; see also 26:226.

<sup>81</sup> Surah 17:36 enunciates the precept of responsible knowledge: "Pursue not that of which you have no reliable knowledge: Verily (thy) hearing, sight, and reason/heart are ultimately accountable for every such pursuit [on the Day of Judgement]."

<sup>82</sup> *Sunnat allah* suggests a patterned order, a sequence, a regularity, a system and causality; it applies to the realm of creation, including both nature and history. In fact, the specific references focus on the latter in verses 33:38, 62:35, and 48:23, where the reference is direct, while in the case of natural phenomena, causality is more often implicit in the account.

## COMMENSURABILITIES

The scope of knowledge also differs. Where learning is direct, the object is the physical, or the observable world, the world of things, and the visible order. Where knowledge is transmitted, the scope is primarily that of the unseen, but it could subsume the "sensate" and that which is seen as well. The "unseen" as a category refers to that which is absent from the range of material vision, whether for reasons of intrinsic intractability, or on account of super-/ax-temporality; this absence from the present, the immanent, or the contingent constitutes the *ghayb*.<sup>83</sup> While any kind of belief, knowledge, or conviction presupposes an element of faith, the belief, knowledge, and conviction in the *ghayb* is a categorical act of faith, and it is acknowledged as such in the Qur\_an.<sup>84</sup> The world of the *ghayb* is predicated on a number of basic suppositions, centered on the existence of a realm of knowledge which is not immediately accessible to direct human learning but which is, nevertheless, relevant and essential to the human condition in this life-world. It is because of this relevance and essence that human perceptions are open to this kind of learning and are disposed, or attuned, to receiving knowledge about it. This is the positive disposition which has characterized human nature from time immemorial, and which has given rise to contentious speculations about man's innate religiosity.

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<sup>83</sup> Muhammad Asad refers to *al-ghayb* as the "realm which is beyond the reach of human perception," and points out that it is this concept that constitutes the basic premise for an understanding of the call of the Qur\_an and of the principle of religion as such. "For all truly religious cognition arises from and is based on the fact that only a small segment of reality is open to man's perception and imagination, and that by far the greater part of it escapes his comprehension altogether." Appendix 1, *The Message of the Qur\_an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 989.

<sup>84</sup> In the opening verses, following the supplication in the *Fatihah*, people are classified into three basic types: believers, ingrates who deny God, and hypocrites. Belief in *ghayb* constitutes the first criterion of God-consciousness (2:3). It is by virtue of this initial leap of faith that God delivers His promise of immeasurable reward in the hereafter to believers (50:31-33, 67:12). The realm of this sublime exchange is clearly one of reciprocity; it is an exchange suspended in a "metaxy," delivered in the present, redeemable in the future, and occupying an ex-temporality - an "in-between" - which is predicated on trust and promise.



## FAITH AND VALIDATION

Wherever the access to this knowledge is obstructed, or whenever this knowledge is missed, historical man, created *insan*, has resorted to reason in order to speculate, and has strained his senses to reach out into an extrasensory realm in search of the answers which would give meaning to his life-world. In each case, however, in the case of positive, acquired knowledge and in the case of transmitted, learned knowledge, the *reliability* of the knowledge acquired/received is contingent on proof, or verification; and for each kind of learning a distinct methodology for such validation is required. In Qur\_anic parlance, reliability is intrinsic to knowledge, particular to that kind of knowledge of basic realities which structures entire perceptions. There must be some reasonable proof of credibility, and some criterion for authoritativeness, in order for knowledge to be, or else it is nothing but vain speculation. In contesting the validity of claims to rival deities and ways, the deniers of the truth are urged to bring forward their proof and evidence in support of their claims: "Say: Bring forth thy proofs if ye are truthful."<sup>85</sup> Otherwise, their entire position on vital issues would rest on pure speculation, which avails them nought of the Truth.<sup>86</sup> The responsibility attendant on knowledge is contingent on this validation, and one's obligation is accordingly to "check one's sources." This applies to all kinds of learning, including learning about the moral order.

A characteristic disposition must also accompany learning and dispose it towards validation. This may be rendered as a categorical inclination, or an essential openness, to knowing; and this constitutes the primary prerequisite without which no knowledge of any sort would ever be possible. This inclination is premised on trust or faith (*iman*) and is rooted in an elementary sense of benevolence. Creation is for a purpose, and the world is essentially good. It assumes a belief in the existence of something which can be known or learned about, that this pursuit is a worthwhile pursuit, indeed, that there is a moral compulsion to find out or to learn about it. In this sense, faith is the cornerstone of any act of learning, whether by observation or by hearsay.

However, in order that *iman*, as an initial and conditioned openness, may result in a form of binding knowledge, it requires a further category: that of *tasdiq* (confirmation). This is a category which involves all the senses, beyond inclining towards it is acting in the direction of ascertaining the truth. It is in doing and not just in being, in acting and not just in knowing, that this involvement is complete. Hence, the Beloved Prophet's (pbuh) response: "*iman* is that which is firmly lodged in the heart and actively corroborated by the deed."<sup>87</sup> The term for this corroboration is *saddaqa*, literally that which is "affirmed in its truth."

In this way, in the *tawhidi* episteme belief and action are two faces of the same coin. On the one side is a grounded and confirmed belief; on the obverse, is a purposeful and responsible act. There

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<sup>85</sup> *al-Qur\_an*, 2:111; see also 21:24 and 27:64.

<sup>86</sup> For rich juxtapositions between Truth (*haqq*) and real knowledge (*\_ilm*) on the one hand, and conjecture and speculation (*zhann*) on the other, see verses 10:36, 53:23, 53:28, 45:24, 4:157, and 2:78.

<sup>87</sup> In the Qur\_an itself the concept is a rich one, which has been used in a wide and integrated semantic field. For usage in the conceptual context mentioned here of confirmation and authentication, see verses 2:89, 3:81, 10:37, 5:46, and 5:48. The immediate context of this usage relates the place of the final divine message of guidance to its antecedents.

is no autonomous space for a *bios theoretikos*, while the *vita activa* presupposes and is contingent on an engaged knowledge, i.e., a knowledge which is committed to a moral existence. In this episteme, thinking is the acting out of the disposition to learn about and to understand the life-world. Thinking is, accordingly, that active category which links knowledge to being, and with Will forms the twin resolve which underlies all morality: Morality is not constituted of values but of the realization of values. It is the informed, pre-formed, and re-formed will which activates such abstract and reflexive categories as "knowing" and "being" and puts them into the transitive, interactive, and procreative mood to engender belief and action.

This condensed and passing overview of a rich and dense topic, which has engaged the best of Muslim minds in the past, is intended to provide the background for the discussion which follows. It paves the way for distinguishing the cultural modes/models assumed in a discourse on a "Contrasting Episteme." The contrast here does not refer to the distinct modes of knowing in the sense introduced above. For it assumes that positive or acquired knowledge and transmitted knowledge are generic, natural modes to the human condition. Rather, the distinction is between the conventional discourses which are set up as models of credibility and reliability at any given moment. The question then becomes which model accommodates or incorporates the natural modes of knowing and how this is done.

A model which incorporates these modes and apporions or proportions them to one another is basically a stable one, while one which overlooks one mode, or misappropriates the one against the other, is basically flawed. What constitutes positive knowledge in the one case and transmitted knowledge in the other, how the one and the other are ascertained, what constitutes the sources and methods for each, and how the proportions are defined are the details which are not the object of this modest essay. Instead, the focus is on bringing into perspective the possibility of a distinction between conventional modes of discourse in different epochs and among different people. On the basis of this distinction, culture-modes, or culture-types, will be postulated and abstracted from historically known or current contexts.

A further qualification is needed in order to understand the thrust of this distinction. Human reason and divine revelation are historically integral categories, and constituent of all conventional cultural discourse. However, the fundamental distinction between what will be termed a secular paradigm of knowledge and a *tawhidi* episteme is postulated on the place and role of revelation in the one and the other. The secular paradigm projects the primacy of an autonomous human endeavour to set the terms of the conventional discourse. Conversely, the *tawhidi* paradigm takes revelation as central to the terms of this discourse. In the secular mode, the status of transmitted knowledge is generally ambiguous, and within that latter category, attitudes to revelation are even more ambivalent. In contrast to this, transmitted knowledge has a definite/concrete place in the *tawhidi* mode. In addition to setting the terms of the more general framework of the epistemic discourse, divine revelation assumes a key role in classifying transmitted knowledge itself and contributing to its concreteness. The implications of these qualifications for a self-conscious and critical social science might best be conceived if, in charting the episteme, we took recourse to the alternating set of intellectual constructs postulated at the outset of our inquiry as "culture-types."

### RECAPITULATING ON A THEME

The different epistemes, or the ways of knowing about reality, lead to their corresponding systems of belief and action which structure society and history and come to be filtered through a modulating optic of "lifestyles" and civilizations. The one will be referred to as the Oscillating Culture and the other as the Median Culture. The latter falls on a *vertical axis* in the epistemic chart while the former falls on a *horizontal axis*. The Oscillating Culture is generally identified with a secular paradigm of knowledge and being, because it has no reference outside itself.<sup>88</sup> If it takes man for its center it is assumed to be "humanist;" and if it takes nature, the cosmos, or history for its referent it is assumed to be "naturalist" or anti-humanist. In reality, the Oscillating Culture is more noted for the absence of a core than for any fixity as such, and it is more or less given to the persistent search for one, although at times it has tended to degenerate into the refutation of the very idea of a core.<sup>89</sup> This accounts for an intrinsic "dynamism." This dynamism, however, tends towards a morbidity, and is more simulated than real. It marks the restive quest for an evasive center and referent. It is alternately marked by the periodic reversals and surface ruptures which give rise to an illusive vitality, and foster a generative abundance. In this way, there is also something characteristically "modern" about this culture type.

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<sup>88</sup> The secular humanist paradigm is built into an anthropocentric world view. This theme is addressed in my *Disencumbering Social Theory*. For the general literature on the subject, see Kate Soper and Duncan Homer, op cit.

<sup>89</sup> This contention inspires some of the radical and nihilistic movements associated with the post-structuralist schools of thought.

## THE MEDIAN CULTURE<sup>90</sup>

This is all in stark contrast to a Median Culture medium. There, change, which is intrinsic to temporality is modulated by an element of constancy assured by the continuity or the reliability of an established frame of reference. This suggests the presence of a dimension of authority which evades the Oscillating Culture, not because the latter has no acknowledgeable authority, but because the nature of this authority is perennially challenged and frequently assumes an evasiveness which makes it defy location. In the Median Culture, the most notable feature is the pervasiveness of a center which is known and knowable, and an acknowledged core which constitutes a *nodal reference point* for the operational social/historical dynamic in this medium. The result is that there is an inherent sense of measure and proportion which is assumed to govern all change and action and to assure its direction. Its dynamic assumes a generative momentum which enables the operants in the system to identify and to relate co-ordinates and the variables in it. In the Oscillating Culture, the dynamic was contingent on a persistent tension of polarities and a recurrent polarization of tensions ultimately giving way to an apotheosis of relativism. In contrast, the necessary tension in a median dynamic is mediated by the potential immanence of the Absolute, and the transcendence of the relative in a medium which significantly maintains the distinction between the one and the other while affirming the relationship of both. By "immanence" here we simply mean the relevance of the absolute to actuality, and by "transcendence" we mean that the implications of the relative stretch beyond the immediate or the contingent.

These culture types provide alternative accessing media for approaching social theory and carry with them practical implications for inquiring into any of its cognate fields. They constitute reference points in re-structuring our conceptions in social theory in the present *pre-architectonic* phase of our inquiries in the field. In what follows, we shall first review an access to the field in terms of proposing a vocationist perspective, on the understanding that this is necessary before a critical profile of contemporary social theory is projected. In the process, some of the implications for reconstructing the premises of a social theory predicated on a "vocationist" ethic will also be considered.

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<sup>90</sup> Our conceptualization here is inspired by the Qur\_anic notion of community (2:143). Yusuf Ali renders the *ummatan wasatan* as the "justly balanced community," and invokes connotations of "intermediacy" (p. 57, n. 143). M. Asad renders it as the "community of the middle way," literally the "middle-most community," and explains it in terms relevant to our own usage here as a "community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes" and that embodies in its world view and institutions a code construed around a denial of excesses and an affirmation of life-integrating values derived from the ultimate value of the One-ness of God (*tawhid*) (p. 30, n. 118). The middle is not defined in relation to the extremes, but stems from an intrinsic organizing value, and is consequently self-defining and knowable, and is not contingent for its position on a continuum of changing variables. Fazlur Rahman uses "median" for *wasat*, *Major Themes of the Qur\_an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). Frederick Denny's qualifications on *ummah* as an axial term, and the inferences he draws, are consistent with our Median Culture construct. See "Ethics and the Qur\_an: Community and World view" (esp. pp. 106-107), in *Ethics in Islam*, R. Hovannisian, ed., (Malibu: Undena Public, 1985).

## SOCIAL SCIENCE AS A VOCATION

Speaking in the voice of a Muslim social scientist, one may note that the nature of our concern with the Oscillating Culture is an intimate one which arises from "within," although one might conceivably have the advantage and the prerogative of reading it from without as well. This element of detachment is possible not because we are, in the idiom of a godless era, "cosmic orphans,"<sup>91</sup> and as such that we might claim to have landed our Archimedean Point in the expanse of a cosmic exile. Rather, such a detachment is possible because we have access to the Median Culture. To the extent that we are anchored in its security, whether as "vocationists" or as pious Muslims, we can afford to reflect upon the Oscillating Culture, with neither the customary Angst/panic nor despair. We do so with a legitimate concern where there can be no room for indifference and even less for glee. Added to this concern is a keen interest in procuring a leverage within that culture, because we are convinced that there is something of value that can be brought to it from an "Alternative Perspective." By definition, the alternative must be outside the current, and the assumption is that only an outside perspective can break the impasse in the culture which supports and is supported by the dominant paradigm.

## THE VOCATIONIST AND THE MISSING MEDIUM

Theoretically, the Muslim social scientist is historically the "Other." As such, when compared with his counterpart in the European/Western culture-zone, he is presumably privileged with a ready accessibility to that alternative vantage point. By academic training and formation, however, the Muslim social scientist is just as much a part of the globally dominant culture as any third world social scientist might be. To this extent then, the distinctions among social scientists working in the medium of contemporary social science are blurred. Addressing an audience in a predominantly Western forum of scholarship, one is inclined to stress our common need/duty as scholars working within the parameters of the dominant medium to turn to the Median Culture as a viable alternative which needs to be explored in the modern context and to have its virgin resources tapped accordingly. In this sense, as the reference to the Median Culture proceeds within the semantic field and referential codes developed in the context of the Islamic tradition, i.e., within the parameters of Muslim experience and civilization, it will be possible to learn from and about a medium of the *tawhidi* episteme, which will then be open to interaction.

To be at all meaningful and effective, this interactive learning process will have to be conducted in the vocational spirit. This calls on social scientists to abandon the biased stance, whether this is dictated by requisites of their profession or by denominational, confessional, or other ethnic affiliations. This biased stance, it may be recalled, can be exerted for or against a given position. In the positivist phase, this bias was exerted in favor of the autonomy of human reason, and against any openness to external criteria of validation. In the present, post-positivist phase in the social sciences, there is less confidence as to what position to opt for in advance of the quest. There is still considerable hesitation to abandon the bias against external sources of validation of criteria of belief and legitimation. But there are factors which impel the social scientist to opt for the vocational

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<sup>91</sup> "... of uncertain beginnings and an indefinite ending ..." as Loren Eiseley deduces from an inscription in the Dead Sea Scrolls: "None can there be, can rehearse the whole tale." This really tells us more about human finitude than about human abandon. See the Introduction to Part IV, "The Cosmic Orphan," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Propaedia: Outline of Knowledge and Guide to the Britannica* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975), 139-141.

perspective, and which draw on a conscientious and realistic assessment of the current state in the discipline. The social scientist is aware of a certain superfluity and a redundancy which no amount of assumed expertise or recourse to methodological diligence and acumen can shield.

### **CONSCIENCE AND ACTION**

The vocational social scientist is one who lives the crisis of the profession and, beyond that, the crisis of the times. His or her conscience and integrity combine with intelligence to invoke a sense of moral responsibility which induces social scientists to use their training to the best of their abilities to do what they can from their professional position or their station in life in order to alleviate the situation. Depending on their position and their authority, they will apply themselves in a practical or a theoretical capacity. The first instance of a morally responsible stance is to acknowledge the critical condition, or the malaise. But this is hardly sufficient to absolve the conscience or to assuage the intelligence. In exploring alternatives and ways to improvise and reform, the need is to muster the courage to step out of the dominant paradigm and to step into new and at first unfamiliar ground. The moment potentialities are sensed and possibilities are unearthed, the initiative to effect the leap should be taken. This is why it is significant to understand the Median Culture for what it is: a distinct possibility and potentiality for improving on oneself, and not to see it in terms of a self-abandoning to the Other. Perceiving it as the historically cultural Other would encumber and trammel the process of stepping in. The inhibitions and constraints attendant on such a frame of mind would throttle any possibilities and opportunities.

The challenge to the vocationist is to divest himself or herself of all kinds of prejudices and preconceptions as far as this is possible, for this constitutes the psychological and sociological baggage which hinders the advance into the new culture realm. He or she will have to be able to give of him or herself in order to be able to take of that realm. A Contrasting Episteme conceived in the *tawhidi* view gives the vocationist the benefit of the doubt in his or her own ability to overcome many of the binding constraints. This is hardly the "ungrounded hope" of some post-modern thinker or other,<sup>92</sup> but it is a grounded conviction backed by historical experience. This legacy testifies to the validity of a proposition inscribed into the epistemological outlook of the Median Culture. The challenge to overcome the constraints of the profession is itself further reinforced by the gravity of the consequences at stake in the event of a continued indifference or inability to respond to the needs of contemporary societies. Not only might social theory steadily marginalize itself beyond all relevance, but the survival of these very societies as we know them may well be a matter only of time. The hope for reviving both lies in the emergence of the vocationist, whose stock and surety can be drawn from the wellsprings of that Median culture-medium.

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<sup>92</sup> Such as in Rorty's position that "loyalty to itself is morality enough" and that communal solidarity need not be grounded in any transcendence drawing on history or philosophy - or revelation. See Paul Roth, "Politics and Epistemology," *History of the Human Sciences* 2, no. 2 (June 1989), 171-191. This article provides a useful synopsis of two contrasting positions within the prevailing epistemic discourse in American circles. See also my forthcoming essay "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme."

**THE DYNAMICS OF THE *SHAHADAH*:  
A DIALOGY OF RUPTURE AND COMMUNITY**

In *tawhid*, the cornerstone of this epistemological system is found in the *shahadah*, the confession of faith: There is no deity but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. This confession of faith subsumes a mechanism and an attitude as well as a methodology for learning/knowing. It also enshrines a substantial code of the kind of knowledge or learning entailed. In the context of addressing the possibilities of acquiring the disposition and the habits of mind of the vocational social scientist, the aspect to emphasize in this code and methodology is the instrumental, or the procedural aspect. The credal formula suggests a way of proceeding by divestiture and investiture; to empty out, or to clear the slate, and to fill in, or to inscribe it afresh; a moment of "rupture" which precedes and precipitates an emergent community.<sup>93</sup> If we took that rupture as signifying an imminent liberation from the clutch of the prevailing modes of thought at any given moment of time, and if we further assume that "community" implies the existence of a normative and cognitive pattern of knowing shared among its members, then the inferences here are clear. This was, in fact, the learning mode instituted in the first school of thought instituted by the Prophet (pbuh). We are authoritatively informed of this method of instruction within the circle of his early companions in historical Arabia from a *hadith* (a tradition) which runs along these lines: "Whenever we went to the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be peace, he would empty us out and fill us up afresh..., empty us of our dregs and replenish us in the truth."<sup>94</sup>

A *tawhidi* episteme recognizes and acknowledges the learned impositions of culture and society, as well as the pressures resulting from inner drives and passions. It does not, however, concede to their overwhelming power, nor does it subscribe to any kind of determinism in the name of a lame sociologism. The litmus test lies in the presence of the disposition, or the awareness and the resolve, to proceed independently. To this extent a *tawhidi* episteme has a deeply liberating impact on the psyche of the social scientist and it funnels his or her creative potentials accordingly. The social scientist will need to become a *tawhidist* in vocation, so to speak, in order to be able to experience that liberating impulse and realize that potential. This has nothing to do with confessing to the faith or with opting for the primordial state and accepting the revealed *din*. Clearly, from the doctrinal standpoint,<sup>95</sup> as much as from any other rational or academic stance, this is a purely

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<sup>93</sup> See Maurice Causse, "Theologie de rupture et theologie de la communaute," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 44 (1964), 66-80, cited and discussed in F. Denny's *Ethics and the Qur'an*, op cit. Exploring the semantic range of the Qur'an in a concrete, historical context points to significant sociological as well as ethical implications, as Denny and others show. See T. Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966) and *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964). Beyond semantics is the epistemological level, with its socio-political implications. See more on this theme in the context of a political inquiry in my paper "Paradigms in Political Science: *Tawhidi* Projections (Part 2)," prepared for the political science seminar at IIIT, December 15-17, 1989.

<sup>94</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani for bringing this *hadith* to my attention and extrapolating upon it in the context of defining the task of *islamiyat al-ma\_rifa wa islah manahij tafkir al-muslimin*, i.e., the Islamization of knowledge and the reform of the ways of thought of Muslims in our own times.

<sup>95</sup> See *al-Qur'an*, 2:256. That there can be no compulsion in the faith is the cardinal imperative which preserved the integrity and dignity of the person and safeguarded the alternative-faith communities of other religions throughout the making of Islamic civilization. Misconceptions induced by taking the "Book and the Sword" to have been the symbols of the spread of the faith are conflated with misunderstanding temporality in

private concern for the individual to decide on, a matter entirely contingent on one's intent and will, and solely judged by God; it has little to do with the vocational status or the community of scholarship to which we are here referring.

Learning about and assuming some of the mechanisms and dispositions attendant on a *tawhidi* episteme is the condition for grasping the substance, relevance, and implications of the Median Culture. In short, it is the condition for being able to relate to this medium in a meaningful and practical manner. Vocationists will need to do this if they are to fulfill their measure, whether in terms of their own self-expectations and self-image, or whether in terms of the expectations of a community which sees its salvation in the integrity of its intellectuals. Otherwise, they will be little better than accomplished Orientalists of an outdated era. If classical social theory with a Weber or a Marx could afford this luxury - and waste - it can hardly do so today.

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE VOCATION

The perspective of a Contrasting Episteme provides the opportunity to develop the vocation of the social scientist in ways hardly possible otherwise. It does so by enabling the scholar to discard the constraints inherent in a confrontational mode of perceptions, or in a conflictual matrix of conceptions, and it allows him or her to substitute it for a more congenial, perceptual mode and matrix. The congeniality of the latter system of learning derives from the way it integrates thought and understanding about social and historical realities, in as much as it integrates patterns of mind and being, thought and action, in a domain which includes the "intersubjective," which is the concern of the social theorist. In this domain, where it is no longer feasible to postulate social reality in terms of dualisms and fictitious boundaries, it becomes imperative to define the matrix which conditions the interface of continuity and discontinuity within the socio-global order of human community and aggregation. This is where the perceptual/conceptual orientation provided in the *tawhidi* episteme acquires its psycho-sociological congeniality which assures it a constructive dynamic in its approach to socio-human realities. While it recognizes diversities, it also reconciles them within a unitary and a unifying frame of reference. Commonality, as the original and predisposing premise in the human condition, comes to embrace diversity, and to give it its ultimate referents which ensure the relational affinities of the distinct parts to one another and, at the same time, to the whole. This perceptual and conceptual point of departure has its consequences for reformulating the matrix of inquiry, whether in the field of sociology, political economy, or political science, in ways which may only be briefly considered here.<sup>96</sup>

This matrix would, furthermore, need to be conceived holistically. Ultimately, this is also the more realistic conception. We are not made up of disparate limbs and organs mounted together on a skeletal frame. There is an organic unity which holds the whole together externally, and an interiority or an innerliness which instils it with essence, identity, and meaning, and that, while differentiated, cannot be cut off from the whole. There is no reason why the life-world, temporally and spatially projected, should not conform to this principle. The integrating and structuring point, or the nodal centering referent is provided in the *tawhidi* framework, and can only have its attendant

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Islam. There, the ethical order presupposes the political order; and spirituality in Islam is consonant with a public order enshrined in the *shari\_ah* and protected by the state.

<sup>96</sup> See my forthcoming essays "Disencumbering Social Theory" and "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme."



consequences for the social and political order in any given context. Ignoring this modulating, regulating, and mediating fulcrum, the system is vulnerable to all kinds of "violations" bordering on anarchy or tyranny, *anomie* or distraction. These are the kinds of symptoms which social science as a vocation will need to address. In the one case and the other, in the polity and in society, there is room for reformulating the matrix of inquiry; and in both instances there is a possibility and an opportunity which follows for reconstructing historical realities to attenuate the biases and impositions which are bred in the current episteme.

Before engaging in a critical reading of aspects of the current episteme from a standpoint of the "Median," let us briefly pause to consider what this standard and standpoint might imply at the general level. As already suggested earlier on, a *tawhidi* episteme is taken to characterize and engender the Median Culture. To relate this episteme to the empirical order calls for some elaboration at the conceptual level. Analytically, this entails referring it back to its constituent categories and proceeding thence to indicate its composites. These could then be applied to the different, interrelated domains in a given inquiry. Note that the conception of this interrelatedness is partly the function of the episteme itself. How can such abstract condensations be rendered into more familiar language? This takes us from meta-theory into theory, and opens the way to employing the semantics of the field. In the *tawhidi* mode of conceptualizing, there is a singular tripod that assures its consummation: *Din*, *Minhaj*, and *Shari\_ah* provide the basic referential constituents which need to be taken together so as to grasp the integrality and holistic aspects of that episteme. In a way, they are correlates, each supplements and completes the other to generate and sustain a distinctive and original semantic field.<sup>97</sup> Ideally, in this field, *din*, in the generic sense, denotes a complete way of life and its subsumes the ways of thought. Not every *din*, however, is necessarily integrative in its functions, or at least not to the same degree. The complete *din* is that which assumes this function successfully and is acknowledged by its followers in this sense at the personal and the social levels. The merits of *tawhid*, in a sociological perspective, lie precisely in the measure of its integrating and unifying potential for the realms of social being.

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<sup>97</sup> For a conceptual grid of Islamic social thought see Chapter 4 in *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*, op cit. For articulating and interrelating the specific concepts mentioned here, see esp. pp. 101-112.

**RECONSTITUTING SOCIOLOGY:** In the light of this "covering principle," and whether as *tawhidi* epistemists or as vocationists, if we were to differentiate a way of life into its respective domains of emphases, then the same principles informing the whole would also be expressed within these spheres at the different levels. For example, social life could be conceived holistically as a web of relations between men and women as social individuals performing various roles. Conversely, it could be seen as the nexus of such relationships as might interweave the different groups in society. In this way, the broad spectrum of social life is brought within the purview of the same rules. The value-system which orders these relationships, whether in their functional roles or in their personal relations, serves to integrate the social system conceived as a whole as well.<sup>98</sup> The same hierarchy of values will order their relations within the constituent units, beginning with the family. At this general level, there can be no distinction between a private and a public morality. Rather, within a broad framework of "permissible structures" in a system of "open alternatives," any of a variety of groups or institutions, or any order of multiformalities, can legitimately co-exist and contribute to the dynamics of a complex and multi-dimensional social order. The warp and woof of the system which ensures its coherence and cogency would be sought in its substantial rather than its formal constitution.<sup>99</sup> The place of the constituents within the system, whether as individuals or groups, is determined by their affinity to an order in which they are socialized and to which, in principle, they voluntarily submit. In this conceptualization, the normative and the ethical are integrally assumed in the structural and functional conception of society. At the same time, it singles out the specific characteristics of a sociology developed in a *tawhidi* perspective as a discipline which is grounded in an ethical matrix understood as a realistic sociological proposition, and not just as an idealization or an abstraction of social reality. The tenor of the discipline is just as significant for its orientation and scope as its content and formal structure could be, and this distinguishes between the practice of a new sociology from its conventional mode.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Muhammad al Tahir Ben Achour, the late Tunisian *\_alim* (scholar) of Zaitouna University, for example, is one of the few Muslim thinkers writing in the classical school to distinguish the social system (*al-shai\_ah al-ijtima\_iyah*) from its individual constituents, and to hint at the implications of values for the system as a whole in grasping the structural requisites of social reform. *Usul al-nizham al-ijtima\_iyah fi al-islam* (Tunis: 1976) 42-43.

<sup>99</sup> The exemplary exposition of Hammudah \_Abdel \_Ati in *The Family Structure in Islam* (American Trust Publications, 1977) derives from its successful application of a methodology which combines the normative and the sociological, as much as from its attention to examining the implications of the Islamic holistic value framework for integrating the behavioural and normative aspects of the social system.

