

Contemporary Social Theory: *Tawhīdī* Projections

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Introduction

Contemporary social theory is conventionally addressed from within the dominant tradition of inquiry. Rarely is it subject to a critical reflection from beyond its own ken. This is a pity, for the subject matter and scope of social theory go beyond the confines of any exclusive tradition, while its reach and influence in the global context of our times merely reinforce its extended compass. Given the fact that the ambitious claims made by social theorists about the universality of their project are hardly borne out by the reality, any pretensions at exclusivism or hegemony would be as anachronistic as they are morally reprehensible. The gap between the legitimate ambitions for a universally relevant social theory and the reality of a field grounded in its historical constraints and cultural prejudices can be filled only by a critical and constructive initiative taken from within the profession to constitute a candid, open, and reflexive self-encounter. The opportuneness for such an initiative is enhanced by its urgency: the discrepancies that follow on the ineptitude of our social knowledge can only raise doubts about the relevance of our science to our social condition.

In deploring the resulting ineptitude and irrelevance, it is possible to do so in the voice of a generalized subject, the universal "I," for surely this is one of the areas of convergence where scholars from different traditions could agree. The measure of this agreement can only be gauged by remembering that "a science for the study of society" originally went beyond its grounding in scientific reason to its justification in a moral reasoning. And here, regardless of the grounding of that morality, we find another significant area of convergence for scholars working in different

traditions: whether we come to the field from an Islamic perspective that we strive to recover and reconstruct, or from a diffuse western perspective with its overlapping currents, the need is admittedly for a framework of inquiry and for new directions, and above all for a more salubrious ethos to inform our social knowledge.

The test of the new science of society would lie in its ability to accommodate the universality of a realm of human experience, demonstrated in the range and versatility of social phenomena and social activity, and the specificity that accrues to such experience, as indeed it must in consonance with the principle of temporality and inherent diversity. It would also be found in the possibility of the new science recovering, or, more aptly, renewing its moral mandate to be exercised as a profession with a conscience and experienced as knowledge with a vocation. For various reasons, some of which are addressed in this essay, the recovery of social theory cannot come from within the prevailing traditions of inquiry, which, at the very least, call for a radical restructuring. The elements for this recovery will have to be sought from "without," although clearly one of the structuring premises in the reorientation of social theory will have to call into question the autonomy and boundaries of "traditions" in question.

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The present essay constitutes a step in this general direction of rethinking some of the characteristic strains of contemporary social theory and it is taken as a prelude to the quest for a new synthesis.¹ For our point of departure and implicit frame of reference, we take a paradigm of contrasting epistemics in the conviction that such a paradigm offers a more promising venue both for the reconstruction of social theory proper and for the opportunity it provides for promoting an intra/intercultural discourse as a premise and a field for this reconstruction.² Ultimately, it

¹This is a revised version of a presentation originally submitted at the annual convention of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists in 1990. It resumes the discussion of the possibility and prospects of inquiry into society and across cultures along the lines suggested by a *tawhīdī* paradigm conceived within the framework of a contrasting episteme. See *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (March 1990): 15-38 and 8, no. 1 (March 1991): 15-44.

²For some relevant literature broaching social theory with cultural perspectives in view, Ernest Gellner's work in general provides a good example. *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (1987), Gellner's polemics, reflects on a complex of culture, identity, and politics in two different communities: one evolving in the context of the western intellectual tradition and the other in that of a Shi'i Muslim cultural tradition. The final essay on "Tractus Sociologico-Philosophicus" is a subtle reflection of this thrust. In his *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (Chicago: 1988), the historical dynamic of patterns and interrelationships between the determinants of history, politics (coercion)

is only such an intellectually open and culturally sensitive field that can constitute a realistic plane for a genuine interaction in a global age. Given that the social aggregate, whatever its level, constitutes the primary unit of social inquiry, a better understanding of its various dimensions is essential. These dimensions include the much touted categories of subjectivity and contextuality, as well as those even more pervasive and encompassing, if more ambivalent and more complex categories of intrasubjectivity and intercontextuality, which animate and structure the civilizational encounter among world communities through time and particularly at this elusive point in time, qualified as "modernity."

Social theory takes this complex field for its scope of inquiry, although it assumes its mandate more in terms of a juxtapository anthropology of "self" and "other" and is predicated on a semantics of causality and explanation rather than a hermeneutics of understanding. A more humane global order postulates an appropriation of discursive categories that transcend exclusionary and hegemonous practices and that lay the ground for an alternative anthropology and moral economy. At present, this order is more of a realizable postulate than an established actuality. It is against the contours of a paradigm that enhances the prospects of this realizability that our reflection on social theory is conducted, and it is towards a crystallization of such a paradigm that we hope to be contributing. Even though our preliminary summation concedes initially to a semantics of identity and dichotomy, it does so, within the framework of a contrasting epistemics, by redefining its points of reference and taking commonality for its shaping ground. "Beyond Cultural Parodies and Parodizing Cultures" suggested how this process of resituating and restructuring the sociocultural encounter affects its premises and its promise. For the benefit of the present inquiry, a brief recapitulation on this conceptual strategy may be in order.

One part of the dialogy in a multilateral and opened discourse is constituted around the *tawhīdī* episteme, and the other around a naturalistic humanist counterpart identified with the dominant discourse. Historically, the *tawhīdī* episteme constitutes the submerged nexus in the dominant discourse, and the challenge and priority go to elucidating its premises and presuppositions. The need for such articulation is prompted by the promise that it holds for providing a corrective to the dominant discourse, where the self-destructing elements have come to outweigh the

and culture (cognition/knowledge) are contoured from a sociological division of labor perspective. The interest of Gellner's works partly derive from the range and comparative perspectives he deploys, particularly with regard to his awareness and familiarity with aspects of the Islamic tradition, like Clifford Geertz, author of *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), who has written more strictly as a cultural anthropologist.

constructive elements of which it was comprised initially in the earlier stages of its emergence, which coincided with the birth of the modern project for which it set the pace.³

For analytical purposes, the core features in each of the epistemes in view, the *tawhīdī* and the secular, or the immanentist-cum-humanist, are profiled against two corresponding culture types that are projected in their affinate historical proximations. These constructs are respectively designated as a "median culture type" and an "oscillating culture type." The conceptual constructs are conceived of by way of a discursive strategy in order to overcome the conventional stereotyping, which emphasizes the cleavage between the classical-Biblical West as "self" (Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian) and the Muslim Orient as "other."

In the shaping discourse that is proposed, whatever formal affinities that might arise between the historical West and the oscillating culture are taken for concurrences of contingency more than necessity. In other words, whatever the convergences between the oscillating culture type and the culture identified with the modern West, these convergences may be genealogical but not congenital: they fall within the realm of the presently congenial—a "conjuncture"—but not the culturally genetic. Conversely, Muslim societies, which historically fall within the range of the median culture type, do so by virtue of a founding set of assumptions that, in their generality, are potentially accessible and realizable for other societies as well. If the affinity is temporal in the one case, that of the oscillating culture type and the modern West, it is constitutive in the other, as in the case of the Muslim historical community. As such, the convergence with the median culture type in this historical community maintains its dynamic efficacy only as long as its constitutional affinity remains intact. By the same token, to the extent that they are distanced

³For the reconstruction of the discursive genealogy of modernity, see Hans Blumenberg's epic "The Legitimacy of the Modern Age," in *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983 [1966]). For a useful discussion of his work, see the special issue on Hans Blumenberg in *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 4 (November 1993). With the assault on the metaphysical foundations of the western tradition conducted by influential postmodern currents, the debate on modernity has intensified over the past decade. Among the interesting initiatives are those taken not so much to salvage the modern project, but to distance it from the metaphysical sources of the tradition together with an attempt to reconcile the contradictions in the latter. Patrick Madigan's interpretative essays in this area, which deserve to be better known, provide an accessible example of this tendency. See *The Modern Project to Rigor: From Descartes to Nietzsche* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); *Christian Revelation and the Completion of the Aristotelian Revolution* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), and *Aristotle and His Modern Critics: The Use of Tragedy on the Non-Tragic Vision* (Scranton, PA: University Press of Scranton and Associated University Presses, 1992). This theoretical trope is authoritatively dissected, with an optimistic pithy humor, in an internal debate by John Nelson, "Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save: Or John Gunnell Turns on the Western Tradition," in *Tradition, Interpretation and Science: Political Theory in the American Academy*, ed. J. Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

from their constitutively structuring matrix, median-proximate societies become equally vulnerable to the currents of the oscillating variant. In all cases, however, assuming the intrinsic universality of both these culture types and their conditioned/conditioning historicity, their differential implications for their relevant histories/communities may be relative, but they are by no means morally equivalent.

The effects of a civilizational dynamic drawing on the median culture type are, in principle, more likely to be consistent with the well-being of the societal aggregate. We take this to be the case in view of a grounded referentiality, securing the multidimensionality and the proportion that characterize the cognitive and valuational sources of that culture type. To explain this, we need to touch briefly on the idea of the *bearings of a culture*, a compass that assures it meaning, coherence, and directionality, or purpose. We distinguish between a horizontal and a vertical bearing. These bearings are defined initially in relation to the centrality or the marginality of the cosmic axis and its nature. A culture in which the concept of revealed guidance from beyond a human source is central is qualified primarily by its vertical bearings, whereas a culture in which this concept is peripheral to its constitution, incidental, or arbitrarily composed, is qualified preeminently by its horizontal bearings. Given its transcendental axis, the median culture type is assured a "verticality" that cuts through the various common categories (nominal, cognitive, substantial, formal, spatial, temporal) in a manner that is not available to a counter culture type (the oscillating culture), which is defined primarily by its "horizontal bearings." As a consequence of this horizontality, the boundaries of social knowledge (values, cognition, meaning) in the oscillating culture type will stop short in the here-and-now, the world of immanence, whence history comes to an end. In the other case, these boundaries extend to include both this world and "the hereafter," the beginning and the beyond as well as the immediate and the immanently tangible that unfolds in time, in the in-between.

In the same way, while the limits of human responsibility and morality stop short at the boundaries of this life-world for all in the horizontally pitched culture type, in the median culture type the circuit of consciousness and the span of human moral accountability go beyond the here-and-now only to redound reflexively upon it and to "calibrate" immediate human conduct and worldly attitudes or to qualify history. In short, where the end of history is imminent in the oscillating culture type, in the median culture type no such end is foreseeable in the life-world, not because history is perceived to be cyclical *ad infinitum* as opposed to a punctuated linearity, nor because of a myth of the eternal return, but because with the vertical bearings of that culture type, the line does not come to an abrupt and arbitrary end on the horizontal plane of mortality.

