



# IN SEARCH OF SUITABLE KNOWLEDGE THE NEED OF ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM

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## ABSTRACT

This article points up a very crucial, yet non-political and non-economic issue, involved in the enduring conflict between Islam and the West which, unfortunately, has not been given adequate attention academically. The article highlights debate among Muslim thinkers regarding Muslim's reconstruction of knowledge project that emerged as reaction against the perceived incompatibility between modern knowledge system and the 'Islamic minds'. The project aims at cognitive transformation towards a 'unified systemic worldview' of Islam where no barrier would appear to exist between the sacred and the secular. My argument was made from the perspective of secularization theory and the Perennial Philosophy approach of religion. Accordingly, with the concept of human as spiritual being - a contrast to Western's vantage point in social sciences in which human is perceived to struggle only for economic gain and power - this article explains Muslim's reconstruction of knowledge project as reaction against cognitive dissonance inasmuch as inconsistencies appear between one's belief, cognition and action. This proposition runs counter to the often cited Foucault's 'power/knowledge' explanation in which Muslim's resistance to modern knowledge system appears as merely anti-colonial/anti-imperial struggles. The paper ultimately suggests the need of ontological and epistemological pluralism to exist, to make the dialogue between Islam and the West possible.

**Keywords:** Reconstruction of Knowledge, Cognitive Dissonance, Islamic system of thought, Ontological-Epistemological pluralism

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On *A World without Islam*, Graham Fuller (2010) begins chapter twelve, 'Colonialism, Nationalism, Islam and the Independence Struggle' with a brief sketch of a long and poignant trajectory for Muslims: "Muslim glory, gradual Muslim decline, the rise of the West, the takeover of the Muslims world by Western imperial powers, the anticolonial struggle, and contemporary resentments against Western neo-imperial policies of control and interventionism" (p.243). This sketch is often invoked in analyzing the historical roots of the conflict between Islam and the West. The course of events suggests at once a fit of piques portrayal of Muslims against the West that leads to obscure the more essential issues underlie Muslims' resistance to modern knowledge system. Hence, we are made oblivious about the serious concerns around the incompatibility between Islam and modern Western philosophy, and thus came to suggest Foucault's power-knowledge pattern, in which the resistance appears as a manifestation of anti-colonial, anti-imperial struggles. By presenting debates among Muslim thinkers regarding reconstruction of knowledge, or more popularly known as 'Islamization of knowledge', I would like to bring to attention the profound incompatibilities between Islamic and modern Western worldviews that have not been given adequate attention in the study of Islam's predicaments with modernity. My argument centers around secularization theory according to which modernization necessarily leads to the decline of religiosity, and the Perennial Philosophy approach of religion according to which religion begins with the origin of the human state itself. From that perspective, Muslim's reconstruction of knowledge debate emerges as reaction against cognitive dissonance inasmuch as inconsistencies appear between one's belief, cognition and action. Elsewhere, the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) states that inconsistency creates an aversive motivational state akin to hunger or thirst. This tension is typically reduced by changing one of the dissonant elements, or adding new ones, until mental consonance is achieved. In like manner, I argue, with reconstruction of knowledge, Muslims aim at an epistemology in which religious convictions and the world correspond. Accordingly, the incompatibilities between the two systems of thought could have been among the sources of deep problems and disputations Islam has with modernity and secularism. For that reason, I disagree with scholars such as Oliver Roy (1994) and Bassam Tibi (1995) who argue that reconstruction simply represents an ideological reaction to Western economics and political dominance.

Empirically, the prevailing dualistic structure of education in Muslim world and varied problems associated with it (see: Meijer, 2009; Cook, 1999), alongside resistance by a sizeable

portion of Muslim groups<sup>1</sup> and traditional Islamic education to modern knowledge system (e.g. Fuad, 2004; Pohl, 2009:147-8; Abubakar et. al., 2016), have called for inquiries into the 'nature' of the incompatibilities in question. The paucity of works on this issue so far, is especially puzzling given the heated debates on the presumed role of Islamic education in the spread of Muslim militancy. This article concludes with a list of capacities that reconstruction of knowledge should ultimately achieve. That is, knowledge that enables pious Muslims to view the world in correspondence with their beliefs. Furthermore, relevant to the aim of this article, the evidence today is overwhelming that humankind cannot continue on the path on which it is now heading into the future, considering the scale of ecological problems. The planetary crisis and human dilemma have prompted people to question the validity of the conception of nature held in modern science. Besides, materialism that has become a cosmological basis underlying epistemology of modern science, has also driven people to endless material growth which is not compatible with the long term viability of the earth's environment.

## I. SECULARIZATION AND DE-SECULARIZATION

While there has never been a single theory of secularization, the single underlying idea is simple: 'modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals'. Subsequently, as secular institutions would become predominate, 'the 'collective conscience' generated by religious participation would erode, and the functions performed by religion would be taken over by newly specialized institutions, such as the nation-state and the education system.

For Max Weber, the disenchantment<sup>2</sup> of the world is the essence of what is called modernity. Weber contends that rationalization that characterizes modernity will eventually shatter the unified systemic epistemologies that constitute pre-modern worldviews. Two aspects of disenchantment that reinforce each other are: the secularization and the decline of magic, and then, the increasing scale, scope, and power of the formal-rational logics and processes in the areas of science, bureaucracy, law and policymaking (Jenkins, 2000:12). Thus, Jenkins describes disenchantment as:

- 1 Boko Haram is an extreme example. In Hausa language the word 'Boko Haram' literally means 'Western education is a sin'.
- 2 He borrowed the expression from Friedrich Schiller when he spoke about de-divinization of the world.

the historical process by which the natural world and all areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious; defined, at least in principle, as knowable, predictable and manipulable by humans; conquered by and incorporated into the interpretive scheme of science and rational government. In a disenchanted world everything becomes understandable and tameable, even if not, for the moment, understood and tamed. Increasingly the world becomes human-centered and the universe – only apparently paradoxically- more impersonal. (p. 12)

Weber's disenchantment thesis seems to have been based on a number of assumptions, two key ones being that history has some direction, and that time is linear. Both these assumptions are distinctive to Western culture, with Jenkins claiming:

Even if we disregard the rich variety of communities and ethnies in the pre-modern world, there is every reason to suggest that the European world, at least, has been disenchanted, *in the sense of epistemically fragmented*, for as long as we can perceive it in the historical record. (Jenkins, 2000:15)

However, in respect of disenchantment and re-enchantment, we are witnessing in modern societies an array of opposing tendencies, themes and forces, and thus the world is arguably more mysterious today than ever. For Jenkins, the diverse array of oppositional re-enchantment that we see today tells us that the world may never have really been disenchanted, or only unevenly so, and that “the progressive banishment of mystery in the face of ‘objective’ knowledge is an idea which was more defensible in Weber's day than it is today” (Jenkins, 2000:17).

Berger (1999), once a prominent proponent of the secularization thesis, now declares that our age is no longer an age of secularization. On the contrary, it is an age of exuberant religiosity, much of it in the form of passionate movements with global outreach. Berger (1999:11) indicates two possible origins of the de-secularization forces: one is associated with human's deep need of certainty, and the other with resentment of the masses who are not part of the elite's Enlightenment program.

## II. PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY AND RE-ENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD

I need to clarify from the onset that ‘faith’ in this article is not faith that limits the function of intellection to a handmaid of religion as exemplified by ‘faith’ that many used to dismiss the scientists' warning of climate change<sup>3</sup>. I regard myself a supporter of Perennial Philosophy - especially in the works of its Islamic advocate Seyyed Hossein Nasr (see Ernst, 1994). Perennial philosophy is a school of thought that believes in the theomorphic nature of human, spiritual significance of all creation, and the spiritual reality of religion. In addition, while this school does not neglect the social or psychological aspects of religion, it refuses to reduce religion to its social or psychological manifestations. This latter account is worth mentioning in advancing an argument that takes human's psychological condition such as cognitive dissonance here into account in evaluating one's faith-based responses.