<sup>100</sup> This is not to be confused with a sociology with a "humanist face" as advocated, for example, in *Humanistic Sociology*, Bowman, ed. (N.Y.: Meredith, 1973). Within the Median Culture, the difference is paradigmatic.

## RECOVERING THE POLITY

On another plane, the vocationist will be able to point out that there is no parallel Leviathan, nor any of its analogues, in an Islamic contractual theory of polity and political obligation. It will be clear that carrying this covering principle to a domain where coercion is pre-eminent involves a re-orientation to that very domain. The integrating principle assumed in *tawhid* is totalistic (without being totalitarian!) and, accordingly, it provides for all the elements in the system, including the coercive element. There is no question of indifference or ambiguity to power, whether it is conceived as an enabling agent or as a legitimate nexus of enabling relationships to secure the public order in an instant of last resort. But the dimension of *tamakkun*, (the act of enabling, or capabilities, rendered as the equivalence of *potestas*), cannot be seen outside its substantive referents of *haqq* (truth, as well as dues, rights), and *\_adl* (justice), subsuming the precept and principle of *auctoritas*. The value-system and hierarchy which sustain the social order serve to integrate and unify its differentiated domains. They also serve to define them in relation to one another, and so assure them measure and restraint. This has its implications for distinguishing approaches to politics.

There are two possibilities for conceiving the polity paradigm in this mode: the one uses the idiom of Contract, and the other that of Power Politics. The notion of a contract evokes a system of reciprocities (i.e., obligations and rights), which are in principle identical for society and polity. There is no dualism or double-coding here, rather the difference, should such a difference exist, is one of an economy of scale and modality, rather than an economy of morality. The other approach calls for redefining power in terms of the contractual matrix of reciprocities on the one hand, and in the perspective of ends, or the purposes of the *jama\_ah* (collectivity as temporal community) on the other. In this sense, power assumes the role of a reinforcing principle, not a generating or a founding principle. The precept that whatever is necessary to implement a devotional duty acquires the status of an obligatory devotion by proxy perhaps best explains the relationship of power to morality in the Muslim ethos.<sup>101</sup> This explains why power was conceived in the legacy of Muslim jurisprudence as a providential agent, and not a necessary evil. Whatever ambivalences and reservations might have prevailed towards politics, they were related to its exercise and usurpation or abuse, not to its ontological status. In the dominant Muslim paradigm, which was constituted of the time-honoured *jumhur al-fuqaha\_* (body of jurists) and which was generated amid the mainstream culture of *ahl al-sunna wa-al-jama\_ah* (people of the way and the community), deference was given to the ideal of the polity, which was conceptualized as *khilafah* (vicegerency/delegation) and not *mulk* (kingship).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> This *fiqhi* precept, *ma la yatimm al-wajib ila bi-hi fa-huwa wajib* (that without which an obligation cannot be fulfilled is also an obligation), rendering governance integral to the community and a pillar of the social order, has been invoked by contemporary scholars (including Ben Achour, op cit., pp. 206-207) and others through an uninterrupted sunni tradition dating back to the earliest treatises on *usul* with Imam al-Haramain al-Juwaini's *Ghiath al-umam* (478 A.H.), preserved as a manuscript in Dar al-Kutub in Cairo. The modern "politicization" has merely brought in a new idiom or rhetoric of the state in Islam, not its reality. Conversely, al-Shahid Isma'il Faruqi points out, in a comment on Muhammad Iqbal's idea, that the state is rather "the necessary extension in space-time" of an Islamic spirituality. *The Hijrah: The Necessity of its Iqamat or Vergegenwartigung* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1983), 21.

<sup>102</sup> One might rethink Ibn Khaldun's broad distinction in his *Prolegomena* (808 A.H.) between the two concepts along the lines of a legitimate/moral polity grounded in the notion of a *siyasa shari\_ayah* (a polity of Divine Law) and that of a power polity, or a dominion/imperium, aspiring at best to a rational civic culture, as in the *siyasa madaniyah* (a civic or secular polity)). Professor Bernard Lewis' recent literary excursion in

If, on the other hand, politics is understood in the sense of the primacy of physical coercion or of the threat of its application, as it is understood in the Weberian sense and in its Marxian parody, then the place of such a power-political concept in the foundational "myth"/structure of the Median Polity is only secondary. In terms of the ordering value-system, power is no ground for self-justification, and in principle it cannot be seen outside the system to which it is subordinated. In a sense, it constitutes a subordinate as well as a co-ordinate position, which derives its legitimacy from its place and role in the whole. Within such a context, power is valorized to become either positively valued and on a par with truth and justice, or simply corrupt and corruptible, synonymous with excess and tyranny. External coercion taken as the manifest will of the sovereign state, or in any other self-adulating posture, cannot be the foundation of the social order, and certainly not of the community even as political community.

The vocationist will also realize that the same reasoning which might be critical of a discriminatory appreciation of power, which sees it as "right" for the state and "wrong" for the individual, is bound to affect related notions of legality. This kind of appreciation condones a system of double standards, consecrating Antigone's dilemma,<sup>103</sup> and paves the way for an arbitrary division between public and private morality. The issue is periodically reformulated, more explicitly and trenchantly in the context of feminist political theory where the focus is on reinterpreting the bases of political obligation.<sup>104</sup> A dubious and ungrounded public morality frequently becomes the battle-ground of suspicious, outraged, and vocal segments of a public, whether they are motivated by a heightened bout of gender-consciousness or simply spurred on by an alienated and confrontational psyche. In contrast, here again, in the Median Culture it is the same nodal and integrating value-system which sets the limits on the nature and scope of its legal norms, and commands a residual allegiance throughout the socio-cultural order. The idea of the *Shari\_ah*, or the (divinely-ordained) order of legitimacy, illustrates the point. In its absence, there can be little justification for the State. Conversely, outside its normative and contingent role in safeguarding and implementing the *Shari\_ah*, it can have no ultimate recourse to any other "reasons of state" (*raisons d'etat*) to justify its power. Unlike the *Rechtstaat* of German idealism, the state is not the dispenser of the law, and can therefore make no claims of autonomy on its behalf. In a similar manner, it would be realized, the conception of the law in the *shari\_ah* polity cannot be tailored or conceived in terms of positive law.

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*The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) may be recommended for its expected erudition and readability, quite apart from the appeal of its subject. But it is often misleading, trivializing, and anting in conceptual as distinct from analytical "valour."

<sup>103</sup> Antigone was a woman in Ancient Greece who died at the altar of conflicting loyalties, torn between her duties to her husband and her city. She is taken as a symbol of a presumably perennial contradiction between morality and power. Feminist political thought has been revisiting the myth. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Meditations on Modern Political Thought* (New York: Praeger, 1986), and other relevant articles in *Hypatia* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1986).

<sup>104</sup> See one of the more recent contributions on the subject by Nancy Hirschmann, "Freedom, Recognition and Obligation: A Feminist Approach to Theory," in *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 4 (December 1989), 1227-1244. See also the review by Emily Gill of an apparently provocative book by W. Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), projecting visions of a post-masculinist politics and giving an idea of where the debate is headed, *ibid.*, pp. 1359-1360.

Islamic *fiqh*, or jurisprudence, is not law in the positive sense of the term, but it comprises an ethical-legal system which, in a sense, is far more comprehensive and more binding than any proclaimed positive law. Its mode of operation, in its conception, generation, and application, and the modalities or formal channels or structures for its implementation, are different. So too, where the physical compelling dimension exists, it does so within the framework of a legitimately constituted polity which has nothing to do with the normative sovereign entity of a Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau. Even the historical variants of the Muslim polity, in their lesser and greater degenerate proximations to the norm, continued up to the colonial interlude to fall within the range of the Median Culture mode.

This is not in any way to suggest that politics in Muslim history was any the more principled than it might have been elsewhere. It is intended to draw attention to the existing possibilities, at the conceptual and the historical levels, for alternative structural and normative foundations which might be worth investigating. In considering aspects of political sociology in the culture-type medium in question, the vocationist would find it appropriate to do so within an internally consistent framework conceived in terms of that culture-type. This, it may be readily acknowledged, was a dimension which was often missing in the contemporary sociology of Muslim societies. Its absence was ironically justified in terms of a scientific conscience, i.e., in terms of a presumed objectivity which in fact appropriated the ideology of the dominant culture, whether in its rational-liberal or in its materialist-historicist variants.

In recognizing that objectivity was not the monopoly of the dominant culture, and in proposing alternative referents for historical/sociological inquiry, the vocationist opting for a Contrasting Episteme would come to see new possibilities for explanation and for understanding. These would not be confined to Muslim socio-historical entities but, in principle, they would be extendable to other such entities as well. Strictures on politics in Muslim history could be contextualized and tested elsewhere. All around, the prospects for a general sociology would be considerably enhanced by the insights and gains acquired in the crystallizing perspectives coming from a Median ground. This should decidedly appeal to the sensibility of the vocational social scientist. After all, the latter has a different scale of priorities and conceives of a different spectrum of opportunities than those of the professional scholar.

#### **REAPPRAISALS: SCALING THE DROSS**

As the conception of a Contrasting Episteme becomes the prelude and condition for its application to any given area of inquiry, the transition from one level to another is effected. In turning to an alternative perspective, one also locates its correspondences in understanding society and polity, and the scope of social science is expanded and its nature revamped. At first glance, it will seem as if this expansion is merely quantitative, the mutation indiscernible. It suggests that merely another window has been opened onto a field no longer the monopoly of one set of assumptions and their corollaries. On closer scrutiny, however, the possibility of a qualitative shift in social theory is imminent. The premises of inquiry will shift. With them, new foci will be discerned and found to be relevant to social theory and either lead to questions hitherto ignored as irrelevant and deemed meaningless under a misconceived scientific canon that claimed to be indifferent to values, or to questions that were simply not thought about in the context of social theory but that, once raised, could become suitable vantage points for redressing it.

Moreover, a *tawhidi* episteme, reconstituted into its conceptual and analytical matrix and projecting the standards of a Median Culture-type, can provide an opportunity for reconstructing society and polity as well as social theory. This is due to the inherent bridging propensities and orientations in this matrix which, when adequately made operational, could conceivably reduce the gap between theory and practice, or empirical and normative inquiry. In another germane sense, a social theory drawing on this reconstituted matrix would go beyond reinterpreting existing polities and societies in terms consistent with their particular socio-cultural foundations and political economies to providing a universalist dimension to allow for interrelations and comparisons. A culturally sensitive inquiry would assure the premises of contextualization necessary in the former, while a *tawhidi* sensibility would secure this contextualization against its own limitations. By relating it to a universalist and universalizing ontology, it would rescue it from a constricting parochialism attendant on a self-indulging culturalism. These observations, however, bear closer scrutiny. Here, they are offered by way of extending the horizons of inquiry and stimulating further research, rather than by way of providing any conclusive generalizations in a field which is only just beginning to be charted.

Meanwhile, it should be kept in mind throughout that the social sciences, which are the object of our concern, could be redefined here as that vocation sought and pursued in the light of ascertainable public goals and universal and encompassing standards. Like all public pursuits evolved in a setting mediated by the values of a *tawhidi* culture, the practice of social knowledge defers to an overarching purpose which harmonizes it with the other activities in the lifeworld as they would be projected in a given socio-political order. This is the logic derived from a code of legitimation and justification identified by a paradigm of realizable ethical imperatives, which has historically been acknowledged in the idiom of Muslim jurisprudence as *al-maqasid al shari\_ayah* (the implications or import of Divine Law).<sup>105</sup>

A corporation employing a team of experts to investigate a certain social problem could be engaged in either commissioning a vocationist enterprise, or it could be providing a commercial service. This would depend on the kind of goals it sets for itself as much as upon the socio-political context in which it was running its enterprise. Similarly, if a materialist profit and loss calculus is applied as an end in itself for assessing the results of an inquiry, then the exercise is no longer inscribed within the limits of the vocationist. The criteria needed should extend to a qualitative index taking its bearings from a futurist orientation, one prescribing a moral as well as an eschatological economy. There are clearly other ways in which these standards and goals could be elaborated upon, but this will suffice to make the point.

This would also suggest that in the process of attuning themselves to the requisites of their vocation, social scientists will be testing their "mettle" and ingenuity in other ways. In opting for a new practice and an original perspective bringing its own ethos of inquiry with it, they will be on their way to reformulating the terms of contemporary social theory and renegotiating the terms of the

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<sup>105</sup> This is most developed in the *fiqh* of the Andalusian al-Shatibi's *al-Muwafaqat*, and is taken up in contemporary Islamic thought by Muhammad al Tahir Ben Achour in his masterly and enlightened exegesis on the Qur\_an, *Tafsir al-Qur\_an wa-al-Tanwir*. Not surprisingly, he has some original insights into social thought. At present, a second generation of scholarship is contributing to a vital reconstruction of a socio-*fiqhi* tradition of inquiry. See, e.g., Abdel Meguid al Naggat, *Fiqh al-tadayyun*, 2 vols., no. 22, (Qatar: Kitab alummah, 1989).

current social discourse. In doing so they will, in all likelihood, be blazing the trail for a new generation of social scientists. In this way too, a Contrasting Episteme holds the key to the future of reconstructing a civilization field, and not just to contributing to the cognitive sanification of a set of disciplines. This is, however, to aspire to an ideal as much as to an ordeal. As such, it merits its own "research program" in the sense used by Imre Lakatos.

## CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

The present essay constitutes a step in this general direction of rethinking some of the characteristic strains of contemporary social theory, and it is taken as a prelude to the quest for a new synthesis.<sup>106</sup> We take for our point of departure and implicit frame of reference a paradigm of Contrasting Epistemics in the conviction that such a paradigm offers a more promising venue both for the reconstruction of social theory proper and for the opportunity it provides for promoting an intra/inter-cultural discourse as a premise and a field for this reconstruction.<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, it is only such an intellectually open, culturally sensitive field which can constitute a realistic plane for a genuine interaction in a global age. Given that the social aggregate, whatever its level, constitutes the primary unit of social inquiry, a better understanding of its various dimensions is essential. These dimensions include the much touted categories of subjectivity and contextuality, as well as those even more pervasive and encompassing, if more ambivalent and more complex categories of intra-subjectivity and inter-contextuality which animate and structure the civilizational encounter among world communities through time, and particularly at this elusive point in time qualified as "modernity." Social theory takes this complex field for its scope of inquiry, although it assumes its mandate more in terms of a juxtapository anthropology of "Self" and "Other" in the context of an evolution, and is predicated on a semantics of causality and explanation rather than a hermeneutics of understanding. A more humane global order postulates an appropriation of discursive categories which transcend exclusionary and hegemonist practices, and which lay the ground for an alternative anthropology and moral economy. At present, this order is more of a realizable postulate than an established actuality. It is against the contours of a paradigm that enhances the prospects of this realizability that our reflection on social theory is conducted, and it is towards a crystallization of such a paradigm that we hope to be contributing. Even though our preliminary summation initially concedes to a semantics of identity and dichotomy, it does so, within the framework of a contrasting epistemics, by redefining its points of reference and taking commonality for its shaping ground.

One part of the dialogic in a multi-lateral and open-ended discourse is constituted around the *tawhidi* episteme, and the other around a naturalistic humanist counterpart identified with the dominant discourse. Historically, the *tawhidi* episteme constitutes the submerged nexus in the dominant

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<sup>106</sup> This is a revised version of a presentation originally submitted at the Annual Convention of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists in 1990. It resumes the discussion of the possibility and prospects of inquiry into society and across cultures, along the lines suggested by a *tawhidi* paradigm conceived within the framework of a contrasting episteme. See *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS)* 7, no.1 (March 1990) and 8, no.1, (March 1991).

<sup>107</sup> For some relevant literature broaching social theory with cultural perspectives in view, Ernest Gellner's works provide a good example. *Culture, Identity and Politics* (1987). Gellner's polemic reflects on a complex of culture, identity, and politics in two different communities: one evolving in the context of the Western intellectual tradition, and the other in that of a Shi'i Muslim cultural tradition. The final essay on "Tractus Sociologico-Philosophicus" is a subtle reflection of this thrust. In his *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (Chicago: 1988), the historical dynamic of patterns and interrelationships between the other determinants of history, politics (coercion), and culture (cognition/knowledge) are contoured from a sociological division of labor perspective. The interest of Gellner's works partly derives from the range and comparative perspectives he deploys, particularly with regard to his awareness and familiarity with aspects of the Islamic tradition, like Clifford Geertz, who has written more strictly as a cultural anthropologist, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).



discourse, and the challenge and priority go to elucidating its premises and presuppositions. The need for such articulation is prompted by the promise which it holds for providing a corrective to the dominant discourse, where the self-destructing elements have come to outweigh the constructive elements it initially comprised in the earlier stages of its emergence, which coincided with the birth of the modern project for which it set the pace.<sup>108</sup> For analytical purposes, the core features in each of the epistemes in view, the *tawhidi* and the secular (or the *immanentist-cum-humanist*) are profiled against two corresponding culture-types which are projected in their affinate historical proximations. These constructs are respectively designated as a Median Culture-type and an Oscillating Culture-type. The conceptual constructs are conceived of by way of a discursive strategy to overcome the conventional stereotyping which emphasizes the cleavage between the classical-biblical West as "Self" (Greco-Roman, Jewish-Christian) and the Muslim Orient as "Other." In the shaping discourse that is proposed, whatever formal affinities might arise within the historical West and the Oscillating Culture are taken for concurrences of contingency more than necessity. Whatever the convergences between the Oscillating Culture-type and the culture identified with the modern West, these convergences may be genealogical, but not congenital; they fall within the realm of the presently congenial, a "*conjuncture*," but are not culturally genetic. Conversely, Muslim societies, which historically fall within the range of the Median Culture-type, do so by virtue of a founding set of assumptions which, in their generality, are potentially accessible and realizable for other societies as well. If the affinity is temporal in the one case, that of the Oscillating Culture-type and the modern West, it is constitutive in the other, in the case of the Muslim historical community. As such, the convergence with the Median Culture-type in this historical community maintains its dynamic efficacy only as long as its constitutional affinity remains intact. By the same token, to the extent that they are distanced from their constitutively structuring matrix, Median-proximate societies become equally vulnerable to the currents of the oscillating variant. In all cases however, assuming the intrinsic universality of both these culture-types and their conditioned/conditioning historicity, their differential implications for their relevant histories/communities may be relative, but they are by no means morally equivalent.

The effects of a civilizational dynamic drawing on the Median Culture-type are in principle more likely to be consistent with the well-being of the societal aggregate. We take this to be the case in view of a grounded referentiality, securing the multi-dimensionality and the proportion that characterize the cognitive and valuational sources of that culture-type. To explain this, we need to

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<sup>108</sup> For a reconstruction of the discursive genealogy of modernity, see Hans Blumenberg's epic "The Legitimacy of the Modern Age," translated by Robert Wallace, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, (1966; reprint, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983). For a useful discussion of his work, see the special issue on Hans Blumenberg in *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no.4 (November 1993). With the assault on the metaphysical foundations of the Western tradition conducted by influential post-modern currents, the debate on modernity has intensified over the past decade. Among the interesting initiatives are those taken not so much to salvage the modern project, but to distance it from the metaphysical sources of the tradition, together with an attempt to reconcile the contradictions in the latter. Patrick Madigan's interpretative essays in this area, which deserve to be better known, provide an accessible example of this tendency: *The Modern Project to Rigor: From Descartes to Nietzsche* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); *Christian Revelation and the Completion of the Aristotelian Revolution* (Univ. Press of America, 1988); and *Aristotle and his Modern Critics: The Use of Tragedy on the Non-Tragic Vision* (Scranton: Univ. Press of Scranton and Associated Univ. Presses, 1992). This theoretical trope is authoritatively dissected with an optimistic and pithy humor in an internal debate by John Nelson, "Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save: or John Gunnell Turns on the Western Tradition" in *Tradition, Interpretation and Science: Political Theory in the American Academy*, ed. J. Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

touch briefly on the idea of the *bearings of a culture*, a compass assuring it meaning, coherence, directionality, and purpose. We distinguish between a horizontal and a vertical bearing. These bearings are initially defined in relation to the centrality or the marginality of the cosmic axis and its nature. A culture where the concept of revealed guidance from beyond man is central is primarily qualified by its vertical bearings; whereas a culture where this concept is peripheral to its constitution, incidental, or arbitrarily composed, is pre-eminently qualified by its horizontal bearings. Given its transcendental axis, the Median Culture-type is assured a "verticality" that cuts through the various common categories (nominal, cognitive, substantial, formal, spatial, and temporal) in a manner that is not available to its counter culture-type, the Oscillating Culture, that is primarily defined by its "horizontal bearings." As a consequence of this horizontality, the boundaries of social knowledge (values, cognition, meaning) in the Oscillating Culture-type will stop short in the here-and-now, the world of immanence, whence history comes to an end. In the other case, these boundaries extend to include both this world and "the hereafter," the beginning and the beyond, as well as the immediate and the immanently tangible that unfolds in time, the in-between. In the same way, the limits of human responsibility and morality stop short at the boundaries of this life-world for all in the horizontally pitched culture-type. In the Median Culture-type the circuit of consciousness and the span of human moral accountability go beyond the here-and-now, only to redound reflexively upon it and to "calibrate" immediate human conduct and worldly attitudes, or to qualify history. In short, where the end of history is imminent in the Oscillating Culture-type, in the Median Culture-type no such end is foreseeable in the life-world, not because history is perceived to be cyclical *ad infinitum* as opposed to a punctuated linearity, nor because of a myth of the eternal return, but because with the vertical bearings of that culture type, the line does not come to an abrupt and arbitrary end on the horizontal plane of mortality.

The meaning, relevance, and efficacy of the paradigms of social inquiry are as much a function of the dimensions they comprise as of the way they might be used in specific contexts. Invoking such dimensions as "interiority" and "exteriority," the immanent and the transcendent, the here-and-now and the hereafter, as much as consciousness and society, can thus hardly be taken for a metaphysical diversion. The levels of experiential reality and the multi-dimensionality of the human experience have a direct bearing on the field of social theory, a fact which is not easy to grasp in the absence of a viable source for an integrated vision.<sup>109</sup> This is especially the case if we recall that, in addition to the categories suggested above (subjectivity, contextuality, etc.), the staples of conventional social theory include rationality and legitimacy,<sup>110</sup> which cannot be separated from an ontology and a

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<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to note that the modern German debate on reforming the university, which is taken to be the condition for a renascent community (cf. Islamization of Knowledge goals) focuses on the centrality of philosophy in structuring and guiding the academy, i.e., the modern empirical disciplines of scientific inquiry, since it is taken to orient research and to impart a unified and unifying potential to knowledge in society. See J. Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, edited and translated by Shierry W. Nicholsen, (Camb., Mass: MIT Press, 1987), esp. ch. 4, where the theme "The Idea of the University" is taken from Karl Jasper's original thesis in *Die Idee der Universitat* (Heidelberg: 1961). It is the elusiveness of this search for an integrating principle which provides the animus for a paradigm-seeking/refuting debate in contemporary western thought verging on contingency (Rorty) and ambivalence (Bauman). See Thomas Fleming, "The Part and the Whole" in *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988); Thomas Pangle, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1989); Geoffrey Hawthorne, *Enlightenment and Despair: The History of Social Theory* (Camb.: n.p., 1987); Rorty; and Agnes Heller, "From Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences to the Hermeneutics of the Social Sciences," *Theory and Society* 18 (1989), 291-322.

<sup>110</sup> For the discourse on rationality and legitimacy, the Weberian academy continues to deconstruct and

praxiology, and which are all central to human agency and social order. Where the paradigm of inquiry fails to comprehend critical dimensions of human cognition and valuation, or where it fails to relate these adequately to being or to the "life-world," it comes to operate against inherent constraints which inevitably reflect on the quality and practical consequences of social theory. One such area of "scientific lag" persistently recurs in the study of Muslim societies in general, and particularly in addressing socio-cultural dynamics in the predominantly Muslim Middle East.<sup>111</sup> The frustrations frequently experienced by Westerners in understanding events in that part of the world are hardly due to their being beyond the pale of rationality or resistant to acculturation to standards of legitimacy. Rather, assuming the good faith belying intent, it is because the "monochromic" paradigm within which they continue to reconstruct their worlds, operates within stunted and partial confines of an arbitrary and biased definition of both rationality and legitimacy.<sup>112</sup> At present, the dominant tradition that structures the discourse within and beyond

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unravel the uniquely Occidental dimensions of the central sociological concepts he developed. W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*, translated and with an introduction by Guenther Roth and Richard Munch, (1981; reprint, Univ. of California, 1985); *Understanding Modernity: Toward a New Perspective Going Beyond Durkheim and Weber* (London: Routledge, 1988); Thomas Burger, *Max Weber's Concept of Theory Formation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), esp. "Postscript," pp.181-230;

Susan Hekman *Weber, the Ideal Type and Contemporary Social Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) is more concerned with the problems of objectivity in comparative cultural contexts and the possibility of a post-positivist social theory; Franco Ferraroti, *Max Weber and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (New York and London: Associated Faculty Press, 1987), esp. Chs. 4 and 5, retains the focus on the historicist dimension of these concepts. A less conventional line of inquiry updating the founding father with frontier ideology was opened up by Alan Sica, *Weber, Irrationality and the Social Order* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).

<sup>111</sup> There is something to suggest that there is a parallelism between the scientific world-view of the modern age and its practices of power-politics, along the lines developed in Edward Said's thesis on "Orientalism" and Abdul Wahab Messiri's concept of an "Imperialist Epistemology," although one would want to qualify Zygmunt Bauman's cryptic cynicism when he observes that "the practice of science is in its innermost structure no different from that of state politics; both aim at a monopoly over a dominant territory, and both reach their aims through the device of inclusion/exclusion ..." *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 8, fn. Linking social theory to a perceived mode of civilization (e.g.. "capitalism") and to the socio-cultural encounter (e.g.. "third world") may be seen to implicitly constitute Giddens' project, as in *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), and explicitly prompts such critical overviews of the field as with Timothy Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1990), esp. as in ch. 8.

<sup>112</sup> But this is changing, even in theology. From its origins in the history and philosophy of the natural sciences in the sixties, the paradigm debate caught on in the social sciences and, by the latter eighties, had reached theology, where it triggered fresh theoretical insights, especially in the domain of relating values to history and social change. See the proceedings of an international symposium jointly sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Studies of Religion at the University of Chicago and the Divinity School for Ecumenical Research at Tubingen, in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, edited by David Tracy and Hans Kung, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989). The renowned Catholic theologian's recent writings on globalism presume this paradigmatic shift, which reflects a converging culture in certain social science and theology circles. For its discussion in the context of developmental studies, see Marvin Ellison, *The Center Cannot Hold*. For an overview on comparable trends in Protestant theological circles with a special focus on social theory, see Paul Marshall and Rober Vandervennen, eds., *Social Science in Christian Perspective* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1988). Cf. analogous periodic convergences within social science itself, as between Freudians and Marxists (Fromm, Marcuse, and the "critical school") or

social theory is shaped against the Oscillating Culture-type. It thrives on patterns of cognition and a scale of values that promote a delusory sense of abundance and variability when in fact it replicates a welter of monochromes. Introducing a mode of discourse drawing on the sources and assumptions of the Median Culture-type would be a means of illuminating and extrapolating on some of these propositions and exploring the possibility for a more salutary moral economy.<sup>113</sup> In the process, too, the parameters of social inquiry would be expanded and reinvigorated.

In the perspective of a contrasting episteme, theory and episteme are means for identifying as much as for construing or representing social reality at any given moment. Hence, it is logical and empirically consistent to expect a degree of correspondence between culture-types and the prototypical vehicles for reproducing, disseminating, and controlling knowledge, values, and power in society. Central to the episteme and the culture alike is that world-view which marks the divide between two possible worlds and opens up a range of alternatives and options for conducting social theory. Since it is the Oscillating Culture-type that currently prevails and defines the norms for the practice of contemporary social theory, it qualifies as an apt subject of inquiry. While conceding it a "procedural preference," the vantage point for our critical reflection will be set against its obverse in the Median Culture-type.

Adopting contrasting culture-types as a strategic access and a heuristic device is, moreover, an exercise which is ultimately justified to the extent that it provides those analytical insights and synthesizing perspectives which are needed to critique and reconstruct contemporary social theory. In what way would a social theory conceived and practiced in the Median Culture differ from its current practice and conception? To answer this question, we need to identify the premises and founding assumptions or formative currents and practices which inform current social theory as it is practiced in the advanced outposts of the academy, to see how they are replicated at different levels of inquiry and how they come to affect the various areas of intellectual and academic activity concerned with the study of human and social phenomena. This, however, is a project which will only indirectly be broached in this essay. In doing so, we assume that central to these conceptions is a world-view which permeates the understanding of society at a given moment and serves to

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between Marxians and Weberians such as William Roff, ed., *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), which provide the Oscillating Culture-type with its moments of reprieve, veritable spaces of incubation, in anticipation of new currents and directions.

