

THE SECULARIST MODERNIST BIAS OF WESTERN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Western social sciences in general bear a clear stamp of the modernist and secularist bias of the Western liberal academy. Adopting their typical mode of enquiry entails an *ipso facto* espousal of the liberal and secularist worldview with its epistemological and cultural preferences. Such an epistemological framework is largely confined to empiricism and its cultural perceptions are constricted by a Euro-centric view of history. It is a truism that an empirical mode of enquiry by its very nature cannot go beyond a partial perception of human existential reality. When this mode is further restricted by Western cultural dogmatics, it defies the perception of objective reality, precludes the cognition of significant subjective, introspective, and emotional dimensions of human behavior, and falls short of recognizing significant variables of cultural relativism. Therefore, this method is not only unfit to understand Muslim societies and their dynamics, it also fails to reach an adequate understanding of the various dimensions of human social behavior in general.

The impact of the modernist secularist bias on the fundamental approach common to the disciplines of the social sciences is that the knowledge of social phenomena supplied by them is deliberately filtered to fit the typical liberal modernist paradigm. These so-called objective and value-free sciences then assume the role of a messianic cultural movement to mold the whole world in accordance with the perceptions and priorities of the dominant Western paradigm. These sciences prescribe an epistemol-

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*Islam & Science*, Vol. 6 (Summer 2008) No. 1

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ISSN 1703-7603 (Print); ISSN 1703-7602X (Online)

ogy which forces its user to conceptualize both manners of experiencing as well as the modes of explaining man and the world around him, all in accordance with their given presumptions. The result of an uncritical adoption of this method of enquiry is that one immediately becomes hostage to the proselytizing project of secular modernity launched by Western powers for their own specific ends. These powers have assumed a self-commissioned apocalyptic mission to liberate humanity from ‘ignorance’, ‘irrationality’, ‘superstition’, and ‘backwardness’, and recast the world in their own favored secular modernist model of ‘enlightenment’, ‘progress’, and ‘development’.<sup>1</sup>

The most important bias of secular modernity is that it holds as an a priori assumption the absolute superiority of the present over the past. Whatever is later in time is reckoned as ‘modern’ and regarded as unquestionably higher, more progressive, more precious, and more valuable than all that which pertains to the past, which is in turn dubbed and dismissed as pre-modern, retrogressive, ancient, and archaic. There also exists in the modern Western mindset an inherent antagonism between ‘then’ and ‘now’, ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’, ‘old’ and ‘new’. The word ‘modern’ has been derived from the Latin root *modo*, meaning ‘just now’. Thus, in the very term ‘modernism’, a necessary superiority of the present over the past has been arbitrarily presumed. This typical occidentalist bias reflects the Western weariness with its own past which it perhaps rightly calls a dark period. In their myopia, however, the occidentals universalize their prejudice toward a particular era of their own history. The ethnocentric bias and bigotry of the Western episteme thus insists on seeing and showing the entire history of humankind from its own narrow prism and shallow spectacles. Hence the excessive obsession of Western social thinkers with an absolute preference of the present over the past and their dogmatic adherence to this creed, which is religiously followed in all social research that takes for granted that whatever is prior in historical time has to be backward and blame-worthy and whatever is subsequent must be ‘advanced’ and praiseworthy. This dogmatic attachment to a fixed notion of temporality has *ab initio* blinded the vision of high modernist scholars.

Those who uncritically borrow wisdom from their occidental masters thus land in serious flaws and fallacies on account of a blind emulation of modernist and secularist academics. For example, a widespread though often unconscious understanding among the ideologues of high modern-

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1. For further details, see Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (eds.), *Looking Back on the End of the World* (New York, 1989).

ism alleges that, before the touch of the colonial baptizing hand, as it were, orientals lived in an abject condition of economic backwardness, intellectual insolvency, and in a deplorable state of cultural barrenness and civilizational void. They opened their eyes in the world of culture and civilization only when the white man emerged to bear their burden and conduct them to the shores of enlightenment and progress.<sup>2</sup> Muslim