As for Islam, the most basic element of this faith is that God is the Ultimate Reality, *Al-Haqq*. One may call it a radical or total Theo-centrism. Indeed, this principle is hard to grasp in sensualist and empirical epistemology which has dominated the horizon of Western people in the modern times and which has been the basis of modern knowledge system. In sensualist and empirical epistemology, the meaning of reality is reduced to the world experienced by the external senses. It, therefore, limits the meaning of reality and removes the concept of reality pertaining to God. Inferring from that, God and all spiritual realms of being are reduced to the category of ‘abstract’, and then ‘unreal’. This article aims to bring this different concept of ‘reality’ to our attention, as it could have been the major source of cognitive dissonance among Muslims that issues from the modern system of thought.

The main idea of humanism of the Renaissance in which humans are the center of all things, and thus everything revolves around humans, is the antithesis of the concept of human in Islam according to which human is the *'abd* (servant) and *khalifah* (vicegerent) of God. Accordingly, as the Muslims adopt humanism through the modern system of thought, they are placed in great inconsistency with what they believe. Festinger (1957) contends that an individual strives toward consistency within himself, the kind of consistency between what a person knows or believes and what he/she does. According to him, cognitive dissonance leads to activity oriented towards dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented

<sup>3</sup> E.g. as reported in *The Economist* 2/21/2014.

toward hunger reduction. The activity of dissonance reduction aims to achieve consonance, or active avoidance of situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. This article proposes cognitive dissonance as another explanation behind the resurgence of Islam or de-secularization waves in the Muslim world. The following discussion captures the attempts by Muslim intellectuals to re-enchant modernity through cognitive transformations as the incompatibility between the two systems of thought appeared against the backdrop of modernization. Reconstruction of knowledge attempts, while reminding us that 'faith' is ineffable and personal, and that 'meaning' is subjective and historically and culturally specific, the debate confronts the secular presumptions that the tension between science and religion, knowledge and faith, is universal (Zaidi, 2006).

### III. COGNITIVE TRANSFORMATION PROJECT THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Ali Hasan Zaidi (2006) in *'Muslim Reconstruction of Knowledge and the Re-enchantment of Modernity'* outlines Muslims' attempt to re-enchant modernity. He began with featuring the *Salafi* thinking, followed by Al-Faruqi's *Islamization of knowledge*; Naquib Alattas' *de-westernization of knowledge*; Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *reconstruction of knowledge*, the Ijmali's *reopen the gate of ijtihad*, and Farid Alatas's critiques. While Zaidi does not refuse to understand the debates by setting them in historical context, he denies they should be dismissed as merely ideological and reduced only to the postcolonial moment. The too narrow perspectives of both the proponents and the critics alike have made them fail to perceive the most fruitful aspects of the debate. Without ever pointing out cognitive dissonance as a possible trigger as I maintain in this article, Zaidi asserts that there is more to Muslims' desire to re-enchant the world than simply anti-imperialist sentiments.

It is important to remember from the onset, while Muslim worlds have never been completely secularized as many noted (e.g. Gellner 1991), the strong western colonial hegemony in the development of education system in Muslim world at large cannot be neglected. The disenchantment with the excesses of the European Enlightenment and modernism in Muslim world has given rise to the birth of major ideologies that have devastating effects to Islam (Ernst, 1994). These ideologies remain strong to this day:

1. The pseudo-religion of nationalism,
2. The positivistic belief in science, racism and evolutionism as a rationale for unbridled imperialism;
3. The erosion of the public role of religion.

Thereby, the dualistic structure of education system has been prevalent across the Muslim world: one was demanded by secular nationalists and the other by Muslim leaders. It is within this context that we must understand the debates on cognitive transformation in the following section.

#### A. EARLY MODERNIST MUSLIMS

Reformist Muslims began with the figures such as Afghani (1838-1897), Abduh (Egypt, 1849-1905), and Iqbal (1875-1938). Scholars in the field refer to Islamic reformism interchangeably with the Salafi movement, Islamic revivalism, Islamic resurgence, political Islam, and Islamism. Another term that is recently used is Islamic fundamentalism. The first wave of reform movements emerged in the 19th century on the proposition that European imperial expansion was due to Muslims' religious laxity. A central issue in the debate among reformist intellectuals in the Middle East was whether to fight colonialism through political struggle or cultural struggle (Fuad, 2004). The former was championed by Afghani who called Muslims around the world to unite against Western colonialism and to fight for immediate independence. That became the basis of Pan-Islamism. The latter was championed by Abduh who appealed for education of the Muslim people. Adopting the former would mean going for an armed revolutionary struggle, and adopting the latter for the longer struggle of setting up new educational institutions and reforming existing ones.

Salafi reformists combined an anti-imperialist, Pan-Islamic vision with an admiration for modern rationality and science, which they regarded as sources of Western progress and dominance (Zaidi, 2006). Abduh, for instance, stressed the role of reason, contending that there is nothing which reason finds impossible even though there may be in religion something which transcends the understanding. He also believed that Muslims could adopt European science which itself owed (in his view) a great deal to Islam (Bennet, 2005:21). Another figure, Iqbal, is known to have advocated 'progress', arguing that in fact the Quran itself teaches that life is the process of progressive creation which necessitates that each generation -guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors- should be permitted to solve its own problems. While Iqbal was often accused of borrowing too much from Western philosophy, he was not

uncritical of the West. He denounced the West's petty nationalism and saw its materialistic worldview as bankrupt (Bennett, 2005).

It is worth noting, that the use of terms 'reformist' and 'fundamentalist' borrowed from the Protestant Christian Movement in the 19th century have caused confusion and were considered problematic by a notable group of academic scholars and Islamic activists. Firstly, there was no true affinity between Protestantism's and Islamic reform. The latter call for return to the Quran and Sunna (traditions of Prophet Muhammad) in order to purify Islam from accretions of which locally-derived customs were part. Afsaruddin (2012) reminds, that fundamentalism in the Christian context refers to Protestant Christian movements which insisted on the acceptance of the Bible as the literal word of God, this is simply different to Islam because a Muslim by definition is someone who accepts the Qur'an as the literal word of God, "whether one is a conservative or liberal Muslim, there is a consensus on this issue; one cannot be a Muslim without accepting that the Quran is a divine, revealed text" (Afsaruddin, 2012). Therefore, from this point of view, "it doesn't make sense to talk of Muslim fundamentalists as a separate group within Islam". With this warning in mind, "it is better to speak of Islamic revivalist or reform movements, and particularly in the 20th century, to talk about modernist Islam and political Islam" (Afsaruddin, 2012).

There seems to be a direct correlation between colonial political-economic power with their military forces in the Muslim world and Islamic reformism. It must be highlighted that for the reformists, modern science and technology were the secret of colonial power, and hence, had to be appropriated to resist them. For this reason, the Reformists have been labelled as early Modernists as well, since they are the ones who have propagated modern education in the Muslim world. The Reformists or modernists Muslims have been criticized severely by the Traditionalist scholars (Nasr, 2001a; Lombard, 2004). For them, both movements represent subversion of traditional values and teachings from within the Islamic tradition.

In an effort to transform Islamic civilization, each has in fact hastened the onset of the very illness they sought to ameliorate. Rather than contemplating and evaluating Western civilization through the Islamic intellectual tradition, modernists have embraced many tenets of Western thought out of a deep sense of inferiority—a sense which results from mistaking the power of Western nations for the truth of Western ideologies. (Lombard, 2004:69)

This whole scene of Islamic movements and thoughts brought to my mind, Gadamer's (1976) conception of 'prejudice'<sup>4</sup> to explain what has made some of the Muslims react against colonial power by reinterpreting Islam as an 'ideology' to counter, whereas others continue to reject the 'ideologisation' of Islam which, in their view, is an act of de-divinizing Islam. The former camp is inclined to political Islam whereas the latter to the 'sound knowledge' of Islam (including philosophy and mysticism). From then on, the diversity of interpretations of Islam, and hence of learning communities, emerged. It ultimately led to the diversity of social movements that carry Islam as either an ideal or source of inspirations. In this respect, Moaddel and Talattof's (2000) accounts are important. In discussing the modernists and fundamentalists, they enumerated, nevertheless, factors they hold to have been uniting the two streams with the rest of the Muslims. They are: (i) The One God (Allah); (ii) The Book (Quran); (iii) Prophet Muhammad; and (iv) The Prophet's traditions (Sunna):

In their efforts to formulate a distinctively Islamic response to the problems facing their communities, these thinkers could not and should not violate such core principles of Islam as God's unity, the Quran being His word that descended to the people through Prophet Muhammad, and other fundamental religious dogma explicitly stated in the Quran (Moaddel and Talattof, 2000: 3).