<sup>113</sup> Indeed, it must not be lost sight of that the origin of social theory as it developed in the nineteenth century lay in the quest for a new moral basis for society, following the collapse of traditional authority and the pervasive "breakdown in connections." See Bruce Mazlich, *A New Science: The Breakdown in Connections and the New Sociology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989). Whether in the continental tradition of positivist sociology, (e.g.. Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*), or in the more empirical tradition of political economy (e.g.. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), the founding fathers have all left their contributions in this area. For a relevant inquiry into the place of religion and moral values in the founding traditions of western social science, see Cormie LeRoy, *Religion in the Social Sciences and the Modern World* (Doctoral Dissertation, Chicago University, 1977). The general tenor remains very much as Robert Nisbet put it in his introduction to his compact classic *The Sociological Tradition* (London: Heinemann, 1966), where he pointed out that the "major ideas in social sciences invariably have roots in moral aspirations." For present trends, see Norma Haan et al., *Interpretive Social Science as Moral Inquiry* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983); see also M. Abul-Fadl, "The New Sociology: Gender and the Moral Economy" in the published proceedings of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists 21st Annual Conference, *New Directions: Proceedings...* (Herndon, Va: AMSS/IIIT, 1993,) 242-258.

structure and shape the disciplines in its light.<sup>114</sup> While clearly the shape and pursuit of social theory may not be solely conditioned by the prevailing world-view, and while the underlying assumptions constitute a part of that world-view as much as its product, yet together, the theory and the episteme, should be seen in the context of that interdependence.<sup>115</sup> Taking our cue from a holistic perception, it will thus be possible first to outline the underlying characteristics of the dominant paradigm and then to consider its operational implications. This will be done by selecting areas/moments at the interface of the civilizational encounter to highlight the nature and significance of a transition where "Self" and "Other" crossed.<sup>116</sup> Eventually, this is the crossing and transition that must be revisited, examined, confronted, and reappropriated in the transcendent trajectory that aims at more than a "fusion of horizons."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The current debate on modernity has cast doubt on the merits and viability of this world-view as much as it has thrown its features into relief. From the pen of a partisan, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge and Oxford : Polity Press, 1992), who attempts to salvage what was left of a radical critique that set the pace for much of the present debate; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming, (1969; reprint, New York: Continuum, 1993). For one of the enduring anatomies of "the mind of the Enlightenment," as the soul of the modern world view, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, (1951; reprint, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), 3-36; "The Concept of Enlightenment," by Horkheimer and Adorno, op cit., pp. 3-42. In *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), Dorothy Ross reviews the imported and adapted models of political science, sociology, and political economy specifically in this context of a differentiated "discovery of modernity" on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>115</sup> "... 'the polar night of icy darkness and harshness' that Weber saw as the inevitable accompaniment of a modern rationalized and routinized society does not merely require social scientific explanation ... a routinized and regularized life world is itself a *requirement* for a positivistically conceived science of society," in view of which a critique of the concepts and categories of such a social science is necessarily too "a critique of the covertly manipulative precepts and practice of the society in which we are living and of the instrumentally rational world view which tends to legitimize it." Terence Ball, "The Ontological Presuppositions and the Political Consequences of a Social Science," in *Changing Social Science: Critical Theory and other Critical Perspectives*, edited by Daniel Sabia, Jr. and J. Wallulis, (Albany: SUNY, 1983). It is this web of dialectic and interrelatedness which sums up the premise and purpose of our point of departure in the direction of a critical reconstruction of both social theory and the *\_umrani* context that constitutes its setting as much as its object.

<sup>116</sup> The attempt to relate a sociological to a civilizational perspective, or to evolve the latter from the former, is not typical of mainstream (American) sociology, although it is at the roots of the Khaldunian scholarly tradition of inquiry into the phenomenon of *al-\_umran al-bashari*. Cf. Anouar Abdel Malek, *Civilizations and Social Theory*, Vol.1 of *Of Social Dialectics* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1981), who is however clearly writing from within a revisionist Marxism, and whose grasp of Ibn Khaldun is accordingly constrained. Recent trends in western sociological scholarship on urbanization may also have affinities with this tradition, especially as it can also draw on significant internal sources of varying subtraditions, whether we think of work by Mumford, Wallerstein, Braudel or others. Janet Abu Lughod's bold and challenging synthesis, exemplary for its originality, methodology, range (and bibliography), *Before European Hegemony: The World System 1250-1350 A.D.* (Oxford University Press, 1989) is in this tradition. On the other hand, the earlier work of Russian born Pitrim A. Sorokin in the area of cultural/sociological symbiosis is of special interest to a *tawhidi* sociological perspective, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York: American Book Co.,1937), *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1928), and *Sociological Theories of Today* (Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>117</sup> See H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Sheed and Ward, (New York: Crossroads, 1975), 270-272. Although a dialogic conceived in the framework of a *tawhidi* episteme has its distinctive

The integrality of a culture field and its internal coherence might best be indicated by tracing the philosophical antecedents of the social sciences. The aim is to demonstrate how social theory, far from being an isolate in a complex of isolates, constitutes an integral part of an epistemic field to which it contributes and from which it derives its own coherence.<sup>118</sup> This "organic" affinity provides a useful diagnostic/analytical category for ascertaining some of the traits of theory which are not exclusive to it, but are germane to knowledge produced in that culture frame. At the same time, identifying these traits within their "family clusters," in itself, perhaps, constitutes the single most plausible argument as to why a perspective coming from the Median Culture is needed. It serves to show that the particular points of emphasis which lend contemporary social theory its style and which structure its modes of thought and research are not "given," as hitherto assumed by an objectivist social science, but are self-imposed elements more aptly acknowledged as elements in a socially/historically constructed universe.<sup>119</sup> It would be misleading to defer to them passively as simply the predilection of the times, a kind of irrepressible manifestation of the universal *Zeitgeist*, just as it would be misleading to impute them to the creation of alienated or troubled geniuses in society. Rather, whatever the specific or changing traits of contemporary social theory,<sup>120</sup> they are

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points of departure and ends, there is much in the Gadamerian hermeneutics that could provide a fertile ground of exchange. So too, with some of the current initiatives coming from feminist theory. Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), who takes up this theme - a "fusion of horizons" - in proposing a dialogic model of inquiry, see esp. pp. 200-201 and Ch. 7.

<sup>118</sup> The notion of an organizing concept running throughout a knowledge field and lending a certain consistency to its various departments may have gained currency in the meta-theoretical debate following on the Kuhnian revelations in his classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, but original insights at the inception of social theorizing were not wanting, as the opening remarks to the classical paradigm in political sociology would suggest. Andrew Janos' *Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Science* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1986), 7 ff. This same underlying continuity in the spirit of an epoch, so noticeable in the heyday of positivism, is currently evidenced in the "discursive" climate of a post-modern academy of fluidity and "transitoriness." See Chs. 1 and 6 in Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca: Univ. of California Press, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> For a pithy and spirited debate of this theme, see the special section, "Constructing the Social," *History of the Human Sciences* 7, no.1 (February 1994), 81-123, which brings refreshing perspectives and mines the insights developed nearly three decades earlier in the pioneering work by Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). Writing on modes of thought about culture and variants of relativism, Stephen Turner, (*Constructing the Social*, op cit., pp. 109-115) refers to James Bryant Conant's idea that "the science of a particular period served as a kind of reception device which received and accepted only those ideas for which it was ready, so that a scientific idea born out of its time would need to wait until the discipline had changed enough for new ideas to be received," which may well be a tribute to a spiritual mentor as well as a suggestive insight for contemporary Muslim thinkers puzzling over some aspects of their own intellectual legacy. (It should be noted that Kuhn was assistant professor to Conant.)

<sup>120</sup> With a few notable exceptions, the preoccupation with the meta-theoretical level of inquiry continues to echo a Continental mystique (malaise, Lust, or a *Schadenfreud*) notably cultivated in critical and post-Marxist strains, as Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner point out in surveying the proliferation of approaches in a succinct overview to the state-of-the-art in the field in the Introduction to *Social Theory Today* (Cambridge and Oxford, UK: Basil and Blackwell, Polity Press, 1987). Jeffrey Alexander's discussion of the

embedded in the structure of an episteme and discourse that have defined the character of the modern West, and that can be inferred from any point of entry or access to it.<sup>121</sup> In the following, I will attempt a simplified condensation of the shaping culture of science in the direction of an all-inclusive empiricism which, for specifically American reasons, reached their apogee in American social science.<sup>122</sup>

### **PHILOSOPHICAL ANTECEDENTS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE**

The empirical or "logical positivist" character of the social sciences can best be understood in light of major philosophical trends in modern philosophy and natural science.<sup>123</sup> The outcome was the establishment of an ideal model of knowledge which thereby excluded all forms which did not meet its strict criteria. Each discipline was thus left with the option of adopting this epistemological model or perishing. The "ideal" model, of course, was the scientific/empirical one. The immense success of science in the modern period propelled this paradigm of knowledge to a position of pre-eminence amongst all other forms of knowledge, and soon rendered them obsolete, vestiges of a pre-scientific age. Hence, man's inquiry into the nature of his social world was forced to adopt this empirical model as its epistemological basis.

However, it was not just the success of the scientific enterprise which cleared the way for the empirical model; the self-criticism which philosophy underwent also contributed to this hegemony. One must recall that the social sciences were at one time not "sciences," but were areas of philosophy. If philosophy can be shown to be an illegitimate practice, or at least can be restricted in its scope, then all fields relating to the investigation of the social world must find a new home. The

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field (*ibid.*, pp. 11-57) from the perspective of the enduring "Centrality of the Classics" for both empiricists and post-positivists is itself suggestive of the degree of obfuscation and ambivalence at the roots of contemporary social science.

<sup>121</sup> Of which a philosophy of science perspective provides the most encompassing as illustrated for example in the multifaceted approaches to the subject in the writings of Stephen Toulmin over the last two decades, culminating in his recent original contribution to rethinking the strains of modernity, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990); see also "Rediscovering History," *Encounter* 36, no.1 (1971).

<sup>122</sup> See Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, op cit.

<sup>123</sup> The literature on positivism in the social sciences is immense and varied and cuts across generations, from the latter twenties with the formation of the "Vienna Circle" to the present polemics. See Otto Neurath, *Foundations of the Social Sciences: International Encyclopaedia of Unified Science*, Vol. 2 (University of Chicago Press, 1944); Anthony Giddens, "Positivism and its Critics" in Tom Bottomore and R. Nisbet, *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: 1978); and Russell Keat, "The Critique of Positivism" in *The Politics of Social Theory: Habermas Freud and the Critique of Positivism* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981); a classic concise statement is A. J. Ayer's "Introduction" in *Logical Positivism*, A. J. Ayer (ed.), (New York: Free Press, 1959), which condenses his fame-making book in the English speaking world, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollanz, 1936); another is Herbert Feigl, "The Origin and Spirit of Logical Positivism," in *The Legacy of Logical Positivism*, Peter Achinstein and Stephen Barker, eds., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969) 3-24. Bringing a less conventional civilizational, socio-cultural, and theosophical dimension to the fore is Eric Voegelin's "Positivism and its Antecedents" in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, edited by John Hallowel (Duke Univ. Press, 1975) 74-109.

seeds of philosophy's demise are to be found in British empiricism, which reached its climax with David Hume. Beginning with the Greeks, the heart of philosophy has identified with metaphysics and with its baggage of metaphysical concepts. Essentially, British empiricism destroyed the validity of metaphysical knowledge by their claim that experience is the origin of all of our knowledge. Locke denied the notion of innate ideas by holding that all knowledge comes from our senses and is "built up" into more complex ideas. Locke said that "secondary qualities" (such as color, warmth, and smell) were not actually in the objects themselves, but instead existed in our subjectivity. However, he held that the "primary qualities" (such as extension and mass) were inherent in objects. He therefore retained the metaphysical notion of substance (something existing independently from us). Nonetheless, he was not a thorough and through empiricist. He maintained that intuitive knowledge (such as our existence and the principle that all men are born equal) is valid. Berkeley extended the scope of this argument by claiming that the primary qualities were also subjective in nature, thus denying independent existence to things (substance). With the exception of ourselves and God, all knowledge is knowledge of sense perceptions.

This "purging" of nonempirical elements was continued by Hume (1711-1776) who brought empiricism to its extreme. Like Berkeley, Hume denied a reality "behind" sensory impressions. He claimed that all we can know are "bundles" of sensory impressions. Furthermore, we have no knowledge of ourselves or God, for sensory impressions do not grant us these notions. Similarly, notions of necessity and causation are equally bogus. Hume said, "Where is the necessary connection?" Certainly not in experience, where all we find is a series of sensory impressions. According to Hume, we take frequent associations of some of these impressions from "psychological habits." For instance, it is simply a habit of mind to think the sun will rise tomorrow; there is no necessity involved here. This extreme empiricism led to skepticism, whereby all "matter of fact knowledge" (empirical knowledge) is reduced to associations and probabilities. Math and logic alone survive Hume's devastating critique, for they deal not with "matters of facts," but with logical relations between facts. Thus comes his famous statement regarding metaphysics, moral science, theology, and even the natural sciences; namely, that we throw all such works on these subjects "into the flames for they contain nothing but superstition."

Yet, the undeniable results of science cast doubts on the extent of Hume's critique. Thus Kant, after presupposing that we do in fact have scientific knowledge, strove to show how we can have this knowledge, *a priori* and synthetic knowledge, that is both certain like math and logic, but also says something about the world, unlike the analytical truths of math and logic. The consequence of this salvaging of science, however, placed limits on the human mind; namely, our knowledge extends only to our experience and not beyond. Concepts such as substance, cause, and unity apply to experience, and any further application is unwarranted. Hence, reason knows no metaphysical truths and the realm of moral knowledge is reduced to "practical knowledge" or faith. Thus, while Kant saved scientific knowledge from skepticism, he also reconfirmed Hume's skeptical position with regard to metaphysical speculation.

A final blow was given to the notion of nonempirical truths by J. S. Mill. Mill maintained that logic was not deductive in nature, but rather was inductive. More specifically, the syllogism is not a case of inferring via deduction from one premise to another. The premise, according to Mill, is originally an inductive (empirical) truth such as: (1) All men are mortal, (2) Socrates is a man, (3) Therefore Socrates is mortal. We reason inductively from men being mortal to the specific case of this particular man (Socrates) being mortal. Logic is no more than a helpful tool for organizing our inductions. Mill also concluded the same about Mathematics. Hence, all knowledge is from



experience, even the relations between "matters of fact."

The preceding paragraphs trace the steps involved in the decline of speculative (metaphysical) philosophy. What remains are empirical facts by which we can then form generalizations by way of induction. And most importantly, these facts must be observable sensory data, in other words, verifiable through experience. Logical Positivism was the epitome of this empirical/scientific trend in modern philosophy. For Logical Positivism, philosophy is metaphysics and metaphysics is superstition; thus, only science (empiricism) is valid knowledge. But while the present day methodology of the social sciences is most definitely empirical, it should not simply be equated with logical positivism. For logical positivism was from the start riddled with contradictions, and was actually antagonistic to the actual practice of the natural sciences in-so-far as the hypothetical/deductive model of the natural sciences were in principle ruled out by a strict empiricism. There always remains an element of rationalism in any empiricism. Theory, which is so essential for the natural sciences, is a necessary rational element which cannot be ignored without an inevitable anarchy of unrelated bare facts arising.

As the social sciences were expelled out of the dying body of speculative philosophy, they sought refuge in the epistemological canons of the natural sciences. The demise of metaphysics went hand in hand with the ascension of science. Thus, it could be plausibly argued that the social sciences did not borrow a model from another "discipline" in the sense of an analogy. For instance, the evolutionary model which the social sciences borrowed from biology was not the same as the adoption of a certain type of epistemological methodology. Issues of methodology must be kept separate from issues of theories or models. Yet, there was a connection between the transformation of the social sciences into empirical sciences and the application of the evolutionary model to political and social theory. The reductionism which was a consequence of a radical empiricism made these disciplines receptive to a biological model. Ultimately, the "unity of science" proponents desired a complete reduction of all sciences to physics, so in the end social phenomenon would be explained in terms of physical laws.

There was thus a certain element of ruthlessness about the epistemological project that came to define the terrain of social knowledge, and to make it an integral part of an emerging pattern of inquiry and subject it to its ubiquitous underlying presuppositions. The general autonomy of a cultural tradition would seem to be assured by the pervasiveness of its logic. This thesis has two implications for assessing contemporary social theory. The one would suggest that radical restructuring calls for going beyond the closed circle of positivism and its internal counter-cultures and justifies a recourse to alternative epistemic modes drawn from beyond that circle, such as that proposed in the Median Culture-type.<sup>124</sup> The other implication calls for a holistic framework for investigating social theory which would make it possible to engage it as part of a more encompassing and inclusive epistemic discourse. With this provision in view, the question is whether or not it is possible to identify the elements of a more pervasive world-view in the western cultural sphere which transcends social theory and which may have its roots in a heritage antedating the modern era. Clearly, this pushes back the boundaries of inquiry in ways hardly conceivable if social theory were technically confined to a closed, self-contained spectrum, beginning and ending with itself.

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<sup>124</sup> I have addressed this issue in *Paradigms in Political Science Revisited*, separately published as a Supplement to AJISS (September 1989), and in "Beyond Cultural Parodies," *ibid.* 8, no. 1, March 1991.

## EROS AND THANATOS: OR THE CULT OF CONFLICT

The dominant world-view sees in conflict and antagonism the stuff of the social order.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, psychoanalysis, which remains largely dominated by its Freudian origins, candidly sums up the life-principle as one of perpetual struggle, whether at a primary level for survival or at a secondary level, the libidinal, for fulfillment.<sup>126</sup> This struggle which animates the individual psyche is externalized and projected on temporal society in all its sectors to constitute its civilizational life-force. Inherent to this semantic field is a whole gamut of concepts and symbols suggestive of the struggle: conflict, control, manipulation, confrontation, domination, repression. Psychoanalysis is a gateway to social theory. The other grand portal is that of economics, which, even before the breakthroughs in psychoanalysis, has been the arena defined by scarcity. It too was targeted for a competitive and conflictual mode from the outset, with its own paraphernalia of suggestive concepts and with an emphasis on a dimension of power politics. The notoriety achieved in the one field or the other should by no means rob the other more autochthonous disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, of their share of originality in this field. Here again, the key to the conception and growth of the disciplines from the very outset lay in the conflictual and power-centric animus. The whole literature is infected with this virus, whichever the field and whatever the ideological assumptions of its observer. Studies are either given to exploring and projecting the ways and means to containing this conflict, or they are articulating it and exposing it in anticipation of its manipulation and control. Depending on the ideological perspective, the need is to ensure the maximum freedoms for conflicting interests without having the system founder, and, perhaps, to seek means of mediating the conflicts that emerge. Elsewhere, research is busy anticipating, gauging, precipitating, or investing in the conflicts and antagonisms which serve to discredit the system and prove the inevitability of its destruction, presumably, to make way for a consistently superior order.

This element of what might be properly construed as a social Darwinism may have reached its apogee in the Marxian formulation of social theory.<sup>127</sup> There, the class struggle is the agent of a

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<sup>125</sup> R. Collins, *Conflict Sociology* (New York: Academic Press, 1975); L. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); A. Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Vol. 2 of *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>126</sup> *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. by James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1961), for all its compactness, provides an exemplary and graphic illustration of this conflictual and antagonistic essence which is integral to the natural world, which carries over to guilt-ridden man and his cultural artifices. In *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), Herbert Marcuse attempts to synthesize Marx and Freud as he negotiates his way through the same tradition, notwithstanding his disillusionment and soul-searching for a way out in a resuscitated Dionysian aesthetic. Habermas takes up the cue in "Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity" in Richard Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Basil and Blackwell, Polity Press, 1985).

<sup>127</sup> It is interesting that a recent prospectus on Marxism in the nineties is conducted against a Darwinian perspective. Alan Carling, "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: A Reconstructed Marxist Theory for the 1990's?" *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 2 (May 1993) 115-120. Marx's own "orientalism" and his defence of imperialism reflect and anticipate the culture which favored the success of Darwinism. On the other hand, an even more congenial trans-Atlantic culture hastened its appeal and spread

dialectical historical materialism, and as such it comes to be apotheosized into the catalyst of social transformation and the benefactor of an alienated humanity. In giving priority to the dialectics of the forces of material production over those of biological reproduction, it retains the essence of the conflictual and repressive dynamic inherent in the ongoing battle between Eros and Thanatos for the soul of civilization: the prize remains that of domination and mastery, rather than sheer primitive survival or "enlightened progress." This ethical code permeates the mainstream and becomes the mainstay of social theory as the cult of domination comes to be eulogized under various norms and guises, and is practiced and legitimated accordingly. The art of civilization excels in deceit. As social theory itself becomes its subtle exponent, the spade is no longer called a spade. Instead, as many names are devised for the cult as to smother its reality.

Whether in its cruder or in its more sophisticated forms, it is this Darwinian assumption which constitutes a fundamental bone of contention between the two culture-types and epistemes. This is hardly because the Median Culture is more idealistic, while its counter-construct is more realistic; nor is it because the latter deals in empirical realities so the first might indulge in utopias. Rather, the difference is due to the different normative premises and the conceptual framework of the Median Culture-type, as it has historically been formulated in workable structures and institutions. Such premises will admit of the possibility of another version of social reality which may be just as practical and realizable without being necessarily destructive, self-transcending, or self-refuting. This alternative is feasible because it is predicated on a unitary conception of social reality which admits of an integral complexity and diversity within a framework of consonance. It renders it radically at odds with the present reductionist and exclusivist conflictual model.

The *evolutionary code* is a good example of a pivotal access to the modern mind which has spawned, spanned, and punctuated its activity, whether its domain was that of the life-sciences or that of the social sciences.<sup>128</sup> Its animus is one of conflict, struggle, and domination in a race for survival. It is this conception which has structured much of contemporary social theory. The question is whether this influence was due to a predilection in the scope and subject of the field of social relations which made it more susceptible to a Darwinian interpretation of reality, or whether, beyond social theory as a specialized inquiry, there was something in this code which appealed to a more basic sensibility in the pervasive perceptions in the later nineteenth century. Both possibilities are real, and the case of the growth and consolidation of a trend has been validly made in the different and complementary accounts of an era. Conversely then, the question is one of accounting for the success of the Darwinian mode of thought in the European cultural context of its times. Contrary to prevailing orthodoxy, Darwin's thought did not launch the evolutionary epoch, but more

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at the turn of the century, to coincide with the institutionalization of sociology and anthropology. See R. Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed., (Boston: Beacon, 1955); and John Greene, "Darwin and the Social Sciences" in *Darwin and the Modern World View* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1961). Through his unconventional work, Bowler has established his authority in the field, *Darwinism* (1993); *The Non-Darwinian Revolution* (1988); *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900*. In another of his books, he applies his eclectic interests as a natural scientist and a historian to reconstruct the identity and self-imag(in)ing in Victorian England through an imagined past that would justify them in their turn of the century empire, *The Invention of Progress* (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>128</sup> Peter Bowler, *Evolution: the History of an Idea* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1989); see Michael Schmid and Franz Wuketitis, eds., *The Evolutionary Theory in Social Science* (Dodrecht, Holland: 1987) for recent debates in the field.

consistent with the evidence at hand, it was merely a formalization and a consummation of a trend which was already well underway. By providing the empirical evidence it needed from the natural sciences, the Darwinian discovery provided already existing currents of intellectual thought the legitimation needed to consolidate a trend and lend it the currency it came to command.<sup>129</sup> More disconcertingly, *the roots of this conflictual animus can be found much deeper in the recesses of the historical Western tradition,*<sup>130</sup> whether the latter is seen in its affinities with a liberal humanist ethos, or in terms of a specific theological humanism. If decoding an episteme may take its cue from struggle and confrontation as an underlying and persistent theme in much of social inquiry, plumbing the depths will likely lead beyond social inquiry.

One of the first lessons the reflexive social scientist will need to learn as he taps the psychogenesis of his field concerns the traumatic involvement with the conflictual mode which conditions the dominant paradigm. Challenge, defiance, and rebellion are found to be rooted in the mythological wellsprings of a classical antiquity which is replete with conflicting and conflictual models which plunge it in ambiguity.<sup>131</sup> There, Prometheus, the culture hero, steals fire from the pagan gods, and the struggle is perpetuated among these petty deities themselves in a vision which is spuriously ennobled by a nostalgic appeal to the "essential humanism" of the Greeks, and to their basic "naturalism." So compelling was this theme in the early Roman empire that it conditioned the reception and mediation of Christianity there. Instead of indelibly shaping a culture from the start, the response to divine revelation itself in the Roman West was conceived in terms of the dominant Hellenistic context of its times.<sup>132</sup> A comparison of the respective accounts of Adam's fall in the Biblical and Qur\_anic versions illustrates the point. In the Qur\_anic record, the event is attributed to forgetfulness, to a dawning curiosity and a weakness of resolve before temptation. It is followed by Adam's repentance and God's forgiveness and promise of continued guidance to his progeny.

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<sup>129</sup> For a history of the social sciences and place of evolution, see "The Social Sciences" in volume 27, *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, Fifteenth edition (Chicago, 1978) esp. pp. 366-379; also *The Social Sciences Today*, edited by Robert Hutchison and R. Doran. The periodic academic and intellectual reviews of the field are suggestive of general trends, as well as evaluations of the past. Recently, a number of prominent professionals in the field were invited to reflect on the state of the art, see *Social Science and Modern Society* 30, no.1, Special Thirtieth Anniversary Issue (November/December 1992).

<sup>130</sup> With an ironic nod at the social Darwinists, Crane Brinton, *A History of Western Morals* (1957; reprint, New York: Paragon House, 1990), takes the *agon*, the Greek root of "agony" and signifier of strife and struggle, for a starting point in tracing a western moral ideal, on the assumption that "conflict" is a good and necessary word underlying much that is valuable in western character, and richer in its connotations than mere "competition" which is at the root of democracy. Originally, the Greek *agon* was the name given the former religiously ritualized assembly of the Greeks to witness their games. See p. 27.

<sup>131</sup> An original and insightful exploration of the socio-cultural relevance and the restorative value of classical mythology (and the specific form it assumed) for the Western psyche, especially during epochal transitions where bearings are sought, is provided by Charles Segal, "Greek Tragedy and Society: A Structuralist Perspective" in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, edited by J. Peter Euben. Sophocles' trilogy provides a key to illuminating more than the psyche of a generation, the foundation of a civilization, the "curse of civilization." See Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Camb. Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), and Leonard Wessell, Jr., "Mythos and Logos," and, taken as a key metaphor, "The Myth of Prometheus," in *Prometheus Bound: The Mythic Structure of Karl Marx's Scientific Thinking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1984).

<sup>132</sup> See Arthur Weigall, *The Paganization of Christianity*.

The same event is rendered in the extant Biblical account as an act of man's blatant rebellion which is followed by God's own remorse at having created such a spirited monster that could not be restrained. So much so is the heavenly agitation that damnation becomes the lot of man, much along the lines of Zeus's revenge upon a Prometheus chained to the rock and doomed to have his liver pecked out by the vulture on to eternity.<sup>133</sup> In the Biblical version, however, atonement is in view: in his loving compassion God, so that version goes, takes it upon Himself to redeem fallen man through the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

In the event, the drama of Greek mythology, which was played out in the temples of yore and which gave the world the tragedy as a unique form of art, also provided the setting and format for much in the "modern paganism."<sup>134</sup> It gave the modern (Western) mind the specific modes, mores, and concepts which molded a consciousness and furnished it with the means for its self-expression and articulation - and to which we can react today as social theorists reflecting critically on a tradition. In the age of science and scientific rationalism, the re-enactment of the Act of Creation finds its metamorphosis in the Drama of Evolution. The catharsis of the ancients becomes the "revolution" of the moderns and comes to be seen as that creative act which at a given moment releases the load of tensions in a society teeming with contradictions and frustrations so as to "transform" that society and carry it one step forward in the spiral of progress. In the process, the Delphic oracle gives way to the predictions of the pollsters and the experts from their new Olympian heights of rational objectivity and data computations. Surely, for a political scientist of a reflective disposition, the search for the roots and constituents in the Western tradition as they are projected in his field will unravel a labyrinth that is as fascinating to the imagination as it is stimulating to the intellect. It can almost certainly contribute to an enlightened and enlightening paradigm for the study of a tradition in mutation and continuity.

