

Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muzaffar Iqbal: *Islam, Science, Muslims, and Technology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal*

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Ever since modern science and technology made their first impact on the Islamic world about two centuries ago, posing increasing challenges to Muslim life and thought as the decades passed, Muslims have been debating among themselves how best to respond to these Western creations. This ongoing debate has produced several distinct 'philosophical positions' on Islam and modern science and technology, which compete against each other for influence and dominance in society. Because of the pervasive nature of the impact of modern science and technology on traditional Muslim life and thought, Muslim responses have covered and addressed a broad range of issues related to their implications from all dimensions.

One of the most well-known of these responses in the post-colonial period is the one articulated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, currently University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. The philosophical position Nasr and his intellectual school have founded and articulated is well-known both in the Islamic world and in the West. It is not an exaggeration to say that, through his numerous writings and countless public lectures he has delivered throughout the world over the last five decades, Nasr has provided the most comprehensive intellectual response to modern science and technology that a Muslim scholar has ever presented in the entire history of the debate in question. Nasr's critique of modern science is profound and based on sound scholarship. He displays a deep knowledge of both the history and philosophy of modern western scientific thought and Islamic scientific tradition. He insists that Muslims should study and evaluate modern science from the perspective of Islamic tradition.

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Nasr's clear philosophical position on modern science and technology can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Modern science is not the *only* legitimate science of the natural order, but is simply a science of nature, legitimate only within the premises of its assumptions of the nature of both the known object and the thinking subject;
- (2) Islamic civilization cannot simply emulate Western science and technology without destroying itself; to those who know well both the religion of Islam and the nature of modern science, it is very clear that modern science is a direct challenge to the Islamic worldview;
- (3) Modern science and technology is not neutral or value-free; it imposes on humanity the worldview and the value system inherent in its operators.

Accordingly, Nasr argues, Muslims must confront modern science and technology with a deep sense of intellectual and moral responsibility and integrity in light of the Islamic intellectual tradition. He wants Muslims to master modern sciences and not to shun them. But, at the same time, he urges Muslims to come up with a positive Islamic critique of modern science on the basis of the Islamic intellectual tradition—a critique concerning both what it is and what it is not. As he sees it, it is the sacred duty of Muslim scholars, intellectuals, and scientists to create an authentic contemporary Islamic science.

Nasr has been consistent and steadfast in his critique of modern science and technology for the last fifty years. Writing from the perspective perennial philosophical tradition, his works expose numerous dimensions of what he strongly believes to be the destructive and dehumanizing aspects of modern science and technology. Many Muslims agree with his views, but there are also many who have criticized his alternative to modern science and technology—an authentic Islamic science—as being 'backward looking' and too impractical to be implemented in the contemporary world.

With this background, how should one react to *Islam, Science, Muslims, and Technology: Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal*? As someone who has been closely following Nasr's writings on the subject, I must say that this is an interesting book for several reasons. Structurally divided into seven chapters arranged in three interrelated sections, the book explores the central theme of the relationship between Islam, science, Muslims, and technology. The sections appear to have been ar-

ranged in such a way as to invite readers to focus on the middle section, which contains four interview-style conversations between Nasr and Iqbal originally published in the journal *Islam & Science* but which have been thoroughly revised for this publication. These conversations are preceded by the first two chapters of the book: the first, by Muzaffar Iqbal, another leading scholar of Islam and science, serves more or less as their historical context; the second, “The Cosmos as Subject of Scientific Study” by Nasr, serves as their metaphysical and cosmological context or framework. The conversations are followed by one chapter entitled “The Islamic Worldview and Modern Science,” which contains the text of Nasr’s keynote address delivered at an international conference on science in Islamic polity held at Islamabad in 1995, the occasion that had brought Nasr and Iqbal together for the first time.

In my view, this new book is of considerable significance to the contemporary Muslim discourse on Islam and science and technology in a number of respects, and should be welcomed accordingly by all interested in finding veritable solutions to problems which modern science and technology pose to the Islamic world. First, this book may be considered as the first in which Nasr’s all-embracing responses to modern science and technology in relation to Islam and Muslims have been presented in a single volume. It addresses the problems and dilemmas of contemporary Muslims in the field of science and technology in a more comprehensive and contemporary manner than any of his other writings on the subject.