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2. There are many honorable exceptions in the Western academia with regard to appreciating the substantive and sustainable contributions of Muslims in pre-modern times to human culture and civilization. This feature of world history is too self-evident to require revisiting here. However, for the sake of refreshing readers' memory, we may profitably cite excerpts from a recent statement given by a prominent Western figure acknowledging humanity's debt to Muslim Civilization. This statement was issued in the aftermath of 9/11 tragedy—a tragedy without any parallel or precedent in world history since its damaging after-effects continue to multiply even till now (nearly seven years after its occurrence). The significance of this testimony increases manifold when we bear in mind the horrendous spectacles generated by that great tragedy. This statement was given by Ms. Carly Fiorina, CEO Hewlett Packard on 26th September 2001:

“There was once a civilization that was the greatest in the world. It was able to create a continental super-state that stretched from ocean to ocean, and from northern climes to tropics and deserts. Within its dominion lived hundreds of millions of people, of different creeds and ethnic origins. One of its languages became the universal language of much of the world, the bridge between the people of hundred lands. Its armies were made up of people of many nationalities, and its military protection allowed a degree of peace and prosperity that had never been known. The reach of this civilization's commerce extended from Latin America to China, and everywhere in between. And this civilization was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and exploration. Its writers created thousands of stories of courage, romance and magic. Its poets wrote of love, when others before them were too steeped in fear to think of such things.

When other nations were afraid of ideas, this civilization thrived on them, and kept them alive. When censors threatened to wipe out knowledge from past civilizations, this civilization kept the knowledge alive, and passed it on to others. While modern Western civilization shares many of

social scientists must, therefore, take great care when adopting the social scientific methods of the Western academy, for its implicit epistemological frameworks and modes of research are often deeply influenced by a definite teleological understanding.

In its obsession with dry rationalism and mechanical scientism, secularist modernism and its academic off-shoots take an impersonal, clinical, and laboratory approach to isolating and understanding the human condition. In the name of objectivity, modernity sets aside emotions and feelings, intuition and reflection, speculation and imagination, individual wisdom and experience, custom and convention, metaphysics and tradition, cosmology and religion, ethics and aesthetics, and esoteric and mystical vision.<sup>3</sup> At the price of its cultural legacy, modernity has engendered industrialization, urbanization, advanced technology, the nation-state, and life in the fast lane. It has established and dictated its own typical set of priorities for human beings: individual freedom, liberal democracy, detached experiment, neutral procedures, impersonal rules, and dry rationality.<sup>4</sup> The end result of modernization in human societies, notwithstanding the highly exaggerated claims of success by its votaries, has been reflected in such ruinations as the dissolution of the institution of marriage, the fluidity of the family and its constant decline, a self-centred individual completely estranged from his human relations and linkages,

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these traits, the civilization I'm talking about was the Islamic world from the year 800 to 1600, which included the Ottoman Empire and the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and enlightened rulers like Suleiman the Magnificent. Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to this other civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage. The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians. Su. Poet-philosophers like Rumi challenged our notions of self and truth. Leaders like Suleiman contributed to our notions of tolerance and civic leadership. And perhaps we can learn a lesson from his example: It was leadership that harnessed the full capabilities of a very diverse population – that included Christianity, Islamic, and Jewish traditions. This kind of enlightened leadership—leadership that nurtured culture, sustainability and diversity and courage—led to 800 years of invention and prosperity.”

Cited in Syed Faiyazuddin Ahmad, *Issues Non-Issues* (Karachi: Intermedia Communications, 2007), 29-30.

3. Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 32-33.
4. Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-11.

the erosion of perennial values by the monster of the media, excessive entertainment, distortion of reality through advertisements, the dissemination of pornography and prostitution, abuse of women in entertainment and advertisements, an increase in such deviant habits of moral turpitude as incest, homosexuality, and marital infidelity, drug abuse, AIDS, and alcoholism at an unprecedented scale. If one were to judge the merits of secular modernism by the results it has produced, then a very ugly picture of its performance inevitably emerges. Even if one were to assess this performance by strictly applying modernity's own preferred standards of success, progress, and human happiness, a very gloomy picture of the present and an utterly hopeless projection of the future of mankind is unavoidable.

Modernism initially proceeded in its career from a postulated aim of human freedom and happiness. However, it has only further chained man in the shackles of matter and materialism. It has landed him in a vicious circle of the fast and mad race for material amelioration of the conditions of life. This endless race for material progress without any spiritual content has entangled him in a cobweb of conflicts with his own self and with others. Despite the excessive production of gadgetry to save human time and energy and provide greater ease and leisure, as promised by the ever-expanding and diversifying technologies, man has been deprived of previously available leisure, peace of mind, harmony and tranquility. His impatience, anxiety, and restlessness increase with his increased encirclement in this cycle of so-called progress and development.