Identifying the Darwinian code, which is the evolutionary code informed by the conflictual ethic, as a valid and fruitful point of access to the modern epistemic discourse which has structured social theory is one thing. Locating the sources of this code and its possible variations beyond contemporary social theory is quite another. It goes to show the inbuilt constraints in the Oscillating Culture-medium which limit the prospects of rectifying the imbalances it generates, and which are simply reinforced, multiplied, and perpetuated in the practice of social theory. This is what we mean by suggesting that the Oscillating Culture necessarily points beyond itself, and that a radical critique of contemporary social theory is likely to reinforce a sensibility for options and dimensions which are acquired and developed within the Median Culture. The vocationist, as opposed to the professional social scientist, will be more sensitive than others to the opportunities which lie in that alternative culture mode, and will be more capable, if she or he so desires, to proceed on a track of re-forming contemporary social theory from within on the basis of insights gained in the course of exposure to the view from without. To cultivate this conviction though,

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<sup>133</sup> The *cunning* of Odysseus may have spared him such ignominy (see Adorno, "Odysseus: Or Myth and Enlightenment" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment, op cit.*). Whether the "culture of mass deception" (Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *ibid.*) is itself a cause or a consequence of the abortion of modernity remains an open question. See Michael Hollis, *The Cunning of Reason*; Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes* and *Travels in Hyperreality*; and Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*.

<sup>134</sup> See the review essay on volume 1 of Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation - The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967) in Mona Abul-Fadl, "The Enlightenment Revisited," *AJISS*.

namely, to assure the belief in the benefits and the possibilities of breaking out of a self-imposed closure, he will need to see how the ingrained habits of a mind formed in the process of centuries of the great conversation have acted on its perceptions of reality, and have continued to do so, in ways which have not always been productive. In this sense too, it will be necessary to realize the price this kind of monochromatics has exacted - if only as an argument for fostering the virtues of opening to alternatives

### THE MATRIX OF AN INQUIRY: REDUCTIONISM AND EXCESS

Just as social theory develops in the context of an epistemic field of cognition which reinforces its characteristics in one direction or another, so its conflictual underpinnings tend to be reinforced by other elements in its operative paradigm. It is the presence of a certain matrix of inquiry that adds to the encumbrances of devising a social theory that might be more responsive to the needs of global societies in transition, whether in the Western world itself, or more particularly in the much larger and more challenging societies that constitute the "third world."

With conflict presumed to be a foundational premise of the social order and of history more generally, a self-destructive core belief is arbitrarily imposed and generalized upon contemporary social theory. This is reinforced by a matrix of inquiry which is similarly afflicted as it arbitrarily constrains the range of inquiry and misleads by the modes it projects for its focus. The importance of any matrix of inquiry, it might be noted here, is due to the way it determines the kind of questions to ask and sets the preliminary orientations which, by virtue of the mechanics of the inquiry itself, come to be subsumed into its conclusion. Asking the wrong kind of questions not only prejudices the course of inquiry, but it also dissipates the efforts which go into it. What happens the moment questions are raised within the prevailing antinomic matrix is that that matrix imposes dilemmas on the domain of the inquiry which need not be. To assume the division between public and private morality, for example, paves the way for much ambiguity in assessing individual conduct in society and appraising social action. This has a demoralizing impact in more than one sense, and the reaction is even more disconcerting when scholars assume attitudes analogous to throwing out the baby with the bath. In a context where theory threatens to assume the burdens of a futile metaphysical disputation, it provokes its pragmatic response, and scholars are almost forced to choose between their reason and their conscience.<sup>135</sup> They must either confine their pursuits to narrow utilitarian interests, and renounce all claims to a moral integrity, or else they must abdicate their profession and follow their vocation at their own peril.

The matrix of inquiry can be an encumbrance for social theory, and not just for the conscience of its practitioners. It is rooted in dualistic and polarized conceptions which are themselves the constituents as well as the source for the conflictual/confrontational dynamic. The categorical fact/value dichotomy heads the list of these schisms. But the antipodes are pervasive and litter the field, as the distinctions run the gamut between the real and the ideal, the material and the spiritual, the sacred and the profane, theory and practice, philosophy and science, reason and revelation, and most of all perhaps, subject and object. These are categories not particular to social theory in itself, but they riddle the Western tradition from its classical sources in antiquity down to the existential

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<sup>135</sup> See Kariel on the moral dilemma confronting American political scientists torn between the demands of their discipline (positivist) and their moral perceptions, "Possibilities...." in George Graham, ed., *The Post-Behavioural Era*. Defiant of the rationalist temper, Kariel's tone carries echoes of a later anarchist discourse, and with it corroborates the pendular generative momentum of the Oscillating Culture-type, pp. 127, 130.

philosophies of our times. Their implications go beyond determining the anatomy and morphology of social theory to defining many of its procedural and functional traits.

The reductionist propensity which has overtaken the field of social inquiry as much as it has every other area of modern existence is an outcome of this dichotomy and dichotomizing instinct. As such, it constitutes another point with which we take issue in questioning the validity of the dominant paradigm. As the trajectory of modern social theory illustrated, the triumph of positivism occurred through a reductionist constriction of the vision confining the world to the sensory world, and reducing life to its biological conception.<sup>136</sup> Various interpretations have been given to account for the precipitating factors in this regression, and as often as not, in the complexity of a many-sided world as the social world is bound to be, it is difficult to isolate the causes from the effects. The coming of a nominalist trend at the onset of a de-sacralizing current, identified by some modern diagnostics of the malaise of the culture, could have been as much a symptom of the malady as its cause.<sup>137</sup> The issue is not one of causality but of understanding. This is another area, though, where the traditions and methodologies of contemporary social science founder. While such social science may display considerable analytical virtuosity, its faculty for synthesis is astonishingly underdeveloped. Reductionism does not affect the area of understanding in general, or specific areas of inquiry, but its consequences are diffuse and affect attitudes in a more practical context. The distortions attendant on reductionism have not only reflected on the understanding of human nature and the social world, they have reflected negatively on the attitudes and ethics of social science in a manner detrimental to man and society.

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<sup>136</sup> Underlying social theory is a concept of man, and a projection of this concept in the disciplines is not just at the root of their emergence, but the source of the differentiation that occurs through time and from one thinker or school to another. The modern search for the "subject" underlies much of the uncertainty in contemporary social theory. See John Christie, "The Human Sciences: Origins and Histories," *History of the Human Sciences* 6 no.1 (February, 1993), and Claude Blanckaert, "Buffon and the Natural History of Man: Writing History and the 'Foundational Myth' of Anthropology," (*ibid.*, pp.13-50). The thrust in the present reductionism comes from a revival in sociobiology, where studies on man and human nature have resurged more sophisticated and mellowed by an ethical sense of realism, and drawing more on Aristotle than on Skinner. Currently, Roger Masters commands the field of postulating a political theory of the state in this perspective, *The Nature of Politics* (Yale 1989). See also Degler, *In Search of Human Nature* (1991); and Thomas Fleming, *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988), which provides a more accessible and potentially more relevant work for an interactive Islamic scholarship, see esp. Chs.1 and 4. Inquiries, reflections and insights from an Islamic perspective abound, especially those written within the theological tradition. See S. H. Nasr. Considered relevant for social theory are those written with a view on the issues of contemporary social thought and which develop comparative insights, e.g. Gai Eaton, *King of the Castle*, and Mohamed Talbi, "La Vocation de l'Homme" in Talbi and M. Bucaille, *Reflexions sur le Coran* (Paris: Seghers, 1989); or those with some interest in conceptualization. Because of its centrality, of the concept of *khilafah* has frequently been taken up from traditionalist *fiqhi* perspectives, more descriptive and analytical than conceptual or sociological. Because of the rich legacy, scholarship on sources also provides an important resource for the Muslim social theorist. See Abdul Majid al Najjar, *al-Insan fi al-Qur'an*. See M. Abul-Fadl, "The Islamic View of Man: Agency, Morality and Responsibility," a synopsis of which was prepared for publication in *The Foundations of Islam*, vol.1, edited by Zafar I. Ansari and Ibrahim Nawab (Paris; UNESCO,) (forthcoming).

<sup>137</sup> For some relevant insights from a semiotic perspective, see Chs. 1 & 11 of Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *Meaning and Modernity: Social Theory in the Pragmatic Attitude* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); for a sapiential perspective see Chs. 1 & 5 of S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

There was a time when the methods of psychoanalysis and behaviorism together claimed to open up new vistas of understanding and unfathomed prospects for human betterment. The grandeur and promise of this scientific breakthrough lay in a reductionist fallacy concerning the concept of man, which exerted its fatal attraction in practically every nascent discipline in the nineteenth century, including *homo economicus* and Superman. By the early twentieth century, reducing man to the essentials of his biological organism and elaborating on the possibilities of manipulating and controlling the reactions of this organism in an equally controlled environment fed the tensions of an age torn between exorcizing the "ghost in the machine" (Koestler) and lamenting, with T. S. Elliot, the spreading "Wasteland." Experiments on rats and analogous organisms pointed the way to prognostics on the human behavioral potential, which was canonized in B. F. Skinner's tome.<sup>138</sup> While the ideas of this school may no longer constitute the orthodoxy they once did, yet the naturalism which underlay its philosophy continues to infect the profession and to reflect on its perceptions of morality. The ethos of manipulation, prediction, and control continues to haunt an era noted for its scientific breakthroughs in the areas of genetics and reproductive technologies. Behaviorism might have exhausted its momentum by the end of the sixties,<sup>139</sup> but the ethics of the profession remain vulnerable and reflect on the practice. Admittedly, a notable shift away from the scientific cult might be taking place. This is seen in the profusion of organs and organizations which have come to reflect the rediscovery of ethics and its relevance to modernity. A new agenda of priorities is emerging, but whether this can effectively check the excesses associated with the reductionist syndrome is another matter. The view from the Median vantage point is inclined to be more skeptical about the prospects of success in the absence of external sources to reinforce these efforts. These doubts are based on a reading of the nature of the "self-correcting" mechanisms in the Oscillating Culture.

Another, less conventional, way of viewing reductionism would be to relate it to *excess*. The latter is itself one dimension of a syndrome of absence of restraint and lack of measure. These related features are germane to an Oscillating Culture, and in this sense reductionism in the materialistic cult of our times is merely one phase and expression of a residual propensity in that culture-type. This is partly reflected in the ease with which the Western tradition lends itself to classification into epochs and discernible tempers (the *Zeitgeist*). It facilitated Comte's task in isolating the Ages of Man in his evolution through the theological, the rational, and into the scientific age. It is also reflected in the smoothness with which the transitions, back and forth along the cultural continuum, are effected. It was easy for Marx to stand Hegel on his feet, for example, with little embarrassment. To take a nearer event from a more pragmatic field: The political convergence in the international order between Liberalism and Communism should hardly come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the currents in an age of "the end of ideology."<sup>140</sup> In the past, however, these

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<sup>138</sup> *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

<sup>139</sup> G. Homans, "Behaviorism and After" in *Social Theory Today*, Giddens and Turner, eds., *op cit.*, pp. 58-81, claims that, quite the opposite: the Behavioral movement maintains its influence today through its internalization in behavioral psychology, and more generally through its pervasive and unacknowledged influence in various rational and utilitarian schools. What is clear, however, is that it exerts its influence in an attenuated form within a milieu that has itself become more attuned to a variety of reductionisms.

<sup>140</sup> Daniel Bell's review of the field in *The Social Sciences after the Second World War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1982) seems to have been written with his earlier theme on *The End of Ideology* in view. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the triumph of liberalism, a new jubilatory mood



reversals and convergences, in short these "oscillations," took place against a more complex and prodigious cultural grounding which effectively mediated the contradictions and moderated the fall-out of the swings.

What makes the modern variant of reductionism, then, ostensibly more reprehensible than its counterparts in earlier epochs is the near erosion of the cushioning of a tradition which provided a sense of both measure and restraint. In the present swings of an essentially empirical, moody culture, there seem to be little reserves to check the regular indulgences. It is, moreover, the nature of the self-correcting mechanisms in this culture-mode which adds to the malaise in social theory. The Marxian *volte-face* to the Hegelian fallacy may have put the dialectic on its feet, but it hardly provided a more credible grounding for modern social theory. Similarly, if the socialist system was conceived as the remedy to the excesses of an individualist liberalism, its own excesses, conceptually and historically conceived, were no assurance that the social order could be sanified. The tendency to counter excess by excess is hardly the prescription for sound theory.

The Oscillating Culture is typical of a mode of thought and action which represents the unaided human quest in all its stumblings and its consequences: the heroic image of man, self-subsistent, autonomous, and self-sufficient. In this sense, it is susceptible to all the frailties to which this quest is vulnerable. Yet the vocational social scientist will also concede to its elements of nobility, if only on account of man's generic humanity. Endowed with a *fitric* sensibility, man is urged on, instinctively, to search for the moral basis of the social order. Intuitively, as Aristotle well knew in corroboration of the certitudes of still earlier generations of Oriental sages, virtue in this order could be sought in justice: and the just lay in the "median."<sup>141</sup> *Nothing to excess, moderation is best.* This is an often overlooked piece of intuition which has recently been resuscitated, albeit in the dry, reductionist, and somewhat banal computations and formulations on the subject that sparked off another of those elated moments of discovery in the odyssey of a young but prematuring social theory.<sup>142</sup>

The upshot is that reductionism as one of the consequences of the matrix of inquiry affects modern social theory in a variety of ways and at different levels. It is associated with an ethos of excess and indulgence, and displays a chronic want of measure. Because these would seem to be traits

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briefly took on with the revival of the controversy around "The End of History" (and the Last Man) with its implicit Hegelian (and Nietzschean) themes signifying a rediscovery of "ideology" in a new world order. Ironically, it was the latter that would provide the sequel to the end of ideology in the rebirth of an impending clash of cultures, according to Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington, and other central figures in American think-tank circles. Clearly, the discourse in a globalizing social theory is calibrated on the scales of a praxis in reflexivity. For a launcher on this theme in Muslim scholarly circles, see "The End of History? Or the West and the Rest?" A Roundtable, *Proceedings of the Twenty First Annual Conference ... New Directions, op cit.*, 31-63.

<sup>141</sup> See Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean :Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>142</sup> I have in mind the Rawlsian debate in the latter seventies, which turned the young author overnight into a *cause celebre* and provoked a polemic which reached beyond the confines of the American academy. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies on Rawls' Theory of Justice*, (1975; reprint, Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989); John Rawls, *Liberty , Equality and Law* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993).

historically endemic to the culture-type in view, any autochthonous efforts to counter this tendency from within the same self-contained parameters are perennially caught up in the same self-defeating cycle. One is reminded of the parabolic bird-infested tree and the sage of al-Ghazali. One way to overcome excess is to inject a sense of measure into contemporary social theory, and not to presume either the indifference of social theory or the irrelevance of measure to it. Left to its own devices, theory as philosophy can only intuitively locate the need, but it stumbles in its efforts to define content.<sup>143</sup> The costs of stumbling are too high in an era of technological glut, nor can the matter be left entirely to a fortuitous pragmatics to fill the void; this is enough incentive to induce a turn for direction to other sources beyond the culture closure. It is at this point that perspectives drawing on the example of the Median Culture-type and its sources could provide more than the principles needed for critiquing social theory. They could constitute a substantial resource to ground efforts for going beyond criticism to constructive synthesis, and in this sense they set the stage for the missing directionality. A number of factors qualify the alternative culture for this role, not least of which is the holistic conceptual affinity associated with its culture-matrix, backed by the substantive and integrated nature of its procedural ethic. In the *tawhidi* episteme, for example, justice is not simply the formal/instrumental value of the modern liberal rationalist and its pragmatic variations in the West; rather, it is essentially a substantial value that cannot be arbitrarily reduced to any one of its constituent dimensions, or components.<sup>144</sup> As an inclusive scale of values, itself embedded in the *tawhidi* epistemic field, justice permeates the value-system across a means-ends axis. It operates as a key ordering mechanism which is integrated with and integrating of the value scale at the foundational and operational levels of the social order.

The practical consequences of such an outlook for the conduct of contemporary social theory are immense. Not only would it restructure the grounds of many an inquiry in the field of social studies, but it would invest it with meaning and purpose or direction such as it lacks at present. In deed, it would clear the ground of the plethora of fragmented, dispersed, redundant researches whose sole validation lies in their data-pooling virtues and that become the temptation and justification for a dubious market morality.<sup>145</sup> It would also heal the rifts that splinter an academy torn between its moral conscience and its professional consciousness. Even the criteria of policy making, whether the issue-area is one of welfare and social policy or foreign policy, would be included in the propedeutic thrust in the theoretical field. By appropriating a means-ends axis at the cognitive level of inquiry, it would be possible to be both consistent and moral. There would be no room for an amoral science or a value-neutral technology, any more than there would be scope for validating an end irrespective of the means. The categorical imperative would be a practical/pragmatic alternative, instead of parading as an autonomous category.

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<sup>143</sup> The whole paradigm of modernity, hence its underlying episteme, is constituted on a procedural impetus without content, growth/change for its own sake without directionality, so much so that freedom, rationality, and progress become a function as much as a measure of this void. See Chs. 1 & 12 of David Kolb, *A Critique of Pure Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1989). His conclusion in rethinking the modern world from the vantage points of identity, community, and rationality converges with the points of departure of such thinkers as Rorty and Bauman, who end up merely affirming the premises of Kolb. In this sense, the self-referential discourse on modernity is locked in an impasse.

<sup>144</sup> See Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1984), for a discrete exposition of the different dimensions as seen through the legacy.

<sup>145</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "The Moral Foundations of the Marketplace. What is to be Done?" in *Currents in Modern Thought. The World and I: A Chronicle of our Changing Era* 5 no.12 (Dec. 1990), 466-475.

What are the implications and projections of our inquiry into the general character of contemporary social theory for our interest in the broader realm of an inter-cultural encounter? In this context, we focus our interest on the encounter between historical Islam and the West for various reasons, not least of which is its continuity, intensity, and purport for shaping the course and fate of a modern culture. As we have inferred from the outset, a critical reflection on social theory from a contrasting epistemic perspective has the advantage of redefining its grounds and scope in such a manner as to encompass planes of inquiry that have unwarrantedly been excluded or suppressed in an ethnocentric profession. The same social theory which provides the framework of inquiry into social phenomena within a particular society also provides us with the tools and insights for intra-social and inter-societal comparisons. These comparisons go beyond their academic intent. They project an understanding that is likely to reflect back on a matrix and reinforce its subsequent output. The rupture that might have occurred with the coming of the Enlightenment was not of a nature to undo some of the more enduring characteristics that would eventually come to reinforce the epistemic underpinnings of modern social theory. To all purposes and intent, they formed part of the effective cultural and knowledge framework which conditioned the kind of interaction and borrowing that took place in the medieval Christian West on the eve of its renaissance, as it came into contact with the then dominant Islamic civilization. In the same way, it continues to affect the reading by the West of society in the Muslim ecumene, whether in modern times or in retrospect, as it attempts to reinterpret its socio-cultural patterns and pontificate on its implications. As this constitutes a distorting propensity in any prospective cultural encounter, as much as it distracts from the credibility and viability of contemporary social theory, it would be instructive to draw attention to some of the areas where the matrix of inquiry and its reductionist or conflictual propensities potentially constrain more constructive developments in self understanding as much as in the understanding of the Other.

**THE CONFLICTUAL MODE AND THE CULTURE-FILTER**

One of the areas of enlightenment which might benefit from a critical reflection on the Western heritage from its sources may be that of cross-cultural interaction.<sup>146</sup> How the historical West interacted with other cultures, and how this exchange was projected in the various domains of the encounter, particularly during the "epochal thresholds," deserves particular attention for its heuristic-revealing potential. An example of one of those historically pregnant moments occurs in the course of the transmission of the Islamic empirical tradition of inquiry to the European centers of learning, and in the way in which this tradition was received in the cultural medium of the Renaissance. This is one of the relatively gray and ambiguous junctures in the history of the rise of the modern West that have scarcely received the attention they deserve. The constraints are as much paradigmatic as historical and psycho-historical. Yet it is only in revising the framework of inquiry in a spirit of critical empathy implicit in a Contrasting Episteme that the anomalies and the distortions of a historical encounter can be explained and understood. Corrective perspectives could then be introduced to address the implications which have continued well beyond the initial encounter to shape the modernity of our day. To take but one example here, let us turn to that critical juncture in the early modern period when scientists like Francis Bacon were actively engaged in mediating the lessons from another heritage. Only a deeply riveted, conflictual psyche could have conceived of "torturing" Nature to yield her secrets, and such logistics could only be fitting of a vivid imagination that saw Nature "red in tooth and claw."<sup>147</sup> There was nothing in the transmitted Islamic legacy to suggest such an ordeal, but clearly the cultural filter which was effecting the mediation must have played its role. In the event, Bacon also imparted to the modern scientific world-view its ethos, which has set the tone to man's ambivalent encounter with nature in modernity. Other examples could be sought of the way in which the rationalist legacy was re-appropriated from Islamic sources to reconstruct a chapter in Western scholasticism and to bridge the transition to modernity. But this would constitute one of the themes for researching within a new paradigm of inquiry where the agenda setting would allow for new perspectives on old questions, and enable the raising of questions hitherto unthought of. At a critical juncture in the encounter between two great traditions, opportunities abounded for the rising West, but they were marred by the misperceptions and cross-perceptions which affected the culture-filtering in progress, to the detriment of an entire sequence.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Where East Meets West: The West on the Agenda of the Islamic Revival* (Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

<sup>147</sup> See Jerry Weinberger, *Science, Faith and Politics: Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age - A Commentary on Bacon's Advancement of Learning* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), where he interprets Bacon's ethos against its contending biblical and classical antecedents with a view to illuminating the "problematic of technology" whence "the more science promises human self-reliance, the more we search for missing gods, we feel besieged by the very means which grant us power, and we are alternately proud and ashamed of our impious mastery over nature." (p.17). For the consequences of such a confounded impiety, see Chs. 1 & 9 of Fred Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature: Marcuse and Habermas* (Tampa: Univ. Presses of Florida, 1985). One can only think of the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the steady alienation of Nature that was to provoke its backlash in the Romantic movement of the 19th century as an antecedent to the current *fin de siecle* malaise evidenced in the ecological movement. To highlight the historical alienation in the western psyche, Lowith's analysis in *The Meaning of History* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949) may retain its heuristic value for the ongoing soul-searching of the genesis and consequences of modernity.

<sup>148</sup> For the concept of the "culture filter," I am indebted to Norman Daniel, whose authoritative work on

### HOW CONFLICT IS VIEWED FROM THE "MEDIAN"

In contesting the conflictual mode of the modern episteme, the Median Culture-type is not indulging a utopian vision of eternal harmony and concord among a breed of mortal demi-gods. The historical record of confrontation and struggle in human aggregations points to a contrary reality, which needs to be explicated in other than a eulogizing vein. What is at issue here is the primacy of conflict, and there is every need for redefining its parameters to make it more consistent with the alternative and even more realistic reading of social reality and human condition, projected in their telic conception. In such a reading, conflict is a function of a substantive injustice, *zulm*, and not of differences or diversity as such. Conflict, in the sense of an irrevocable and sustained clash of forces, or of a disputatious conduct that is secured to a calculus of domination and subjugation, or an ethic of mastery and dominion, is not ingrained in the natural order, and its perpetuation in the social order can hardly be the norm. There is nothing "natural" or edifying about the jungle law when it is applied to the human species, and its consecration amounts to a flagrant deviation from an order of creation which is inherently beneficent and just.

In fact, if a semantic field for conflict and confrontation as concepts were to be constructed in the respective modes of inquiry associated with their respective culture-types, the Oscillating and the Median, one would at best come up with a range of remote equivalences of meaning, rather than with any identity in meanings. This is a point which can not be developed here. To take but one example in passing, however, to shed some light on the distinction in view, one might consider the Arabic term *d-f-\_/daf\_* and its Qur\_anic usage. Literally, the term could be associated with a range of activity connoting taking the initiative, paying one's dues, pushing forth, warding off, averting, repelling, defending, fending, advancing, or repaying. In fact, it provides a compact generative concept which invokes a world of meaning, none of which identically translates into analogues associated with conflict in its generic Western mode. In the latter, conflict is generally associated with domination, mastery, and subjugation. It is a function of power, greed, desire or whatever could be rationalized in terms of "ideal and material interests." In this sense, conflict is both conceived instrumentally, on a means-ends axis and, like mastery and domination, it also constitutes an end, or a terminal value. In contrast, whether in its syntax or inflections, *dafa\_a* (verb) as a profile in action, and *daf\_* (substantive noun) as a state or a process in progress, the Qur\_anic usage places the concept in a unique context of a purposeful deterrence.<sup>149</sup> Here, the phenomenal friction, or clash of wills, is embedded in a state of activity and a constellation of relationships essentially provoked by a seismic infraction in the "cosmic balance" and signaling a violation in the natural/social order which sparks off an ignitional charge for due restitution. To borrow a less

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the medieval relations between Europe and the Muslim world provide an interesting, reliable, and instructive interpretation. In *The Cultural Barrier: Problems in the Exchange of Ideas* (Edinburgh: Edinb. Univ. Press, 1975), he has used his research as a historian (*The Arabs and Medieval Europe* [London: Longman, 1975]) to sharpen his cultural sensibility and focus on an area which calls for more intensive study than is presently available.

<sup>149</sup> See *al-Qur\_an*, 2:251 and 22:40, where the verses, taken in their corresponding sequences, parallelisms, and symmetries, relating the precept to the practice, the empirical to the normative, and the relative to the universal, provide a wealth of material for a sociological hermeneutic that could take us beyond the traditional commentaries, which for all their instructive insights are no substitute for an integrated social theory.

familiar, but more graphic expression, conflict here becomes "ambilectic" and diffusely structuring of the system. The implications for social theory are real.

Conflict comes to be seen as a provisional, not a permanent, state. It is a contingency, not a necessity. The vocational scholar would not be taking this for his starting point in an inquiry simply because such an inquiry conducted in the unitary perception and telic conception of social reality would have other grounds and ends in view, which themselves become signifiers or qualifiers of conflict. He would take that condition as a symptom of a substantive disorder or disjuncture, which would then constitute the proper target for social inquiry. Conflict, in the sense of forced confrontation and imposed encounter, may be a means to avert a wrong, to "right" an order, but there are a variety of means of achieving such a betterment, and conflict is not the norm. "Standing up for" something and "standing up to" some happening suggest countering a violation or an aggression, a taking of the initiative to set things right. All of this amounts to a different reading of social reality, which reflects on other central values in social theory too. Conflict for control and mastery assumes a conception of power as a value to be had. Beyond its instrumentality, power becomes an acquisition, and conflict is the enabling mechanism. In the *dafi\_ia* context, power is associated with a field of exercise, not an object of acquisition. This paves the way for ascertaining the ends to which it is exercised, and reinforces the purposefulness of the deterrent/initiative suggested in the generative concept. This again redounds on the nature and the role of social theory in two contrasting modes, so that ultimately an inquiry into the semantics of a controversial concept ends up verifying/validating its sociological significance. Beyond contesting the counter-implications of a conflictual ontology and epistemology, it is necessary in the Median Culture-type to make another qualification. Differences among the constituents of a community, whether that community is globally or locally conceived, or differences among the participants in a situation, fall within a broader category of characteristically human exchange. The resulting institutional complexes potentially cover a broad spectrum of nuanced transactions, and can by no means be primarily conceived in terms of antagonisms and paradoxes. Functionally, complementarity is the norm, while "kinetically" a distended dynamic provides the code. The conceptual as well as the institutional matrix in the different domains and levels of the social order in that culture-medium are projected so as to assure that this complementarity and affirmative dynamic are in fact the assumed norm.<sup>150</sup>

Variety and difference are not only a part of the "natural (created) order" to which the social order bears an affinity in consonance, and to which it could plausibly be made to conform. This variety is ordained and sanctioned in the *tawhidi* principle which legitimates both orders: the cosmic and the social. This legitimating principle assumes its noetic/conceptual expression at the level of the belief-system it engenders (*al-‘aqidah*); it also assumes an ethico-legalist expression at the font of the social order at the organizational level, in the form of the *shari\_ah*. Admitting this principle

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<sup>150</sup> Hammuda Abdel Ati, *Family Structure in Islam* (American Trust Publications, 1979). Combining his Azharite training with his western graduate work, Abdel Ati withstood the attractions of the dominant sociology which continues through its conflictual binary reductionisms and its materialist power orientations to condition much research and writing, particularly in the area of feminist scholarship in general and women in Islam/the Middle East in particular. This is an epistemic flaw which cannot be reduced to the "ideology versus science" distinction to which Nikki Keddie refers ("Problems in the Study of Women in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 10 (1979), 225-240), a distinction and category which itself bears questioning in a critical social theory. See ch. 1 of John B. Thomson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1990).

goes beyond its historical relevance in the Muslim ecumene to its sociological implications for a global moral order.