They noted further, "Besides the fact that they were devout Muslims, violating such principles meant that they would lose their right to speak as Muslims" (p.3). In relation to the key argument of my thesis about the uniting power of a symbolic universe (Alkatiri, 2016), I would like to highlight that disagreements between diverse groups of Muslims arise from the interpretation of Islam in the context of modernity and not about the classical jurisprudence itself as Nasr (2001a:251) also suggests. Esposito (2002) pointed out that in Islam what matters is not orthodoxy (correct doctrine) but orthopraxy (correct action).

Relatedly, Zaidi (2006) argues further, that reformist figures, even those such as Qutb, Mawdudi and Hassan al-Banna who have been dubbed fathers of Islamic fundamentalism, or 'ideologues' and 'pamphleteers' (El Fadl, 2001:56), at least did sense some of the implications of

4 In his hermeneutics, Gadamer argues that prejudice defines the ground the interpreter him/herself occupies when he/she understands. Gadamer did not use 'prejudice' as a negative category, instead he aims to raise an awareness (and an acceptance) of individuals' own pre-judgments (prejudices) and influence attempts to understand a text. The researcher ponders that it is usually individuals' own biases that are responsible for what is selected to study. It is unlikely that individuals research a text that they have no interest in.

the cognitive transformation underlying modernity. Zaidi argues by giving example of a well-known Islamist argument raised by Mawdudi that the liberal notion of popular sovereignty supersedes the sovereignty of God. Such an argument, according to Zaidi, should have not been simply rejected as superficial, because people may also acknowledge the increasing exclusion of the Transcendent from the political and moral realms.

Similar treatment should have been applied to Qutb's denunciation of modernity as an Age of *Jahiliyah* (an Age of Ignorance) because of modernity's reliance on a strictly rationalist-empiricist epistemology that repudiates the authority of metaphysical truths. Undoubtedly, Mawdudi and Qutb were speaking for an epistemology that is not limited to the earthly realities. Zaidi contends further:

It is unfortunate that much of the academic literature (Euben's account being exceptional) on 'Islamic fundamentalism' has, like the journalistic accounts that we often dismiss, failed to reach beyond the rhetoric of these ideologues. Even if Mawdudi's and Qutb's ideological rejections of modernity offered little in the way of systematic reconstruction, they were crucial in giving voice to the alienation experienced under increasing cultural penetration (pp.73-74)

## B. RECONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

There are Muslim thinkers who realize that cultural, philosophical and cognitive transformations conceptualized within modernity require far more sophisticated treatments of the subject from a Muslim perspective than what have been provided by political reformists, jihadists, neo-revivalists and revolutionaries<sup>5</sup> aforementioned. They posited, instead, a cognitive transformation through reconstruction of knowledge. To return to an Islamic civilization in which there is moral, cognitive and interpretive unity, the proponents believe that it is imperative for the Muslim world to revitalize Islamic thought and to end what is perceived as the 'West's epistemological imperialism', for the latter cannot meet the need of Muslims, and has been at the core of the economic and cultural poverty of the Muslim world (see Bennett, 2005). Zaidi (2006) outlines the project in chronological order.

<sup>5</sup> Ones whose movements were re-enchanting the *political*, who Zaidi argued have obscured more holistic treatments of modernity from a Muslim perspective (p. 69).

## 1. Nasr's Reconstruction of Knowledge

Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a prominent contemporary representative of traditionalist Islam. His notion of 'Islamized' knowledge is best captured by the expression *scientia sacra* or sacred knowledge, that is, 'knowledge of the Real'. This refers to knowledge that "lies at the heart of every revelation and is the center of that circle which encompasses and defines tradition" (Nasr, 1989:130). The eclipse of sacred knowledge in the modern world already given, causes a need for a science which can "relate the various levels of knowledge once again to the sacred" (Nasr, 2004:173). Further, what defines Islamic science as Islamic, for Nasr (1980), is (1) its 'paradigm' which is based on the Islamic worldview, and (2) the minds and eyes of the scientists are Muslim minds and eyes transformed by the spirit and form of the Qur'an.

Nasr is known to be very critical of the uncritical assimilation of Islam and modernity that both modernists and fundamentalists advocate. He considers their *apologetic* turn since the late nineteenth century to have gradually nurtured a certain type of Muslim religious thinker "who had already unconsciously lost the intellectual battle to modernism and the West, and was now seeking only to defend his faith by showing that somehow practically every fashionable thought of the time had been Islamic before being adopted by the West" (Nasr, 2001a:133-4). He criticized the *Salafi's* attempts to "purify" Islam by returning to the sources of the religion, yet throwing away the later development of the Islamic traditions. This included Islamic philosophy and much of the rest of the Islamic intellectual tradition besides artistic traditions, and also their rejection of Sufism and the mystical life in their positive emphasis upon the *Sharia* (Nasr, 2001a:134-5).

Regarding Western science and technology, Nasr criticizes modernists and fundamentalists for what they both regard as an act of repossession under the argument that Western science and technology depends on knowledge that was originally acquired, mainly via Spain, from the Muslim world. Thus, when Muslims utilize Western technology, in fact they repossess what was originally theirs. He is especially critical of Muslim attempts to appropriate Western concepts and philosophical trends while neglecting Islamic metaphysics. According to him, the process of reconstruction of knowledge must begin with Muslim's awareness that modern science is not identical with '*ilm*, knowledge, that the Quran exhorts the believers to seek, and that Prophet Muhammad instructed his followers to seek from "cradle to the grave" (in a Hadith). Nasr (1997) contends that Muslims must realize that modern science is the most anthropocentric form of knowledge possible since it makes human reason and empirical data the sole criteria for the validity of all knowledge. According to him, the character of

modern science and Islamic science are diametrically opposed to each other: Western science denies the One, and denies the relevance of the Transcendence (Nasr, 1989, 2004, 2007). By denying different orders of reality, the natural and social sciences exclude all other possibilities of knowing and destroy the sacred and metaphysical foundations of knowledge. Therefore, Nasr reminded modernists and fundamentalists alike that the nature and character of Islamic science are entirely different from those of modern science. In Nasr's language, Islamic sciences have a 'center' and modern sciences have 'no center'.

Besides philosophy and mysticism, environmental issues are one of Nasr's major interests. His profound criticism of modernity and Western science and technology was made against the background of the destruction they have brought to the natural environment; the creation of a world which makes the 'real appear illusory and the illusory real', and a civilization which has no meaning other than moving at accelerated speed. In response to Iqbal's idea of progress mentioned earlier, and Iqbal's attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam's conception of God, time and space with Hegelian and Bergsonian conceptions, Nasr commented that secularism and evolutionism, in fact, represent the greatest philosophical threat (Nasr, 2004). That is because they have been appropriated by Muslim intellectuals such as Iqbal without realizing that scientism extends the claims of evolutionism into the social realm, where it leads humans to forget God since it suggests that humans can become perfect solely by the processes of evolution and 'progress'. Nasr is a student of the transcendental school of Mulla Sadra, Islamic Gnosticism *Irfaan*, and Sufism. He once commented (2007) that the doctrine of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*) of Mulla Sadra, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Persian philosopher, can explain the theory of evolution without bringing in Darwinian ideas which exclude the role of God's hand in evolutionary changes<sup>6</sup>. Further, he denounced Iqbal for his attempt to synthesize the Sufi concept of *al-insan al-kamil* (the Perfect Man) with the Nietzschean concept of the *Uberman*, ideas that Nasr claims are the antipodes of one another.