Moreover, nature, which had been a source of harmony and peace and supplied immense solace and serenity to the inhabitants of the earth, has been brutally trampled. Man's nature has been tarnished from within and his habitat has been destroyed from without. While the primordial nature of man has been desecrated, outer nature has too been devastated, resulting in unlimited damage in terms of the ozone layer, green house effect, global warming, etc. Ecobalance is being constantly destroyed by the ever-expanding invasive power of the monster of technology. The result of these disasters is clearly visible in the ever-increasing estrangement, unhappiness, loneliness and meaninglessness of man. The archetypal *l'étranger* of Albert Camus has emerged as the universal specimen of modern man.

This tragic state of life in which *homo modernus* finds himself today is reflected in the flourishing business of psychiatrists in Western societies. Without any fear of exaggeration, it could be asserted that the more one modernizes his living, the more he derails his life from the natural

course; hence his increasing dependence on psychiatric sessions, mental healing processes, and sleeping pills. Material progress, in other words, has been bartered for mental peace in the modern way of life. And this is a very heavy price indeed. The basic cause of this profligacy has been that man has sought happiness outside himself and forgot his real inner self; little did he realize that the source and seat of his happiness was inside, not outside himself. The result of this reversal was that excessive means of pleasure and entertainment have been amassed around him at the expense of his inner peace and harmony.

A prominent feature of the academic project of modernism is maintaining rigid disciplinary boundaries between various branches of knowledge. The frontiers of these branches have been sharply demarcated under the ostensible influence of the reductionist atomistic logic of scientism. Thus the natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, arts and literature, philosophy and ethics, and metaphysics and religion are placed in different, almost exclusive categories leaving little channels of mutual enrichment or permitting any fruitful traffic of ideas between them. This sharp division of knowledge has resulted in a mutual estrangement between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the metaphysical, matter and spirit, real and ideal, quantity and quality, civilization and culture, image and reality. This bifurcation of heart and soul, mind and thought, has robbed modern man of the holistic vision of the self and the reality in terms of which a balanced and harmonious symmetry of ideas, equipoise in thinking, and a temperate rhythm of life could be maintained. This centrifugal polarization has precipitated an increasing split of thinking and behavior in nearly every branch of human knowledge and in every field of human endeavor. The result of this polarization is that the natural unity of life has been eroded and man's loyalty has been split into discordant commitments.

This reductionist dissection of knowledge and experience which has been credulously borrowed from the methodology of natural sciences is most conspicuously manifested in the field of modern medicine. The modern empirical science of medicine clearly typifies this dissection of man at the biological level—vitiating its organic wholeness. Man, however one might define him, remains a single and singular composite whole who is born at once and dies at once. He is neither delivered piecemeal nor recalled in installments. But the sharply drawn lines of exclusivity between the branches of modern reductionist medical science compel the treatment of human body in divided parts and broken pieces. The treatment of the brain is divorced from the care of the heart. One who

tries to restore the function of stomach has little concern for the liver. A surgeon who takes pride in his skills in operating upon the tiniest tissues of the human body seldom realizes the adverse effects of his activity on the nervous system. In this way, modern medicine seeks to treat man in the fashion of repairing an automobile. The engineer repairs the engine. The electrician mends the lights and batteries. The wheels are taken care of by someone else. And the outer body of the vehicle is looked after by yet another expert. In this way, the automobile could be kept intact because it is made in parts. But man has not been made piecemeal nor born in parts. He comes into this world as a harmonious whole, a “finished product” and perfect human being. Man represents the best specimen for applying the famous maxim “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The latest investigations of medical sciences themselves have increasingly emphasized the organic unity and inter-dependence of human physiology and psychology. Yet being unavoidably tied by the atomistic chains of the scientific method, modern medical science has thus far failed to develop a harmonious approach to human health and well-being in its totality. Although there is an apparent realization of this drawback of medical science on the part of some perceptive individual researchers and practitioners of medicine, they can find no way out of this predicament so long as they remain hostage to the basic reductionist bias underlying the method of science. Of late, the same realization seems to be forcing itself on scholars in other areas of enquiry. Hence an increasing emphasis among contemporary academics on adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to problems to reach a more plausible and comprehensive explanation of the reality. Although the application of this extended approach seems to be yielding some benefits in the process of lending and borrowing between sister social sciences because of the similarity of their methodologies, it is still a far cry in other areas of knowledge.