In this light, it is quite implausible to assume, for example, that the religious tolerance for which the *pax Islamica* was justly celebrated was simply a piece of accidental charity, or that it was merely the reflex of long-ingrained ancient "Middle Eastern" traditions antedating Islam. Indeed, it was the centuries of Roman/Byzantine oppression and persecution in the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores which not only shaped the history of Christianity and dictated which sects prevailed, but which also paved the way for the swift spread of the Islamic conquests there and for the overall favorable attitude of the local populations to their new Muslim conquerors by the latter seventh century.<sup>151</sup> In attempting to explain away religious tolerance in Muslim history, it was naive if not tendentious to claim that it was in conformity with prevailing conventions (*\_urf*) which provided that communal rights were voluntarily extended to various religious communities. While conceivably the ancient Semitic Orient might have known a wider range of tolerance to communal differences than many in the medieval western world could have even dreamed of, the nature and practice of religious tolerance in the Muslim experience was hardly an unwitting extension of ancient folk traditions. Instead, it owed its significance to systemic factors intrinsic to a deliberate and self-conscious principle of order in community that was both institutionalized in historic precedent and prophetic practice as well as enunciated within the explicit and consensual parameters of the Islamic monotheistic paradigm and its normative precepts.

Again, the folly of claiming convention to have been the arbitrator here can only be seen against the power realities of the day. Where the socio-political order was founded on a religiously inspired belief-system (i.e., an "ideology"), and where the judicial foundations of that order were built into a normative, sociological, and educational system, the issue of communal affiliation and the practice of religious tolerance was hardly a matter of public indifference, as it became with the secularization of the western mind. In the sense of transcending the ascriptive principle of identity formation and power organization, Islam as world order belongs as much to the post-axial "modern" historical system as to the ancient or medieval worlds of "tradition."<sup>152</sup> In evoking our historical analogies, we do not have far to look, whether we take the comprehensive social order enjoined in Islam as a precedent to the ideological order of modernity, or whether we stop to examine one or another variant of the ecclesiastical order in premodern Europe, or Europe on that protracted eve of modernity. In either case, it is not hard to see that paralleling the conflicting ideological interests of the modern Cold War era in a Euro-dominant age, the religious cleavages and clashes of a medieval world were potentially no less intense or deadly, were it not for the more modest means of destruction at their disposal. The Middle Eastern social order was witness to such intensity

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<sup>151</sup> That tolerance was hardly an issue, for it was "the way things always were anyway in the older empires" was the remark casually made to the author by a Columbia Professor in a private exchange which followed a relevant panel session at the 1988 Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association. Inadvertently, too, this might not simply be a matter of interpretation, misinformation, or indifference; it reflects on controversial categories of periodization (Islam as belonging to an order of "antiquity"), which bear questioning as part of both an ideological construct and a Eurocentric timeline. Historical perceptions have a direct bearing for epistemologies and social theories as well, especially in the context of *scientia perrenis* perspectives in the former and evolutionary perspectives and categories in the latter.

<sup>152</sup> See S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Axial Age Breakthrough: Their Characteristics and their Origins" in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (State University of New York, 1986).



wherever that dominance was spread and its means assured. Thus, the interlude of the intrusive crusading kingdoms in the Muslim Mediterranean around the twelfth century (1095-1274 C.E.) merely replicated the uncompromising exclusivism and the liminal principles of identity assertion and power dominance that were now imposed under the Frankish hordes in place of the earlier Romans and Byzantines.<sup>153</sup> What, then, was the restraining factor allowing for tolerance of diversity under the "Islamicate?" Was not this tolerance embedded in its very constitution, which impelled a keen observer of the scene to craft a graphic term to depict a unique reality?<sup>154</sup> If it were not merely a projection of a time-honoured convention, can it be attributed to an enlightened self-interest? Not to belabor the obvious, it might be pointed out that other factors were indeed at work. Where the political powers of the day were under no compulsion to compromise with the Other, whether out of expediency, interest, or similar motivations, as was the case with their later imperial successors in the middle Ottoman period, the roots for a systemic tolerance under the earlier Islamic dynasties surely deserve to be examined more objectively.<sup>155</sup>

Such an inquiry might provide the relevant and much needed model for a contemporary social theory called upon to address the problems and to redress the grievances of increasingly heterogeneous, multi-ethnic societies. Such theory would be grounded in the norms of a historical practice as much as in the cognitive principles of a "knowledge culture" with its tradition of learned inquiry. This is possible because a *tawhidi* philosophical anthropology postulates for its point of

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<sup>153</sup> We have in mind particularly the carnage of the First or the Jerusalem Crusade and how it compares negatively with the Muslim conquest and reconquest of the holy city. Eventually, the crusaders were tamed or acculturated to the civility and tolerance of the Islamicate, and returned to Europe with a code of chivalry. See Francis Peters, "The Early Muslim Empires" in Marjorie Kelly, ed., *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community* (New York: Praeger, 1984), esp. pp.76-77 and 85; John Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62-65; and Roger Savory, "Christendom vs. Islam: Interaction and Coexistence," in *Introduction to Islamic Civilization*, R. Savory, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Contemporary western sources on the epoch generally hover between an economy of stance and a deliberate ambiguity. Edward Synan, "Theological Discussion of the Crusades by Twelfth Century Christians" in *Essays in Islamic and Comparative Studies*, edited by Ismail R. al Faruqi (Brentwood, MD: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982). The recent reprint of Francesco Gabrieli's *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. from the Italian by E. J. Costello, (1957; reprint, New York: Dorset Press, 1989) is hardly an innocent academic or cultural diversion, in view of its timing ("the Rushdie affair"), previous publications of this press (e.g., Robert Payne's notorious *The History of Islam* [1987]), and the questionable quality of aspects of the selections/translations of the work at hand itself, too numerous and pervasive to pin down here (but see, e.g., p.165 ),- the jacket-cover's pieties notwithstanding. Classics in the scholarly sense were Harold Lamb's two volumes (1945) and Hilaire Belloc's challenging title: *The Crusades: The World's Debate* (1937). More recently (1987), a short history of the Crusades by Jonathan Riley has been published by Yale University Press; while Pamela Kernaghan's *The Crusades: Cultures in Conflict* (Camb. Univ. Press, 1993), published as part of the Cambridge History Program, is strangely evocative of the Huntingtonian thesis of global trends in international conflict

<sup>154</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, vol. 1, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 Vols., (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 57-60. For a compact and enlightening review of this work, see Albert Hourani, ch. 3, *Islam in European Thought* (Camb.: Camb. Univ. Press, 1993).

<sup>155</sup> This includes observing a more skeptical attitude to sources chronicling the initial conquests and reporting the alleged terms of the conquerors. See Fred M. Donner on the problem of the historicity of texts, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 246-247.

departure a diversity and a difference within a framework of essential unity and affinity.<sup>156</sup> Within such an anthropology, the dynamics of self-realization are predicated on the interaction and complementarity of different cultural entities, each constituting a moral entity in its own right and potentially capable of, and responsible for, fulfilling its morality in the course of its interaction with the Other/s. There are no privileged exemptions, or salvationist eschatologies reserved for any birth rights. Instead of dichotomy and polarities in a universe postulated on confrontation and competitive survival, a *tawhidi* anthropology assumes, beyond a rationality, a legitimacy for diversity and premises its principles of social interaction accordingly. Communities are not just left to be, existentially acknowledged as it were. They are entitled to their identities, and partake of the mutual reciprocities, in terms of socio-ethical dues and legal rights and responsibilities that attend the web of mutual obligations. They do so within the bounds of an intra-group order that underlines a commonality assuring a threshold of solidarity, and that is anchored in a transcendent moral ground which is the source and warranty. Unlike contemporary social theory, whether in its neo-liberal and radical mood or in its conservative refrain, there can be no room for parochialism. There is instead, in a *tawhidi* sociology, a matrix for a social jurisprudence that goes beyond instrumentality in preserving the groundwork for a moral order that accommodates the principle of equity in a communal context of individual and collective diversity. A seemingly redundant discourse on "rationality" and "legitimacy" such as that cultivated in contemporary social theory has painfully little to say to emergent global needs in view of the reductionism that inheres in the dominant rationality and the narrow and egoistic utilitarianism of its ethics.

In short, the pursuit of contemporary social theory in its characteristic conflictual/confrontational modes of thought and inquiry against a hermeneutic of suspicion can only leave it as ill-equipped as ever in dealing with a polyarchic model of interdependence, whether global or on lower levels of community. The lag is particularly devastating in the case of an American academy and a socially conscious intellect, as it comes precisely at a moment when the pressures to live up to a calling as much as to immediate professional needs mount. With the competence of social theory in doubt before those issues which currently impinge on both the social conscience and the social order, this lag cannot be resolved by continuing to rely on an empirical efficacy and indulging the pragmatic sensibility for more social engineering in the absence of its substantial premises. The staying issues that defy a procedural or technical resolution include a range of problems of an essentially socio-ethical dimension, which are steadily politicized, and which come to cast an entirely different light/shadow on matters of freedom, individuality, and tolerance in a permissive and amoral society.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*. (London: Mansell, 1989).

<sup>157</sup> The ideas of Sustainable Growth and a Sustainable Society gained currency by the latter seventies and early eighties in the context of third world and globalization literature, expressing the disillusion with a failed development and modernization agenda and shifting emphasis to concepts like equity, interdependence, ecology, morality, community, and the general re-evaluation of value. See *The Center Cannot Hold*, *op cit*. Sociology in the tradition of Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, and others, which was considered marginal or counter-culture in the sixties, assumed a new significance amid the newer voices. In the American setting, the terminus and home of much social theory, the situation is compounded by the anxiety over the values of western civilization amid the demographic challenges multi-ethnicity poses, so that social theory jargon on cultural relativism became central to public discourse and the media, forcing major debates on America's Cultural Wars in academia and literary circles. See "Polarizing American Culture," *Social Science and Modern Society*, 30, no.5 Special Issue (July/August 1993). See also Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) and Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York:

Clearly, other aspects in the area of conflictual dynamics and group accommodation could be addressed from within a reflexive social theory. These include the mechanisms needed for re-channelling or for mobilizing the tensions which arise from existing polarities. The parameters of social interaction need to be redefined at a time when the boundaries between socio-cultural entities, individuals and communities, the state and society, the national and the supra/intra-national, are in flux.<sup>158</sup> The scales need to be relocated so as to determine at which point differences become dissonances, and the potential or inertia for complementarity is suffused into negative tensions feeding into hostility. Differences, variations, and gradations are part of any social order. Yet these differences do not of themselves translate into disparities and antagonisms, any more than the competitive impulse can be reduced to an exclusive and exclusionary jingoism. An objective inquiry would be a prudent inquiry, one that would entail a framework which does not prejudice or bias and anticipate the "findings" in one way or the other, to use the language of a conventional or "normal" sociology. But unlike conventional sociology, it would not shun, or pretend to shun, a high ground of adjudicating or arbitrating referents by which it could provide the means for choosing and deciding on practical consequences. Such a framework would also be open to differentiating contexts in response to the complexity and variety in the human condition reflecting on the legitimacy and possibility of variable arrangements. Once the inflationary ego and its self-referential field of perception and presumption that underlie and feed the conflictual ethos are restrained, then too it would be possible to entertain horizons of purposeful engagement and reciprocity in the social world. The challenges to such a social theory would continue, but the changing agenda would prompt changing emphases and priorities. Under what conditions would differences be precipitated into corrosive factors impinging on the nexus of the social order? Conversely, how could such differences be deployed to vitalize and integrate the social entity? These are questions which already suggest value preferences. No inquiry can be value-free, nor should it. The issue is what kind of values are at stake in examining diversity and difference, and what are the pertinent and enduring parameters within which such an inquiry is to be conducted and beyond which it would be futile, or meaningless, or both.

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Free Press, 1991).

<sup>158</sup> See, e.g., R. Munch, *Understanding Modernity*, (*op cit.*), where the search is for carrying the theory of social action (as voluntaristic and directional) beyond its current stalemate by reinterpreting and synthesizing the work of the founding fathers around a post-Weberian synthesis, which takes "interpenetration" for an operational category. Anthony Giddens' work on structuration is similarly involved with trying this synthesis, though more in a post-Marxian mode.

## THE MATRIX OF INQUIRY: A SEQUEL

Beyond its implications for the disruption of trends within the profession, a flawed matrix has other more general consequences in fragmenting the field of inquiry itself. One aspect is the distortion of realities perceived. Here again, an incidence taken from the medieval European encounter with the Islamic heritage, and the way in which it was processed in the cultural filter of its times, may be instructive. One of the persistent questions in this area is how Europe emerged from this encounter virtually untouched by the metaphysics of a culture from which it borrowed substantially in significant domains.<sup>159</sup> The following passage gives us a clue to both a manner of perception and a mode of reception. It comes from a work in a series devoted to exploring *The Spirit of Western Civilization* and which might otherwise have been a significantly enlightening anthology on its subject:

... the separation of intellectual from religious life, the ideal of many in universities today, may be looked at through the historical experience and be better seen for what it is, not as a simple continuation of classical antiquity, but as a page taken from the history of Islam.<sup>160</sup>

The context of this comment is an introduction to Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), a selection already indicating how narrowly the "Islamic Tradition," which is the title of this section in the book, was perceived. While neither of the great philosophers may have necessarily epitomized the "tradition," and while both admittedly shared an admiration for Aristotle, it is inconceivable that they should be insulated from their historical and socio-cultural medium, which was unequivocally Islamic ("Islamicate"), and inconceivable to ignore its formative impact upon them. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), for example, had learned the Qur'an by heart by the age of twelve, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) had received the usual training of his class in the range of Islamic sciences of his day before he went on to devour philosophy. Unlike the modernist Muslim "philosophes" and rationalists, their assumed "infatuation" with the classics was tempered by their anchoring formation in the Islamic tradition. The Aristotelianism of Ibn Rushd and the neo-Platonism of Ibn Sina were ultimately mediated through a residual originality, in ways which are inconceivable with their modern heirs and aspirants.

To truncate a tradition and attempt to cut off the Muslim classicists from their culture formations and resources, then, is symptomatic of more than an academic partiality or a mere individual eccentricity on the part of one commentator or another. Indeed, the paradigm of knowledge within

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<sup>159</sup> A less typical but much needed perspective in current literature is Roger Garaudy, *L'Islam habite notre Avenir* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1981), which assesses the Islamic contribution to the European renaissance against its Islamic doctrinal and metaphysical underpinnings, and uses it as a precedent for a cultural dialogue. See George Sarton's *The Incubation of Western Culture in the Middle East* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1951). More typical of the general literature in this area is John R. Hayes, ed., *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance* (Camb. Mass: MIT Press, 1983); Rom Landau, *The Arab Heritage of Western Civilization* (New York: The League of Arab States, 1975); Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (Seattle and London: Univ. of Washington Press, 1987), where, however, the emphasis shifts to examining actual contact and evolving images of Islam, as with Norman Daniel, Waardenburg, Southern, and Albert Hourani.

<sup>160</sup> William Bryar, comp., *The Rebirth of Learning: The First Twelve Centuries, The Spirit of Western Civilization* (New York: Putnam, 1968), 184.

the Islamic legacy bears investigation,<sup>161</sup> in view of an illustrious pedigree and its continuity, as well as because of the unrivaled cultural osmosis which occurred in it with the mixed sources of Antiquity, particularly that of the Hellenic and Hellenistic varieties. An indelible imprint of this symbiotic moment was left, at least at one level of the Muslim paradigm that identified with the *falasifa*, and for the rest it ended up permeating the tradition to different degrees. Yet, even at that level, the evidence does not warrant ignoring the elements of an authentic Islamic tradition which is predicated on its unique perspective on reality and its modes of representation, and which cannot be subsumed under the Western paradigms of rationality and authority without its perversion. More often though, the very terms in which the tradition has been processed in the West from its sources has constituted a barrier to interpreting its constituents and has served merely to isolate its episodes.<sup>162</sup> In the case at hand, to perceive that separation or fragmentation in the areas of inquiry was the norm in Muslim culture may partly be due to a different understanding of what it is that constitutes a religious and what a secular question.<sup>163</sup> While clearly there are radical differences between the foundational and historical Islamic and Christian traditions on the matter, and while it is understandable that the culture-filter in Western Christendom should operate within its own tradition, yet the question is that the authority or frame of inquiry here, in this as in other works on the subject, was such as to appropriate this assumption about the Other in history without question. It left no room for even raising the question of a possible difference in conceptions.

If this observation is extended to other domains, the same incidence of incongruities will crop up with disconcerting regularity. This is how it was possible to mutilate the spirit of empirical inquiry in the course of its transmission into the Western cultural space. There, to use Maritain's terms, as the "empiriological" tradition in the Median Culture was stripped of its metaphysics, so too the co-

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<sup>161</sup> Such an inquiry should not be assumed under the materialist and historicist predilection currently in vogue among the radical revisionists, who stepped in to fill the void in the absence of more authentic and reliable approaches to Muslim historical and socio-cultural phenomena.. The value of a recent study in mixed cultural context lies precisely in its attempt to liberate itself from the dominant paradigm in addressing the situation of a Muslim population, and in that it seeks to construct a paradigm in terms of criteria internally valid to the Islamic world view. Kenneth Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines* (Durham, N.C.: Acorn Press, 1991). I am indebted to Professor Ralf Braibanti, J. B. Duke Professor, for bringing to my attention this book upon its publication.

<sup>162</sup> More than familiarity and access to the tradition, it takes courage and integrity to question standard interpretations and dislodge misconstrued analogies. Yet, this is what Oliver Leaman attempts to do in questioning the appropriateness of taking the work of the Islamicate Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed" as a "guide" to the paradigm of the *falasifa* and *falsafa* as practiced in the Muslim space. He suggests how this initial bias became a source for reinforcing misconceptions. "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *IJMES* 12, no.4 (December 1980) 525-538.

<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, the different schools within the tradition and the differences between them, the ambiguities inherent in distinguishing between the *naqli* (transmitted) or *shar\_i* sciences and the rationalist or *\_aqli* sciences, and the rift between the "*falasifa*" and the "*fuqaha*" were among the factors which encouraged such facile conclusions, even among Muslim students, and which were reflected in conventions of writing about the Islamic theory of knowledge, alternately confounding it with one school or another, depending on the author's training or predilections. See M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 2 vol., (1963; reprint, Wiesbaden: Otto Harasowitz, 1966); C. A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); S. H. Nasr, "The Teaching of Philosophy" in *Philosophy, Literature and the Fine Arts*, Islamic Education Series, S. H. Nasr ed., (King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982); and *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Camb. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968).

naturalist orientation of a tradition of empirical inquiry was lost. "Co-naturalism," it may be recalled, is a Thomistic term used in the *Summa Theologica* to convey the essentials of the *fitriic* sensibility, and is itself a token of the significant Islamic influences of the period shaping the scholastic tradition, contrary to some devious attempts to evade the issue.

More intimately impinging on our field as social scientists, is the case of the positivist - and the positive - distortion of Ibn Khaldun.<sup>164</sup> Again, here was a blatant case of cultural amputation, as the Muslim historian and theoretician was abstracted from his socio-cultural setting and conceived in terms of an odd genius in a primitive culture who would anticipate the coming of modernity itself. Little could it be realized that Ibn Khaldun belonged to a lineage of great system-builders in a cultural matrix that generated such architects. Like Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Razi, or before them, Imam al-Shafe\_i, each would leave his synthesizing imprint in an area of knowledge which would have its relevance for a contemporary Islamic social theory, were it only to be adequately reinterpreted and developed in the context of our times and needs. Little, in the prevailing orientalizing scholarship of our day, could it be realized how the new science of Human Civilization, the *\_ilm al-\_umran al-bashari*,<sup>165</sup> was conceived in the spirit of such a synthesis. In this case, the new science drew on the inductive sciences coming from *hadith* scholarship, and the deductive sciences cultivated in the *usuli (usul al-fiqh)*, the bases of jurisprudence) tradition of inquiry. Ibn Khaldun applied this integrated methodology to the domain of conventional historiography, which by his time had grown into a voluminous body and tradition of a wealthy cumulation of historical narrative.

Given the proclivities in the Islamic tradition of learning to critically investigate the possibility of a methodological/systematic structure for verification and for evaluating the truth of the reported event or its transmitted narration, the conditions for the conception of the new discipline were rife. If it had not been Ibn Khaldun, it would have been another figure, although there were admittedly precipitating factors which made the Muslim West a hospitable medium for this development. As far as the objective concern for ascertaining the reliability of information goes, it should be remembered that this concern lay at the roots of a tradition of scholarship and devoted inquiry which had developed in the culture-mode associated with historical Islam. Its direct impetus came from the orientation and habits of mind and the moral injunctions inculcated by the Qur\_an and the *Sunnah*. The first stirrings in this direction of cultivating a tradition of inquiry activated by the

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<sup>164</sup> Insights relevant to an epistemic perspective have recently come from Fuad Baali and Ali Wardi, *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Thought Styles* (Boston: G. Hall, 1981), using a social knowledge approach; and Aziz Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London: Third World Center for Research and Publication, 1981), and *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Routledge, 1982). Azmeh's pioneering initiative at deconstructing semantic fields and paradigmatic contexts, both within the *Muqaddima* itself and within the orientalist scholarship on Ibn Khaldun, may well constitute the work of "radical revisionist intent" he claims it to be, but it is certainly not a work without "malign intent." With consummate skill, he reconstructs the whole from the parts, using metaphors of decentering and dislocation, only to tear down an edifice dismissed for its logical limitations and historicity. Like the compulsive Nietzschean decadence which inspires it, the work is totally alien to the spirit of the tradition and world view it dissects. It tells us more about Azmeh's calibre as a scholar, whose genius is more attuned to the orientalism he is critiquing than he realizes. The Khaldunian repertory of scholarship, as much as its original, retains its perennial value for scholarship in both the Islamic and Western tradition.

<sup>165</sup> Appropriately rendered into German as "*Kulturwissenschaft*". See Heinrich Simon, *Ibn Khaldun's Science of Human Culture*, trans. by Fuad Baali, (Rep. Kashmir and Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1978).

concern for integrity and veracity was, not surprisingly,<sup>166</sup> developed in the immediate vicinity of the sciences which grew around the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.<sup>167</sup> These would constitute the core and nucleus of an authentic and unrivaled tradition of learning in Islam, one which would be perverted in the course of its transmutation to another mode of cultural inquiry and immobilized alternately through fossilization and contamination within its immediate culture-medium.

The culprits in misrepresenting a tradition are neither the Westernists and Orientalists nor the Muslims who have followed in their tracks, knowingly or otherwise. The problem rather lies in the matrix which structures all research and inquiry in the field, and which proves to be hopelessly inadequate whenever it comes to processing the semantics and the epistemic and social fields of experience in other cultures. While the dimensions of relativism and universalism have been debated in contemporary social theory,<sup>168</sup> the challenge is to rethink the matrix of inquiry against this problematique, not the reverse. This is particularly needed if the globalization of social theory is not to become simply another arm in the imperialistic epistemology,<sup>169</sup> and if we are to supercede the present stage of cultural hegemony politics to a dynamic more conducive to cultural parity. Rethinking contemporary social theory against a redefinition of its scope, and the restitution of the vertical bearings of knowledge and being which are implicit in the conceptual vistas of a contrasting episteme, has suggested limitations and constraints, as well as possibilities and opportunities. Neither the conflictual ethos nor the binary reductionist matrix need be unqualified parameters for a social theory which is pre-eminently historicist and lends itself to critical construction, as suggested

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<sup>166</sup> To date, perhaps the exemplary source on this subject to bring out the nodality of the Qur'anic nexus for the multifaceted cultural efflorescence, in its intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, moral, philosophical, and religious dimensions, is Ismail al Faruqi and Lois Lamy al Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, Part IV, (London and New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986). See in conj. with Chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>167</sup> *Hadith* scholarship, connoting a tradition of meticulous, objective, and systematic inquiry, retains its significance for intellectual reform. Z. S. Sarar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London: Croom and Helm, 1982). In modernist circles, the *sunnah* was seen to pose certain methodological problems which needed to be addressed before it could be taken as a source for such reform. Yusuf Qaradawi's *Kaifa nata amal ma al sunnah* (Herndon, Va.: IIIT, 1990) addresses this concern from within a tradition which remains intractable. See also Sheikh Abdul Ghani's *Hujjiyat al Sunnah* (Herndon, Va.: IIIT, 1989). The movement to critique and reconstruct the modern Islamic episteme takes its logical axis from a rediscovery of its authentic sources, including the authoritative *sunnah*, in terms of new methodologies which are to be generated in this process of rediscovery in the context of modernity. Taha J. Alalwani *Islah Manahij al Fikr* (Herndon, Va.: IIIT 1992), and *Ilm al Ilm: muqaddima* (Herndon, Va.: IIIT, 1994).

<sup>168</sup> See Ernest Gellner, *Relativism and the Social Sciences* (Camb.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).

<sup>169</sup> Abdel Wahab al Messiri, *op cit.*; on globalization, see R. Robertson "Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept" in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, edited by M. Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990); I. Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science. The Limits of Nineteenth Century Paradigms* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991); Roland Axtmann, "Society, Globalization and the Comparative Method," *History of the Social Sciences* 6 no.2 (May 1993), 53-74. Bearing in mind the ideological constraints and restricted audience he is addressing, Samir Amin's recent writing also provides some relevant insights from our contrasting epistemics perspective, esp. where he contours the "developed Arab-Islamic version" of the medieval tributary culture against its "peripheral Western version," and where he traces the construction of the Eurocentric culture. *Eurocentrism*, trans. from the French by Russell Moore, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

in this essay. The requisites for a more generative social theory call for a new understanding as well as a new resolve, an ability and a willingness to see, for example, that a dualistic and schismatic conception can hardly be expected to handle the load coming from a unitary conceptual matrix without splitting it, and the realization that a fragmenting and reductionist matrix cannot deal with the experiences and the meanings conceived in a holistic and integrated tradition without distortion. To be able to address the challenges attending the reconstruction of social theory, it will be necessary to reconsider the paradigm of inquiry with an eye on expanding current perceptions of the scientific community or the Habermasian speech community beyond a parochialism or neo-tribalism masquerading in the garb of a flawed sense of modernity. Once this has been accomplished, the necessarily expanded sphere of knowledge and interests represented in that community will reflect on a re-orientation in the horizons of inquiry and social theory could then capitalize on fresh currents of alimentation in addition to existing latent sources and energies. Needless to say, the revitalization of social theory is a function of a *qualitative* expansion in the community of inquiry without which it would be impossible to escape the vicious circle and voracious appetite for wasteful energy consumption that inheres in the morbid dynamism of the Oscillating Culture.



## BEYOND CULTURAL PARODIES AND PARODIZING CULTURES: SHAPING A DISCOURSE

*"Why if a fish came to me and told me he was going on a journey, I should say, 'With what porpoise?'" "Don't you mean 'purpose?'" said Alice. "I mean what I say," the Mock Turtle replied in an offended tone.*

(Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)

*Consider this analogy: There was a man beneath a tree. He wished to collect his thoughts, but the sparrows disturbed him with their chirping. He would chase them with his stick and then resume his train of thought, but the sparrows would come back and he would have to scare them away... Eventually someone told him: "This is like being a slave at the wheel going round and round forever. If you want to escape the vicious circle, you should fell the tree."*

(Imam al-Ghazali, *Ihya' ulum al din*)

### INITIAL PERSPECTIVES

The prevailing secularist culture, which is identified with modernity and with the historical Occident, subverts morality to power and principles to expedience. Unchecked in its morbid dynamism, it has become a global threat as its influence spreads to englobe every other culture and its voice rules. In the glut, a deadly silence falls which goes unnoticed in the distraction that attends a virtual monopoly of discourse. Dominance cannot be equated with truth, although it no doubt benefits from the old confusion of right with might. The need is for laying the woof and warp for a new discourse which is immune to its own perversities. Minds fed on the myths of the dominant culture need to be provoked into rethinking their complacencies, and weaned to the idea that whatever the culture which might prevail at any given moment, there is always another possibility, an alternative to understanding and to virtue. The possibility for recovery and renewal, whatever the cultural givens/constructs might be, is a function of this openness and orientation which goes beyond the self to embrace the Other.

This is where a Contrasting Episteme is advocated as an approach and a strategy for bridging cultures and for laying the foundations for a dynamic of critical reflection and reconstruction. It is inspired by a hermeneutic of mutuality which takes difference as a dialectic for convergence. Contrasts can be conducted at any level of discourse and within any of its strands. The purpose, however, is to launch it at a foundational level which addresses the major presuppositions of cognition and affection, and to proceed from there to see how the ground-rules for a reshaping discourse can develop. There are three major assumptions which condition this premise: (1) Present civilization is at a cross-roads as it must deal with the existing chasm between its material accomplishments and its moral failures; (2) It is not enough to critique the prevailing culture but the challenge is to transform it; and (3) The sources for meeting such a challenge cannot be reinvented from the debris of extant cultures, but must be sought in the Transcendent.

Two basic culture types are projected to take their distinct stance from an outlook and understanding of the fundamental categories of existence: man, nature, and life. Are these essentially autonomous or dependent categories? In the one case we encounter a culture mode that takes its bearings from a horizontal axis; in the other, the bearings are projected onto a vertical axis.