On the other hand, Nasr recognized re-enchantment currents within modernity towards

6 "If you really master the doctrine of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*) of Mulla Sadra, the great seventeenth century Persian Islamic philosopher, you can explain a theory of evolution without being Darwinian evolutionist. You can believe in both the archetypal realities in God's Knowledge that are reflected in the temporal flow and the constant flow and motion of the substance of the material world which bears the imprints of those archetypes. When I was studying Islamic philosophy in Persia, I studied just this one idea of Mulla Sadra for a whole year: the trans-substantial movement in the cosmos. How can God know this flow? Will this not introduce change in God's knowledge? We studied just that one idea for months. This is, needless to say, a complicated issue; it is not for children. We have few people in the Islamic world who can understand such deep theological and philosophical ideas and are at the same time, good biologists and physicists, and that is a tragedy" (Nasr, 2007:166).

Romanticism, and argues that without the revival of philosophy and metaphysics in the true sense, they will not be able to overcome the de-sacralization of knowledge. Therefore, for him, reconstruction of knowledge must once again turn to the concept of *Tawhid*<sup>7</sup> in its metaphysical perspective (rather than its theological notion), to reveal the underlying unity and interrelatedness of all that exists, and to rediscover the primordial bond between God and humanity that has been severed. In all his writings, Nasr restated the concept of man as *abd* and *khalifah* of God in Islam. In the *The Need for a Sacred Science* (2004), he examined the fallacy of the Western linear conception of time, history and progress. He expounds elaborately time and human progress from a *scientia sacra* perspective. Herein he explains relations between time and Eternity, cyclical time in Oriental religions, and linear time "which came to the fore in Western philosophy and science as a result of a complex set of factors related to the secularization of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, as well as certain other philosophical and scientific ideas" (p. 31). Since Descartes, purely quantitative conception of time and space came into being as defined mathematically by the *x, y, z* Cartesian coordinates to which *t* (time) is added. Henceforth, the nexus between the phenomenal world and higher level of existence was ruptured. Nasr explicates further the relation between a linear concept of time in the West and the idea of human progress through material evolution. The conquest of Asia, Africa and the New World not only have brought great wealth into Europe but also confidence in humans' ability to conquer the world and to remold it. This success was due to the secularization of humans and in turn hastened the process of secularization and this-worldliness by encouraging human beings to devote all their energies to worldly activities as the hereafter became a more and more distant concept or belief rather than an immediate reality.

Henceforth, the idea of perfection and progress of the soul toward its upward, vertical dimension towards God (Nasr, 2004) was transferred to a purely this-worldly and temporal progress. As an advocate for perennial philosophy, Nasr's substantive critique of scientism and modernity is not meant solely for the benefit of Muslims but is a general defense of the traditional conception of the Sacred. In his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, he chronicled the gradual process of desecralisation of knowledge that originated in the West by pointing to the history of Christianity. According to him, since the beginning, Christianity expanded in

7 *Tawhid* is the core of Islamic beliefs, according to which, metaphysically all aspects of life, as well as all degrees of cosmic manifestation, are governed by a single principle and are unified by a common centre. For more account, see Nasr (2001b).

a world already suffering from rationalism and naturalism which “had stifled the spirit and hardened the heart as the seat of intelligence, dividing reason from its ontological root” (1989: 35). It, therefore:

had to present itself as a way of love which had to sweep aside completely all the “ways of knowing” that lay before it, not distinguishing in its general theological formulations between intellection and ratiocination and preferring quite rightly a true theology and a false cosmology to a false theology and a true cosmology. ... All knowledge appeared to a large number of Christian theologians as “pride of intelligence” and a climate was created which, from early days, was not completely favorable to the sapiential perspective.... As a result, the mainstream of Christian theology, especially after the early centuries, insisted upon the *credo ut intelligam*, a formula later identified with Saint Anselm, while limiting the function of intellection to that of a handmaid of faith rather than the means of sanctification, which of course would not exclude the element of faith. (Nasr, 1989: 35-6)

Nasr has made a nuanced and notional understanding of the words ‘to know’ and ‘knowledge’ that may easily be taken for granted. From his point of view, ‘knowledge’ extends in hierarchy from an empirical and rational mode of knowing to the highest form of knowledge, that is, the ‘unitive knowledge’ (Nasr, 1989), or *al-ma’rifah*. Correspondingly, ‘to know’ extends from ratiocination to intellection. Zaidi (2006) contrasted Nasr’s re-sacralisation of knowledge, which is a reversal of the process of rationalization, with Weber’s *Entzauberundprozess*. He quoted Nasr’s statement: “Certainly my goal is to move in the opposite direction than what Max Weber called the *Entzauberundprozess*” (Zaidi, 2006: 75). Nasr believes a new kind of scholar is needed to lead the Muslims into the future, scholars who know traditional Islam and the Western world in depth.

Since the 1960s, Nasr has been a prolific writer on environmental issues as much as in Islamic philosophy. For him (Nasr 1996, 1997, 2007), environmental crisis has deep spiritual, philosophical and religious roots and causes: it involves both the natural world as well as the microcosm within humans, and between these dimensions there are integral links. Therefore, although he recognizes the role of science and technology in the making of the crisis, he does not see it as merely the result of bad engineering and faulty economic planning. Rather, it is a matter of modern technology in combination with the new image of man that has developed

in the West since the Renaissance which he called the ‘promethean man’, the man who then carried out the industrial revolution:

As soon as the concept of nature changed and nature became a secularized mass, just an “it”, and what I have elsewhere called “Promethean man” was born, there was bound to be this destruction. ... After that change, man no longer felt any responsibility for nature. Nature served only as a source of materials; it could be dominated and used for whatever purpose and in whichever way without having any rights of its own. (Nasr, 2007: 125)

He exhorts us to be aware of the sternness of the crisis and rejected the ideas that the environmental crisis today is just another one that humankind has once had in the history.

Not that there was no contention or strife between man and nature before, not that ten thousand years ago when man was becoming agricultural, that shift had no impact on the natural environment, but such shifts did not create a crisis for there was a remarkable ecological harmony which continued. Had there been a crisis of the dimension we have now at that time, it is most likely that we would not even exist today (Nasr, 2007: 120).

In response, Muzaffar Iqbal, another Muslim scholar, asserts that Nasr’s position on environmental crisis is impossible for Western sensibilities:

I say this because you are suggesting a fundamental shift in our view of God and nature and that, I think, may be very difficult for the general populace in the West. It may be asking too much from a non-Muslim to change his or her views about God and His relationship with humanity and nature. What you were saying about the nature of the change that took place in the West during the Renaissance is, after all, a significant historical development that has affected the course of Western civilization to such an extent that to ask for such a radical change- the kind of change you are suggesting- is to ask for a total re-orientation of the belief system – from a homocentric to a theomorphic, and that may be too much” (Iqbal in Nasr, 2007: 132)

This is why Iqbal thinks that it may be easier for the Muslim world to recognize the roots of the environmental crisis for it would not involve such a huge step for the Muslims.

Muslims already have a certain set of beliefs which they partially apply in their lives – for instance, not eating pork – and perhaps it is easier for them to take the next step and understand that the natural environment is sacred and has rights upon them, just as they respect laws regarding eating, they can admit that there are certain laws regarding the natural world as well and respect them (Iqbal in Nasr, 2007: 129)

To such a comment, Nasr added that not only are there explicit commands in the Quran and Hadith about the treatment of God's creation but also in almost all languages spoken in the Muslim world there is a very rich tradition of the love of nature, in poetry and in aphorisms which deal with the subject. Then there are the works of Muslim philosophers and Sufis on the philosophy of nature. Therefore, Muslims have to resuscitate this tradition which has only recently been partially forgotten. Nasr agrees that this heritage can be revived much more easily for the Muslims than the Western tradition for contemporary Westerners. But Muslim governments, he added, do not want to pay attention to this matter, even when they are paying lip service to Islam, because they want to become masters of modern technology as fast as possible for political, military and economic reasons (Nasr, 2007:134).

Finally, Nasr points out the deep philosophical issues underlying the great paradox of the modern world. That is, “modern Western science emphasizes the continuity while modern Western culture emphasizes discontinuity” (Nasr, 2007:171) so much as to enable modern human to destroy much of the rest of creation in the name of human welfare. He asserts that Muslims have tremendous responsibility because Islam is one of the very few civilizations left in the world which is non-Western and which also has a vast scientific and intellectual tradition, and which can provide alternatives (Nasr, 2011). Otherwise, “where shall we be going? we are going to evolve ourselves into non-existence.” (Nasr, 2007: 52).