Second, there is great value in the interview-styled conversations. Nasr’s previous writings have not dealt with all of the criticisms directed against his views concerning modern science and technology and his idea of Islamic science. Or, if he has, in some of the cases the response has been brief, emphasizing only principles which in the case of many people need further explanation. Through his well formulated questions, Iqbal has provided an excellent opportunity for Nasr to address in a more detailed manner questions and issues on the subject, both theoretical and practical, which are very much in the minds of many Muslims today.

Third, Nasr’s articles on the cosmos and the Islamic worldview help us to remind ourselves of the need to have an immutable and veritable philosophical context for our discourse on Islam, science, and technology. If Iqbal’s chapter on the “Context” has provided readers with a good background of the current diverse Muslim thinking on modern science and technology, including explicitly identified views critical of Nasr’s position such as those of Pakistan’s political and scientific elites (6-11) and Ziauddin Sardar (19-22), Nasr’s chapter on the cosmos and the Islamic

worldview helps to not only differentiate his position from others, but also to give justification and meaning to whatever conversations Muslims want to have on the subject in question. This is because Nasr's discussion of the cosmos and the Islamic worldview is explicitly based on the teachings of the Qur'ān.

Iqbal's conversations with Nasr deal with a wide range of theoretical and practical issues under four broad headings: (i) Islam, science, and Muslims; (ii) Islam, Muslims, and modern technology; (iii) On the environmental crisis; and (iv) On biological origins. All of these general themes are of immense importance and their treatment is a matter of urgency, not only for Islamic life and thought and the global Muslim *Ummah* but also for humanity as a whole. Looking at the content of the conversations, with Nasr giving greater clarity to his intellectual position on modern science and technology than he has ever done before, I am inclined to think that this new book could very well inspire a new positive and fruitful debate among Muslims on the issues in question. Both Nasr and Iqbal are to be congratulated for making available this much needed book to Muslims everywhere, particularly the younger generation of Muslim scholars, scientists, and technologists.

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BRILL'S CLASSICS IN ISLAM: VOLUME 1

C. Snouck Hurgronje: *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*

Leiden • Boston: Brill 2007, xiv+355 pp., HC, Eur 69.00/ US\$ 90.00

ISBN 978-90-04-15449-3

The subtitles of this first volume in the newly launched "Brill's Classics in Islam" series are as important for understanding the content and nature of this book as its title: "Daily Life, Customs and Learning. The Moslems of the East-Indian Archipelago." More revealing, however, are the colorful details of the life of its author, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), variously known as an imposter, a Dutch spy, an opportunist of the worst kind who used the ambitions of a flagging Dutch colonizing empire for personal gains, and a respected Orientalist. Perhaps he was all of these at

once. He was certainly one of the few Europeans who have actually resided in Makkah—the Sacred City of Islam forbidden to non-Muslims—prior to the twentieth century. His fortunes were aided by the times in which he lived, an era during which it was possible for any adventurous European to single-handedly direct the course of history—at least in that part of the world where the European’s presence struck awe, even terror, in the hearts of the natives, as Marshall Hodgson once remarked.

When the twenty-seven-year old Hurgronje landed in Jeddah on August 28, 1884, he had multiple agendas. Four years prior to his arrival in Jeddah, he had successfully defended his thesis, *Het Mekkaansche festival* (*The Makkan Feast*), and earned a doctorate with honors. “In [this thesis] he not only described the pilgrimage and its rituals in a historical perspective,” writes Jan Just Witkam in his informative introduction (which does not seem to have been proofed by the copy editors),

but in it he also addressed the question of how and why Prophet Muḥammad had incorporated this pre-Islamic, basically pagan, ritual of the pilgrimage into his new religion. Snouck Hurgronje came up with the answer that this had mainly been for reasons of political expediency. How he debunks the Abrahamic legend in Islam is a telling example of his non-religious perspective. The Pilgrimage, the re-enactment of some dramatic episodes in Ibrāhīm’s life and divine mission (Hagar’s despair, the sacrifice of Ismā‘īl), being what is (*sic*) was, irrespective of the question whether it was true or false, needed study as a social, and political, phenomenon. (xiv)