The meaning, relevance, and efficacy of the paradigms of social inquiry are a function of the dimensions they comprise as much as of the way they might be used in specific contexts. Invoking such dimensions as "interiority and exteriority," the immanent and the transcendent, the here-and-now and the hereafter, as much as consciousness and society, can thus hardly be taken for a metaphysical diversion. The levels of experiential reality and the multidimensionality of the human experience have a direct bearing on the field of social theory, a fact that is not easy to grasp in the absence of a viable source for an integrated vision.⁴ This is especially the case if we recall that, in addition to the categories suggested above (subjectivity, contextuality, etc.), the staples of conventional social theory include rationality and legitimacy,⁵ which cannot be separated from an ontology and a praxiology and which are all central to human agency and social order.

Where the paradigm of inquiry fails to comprehend critical dimensions of human cognition and valuation, or where it fails to relate these adequately to being or to the "life-world," it comes to operate against inherent constraints that reflect inevitably on the quality and practical

⁴It is interesting to note that the modern German debate on reforming the university, which is taken to be the condition for a renaissance community (cf. Islamization of Knowledge goals) focuses on the centrality of philosophy in structuring and guiding the academy, i.e., the modern empirical disciplines of scientific inquiry, since it is taken to orient research and to impart a unified and unifying potential to knowledge in society. See J. Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, ed. and trans. Shierry W. Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), chapter 4, where the theme "The Idea of the University" is taken from Karl Jasper's original thesis in *Die Idee der Universität* (Heidelberg: 1961). It is the elusiveness of this search for an integrating principle that provides the animus for a paradigm-seeking/refuting debate in contemporary western thought verging on contingency (Rorty) and ambivalence (Bauman). See Thomas Fleming, "The Part and the Whole" in *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988); Thomas Pangle, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989); Geoffrey Hawthorne, *Enlightenment and Despair: The History of Social Theory* (Cambridge: 1987); Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and Agnes Heller, "From Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences to the Hermeneutics of the Social Sciences," *Theory and Society*, no. 18 (1989): 291-322.

⁵For the discourse on rationality and legitimacy, the Weberian academy continues to deconstruct and unravel the uniquely occidental dimensions of the central sociological concepts he developed. W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History* (University of California, 1985 [1981]), trans. w. introduction by Guenther Roth; and Richard Munch, *Understanding Modernity: Toward a New Perspective Going beyond Durkheim and Weber* (London: Routledge, 1988); Thomas Burger, *Max Weber's Concept of Theory Formation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), esp. "Postscript," 181-230. Susan Hekman, *Weber, the Ideal Type and Contemporary Social Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) is more concerned with the problems of objectivity in comparative cultural contexts and the possibility of a post-positivist social theory; Franco Ferraroti, *Max Weber and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (New York and London: Associated Faculty Press, 1987), esp. chapters 4 and 5, which retains the focus on the historicist dimension of these concepts. A less conventional line of inquiry updating the founding father with frontier ideology was opened up by Alan Sica, *Weber, Irrationality and the Social Order* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).

consequences of social theory. One such area of "scientific lag" recurs persistently in the study of Muslim societies in general, and particularly in addressing sociocultural dynamics in the predominantly Muslim Middle East.⁶ The frustrations experienced frequently by westerners in understanding events in that part of the world are hardly due to their being beyond the pale of rationality and resistant to acculturation to standards of legitimacy. But rather, assuming the good faith belying intent, it is because the "monochromic" paradigm,⁷ within which they continue to reconstruct their worlds, operates within the stunted and partial confines of an arbitrary and biased definition of both rationality and legitimacy.

At present, the dominant tradition that structures the discourse within and beyond social theory is shaped against the oscillating culture type. It thrives on patterns of cognition and a scale of values that promote a delusory sense of abundance and variability when, in fact, it replicates a welter of monochromes. Introducing a mode of discourse drawing on the sources and assumptions of the median culture type would be a means of illuminating and extrapolating on some of these propositions and

⁶There is something to suggest that there is a parallelism between the scientific worldview of the modern age and its power-political practices along the lines developed in Edward Said's thesis on "Orientalism" and Abdul Wahab Messiri's concept of an "Imperialist Epistemology," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 404-16, although one would want to qualify Zygmunt Bauman's cryptic cynicism when he observes that "the practice of science is in its innermost structure no different from that of state politics; both aim at a monopoly over a dominant territory, and both reach their aims through the device of inclusion/exclusion ..." *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8 fn. Linking social theory to a perceived mode of civilization (i.e., capitalism) and to the sociocultural encounter (i.e., Third World) may be seen to implicitly constitute Giddens' project as in *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and explicitly prompts such critical overviews of the field as with Timothy Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1990), esp. chapter 8.

⁷But it is changing—even in theology. From its origins in the history and philosophy of the natural sciences in the sixties, the paradigm debate caught on in the social sciences and, toward the end of the eighties, had reached theology, where it triggered fresh theoretical insights, especially in the domain of relating values to history and social change. See the proceedings of an international symposium jointly sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Studies of Religion at the University of Chicago and the Divinity School for Ecumenical Research at Tübingen in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. David Tracy and Hans Kung (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989). The renowned Catholic theologian's recent writings on globalism presume this paradigmatic shift, which reflects a converging culture in certain social science and theology circles. For its discussion in the context of developmental studies, see *The Center Cannot Hold*. For an overview on comparable trends in Protestant theological circles, with a special focus on social theory, see Paul Marshall and Rober Vandervenn, ed., *Social Science in Christian Perspective* (Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, 1988). Cf. analogous periodic convergences within social science itself, as between Freudians and Marxists (Fromm, Marcuse, and the "critical school") or between Marxians and Weberians (cf. William Roff, ed. *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987]), which provide the oscillating culture type with its moments of reprieve, veritable spaces of incubation, in anticipation of new currents and directions.

exploring the possibility for a more salutary moral economy.⁸ In the process, the parameters of social inquiry would also be expanded and reinvigorated.

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

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

⁸Indeed, it must not be forgotten that the origin of social theory, as it developed in the nineteenth century, lay in the quest for a new moral basis for society following the collapse of traditional authority and the pervasive "breakdown in connections." cf. Bruce Mazlich, *A New Science: The Breakdown in Connections and the New Sociology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Whether in the continental tradition of positivist sociology (i.e., Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*) or in the more empirical tradition of political economy (i.e., Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), the founding fathers have all left their contributions in this area. For a relevant inquiry into the place of religion and moral values in the founding traditions of western social science, see Cormie LeRoy, "Religion in the Social Sciences and the Modern World" (Ph.D. diss., Chicago University, 1977). The general tenor remains very much as Robert Nisbet put it in his introduction to his compact classic *The Sociological Tradition* (London: Heinemann, 1966), in which he pointed out that the "major ideas in social sciences invariably have roots in moral aspirations." For present trends, see Norma Haan et al., *Interpretive Social Science as Moral Inquiry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); cf. Mona Abul-Fadl, "The New Sociology: Gender and the Moral Economy" in *Proceedings of the 21st Annual AMSS Conference* (Herndon, VA: AMSS and IIIT, 1993), 242-58.

assume that central to these conceptions is a worldview that permeates the understanding of society at a given moment and serves to structure and shape the disciplines in its light.⁹ While clearly the shape and pursuit of social theory may not be conditioned solely by the prevailing worldview, and while the underlying assumptions constitute a part of that worldview as much as its product, yet the theory and the episteme together should be seen in the context of that interdependence.¹⁰

Taking our cue from a holistic perception, it will thus be possible first to outline the underlying characteristics of the dominant paradigm and then to consider its operational implications. This will be done by selecting areas/moments at the interface of the civilizational encounter to highlight the nature and significance of a transition where "self and other" crossed.¹¹ Eventually, this is the crossing and transition that must be

⁹The current debate on modernity has cast doubt on the merits and viability of this worldview as much as it has thrown its features into relief. Coming from the pen of a partisan, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), who attempts to salvage what was left of a radical critique that set the pace for much of the present debate. See also Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993 [1969]). For one of the enduring anatomies of "the mind of the Enlightenment," as the soul of the modern worldview, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979 [1951]), 3-36. Cf. "The Concept of Enlightenment" in Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3-42. In *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Dorothy Ross reviews the imported and adapted models of political science, sociology, and political economy specifically in this context of a differentiated "discovery of modernity" on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹⁰Cf. "... 'the polar night of icy darkness and harshness' that Weber saw as the inevitable accompaniment of a modern rationalized and routinized society does not merely require social scientific explanation . . . a routinized and regularized lifeworld is itself a requirement for a positivistically conceived science of society," in view of which a critique of the concepts and categories of such a social science is necessarily also "a critique of the covertly manipulative precepts and practice of the society in which we are living and of the instrumentally rational worldview which tends to legitimize it." Terence Ball, "The Ontological Presuppositions and the Political Consequences of a Social Science," in *Changing Social Science: Critical Theory and Other Critical Perspectives*, ed. Daniel Sabia, Jr. and J. Wallulis (Albany: SUNY, 1983). It is this web of dialectic and interrelatedness that sums up the premise and purpose of our point of departure in the direction of a critical reconstruction of both social theory and the 'umrānī context that constitutes its setting as much as its object.