## 2. Al-Faruqi's 'Islamization of Knowledge'

Ismail al-Faruqi was a Palestinian American philosopher. He called upon Muslim scholars to recast every discipline in modern knowledge “so as to embody the principles of Islam in its methodology, in its strategy, in what it regards as its data, its problems, its objectives, and its aspirations” (Al-Faruqi, 1988:16). Each discipline must be remolded along

a triple axis that constitutes the concept of *tawhid* (unity), that is: unity of knowledge; of life; and of history. Unlike Nasr whose notion of Islamized knowledge transcends the religious boundaries towards *scientia sacra*, which is a transcendent unity of religions, Islamization of knowledge for Al-Faruqi serves the cause of Islam (Al-Faruqi, 1988).

## 3. Naquib al-Attas' Dewesternization of Human Sciences:

The third scholar, Naquib al-Attas, like Nasr, was concerned firstly with the effects of Westernization on Muslims' 'minds and eyes' (al-Attas, 1978: 130-1). He proposed 'intuitive knowledge' as well as ontological and epistemological objections to Sociology. According to al-Attas, having been infused with Western elements and key concepts, the sciences that originated in the West but then disseminated throughout the world do not necessarily represent true knowledge. Al-Attas posited that Islamization of knowledge requires a liberation of knowledge from interpretations based on secular ideology. Especially, the isolation of the elements and key concepts in human sciences that constitute Western culture and civilization, such as: (1) “the dualistic vision of reality and truth, locked in despairing combat” (al-Attas 1978: 135); (2) the denial of absolute values and affirmation of relative values, as reflected in: “nothing can be certain, except the certainty that nothing can be certain” (p. 136); and (3) the 'drama and tragedy of unattainment' held in the West as universal human nature and existence (pp.136-7, 155)<sup>8</sup>. Once knowledge is freed from these elements, it becomes 'true knowledge', that is, in harmony with the essential nature (*fitra*) of human, and thereby, Islamic.

## 4. The Ijmali's Reopen the Gates of *ijtihād*

Together with Pervez Manzoor, Ziauddin Sardar advocates an *Ijmali* (from *ijma'*, social consensus and *jaml*, beauty/wholeness) approach that seeks to synthesize 'pure knowledge' with 'moral knowledge'. Its guiding principles are social consensus (*ijma*), trusteeship (*khilafah*), public welfare (*istilah*) and justice (*adl*). Sardar (1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 2011) shares the following in common with Nasr:

- (1) He wants to end what he calls the West's epistemological imperialism by revitalizing Islamic thought. He also holds that Western science has mistakenly and dangerously separated ethics and morality from its epistemology (Sardar, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> For him the spirit of Western culture and civilisation is quite rightly depicted by the drama of Promethean and Camusian Sisyphus, which are alien to Islam.

(2) He shares their concern to Islamize knowledge and argues very strongly that the Muslim world must develop its own paradigm as an alternative to that of the West which cannot meet the needs of Muslims.

(3) He argues that the world needs epistemological pluralism where different cultures work out 'their own way of being, doing and knowing', construct 'their own science and technologies' and undertake 'their own civilizational projects', instead of copying the West (Sardar, 1989: 7). He is convinced that no civilization can retain its vitality if it does not possess its own science. He denounced the claim of Western science to be neutral and value-free. Rather, it is profoundly secular and deeply rooted in Western free-market values, which are both alien to Islam (1989:48)

(4) He also shares with Nasr in advocating "system thinking" and criticizing compartmentalization of knowledge, "since neither nature nor human activities are divided into watertight compartments marked "sociology", "psychology" (1989: 99).

According to Sardar, sciences in the Muslim world today are sciences that have been imported from the West. Such science fails to meet the needs of Muslim countries because it originates from a worldview that has divorced enquiry from such core values as justice and humanity's trusteeship of nature, which are the central plank of Islamic beliefs and essential to the pursuit of science in the Muslim world. He continued with what happens when Muslim scientists are unable to incorporate Islamic values into their work: they "suffer acute schizophrenia" (1989: 24) trapped between their operational and nonoperational knowledge. By operational knowledge, he refers to technical know-how such as engineering, and by non-operational knowledge he refers to their value system. By this account, Sardar implored the Muslims to be aware of the clash between the Islamic knowledge system whereby there is moral, cognitive and interpretive unity, and the modern system of thought.

Thereby, Sardar criticized al-Faruqi (1981, 1988, 1992) for his synthesis between the best that Western science can offer and Islamic values, because such synthesis would fail to produce a viable methodology to enable this. Even Faruqi's principle of equating knowledge and truth, according to him, is unhelpful to the project of developing a pragmatic epistemology. Sardar also criticized Nasr's Gnostic approach. Sardar's critique, in my view, seems to be attributable to his lack of a grasp of Nasr's metaphysical conception of knowledge and of knowing already elucidated. In his more recent work (Sardar, 2011), he seemed to correct this position as he began to appreciate the "mystical quest for understanding the Absolute" (p. 374-5). Like Nasr,

Sardar (1987) agrees that Islam must not be reduced to an ideology, which Nasr says, is a "Western concept" (Nasr, 1990:306). He (Sardar, 1985) describes "ideology as the antithesis of Islam, an enterprise of suppression and not a force for liberation". "Ideology" he says, "closes down thought and analysis" and "ensures that mistakes and errors are perpetuated", while Islam "requires an open attitude" (pp.81-2). What distinguishes Sardar from other thinkers is his insistence for revival of *ijtihad*. With the "closing of the gates" of *ijtihad*, Islamic science truly became a matter of history" (1989:18). However, in response to the *Ijmali's* call for *ijtihad*, Nasr warns that opinion in Islamic law cannot be practiced by "a mind that has been transformed by the tenets of modernism" (Nasr, 2001a:193). *Ijtihad* requires both profound critical attitudes toward the modern world combined with a deep understanding of this world.

In sum, the following chart illustrates how Sardar (1989) views Islamic science and Western science. He often claims that Islamic science will treat the environment with more respect than Western science, exercising stewardship as a divine duty.

**Table 1. Western and Islamic Science**

Western science	Islamic science
Puts its faith in rationality	Places its faith in revelation
Values science for the sake of science	Sees science as a form of worship which has a spiritual and moral function
Posits one all-powerful method as the only way of knowing reality	Uses many methods based on reason as well as revelation
Claims impartiality – to be value-free; a scientist is not responsible for the use of which his/her work is put	Claims partiality – towards the truth; consequences must be morally good
Claims the absence of bias	Admits the presence of subjectivity
Reduces the world to what can be empirically verified	Admits the reality of the spiritual dimension
Is fragmented into disciplines	Values synthesis, is multi-disciplinary but holistic in its approach

9 Sardar (1987) argues the gates were probably closed to prevent unqualified people from misusing this.

## IV. THE CHALLENGES IN RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Farid Alatas argues that the Islamization of knowledge project is still vaguely conceived as far as the social sciences are concerned. He critically evaluates the idea of “Islamic social sciences” as part of the Muslim reconstruction of knowledge. According to him, the call for indigenization shares two things in common with Islamic social science, i.e. the critique of modernist discourse of man and society, and the rejection of the universality of the social scientific concept that originated in the West. The institutional and theoretical dependence of scholars in the Third World societies on social science have become his main concerns. Alatas noted that the situation has produced ‘the captive mind’, it is a way of thinking that is “dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner” (1995: 90). He enumerated among the characteristics of captive mind are:

the inability to be creative and raise original problems, the inability to devise original and analytical methods, and alienation from the main issues of indigenous society. This is manifested in the areas of problem selection, choice of research methods, as well as the suggestion of solutions and policies. It is also manifested at the meta theoretical and epistemological levels as well as at the levels of theory and substantive work (p. 90).