We cannot comment here on Witkam’s own orientalist views of the sacredness of the rites of Ḥajj, but it is noteworthy that Hurgronje’s book does not describe the pilgrimage as a first-hand account. He did not attend the Ḥajj, since he was ordered by the Ottoman Governor to leave Arabia before the Ḥajj season. Hurgronje had arrived in Jeddah at a time when European colonial powers were becoming increasingly anxious about the role of Makkan Muslims in supporting liberation movements in the colonies through the flow of ideas and money. They considered Makkah to have become the safe haven for “Muslim fanatics”—as today’s “fundamentalists” were called in the late nineteenth century. From 1873 onwards, the Netherlands was facing a war of attrition in the then-independent Sultanate of Aceh, on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, and it had become important for the Dutch government of the time to acquire accurate and up-to-date information about the role the Javanese community in Makkah and its environs was playing in this war. Hurgronje offered his services for this espionage mission and his expedition was partly funded

by the Dutch government for this specific purpose. Hurgronje no doubt had personal academic interests as well, for after all he was a well-trained orientalist whose ideas had been influenced by none other than Michael Jan de Goeje (1836-1907), the grand old master of the Leiden School of Oriental Philology.

The Ḥajj commenced on the first of October 1884, just four weeks after Hurgronje's arrival in Jeddah. By the time he was settled in the residence provided by the Dutch Consulate, pilgrims had started to return from Makkah. Hurgronje set to work immediately. He had by then made his way into several social groups in Jeddah. These ranged from the locals involved in the pilgrimage business to the Javanese community that lived in Jeddah and from the Western diplomats to the Turkish officials and owners of boats at Jeddah harbor. In this he was aided by his fluency in vernacular Arabic and the photographic equipment he had brought along; the latter was particularly helpful in penetrating the elite circles where photographic portraits were much sought after.

Even with all these connections, however, he could not go to Makkah yet; he needed to publicly become a Muslim. Though this was not a problem for him, he wanted to do it tactfully, in order to gain the confidence of officials so that he would not be suspected. He proceeded systematically. First he searched for and found a companion who could assist him in penetrating religious and official circles. The choice fell on one Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadinginrat (1854-1914), a man from Java who had already lived in Jeddah for five years and who served as an informant for the Dutch Consul there. Next, he moved out of the residence provided by the Dutch Consulate, thus distancing himself from his paymasters.

The physical move from the premises of the Dutch Consulate on the first of January 1885 was followed by the (at least putative) transition from Christianity to Islam. He took on the name of 'Abd al-Ghaffār, meaning the Servant of the Much-Forgiving One—a name not without deeper symbolic meaning. The three weeks prior to January 21, 1885, the unforgettable day he finally set foot in the Sacred City after a full day's journey, were filled with intense social activity. He met with the *qāḍī* of Jeddah, both to express his fidelity to Islam and to gain access to 'Uthmān Pasha, the Ottoman Governor of the Ḥijāz who was in Jeddah at the time. He must have impressed the *qāḍī* with his command over intricacies of Islamic law as much as with his skills in photography, for he was given easy access to the Governor, who enjoyed his conversation as well as the production of several sitting and standing photographic portraits.

The seven month period between his arrival in Makkah and his de-

parture in the August of the same year is the period of observation and experiences that furnishes much of the material for *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, although it also contains second-hand accounts. The first volume of the original work, not included in the present edition, was devoted to a history of Makkah.

Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century is not a diary or journal but an overall record of routines of daily life in Makkah, from the complex perspective of both a spy sent there to gather information about the Javanese community in Makkah, as well as that of an orientalist seriously interested in Islam. During these seven intensely-lived months, he made a series of photographic portraits of a cross-section of Makkan society, some of which are included in the present edition. He met prominent religious scholars, *muftīs* and shaykhs. He joined *dhikr* sessions, attended public and private meals, gathered information about the Javanese community, participated in the religious rites, joined congregations in mosques, made his rounds of the Sacred House of Allah, made hasty and often incorrect judgments about social and political structures and relationships, and wrote detailed notes which would furnish raw material for his two volume work on Makkah that would earn for him a brief period of fame and a job.

Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century is divided into four sections: "Daily life in Mekkah"; "Family Life in Mekka"; "Learning in Mekka"; and "The Jāwah." Each part attempts to construct a comprehensive picture of that particular aspect of life in Makkah. In spite of the advantages available to a first hand observer, the conclusions drawn by Hurgronje remain superficial. His account of family life in Makkah, for instance, reads as if the Sacred City is immersed in an unending orgy of trading and changing wives, a conclusion he states in so many words after a lengthy description of the family life of various classes:

So the man is glad to be continually changing his wife as he ever seeks for something better, while the woman knows how to make herself tolerably comfortable in most situations. Let it be here expressly stated that also more favourable instances are not wanting, but the characteristic note of the usual Mekkan marriage is the seamy-sidedness that we have above depicted. (106)

His authoritative opinions about legal aspects of Islam are, likewise, colored with his own orientalist views and training:

The Shaff'ite Law, though confined by Turkish influence to the sphere of family life in most of the lands in which it used to rule, has still held its own in the lecture halls, and has remained a spiritual power. Its wide diffusion in the earlier centuries was due to the pro-

tection of the Abbaside Khalifs. At that time its only local competitor in Mekka was Shi'ism, which counts many adherents in West and South Arabia.

The Sherifs of Mekka were opportunists in questions of rite, and exchanged their Zeidite (Shi'ite) confession for the Shafi'ite, which was the rite of the great majority of their subjects. Since that time the mass of the population of Western Arabia have remained Shafi'i. They have not followed their rulers in adopting the Hanafi rite. In the environs of Mekka there are still strong remains of that Shi'itism which once contributed to the conquest of Western Arabia by the Sherifs, and is now for its reward despised by them. There are also in the environs of Mekka some Harb tribes adhering to Wahhabism. Both Shi'ites and Wahhabis are now simply remains of no importance as compared with the dominating Shaf'ism. (199-200)

When he received his deportation order, Hurgronje's first task was to safeguard his notes and his photographic equipment. He was helped in this by his Javanese companion as well as by the Dutch honorary Vice-Consul and shipping agent, P. N. van der Chijs, who is dubbed by Witkam as a "wise man" with whom "[Hurgronje] had already concluded a close friendship before he went from Jeddah to Mecca" (xix). Thus, with the connivance of the "wise man", Hurgronje received a steady stream of shipments from Mekkah, via Jeddah, to Leiden between 1885 and 1889, containing "all sorts of information, photographs and ethnographical objects" (xix-xx).¹

1. For a description of the Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje Collection, now part of the Leiden University Library's Special Collections, see <<http://dpc.uba.uva.nl/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=ubleideninv;cc=ubleideninv;view=text;lang=en;didno=ubl085;sid=b99da2db2ba09bd580f8f041ed292544;byte=1358315; focusrgn=beforedsc;rgn=main>>, accessed on November 7, 2007. In addition to photographs and papers, there were some sound recordings made on wax cylinders by the staff of the Dutch Consulate at Jeddah between 1906 and 1909 at the request of Hurgronje with the equipment provided by him, and these have a dramatic episode: on October 14, 1970, a bomb planted by Vietnam War protesters in the Harvard Semitic Museum, which then also housed the Center for International Affairs, literally blew the roof off the building. The explosion resulted in a fateful "moment of light," as Dr. Carney Gavin, curator of the museum later said: it uncovered more than 27,000 old photographs of the Middle East (see Paul Lunde, "The Lure Of Mecca," *Saudi Aramco World*, November/December 1974, 14-21). These nineteenth-century photographs, known as the Bonfils Collection, had been acquired by the museum in the 1890s, stored

Back in Leiden, Hurgronje immediately set himself to produce a stream of articles on Makkan topics and was soon considered an authority on the subject. When his two-volume German work finally made appearance in 1888, he was immediately rewarded by the political authorities. The Minister of Colonial Affairs “rightly interpreted the final pages of the last chapter of *Mekka* as a job application” (xx) and created for Hurgronje a position in the Dutch occupied East Indies, where he would stay for the next seventeen years as governmental advisor on indigenous, Arab and Islamic affairs. His penetration into Javanese circles in Jeddah and Makkah would be especially useful given the intense political work aimed at undermining resistance against the Dutch occupation.