¹¹The attempt to relate a sociological perspective to a civilizational one, or to evolve the latter from the former, is not typical of mainstream (American) sociology, although it is at the root of the Khaldūnīan scholarly tradition of inquiry into the phenomenon of *al 'umrān al basharī*. Recent trends in western sociological scholarship on urbanization may constitute a revival of this tradition, especially as it can also draw on significant internal sources of varying subtraditions, whether we think of work by Mumford, Wallerstein, Braudel, or others. Janet Abu Lughod's bold and challenging synthesis, exemplary for its originality, methodology, range (and bibliography)—*Before European Hegemony: The World System 1250-1350 A.D.* (Oxford University Press, 1989)—is in this tradition. The earlier work of Pitrim A. Sorokin in the area of cultural/sociological symbiosis is of special interest to a *tawhīdī* sociological view. Cf. *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New

revisited, examined, confronted, and reappropriated in a transcendent trajectory that is aimed at more than a "fusion of horizons."¹²

2

The integrality of a culture field and its internal coherence might best be indicated by tracing the philosophical antecedents of the social sciences. The aim is to demonstrate how social theory, far from being an isolate in a complex of isolates, constitutes an integral part of an epistemic field to which it contributes and from which it derives its own coherence.¹³ This "organic" affinity provides a useful diagnostic/analytical category for ascertaining some of the traits of theory that are not exclusive to it, but are germane to knowledge produced in that culture frame. At the same time, identifying these traits within their "family cluster," in itself perhaps constitutes the single most plausible argument as to why a perspective coming from the median culture is needed. It serves to show that the particular points of emphasis that lend contemporary social theory its style and that structure its modes of thought and research are not "given," as hitherto assumed by an objectivist social science, but rather are self-imposed elements more aptly acknowledged as elements in a socially/historically constructed universe.¹⁴ It would be

York: American Book Co., 1937), *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1928), and *Sociological Theories of Today* (Harper and Row, 1966).

¹²See H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. Sheed and Ward (New York: Crossroads, 1975), 270-2. Although a dialogic conceived in the framework of a *tawhīdī* episteme has its distinctive points of departure and ends, there is much in the Gadamerian hermeneutics that could provide a fertile ground of exchange. So too with some of the current initiatives coming from feminist theory. Cf. Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), who takes up this theme—a "fusion of horizons"—in proposing a dialogic model of inquiry. See pages 200-201 and chapter 7.

¹³The notion of an organizing concept running throughout a knowledge field and lending a certain consistency to its various departments may have gained currency in the metatheoretical debate following on the Kuhnian revelations in his classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. But original insights at the inception of social theorizing were not wanting, as the opening remarks to the classical paradigm in political sociology would suggest. See Andrew Janos, *Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 7. This same underlying continuity in the spirit of an epoch, so noticeable in the heyday of positivism, is currently evidenced in the "discursive" climate of a postmodern academy of fluidity and "transitionality." Cf. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), chapters 1 and 6.

¹⁴For a pithy and spirited debate of this theme, see the special section "Constructing the Social," *History of the Human Sciences* 7, no. 1 (February 1994): 81-123, which brings refreshing perspectives and mines the insights developed nearly three decades earlier in the pioneering work by Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction*

misleading to defer to them passively as simply the predilection of the times, a kind of irrepressible manifestation of the universal *Zeitgeist*, just as it would be misleading to impute them to the creation of alienated or troubled geniuses in society. Rather, whatever the specific or changing traits of contemporary social theory,¹⁵ they are embedded in the structure of an episteme and discourse that have defined the character of the modern West and that can be inferred from any point of entry or access to it.¹⁶ In the following, I will attempt a simplified condensation of the shaping culture of science in the direction of an all-inclusive empiricism that, for specifically American reasons,¹⁷ reached its apogee in American social science.

Philosophical Antecedents of Contemporary Social Science

The empirical or "logical positivist" character of the social sciences can best be understood in light of major philosophical trends in modern philosophy and natural science.¹⁸ The outcome was the establishment of

of Reality (New York: Doubleday, 1966). Writing on modes of thought about culture and variants of relativism, Stephen Turner ("Constructing the Social," pp. 109-15) refers to James Bryant Conant's idea that "the science of a particular period served as a kind of reception device which received and accepted only those ideas for which it was ready, so that a scientific idea born out of its time would need to wait until the discipline had changed enough for new ideas to be received," which may well be a tribute to a spiritual mentor as well as a suggestive insight for contemporary Muslim thinkers puzzling over some aspects of their own intellectual legacy (Kuhn was assistant professor to Conant).

¹⁵With a few notable exceptions, the preoccupation with the metatheoretical level of inquiry continues to echo a Continental mystique (*malaise, lust, or a schadenfreud*), notably cultivated in critical and post-Marxist strains as Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner point out in surveying the proliferation of approaches in a succinct overview to the state-of-the-art in the field, in *Social Theory Today* (Cambridge and Oxford, UK: Basil and Blackwell, Polity Press, 1987), introduction. Jeffrey Alexander's (*ibid.*, pp. 11-57) discussion of the field from the perspective of the enduring "Centrality of the Classics" for both empiricists and postpositivists is itself suggestive of the degree of obfuscation and ambivalence at the roots of contemporary social science.

¹⁶Of which a philosophy of science perspective provides the most encompassing, as illustrated, for example, in the multifaceted approaches to the subject in the writings of Stephen Toulmin over the last two decades and culminating in his recent original contribution to rethinking the strains of modernity: *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990); cf. "Rediscovering History," *Encounter* 36, no. 1 (1971).

¹⁷Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*.

¹⁸The literature on positivism in the social sciences is immense and varied and cuts across generations: from the latter twenties with the formation of the "Vienna Circle" to the present polemics. Cf. Otto Neurath, *Foundations of the Social Sciences: International Encyclopaedia of Unified Science*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); Anthony Giddens, "Positivism and Its Critics," in *A History of Sociological Analysis*, eds.

an ideal model of knowledge, which thereby excluded all forms that did not meet its strict criteria. Each discipline was thus left with the option of adopting this epistemological model or perishing. The "ideal" model, of course, was the scientific/empirical one. The immense success of science in the modern period propelled this paradigm of knowledge to a position of preeminence amongst all other forms of knowledge and soon rendered them obsolete, vestiges of a prescientific age. Hence, humanity's inquiry into the nature of its social world was forced to adopt this empirical model as its epistemological basis.

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

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

(New York: 1978); Russell Keat, "The Critique of Positivism," in *The Politics of Social Theory: Habermas, Freud and the Critique of Positivism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). A classic and concise statement is A. J. Ayer's "Introduction" in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York: Free Press, 1959), which condenses his fame-making book in the English-speaking world, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollanz, 1936). Another one is Herbert Feigl, "The Origin and Spirit of Logical Positivism," in *The Legacy of Logical Positivism*, ed. Peter Achinstein and Stephen Barker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969), 3-24. Bringing a less conventional civilizational, sociocultural, and theological dimension to the fore is Eric Voegelin in "Positivism and Its Antecedents," in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, ed. John Hallowel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975), 74-109.

existence to things (i.e., substance). With the exception of ourselves and God, all knowledge is knowledge of sense perceptions.

This "purging" of nonempirical elements was continued by Hume (1711-76), who brought empiricism to its extreme. Like Berkeley, Hume denied a reality "behind" sense impressions. He claimed that all we can know are "bundles" of sense impressions. Furthermore, we have no knowledge of ourselves or God, for sense impressions do not grant us these notions. Similarly, notions of necessity and causation are equally bogus. Hume said: "Where is the necessary connection?" Certainly not in experience, where all we find is a series of sense impressions. According to Hume, we take frequent associations of some of these impressions and form "psychological habits." For instance, it is simply a habit of mind to think the sun will rise tomorrow; there is no necessity involved here. This extreme empiricism led to skepticism, whereby all "matter of fact knowledge" (i.e., empirical knowledge) is reduced to associations and probabilities. Math and logic alone survive Hume's devastating critique, for they deal not with "matters of fact" but with logical relations between facts. Thus comes his famous statement regarding metaphysics, moral science theology, and even the natural sciences, namely, that we throw all such works on these subjects "into the flames for they contain nothing but superstition."

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

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

ics. Hence, all knowledge is from experience, even the relations between "matters of fact."

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

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

There was thus a certain element of ruthlessness about the epistemological project that came to define the terrain of social knowledge and to make it an integral part of an emerging pattern of inquiry and subject it to its ubiquitous underlying presuppositions. The general autonomy of a cultural tradition would seem to be assured by the pervasiveness of its logic. This thesis has two implications for assessing contemporary social theory. The one would suggest that radical restructuring calls for going beyond the closed circle of positivism and its internal countercultures and justifies a recourse to alternative epistemic

modes drawn from beyond that circle, such as that proposed in the median culture type.¹⁹ The other implication calls for a holistic framework for investigating social theory, which would make it possible to engage it as part of a more encompassing and inclusive epistemic discourse. With this provision in view, the question is whether or not it is possible to identify the elements of a more pervasive worldview in the western cultural sphere that transcends social theory and that may have its roots in a heritage antedating the modern era. Clearly, this pushes back the boundaries of inquiry in ways hardly conceivable if social theory were technically confined to a closed, self-contained spectrum, beginning and ending with itself.

Eros and Thanatos, Or, the Cult of Conflict

The dominant worldview sees in conflict and antagonism the stuff of the social order.²⁰ Indeed psychoanalysis, which remains largely dominated by its Freudian origins, candidly sums up the life-principle as one of perpetual struggle whether at a primary level for survival, or at a secondary level (the libidinal) for fulfillment.²¹ This struggle, which animates the individual psyche, is externalized and projected on temporal society in all its sectors to constitute its civilizational life-force. Inherent to this semantic field is a whole gamut of concepts and symbols suggestive of the struggle: conflict, control, manipulation, confrontation, domination, repression. Psychoanalysis is a gateway to social theory. The other grand portal is that of economics, which, even before the breakthroughs in psychoanalysis, has been the arena defined by scarcity. It too was targeted for a competitive and conflictual mode from the outset, with

¹⁹I have addressed this issue in *Paradigms in Political Science Revisited*, which was published as a separate supplement to *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (September 1989) and in "Beyond Cultural Parodies," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (March 1991): 15-44.

²⁰R. Collins, *Conflict Sociology* (New York: Academic Press, 1975); L. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959); A. Giddens, "The Nation-State and Violence," in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

²¹James Strachey, trans., *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1961), for all its compactness, provides an exemplary and graphic illustration of this conflictual and antagonistic essence that is integral to the natural world and that carries over to guilt-ridden man and his cultural artifices. In *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), Herbert Marcuse attempts to synthesize Marx and Freud as he negotiates his way through the same tradition, notwithstanding his disillusionment and soul-searching for a way out in a resuscitated Dionysian aesthetic. Habermas takes up the cue in "Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity" in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, Polity Press, 1985).

its own paraphernalia of suggestive concepts and with an emphasis on a power political dimension. The notoriety achieved in one field or the other should by no means rob other more autochthonous disciplines (i.e., sociology and anthropology) of their share of originality in this field. Here again, the key to the conception and growth of the disciplines from the outset lay in the conflictual and power-centric animus. The literature is infected with this virus, regardless of the field and the ideological assumptions of its observer. Studies are given to exploring and projecting the ways and means to contain this conflict or to articulating it and exposing it in anticipation of its manipulation and control. Depending on the ideological perspective, the need is to ensure the maximum freedoms for conflicting interests without having the system founder and, perhaps, to seek means of mediating the conflicts that emerge. Elsewhere, research is busy anticipating, gauging, precipitating, or investing in the conflicts and antagonisms that serve to discredit the system and prove the inevitability of its destruction—presumably to make way for a consistently superior order.