This atomistic reduction, a distinctive feature of modern empirical science, has been mindlessly applied to the whole body politic of the human condition. Those who used to perceive and practice life as a holistic experience are fast losing ground to narrow specialists in nearly every field of human activity. It is apprehended that if the current pace of continuous diversification and bifurcation of knowledge continued in the name of specialization, then the logical end of this process would be nothing but mere bewilderment and sheer agnosticism. Because specialization claims to know more and more about less and less, this process must logically culminate in knowing nothing about nothing.

Owing to their constant shrinking in their own shells of reductionism,

the typical modernist intellectuals often become hostile or opposed to all those aspects of human cultural heritage that seek to go into the deeper meanings of things in order to arrive at a comprehensive and balanced view of the reality. That is why one finds that such attainments of human thought and culture as are represented by philosophy, poetry, intuition, reflection, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, a religious worldview, spiritual vision, and experience are undermined, ignored, trivialized or rejected outright in typical secular modernist discourse. In its excessive obsession with specialization, scientific precision and reductionism, liberal and secular scholarship mocks at all those areas of human cultural undertaking that seek to take and promote a holistic view of life and its varied phenomena. The results of the educational system generated by modernist ways of thinking provide sufficient evidence of the truth of this statement. The higher a society rises in the scale of modernization, the more it shows shocking signs of marked impoverishment of human attainments in the fields of art, literature, philosophy, metaphysics, speculative logic, hermeneutics, mysticism, ethics, and aesthetics. In the pre-modern classical period, all these areas of human cultural and cognitive endeavor significantly contributed toward arriving at a comprehensive and eclectic understanding of life and reality. But now it seems that the infertile womb of secular modernity has inhibited the birth or arrested the growth of such giants of the past as Milton, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Tolstoy. Similarly, the branches of knowledge that have been typically promoted and patronized in most modernist societies of the West are those that are concerned with partial perception of things and a peripheral treatment of the problems of life. These forms of knowledge often generate clichés and stereotypes, assemble platitudes and banalities to reinforce their own preferred customs and conventions, but do little to make men any wiser. In this way, they play the role of the custodians of the intellectual status quo and inhibit any growth and fermentation of human ingenuity beyond their own dogmatic confines. History has seldom witnessed such a scale of the mind's slavery and bondage in the name of freedom and liberty.

The same reductionist biases and mechanical attitudes have also penetrated those areas of human skill and artistry that maintained a totalizing and holistic approach in pre-modern times. For example, in the field of architecture, one of the oldest areas of human ingenuous endeavor, the typical modernist approach prefers to focus on the parts rather than the whole. It often gives priority to the precise functional and utilitarian aspects of buildings to the detriment of ethical and aesthetic considerations, if only because the latter are seldom translatable into immediate material



gains. The modernist architecture thus becomes content with an efficient and pragmatic layout of mass, void, and space and a clever juxtaposition of light and darkness. It thus delivers culturally impervious and aesthetically ugly structures of steel, glass, and concrete. It does look to the details and particulars to secure maximum functional advantages to the capitalist investor, but seldom cares for symmetry, harmony, beauty, and the total impact of buildings on the skylines of cities and on the overall ambiance and environment of modern metropolises. The best buildings produced by modern architecture, despite their excessive utility, are a far cry from such beauties as the Taj Mahal, al-Hamra, Shalimar Gardens, or the Blue Mosque. In the former, technical preferences and utilitarian choices have overpowered the deeper aesthetic imagination and artistic vision that used to conceive and create beautiful images and symmetrical patterns out of the same mass, void, and space in the pre-modern past. The chief cause of this ugliness of modern architecture is that the subject conceiver is often devoid or negligent of inner deeper imagination, and higher vision. On the contrary, he is imprisoned in objective measurements and geometrical quantifications by means of mechanical tools and technical instruments.

The same is more or less true of the area of literature, one of the oldest sources of human wisdom and boldest fields of human self-expression. Modernist literary discourse mostly tends to be exact, precise, pragmatic, dry, terse, and curtly impersonal and objective. Hardly any “higher” literary standards or stylistic criteria seem to be maintained in this discourse. The result of this approach is reflected in the impoverishment of the modernist idiom in terms of the traditional nobility of feeling, majesty of thought, beauty of expression, rhetorical excellence, or literary sublimity. The infertility that has afflicted modern trends in literature makes it inhospitable to fermenting the genius typical of classic giants like Milton, Shakespeare, or Goethe. Modernism has erected impenetrable walls against the high seas of transcendentalism from where such gifted men discovered invaluable pearls of perennial wisdom and universal truths. It is these truths that invested the classical literature of yore with an immortal appeal and abiding influence.