The dominant paradigm today has been shaped against the horizontal axis; the *tawhidi* episteme, which is the subject of recall and recollection from the depths of a universal and generic human history, evokes the vertical axis. Modes of thought and apprehension are projected into their socio-cultural and historical plane in terms of variants of an Oscillating Culture-type and of a Median Culture-type. One further caution should be noted here: Muslims and Islam are not interchangeable conceptual referents, and the Oscillating Culture and the "West" are not immutable conflates. With the predicament of modernity, the Oscillating Culture is a common but not invincible fate, and the Median Culture is the source for a wholesome recovery and renewal/reconstruction for all those with a stake in the future of humanity.

We have already explored some of the implications of these assumptions and introduced certain concepts suggesting areas in which new perspectives could be developed. Social theory as a vocation was proposed to reorient attitudes in the field.<sup>170</sup> A hermeneutic of mutuality was predicated on an ethos of renunciation and reconciliation that paved the way for transcending the Self/Other dichotomy. This was referred to as engaging in a co-substantiating mode of discourse.<sup>171</sup> In this presentation, another forum for developing these concepts is sought as the resources of a Contrasting Episteme and of its instrumental culture-types are further mined. The focus is on the elements of a cultural discourse that is critical of the dominant secularist culture, understood here essentially in terms of a diminishing and diminished sense of value and a pervasive disorientation. Interest shifts to modes of discourse. A vocabulary for the recognition of the malaise and its articulation is sought both within the Western tradition and from Muslim sources. One lesson of an integrated and synthetic approach is to see continuities not simply within each tradition but among historically differentiated traditions. Another lesson is to see how enriching for the current discourse in the West it might be to become attentive to other voices. A third lesson is to suggest that in recovering a voice from the Muslim tradition in particular that discourse can be significantly enlightened, because reason there was not subverted by pretensions to autonomy or by indulgences in excess. In that tradition, one could doubt without being cynical, and one could hope without abandoning reason. Above all, the alternative to rationality was not absurdity. Common sense was grounded in a *fitric* and empirical/pragmatic sensibility which was reinforced by the pervasive, principled convictions in a Revelation which provided the impetus to the individual and to the group at all levels of activity and creativity. This, in brief, is what commands attention to voices articulated in the Muslim tradition.

In the makings of an intercultural discourse, the parameters of rationality are implicitly invoked, and so too are the boundaries between the humanities and the social sciences. The implication is that the social sciences must be grounded in a discourse that is morally conscious, and that the humanities must reinterpret their material and domain so as to become historically relevant. This too is a lesson which cannot be learned in isolation or deliberated upon in a presumptuous self-sufficiency. A hermeneutic of mutuality would sharpen sensibilities of areas of complementarity and enrich perspectives on the human condition and its potential for morality. The above lessons are significant in themselves, and can be demonstrated in any number of ways by recourse to sophisticated and specialized arguments. The presentation here, however, opts for a simplicity and a directness in the illustrations it selects, as it moves from one plane to another, to show how

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<sup>170</sup> "Contrasting Epistemics: *Tawhid*, the Vocationist, and Social Science," *AJISS* 7, no. 1 (March 1990).

<sup>171</sup> "The Art, the Artifact, and the Artist," in *Where East Meets West: The West on the Agenda of the Islamic Revival* (Herndon, Va: The International Institute of Islamic Thought).

evolving a discourse in the perspective of a Contrasting Episteme can reveal much that is pertinent within each tradition. At the same time, it points to the direction where convergence can be a virtue as it invites a critical reflection of the dominant paradigm. The background to this reading relies on technique as much as on the interface of culture types and modes of discourse. Its aim is to show the range and possibilities which inhere in such a perspective.

### PARABLES, METAPHORS, AND HEROES RE-MEMBERED

A Contrasting Episteme would be a timely check against the random distortions which might have occurred in cultural encounter in the past. It would also contribute significantly to relocating the distorted elements of the misrepresented culture to the benefit of the modern encounter. An example may illustrate this point. The negative transfiguration of Ibn Tufail's hero into Daniel Defoe's precursor of *homo economicos* is an eloquent testimony to what happens when one party appropriates to itself the prerogative of interpreting the tradition of the Other - and in the process manages to completely deform it.<sup>172</sup> Obviously, it would be naive to contend that Crusoe on his desert island was deliberately conceived in the mould of Ibn Yaqzan, nor is it even adequate to speak of a reductionist detransfiguration of roles and images between a *homo sapiens* and a *homo faber*. This would be too crude for intellectual justice and miss the point of the nuanced readings within the respective traditions. Yet, because Ibn Tufail's story could be seen to epitomize much that is significant from the perspective of a Contrasting Episteme, a brief account may yield some refreshing insights which could be followed up elsewhere.

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, the living, son of He who is ever awake, ever-watchful (which is the literal meaning of this hero's name), found himself in an island deserted of all human habitation. His very conception and survival were a token of a providential care. He was, it will be recalled, nurtured by a doe that had lost its fawn and that chanced upon the suckling babe, just at the right moment. As he grew into consciousness, he became steadily aware of the qualities of a divine sustaining presence, until he was led through his yearning and untiring search into an encounter with it. In substance and in form, the story was entirely consistent with the world-view of the culture which spawned it, and was conspicuously representative of the mood of its times. After all, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan did not reach the highest truth through mere contemplation, nor through the tireless speculations of the philosophes. Rather, it was through his active and practical involvement in his daily, mundane surroundings that his journey began from a concrete and visible world to the reality beyond it. It began with a systematic, patient, and persistent curiosity that took him through a fascinating progression of stages in practical and intellectual inquiry, engaging him in a full-fledged exercise of first his *sensory* perceptions, then the *rational* faculties, and leading to the ultimate discovery of the *extra-sensory*, with the consummation of the "theosophical." It was a journey in interiority and self-transcendence where the leitmotif, demonstrated at every turn, was that the world of the visible pointed to a world beyond it. This in fact was the summation included in al-Ghazali's own highly original theory of knowledge, and al-Ghazali was the grand synthesizer of a

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<sup>172</sup> As Will Durant observes, "Abu Bakr Ibn Tufail (1107-1185 C.E.), [the Andalusian philosopher-scholar] found time to write among more technical works the most remarkable philosophical romance in medieval literature.... and (through Ockley's English translation in 1708) may have suggested Robinson Crusoe to Defoe." From *The Age of Faith*, quoted in M.Fazlurahman Ansari, *The Qur\_anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society*, vol.1 (Karachi: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1977), 211. Very few of those working on Crusoe would recall such a possibility, as is shown by default in one of the more recent studies on the subject which is construed in a hermeneutically meaningful context. See *Beyond Anthropology*.

tradition conceived in the pale of the Median Culture. Only by seeing the story of Ibn Tufail within its cultural tradition is it possible to grasp its integrating and synthetic dimensions, and bring them to bear on a retrospective reading of both modernity and the Muslim legacy.

In acknowledging the genuine intellectual contribution of al-Ghazali and his peers, it would be wrong to attribute the synthesis to their genius or to their ingenuity, and to overlook its elements in the culture they breathed. The culture which became the hallmark of Muslim civilization was certainly, as a historical product of its times, open to the spectrum of influences at play from within "constituent" and surrounding cultures, as assumed in Hodgson's "Islamicate." But what was genuine and unique about it was constituted by an ideal core in which it was originally conceived and which continued to sustain it. The *tawhidi* episteme was the node, or nexus and sustaining mode, or operational parameter and frame, within which the divergent influences crystallized and modulated. The closer the great thinkers proximated this core, the more authentic their expression. In this sense, the ideal-typical culture that corresponded to the *tawhidi* episteme was a Median Culture favoring a proportion and measure, aversive of excess (*hadarat al-mizan, mazajuha al-itidal*). The actual historical culture, as it was lived and experienced at any given moment, was a proximation to this "median," that might vary in degree but not in kind. Its lapses were behavioral rather than structural, and its deviations could be addressed from within the system. The unitary sources and their homogeneity, their internal coherence and integrity, secured stability and continuity for the ideal core as a mainstay of both episteme and culture, and was ultimately reflected in the practice.

The giants in that tradition were great to the extent that they were capable of articulating aspects of that core culture. Even the controversial *falasifa* (the speculative theologians) were representative of the tradition to the extent that they were conditioned by the persistent dimensions in the Ideal Core as they interacted within the "Islamicate." What distinguished the great synthesizers, or system-builders, in the cultural history of Islam, however, was their ability to identify and formulate the elements intrinsic to that core in a manner that replicated the integrality of the whole. In this sense, in *fiqhi* jurisprudence, al-Shafe'i became the instantiation and expression of a synthesis which was already there defining the field of action. It might have been popularized, fragmented, and diffuse, but it was nonetheless intrinsic to the habits of mind and thought engendered through the Median Culture. In the same way, a Fakhreddin al-Razi, an Ibn Hazm, a Shatibi or an Ibn Taymiyya, each in his own way and in his respective field of knowledge and expertise, left his indelible marks. Each brought together the elements of knowledge accumulated to his time and welded the disparate arguments into a systematic whole, to produce a rationalizing and integrating totality, whereby the rationale and logic provided there could assure a systemic coherence to the parts.

The great synthesizers, or system-builders, all belonged to the same great tradition embodying a distinctive way of knowing in its sources, modes, and conceptions. Each would leave his imprint in the paths crossed, beginning with the monumental contribution to laying the foundations of a *fiqhi* jurisprudence by Imam al-Shafe'i and ending, five centuries later, in a science of human culture and civilization with Ibn Khaldun. The range of rationality spanned the ethical and regulative premises that structured the bounds and solidarity of the political community to the principles that shaped its historical consciousness of itself.

A discourse shaped in the perspective of a contrasting episteme is deferential of the internal logic of cultures, and seeks to relate the elements to the whole with an eye on ulteriority. Ibn Tufail's

account invoked a reinterpretation of the culture which spawned it, to the benefit of recovering elements of the Median (*al wasatiya*) which could be meaningful in reassessing the culture of modernity. In such a medium, impetus is given to a range of rationalities, seeking comprehension/comprehensiveness within a radius that is set by an integrating center. Ibn Yaqzan's ascent to interiority was not bought at the expense of negating the external, and for every step of the way, the medium of access called for measure and proportion. In the same way, the growing complexity of the edifice of learning in the Muslim legacy was accompanied by its centripetal tendencies. The "mid-point" is institutionalized to assure a verticality to expansiveness and to serve as a check on fragmentation and dissipation.

### **THE OSCILLATING CULTURE REFINED**

In launching the discourse, a preliminary distinction was made between two culture types: an Oscillating Culture and a Median Culture, with the former identified with a secular humanist paradigm of knowledge, and the latter projecting and instantiating a *tawhidi* episteme. The task is to reassess the one in terms of the other, so as to highlight dimensions which might otherwise be missed. Internal reflection and criticism are reinforced by a cross-reflexive critique, which is to be ultimately relegated to a higher court of appeal, (history/praxis, or a new discursive tradition). In the meantime, a co-substantiating mode calls for reading a culture from within with the purpose of gaining common ground. The following illustration further clarifies this technique.

From the *tawhidi* premise which informs a Contrasting Episteme, the secular humanist dynamic was projected as subject to fluctuations, animated by polarities, and given to excess. It is interesting to see that evidence for such a reading can be found from very different sources exclusively developed within that secularist culture mode. Contemporary critical self-assessments in the West perceive the force of this pendular rhythm within their intellectual tradition, they recognize the antinomies and admit the inclinations to excess. Some will even see in the irreconcilable tensions which feed that tradition a source of vitality, and will support their various theoretical predications on the purging fires of these counter-flexing surges. For those within the Oscillating Tradition, it is hard to conceive of the historical process, or the human condition, in any other way: The scourge of a horizontal axis in an episteme lies in its perennial want of measure and, indeed, in a persistent elusiveness to all measure.

In the event of reading the Oscillating Culture from within, as a co-substantiating mode would require, one can take any moment to illustrate its thrust. Adorno's and Horkheimer's perspicuous reflection on the Western intellectual tradition is as authentic and original as one can get. Its force and resonance come from its context as much as from its content. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the criticism of enlightened reason is developed, was written in the thirties in an attempt to explain how fascism could have developed in a nation that was seemingly the embodiment of liberal ideals. The fact that they were so easily displaced, giving way to irrationality, seemed to be an indictment not only of a particular conception of rationality ("instrumental reason") but of an entire intellectual tradition. At about the same period, the humanist Marxist critic, George Lukas, was already wrestling with the problematic of the vulnerability of reason and the rationalization/bureaucratization processes attending it. While liberating man's productive powers, they saw man himself enslaved, by being reduced to his relations of exchange ("the reification of social relations"). Horkheimer and Adorno took up this critique and radicalized it as they traced this process of reification back to a flaw at the core of the Western idea of reason. This flaw is represented in various ways, but in accounting for it, the critics unknowingly assume the vocationist

perspective. As Alford wrote, it is that Western reason finds no midpoint between idealism and realism:

Reason and its object are divided into two realms. Noble ideals, values, discourse over the good life ... are removed to the abstract realm of the intellect and the spirit. Like religion, which is an instance of these ideals, these themes are often applauded in the abstract. However, precisely because these values come to be seen as an expression of our "higher" selves, they are disconnected from the everyday material world. The material world in turn is given over to crass materialism that brooks no opposition to the contingently given.<sup>173</sup>

Our own construct of the culture-mode associated with the positivist episteme, whether in its humanist or naturalist variants, derives from our understanding of this schizomorphic structure of perceptions which undergirds the Western tradition. It is hardly surprising that this structure should be projected in social theory, and that it should provide the "meeting ground" among the heterogeneous elements from both the left and right of the spectrum as will be noted below. More significantly though, is that the "midpoint" can neither be sought from a culture which defies subjectivity, such as is the case with modernity, nor can it be secured under an order that mistakes its own shadows for objectivity. Only a vertical axis can assure the human psyche and the social order alike that necessary point of fixity around which the whole can cohere, and to which the parts can relate. Only then is it possible to conceive of some reliable measure which can reduce the vulnerability of "instrumental reason" that is at the roots of modern rationalism.

There is a moral to maintaining the above distinction between culture-types and epistemic bearings which could be usefully drawn upon for making other inferences in social theory.<sup>174</sup> Moral is an adjective concerned with character, as well as a noun designating a moral lesson. It is in this latter sense that the West will need to reach beyond itself if it is to circumvent, or overcome, its oscillations. Clearly, opinions vary on the score. There are those who maintain the incommensurability of traditions, and defend their circularity and closure.<sup>175</sup> Others confess to a certain obduracy within the tradition which makes it difficult to communicate with the Other, whose title to differ is only grudgingly conceded in muted tolerance.<sup>176</sup> The periodic interest in a mystique of the Orient may well be taken to point to a hovering consciousness in the Western mind which goes beyond mere curiosity to defy its own diffidence. Admittedly, this impetus is more often

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<sup>173</sup> This insightful passage is abstracted by C. Fred Alford from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See his *Science and the Revenge of Nature: Marcuse and Habermas* (University Presses of Florida: Tampa, 1985), 16-17.

<sup>174</sup> See M. Abul-Fadl, "Contemporary Social Theory: A Critique," paper presented at the 18th AMSS Annual Conference, October 26-28, 1990, Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>175</sup> As with Heidegger's remarks in an interview with *Der Spiegel* 214/62, cited in *Critique of Pure Modernity, op cit.*, pp. 231 ff.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 130-131. Kolb remarks that "We (the West) can enter into a dialogue with the other traditions, but this is a matter that requires more delicacy of intellectual touch than is typical of Western attempts to understand others." On the other hand, some critics from the "Orient" are critical of those more sympathetic attempts to read into their tradition. See Claude Alvarez, "We Have Been Here Before" *Inquiry* (April 1987), 39-42, commenting on Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975; reprint, London, 1986).

associated with a romantic drive which strikes at the the height of a bout of excessive rationalism, as with a Goethe in the eighteenth century or a Fritjof Capra in our own times.<sup>177</sup> Unless, however, this orientaling compulsion takes its cue from substantative rather than spatial moorings, the search will be in vain. Failing that essential act of self-transcendence, the West will remain hostage to its own grand, but tragic, tradition.

### BACK TO THE LOBSTER QUADRILLE AND TO GOHA

In its present incarnation, this predicament is played out in the conflicting pulls between the splintering shafts of a post-modernity and the sterility of a self-eulogizing neo-Conservatism. The literature in the social sciences and the meta-theoretical debates they occasion can be diagnosed in such a perspective. The essence of this conflict can perhaps best be conveyed in an idiom that draws on an elemental and unpretentious chord in the Western experience which can easily be shared by others. In the case of the flight from modernity, we remember the poor and wretched Hans of the Alsatian folktale, who is forever frustrated in his elations: he knows not what he wants, yet wants it badly all the same, and spares naught in a pursuit from which he knows there can be little gain. He is the paragon of a modernity deprecated for its emptiness and directionlessness as much as for its insatiable appetite for "more and more."<sup>178</sup> In the case of the nostalgia for the past, we recall the perplexity of little Alice in Wonderland as she puzzled over the meaning of the Lobster Quadrille, among a dozen other perplexities she encountered in her metamorphosis: she wondered whether in a world of so much "nonsensical common sense" anything would ever be normal again. Or perhaps, after all, the modern West has finally arrived with all its sequence of "ends" in history, philosophy, and metaphysics to the point where Alice found herself at the beginning of her journey. There she had stopped at the signposts to figure out whichever way to go, not quite knowing her destination, but hoping all the same that in the end she would get somewhere.<sup>179</sup>

The global nature of the modern world extends the predicament of the Oscillating Culture beyond its original bounds and confirms Heidegger's insight on the debasing potential of Westernization/modernization. Partly as a result of a universal imposition, and partly as a response to their own malleability in a manipulative global amoral economy, Muslims, like many An/Other in the third world, are ineluctably caught in a catch-up game. In some ways, they have ended up more confounded than their counterparts in the West, who have at least come to doubt some of the virtues of their own prodigy. Entrammelled in their infatuated pursuit, they cannot venture to reflect upon the gains, or indeed upon whether in the struggle for survival selfhood itself has

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<sup>177</sup> For a provocative, and perhaps somewhat unjustified, critique by an avant-garde Indian intellectual of the nostalgic turn, taken by Capra in his works *The Tao of Physics* and *The Turning Point*, see Claude Alvarez, "We Have Been Here Before," *Inquiry/Afkar* (op cit.).

<sup>178</sup> *The Critique of Pure Modernity*, op cit., passim.

<sup>179</sup> This stance clearly evokes themes associated with the post-positivist return analogous to the Voegelinian category of anamnesis, or the Gadamerian remembrance, the Heideggerian forgetfulness and retrieval, or what Leo Strauss addresses in his essay on "Progress and Return," first published in *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981)). Lewis Carroll was clearly no ordinary author writing stories for children, and by every count, his style dealt in paradigms, as the very title of his books suggest. *Through the Looking Glass* might outlast many a post-modernist tract.

become a computable value worth its pain. The modern Muslim has more often than not turned himself into a shadow chasing shadows in a breathless Monty Python shadow play.

Asked where his ears were, so the tale in the Muslim legacy goes, the simple and conscientious Goha heaved a sigh, caught his breath, and in painstaking precision turned to wind his right arm around the back of his head to point to the lobe of his left ear. Or again, wherever the roads or lanes run into a holy maze, Goha's tortuous sense of geography comes to mind. The moral is that sometimes we search far and wide to arrive at a truth or to discover our destination, when in fact it is right there before us. Goha was no simpleton. In fact he was a *hujja*, a learned scholar, who travelled up and down the land to entertain and instruct. There is much that can be learned from folk wisdom about the episteme, and one does not have to delve in Kant's "serpentine windings" for instruction. This evokes some of the frequently missed nuances in our own intellectual heritage.

Ibn Khaldun contrasted the gruffness of the Bedouin culture with the refinement that was brought about in the course of civil living. In doing so, he was not deploying the contrast to demean the essential dignity and inborn wisdom that went with it. Rather, his whole point was that culture could build and edify on the stock of nature, but that, at the same time, that culture could also become the victim of its own accomplishments and lose sight of qualities that were essential to its survival - and nobility. This could be paralleled to the contemporary concern for "humanization" in the face of the threats of rationalization and bureaucratization. The intervening layers of acculturation, as we might now say, could easily come between man and his *fitric* nature. In this way, the cultivation of the sciences as conceived by Ibn Khaldun in the state of *\_umran*, was not simply a corollary to this state, but it was also a way of ensuring that created *insan*, *homo sapiens*, did not lose some of his essential insights by the inevitable distancing that ensued. Yet, there was little that could safeguard the sciences from a potentially corrupting/stultifying momentum implicit in their rationalization and institutionalization; these were conditions essential to their initial edification, but could ultimately defeat their purpose as they came between the access to knowledge and the pursuit of truth. Aspects of a *fitric* nature, reinforcing a basic common sense and *fitric* values, including primary solidarities, were more in evidence in the life of the nomads, if only on account of a diminished sophistication in the conditions of their existence.

Yet this muted note constitutes a subtle shade in Ibn Khaldun's writing which frequently evades his modern readers, who tend to de-contextualize author and text alike, and so distort their rationality.<sup>180</sup> In suggesting a relationship between the mode of thought and the material existence of the group, Ibn Khaldun was at the same time working on his anthropological/sociological philosophy from a host of other premises about human nature and the laws of God in creation, subsuming such categories as *fitrah* and *sunnah*. These have no place in the reductionist grid of the materialist sensibility which pervades the Oscillating Culture at the moment of the Khaldunist revival. A Contrasting Episteme, conscious of the intrinsic and the common, can highlight them for the cultural encounter.

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<sup>180</sup> An example of a recent critical reading of Ibn Khaldun, placing him in the heart of his tradition, is found in Aziz Azmeh's work, which is unfortunately marred by its own modernist bias in taking a stance on the question of the "historicity" of the text. In relocating Ibn Khaldun in the context of a historical tradition, he strives to rehabilitate the thinker, only to discard a culture. See Chapter 1 of his *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) for an interpretation of the metaphysical foundations of Arabic Thought.



## FROM CULTURE TYPES TO MODES OF DISCOURSE

The trouble with social scientists and most professionals, who are by definition "modern," is that they are overtrained. In their surfeit, they have not only lost much of their humour, but also a good deal of a plain stock of common sense. The idea that a Contrasting Episteme can constitute its own approach, and that it calls for improvising techniques and modes as well as concepts, provides a refreshing opportunity to break out of conventional modes. At a time when rationalism itself has become a suspect category - and janus-faced at that - there is every need to turn to alternative sources of understanding and knowledge and to explore other modes of expression to this end.

The indirectness implicit in the recourse to parables, metaphors, and symbolism has nothing to do with the mental passes, impasses, and blind alleys which might be the privilege of the intellect as well as the bane of philosophy. Its point, as the Goha technique illustrates, is to induce reflection and to tap indigenous sources that stimulate rather than pre-empt reasoning. It is a mode of reasoning where a seemingly irrelevant digression can, by way of association, dissociation, and other such processes, drive home a substantial point; one is enlightened in a practical way about the salient traits in a given culture. Conversely, the philosophic mode frequently conduces to a type of empty circular reasoning, which ends up obfuscating the point it sets out to elucidate. This was what al-Ghazali discovered after his own peregrinations in the field and, not unlike Hume after him, he demonstrated how the ways of unaided human reason ended up distracting rather than enlightening the human mind.<sup>181</sup> The testimony of Fakhreddin al-Razi (d. 606 A.H.) to this effect is made just as poignantly as the rigorous theologian waxes poetic.<sup>182</sup> When, towards the end of his life, he laments the mediocrity and vanity of a knowledge sought through an "instrumental reason," al-Razi sounds the notes which have echoed throughout a tradition before him.<sup>183</sup> Like the intent of al-Ghazali, here too there is no foundation to disparage reason, but to remind us of its limits. The

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<sup>181</sup> His two classic tracts, *Tahafut al-Falasifa (In Refutation of the Philosophers)* and *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dhalal (A Refuge from Straying)*, both containing the rational arguments which question the validity of the ways of the philosophers of his times, might stand to benefit from a sociology-of-knowledge perspective which would not lose sight of their general validity, but would at the same time give proper due to the historical context to which they were addressed. This is an area where a re-formed social theory can have more to contribute than the conventional static approaches applied from theology, philosophy, and Orientalism, which are scarcely relevant to an active life-world impregnated/impregnating tradition like the Islamic. The image popularized in the Orientalist litany of Islamic civilization/culture as stagnant, stylized, and moribund would in retrospect tell us more about the methodology than the subject matter.

<sup>182</sup> Rendered into English, the general meaning of that moment of light arrived at shortly before his death would be something to this effect: Reason's bold ventures at long last come to a halt / And man's vain labours in the end come to naught / Petty, petty is the gain indeed, of a lifelong ransomed to the meed(research/scholarship) / Where the end yield is little more than so it was said this and thus it was said that! See *al-Mahsool*, edited by Taha Jabir al-Alwani, Vol.1.

<sup>183</sup> The rhyming couplets have been variously attributed to jurists and *ulama\_* (scholars) like Juwaini and Shahrastani, respectively of the fifth and fourth centuries hijri. Of course, reason as *\_aql* in the Muslim tradition was hardly the kind of "instrumental" reason implicit in the understanding of modern rationality in a horizontal episteme. For a learned incursion into the distinctions between levels and kinds of a "transcendental" rationality, see S. H. Nasr, "Intellect and Intuition: Their relationship from an Islamic perspective" in *Islam and Contemporary Society (op cit.)*, pp. 36-45. On the other hand, an incisive and succinct redefining of the relationship between a positive rationality and a Qur\_anic rationality was summed up in al-Razi's Will (*wassiya*), which subsequently came to be reflected in the course of the debates on revelation and reason in the Islamic tradition.

gist of the Muslim legacy confirms that which common sense and integrity would concede in any tradition: Just as words tend to lose their meaning when they are abused, so too the abuse of reason ends up turning it into a means of distraction leading away from Truth and reality. It is the task of a Contrasting Episteme as strategy to alert to the pitfalls in shaping the discourse.

### **A SURFEIT IN REASON SPELLS A COUNTERFEIT**

In this way, it is hardly to be wondered how rationalism in the modern West was periodically subverted by an anti-Reason that it engendered, culminating in its first Nietzschean moment and now, nearly a century later, in a second incarnation. This is one lesson to be learned from a common experience: to conserve the value of Reason one must avoid its indulgence. In the Oscillating Culture, prudence counsels a restraint which can hardly be observed given the absence of a universally accepted alternative/supplement to the very reason and empirical experience prudence draws on. In contrast, in the Median Culture this is a counsel that is more easily heeded. Through the ubiquity of Revelation, mechanisms are inbuilt into that culture to diffuse the excesses that might occur. But what if reason is indulged to saturation and taxed beyond measure, as in Modernity? It is then that the recourse to an element of playfulness, to humour, to the crude, the simple, or the primitive, can serve to enlighten where the distended intellect may fail or where the over-exposed senses have been dulled. Advocating an economy of enlightenment that taps the unconventional and assumes compactness in its mode of delivery can have a significant role to play in self-understanding as well as in the field of the cross-cultural encounter. It can secure a measure of understanding and reciprocity which no amount of purely intellectual exchange could hope to secure.

This invokes a touch of irony, as the logic which questions the range of reason and searches for ways to circumvent its limits evokes the aesthetic option in the post-modernist schools.<sup>184</sup> How could a Contrasting Episteme evolved in the *tawhidi* mood converge on common grounds and lend a credibility to that with which it can ultimately share little of substance? This would be to miss the point, though, in much the same way as the point al-Ghazali had made in the past was missed by his contemporaries and those who followed.

To recapitulate on the example of al-Ghazali and see how easy it is to distort a tradition, one need only reflect on a few key statements which might be helpful in reconstructing the modern dispersed and fractured psyche. First, there is no question that rationality is not a rule unto itself; it is part of a kingdom whose essence is justice and measure, where every relationship must be given its due.

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<sup>184</sup> The prominent place given the aesthetic dimension in the modern sensibility in the West lies in its perception of the artistic as the domain to be contrasted *par excellence* with reason. As such, it is seen to constitute the only space where a true spontaneity, freedom, and reconciliation can be attained away from the constraints and frustrations associated with rationality. This is the strain underlying the Nietzschean periodic revival, whether in its radical expression as with Herbert Marcuse's works, like *Eros and Civilization* (1955; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1962), or with the later "anarchists" of post-modernity, who are indulging in a "poetics of rejoicing" reminiscent of Zarathustra's moment of ecstatic inspiration where "Mid-day and Eternity" drown out consciousness in his "drunken song." See Lowith's comment in the appendix to his volume, *Meaning in History* (*op cit.*), pp.214-222; cf. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Feminist Political Rhetoric and Women's Studies" in J. Nelson and others, ed., *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1987).