“[Then] in 1906, when he may have sensed that he had overstayed his welcome in the colony or that his career had reached a cul-de-sac, he grasped the opportunity to succeed his teacher, De Goeje, and he enjoyed the Leiden professorship with great gusto” (xx). During his years at Leiden, he had

informants write down all sorts of texts, from geographical surveys, to *fatwā*'s (*sic*) on early sound recording of the Qur'ān, to texts of popular songs, to lists of manuscripts in Ḥiğāzī libraries, etc., etc. In the end, however, nothing much came from it. University life (and old age for that matter) had requirements of its own, and he may have underestimated these. The appearance of the English translation in 1931 of his second volume of *Mekka* was a last and final act of interest and of recollection to that period which had meant so much to him in his late twenties. (xx-xxi)

Disregarding certain gross misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the “Muhammedan religion” that he took Islam to be, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, with some of the old and rare photographs that accompanied the original work, is certainly a treasure house of information about Makkah of an era that still had the fragrance of the centuries past. What Hurgronje's witnessed in Makkah was at the verge of disappearance. Within two decades of his departure, the Great Game would start. In 1908, Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (1856–1931) would become the Grand Sharīf of Makkah. Hurgronje would be replaced by Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888–1935), the British adventurer, espionage expert, soldier, and scholar, known as

neatly in boxes up in the attic, and forgotten for almost 80 years. To see the details of how this discovery led to the discovery of the wax cylinders containing sounds recorded by the Dutch Consulate at Jeddah, see Piney Kesting, “A Doorway in Time,” *Saudi Aramco World*, September/October 1993, 32-39.

Lawrence of Arabia, who would successfully help to foster a revolt against the Ottomans by making promises on behalf of the British government which were never meant to be kept. Sharīf would, in turn, be replaced by ‘Abd al-Azīz ibn Saūd (*ca.* 1880–1953), the ruler of Najd, who would change the name of the region under his control to Saudi Arabia and grant oil concessions to American companies in 1936. The discovery of the world’s largest reserves of oil would, in turn, destroy Makkah and daily life in the Sacred City as it had been for centuries.² Hurgronje’s book provides a lens, albeit a tainted one, through which one can peer into the daily life of an era now lost forever.



BRILL’S CLASSICS IN ISLAM: VOLUME 2:

Franz Rosenthal: *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*

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He was the most brilliant representative of the heroic and final stage of classical orientalism, notes Dimitri Gutas in his glowing tribute to Franz Rosenthal (1914-2003), whose *Knowledge Triumphant* (first published by Brill in 1970) is the second volume in Brill’s new series, “Classics in Islam”. “[His] precocity matched the exacting standards of his renowned professors” (xi). Trained in an age “when oriental studies had not developed narrow specialization in the various disciplines”, Rosenthal was “a consummate philologist in a number of languages, especially in Arabic and Aramaic” (xiii). Born and educated in Berlin, Rosenthal moved to the United States in 1940, where he first taught at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and then at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1956, he moved to Yale where he remained until his retirement in 1985.

“Significant authors may write many and valuable works,” Gutas theorizes in his short introduction, “but as a rule there is one among them in which there is such harmonious blend of profound and original insight, industry, and their own unique voice that it is exceptional. Franz

2. For details on a recent workshop on Hurgronje’s life and works, “Views on Life and Work of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936)”, held on February 16, 2007 at Leiden, visit <<http://www.ias.nl/portal/index.php?q=event/2007/02/16>>, accessed on November 7, 2007.