Contrary to its oft-repeated claims of objectivity, modernism is firmly rooted in its own bigoted biases and arbitrary choices. It takes for granted certain parts or facets of the human condition in the past or present that suit its own scientific bias or fit into its methodological models and limited categories. These models and categories have been defined by the hegemonic agenda of Western powers to promote their political ends by

means of imposing intellectual slavery and literary serfdom on weaker peoples and nations. Modernism, therefore, downplays areas of opposition and the regions of resistance. For example, modernist analysts would not recognize alternate life-worlds, even as occurring in literature. Similarly, in their studies of past peoples and events, they would relegate into insignificance all that was classical, sacred, traditional, and sublime in human history. Dictated by their own typically biased choices, the modernist scholars isolate elements, specify relationships, and make self-serving formulations. Going by their favorite modes of analysis and methods of empiricism, they make simplified generalizations to deliver deterministic sorts of results.

For example, a common perception among modern sociologists about the migration of the work force from the so-called underdeveloped to developed countries, is that this phenomenon furnishes proof that man is basically *homo economicus*. Based on their narrow view of *homo sapiens*, they have argued that man was essentially motivated by selfish economic ends to improve his material lot. Whenever there is economic backwardness, migration to a prosperous land will take place if and when an opportunity is available. They ignore the fact that there always remains a far greater number of people who still continue to live in the so-called backward countries and never contemplate migration, despite available opportunities. Otherwise, the poor population of Fiji should have been absorbed by Australia and New Zealand long ago! Many East European countries would have been deserted by their inhabitants, especially after they became part of the European Union. Also, millions of Jews should never have migrated to Israel from some of the most prosperous and affluent countries of North America and Western Europe. These sociologists also ignore the fact that another sort of migration is also taking place from the most advanced economies in Scandinavia. This is the self-propelled flight of modern men and women, old as well as young, from this prosperous world into the hereafter through increasing suicide rates.

Moreover, even those who do migrate from barren lands to greener pastures quite often do so with the altruistic motive of maintaining their large families of dependants. They accept the humiliation of a secondary status in a foreign country, vex themselves into a hard life, often sleeping in a rented bed in turns, feeding themselves the barest minimum of food, working twice the normal load—they force themselves to face these travails just in order to support poorer members of their extended families. They deprive themselves of the comforts of life to make the lives of others comfortable. Is there, then, any justification for the generalization that

migration proves an essentially materialistic or selfish nature of man?

Similar is the superficial inference from the process of urbanization. It has long been a near-truism among Western sociologists that urbanization brings about a drastic departure from erstwhile traditional values. When an individual or group abandons rural roots and adopts urban ways of living, conservative moral and religious values are *ipso facto* replaced by those of secular modernity. This view also, by implication, puts a premium on the materialistic nature of man. It advances the notion that a change in material conditions must alter the moral consciousness of man. However, an overwhelming evidence of increasing religiosity among the urban populations of North America is itself a sufficient living testimony against this perception. In our own (Pakistani) society also, the more religious are quite often the more urbanized. The experience of *Tablighī Jamā'at* provides ample illustration of this phenomenon, as it is mainly a movement sponsored by urban educated people directed at rural populations. This is true of many other religious movements of reform and education of various persuasions that have emerged in our country since its inception. They have invariably originated from urban areas and flourished there. Once consolidated in the urban centers, they extended their appeal to the rural population and disseminated their message among the less religious un-urbanized masses.<sup>5</sup>

The basic failure of the modernist empirical reductionism that informs the Western social scientific approach is its inability or lack of interest to perceive human behavior in its entirety as a harmonious whole. Obviously, human behavior has not been tailored according to any exclusive predetermined categories dictated by social scientific dogma. These narrow categories, therefore, defy the ontological unity and harmony characteristic of traditional thought. They devise all 'scientific' attempts to break the primordial totality of human self and behavior as an integrated whole down into parts that could be understood or analyzed separately. But decomposing a social phenomenon or a pattern of human behavior which is dictated by the very definition of the social science method misses the true essence of human life.<sup>6</sup>

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5. This is equally true of *Jamā'at-i-Islāmī* which originated in 1941 from the urban centers of British India. After independence in 1947, its organization became divided between Pakistan and India with independent leaderships. Both the outfits are constantly increasing their influence in rural populations of these two countries.