Most notably, under positivist and empiricist traditions, practitioners of social sciences can easily win the argument of the universality of sciences by “ignoring the differences in inter-subjective meanings between Western and non-Western settings” (p. 91). For that reason, “they persist in using Western categories, even in cases where they may not be relevant” (p. 91). On the other hand, while indigenization is by no means an expression that Western knowledge is of no use to the Third World, the uncritical imitation of social sciences in the Third World has been considered as the main problem (p. 90). The call to indigenization is “a call to truly internalize the social sciences” (p. 91, which entails, “the process of the decolonization of knowledge and the unmasking of ethnocentrism and bias that seeped into postcolonial thought” (p. 91). Therefore, Alatas argues that indigenization in fact is globalist in orientation “because it seeks to break the current monopoly over social scientific discourse”. Put differently, it is the idea that social scientific theories, concepts and methodologies can be

derived from the histories, cultures and experiences of the various non-Western civilizations, and hence, are a contribution to a universal social science. Like Zaidi, Alatas argues that indigenization “does invite an attitude of vigilance” with regard to universalistic science in the positivistic tradition, the one that “treats human beings as object devoid of consciousness and agency” (p. 91).

Alatas (1995: 97-99) detailed his critiques of reconstruction concerning social sciences. He pointed out that the call for Islamization of knowledge goes beyond the assertion that science is value-laden. “The proponents do not refer to merely the value content of social scientific research activities, but to the very principles, methods, theories, and concepts in the social sciences that are to be Islamized”. The question is, what are the ways that a discipline of social sciences is defined by Islam and takes on an Islamic character? Is it that the discipline is to be defined by Islamic metaphysics and epistemology? If so, will that be adequate if the affirmations of Islamic philosophy are also common to many philosophical systems?

## V. TRANSFORMATIVE UNDERSTANDING

Zaidi (2006) entered into the debates in the position of suggesting that a more holistic response to modernity from Muslim perspectives is needed than what has been provided by jihadists, neo-revivalists, and revolutionaries who do not want to engage in any intellectual dialogue with the West and modernity. The response would need to account for not only its political and social transformation, but also for the cognitive and intellectual transformation, that Habermas (1987) argues are the co-requisites of modernity. Zaidi aims to show that in actuality the debates on reconstruction articulate social theoretical critiques from Muslim perspectives of the cognitive transformations of modernity, “critiques that, in attempting to re-enchant modernity, are implicitly carrying on a dialogue with Western social theory” (p. 72).

Regarding al-Faruqi, Zaidi sees a similarity between al-Faruqi and Habermas when he proposes Islamic civilization as a remedy to the bankruptcy of modernity: “just as Habermas attempts to derive rational justifications and procedures for modernity’s normative vision, so too al-Faruqi seeks to rationally justify its own normative vision” (p. 78). Further, since al-Faruqi did not challenge the possibilities of universal knowledge, Zaidi regards him remains accepting the primacy of “modern rationality over traditional Islamic metaphysics”, just like

the *salafi*-reformist response. Yet, he added, “there are moments when religion and revelation are rational, but surely there are moments when religion and revelation are suprarational”. In a sense, Zaidi was defending Nasr’s metaphysical concept of knowledge and knowing. On the matter of rationalization of Islam, despite his disagreement with Roy’s assessment of literature on reconstruction of knowledge, Zaidi agreed with Roy’s (1994) conclusion that the militant insistence on the rationality of religious prescriptions is a sign that “modernity has worked its way into the very heart of Islamist discourse” (Zaidi, 2006: 21).

With regard to social science, Zaidi highlighted the *Ijmali*’s critique of al-Faruqi’s desire to Islamize the existing disciplines of the social sciences and humanities with an argument that this is merely “uncritical assimilation of much of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of modern disciplines” (Sardar 1989, p. 4-5). As already discussed, *Ijmali* contends that disciplines develop, evolve and have meaning only within a particular worldview. In a way, this supports Taylor’s argument (1985/1991) that Western social sciences serve the needs of Western society for its self-understanding. Therefore, the accusation of bias against Western social science is misplaced. Zaidi continues reiterating Sardar’s point that reconstruction of knowledge must begin with conceptualizing an Islamic worldview and evolving new disciplines geared to fulfilling the needs of Muslim societies and cultures, rather than Islamizing knowledge.

## VI. MODERNISTS’ CRITICS OF RECONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

To get a complete picture of Muslim scholars we need to recognize that the onslaught of rationalization has made modernity appear as a largely normative account possessing right or wrong moral judgments for a sizeable portion of the population (Featherstone, 1991: 6). Yet, it is a worldview that marginalizes religiously inspired worldviews by “depriving knowledge of its teleological and sacred qualities” (Zaidi, 2006). For that reason, one can expect there would be pro-modernity thinkers among Muslim scholars who would stand against ‘reconstruction of knowledge’. Besides, not all Muslim scholars comprehend the philosophical problems that reconstruction aims to rectify. In what follows, Zaidi (2006) presents the critics of the literature on reconstruction, among others as Bassam Tibi, Oliver Roy, Mona Abaza, and Georg Stauth.

Roy (1994) and Tibi (1995) argue that the literature of reconstruction simply represents

an ideological reaction to Western economics and political dominance, and “an encroachment of religious fundamentalism into academia.” Zaidi (2006) also presents a defender of reconstruction, Pieterse (1996), who argues the ideological charge to reconstruction of knowledge discourse is rather meaningless and engages in “the all too familiar tropes of Orientalist scholarship which serves only to reassure ‘us’ moderns that obscurantism lurks on the ‘other’ side” (Zaidi, 2006:80). For Zaidi, such an attitude can be seen as “post-Enlightenment reflex of ideology critique, which threatens always to impose itself before the Other” (Zaidi, 2006: 81).

Zaidi presented the most persistent critics of the literature on reconstruction: Abaza and Stauth. He strongly criticized them both for their too easily dismissal of reconstruction, firstly, for their focus on internal interpretive contests among competing Islamic currents, secondly, for their relegating the focus of criticism to the genealogist and network of the protagonists, and then for the focus on the location of the proponent of reconstruction, to argue that the literature represents a search for authenticity among Muslim intellectuals in the diaspora. In general, Zaidi criticized their following Ahmad’s criticism of postcolonial theory too closely for assuming that the diaspora Muslims have lost their organic connections, and therefore write only for the metropolis.

The problem here is that Abaza and Stenberg’s discursive focus, de-legitimizes the critique of modernity that emerges from this literature and pre-empts dialogue because it suggests that reconstruction, as an intra-Muslim interpretive contest, is only relevant to ‘them’ in immigrant circles in Europe and North America, or in very specific circles in Egypt and Malaysia. (2006, p. 79)

Zaidi claimed that his arguments were drawn from a dialogical point of view, that the critiques of modernity may best be launched by “those who sit at the interstices of the metropolis and the colony”. Further, he says if Muslim proponents of reconstruction engage in the language of Western theory, it is not because they have lost their organic connections since they are working from the metropolis, “but because the language of Western theory is necessary – both in the metropolis and the colony – to engage in a global dialogue”. He argues that Abaza’s argument implied, that due to their “lack of authenticity” and their ideological appropriation of Islamic discourse, the proponents of reconstruction can be ignored either because they have false consciousness or because “they” are only speaking among themselves

and have nothing of great relevance to contribute to the general critiques, internal or otherwise, of modernity” (p. 80).

At the heart of Abaza and Stauth’s persistent criticism of reconstruction is what they see as the unawareness of the protagonists that they are part of a global cultural system that itself calls for the essentialization of local truths, which, they believe, has taken place already through Orientalist discourses. They see a problem in the ‘going native’ of the natives themselves. Abaza further questions the authenticity of reconstruction, and accused Nasr as being an “Orientalized Oriental” because he draws upon the work of Henry Corbin. On that, Zaidi shows the fallacy of Abaza’s argument. For him, the ‘going native’ of the native should not be a problem in view of the truth in “the role of the Other in constituting the Self” - especially as Nasr has been quite open in acknowledging the influence on his thought of Western sources that are critical of modernity. Elsewhere, in his more recent writing, Stauth (2002) put his hope in the possibility of “new methodologies in the cultural sciences”. He, however, still doubted that the protagonists can contribute to such new methodology since they critique an outdated model of positivistic science that does not account for a hermeneutically informed model of science.