This element of what might be properly construed as a social Darwinism may have reached its apogee in the Marxian formulation of social theory.²² There, the class struggle is the agent of a dialectical historical materialism and, as such, it comes to be apotheosized into the catalyst of social transformation and the benefactor of an alienated humanity. In giving the priority to the dialectics of the forces of material production over those of biological reproduction, it retains the essence of the conflictual and repressive dynamic inherent in the ongoing battle between Eros and Thanatos for the soul of civilization. The prize remains that of domination and mastery rather than sheer primitive survival or "enlightened progress." This ethical code permeates the mainstream and becomes the mainstay of social theory as the cult of domination comes to be eulogized under various norms and guises and is practiced and legitimated

²²Interestingly, a recent prospectus on Marxism in the nineties is conducted against a Darwinian perspective; see Alan Carling, "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will": A Reconstructed Marxist Theory for the 1990's?, *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 2 (May 1993): 115-20. Marx's own "orientalism" and defence of imperialism reflect and anticipate the culture that favored the success of Darwinism. An even more congenial trans-Atlantic culture hastened its appeal and spread at the turn of the century, to coincide with the institutionalization of sociology and anthropology. See R. Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1955) and John Greene, "Darwin and the Social Sciences" in *Darwin and the Modern World View* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1961). Through his unconventional work, Bowler has established his authority in the field: *Darwinism* (1993); *The Non-Darwinian Revolution* (1988); *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900*. Elsewhere, he applies his eclectic interests as a natural scientist and historian to reconstruct the identity and self-imag(in)ing in Victorian England through an imagined past that would justify them in their turn of the century empire. *The Invention of Progress* (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1989).

accordingly. The art of civilization excels in deceit. As social theory itself becomes its subtle exponent, the spade is no longer called a spade. Instead, so many names are devised for the cult as to smother its reality.

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

The *evolutionary code* is a good example of a pivotal access to the modern mind that has spawned, spanned, and punctuated its activity, whether its domain was that of the life sciences or that of the social sciences.²³ Its animus is one of conflict, struggle, and domination in a race for survival. It is this conception that has structured much of contemporary social theory, and the question is whether this influence was due to a predilection in the scope and subject of the field of social relations that made it more susceptible to a Darwinian interpretation of reality, or whether, beyond social theory as a specialized inquiry, there was something in this code that appealed to a more basic sensibility in the pervasive perceptions in the later nineteenth century. Both possibilities are real, and the case of the growth and consolidation of a trend have been made validly in the different and complementary accounts of an era. Obversely then, the question is one of accounting for the success of the Darwinian mode of thought in the European cultural context of its times.

Contrary to prevailing orthodoxy, Darwin's thought did not launch the evolutionary epoch, but, more consistent with the evidence at hand, it was merely a formalization and a consummation of a trend already well underway. By providing the empirical evidence it needed from the natural sciences, the Darwinian discovery provided already existing currents of intellectual thought the legitimation needed to consolidate a trend and

²³Peter Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989); cf. Michael Schmid and Franz Wuketitis, eds., *The Evolutionary Theory in Social Science* (Holland: Dordrecht, 1987) for recent debates in the field.

lend it the currency it came to command.²⁴ More disconcertingly, the roots of this conflictual animus can be found much deeper in the recesses of the historical western tradition,²⁵ whether the latter is seen in its affinities with a liberal humanist ethos or in terms of a specific theological humanism. If decoding an episteme may take its cue from struggle and confrontation as an underlying and persistent theme in much of social inquiry, plumbing the depths will likely lead beyond social inquiry.

One of the first lessons the reflexive social scientist will need to learn as he/she taps the psycho-genesis of his/her field concerns the traumatic involvement with the conflictual mode that conditions the dominant paradigm. Challenge, defiance, and rebellion are found to be rooted in the mythological wellsprings of a classical antiquity replete with conflicting and conflictual models that plunge it in ambiguity.²⁶ There Prometheus, the culture hero, steals the fire from the pagan gods, and the struggle is perpetuated among these petty deities themselves in a vision that is spuriously ennobled by a nostalgic appeal to the "essential humanism" of the Greeks and to their basic "naturalism." So compelling was this theme in the early Roman empire that it conditioned the reception and mediation of Christianity there. Instead of shaping indelibly a culture from the start, the response to divine revelation itself in the Roman West was conceived in terms of the dominant Hellenistic context of its times.²⁷

²⁴See "The Social Sciences" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*; also Robert Hutchinson and R. Doran, eds., *The Social Sciences Today*. The periodic academic and intellectual reviews of the field are suggestive of general trends as well as evaluations of the past. Recently, a number of prominent professionals in the field were invited to reflect on the state of the art; see *Social Science and Modern Society* 30, no. 1 (November/December 1992): Special Thirtieth Anniversary Issue.

²⁵With an ironic nod at the Social Darwinists, Crane Brinton, in *A History of Western Morals* (New York: Paragon House, 1990 [1957]), takes *agon*, the Greek root of "agony" and signifier of strife and struggle, for a starting point in tracing a western moral ideal on the assumption that "conflict" is a good and necessary word underlying much that is valuable in western character and richer in its connotations than mere "competition," which is at the root of democracy. Originally, the Greek *agon* was the name given the former religiously ritualized assembly of the Greeks to witness their games. See page 27.

²⁶An original and insightful exploration of the sociocultural relevance and the restorative value of classical mythology (and the specific form it assumed) for the western psyche especially during epochal transitions where bearings are sought is provided by Charles Segal, "Greek Tragedy and Society: A Structuralist Perspective," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. J. Peter Euben. Sophocles' trilogy provides a key to illuminating more than a psyche of a generation, the foundation of a civilization—the "curse of civilization." See Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), and Leonard Wessell, Jr., "Mythos and Logos" and taken as a key metaphor, "The Myth of Prometheus," in *Prometheus Bound: The Mythic Structure of Karl Marx's Scientific Thinking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

²⁷Cf. Arthur Weigall, *The Paganization of Christianity*.

A comparison of the respective accounts of Adam's fall in the biblical and Qur'anic versions illustrates the point. In the Qur'anic record, the event is attributed to forgetfulness, to a dawning curiosity and a weakness of resolve before temptation. It is followed by Adam's repentance and God's forgiveness and promise of continued guidance to his progeny. The same event is rendered in the extant biblical account as an act of humanity's blatant rebellion that is followed by God's own remorse at having created such a spirited monster that could not be restrained. So great is the heavenly agitation that damnation becomes the lot of humanity, much along the lines of Zeus's revenge upon a Prometheus chained to the rock and doomed to have his liver pecked out by the vulture for eternity.²⁸ In the biblical version, however, atonement is in view—in His loving compassion God, so that version goes, takes it upon Himself to redeem a fallen humanity through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

In the event, the drama of Greek mythology that was played out in the temples of yore and gave the world the tragedy as a unique form of art also provided the setting and format for much in the "modern paganism."²⁹ It gave the modern (western) mind the specific modes, mores, and concepts that molded a consciousness and furnished it with the means for its self-expression and articulation—and to which we can react today as social theorists reflecting critically on a tradition. In the age of science and scientific rationalism, the reenactment of the Act of Creation finds its metamorphosis in the Drama of Evolution: the catharsis of the ancients becomes the "revolution" of the moderns and comes to be seen as that creative act that, at a given moment, releases the load of tensions in a society teeming with contradictions and frustrations so as to "transform" that society and carry it one step forward in the spiral of progress. In the process, the Delphic oracle gives way to the predictions of the pollsters and the experts from their new Olympian heights of rational objectivity and data computations. Surely for a political scientist of a reflective disposition, the search for the roots and constituents in the western tradition as they are projected in his/her field will unravel a labyrinth that is as fascinating to the imagination as it is stimulating to the intellect. It can

²⁸The cunning of Odysseus (Adorno, "Odysseus: Or Myth and Enlightenment" in Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) may have spared him such ignominy. Whether the "culture of mass deception" (Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception") is itself a cause or a consequence of the abortion of modernity remains an open question. Cf. Michael Hollis, *The Cunning of Reason*; Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes and Travels in Hyperreality*; Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*.

²⁹See review essay on Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation - The Rise of Modern Paganism*, no. 1 (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967) in Mona Abul-Fadl, "The Enlightenment Revisited," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (December 1990): 417-35.

almost certainly contribute to an enlightened and enlightening paradigm for the study of a tradition in mutation and continuity.

Identifying the Darwinian code (which is the evolutionary code informed by the conflictual ethic) as a valid and fruitful point of access to the modern epistemic discourse that has structured social theory is one thing. Locating the sources of this code and its possible variations beyond contemporary social theory is quite another. It goes to show the inbuilt constraints in the oscillating culture medium, which limit the prospects of rectifying the imbalances it generates and which are simply reinforced, multiplied, and perpetuated in the practice of social theory.

This is what we mean by suggesting that the oscillating culture necessarily points beyond itself and that a radical critique of contemporary social theory is likely to reinforce a sensibility for options and dimensions that are acquired and developed within the median culture. The vocationist (as opposed to the professional social scientist) will be more sensitive than others to the opportunities lying in that alternative culture mode and will be more capable, if he/she desires, of proceeding on a track of reforming contemporary social theory from within on the basis of insights gained in the course of exposure to the view from without. To cultivate this conviction, namely, to assure the belief in the benefits and the possibilities of breaking out of a self-imposed closure, he/she will need to see how the ingrained habits of a mind formed in the process of centuries of the great conversation have acted on its perceptions of reality and have continued to do so in ways which have not always been productive. In this sense too, it will be necessary to realize the price this kind of monochromatics has exacted, if only as an argument for fostering the virtues of opening to alternatives.