Foremost in the world of human cognition is the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. There is a need to seek out the sources, define relationships, and avoid the confusion between means and ends. Al-Ghazali's reminder seems particularly timely to a posterity that lives the anguish of modernity and looks in vain for the elements of retrieval and renewal:

The like of Reason is that of the sound, unailing vision, and the like of the Qur\_an is that of a brilliant, radiating sun; neither can do without the other, except for those who are fools. He who denies reason and confines himself to the light of the Qur\_an, is just like one who exposes himself to the sunlight only to close his eyes. There is no difference between such and the blind. Reason in the presence of revelation is a light upon light, and whoever sees with only one eye is tethered to the yoke of vanity (*mutadalil bi habl al-ghurur*).<sup>185</sup>

A world-affirming knowledge must be a knowledge that is as open to the transcendent as it is open to the range of time. This is what he means when he classifies types of knowledge and predicates validity on it: "... As for those learned in the knowledge of the Hereafter," he points out in his *Ihya\_ al\_ Ulum al-Diniya*, "the meaning they attach to validity is acceptance, and by acceptance they mean attainment of the goal." In this sense, there is a confident note of affirmation that is accompanied by a knowledge of purposefulness. Rationality plays different roles according to different contexts and ranges of deployment. When it is not an instrument for discernment, it is necessarily associated with restraint, and is subordinated to higher values. This is what he means when he maintains that there are areas and situations which might not be commensurable with reason and where, consequently, rationality might be put aside "... and the natural self deflected from where its comfort lies." To all being, there is a dimension of interiority as well as its externalities, and this is a fact that has its implications for rationality and validity. Its acknowledgement is a condition for openness and measure. The language of reason is not a language of renunciation and negation, rather it is one of receptivity and anticipation: "For those to whom God opens the door, the material and visible world is but the threshold of the invisible, angelic universe." Above all, in his appeal to a rationality that goes beyond externality and instrumentality, without renouncing or deprecating either as long as they occupy their space with measure, al-Ghazali takes his point of departure in an address that is inclusive, addressed to all, and not confined to its immediate audience or to its times. "Assuredly there was in the age of the philosophers, as indeed there is in every age, a group of those godly men, of whom God never denudes the world" (*The Deliverance/al-Munqidh*). The kind of measured and proportioned rationality that is advocated by al-Ghazali is thus also shown to be a truly universal rationality that can be sought by all, although admittedly its effective appropriation remains ultimately contingent on an act of grace.

Al-Ghazali strove towards a synthesis that brought together dimensions of the abstract and the

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<sup>185</sup> *Economy/al-iqtisad fi'l-i\_tiqad*. Various scholars, in a commemorative volume on al-Ghazali, address different aspects of his epistemology and ethics. The excerpts here are my translation of their Arabic original in Yusuf Qaradawi's authoritative and insightful overview of al-Ghazali's thought in the context of its times and tradition. See Chapter 1 of *Al-Imam al-Ghazali on the Occasion of the Ninth Centenary of His Death*, compiled and edited by the late Prof. M. K. I. Gaafar, (Qatar: Qatar University, 1986) (Arabic), 17-83. A compact selection from the Master deemed to bring out the mystical dimensions is found in *Al-Ghazali, Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, trans. from the *Ihya* by Muhtar Holland (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986).

concrete, the universal and the particular, the transcendental and the immanent, in a way which bears directly on the meaning of a Contrasting Episteme and which reinforces the co-substantiative mode of a cross cultural discourse. It teaches that to admit the limits of human rationality is not to denounce reason, any more than cultivating other sensibilities is to suggest its abdication.

In turning to alternative modes of expression by tapping other levels of communication, we seek to enhance our "communicative competencies" in a Habermasian sense. The purpose is to explore the fields of possibility which are available in the modern situation which, notwithstanding its perceived impositions and dehumanizing implications, has the merit of affording the experience of a shared globality.<sup>186</sup> This is the situation of a controversial modernity. In it there, is a need to expand the shared terrain between consciousnesses bred on divergent epistemes. A "*tawhidi* instinct" would tap on such a fund of shared human experience which, while assuming a variety of forms, nevertheless retains in its essence a commonality inferred from a residual shared sensibility. This instinct informs the evolving hermeneutic towards a new science of culture which is more aligned to a "reconstructive" rather than a "nomothetic" science. To invoke the terms and the hope echoed in contemporary philosophy-of-science debates is not beyond the pale, as Mary Hesse suggests in her work.<sup>187</sup>

#### **RECOVERING THE RATIONAL AND RECONSIDERING ITS RATIONALE**

It is this residual essence of a common *fitric* sensibility which is conserved in the more spontaneous modes of expression which pervade any culture. The "rational," as a stance or a moment of deliberate and calculated expression, does not exhaust the spectrum of potential communication and understanding. To this extent, there is nothing ironic about the shared understanding between the admittedly strange bedfellows of the human and cultural potential. An Islamic and a post-modernist stance would appear to converge. Where the *tawhidi* approach differs, though, is in the ends for which it invokes the spontaneous levels of expression. The discourse is not intended as an indulgence in an open-ended and directionless enterprise, a "purposeless purposefulness," which is simply endured to keep a conversation going, as some would propose.<sup>188</sup> Its telos constitutes a significant feature inspired by the Qur\_anic ethos, and has its attendant implications for socializing the individual to the physical and social environment and for integrating the individual psyche. The recurrent reminder in the Qur\_an rules that the world, including the lifeworld, has not been created by God in jest.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> The debate on modernity constitutes a fertile ground for critical reflection which goes beyond the bounds of "cultures" and is often used to bring together common strands in a conversation which goes on in the East and the West. See L. Binder's approach and theoretical premises in *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Theories* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988). Also, *Science and the Revenge of Nature* and David Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity* (Chicago: 1986).

<sup>187</sup> "Science and Objectivity" in J. B. Thompson and D. Held, eds., *Habermas: Critical Debates* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1982), 98-115.

<sup>188</sup> This seems to be the position of someone like Strauss in making the case for a "return" to the Socratic Way. Richard Rorty's version of "edifying philosophy" similarly seeks to keep the conversation going as an end in itself, rather than as a means of finding an objective truth, the existence of which is anyway questioned, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). In his most recent work, he qualifies the temper of that conversation and distinguishes between its tenor in a "public" as opposed to a "private" space, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Camb. Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>189</sup> "Not without purpose did We create heaven and earth and all between: That were the thought of

With this in mind, turning to Goha, or to a timeless character of Alice in Wonderland, can be used time and again to reinforce a point of reason, not to disparage it.<sup>190</sup> The notion of the limits of rationality refers to a specific kind of rationality, an instrumental, a technical, or a positivist rationality, but it is not invoked to question a standing principle of coherence without which no sense or meaning could hold. The levity then, and its justification as a relevant and valid medium in shaping a cultural hermeneutic, is not to entertain frivolity in a context where the stakes are decidedly high. Quite the contrary, the "playfulness" is as much an ontological as a psychological therapy, in an age where the modern mind and temper have experienced the erosion of much of their *fitric* sensibility.<sup>191</sup> The latter is a category which could be proximated to the Humean "common sense," or to a Thomistic "connaturality," each in its own way, capturing dimensions of that sensibility but not reducible to it.

In the event, it is hardly surprising that this playfulness should become a characteristic disposition in the post-modern movement to the extent that it is a genuine development, although there it understandably takes on a most cynical turn.<sup>192</sup> Given the conflicting sources of the tradition, and its confrontational mind-cast, this profound strain of cynicism is ineluctable. It invokes the deep sense of tragedy and the untiring encounters with irony and paradox which bind the Zarathustras of modernity to their counterparts in antiquity. This is another significant qualification which sets such playfulness apart from a disposition which retains its pristine innocence, unperturbed by the tribulations and trials of a changing world. In the *tawhidi* episteme, the world remains intrinsically unadulterated, much as an effable human nature retains its essential innocence and perfectibility.

In the above, we have addressed aspects of the Oscillating Culture in a general, diffuse context, taking our examples from unconventional sources and explaining why. The point so far has been to deploy a Contrasting Episteme as a strategy for probing features of the Oscillating Culture. Pervasive elements from the *tawhidi* perspective have been woven into the text with this end in view. On another plane, the dilemmas posed by the Oscillating Culture may be inferred from the current debate on modernity which, while essentially philosophical, affects the modern disciplines. In what follows, the theme of the Oscillating Culture will be traced in the echoes of this debate in social thought and in circles of modernist theosophy.

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unbelievers!" (38:27); "We created not the heavens, earth, and all between them in idle sport!" (44:38); "Did ye then think that We had created you in jest and that you would not be brought to Us [for account]?" (23:115). Rather, those of understanding and true perception can see the Signs that are in creation, and it is those who turn to God in their devotions with the invocation: "Our Lord! Not for naught have You created all this! ..." (3:190-191), for as God reminds us: He has created everything in measure (15:85).

<sup>190</sup> See Edward Wakeling, *The Logic of Lewis Carroll: A Study of Lewis Carroll's contribution to Logic* (1978).

<sup>191</sup> See Erich Franzke, *Fairy Tales in Psychotherapy: The Creative Use of Old and New Tales*, trans. by Joseph Smith. (Toronto, Lewiston, N.Y.: H. Huber, 1989).

<sup>192</sup> Garry Brodsky, "Post-modernity and Politics," *Philosophy Today* 31 (Winter 1987).

## PROJECTIONS IN THE FIELD

How can we relate a fragment to an image of the whole? In plotting the terrain of the Oscillating Culture in the modern West, we will resort to a stylized synoptic sketch of its spatial contours and allow for an over-simplification in cultural geography and substantial topography. German sociology remains at the commanding heights of a tradition which runs through Kant, Hegel, Marx, and the contemporary radicals. At the same time, some of the most engaged defense of modernity comes from it.<sup>193</sup> In its depth and fecundity, it is unrivaled, although it is perhaps only matched in vitality by the French. Those are the great system-builders, or synthesizers, in the Western tradition, although their "syntheses" are of a radically different variety than those we referred to above in discussing the Median Culture. Here too, the difference is less due to individual eccentricities - even in a case like Nietzsche - than to intrinsic culture proclivities. The context is the unfolding debate in the thirties in the Frankfurter School.<sup>194</sup> Its development, through a phase of Negative Dialectics to its current more liberal and constructive phase with Habermas, is best seen against its counterpart in a less structured parallel discourse engaging a heterogeneous breed of post-structuralists, anarchists, and critical genealogists in post-1968 France.<sup>195</sup> There, the most virulent forms of anti-humanism have found their ramified and creative expressions. The spin-off of the cataclysms in the Old Continent may typically be gauged at the terminal point of the Western heritage, in the American intellectual fringes of what is otherwise an essentially pragmatic and streamlined current. In this fragment of another refracted moment, we abstract from the length and breadth of a dynamic tradition to point to the directions for identifying the forms assumed by the Oscillating Culture today, and to locate the dilemmas it poses. Underlined throughout are the potentials and limitations of a culture and a tradition which takes its bearings from a horizontal axis.

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<sup>193</sup> Brecht's perceptive account of the philosophical and "deep turn" inherent in the German tradition, as it might be contrasted with the more empiricist and pragmatist Anglo-American strains, is relevant to our account here. See *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

<sup>194</sup> See the above references to Horkheimer and Adorno.

<sup>195</sup> See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La pensee 68: essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); and Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (Open Court, Illinois: 1986), esp. ch. 1 as a background for contrasting the different conceptions in the Continental and Anglo-American usages.

### STRAUSS, HABERMAS, AND THE SOCRATIC WAY

Once more, we will run into a sequel of such parodies which are the consistent byproduct of this modal temperament. Here, we might inquire into the turn taken in an odd partnership between Jurgen Habermas and Leo Strauss. On first impulse, it could be suggested that little binds two of the great minds in contemporary Western thought other than the fact that they might both share an opposing perspective on the Western tradition. There, the very notion of sharing their differences might strike a note of anomaly. The one speaks for a critical post-Marxist tradition, the other opines for a Classical rationalism. The one takes his position from a commitment to a materialist dialectics which strives to accommodate the non-material dimensions of existence, the other conducts his reflections in terms which inter-relate the esoteric to the exoteric. The former addresses the technological dimensions of modernity in terms of their social relevance, the latter constructs his discourse around the anti-thesis of modernity and would fain take it in any context other than that of the passive interlocutor which bears correction in the light of its precursors. Yet, to confound anomalies, the most articulate and imaginative representative of the radical tradition in sociology today ends up on a par with the advocate of the return to a Classicism. Both see the greatest stake in any given system as preserving the techniques for an Open Society. The plea in the one and the other is for consolidating the tottering foundations of community in the modern West. For all the differences in points of departure and the respective structures and textures of discourse, and notwithstanding the different temperaments and approaches,<sup>196</sup> both end up sharing a basic ambivalence concerning the goals and purpose of social organization. Neither is demonstrably capable of convincingly grounding continuity. This inability reflects the constraints inherent in the model to which they both consciously or otherwise, defer. This model is rooted in what Irving Stone has called the "Socratic Way."

The Socratic Way opens the path to a healthy skepticism, in the eyes of its defendants and sympathizers, and to open sedition and amorality, in the eyes of its executioners and critics. But, according to Socrates' biographer, nobody really knew, to recall the Mock Turtle and Alice in our opening epigram, exactly what the "porpoise" was: "The various followers of Socrates disagreed," we are told, "often as violently as modern scholars, as to just what Socrates had taught them, even and especially on the nature of virtue."<sup>197</sup> The most the Socratic Way could point to was an awareness of the existence of a morality, or a source of good, whether "out there" or "deep within" was another matter, and it demonstrated a way, the *bios theoretikos*, to strive to discover it. There was no assurance that it would be discovered. And other than by force of example, there was nothing to compel its pursuit; and beyond that, there was no way of knowing that what we knew really was. The dilemma of the Oscillating Culture, then, would seem to be neither in its want of virtue nor in its want of reason, but in its inability to, temperately or otherwise, define either virtue or reason.

This, nonetheless, is still the same route which Strauss and his students point to in appealing to a

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<sup>196</sup> Strauss is heavily steeped in esotericism, which accounts for the elusive quality of his work and ideas, and for the deep controversy he raises. It is this esotericism which induced J. A. Pocock's censure of Strauss, *Political Theory* 3, no.3 (August 1975), 384-401. For a recent, complimentary interpretation of his ideas, which attempts to grapple with this dimension, see Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (St. Martin's Press, 1988).

<sup>197</sup> I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co), 14.

revival of the old humane republican rationalism and in invoking a moral awareness of the Natural Law. This, in their view, was the surety that would counter-check the assault of a moral relativism and guide society to the civic sensibility it needs to survive. It is a similar faith in another secularized version of the Holy Trinity incarnate - Reason, Science, and Progress - which abuse it has since fallen into, that still continues to inspire models of rational and legitimate communities, notwithstanding their failure to materialize.<sup>198</sup> It is, yet again, the same source and rationality which animates and drives the Habermasian search for an Ideal Speech Community, whose strategy and justification are founded on assumptions which can hardly be entertained outside a secular rational framework perennially in quest of its delusive center. As to what these values are, or what the standards of arbitration should be, or as to questions of moral compulsion and the obligation to act and in what interest or to what purpose, these are the questions which philosophy may raise and about which it may speculate, for which it can well provide the rhetoric and the logic, but for which it can offer precious little beyond the shadows of a learnedly hollow speculation. Learning is no consolation for ignorance in an arena where the stakes are high, where the mortal answers are sought and found wanting. This is not because there are no conclusive answers to be had, as some would like us to believe, but because such answers are beyond the logic and rhetoric devised by human reason. The range of human rationality does not obliterate what lies beyond it, rather it confirms the necessity and the validity of an alternative mode of access to a vital and integral reality.

Philosophy is a science, in the sense that Sheldon Wolin and others contend.<sup>199</sup> It is an objective means of accessing that which is relative, and as such, it itself can only remain open and relative, without claiming to partake of the Absolute or striving beyond opening doors that might at best converge onto a higher court of appeal. Even the difference with the natural sciences might be conceived as a difference in domain and methodology rather than in kind. Reason, which provides the enlightenment required to know about values and goals, is paralleled by the sensory apparatus and its adjunct processes to command the physical/phenomenological world. Reason, whether of the ancients or the moderns, remains more of an instrumental resource in the quest for reliable knowledge than a substantial source as such. The moment it is transposed into a source as well as a means, then one is not far from conflating means and ends, and one is left on the verge of a new destructive transfiguration. Even reinterpreting the Cartesian meditations against the Classical contemplations might yield more in common than is supposed.<sup>200</sup> The Socratic path, like the

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<sup>198</sup> While the pagan roots of modernity have been periodically revisited, only recently is the debt of modernity to its theological wellsprings coming into focus. Among the many such reinterpretations of the founders of modern thought, one critic contends that the essential Hegel would be completely missed outside a metaphysical appreciation of its Christology. See Lakeland, *The Politics of Salvation*, *op cit*.

<sup>199</sup> See "Political Theory as a Vocation" in *APSR* and the relevant, compact contouring of the scientific elements in philosophy by Ellis Sandoz, "The Philosophical Science of Politics beyond Behavioralism" in G. Graham and G. Carey, eds., *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science* (New York: David McKay Co., 1972) 289 ff.

<sup>200</sup> There is even more in common between classical and scholastic rationalism than there is between modern rationalism and either, in so far as reason became ego-centrally reflexive in the latter, rather than reflective and extended beyond itself. This de-formation occurred with the Cartesian shift in the ontological premise, substituting man for God/Good at the center of the life-world, launching thereby the epochal breach with pre-modernity. For an overview of the genealogy of the individualist approach to the institutional problem see Stanley Taylor, *Conceptions of Institutions and the Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 87 ff. Briefly, the individual emerged as a metaphysical entity discrete and independent with the Augustinian tradition.



scientific method, may help us ask more questions than we can answer; but even the questions call for a frame of reference which was derived from the Tradition, and hence which lies beyond the Way. If the questions went beyond knowing and being to belief and action, such as a *tawhidi* frame of reference would entail, then the Socratic Way would have very little to say. Ultimately, it deals with the category of the Ought in a surrealized and imposed manner, while the categories of belief and action are embedded in the matrix of the life-world. It is not surprising that the oldest disciple of Socrates, Antisthenes, should have been the founder of Cynicism, just as in the modern school, anticipating anti-rationalist currents, David Hume has deftly turned the instruments of reason to their own detriment. In a *coup de mains* reminiscent of al-Ghazali six centuries earlier, he too questioned the validity of reason on its own grounds as an instrument of reliable knowledge. Significantly, Hume's philosophy arose in his preoccupation with moral questions. His position that all knowledge in the ethical sphere was ultimately a matter of opinion was tantamount to denying the possibility of ever knowing with any reliability what constituted the good and what the truth. This kind of radical skepticism is the point at which two traditions diverge.

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Descartes moved him to the ontological center and by the 19th century he was firmly established as the rational, free, autonomous, self-sufficient fictive entity of the liberal tradition.

### EXPLAINING DIVERGENCES

This divergence between two traditions is hardly due to the apparent fact that one tradition takes its bearings from human reason and the other from divine revelation. Such a formulation could mislead, and ultimately confirm, the kind of antinomies which from the *tawhidi* median can only constitute misguided and self-imposed, man-made constraints. Far from any presumed incompatibility between Reason and Faith, as some authorities might claim, these antinomies result from the meaning or perception attached to each category in the respective traditions. An understanding along Straussian lines, for example, which seeks to salvage the crisis of modern rationalism by reinterpreting the framework for rationality and virtue as it does, could hardly be reconciled with corresponding conceptions in the Median Culture.<sup>201</sup> In seeking to accommodate philosophy to practicality, Strauss may have hoped to attenuate the excesses of the *bios theoretikos*, but in undermining the eschatological plane, he was hardly insulating society from its own dispersions. Ethics cannot be exclusively the domain of reason any more than of a fickle opinion, without engendering the kind of forces that degenerate into either doctrinal tyranny and absolutism, or into moral anarchy and nihilism. Relegating revealed religion, or "supra-rational piety," to a secondary or subordinate role in society might be a counsel of prudence in certain situations, but it can hardly prescribe a universal norm for the just society.<sup>202</sup> Strauss, an avid student of Medieval philosophy in the Islamic world, could have learned some lessons there, if he had chosen to do so instead of reproducing the Muslim tradition in the light of its Jewish reflections.<sup>203</sup> This is a fallacy cautioned against by a hermeneutic of mutuality on account of its distortive and obstructive consequences.

### THE WAY OF IBN YAQZAN: RECOGNITION AND MEASURE

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<sup>201</sup> See the above-cited excerpts from al-Ghazali. The discussion here draws on the essays by Leo Strauss, collected and edited by Thomas Pangle, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism, op cit.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. xxi.

<sup>203</sup> See Oliver Leaman's provocative article, "Does the Interpretation of Medieval Muslim Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" *IJMES* 15 (1984).

To return briefly to the sequel of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's discovery of his interiority would seem apt at this point. In the wake of Ibn Yaqzan's renewed commitment to the Way that he had come by in his autonomous search for the truth, Ibn Tufail narrates how his hero eventually came to learn of the existence of another way to the truth. This came about through a mediated revelation, through prophets and scripture, about which he was instructed on a chance visit to a neighboring island which, unlike his desert island, was inhabited territory. Upon close inquiry, he came to endorse this Way too as valid and true. Despite his initial resistance and his strong convictions that there was only that one way which he had personally experienced, he retained an open posture. He had the good sense to distinguish states and contexts, such as would evade any one who has not the elements of the sage within him, and not to rush into dogmatic assertions or rash generalizations. Even where he missed a point, he retained the openness to learn, and to admit the limits and the bounds of the autonomous Way, which was assumed in reason and intellect; he conceded to the wisdom and the necessity of that Other Way: that of Revelation and *shari\_ah* as the ultimate in the scales of an order of creation that was anchored in a Providential Justice and Compassion.

With such encounters, we can see how there is much to be learned by example and by an engaged reflection from a legacy bred in the Median Culture. Even the controversial *falasifa*, who had so freely appropriated the legacy of Hellas, would have more to contribute on the relationship of Reason and Revelation than many a tale in the Odyssey or the Peloponnesian Wars. In the context of modernity, as this debate grows more urgent, an exposure to the Other could be particularly beneficial, provided it is conducted in the modal perspectives of a Contrasting Episteme. That such urgency is anticipated to grow is a consequence of the nature of the problems of a high modernity which simultaneously feed on an ethic of re-membering and dis-membering, as rationality and values are brought into the balance. As the leap outside the self-imposed confines is taken, those who venture are likely to find themselves in a more hospitable and fertile terrain with more to offer than any imaginable, or "unthought of," Archimedean point could suggest. In the meantime, however, the search for a midpoint continues within the confines of the Oscillating Culture.

## MODERNITY REVISITED

There is no want of valiant endeavours to reconcile science to philosophy, or faith to reason, or the ideal to the material, in a culture whose history is predicated on a polarity of tensions in these very domains. The valiance is due to the realization that the Tradition is perennially ensnared in a chain of self-inflicted conflicts and paradoxes, where its articulation in contemporary social theory is merely a variation on a theme. Jacques Maritain, the "integral humanist" and one of the powerful influences in contemporary philosophy, is admirably qualified for the task of this reconciliation. By upbringing and training a convinced Thomist, and by temperament open and enlightened, his work lies at a vital juncture in the quest for a spiritual reconciliation within the modern West. In an objective reading of the culture he esteems, he attributes the malaise to the disproportionate growth in the dimensions of human knowledge, with the progress in the "empirico-logical" dimension achieved at the cost of the spiritual and the philosophical. There would be little sense in this context to simply expound lost truths, for in a market inundated by facts, these would be hardly distinguishable from any other data on the screen. The point is to cultivate the discriminating sensibilities and to restore the faculties of an ailing vision through rehabilitating a distinctive mode of philosophical discourse and recovering the sources necessary for alighting it. This mode would have to go beyond conventional philosophy, which is divisive and plagued with the schism it breeds, to a new conciliatory variant. This too might be another useful lesson to observe in devising the logistics for a Contrasting Episteme. But it is above all suggestive of the current temper in the Oscillating Culture.

This temper should not be obfuscated by the occasional bold and brazen exaltations which revel in the contradictions and antagonisms that plague a culture and its conscience, and see in them "the secret of the vitality of the West."<sup>204</sup> Going to the roots of the Western tradition brings us back to Leo Strauss, who dissects it in a more radical and ruthless manner than Maritain's temper would allow. It is instructive for what it tells us of the inherent characteristics which pertain to an Oscillating Culture, notwithstanding the typically Straussian equivocation of making a virtue of necessity and of hailing the problematic character of a tradition as its glory. That tradition is rooted in two ultimately incompatible sources: the Hebrew and the Greek, together projecting the unresolvable tension between faith and reason. It is from this problematic perspective that the prospects for synthesis dim. The whole history of the West can be interpreted in terms of an ever repeated attempt to achieve a compromise between these two antagonistic principles. But all these attempts are doomed to failure, in this view, "because the Western tradition does not allow of a synthesis of its two elements, but only of their tension." Reading between the lines, one can see how the master of eloquent silences conflates a logic and forecloses possibilities. There is no doubt that the tensions and inconsistencies are there at the sources of the tradition, and that the repeated attempts at syntheses are sought in vain. The futility is not because of an inherent or a categorical incompatibility between faith and reason, as the Master presumes, but because of how this misguided assumption has attended its actualization again and again in that particular historical tradition.

Notwithstanding such learned presumptions, there is that inner compulsion which is shared by all cultures by virtue of their human constituency, and which urges on the quest for that synthesis or "wholesomeness" represented in that middle-most ground. The question is not one of entropy, but

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<sup>204</sup> "Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History." See Thomas Pangle, *op cit.*, pp. 72-73, from where other quotations in this paragraph are also taken.

of a kinetic balance and reconciliation. There is an intuitive awareness that a *modus vivendi* is needed, and that this calls for attenuating the polarities which fracture the inner and the outer order, the psyche and the community. Tradition, with its threshold of underlying myths and certitudes, had provided a residual matrix for this attenuation and for reducing the insecurities inherent in the nature and momentum of an Oscillating Culture. Yet, modernity has progressively barred the access to tradition, and has eroded those very certitudes which have conventionally been derived from metaphysical insights and revealed religion. Only these could credibly assure the necessary reference point for effecting the reintegration within the psyche at the individual level and within the community at the aggregate level.

The search for a "third dimension" in a formula that would go beyond the antagonisms continues. In philosophy, it is the search for "cooperation" among mutually hostile and incompatible options, such as is advocated in the style of an integral humanism. In the social sciences, echoes of the end of ideology debate of the sixties periodically resurface. The search is as much for a pragmatic basis of a rapprochement between socialism and liberalism as an acknowledgment of the essential historical and philosophical affinities between them and as much as a concession to the political realities of the times. Some of the more original initiatives to reinterpret modernity, and to reformulate modern society accordingly, include attempts to advance social theory itself beyond terminal and polarized categories like "capitalism" and "rationalism" to a potentially more unifying and integrated paradigm constructed on a scaffolding of "interpenetrating" categories.<sup>205</sup> The idea is to overcome the reductionist and materialist propensities associated with the triumphant positivism that had attended the inception of modernity. Yet, there is little in the resources of a tradition embedded in the Oscillating Culture to assure the outcome of this quest.

The momentum of an Oscillating Culture ensures its basic patterns. It is either embattled in its persistent antagonisms, along the lines of Hume's "opposing monstrosities," or else in the event it renounces reason, but still maintains a faith in finding reason and value in existence itself, it has little to fall back upon other than a common sense which is rooted in a system of experience in permanent mutation. Any attempt to escape the dilemmas generated in the one degenerates into a tyranny of dogmas and absolutes. Conversely, the other option verges on an indiscriminate and irreverent amoralism, which is the inevitable outcome of an absolute relativism. Neither is conducive to an enduring system of meaningful human association. This is not without its implications for social theory, as that area of the episteme immediately concerned with the life-world. In the event, social theory becomes a banal record of the status quo when it is not a futile inquiry into a sequence of quixotic, problem-provoking solutions.

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<sup>205</sup> See Richard Munch, *Understanding Modernity: Toward a new perspective going beyond Durkheim and Weber* (Eng. trans., 1988). At the same time, the more specialized accounts of the adaptation of specific religious communities to modernity are significant for the insights they provide on both the traits of an epoch as well as on the less conspicuous role of historically "interested groups" in their development. Jacob Katz, for example, highlights the role of Moses Mendelsohn in securing access for German Jews to an emergent *Geisteselite* under cover of "intellectual vindication," *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (1987), 11. Concepts like "assimilation" and "tolerance" (just as much as "emancipation" and "civic society") need to be examined in the context of a sub-tradition that emphasized exclusiveness and otherness, not only on account of its undeniable historical influence in shaping the Western tradition in general, but more particularly for its prominence in shaping "modernity" itself and not just "adapting" to it.