Zaidi is similarly critical of Roy (1994) and Tibi’s (1995) dismissive attitude who argue that the literature of reconstruction simply represents an ideological reaction to Western economics and political dominance, and “an encroachment of religious fundamentalism into academia” (p. 81). Zaidi says in response:

Invoking the notion of ideology not only serves to reinforce the primacy of the economic and the political, it also suggests that Muslims are entirely incapable of putting aside their feelings of *resentment*. (Zaidi, 2006, p. 81)

In a different tone, Turner (1985, 1986, 2003) has also raised the charge of ideology, but he also acknowledged his own secular rationalist assumption rather than forcing secular rationalist as the standard by which all other worldviews must be measured. According to Zaidi, as a matter of fact, literature on reconstruction points out that the weaknesses of Muslim society can be addressed once modernity is apprehended in formulations broader than economic and colonial dominance, political ideals and development schemes. The failure to understand the literature on the hermeneutic-dialogical manner has made both the critics and the proponents miss that mark. Thereby, both the critics and the proponents themselves

miss the chance to effectively and explicitly dialogue with critiques of modernity internal to the West.

Notwithstanding, while Nasr and especially al-Faruqi’s projects do not fully value the accomplishment of hermeneutically-informed modern human science, Zaidi appreciated their contribution as a useful point of departure for a more sustained dialogue with Western social theory. It can be summarized that the logic under al-Faruqi’s reformist *salafi* project is, that it is possible to adopt the concepts, social arrangements, practices, and institutions from a different civilization but alter their very meaning to fit within one’s own worldview. On the other hand, Nasr maintains that no easy synthesis is possible. Elsewhere, some non-Muslim commentators (Kurzman 1998, Binder 1988, Khuri 1998) suggested Sufism and Islamic liberalism are the most appropriate to deal with the pluralism of modernity. On that respect, Zaidi has been realistic in the sense that he recognizes two problems of present-day Muslims, namely, repudiation of secularization and disenchantment on the one hand, and, an increasing repudiation of metaphysics on the other, even the immanent metaphysics (p. 83). Still, Zaidi believes that the possibility of transformative understanding is there, and it becomes an urgent task that confronts a world in which “a clash of civilization threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophecy”. He also acknowledges the most difficult part will be in nurturing a particular dialogical attitude on both sides - including the revivalists and the revolutionaries - the tasks that require the disengagement with the obsession with power, and on the part of Western social theory, the subduing of their hegemonic position in a way that permits it to pay more attention to Other voices. He quoted Ricouer’s hermeneutic principle that to presume that what people say is purely a function of the surrounding circumstances is to kill the dialogue before it starts (p. 83).

In sum, the debate has demonstrated that no easy answer can be given to De Young’s question ‘should science be limited?’, ‘is all knowledge valid?’ (De Young, 1996). Nor can we easily agree with Tibi (2001) that religious knowledge is a human construct, hence, is equally accessible to Muslims and non-Muslims. While reconstruction towards Islamic sciences involves an alteration of the point of view towards seeing the phenomena of nature as the signs of God (*ayah*), instead of brute facts, social sciences and humanities pose much greater challenges that the debates has shown insurmountable, and therefore, only hermeneutically-informed social theories are possible.

## VII. THE NEED OF ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM

This section explicates my position that furthers a call for a dialogue. From the *Tawhid*<sup>10</sup> viewpoint of Islam, a ‘dualistic vision of reality’ that manifests in dualities which structure such texts as: ‘good-bad’ or ‘civilized-savage’ in ‘modern-pre-modern’; does not conform to the unitary perspective of Islam where there is nothing outside the power of God. Islam views all things moves according to God’s will and their spiritual nature (*malakut*) which is in His Hands.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, all aspects of life and all degrees of cosmic manifestation are governed by a single principle and are unified by a common center. Therefore, a truly consistent Islamic attitude towards the insoluble problems that arise from the encounter between Islam and modernity would be an attempt to decipher God’s wisdom behind the predicaments. Thus, a call for a dialogue between Islam and modern West in respect to the knowledge encounter.

Drawing on *representational* theory of mind in Psychology, Sandra Jovchelovitch (2007) makes an analysis of the complexity of knowledge encounter. To *represent* is to make present what is actually absent through the use of symbols. From that vantage point, the reality of the human world is in its entirety made of *representation*, and therefore, there is no sense of reality for our human world without the work of *representation*. *Representation* is a fundamental process of all human life. It underlies the development of mind, self, societies and cultures (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 9). Furthermore, according this theory, *representation* is central to the ontogenetic development of the human child and is at the basis of the construction of languages and the acquisition of speech. *Representation* “is crucial to the establishments of interrelations that constitute the social order and is the material through which cultures are formed and transformed across time and space” (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 9). With these in mind, encounter between knowledge systems cannot be a trouble-free affair, but rather a serious matter involving cognitive and social psychological issues. Jovchelovitch classifies knowledge encounter into dialogical and non-dialogical. While the non-dialogical encounter involves displacement and exclusion with the potential for the destruction of either one system (p.

123), active dialogical communications by social actors lead eventually the actors into coming to recognize the legitimacy of alternative representations, patterns of action, values, and relevant structures attached to any given situation (p. 125). Dialogue can be considered at the ontological and epistemological levels (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 123). In my opinion, dialogue is ontological insofar as it offers us the means to understand the constitution of being, i.e. all existing entities; and epistemological insofar as it offers us the means to understand how knowledge is constructed in different systems, including, the nature of knowledge, what constitutes valid knowledge, what can be known, and who can be the knower.

The central feature of dialogical encounter, according to Jovchelovitch (2007), is the effort to take into account the perspective of other and to recognize it legitimate (p. 123-6). She was concerned with establishing the role of recognition and perspective-taking in the social psychology of knowledge encounter, and emphasizes two constitutive dimensions of these processes. Firstly, the nature of intersubjective relations between self and other which allow or distort recognition and perspective-taking. Secondly, the role of larger *representations* about the knowledge of others – in particular, the hierarchical *representation* of knowledge. For her, both are needed to understand how dialogue is facilitated or hindered in the encounter between knowledge systems. From that perspective, for an active dialogical encounter the followings are needed:

1. The potential clashes or alliances need to be recognized.
2. The asymmetries in status and legitimacy of the knowledge of self and of the other need to be recognized and worked upon by interlocutors.
3. Interlocutors need to struggle to take each other into account and reach a mutual understanding about the position, perspective and potential contributions that each can bring.

Jovchelovitch contends further that in non-dialogical encounters, the central feature is “lack of mutual recognition and the domination it makes possible” (p. 125). Hence, “the perspective expressed in the knowledge of the other is denied and recognition remains locked in the power of one knowledge system over another” (p. 125). Moreover, in non-dialogical encounters, the aim of the dialogue is to impose on the other the perspective of self. It is worth highlighting that under the circumstances, the aim is to impose rather than the inability to understand the other, and thus, non-dialogical encounters do not necessarily presuppose that self cannot understand the other. From this standpoint, an inference can be made as follows.

The violence of domination from other knowledge system on the name of the

<sup>10</sup> *Tawhid* is the core of Islamic beliefs. It stands at the heart of Islamic revelations. Muslim theologians and Sufis from the early period were concerned with the meaning of *tawhid*. Theologians tend to define it as Unity of the Godhead, while the Sufis interpret it as the principal Unity of all domains of reality and the subservience of all things in the Divine principle.

<sup>11</sup> “Say, in whose hand is the dominion [*malakuut* means also essence or spiritual root over all things]” (Q. 23: 88).

Enlightenment project of modernization is a salient example of non-dialogical encounter. I made the argument from sociology of knowledge perspective in my thesis (Alkatiri, 2016) which came to be congruous with Jovchelovitch's line of thinking. Sociology of knowledge is concerned with social knowledge and how it is shared with others in a society and how it is available to the common-sense of the ordinary member of society. From that point of view, European colonization appeared as an attempt to seek to inculcate what was believed to be a 'universal rationality' while shattering the epistemic and moral community of pre-modern civilizations including that of Islam. This condition placed insurmountable hindrance to recognition and perspective-taking of the others' knowledge systems in the future, since the history set both the hierarchical *representation* of knowledge that shaped the superiority of modern Western system, as well as a hostile intersubjective nature of the relationship between modern West and the rest. In addition, apart from the social psychological hindrance in knowledge encounter, in what follows I will argue further about ontological and epistemological pluralism as a concrete recognition of the legitimacy of other systems of representation, is needed to work out the clashes.