The Matrix of an Inquiry: Reductionism and Excess

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

With conflict presumed to be a foundational premise of the social order and, more generally, of history, a self-destructive core belief is imposed arbitrarily and generalized upon contemporary social theory. This is reinforced by a matrix of inquiry that is similarly afflicted, as it constrains arbitrarily the range of inquiry and misleads by the modes it

projects for its focus. The importance of any matrix of inquiry, it might be noted here, is due to the way it determines the kind of questions to ask and sets the preliminary orientations that, by virtue of the mechanics of the inquiry itself, come to be subsumed into its conclusion. Asking the wrong kind of questions prejudices the course of inquiry and dissipates the efforts that go into it. What happens the moment questions are raised within the prevailing antinomic matrix is that it imposes avoidable dilemmas on the inquiry's domain. To assume, for example, the division between public and private morality paves the way for ambiguity in assessing individual conduct in society and appraising social action. This has a demoralizing impact in more than one sense, and the reaction is even more disconcerting when scholars assume attitudes analogous to throwing out the baby with the bath. In a context where theory threatens to assume the burdens of a futile metaphysical disputation, it provokes its pragmatic response, and scholars are almost forced to choose between their reason and their conscience.³⁰ They must either confine their pursuits to narrow utilitarian interests and renounce all claims to a moral integrity or abdicate their profession and follow their vocation at their own peril.

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

The reductionist propensity, which has overtaken the field of social inquiry as much as it has every other area of modern existence, is an outcome of this dichotomy and dichotomizing instinct. As such, it constitutes another point with which we take issue in questioning the validity of the dominant paradigm. As the trajectory of modern social theory illustrated, the triumph of positivism occurred through a reductionist constriction of the vision confining the world to the sensory world and

³⁰Cf. Kariel on the moral dilemma confronting American political scientists torn between the demands of their discipline (positivist) and their moral perceptions; see also "Possibilities . . ." in George Graham, ed. *The Post-Behavioural Era*, 127, 130. Defiant of the rationalist temper, Kariel's tone carries echoes of a later anarchist discourse and, with it, corroborates the pendular generative momentum of the oscillating culture type.

reducing life to its biological conception.³¹ Various interpretations have been given to account for the precipitating factors in this regression, and as often as not in the complexity of a many-sided world (as the social world is bound to be), it is difficult to isolate the causes from the effects. The coming of a nominalist trend at the onset of a desacralizing current, identified by some modern diagnostics of the malaise of the culture³² could have been as much a symptom of the malady as its cause.

The issue is not one of causality but of understanding. This is another area though where the traditions and methodologies of contemporary social science founder. While such social science may display considerable analytical virtuosity, its faculty for synthesis is astonishingly underdeveloped. Reductionism does not affect the area of understanding in general or specific areas of inquiry, but its consequences are diffuse and affect attitudes in a more practical context. The distortions attendant on reductionism have not only reflected on the understanding of human nature and the social world, but have also reflected negatively on the attitudes and ethics of social science in a manner detrimental to humanity and society.

³¹Underlying social theory is a concept of humanity. A projection of this concept in the disciplines is not just at the root of their emergence, but the source of the differentiation that occurs through time and from one thinker or school to another. The modern search for the "subject" underlies much of the uncertainty in contemporary social theory. John Christie, "The Human Sciences: Origins and Histories," *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 1 (February 1993) and Claude Blanckaert, "Buffon and the Natural History of Man: Writing History and the 'Foundational Myth' of Anthropology," *ibid.*, 13-50. The thrust in the present reductionism comes from a revival in sociobiology, where studies on man and human nature have resurged more sophisticated, mellowed by an ethical sense of realism and drawing more on Aristotle than on Skinner. Currently, Roger Masters commands the field of theorizing a political theory of the state in this perspective. See *The Nature of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See also Degler, *Human Nature* and Thomas Fleming, *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988), which provides a more accessible and potentially more relevant work for an interactive Islamic scholarship. Cf. chapters 1 and 4. Inquiries, reflections, and insights from an Islamic perspective abound, especially those written within the theosophical tradition. Cf. S. H. Nasr, considered relevant for social theory are those written with a view on the issues of contemporary social thought and that develop comparative insights, i.e., Gai Eaton, *King of the Castle* and Mohamed Talbi, "La Vocation de l'Homme" in Talbi and M. Bucaille, *Reflexions sur le Coran* (Paris: Seghers, 1989), or those with some interest in conceptualization. Due to the centrality of the concept of *khilāfah*, the concept has frequently been taken up from traditionist *fiqhī* perspectives, more descriptive and analytical than conceptual or sociological. As a result of the rich legacy, scholarship on sources also provides an important resource for the Muslim social theorist. Cf. 'Abd al Majīd al Najjār, *al Insān fī al Qur'ān*. Cf. M. Abul-Fadl, "The Islamic View of Man: Agency, Morality and Responsibility" (forthcoming), a synopsis of which was prepared for publication in a UNESCO-sponsored project on The Foundations of Islam.

³²For some relevant insights from a semiotic perspective, see Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *Meaning and Modernity: Social Theory in the Pragmatic Attitude* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), esp. chapters 1 and 11. For a sapiential perspective, see S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), esp. chapters 1 and 5.

There was a time when the methods of psychoanalysis and behaviorism were conspiring to open up new vistas of understanding and unfathomed prospects for human betterment. The grandeur and promise of this scientific breakthrough lay in a reductionist fallacy concerning the concept of the human being, which exerted its fatal attraction in practically every nascent discipline in the nineteenth century, including *homo economicus* and Superman. By the early twentieth century, reducing the individual to the essentials of his/her biological organism and elaborating on the possibilities of manipulating and controlling the reactions of this organism in an equally controlled environment fed on the tensions of an age torn between exorcising the "ghost in the machine" (Koestler) and lamenting with T. S. Elliot the spreading "wasteland." Experiments on rats and analogous organisms pointed the way to prognostics on the human behavioral potential, which was canonized in B. F. Skinner's tome.³³

While the ideas of this school may no longer constitute the orthodoxy they once did, the naturalism that underlay its philosophy continues to infect the profession and to reflect on its perceptions of morality. The ethos of manipulation, prediction, and control continues to haunt an era noted for its scientific breakthroughs in the areas of genetics and reproductive technologies. Behaviorism might have exhausted its momentum by the end of the sixties,³⁴ but the ethics of the profession remain vulnerable and reflect on the practice. Admittedly, a notable shift away from the scientific cult might be taking place. This is seen in the profusion of organs and organizations that have come to reflect the rediscovery of ethics and their relevance to modernity. A new agenda of priorities is emerging, but whether this can effectively check the excesses associated with the reductionist syndrome is another matter. The view from the median vantage point is inclined to be more skeptical about the prospects of success in the absence of external sources to reinforce these efforts. These doubts are based on a reading of the nature of the "self-correcting" mechanisms in the oscillating culture.

Another, and less conventional, way of viewing reductionism would be to relate it to excess. The latter is itself one dimension of a syndrome of an absence of restraint and a lack of measure. These related features are germane to an oscillating culture and, in this sense, reductionism in

³³*Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

³⁴G. Homans ("Behaviorism and After," in Giddens and Turner [eds.], *Social Theory Today*, 58-81) claims that, quite the opposite, the behavioral movement maintains its influence today through its internalization in behavioral psychology and, more generally, through its pervasive and unacknowledged influence in various rational and utilitarian schools. What is clear, however, is that it exerts its influence in an attenuated form within a milieu that has itself become more attuned to a variety of reductionisms.

the materialistic cult of our times is merely one phase and expression of a residual propensity in that culture type. This is reflected partly in the ease with which the western tradition lends itself to classification into epochs and discernible tempers (the *Zeitgeist*). It facilitated Comte's task in isolating the Ages of Man in his evolution through the theological, the rational, and into the scientific age. It is also reflected in the smoothness with which the transitions back and forth along the cultural continuum are effected. It was easy for Marx to stand Hegel on his feet, for example, with little embarrassment. To take a nearer event from a more pragmatic field: the political convergence in the international order between liberalism and communism should hardly come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the currents in an age of "the end of ideology."³⁵ In the past, however, these reversals and convergences, in short these "oscillations," took place against a more complex and prodigious cultural grounding that mediated effectively the contradictions and moderated the fall-out of the swings.

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

The oscillating culture is typical of a mode of thought and action that represents the unaided human quest in all its stumblings and its consequences: the heroic image of man, self-subsistent, autonomous, and self-sufficient. In this sense, it is susceptible to all the frailties to which this

³⁵Daniel Bell's review of the field in *The Social Sciences after the Second World War* seems to have been written with his theme on *The End of Ideology* in view. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the triumph of liberalism, a new jubilatory mood briefly took on with the revival of the controversy around "The End of History" (and the Last Man) with its implicit Hegelian (and Nietzschean) themes signifying a rediscovery of "ideology" in a new world order. Ironically, it was the latter that would provide the sequel to the end of ideology in the rebirth of an impending clash of cultures, according to Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington and other central figures in American think-tank circles. Clearly, the discourse in a globalizing social theory is calibrated on the scales of a praxis in reflexivity. For a launcher on this theme in Muslim scholarly circles, see "The End of History? Or the West and the Rest?," roundtable, *Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual AMSS Conference*, 31-63.

quest is vulnerable. Yet the vocational social scientist will also concede to its elements of nobility, if only on account of the human being's generic humanity. Endowed with an innate sensibility (*fitrah*), humanity is urged on (instinctively) to search for the moral basis of the social order. Intuitively, as Aristotle well knew in corroboration of the certitudes of still earlier generations of oriental sages, virtue in this order could be sought in justice, and the just lay in the "median": nothing to excess, moderation is best.³⁶ This is an often overlooked piece of intuition that has been resuscitated recently, albeit in the dry, reductionist, and somewhat banal computations and formulations on the subject that sparked off another of those elated moments of discovery in the odyssey of a young but prematuring social theory.³⁷

The upshot is that reductionism, as one of the consequences of the matrix of inquiry, affects modern social theory in a variety of ways and at different levels. It is associated with an ethos of excess and indulgence and displays a chronic want of measure. As these would seem to be traits historically endemic to the culture type in view, any autochthonous efforts to counter this tendency from within the same self-contained parameters are perennially caught up in the same self-defeating cycle. One is reminded of the parabolic bird-infested tree and the sage of al Ghazālī.

One way to overcome excess is to inject a sense of measure into contemporary social theory and not to presume either the indifference of social theory or the irrelevance of measure to it. Left to its own devices, theory as philosophy can only intuitively locate the need, but it stumbles in its efforts to define content.³⁸ The costs of stumbling are too high in an era of technological glut, nor can the matter be left entirely to a fortuitous pragmatics to fill the void. This is enough incentive to induce a turn for direction to other sources beyond the culture closure.