Rosenthal's *Knowledge Triumphant* easily falls into this category, even when one considers the author's remarkable career and prodigious scholarly output (xi)." If *Knowledge Triumphant* is really that significant book, then there must be something drastically wrong with the very font from which such scholarship emerges. Rosenthal uses 341 pages to "prove" what is known to every elementary student of Islamic thought: "in Islam, the concept of Knowledge enjoyed an importance unparalleled in other civilizations" (334). This is elementary, for even the Muslim testimony of faith is a statement of knowledge; the Qur'ān is replete with references to *ʿilm* (knowledge); every collection of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam contains a *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, that is, a book devoted to merits of *ʿilm* and those who possess it.

Rosenthal does not take this basic precept of Islamic thought as given, but presents this dictum as *his* thesis, spends a great deal of effort and energy in "proving" it, and then, on the very last page of the book, turns it against Islamic civilization. He does this, of course, with finesse. He first asks: "What does it mean for a civilization, and beyond it, for the history of mankind, if 'knowledge' is made its central concern?" Then, in order to answer this question, he establishes an equally arbitrary criteria, so typical of orientalist's approach to religions:

It would seem doubtful whether an answer in terms of good or bad would have any validity whatever. For a given society, "good" is what it itself acknowledges as such, and "bad" is whatever it rejects... Its insistence upon "knowledge" has no doubt made medieval Muslim civilization one of great scholarly and scientific productivity, and through it, Muslim civilization made its most lasting contribution to mankind. "Knowledge" as its center also hardened Muslim civilization and made it impervious to anything that did not fall within its view of what constituted acceptable knowledge. We can see how much can be achieved by the infusion of intellectual and spiritual values in one dominant concept, but the drawbacks of this process also are obvious. (340-41)

Seen from outside orientalism, what is really astounding about orientalist tradition and scholarship that emerges from it is its total malleability, its appalling artificiality, its alienation from any principles higher than itself, its protean inconsistencies, its imposing self-righteousness, and its slavish fidelity to detail at the expense of clarity and profound principles. *Knowledge Triumphant* bristles with all these traits. Rosenthal starts out, in typical orientalist fashion, quantitatively: *ʿ-l-m*, the root from which the word *ʿilm* (knowledge) is derived, occurs 750 times in the Qur'ān in all its derivatives; this constitutes about one percent of the Qur'anic vocabulary

for the Qurʾān is made up of approximately 78,000 words (20). Such arithmetical acrobatics can be performed by any sophomore today with the help of a calculator and Fūʾād ʿAbdul Bāqī’s valuable *Muʿjam*.³

The entire work is based on the assumption that the Prophet of Islam fabricated the Qurʾān. “The Prophet was also not concerned with variety in the ideas he preached” (20); “It is evident that the terms which were truly important to the Prophet do indeed occur in the Qurʾān with greater frequency than all others” (21); and

Unless there existed some conception of knowledge in pre-Islamic Arabia beyond our purview, it is impossible to understand why Muḥammad should have given knowledge such a crucial position in his teaching. Thus, we are compelled to look for possible outside influences. To some, this might seem to bring up again the much discussed question of the Prophet’s “originality.” The contention that any search for extraneous models and inspiration diminishes the originality of his accomplishment and is, anyhow, unnecessary is as wrong as it is trite. In fact, if the Qurʾānic use of ʿ-*l-m* cannot be placed in a historical context—and pagan pre-Islamic Arabia by itself does not furnish such a context—, it cannot but appear arbitrary and meaningless, and thus not truly original. True creative originality is found only where there is meaningful continuity. The “originality” of the Prophet’s concern with knowledge will therefore be understood only if a likely source can be discovered. (23)

This is followed by a quest for sources and reasons for this stress on knowledge in the Qurʾān. Since it cannot be found in the Prophet’s native Arabia, Rosenthal offers “a possible and by no means daring assumption that somewhat unorthodox Christian discussions in some form or other trickled down to Muḥammad and, sparking his interest in ‘knowledge’, set in motion the great movement toward ʿilm in Islam” (26). As if this source was not enough, Rosenthal then invents a “hypothetical Jewish Gnosticism as a second possible influence on Muḥammad” and a “pagan Gnosticism” as the third source, only to discard them within one paragraph and reaffirm: “Thus, the Gnostic Christian hypothesis would so far seem to point to the most likely source of inspiration for the Prophet’s concept of knowledge” (28).