In the case of religious worldview, an ontological disagreement with modern system of thought is obvious. Quite the opposite of materialist ontology that denies any pre-constituted structure of being and any teleological order of existence (Boyer, 2001), in all non-materialist ontology such as religious and mythological worldviews, belief in the existence of metaphysical<sup>12</sup> dimensions of reality is a common feature. Moreover, major schools of Oriental Philosophy which Islam is more appropriately classified into<sup>13</sup> as far as metaphysics is concerned (see Izutsu, 1983), share an understanding of hierarchy of 'reality' that spans from a superficial level to a deep level. It is understood in Oriental traditions in general that 'direct experience' of the spiritual world is the only way to access higher levels of reality and to gain certitude and intellectual intuitions. In this respect, Oriental thoughts share a common characteristic regarding 'consciousness' - understood as what is needed to open the depth of 'reality'. Oriental thoughts also acknowledge the multi-layered structures of consciousness,

12 As for Islam, the physical and metaphysical domains are variously referred to in religious terminology as "earth" (the world hereunder) and "heaven" (the hereafter); "visible" (*shahadah*) and "unseen" (*ghayb*); *mulk* (the corporeal world or "kingdom") and *malakut* (the spiritual world or "dominion").

13 By Oriental Philosophy, Izutsu means variegated traditional oriental thoughts from the Middle East, India and China which have been developed since ancient times. In his *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (1983), Izutsu shows the concept of Being in Islamic thought presented by Ibn Arabi has profound similarities with Lao-tzu's metaphysics. Yet, there are obviously no historical and cultural connections.

and the hierarchy of vision in perceiving reality which spans from those in the empirical world to those in its 'indetermination' (for detailed accounts, see Izutsu, 1983a; 1983b; 1988; 2008a; 2008b).

As much as clashes at the ontological level, Islam and modern system of thought hold potential clashes at the epistemological level. Islamic system recognizes *ilm huduri* (Arabic for 'knowledge by presence') besides *ilm husuli* ('knowledge by correspondence', which is knowledge in the ordinary or modern sense of the term). Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi (2002) expounds this concept philosophically in "*The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence*". Alongside knowledge of our own sensations, feelings, and bodies, mystical experiences -characterized by noetic quality- is 'knowledge by presence' (*ilm huduri*). The inclusion of these species of knowledge into the corpus of thinking is often disparaged in modern philosophy's attempt to maintain a uniform understanding of awareness. However, the exclusion does not *ipso facto* prove the falsehood of these types of knowledge. They continue to submit themselves to philosophical inquiry and stand to further the search for the nature of being. Within 'knowledge by presence', the object is essential to the notion of knowledge, and immanent in the mind of the knowing-subject without needing representation. It "*has all its relations within the framework of itself, such that the whole anatomy of the notion can hold true without any implication of an external objective reference calling for an exterior relation*" (Yazdi, 2002: 43). 'Knowledge by presence' is immediately present in the mind of the knowing-subject and thus logically implied in the definition of the conception of knowledge itself.

With the insight of *representational* theory of mind in the opening of this section concerning the interlinkage between representation, self and culture, now I would like to draw attention to cultural anthropological premise of *cosmology*. Reuter (2010) delineates *cosmologies* as the collectively shared assumptions and the unconscious commitment people have in the collective. Cultural anthropologist discovered the tremendous importance of *cosmologies* in their attempt to compare the world's diverse cultural systems and understand the effects of different cultural conditioning on behavior. Whether they are religious or secular, *cosmologies* are descriptive models of the world; normative models for action; contain our most fundamental and important assumptions about the world and our place as human beings within the world, as well as what constitutes a good, meaningful and worthwhile life (p. 9). However, despite its importance, we as an individual participant in a particular cultural system might not be fully aware of the *cosmological* premises that guide our decisions and behaviors. Being collectively shared, *cosmological* assumptions have paradigmatic or epistemic

character, and hence, is socially sanctioned and rarely challenged. This premise suggests that Islamic ontology and epistemology are closely associated with Islamic *cosmology* in the cultural anthropology sense of the word. From that vantage point, recognizing the legitimacy of Islamic ontology and epistemology as a distinct system of representation is central to an understanding of Islamic culture - which potentially has a far-reaching implication to a hermeneutically-informed understanding beyond merely tolerance. Moreover, given the insoluble disagreements between Islam and modern system of thought as far as the conception of 'reality'; how knowledge is constructed; what constitutes valid knowledge; what can be known; and who can be the knower -- considering what have been presented about the hierarchical reality, the sacred purview of reality, the nature of consciousness in Oriental philosophy, *ilm huduri* and mystical experience, that characterized Islamic ontology and epistemology -- an ontological and epistemological pluralism is needed to make the dialogue between Islam and the West possible. Ultimately, reconstruction of knowledge should be able to create intellectual space for pious Muslims to view the world in correspondence with their beliefs, where they can:

- 1) Look at the phenomena of nature as the portents or signs (*ayah*) of God
- 2) View divine law as different from convenient agreement between humans
- 3) Look at the Universe not as a single level of reality – the *spatio-temporal* complex of matter and energy - but as having higher levels of reality
- 4) Look at humans as theomorphic beings
- 5) Understand that knowledge extends in hierarchy from an empirical and rational mode of knowing to the highest form of knowledge, which is, *al-ma'rifah* (unitive knowledge)
- 6) Study philosophy that is wedded to spiritual experiences, rather than a philosophy that is synonymous with logic, or a mental play that does not transform one's being spiritually, which - from an Islamic point of view - is meaningless and 'dangerous'

## CONCLUSION

From what has been debated in Muslim's reconstruction of knowledge, one can argue that militant insistence on the rational dimension of Islam on the one hand, and on the other, the denouncement of Islam's esoteric dimension that the modernists and *salafis* insist, are nothing but reactions against modernity. They are re-enchantment phenomenon in their own right. I call them 'disenchanted re-enchantment' phenomenon. Subsequently, the cognitive process of modernization has eventually developed inability of the adherents to comprehend the supra-rational dimension of religion including their lack of capacity to understand paradoxes. The latter is worth highlighting. The inability to comprehend paradoxes ultimately leads to produce a 'black and white' mentality where universe is divided into moral-immoral, light-darkness, shaped in the 'dualistic vision of reality'. In this particular issue, I would like to point up what Muslim philosophers often spoke of about the understanding of **Divine Infinity** which is so essential to an adequate doctrine of the nature of God, besides **Absolute** and **Good** that has not been emphasized in the mainstream Christian theology and philosophy. As a consequence, it leaves the question of the creation of a world in which there is evil by a Creator who is Good, to be bridged over by an act of faith alone. This mental state gives rise to extremism of all kind. One can therefore argue further, that contemporary religious extremism is the by-product of modernity itself.

Social constructivism perspective suggests there cannot be universal rationality under different systems of representation or symbol, and different systems of meaning. Thus, only logical and mathematical laws and wisdom can be universal (that Nasr categorized as sacred and possess ontological reality). Accordingly, there cannot be universal social sciences and humanities, only the hermeneutically-informed social theories are possible. Nonetheless, owing to the true nature of human (*fitrah*), I argue that 'universal man or woman' are possible. They are, man or woman who can act beyond the confines of any systems of representation.

Concerning the unsettled issues regarding: 1) the future of humanity in the face of socio-ecological crisis; 2) the 'unfinished project' of modernity; and 3) Nasr's salutary reminder that no easy syntheses between Islam and modernity are possible, I happened to believe that God is "sitting on His throne ruling the world" (not in anthropomorphic sense, of course), and therefore was reminded to a famous holy Tradition when The Almighty said: "*Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa ahbaktu an 'urafa*" – "I am a hidden treasure, and it pleased Me to be known".

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