It is at this point that perspectives drawing on the example of the median culture type and its sources could provide more than the principles needed for critiquing social theory. They could constitute a sub-

³⁶Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁷I have in mind the Rawlsian debate at Harvard in the early eighties, which turned the young author overnight into a *cause celebre* and provoked a polemic that reached beyond the confines of the American academy. See *On Reading Rawles*.

³⁸The whole paradigm of modernity, hence its underlying episteme, is constituted on a procedural impetus without content: growth/change for its own sake, without directionality, so much so that freedom, rationality, and progress become a function as much as a measure of this void. See David Kolb, *A Critique of Pure Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), chapters 1 and 12. His conclusion in rethinking the modern world from the vantage points of identity, community, and rationality converges with the points of departure of such thinkers as Rorty and Bauman, who end up merely affirming Kolb's premises. Thus the self-referential discourse on modernity is locked in an impasse.

stantial resource to ground efforts for going beyond criticism to constructive synthesis and, in this sense, they set the stage for the missing directionality. A number of factors qualify the alternative culture for this role, not least of which is the holistic conceptual affinity associated with its culture matrix and backed by the substantive and integrated nature of its procedural ethic. In the *tawhīdī* episteme, for example, justice is not simply the formal/instrumental value of the modern liberal rationalist and its pragmatic variations in the West; rather, it is essentially a substantial value that cannot be reduced arbitrarily to any one of its constituent dimensions or components.³⁹ As an inclusive scale of values, itself embedded in the *tawhīdī* epistemic field, justice permeates the value system across a means-ends axis. It operates as a key ordering mechanism that is integrated with and integrating of the value scale at the foundational and operational levels of the social order.

The practical consequences of such an outlook for the conduct of contemporary social theory are immense. Not only would it restructure the grounds of many an inquiry in the field of social studies, but it would invest it with meaning and purpose or direction such as it lacks at present. Indeed, it would clear the ground of the plethora of fragmented, dispersed, redundant researches whose sole validation lies in their data-pooling virtues and that become the temptation and justification for a dubious market morality. It would also heal the rifts that splinter an academy torn between its moral conscience and its professional consciousness. Even the criteria of policy making, whether the issue area is one of welfare and social policy or foreign policy, would be included in the propaedeutic thrust in the theoretical field. By appropriating a means-ends axis at the cognitive level of inquiry, it would be possible to be both consistent and moral. There would be no room for an amoral science or a value-neutral technology any more than there would be scope for validating an end irrespective of the means. The categorical imperative would be a practical/pragmatic alternative instead of parading as an autonomous category.⁴⁰

3

What are the implications and projections of our inquiry into the general character of contemporary social theory for our interest in the

³⁹See Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1984), for a discrete exposition of the different dimensions as seen through the legacy.

⁴⁰Amitai Etzioni, "The Moral Foundations of the Marketplace. What is to be Done?," *Currents in Modern Thought, The World and I: A Chronicle of Our Changing Era 5*, no. 12 (December 1990): 466-75.

broader realm of an intercultural encounter? In this context, we focus our interest on the encounter between historical Islam and the West for various reasons, not least of which is its continuity, intensity, and purport for shaping the course and fate of a modern culture. As we have inferred from the outset, a critical reflection on social theory from a contrasting epistemics perspective has the advantage of redefining its grounds and scope in such a manner as to encompass planes of inquiry that have unwarrantedly been excluded or suppressed in an ethnocentric profession. The same social theory that provides the framework of inquiry into social phenomena within a particular society also provides us with the tools and insights for intrasocial and intersocietal comparisons. These comparisons go beyond their academic intent. They project an understanding that is likely to reflect back on a matrix and reinforce its subsequent output.

The rupture that might have occurred with the coming of the Enlightenment was not of a nature to undo some of the more enduring characteristics that would eventually come to reinforce the epistemic underpinnings of modern social theory. To all purposes and intents, they formed part of the effective cultural and knowledge framework that conditioned the kind of interaction and borrowing that took place in the medieval Christian West on the eve of its renaissance as it came into contact with the then-dominant Islamic civilization. In the same way, it continues to affect the reading of the West of society in the Muslim ecumene, whether in modern times or, in retrospect, as it attempts to reinterpret its sociocultural patterns and pontificate on its implications. As this constitutes a distorting propensity in any prospective cultural encounter, as much as it distracts from the credibility and viability of contemporary social theory, it would be instructive to draw attention to some of the areas where the matrix of inquiry and its reductionist or conflictual propensities potentially constrain more constructive developments in self-understanding as much in the understanding of the "other."

The Conflictual Mode and the Culture-Filter

One of the areas of enlightenment that might benefit from a critical reflection on the western heritage from its sources may be that of cross-cultural interaction.⁴¹ How the historical West interacted with other cultures, and how this exchange was projected in the various domains of the encounter, particularly during the "epochal thresholds," deserves particular attention for its heuristic/revealing potential. An example of one of those historically pregnant moments occurs in the course of the transmission of the Islamic empirical tradition of inquiry to the European

⁴¹*Where East Meets West: The West on the Agenda of the Islamic Revival* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991).

centers of learning and in the way in which this tradition was received in the cultural medium of the Renaissance.

This is one of the relatively gray and ambiguous junctures in the history of the rise of the modern West that have scarcely received the attention they deserve. The constraints are as much paradigmatic as historical and psychohistorical. Yet it is only in revising the framework of inquiry in a spirit of critical empathy implicit in a contrasting episteme that the anomalies and the distortions of a historical encounter can be explained and understood. Corrective perspectives could then be introduced to address the implications that have continued to shape, well beyond the initial encounter, the modernity of our day. To take one example, let us turn to that critical juncture in the early modern period when such scientists as Francis Bacon were actively engaged in mediating the lessons from another heritage. Only a deeply riveted, conflictual psyche could have conceived of "torturing" Nature to yield her secrets, and such logistics could only be fitting for a vivid imagination that saw Nature "red in tooth and claw."⁴²

There was nothing in the transmitted Islamic legacy to suggest such an ordeal, but clearly, the culture filter that was effecting the mediation must have played its role. In the event, Bacon also imparted to the modern scientific worldview its ethos, which has set the tone for humanity's ambivalent encounter with nature in modernity. Other examples could be sought of the way in which the rationalist legacy was reappropriated from Islamic sources to reconstruct a chapter in western scholasticism and to bridge the transition to modernity. But this would constitute one of the themes for researching within a new paradigm of inquiry, where the agenda setting would allow for new perspectives on old questions and enable the raising of questions hitherto unthought of. At a critical juncture in the encounter between two great traditions, opportunities abounded for the rising West, but they were marred by the

⁴²Cf. Jerry Weinberger, *Science, Faith and Politics: Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age—A Commentary on Bacon's Advancement of Learning* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985). This work interprets Bacon's ethos against its contending biblical and classical antecedents to illuminate the "problematic of technology" whence "the more science promises human self-reliance, the more we search for missing gods, we feel besieged by the very means which grant us power, and we are alternately proud and ashamed of our impious mastery over nature" (p. 17). For the consequences of such a confounded impiety, see Fred Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature: Marcuse and Habermas* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1985), esp. chapters 1 and 9. One can only think of the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the steady alienation of Nature that was to provoke its backlash in the nineteenth-century Romantic movement as an antecedent to the current *fin de siècle malaise* seen in the ecological movement. To highlight the historical alienation in the western psyche, Lowith's analysis in *The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949) may retain its heuristic value for the ongoing soul-searching of modernity's genesis and consequences.

misperceptions and cross-perceptions that affected the culture filtering in progress to the detriment of an entire sequence.⁴³

How Conflict Is Viewed from the "Median"

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

In fact, if a semantic field for conflict and confrontation as concepts were to be constructed in the respective modes of inquiry associated with their respective culture types, the oscillating and the median, one would at best come up with a range of remote equivalences of meaning rather than with any identity in meanings. This is a point that cannot be developed here. To take but one example in passing, however, to shed some light on the distinction in view, one might consider the term *d-f-'a / daf'* and its Qur'anic usage. Literally, the term could be associated with a range of activity connoting taking the initiative, paying one's dues, pushing forth, warding off, averting, repelling, defending, fending, advancing, repaying. In fact, it provides a compact generative concept that invokes a world of meaning, none of which translates identically into analogues associated with conflict in its generic western mode. In the latter, conflict generally is associated with domination, mastery, and subjugation. It is a function of power, greed, desire or whatever could be rationalized in terms of "ideal and material interests." In this sense, con-

⁴³For the concept of culture-filter, I am indebted to Normal Daniels, whose extensive work on medieval relations between Europe and the Muslim world provide an interesting, reliable, and instructive interpretation. In *The Cultural Barrier: Problems in the Exchange of Ideas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), he used his research as a historian (*The Arabs and Medieval Europe* [London: Longman, 1975]) to sharpen his cultural sensibility and focus on an area that calls for more intensive study than is now available.

flict is both conceived instrumentally, on a means-ends axis and, like mastery and domination, it also constitutes an end or a terminal value.

In contrast, whether in its syntax or inflections, *dafa'a* (verb) as a profile in action, and *daf'* (substantive noun) as a state, or a process in progress, the Qur'anic usage places the concept in a unique context of a purposeful deterrence.⁴⁴ Here, the phenomenal friction, or clash of wills, is embedded in a state of activity and a constellation of relationships that are essentially provoked by a seismic infraction in the "cosmic balance" and signaling a violation in the natural/social order, which sparks off an ignitional charge for due restitution. To borrow a less familiar, but more graphic expression, conflict here becomes "ambilectic" and diffusely structures the system. The implications for social theory are real.

Conflict comes to be seen as a provisional, not a permanent, state. It is a contingency, not a necessity. The vocational scholar would not be taking this for his/her starting point in an inquiry simply because such an inquiry, conducted in the unitary perception and telic conception of social reality, would have other grounds and ends in view that themselves become signifiers or qualifiers of conflict. He/She would take that condition as a symptom of a substantive disorder or disjuncture, which would then constitute the proper target for social inquiry. Conflict, in the sense of forced confrontation and an imposed encounter, may be a means to avert a wrong, to "right" an order, but there are a variety of means for achieving such a betterment, and conflict is not the norm. "Standing up for" (something) and "standing up to" (some happening) suggest countenancing a violation or an aggression, a taking of the initiative to set things right. But all this amounts to a different reading of social reality, which also reflects on other central values in social theory. Conflict for control and mastery assumes a conception of power as a value to be had.