Needless to say, this sort of treatment meted out to the Prophet and the Qurʾān in this overbearing work would seem blasphemous to Muslims, but what is important to note is that it does not even stand scrutiny from the secular Academy’s own criteria. For instance, there is the mention of

3. Muḥammad Fūʾād ʿAbdul Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras*. Numerous editions, published in almost every Muslim country.

“old traditions” of the Prophet (40), as if there are also some “new traditions”; the book uses a self-coined term “Muslim civilization”—instead of the more meaningful term “Islamic civilization”—in so many different ways that no fixed meaning can be attributed to it. Furthermore, it uses this term in the singular, which is astounding, for orientalism has spent such a great deal of energy in deconstructing and denying the existence of any normative Islamic tradition that can be said to have existed across time and geographical zones (let alone a whole civilization!), and yet, here we have an undefined “Muslim civilization” supposedly spanning the entire geographical region of the Muslim world and across which knowledge was triumphant! Rosenthal also misconstrues well-established and fundamental Qur’ānic terms such as *Islām* and *Īmān*, which, according to the author “were originally conceived by and large as synonyms” (97), but “which came to be seen eventually as involving primarily the relationship between formal religious practice and religious belief” (97). This confusion prevails despite of the distinct usage of these terms in the Qur’ān⁴ as well as their precise and distinctive usage in many sayings of the Prophet, including well-known and widely accepted authentic *aḥādīth* such as the *ḥadīth Jibrīl*.⁵ Rosenthal could have corrected his erroneous views on this usage through Izutsu’s *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām*, published five years before the publication of Rosenthal’s work, but our “prodigious scholar” says he has not seen it (97, n.51).

That this scholarship is ideologically driven and politically motivated is obvious. Its reincarnation as “classic” raises serious questions about the directions of the new orientalism.



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4. For instance, *al-Hujarāt*: 14: *The bedouin say: ‘we have attained to faith’, say: ‘you have not attained to faith; you should [rather] say, we have submitted (aslammā), for [true] faith [Īmān] has not entered your hearts’* and many other usages.
 5. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Īmān* 1; *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, *Īmān* 1; *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, *Īmān* 37; *Mishkāt al-Masābiḥ* 5, 6. For detailed treatment of these concepts, see William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 35-42.

Hamid Parsania: *Existence and the Fall: Spiritual Anthropology of Islam*, translated and annotated by **Shuja Ali Mirza**

London: ICAS Press, 2006, x+198 pp., PB, ISBN 1-904063-23-3

Far from the chaotic modernity of big cities, certain small, ancient centers of Islamic learning keep functioning as they have over the centuries. Qum is one such place. On any given morning one can see students rushing toward the mosques at dawn, where they sit with their teachers after the prayer and do what their ancestors have done for centuries: learn the mysteries of the cosmos and existence from scholars who have themselves received these sciences from their teachers in similar fashion. This transmission takes place in an intimate but informal environment. There is no enrollment, no registration, no fees to be paid. After the class, students sit in small groups to further explore the intricacies of the topics, some follow the revered teacher for a more exclusive class in a more private setting; others retire to meditate.

After spending a few years with one teacher, the student receives his blessings to move on to a higher level of experience or learning and the hierarchical structure eventually leads one to a level of competence where the student can guide others. At times, books are produced through an intricate and involved process wherein a student compiles class notes, shows them to the teacher, and, after receiving permission, prepares a manuscript which then goes through several readings and changes before publication. In other cases, the teacher prepares the text and the students become part of the process of its editing and publication. In yet another scenario, as is the case with regard to *Existence and the Fall: Spiritual Anthropology of Islam*, a student undertakes to translate the book of his teacher for a wider readership. Originally from Canada, Shuja Ali Mirza has spent many years in Qum, studying the intellectual sciences at the heart of one of the oldest centres of learning in Islam. His faithful translation of his teacher's Fārsī work, *Hasī wa Habūṭ: Insān dar Islām*, brings to the English-speaking readership a wealth of wisdom, insights, and a systematic exposition of spiritual anthropology in Islam, by which term the translator distinguishes religious anthropology from so-called "scientific anthropology." This scientific anthropology can conceive existence, but not the Fall; it can study man from a humanistic perspective, but cannot entertain the existence of anything higher.