6. For further discussion, see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Basic Dilemmas in Social Sciences* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1984), 24.

Moreover, the scientific orientation of social thought stifles creativity and the so-called *verstehen*, if not totally destroys it, and disregards all other possible means of comprehending the full meaning of social phenomena.<sup>7</sup> Since the modernist scientific investigator is often influenced by utilitarian motives, it is always in his parochial economic interest to devalue and look down upon all other possible contenders in those fields of enquiry that are monopolized by him. It should be borne in mind that the modernist project of knowledge is not a charitable undertaking or altruistic mission occupied in the service of humanity. More than anything else, it is an economic establishment on the success of which thousands of specialists thrive and derive their livelihood. Hence, this academic establishment acts in its own group's collective interest rather than pursuing the weal or welfare of humanity at large or any universal cause of truth or justice.

Human social reality is a complex and intricate phenomenon. Specific historical events that supply the main material for investigation to sociologists "are unique, unprecedented and without exact parallels in the past or present of human history. In almost all these events, human free will and indeterminism constitute such formidable road blocks that it is fool-hardy to attempt scientific analysis or generalization of more than a limited nature."<sup>8</sup> Often the preconceived bias for scientism, with all its presumptions, predisposes the researcher to study problems that are theoretically or practically trivial as long as they are scientifically tractable. He examines only those variables that are easily measured, often neglecting the truly important ones. He avoids the big questions in favor of lesser ones. The result is that the method adopted dictates the problems rather than *vice versa*. In this way, the social researcher is fixed in the vortex of scientism by compulsively imitating the modes of physical sciences to arrive at an understanding of the social reality that, in effect, and contrary to his presumptions, has not been cast in the mold of physics, chemistry, or biology.

In fact, the relative success secured by the natural sciences through applying their exact methods has created among social researchers a fascination with scientism. They slavishly imitate the physical scientists to bring themselves at par with them in terms of delivering immediate ready-made and marketable results about the nature and condition of the social reality. Ignoring the complexities of human behavior, they conve-

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7. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

8. *Ibid.*, 26.

niently borrow behavioral perspectives and research methodologies from the hard sciences in order to match their own results with the latter's apparently ready and tangible successes. Further, in order to gain greater credibility in favor of their findings and to exploit the credulity of their clients, social scientists excessively employ the jargon of the natural sciences. This is done to insinuate the same exactness, precision, and certainty that ostensibly characterizes the results of physics, chemistry, and biology. For this purpose, they have devised clever ways to bring about a firm social and academic consensus in Western societies about the adequacy, efficacy, and desirability of the positivist, empiricist, and rational-logical model of the social science. That is why their results easily find a receptive and hospitable audience. Liberal Western society has historically been keen and responsive to those modes of enquiry that could replace the heritage of religious conservatism with an alternative system of irreligious knowledge and ideas. This mindset provided a congenial climate for the social sciences to establish their highest credentials in the modern Western academic establishment. Thanks to the political and economic clout and technological and industrial influence which the so-called "First World" exercises and perpetrates through its dominant educational systems and powerful media channels, these social sciences also rapidly gain currency in the non-Western world—including significant sections of the world of Islam.

Against this backdrop, let us now try to see, in a nutshell, the main variance between Western secular and authentic Islamic perspectives in social thought. This brief comparison would enable us to appreciate the intellectual challenge involved in the development of a truly Islamic approach to the study of society in the present times.