## A REJOINDER

If we were to sum up the thrust of the Oscillating Culture as it is demonstrated in the Western tradition, we would be inclined to agree more with a neo-Conservative reading of an Alistair MacIntyre than with a post-modernist one.<sup>206</sup> The notion of the morally good life may well be seen to unite the conversation of the West. To this extent, there is some validity in extending the critical reading of Lakatos in the history of science to interpreting culture and civilization. Unlike the Kuhnian account, it stresses continuity rather than rupture. A *tawhidi* reading too would underline the elements of morality and continuity that exist within the Western tradition, but it would see the validity of such elements as generic to a human culture/condition irrespective of its provenance. What might be conceded to the West might be more its inability to agree on a reliable way of ascertaining what constitutes the good and what morality. The breaks and ruptures in its tradition reflect the moral dilemmas it faces, and a post-modernist account would be more representative in this case. Again, this "failing" is not specific to the West, but it is contingent on a generic culture-type, which is defined by its sources and modes not by its ethnicities and temporalities. Quite the contrary, on the strength of a Contrasting Episteme, there is more evidence to indicate that there is no want of orientation and inclination within the Oscillating Culture type for that human response which strives toward the Median Option of balance and temperance. under a variety of initiatives and appellations.

This option, however, remains an elusive target within that culture-medium, so that the crisis in social theory is likely to persist notwithstanding the attempts to resolve it. Ultimately, it is a crisis which goes beyond sociology. Its resolution may be possible at certain levels, among constituent pockets of the culture, at an individual level. As long, however, as the Oscillating Culture is by definition pivoted on a horizontal axis, the affliction is structural. In the parable of al-Ghazali, the tree must be felled if the vicious circle is to be broken and modern man is to escape his self-inflicted exile into a state of perpetual distraction and ultimate destruction. By acceding to the authority of an external source of knowledge and by accepting the need and relevance of moral guidance from a source beyond the self and the created universe, the tradition is credibly reinforced. In renouncing its pretenses to a false and misconceived autonomy, the dominant tradition can refurbish its authentic reserves and develop its own momentum in proximating a median option in its own terms. The point, however, is not merely to make room for external knowledge and guidance, but also to cultivate an objective methodology of accessing its sources. It is here that the historical lessons available in the Median Culture can become an indispensable and positive wellspring of reinforcement. This latter process can serve as a catalyst to reviving Tradition and become a vector to new patterns of civilization.

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<sup>206</sup> Roth, "Epistemology and Politics," op cit.

## AN OVERVIEW FROM THE MEDIAN CULTURE

What can a perspective coming from the Median Culture offer to contemporary social theory? Where the concern has so far been with locating some of the problem areas which could provide the negative stimulus or propellers to a shift away from the dominant paradigm, the focus for a sequel to this essay will be on the gravitational properties which might attract attention to the Median Culture as a potentially valid and promising source for restructuring the field. For the benefit of economy, three areas could be charted out. The one refers to *epistemic sources and modes*, the second to *the framework for social order*, and the last to *relating practice to precept*. A generative inquiry could thence be structured around three regenerative instances conceived in terms of mutually impacting and reinforcing energy flows: reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reintegration. In the first instance, reason is reconciled to revelation once the latter has been rehabilitated as a reliable source of knowledge for recharting the episteme. The next instance takes us beyond the polarization of binaries juxtaposing the individual to the community so that the fictive chasm separating and fragmenting the units of social inquiry is bridged. The third instance sheds light on the yields of the shaping social theory as the cognitive and the affective dimensions of social inquiry are reintegrated to the benefit of a theory reconciled with practice. A nodal point on which to focus an overview in this perspective can be one where issues of rationality and legitimacy intersect. These are prominent among the issue-areas which have come to engage social theory in the West over the past decades, in the wake of the challenges posed by the disillusionment with modernity. They are also pivotal for an inquiry which takes *tawhid* for its axis.

The discourse in contemporary social theory is significant not only for the light it sheds on the substantive issues at stake, but also for the ethos or mood it conveys. The overall mood may be perceived *tout court* to be one of a pervasive cynicism. With an infusion coming from its exposure to a paradigm of thought and conduct, drawing on the much neglected and under-rated sources of an alternative culture-medium, social theory stands a chance of realizing its stunted potential as an area of practical moral inquiry and as a guide to understanding and implementing or bringing about the global moral order in a world of increasing complexity, where there is no option of "going back" to a primeval simplicity. The task of a social theory rethought in the light of a *tawhidi* episteme is to make this option a possibility. Contrasting epistemics is suggested as a strategic access to this task of critical thought and construction in the new paradigm of inquiry based in an expanded speech community. By cultivating an awareness which goes beyond the current critical disaffection in the field against an exploration of the potential of the neglected sources, it would be possible to break the gridlock of the eternal returns and revisitations within the same closed circle which end up reinforcing the cynicism and disillusion. With an Enlightenment spared its Despair,<sup>207</sup> and with the tensions between a "pessimism of the intellect and an optimism of the will" duly resolved,<sup>208</sup> the stalemate in contemporary social theory, whether in its conservative or its radical wings, would be overcome. If a change in mood is part of what an overview from the Median Culture could bring to the current discourse, an important threshold in rethinking social theory would have been crossed. The condition, however, for landing on the right foot is to overcome the arrogance of our learning.

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<sup>207</sup> See Geoffrey Hawthorne, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Social Theory* (Camb.: 1987).

<sup>208</sup> See Allen Carlin, *op cit.*; the expression was first used by Gramsci.

EPILOGUE:

*Retrieve and Renew*

The discourse between East and West is a task which cannot be relegated to future generations. It has already begun within our present generation, and there is every reason to see to it that it is continued in terms that are deemed by both sides to be most propitious for its fructification. Such projects as the one which has been the subject of the present collection is merely an illustration of the direction in which Muslims today are thinking. Writing from within a *tawhidi* perspective, carrying the legacy of the Muslim past, and with the burdens of its present in view, it was only natural that the priority and the emphasis should have so far been given to rousing Muslim scholars and thinkers to their responsibility towards the *ummah*. Their counterparts in the West must evidently also share in a common responsibility of clearing the horizons for a future global moral order which is inclusive and humane. It must embrace everyone, and be equally accessible to all peoples and cultures indiscriminately.

Only a century ago, such prominent figures proclaiming their affinities and allegiances to the Enlightenment could equally boast a misconceived arrogance in their claims that the future belonged to Europe alone.<sup>209</sup> It is not surprising, in the presence of such paradoxes where reason and bigotry coexist, that the twentieth century would live through the wanton excesses which would leave everyone the poorer in their humanity, not only Europeans. However, man is conceived by his Creator in dignity, and a divine spark of hope must forever burn in his soul. The twentieth century too has seen something in the way of material achievements, and more by way of aspirations to higher elevations of an englobing morality. Dialogues have been taken up with varying degrees of commitment and consistency among the different peoples and traditions. They constitute the cultural venue of a politically self-conscious age. This is one area upon which intellectuals in the East and the West need to reflect in earnest.

A cultural hermeneutic conceived in the spirit of a *tawhidi* ethos, impartial and at the same time engaged, could provide the corrective and the measure to safeguard against complacency and to spur on a benevolent sense of equity with regard for others. It would be impartial in terms of its distancing from contending egoisms, its "bracketing" of the self-centered impulse; it would be engaged in its commitment to the pursuit of the truth, and in striving to its fulfillment in history, in the "worlding of the world." To take up the lead provided in the Prologue, the only test and warranty of integrity in observing this intent lies in the source and premise of its inspiration. The intent begins with the Qur\_anic recollection and the knowledge that:

Mankind was one single nation, and God sent his messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent a Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; But the People of the Book, after the Clear Signs

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<sup>209</sup> Figures like the French philosopher and ethnologist, Ernest Renan, whose views are cited as an epigram in the opening of this collection. The quotation is taken from Vincent Monteil's, *La Pensee Arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1987). Like other orientalists, Renan left his marks on a generation of alienated Muslim thinkers, particularly in North Africa, who have sought to overcome their experiences of uprootedness and to resolve their own ambivalences through intellectual and literary expression of varying calibre and "authenticity."



came to them, did not differ among themselves except through selfish contumacy.  
(*al-Qur\_an*, 2:213)

Despite their differences, people were meant to strive to "know one another" (49:13), and indeed, to use these differences as the gauge of their complementarity and as an access to a purposeful and compassionate mutuality that went beyond the mechanics and the impositions of functional and contingent interdependencies. To do so would require of them, however, a modicum of convictions and a modified self-perception that took its cue from another reinforcing Qur\_anic injunction:

Truly this brotherhood of yours [O mankind] is but a single brotherhood: And I am  
your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me [and no other]!  
(*al-Qur\_an*, 21:92)

In world politics, where the price of power without responsibility has soared in modern times, the turn of a new century seems to promise new crossings as the walls which have long divided crumble. Symbolism is rife, and nowhere more so than in the celebrations from the Berliner Schauspiel on Christmas Day, playing Beethoven's ninth symphony which was relayed by satellite across the globe. There, the Ode to Brotherhood was transfused into a hymn to human freedom. This optimistic surge might be true for the spectacle on the Western front. There, one version of an East/West divide which had fractured the Northern hemisphere during much of the outgoing century, and which in the process had for long imperilled a shrunken globe, seemed at least for the moment to be giving way. A kind of intoxication seemed to be taking over as individuals and peoples emerged to reassert their long denied God-given rights. It is this resurrection of a persistently distorted and a stubbornly dodged source of human morality which seems to be taking the historical West by surprise.

The transformation of totalitarian regimes in the face of popular pressure is more than the ideological triumph it is taken to be by its enthusiastic liberal contenders. Beyond the much vaunted principles of political freedom, there are those even more elemental values which are at stake in the present global effervescence. The perennial quest for dignity and spirituality peaks at the height of a materialist age. It takes a person of Vaclav Havel's sensitivity and humaneness to remind his baffled and admiring audience in the West of the persistence of an "inner realm of truth" which has sustained his nation through the trials and rigors of an automated and perfected totalitarianism in a Communist regime, that to all appearances ruled indomitably for over half a century. Havel is, of course, that Czech playwright, poet, and politician who rose from dissident to President in one of the more providential turns in this century.<sup>210</sup> It is to be hoped that this aspiration to an innate spirituality which extends to the public realm will not be sacrificed at the altar of another variant of the materialistic vice embodied in the consumerist ethic of the liberal West.

This quest for an inner realm of truth, one might add, is perhaps just as evident within the bounds of liberal democracies, where the urge to affirm a moral order is at hand. There, the virtues of political freedom fall short of assuring the means for overcoming a host of other problems afflicting modern communities around the globe. The need to look beyond politics, if not to turn politics itself into a

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<sup>210</sup> *The World and I: A Chronicle of our Changing Era* 5, no.3, (March 1990), 90-427, provides a representative sample of Havel's perceptive writing from his book *The Power of the Powerless*, followed by an instructive commentary on his life and ideas.

paradigm for salvation, is very tempting. The historical West, while politically vindicated and technologically unsurpassed, remains a lone and proud victim of its own virtues and accomplishments. Others might be inclined to be less charitable and call a spade a spade. Defiance and rebellion - or is it arrogance and self-delusion? - are after all the Promethean patent with which some will gladly identify. Nonetheless, one lives in history, and realities that need to be resolved impose themselves.

The need to transcend the claims of a permissive society and to curb the effects of an unbridled individualism seem to be persistently offset by a contentious ethic of cultural relativism. The modern West takes pride in its rational liberalism, yet for all its reverent skepticism, it is not at all sure how it can handle its growing human problems. The demand to do something about values that are turning into vices also grows. If this demand is more often articulated in terms that are more social and cultural, yet they frequently boil over into ominous incursions in the political arena. Although they assume decidedly less dramatic form when compared to the events in a Chinese Tianamen Square or at the Berlin Wall, they are nonetheless historically portent, in the sense of Toynbee. The spectrum of American anxieties at the threshold of another century provides an eloquent testimony to this effect. A catalogue of nagging issues tests the mettle of its intellectuals as much as the boundaries of its moral and political order. Drugs, sex, abortion, child abuse, pornography, a permanent underclass of homelessness and underprivilege, these are among the social plagues of the day which constitute items of priority in that liberal order. The cultural resources of the Western tradition are strained to the limits, and the public debate which touches on such issues as ethics and public policy, or the relations between church and state, does more to disclose the strains in this tradition than to relieve them.

This again is an area which stands to gain by promoting such initiatives and research as those expressed in the Western Thought Project advocated in an Islamizing perspective. "Islamization" is hardly a program for wholesale conversion or for proselytization. Rather, it is a universal summons to learn and to reeducate the self, which begins with a rational appeal to Muslims themselves. This appeal stresses the need for reintegrating a core of pristine values that are universally accessible to everyone into the matrix of modernity, through its information and education networks. As these values are recovered and reformulated, they are also woven into the basic grounds of knowledge, and they can come to inform techniques, technologies, policies, and institutions to the benefit of a wide public.

The human and moral problems in the advanced West constitute an area which suggests to all concerned that it might be salutary to open up to other perspectives on the world and on life. Admittedly, a perspective coming from a *tawhidi* world-view might have something to contribute to resolving problems which, by virtue of modernity, can rarely be confined to any one part of the globe. With a clearing made in the cultural space of the West, one could hope for a turn towards a *tawhidi* episteme. To the extent that such an episteme is admitted into the intellectual and cultural horizons of a discourse which would be carried beyond the current elated idiom of a *glasnost* politics, a welcome access could be assured to the global reserves that would shore up a new moral order. But this could only occur if the obsession with power and power politics, which is so rampant in the dominant forums of our day, were to be scaled down to its proper proportions. Yet, here we come to the crux of the matter. The very word "proportion" seems to be a term which has lost its meaning in an age which can only see itself in an implosion of refractions as it desperately gropes for both content and direction.

"*Nothing in excess, measure is best, know thyself!*" So the echo sounds of the Delphic oracle of a bygone age, which seems to have been entirely lost to the consciousness of a present confounded in its self-consuming immanence: modernity. This is an epoch which was spawned in the West and now credibly threatens to engulf the globe. Yet, it makes sense to recall a timeless exhortation of natural prudence, confirmed in divine revelation, handed down through the generations, and understandable to all, in both East and West. It needs to be taken seriously on the agenda of any future encounter between East and West which presumes to address the future ecology of a moral global economy. In its absence, there can be no "New World Order." In the shapeless post-modern age which is dawning on both East and West, and which is seeking its shape all the same, the boundaries are more than ever becoming those between a reason enlightened in faith and prudence and a blind reason intoxicated by its own excesses and want of restraint. This is what an outgoing epoch is teaching posterity, although its own generation is seemingly impervious to the lesson. When the individual has become a measure unto himself, the community dissolves, or at least, its matrix is severely undermined. In the meantime, there is nothing that can secure the individual himself against his own excesses. "In forgetting their Creator, their origin, and their destiny, God has made them oblivious of themselves" (*al-Qur'an*, 59:19).

This is the real implication of the controversies of our times, whether they are of global vintage like the "Rushdie scandal," or whether they are more local eruptions like the Cincinnati Museum court case deciding on the fate of the Mapplethorpe collection.<sup>211</sup> The one and the other, each in its own way, dramatizes the central issues at stake. In the soul-searching they provoke, the thin end of the wedge is broached in an attempt to deliberate on what constituted "art" and what pornography, and on where the lines, if indeed any, should be drawn between the rights of the individual and those of the community. It was only the politicization of the first of these two issues, the Rushdie Affair, and its interpretation within a saturated ideological setting which obscured its real dimensions.<sup>212</sup> These could only be understood in terms of an unbounded and unrestrained effusion/implosion which undergirds the modern secularist culture. In an event which threatened to cloud the historically dense and fragile horizons between the Orient and the Occident, and to stir dormant passions in the saga of "Islam and the West," there were other factors confounding the benighted affair. Foremost was the pervasive impact of a market-oriented media, which was typically tempted into publicizing a "death-defying novel" to thousands of gullible and well-intentioned buyers. Numbed by the dulling banalities of a boring age, there exists in the West today a ready public which is all too eager to join a crusade, if only for the excitement it offers and the opportunity to vent one's pent-up sense of righteousness and frustration. Here again, another valid lesson of our times was lost in the fray. There was no longer an East "out there" to be ravaged, romanticized, taken to pieces, reveled in, fantasized, or exorcized. The East was now within the West, and in a

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<sup>211</sup> This relates to an obscenity case brought before the Supreme Court in early 1990 by local authorities in Cincinnati, Ohio, led by the Citizens for Community Values. It was occasioned by the exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center of controversial photographs by a deceased artist, showing nudes and sadomasochistic and homoerotic activities, which offended public sensibilities in one of the more propriety conscious Mid-Western cities in the United States. Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), who died of AIDS, used his art as a medium to promote the political agenda of homosexuals. For an informative overview of his artistic style and message, see Eric Gibson in *The World and I* (November, 1989) 211-215.

<sup>212</sup> For a thorough and comprehensive overview and analysis, placing the work in its relevant perspectives and highlighting its implications for a civilizational East/West encounter, see Z. Sardar and M. W. Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* (London and Kuala Lumpur: Grey Seal and Berita, 1990).

way it was as much a part of it as the West, in its globalization, had become of the East. That was reason enough for all sensible men and women of goodwill to come together to defuse the spurious and vicarious spark. This thought conduces to another observation which would not have intruded here had it not been for its implications for an East/West encounter.

Indeed, to many thoughtful Muslims who live in the West, as well as to many concerned Christians and other liberal thinkers who are honest with themselves and courageous enough to admit it, there are many perplexities on the horizons that need to be cleared. Many are the trivial incidents that are blown out of all proportion, whether out of malice or, more frequently, out of ignorance, misunderstandings, misperceptions, misguided analogies or any other contortion. At about the same time, and like the Rushdie affair in the Anglo-American world, another minor happening across the English Channel triggered off tensions there. An administrative interdiction by the French authorities banning the veil/head-scarf from public schools was proclaimed in the name of safeguarding "secular freedoms." Such incidents were bound to raise doubts about the genuineness of the liberal credo. That these incidents coincided with the sweeping developments in the Continent and throughout the globe at the close of an eventful decade made these questions all the more compelling. At the height of their vindication, it would seem, when their proud mentors were debating the Hegelian thesis of "the end of history,"<sup>213</sup> The celebrated ideals of the liberal polity seemed also, ironically enough, to be at their most vulnerable. Beneath the surface pomp and luster, frustrations festered and anxieties churned at the fringes. Equivocations in the standards of freedom and of rights threatened the public peace as much as they troubled many private consciences. How free was freedom? Freedom for whom, and freedom to do what? Whose human rights, and who qualified for the designation "human?" With a steadily growing community of Muslims in the West, both of indigenous stock and of emigrants, these are questions that will have to be addressed to satisfy an innate sense of justice as well as a civic entitlement to equity for all.

Whether in their historical *dar al-islam* homeland in the East, or in their new and adopted home in the West, Muslims have essentially been struggling with the questions of identity and community in an environment that needs to be sensitized to both. For such Muslims, however, there was not a shred of doubt about the immutability and the contemporary vitality of the divinely revealed principles which to them, more than an article of faith, constituted their reason of being. The question was how these principles could be instantiated in a changing time and clime: it was a problem of form and contemporization, not one of content or of direction. The Islam of history that Muslims have lived in the more recent and more distant past, many felt, was not necessarily that of the future. Nor as they well knew, were the boundaries among communities exclusively geographical or ethnic: they were primarily and above all moral. The real task and challenge, as many a self-proclaimed theocentric humanist too would readily concede, was how to evolve a global architectonics of a community that was both free and moral, and how to launch this project from within the West itself, from the lion's den and the eagle's nest. Much would depend on common people's attitudes and on public policies towards the multiplying circles of "pluralisms" there.

The pressing question however would remain the same, one that has periodically resurfaced in the Great Conversation in the West: Could a moral order be worked out without degenerating into either tyranny and dogmatism or nihilism and licentiousness? Could the extremes in an inherently Oscillating Culture be avoided? For Muslims, there is no doubt about the possibility for such a

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<sup>213</sup> See the "Fukuyama Debate," *The National Interest* (Summer 1989 and Winter 1989-1990).

golden mean, as such a possibility constitutes their perception of what their test and witness in this world is about. The challenge, however, lies in how to strive towards instantiating an intrinsically realizable ideal. More to the point in the present context, the question is how the Encounter with the West and from within the West could be developed within the framework of a *tawhidi* ethos in a manner that would contribute to resolving some of its perennial self-inflicted dilemmas.

Given the "global village" where a century's technological accomplishments have dissipated the physical distances between communities and cultures, the East/West encounter has become doubly imperative, not just to avoid the consequences of such potentially explosive misunderstandings, but also to deliberate together and to redefine the bounds of rationality and the meaning of community. This is a task which challenges a common endeavor, to bring together values and good will as well as the power to give them substance. Such a task cannot be left to the West alone to decide and bring about. For if the West has no want of power, it is demonstrably powerless to save itself on the scales of morality. While it is evident that no culture can flout morality, yet it is equally true that history is strewn with the record of civilizations that have lost out in the march in the wake of abortive searches in pursuit of their elusive ideals. In the meantime, if it is left unsubdued in its directionless and contentless will-to-power, the West, under the delusion of its monopoly on progress and right, can only destroy itself and others. But the idea is that there still remain strong pockets of morality and conscience in the modern West, particularly in the trans-Atlantic New World that is rapidly ageing, and that these need to be reinforced and shored up. At the same time, the Orient, as the historical fount of values and morality, cannot afford to indulge its complacencies and to simulate a disdain for power without marginalizing itself from history. Then, in its own carelessness and misconceptions, it would be guilty of partaking of an end to all history in the very real and tragic sense, its own history and that of others, in a globe that can ultimately know of only one history for a common humanity. This is where the prophetic ethos of a joint sense of responsibility for the fate of our global ecology comes alive.

It would not be unseemly at the close of these reflections to paraphrase and briefly dwell on the gist of a parable cited earlier, as a reminder of this ethos. The victim of folly and its perpetuator it are held equally responsible for their plight in an affliction that is visited upon all in our planetary ship called earth. If those who are at one end see fit to deplete its resources or abuse them in a manner that suits their own selfish temporal interests, regardless of others who share with them the earth at a given moment or in the future, and if those others are too indifferent or complacent to act in time to check abuse, then all would eventually perish. The limits of moral responsibility for the public good are set.

What we refer to as the prophetic ethos also inspires dialogue and encounter across cultures, and it might be rendered as a code which balances the elements of personal and public responsibility in such a way as to assure the dignity and moral well-being of all. As a rejoinder to the theme of joint responsibility, it might be pointed out that each individual and group may ultimately carry the burden of one's own deeds in an ethic where "no soul shall bear the burden of another" and where none shall be taxed beyond his or her capacity, and where, moreover, each group is judged in terms of its own mandate and not that of another.<sup>214</sup> Carried into the realm of responsibility for the action of others, in the task of worlding the world, this might evoke its echoes in a variation on a theme from an analogous tradition: "I am not my brother's keeper" cannot simply be countered by its

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<sup>214</sup> For relevant verses in this sense in the Qur'an, see respectively: 6:164; 17:15; 53:38; 2:286; 6:152; 23:62; and 2:134, & 141.

obverse. Rather, the well-meaning insistence that "I *am* my brother's keeper," which could open the way to abuse and transgression, would need to be qualified with the remembrance that "My brother is also my keeper, as long as neither of us legislates for the other, and as long as we both deliberate together in implementing a code revealed to us by our common Creator and Benefactor."

A *tawhidi* episteme which embraces that ethos sees the parties to encounter and dialogue in a relationship that transcends their mutual obligations and reciprocities to reach out to their originating, mediating, and arbitrating source. Accordingly, the rationale against a morale of selfishness and indifference here was as simple and practical as it was morally salubrious. At the same time that it inculcated a sense of commitment and purpose to secure a cohesive moral community, it safeguarded it from degenerating into an arena of self-righteous tyranny, by maintaining the proportions between the personal and the collective, the internal and the external, the immanent and the transcendent. The essential point to note in such a community is that there is no escaping that sense of moral responsibility for oneself and for the whole to which one belongs. This point is only reinforced by the knowledge that history, i.e., the lapse into temporality and the sheer passage of time, is no excuse for forgetfulness.<sup>215</sup>

Muslims can play an axial role in an epoch of transitions as they deliberate on their own destiny. Historically, this role and history have been conceived in terms of retrieval and renewal. Today, retrieval and renewal represent a burden that they must share with the Other in confronting the challenge of the times. To retrieve and renew is this "double-barrelled" quest which confronts all those who live in the modern world. It means to rediscover, to remember, and to recover their common values, and it also means to renew their common life on a shrunken globe as they reverse optics and come to see their planet Earth in the perspective of another epochal moment in cosmic history as it is revealed through the eyes of the Hubble telescope. If anyone is conceivably more qualified than another in taking the lead on this journey to renewal, then it is surely those who are middle-most to the encounter: those who belong to both East and West by virtue of their common allegiance to the Lord of the "two Easts and the two Wests."

It might be recalled in this context that the West has frequently seen Muslims in ambivalent terms. At one moment, Muslims are seen as a part of that exotic Orient - out there, on the other side, the fabled and foibled Other. But, more frequently, they are seen as an extension, a projection or a perversion, of the West itself - another instance of a Christian heresy that has to be brought back into the fold - or exterminated. Only rarely is that flicker of an intuitive sensibility stirred to suggest, to the few that experience it, that somewhere in that extension of self, in that "continental shelf," lies the key to a magnanimous reconciliation that lies at the heart of the Western Odyssey from classical antiquity through modernity. This reconciliation will have to be one that starts from the Self and stretches out to embrace the Other. Those who can conceive of such a vision and its realizability are, indeed, the few whom the inspired Muslim theologian and philosopher of the sixth century hijri, al-Ghazali, referred to as "those from whom God does not denude the world" and who are, as he explained, to be found in every culture and throughout time.

Little is it realized, however, how the "middle-most community," which constitutes the Muslim

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<sup>215</sup> The *hadith* of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, holds that "every Muslim is outposted on a vigil to the Day of Judgement." For the ethic of community and its implications for the Muslim historical consciousness, see ch. 4 of M. M. Abul-Fadl, *Alternative Perspectives: Islam from Within* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1990).

norm, is defined by a vertical and transcendent compass that assigns the unitary orientation to all of mankind in terms of its single origins and its ultimate destination. This is the same perspective which inspired the dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths advocated by Faruqi only a decade ago. With this, we might conclude with a very pragmatic and down to earth proposition on a somewhat more mystical and sublime note.

The Middle-Most Community is an ecumenical community, a universal brotherhood in the full sense of the word; it owes its character and designation to the direction in which it sets its face: its *qiblah*. Every Muslim knows what the *qiblah* is. In his prayers five times a day, he sets his face to countenance a source and direction around which the hearts of millions of his brethren converge in humble devotion. But in the Encounter with the Other, the Abrahamic Sanctuary, that time-honoured House of God which beacons to all its thirsting bondsmen, will need to be communicated on the plane of a paradigm. In this context, the *qiblah* could be transfused symbolically in terms of an interiority that stretches outward to the infinite. Or, conversely, it could be perceived in the heart of the devotees of a world of truth and light, in terms of a transcendence that is projected in its descent in a visible center of finitude, where it is instantiated and to which all who care to turn can palpably relate. Whichever way it is defined and communicated, the *qiblah* ultimately signifies that nodal point which reaches to the invisible depths of the core of our humanity, as we seek to internalize within our consciousness and our consciences the values that can save our common history. The direction of the shaping/reconstructed middling global moral community, as it comes to prevail over the derelict dichotomies that artificially divide, stretches beyond itself to the Creator and Sustainer of both East and West. With such an orientation, the community is confirmed in its bearings, and it becomes finally possible to discern what constitutes measure and what proportion. In this, it can distinguish means and ends, and relate the one to the other; it can balance freedom with morality as it seeks to retrieve and to relearn the essential wisdom that can preserve and ennoble the human species. In this way too, it can "re-member" by putting its world back together and piecing the fragments into a whole.

Thus defined, the Middle-Most Community is a community that is potentially inclusive of a humanity, advancing at its own varying pace and temper to the center of an attracting magnetic field. It is a community that is selectively open to all who would freely elect to subscribe to its manifest and universally accessible principles, regardless of biological genes or of historical geographies and genealogies. In this sense, it is an expansive community by virtue of its membership, and a radiating community by virtue of its principles. By definition, such a community would operate at a level which transcended the factitious East/West divide. The norms for a free and open encounter would be confirmed in the sense enjoined in the following exhortation to consciously heed the meaning and consequences of our unitary origins:

O mankind! We have created you out of a single pair of male and female, and We have made you into multiple nations and tribes, in order that ye may get to know one another. Truly, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the one who is heeds God the most, who is most God-Conscious.  
(*al-Qur\_an*, 49:13)

and:

O mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer who has created you out of one living entity [a self-same soul], and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread forth a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you demand [your rights] from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily God is ever watchful over you.

*(al-Qur\_an, 4:1)*

With the reconstituted perceptions of Self and Other, and with a realistic attunement to the needs of an accelerating future, the Agenda of the Encounter could be set up for an action that was predicated on this understanding. Having opted for retrieval and renewal, the retrieval of a common heritage and the renewal of an ailing humanity, the parties would then be expected to deliberate together on how a life-binding commitment could be optimally achieved - in time and with due measure.