Beyond its instrumentality, power becomes an acquisition, and conflict is the enabling mechanism. In the *dafi'iyah* context, power is associated with a field of exercise, not an object of acquisition. This paves the way to ascertaining the ends to which it is exercised and reinforces the purposefulness of the deterrent/initiative suggested in the generative concept. This again rebounds on the nature and the role of social theory in two contrasting modes, so that ultimately an inquiry into the semantics of a controversial concept ends up verifying/validating its sociological significance.

Beyond contesting the counterimplications of a conflictual ontology and epistemology, it is necessary in the median culture type to make

⁴⁴Qur'an 2:251 and 22:40, where the verses—when taken in their corresponding sequences, parallelism, and symmetries; when relating the precept to the practice; the empirical to the normative; the relative to the universal—provide a wealth of material for a sociological hermeneutic that could take us beyond the traditional commentaries, which, for all their instructive insights, are no substitute for an integrated social theory.

another qualification. Differences among a community's constituents, whether that community is conceived globally or locally, or difference among participants in a situation, fall within a broader category of characteristically human exchange. The resulting institutional complexes potentially cover a broad spectrum of nuanced transactions and can by no means be conceived primarily in terms of antagonisms and paradoxes. Functionally, complementarity is the norm, while "kinetically," a distended dynamic provides the code. The conceptual as well as the institutional matrix in the different domains and levels of the social order in that culture medium are projected so as to assure that this complementarity and affirmative dynamic are, in fact, the assumed norm.⁴⁵

Variety and difference are not only a part of the "natural (created) order" to which the social order bears an affinity in consonance and to which, plausibly, it could be made to conform. But this variety is ordained and sanctioned in the *tawhīdī* principle, which legitimates both orders: the cosmic and the social. This legitimating principle assumes its noetic/conceptual expression at the level of the belief-system it engenders ('*aqīdah*'). It also assumes an ethico-legalist expression, in the form of the Shari'ah, at the font of the social order at the organizational level. Admitting this principle goes beyond its historical relevance in the Muslim ecumene to its sociological implications for a global moral order.

In this light, it is quite implausible to assume, for example, that the religious tolerance for which the *pax Islamica* was justly celebrated was simply a piece of accidental charity or that it was merely the reflex of a long-ingrained ancient "Middle Eastern" tradition antedating Islam. Indeed, it was the centuries of Roman/Byzantine oppression and persecution in the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores that not only shaped the history of Christianity and dictated which sects prevailed, but which also paved the way for the swift spread of the Islamic conquests there and for the overall favorable attitude of the local populations to their new Muslim conquerors by the latter seventh century.⁴⁶ To attempt

⁴⁵Hammuda Abdel Ati, *Family Structure in Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1979). Combining his Azharite training with his western graduate work, Abdel Ati withstood the attractions of the dominant sociology that continues, through its conflictual binary reductionisms and its materialist power orientations, to condition much research and writing—particularly in the area of feminist scholarship in general and of women in Islam and in the Middle East in particular. This is an epistemic flaw that cannot be reduced to the "ideology versus science" distinction referred to by Nikki Keddie in "Problems in the Study of Women in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 10 (1979): 225-40, a distinction and categories which themselves bear questioning in a critical social theory. Cf. John B. Thomson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), chapter 1.

⁴⁶... (tolerance) was hardly an issue, for it was "the way things always were anyway in the older empires" was the remark casually made to the author by a Columbia professor in a private exchange after a relevant panel session in the 1988 Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association. Inadvertently, this might not simply be a

to explain away religious tolerance in Muslim history, it was naive if not tendentious to claim that it was in conformity with prevailing conventions ('urf) that communal rights were extended voluntarily to various religious communities. While conceivably the ancient Semitic Orient might have known a wider range of tolerance to communal differences than many in the medieval western world could have even dreamed of, yet the nature and practice of religious tolerance in the Muslim experience was hardly an unwitting extension of ancient folk traditions. Instead, it owed its significance to systemic factors intrinsic to a deliberate and self-conscious principle of order in community that was both institutionalized in historic precedent and prophetic practice as well as enunciated within the explicit and consensual parameters of the Islamic monotheistic paradigm and its normative precepts.

The folly of claiming convention to have been the arbitrator can only be seen against the power realities of the day. Where the sociopolitical order was founded on a religiously inspired belief-system (an "ideology"), and where the judicial foundations of that order were built into a normative, sociological, and educational system, the issue of communal affiliation and the practice of religious tolerance was hardly a matter of public indifference (as it became with the secularization of the western mind). In the sense of transcending the ascriptive principle of identity formation and power organization, Islam as world order belongs as much to the postaxial "modern" historical system as to the ancient or medieval worlds of "tradition."⁴⁷ In evoking our historical analogies, we do not have far to look, whether we take the comprehensive social order enjoined in Islam as a precedent to the ideological order of modernity or whether we stop to examine one or another variant of the ecclesiastical order in pre-modern Europe or Europe on that protracted eve of modernity. In either case, it is not hard to see that, paralleling the conflicting ideological interests of the modern cold war era in a Euro-dominant age, the religious cleavages and clashes of a medieval world were potentially no less intense or deadly—were it not for the more modest means of destruction at their disposal.

The Middle Eastern social order was witness to such intensity wherever that dominance was spread and its means assured. Thus the interlude

matter of interpretation, misinformation, or indifference: it reflects on controversial categories of periodization (Islam as belonging to an order of "antiquity") that bear questioning as part of an ideological construct and a Eurocentric timeline. Historical perceptions have a direct bearing for epistemologies and social theories as well, especially in the context of *scientia perrenis* perspectives in the former and evolutionary perspectives and categories in the latter.

⁴⁷Cf. S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Axial Age Breakthrough: Their Characteristics and Their Origins," in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (State University of New York, 1986).

of the intrusive crusading kingdoms in the Muslim Mediterranean around the twelfth century (1095–1274 CE) merely replicated the uncompromising exclusivism and the liminal principles of identity assertion and power dominance that were now imposed under the Frankish hordes in place of the earlier Romans and Byzantines.⁴⁸ What, then, was the restraining factor allowing for tolerance of diversity under the “Islamicate”? Was not this tolerance embedded in its very constitution, which impelled a keen observer of the scene to craft a graphic term to depict a unique reality?⁴⁹ If it were not merely a projection of a time-honored convention, can it be attributed to an enlightened self-interest? Not to belabor the obvious, it might be pointed out that other factors were indeed at work. Where the political powers of the day were under no compulsion to compromise with the “other” out of expediency, interest, or otherwise, as was the case with their later imperial successors in the middle Ottoman period, the roots for a systemic tolerance under the earlier Islamic dynasties surely deserve to be examined more objectively.⁵⁰

⁴⁸We have in mind particularly the carnage of the First (or the Jerusalem) Crusade and how it compares negatively with the Muslim conquest/reconquest of the holy city. Eventually, the Crusaders were tamed or acculturated to the civility and tolerance of the Islamicate and returned to Europe with a code of chivalry. See Francis Peters, “The Early Muslim Empires,” in Marjorie Kelly (ed.), *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community* (New York: Praeger, 1984), chapter 4, esp. pp. 76–77, 85. cf. John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62–65 and Roger Savory (ed.), “Christendom vs. Islam: Interaction and Coexistence,” in R. Savory (ed.), *Introduction to Islamic Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Contemporary western sources on the epoch generally hover between an economy of stance and a deliberate ambiguity. Edward Synan, “Theological Discussion of the Crusades by Twelfth Century Christians,” in Isma‘il al Faruqi, *Essays in Islamic and Comparative Studies* (Brentwood, MD: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982). The recent reprint of Francesco Gabrieli’s *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. E. J. Costello (New York: Dorset Press, 1989 [1957, 1969]) is hardly an innocent academic or cultural diversion, in view of its timing (“the Rushdie affair”), previous publications of this press (i.e., Robert Payne’s notorious *The History of Islam* [1987]) and the questionable quality of aspects of the selections/translations of the work at hand itself, which are too numerous and pervasive to pin down here—p. 165 for example—its jacket-cover pieties notwithstanding. Classics in the scholarly sense were written by Harold Lamb (two volumes, 1945) and Hilaire Belloc’s, with its challenging title: *The Crusades: The World’s Debate* (1937). In 1987, Jonathan Riley’s short history of the Crusades was published by Yale University Press. Pamela Kernaghan’s *The Crusades: Cultures in Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), published as part of the Cambridge History Program, is strangely evocative of the Huntingtonian thesis of global trends in international conflict.

⁴⁹Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 57–60. For a compact and enlightening review of this work, see Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 3.

⁵⁰This includes observing a more skeptical attitude to sources chronicling the initial conquests and reporting the alleged terms of the conquerors. Cf. Fred M. Donner on the problem of the historicity of texts in *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 246–47.

Such an inquiry might provide the relevant and much needed model for a contemporary social theory called upon to address the problems and to redress the grievances of increasingly heterogeneous, multiethnic societies. Such a theory would be grounded in the norms of a historical practice as much as in the cognitive principles of a "knowledge culture" with its tradition of learned inquiry. This is possible because a *tawhīdī* philosophical anthropology postulates, for its point of departure, a diversity and a difference within a framework of essential unity and affinity.⁵¹ Within such an anthropology, the dynamics of self-realization are predicated on the interaction and complementarity of different cultural entities, each of which constitutes a moral entity in its own right and which is potentially capable of, and responsible for, fulfilling its morality in the course of its interaction with the "other/s." There are no privileged exemptions, or salvationist eschatologies reserved for any birth rights. Instead of dichotomy and polarities in a universe postulated on confrontation and competitive survival, a *tawhīdī* anthropology assumes, beyond a rationality, a legitimacy for its diversity and premises its principles of social interaction accordingly. Communities are not just left to be existentially acknowledged, as it were. They are entitled to their identities, and partake of the mutual reciprocities, in terms of socioethical dues, and the legal rights and responsibilities that attend the web of mutual obligations. They do so within the bounds of an intragroup order that underlines a commonality assuring a threshold of solidarity and that is anchored in a transcendent moral ground.