The emergence of the singular socio-political order in the *Madīnan* milieu of the seventh century of the common era was a unique phenomenon of history. This phenomenon represented a confluence of the revealed Islamic ideal and the historical Muslim reality and set in motion a sublime cultural career of the *Ummah*. It was this historical concretization of the moral norms and social values of Islam that provided impetus and anchorage to the unfolding of the Unitarian Muslim Culture,<sup>9</sup> the evolution and diversification of Islamic thought with its peculiar categories, and the rich fermentation of multi-faceted Muslim creative genius. Similarly, the

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9. That is, the culture which historically sprang from the fountainhead of *tawhīd* irrigating all spheres of human thought and activity and leaving an undeniable mark on the annals of history. Hence the expression "Unitarian Muslim Culture".

development, in the early era of Muslim history, of a number of disciplines known as *al-ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyyah* aimed at an *ex-post facto* theorization of the whole range of the Prophet's prescriptions and precedents issued during the twenty-three years of his eventful prophetic mission. Hence, the ideal example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, supplemented by the fidel conduct of the faithful and further streamlined during the pious reign of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs constituted the touchstone for authenticity. It formed the very core and kernel of all Islamic sciences that evolved and expanded in the course of Muslim history. These Islamic sciences provided the main substance to Islamic thought. Therefore, all precepts, principles, and perspectives developed by the early doctors of Islamic sciences were premised on the prescriptive infallibility of the Prophet's *sun-nah* and on the normative authenticity of the archetypal Islamic society established by the Prophet, peace be upon him, under Divine mandate with the active collaboration of his companions. All criteria of judgement, categories of thought, scales of values, rules of reason, principles of logic, maxims of law, canons of justice, measures of excellence, manners of etiquette, mores of social life, modes of language, forms of literature, models of arts, motifs of crafts, tastes of aesthetics, ideas of metaphysics, ideals of spirituality, and methods of empirical enquiry that evolved in the Muslim history were, in one way or another, derived from, inspired, guided, animated, enlivened, enriched, and enlightened by the guiding wisdom of the Prophet, peace be upon him, as reflected in the *Madīnan* model. In this sense, *Sunnah* in its widest connotation constitutes the supreme source of Islamic culture and the perennial paradigm of Muslim self-perception, intellectual expression, social consciousness, and cementing force, the validity of which transcends all space-time milieux and matrices.

In contradistinction to this unique character of Islamic thought that originated with all its richness and variety from the cultural universe created by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and sustained by his immediate successors, the development of the secular social sciences emanated from the orbit of Western culture typified by its peculiar traditions of Darwinian science, Freudian psychology, Newtonian mechanics, Hegelian dialectics, Cartesian logic and rationality, Husserlian phenomenology, Sartrean existentialism, Machiavellian politics, anthropocentric liberalism, and utilitarian economics. All ideas, theories, and conceptualizations that characterize the secular social sciences and constitute their core and kernel are premised on this idealized historical experience of modern, secular, promethean, and pragmatic civilization of the Occident. The whole structure of this civilization is firmly resting on these foundations of secu-

lar thought, briefly outlined above.

There is indeed a dire need for a serious and profound study and analysis of this wide gulf represented by two conflicting world-views that emanate from two different historical contexts, and pursue two divergent systems of values and sets of objectives in their cultural careers. This is a formidable intellectual undertaking which, more than anything else, calls for a return to the historical roots and intellectual seeds of both these streams of culture and traditions of knowledge. Any superficial comparison between their conclusions at the micro level cannot serve the purpose of an authentic understanding of the nature and contextual relevance of either of these traditions. It is after a thorough examination of the basic premises and pre-suppositions of the Islamic and secular traditions that a proper approach can be formulated to appreciate each of them in the right perspective. On the firm basis of this profound understanding, an Islamic criteria can be defined for assimilating the useful elements of the secular tradition within the framework of Islamic thought. Such an assimilation would then be on the terms of the Islamic world-view and will hopefully advance the objectives of Islam and serve the ideals of the Muslim *Ummah* rather than serving the agenda of secular modernity.

It is heartening to observe that the Muslim intelligentsia, despite its pupillage in Western academic institutions both during the colonial as well as the post-colonial or neo-colonial period, has not entirely assimilated the secular and liberal philosophy underlying the social sciences. Scores of critical writings have appeared on the intellectual scene of the modern world by powerful and perceptive Muslim writers that challenge the atheistic roots and secularizing overtones that have shaped the contours of these social sciences. These intellectually gifted individuals who paved the ground for current Muslim critiques of social sciences include such luminaries of the world of Islam as Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), Malik Bennabi (d. 1961), Muhammad Refiuddin (d. 1957), Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), Alija Izetbigovic (d. 2003), Ismail al Faruqi (d. 1989), Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Messiri, Abd al-Majeed Mackeen, Naquib al-Attas, Seyyed Hussein Nasr, and S. Parvez Manzoor (still living), to name only a few. The list is constantly expanding, *al-hamdu li'llāh*.