As opposed to this modern caricature, spiritual anthropology relies on revelation and intellect as two sources of its cognitive content; the for-

mer furnishes the basic premises on which the latter constructs a veritable science of existence. Revelation provides authentic data concerning the visible and the unseen worlds, the creation, the fall, the Creator-created relationship, the hierarchy of existence and existents, and the Intellect attempts to fathom the mysteries of existence through a systematic process. The result is a systematic body of knowledge, placing humanity within a hierarchy of existent things. These and related topics form the core of *Existence and the Fall*, which presents a rich flavor of Islamic intellectual tradition. The book is a valuable addition to the scant resources available to English-speaking readers on traditional Islamic cosmology.



William C. Chittick: *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*

Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007, xi+159 pp., PB, ISBN 978-1-85168-495-3

In the short introduction to this work, William Chittick states that after almost forty years of sitting back and letting sages such as Rūmī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, Shams-i Tabrīzī, and Mullā Ṣadrā speak through his translations, he has finally felt at ease in applying their wisdom to the complex problems of the contemporary world. At the heart of this book consisting of seven chapters, all but one of which were originally written as lectures for conferences, is the question: “how do we know what we know?”

Religious traditions clearly distinction two modes of knowing and hence the two kinds of knowledge: transmitted (*naqlī*) and intellectual (*‘aqlī*). The former is passed from generation to generation, the latter is learned by training the mind and polishing the heart. Transmitted knowledge is revealed knowledge. God wants the believers to fast during the month of Ramaḍān; He reveals this to the Prophet who transmits it to the believers and those who hear him say so, pass it on those who are not present—and so on down the generations. Intellectual knowledge, on the other hand, is acquired by the knowing subject. Even though it may require teachers, it does not ultimately depend on the authority of the teacher for its verification and existence; it resides in the heart and mind of the knower. That two plus two equals four does not rely on an authority once it has been comprehended.

The first three chapters consist of lectures delivered to Muslim audi-

ence, and therein one finds ample evidence of Chittick's command over the material he has studied and translated for over forty years. It is also in these three chapters that one finds the sharpest and most clear diagnosis of contemporary Muslim dilemmas as seen from the perspective of a deeply concerned but objective scholar, who can stand aloof from the moribund tradition and look back at the times when it produced great thinkers and sages. He can thus wonder: what has gone wrong? Intellectual tradition is essential for the survival of religion, for one cannot think of Islam without simultaneously comprehending the Qur'ānic commands demanding Muslims to think, reflect, and ponder.

Muslims have stopped thinking, Chittick states boldly, knowing that his observation would be contested by many. Thus he explains what he means by "thinking". By "thinking", he means the kind of thinking that produced the intellectual tradition of Islam which is now rapidly disappearing. It was a training of the mind, a discipline of the heart which was rooted in the message of the Qur'ān. Modern intellectuals, trained in modern modes of thought, inhabit a mental schizophrenia where faith and practice are not harmonious, mind and heart are at war with each other, and the gods of modernity reign supreme in the lives of those who claim to worship only one God. "A god is what gives meaning and orientation to life, and the modern world derives meaning from many, many gods. Through an ever-intensifying process of *takthīr*, the gods have been multiplied beyond count, and people worship whatever gods appeal to them. (13)

Containing clear but frightening prognoses of the modern world, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul* leads one to think about the contemporary state of the world from an uncommon perspective and debunks modern ideology, rooted as it is in humanism, scientism, and many other "isms" which have emerged in the Western thought since the European Enlightenment. Without being "too Islamic", the book draws upon a variety of traditional sources to articulate its main concern: fallen into a path of self-destruction, humanity needs to wake up before it is too late. It is the role of intellectual tradition to help humanity in this effort.

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