In view of the foregoing, there is a pressing need to continue with this process of critical review of the a priori understandings, modes of enquiry, methodologies of research and investigation, and the broader dogmatic presumptions and prejudices of Western social sciences. At the same time, there is an urgent imperative to state in modern sociological parlance the distinguishing features of Muslim society, with its own distinct worldview,

credal postulates, moral choices, and cultural preferences.

In this process, one should be able to serve two purposes, namely (i) benefiting from any positive elements that may be found in the Western enterprise of social science, and (ii) saving the Muslim mind from the alien and incongruent influences of these sciences in its own self-understanding. There is yet a third objective which should motivate these kinds of studies. This third objective is comparatively more formidable and challenging and, therefore, requires a concerted and consistent effort by a team of talented Muslim scholars and writers to work together for its realization. This objective consists in identifying an original and authentic Islamic method of social research, the principles and perspectives of which should be derived from the Madīnan model of society and enriched by the credal and cultural, moral and spiritual, historical, intellectual, and traditional academic sources of Islam. Of course, it should be borne in mind that methodologies are invariably discerned subsequent to the actual development of ideas, evolution of thought, and emergence of practical patterns of behavior.

To the sweeping glance of a superficial observer not sufficiently versed in the Islamic tradition, the Islamic sources of knowledge might appear wanting in intellectual substance relevant to current social thought. But a deeper probe into the rich reservoir of knowledge produced by Muslim scholars of the past would yield an enormous wealth of ideas pertaining to this area, like so many other fields of contemporary scholarship. If a researcher's gaze is not fixed on the familiar and the conventional alone and his quest is not restricted by the narrow prism of his own academic specialization, he could easily lay hands on many precious pearls scattered in the great works of traditional Muslim scholars.

What one needs to bear in mind is that every age and milieu has its own diction and discourse and each form of human knowledge follows its peculiar categories. By acknowledging this temporal subjectivity and tentativeness of classification, one is able to surpass provisional outer designators and fleeting frontiers apparently existing between different formulations of knowledge and can capture the essence of ideas articulated in the terms of a historically distant tradition. A researcher should not allow his search to be restricted by any particular system of classification whereby some segment of knowledge is placed in a certain position contemplated by that classification. He should rather endeavour to delve deeper in the ocean of traditional knowledge to conquer its outer layers and penetrate its more profound precincts where many pearls and jewels lie hidden. The



more persistent the probe, the more rewarding will be the quest. This is true of all knowledge, traditional as well as modern. The deeper one dives in the ocean, the more one discovers the underlying similarity between the apparently divergent elements and ultimately arrives at the essential unity of purpose in the pursuit of knowledge and ideas.

For example, the celebrated works of those Muslim scholars who are generally placed in the category of purely religious thought, esoteric or exoteric, like the *Mathnawī* of Maulana Rūmī, the *Ihyāʾ* of Imām Ghazālī, and the *Qawāʾid al-Aḥkām* of ʿIzz al-Dīn Al-Sulamī contain significant and profound insights relevant to human society and its universal problems. Any perceptive observer should be able to identify this material and make sense of its current relevance. He would then find therein much to bewilder him. He would realize that these Muslim thinkers were able to agitate several significant problems of human life much before others and have—in all fairness—outclassed many a claimant of originality and innovation in our times. He will then have access to the right sources of Muslim understanding of society, its genesis and roots, its constants and variables, its perennial issues and problems, and, perhaps, he might well discover an altogether new perspective in social thought.

A critical study of Western modes of social enquiry and research, in their peculiar historical and cultural contexts, would bring into sharp focus the areas of conflict and confluence between Western secular and Islamic religious approaches to the human existential reality. At the same time, an attempt to identify the unique features and characteristics of Muslim culture and society—both at the normative and historical levels—shall greatly contribute to the development of an authentic Islamic methodology of social enquiry. It will perhaps fall to the lot of some perceptive and keen Muslim scholar(s) of the future to cast a deep discerning glance at all those writings that have come to the surface during the last century. These writings either attempt a critique of the Western social sciences or elaborate the unique characteristics of the Muslim society and culture in the current academic parlance. A keen survey of these recent writings would display a clear picture of the current status of Islamic scholarship in this area. Thereafter, the real task of Muslim scholars will start. This task will consist in clearly identifying the elements and approaches of a new methodology that could be termed truly Islamic for its innovation, originality and authenticity.