Unlike contemporary social theory, whether in its neoliberal and radical mood or in its conservative refrain, there can be no room for parochialism. Rather, in a *tawhīdī* sociology, there is a matrix for a social jurisprudence that goes beyond instrumentality in preserving the groundwork for a moral order that accommodates the principle of equity in a communal context of individual and collective diversity. A seemingly redundant discourse on "rationality" and "legitimacy," such as that cultivated in contemporary social theory, has painfully little to say to emergent global needs in view of the reductionism that inheres in the dominant rationality and the narrow and egoistic utilitarianism of its ethics.

In short, the pursuit of contemporary social theory, in its characteristic conflictual/confrontational modes of thought and inquiry against a hermeneutic of suspicion, can only leave it as ill-equipped as ever in dealing with a polyarchic model of interdependence, whether global or on lower levels of community. The lag is particularly devastating in the case

⁵¹Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell, 1989).

of an American academy and a socially conscious intellect, as it comes precisely at a moment when the pressures to live up to a calling as much as to immediate professional needs mount. With the competence of social theory in doubt before those issues that currently impinge on both the social conscience and the social order, this lag cannot be resolved by continuing to rely on an empirical efficacy and indulging the pragmatic sensibility for more social engineering in the absence of its substantial premises. The staying issues that defy a procedural or technical resolution include a range of problems of an essentially socioethical dimension, which are steadily politicized and which come to cast an entirely different light/shadow on matters of freedom, individuality, and tolerance in a permissive and amoral society.⁵²

Clearly, other aspects in the area of conflictual dynamics and group accommodation could be addressed from within a reflexive social theory. These include the mechanisms needed for rechanneling or for mobilizing the tensions that arise from existing polarities. The parameters of social interaction need to be redefined at a time when the boundaries between sociocultural entities, individuals and communities, the state and society, the national and the supra/intranational are in flux.⁵³ The scales need to be relocated so as to determine at which point differences become dissonances and the potential or inertia for complementarity is suffused into negative tensions feeding into hostility. Differences, variations, and gradations are part of any social order. Yet these differences do not of themselves translate into disparities and antagonisms any more than the competitive impulse can be reduced to an exclusive and exclusionary jingoism.

⁵²The ideas of sustainable growth and a sustainable society gained currency by the latter seventies and early eighties in the context of Third World and globalization literature expressing disillusion with a failed development and modernization agenda shifting emphasis to such concepts as equity, interdependence, ecology, morality, community, and the general reevaluation of value; cf. *The Center Cannot Hold*. Sociology in the tradition of Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, and others, which was considered marginal or counter-culture in the sixties, assumed a new significance amid the newer voices. In the American setting, the terminus and home of much social theory, the situation is compounded by the anxiety over the values of western civilization amid the demographic challenges multiethnicity poses. Due to this, social theory jargon on cultural relativism became central to public discourse and the media, developments that forced major debates on America's cultural wars in academia and literary circles. Cf. "Polarizing American Culture," in *Social Science and Modern Society* 30, no.5 (July/August 1993), special issue. See also Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) and Dinesh D'souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

⁵³See, for instance, R. Munch, *Understanding Modernity*, where the search is for carrying the theory of social action (as voluntaristic and directional) beyond its current stalemate by reinterpreting and synthesizing the work of the founding fathers around a post-Weberian synthesis which takes "interpenetration" for an operational category. Anthony Giddens's work on structuration is similarly involved with trying this synthesis, though more in a post-Marxian mode.

An objective inquiry would be a prudent inquiry, one that would entail a framework that does not prejudge or bias and anticipate the "findings" in one way or the other, to use the language of a conventional or "normal" sociology (Kuhn). But unlike conventional sociology, it would not shun, or pretend to shun, a high ground of adjudicating or arbitrating referents by which it could provide for choosing and deciding on practical consequences. Such a framework would also be open to differentiating contexts in response to the complexity and variety in the human condition, thus reflecting on the legitimacy and possibility of variable arrangements. Once the inflationary ego and its self-referential field of perception and presumption that underlie and feed the conflictual ethos are restrained, then it would be possible to entertain horizons of purposeful engagement and reciprocity in the social world.

The challenges will continue to such a social theory, but the changing agenda would prompt changing emphases and priorities. Under what conditions would differences be precipitated into corrosive factors impinging on the nexus of the social order? Conversely, how could such differences be deployed to vitalize and integrate the social entity? These are questions which already suggest value preferences. No inquiry can be value-free, nor should it. The issue is what kind of values are at stake in examining diversity and difference and what are the pertinent and enduring parameters within which such an inquiry is to be conducted and beyond which it would be futile, or meaningless, or both.

The Matrix of Inquiry: A Sequel

Beyond its implications for the disruption of trends within the profession, a flawed matrix has other more general consequences in fragmenting the field of inquiry itself. One aspect is the distortion of realities perceived. An incidence taken from the medieval European encounter with the Islamic heritage, and the way in which it was processed in the culture-filter of its times, may be instructive. One persistent question here is how Europe emerged from this encounter virtually untouched by the metaphysics of a culture from which it borrowed substantially in significant domains.⁵⁴ The following passage gives a clue to both a manner of

⁵⁴A less typical but much needed perspective in current literature is Roger Garaudy, *L'Islam habite notre Avenir* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1981), which assesses the Islamic contribution to the European renaissance against its Islamic doctrinal and metaphysical underpinnings and uses it as a precedent for a cultural dialogue. Cf. George Sarton, *The Incubation of Western Culture in the Middle East* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1951). More typical of the general literature in this area is John R. Hayes (ed.), *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); Rom Landau, *The Arab Heritage of Western Civilization* (New York: The League of Arab States, 1975); Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1987) where, however, the emphasis shifts to examining

perception and a mode of reception. It comes from a work in a series devoted to exploring the spirit of western civilization and which might otherwise have been a significantly enlightening anthology on its subject:

. . . the separation of intellectual from religious life, the ideal of many in universities today, may be looked at through the historical experience and be better seen for what it is, not as a simple continuation of classical antiquity, but as a page taken from the history of Islam.⁵⁵

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

To truncate a tradition and attempt to cut off the Muslim classicists from their culture formations and resources, then, is symptomatic of more than an academic partiality or a mere individual eccentricity on the part of one commentator or another. Indeed, the paradigm of knowledge within the Islamic legacy bears investigation,⁵⁶ in view of an illustrious

actual contact and evolving images of Islam, as with Norman Daniel, Waardenburg, Southern, and Albert Hourani.

⁵⁵William Bryar (comp.), *The Rebirth of Learning: The First Twelve Centuries, The Spirit of Western Civilization* (New York: Putnam, 1968), 184.

⁵⁶Such an inquiry should not be assumed under the materialist and historicist predilection currently in vogue among the radical revisionists who step in to fill the void in the absence of more authentic and reliable approaches to Muslim historical and socio-cultural phenomena. The value of a recent study in mixed cultural context lies precisely in its attempt to liberate itself from the dominant paradigm in addressing the situation of a Muslim population and that it seeks to construct a paradigm in terms of criteria that are internally valid to the Islamic worldview. Kenneth Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Acorn Press, 1991). I am indebted to

pedigree and its continuity as well as because of the unrivalled cultural osmosis that occurred in it with the mixed sources of antiquity, particularly that of the Hellenic and Hellenistic varieties. An indelible imprint of this symbiotic moment was left at least on one level of the Muslim paradigm that identified with the *falāsifah*. For the rest, it ended up permeating the tradition to different degrees. Yet even at that level, the evidence does not warrant ignoring the elements of an authentic Islamic tradition that is predicated on its unique perspective on reality and its modes of representation and that cannot be subsumed under the western paradigms of rationality and authority without its perversion.

More often, though, the very terms in which the tradition has been processed in the West from its sources have constituted a barrier to interpreting its constituents and has served merely to isolate its episodes.⁵⁷ In the case at hand, to perceive that separation or fragmentation in the areas of inquiry was the norm in Muslim culture may partly be due to a different understanding of what it is that constitutes a religious question and a secular question.⁵⁸ While clearly there are radical differences between the foundational and historical Islamic and Christian traditions on the matter, and while it is understandable that the culture-filter in western Christendom should operate within its own tradition, yet the question is that the authority or frame of inquiry here, in this as in other works on the subject, was such as to appropriate this assumption about the "other" in history without question. It left no room for even raising the question of a possible difference in conceptions.

Ralf Braibanti, who is a J. B. Duke professor, for bringing to my attention this book upon its publication.

⁵⁷More than familiarity and access to the tradition, it takes courage and integrity to question standard interpretations and dislodge misconstrued analogies. Yet, this is what Oliver Leaman attempts to do in questioning the appropriateness of taking the work of the Islamicate Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* as a "guide" to the paradigm of the *falāsifah* and *falsafah* as practiced in the Muslim space. He suggests how this initial bias became a source for reinforcing misconceptions in his "Does the Interpretation of Islamic Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?," *IJMES* 12, no. 4, (December 1980): 525-38.

⁵⁸On the other hand, the different schools within the tradition and the differences between them, as well as the ambiguities inherent in distinguishing *naqlī* or *shar'ī* sciences and the rationalist or '*aqlī*' sciences, the rift between the *falāsifah* and the *fuqahā'*," were among the factors that encouraged such facile conclusions, even among Muslim students and reflected in conventions of writing about the Islamic theory of knowledge, alternately confounding it with one school or another, depending on the author's training or predilections. See M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy* 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harasowitz, 1963, 1966); C. A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); S. H. Nasr, "The Teaching of Philosophy" in *Philosophy, Literature and the Fine Arts* (Jeddah: King Abdul Aziz University and Hodder and Stoughton, 1982) *Islamic Education Series*. Edited by S. H. Nasr and *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

If this observation is extended to other domains, the same incidence of incongruities will crop up with disconcerting regularity. This is how it was possible to mutilate the spirit of empirical inquiry in the course of its transmission into the western cultural space. There, to use Maritain's terms, as the "empiriological" tradition in the median culture was stripped of its metaphysics, so too the conaturalist orientation of a tradition of empirical inquiry was lost. "Conaturalism," it may be recalled, is a Thomistic term used in the *Summa Theologica* to convey the essentials of the innate sensibility (*fiṭrah*) and is itself a token of the significant Islamic influences of the period shaping the scholastic tradition, contrary to some devious attempts to evade the issue.

More intimately impinging on our field as social scientists is the case of the positivist—and the positive—distortion of Ibn Khaldūn.⁵⁹ Again, here was a blatant case of cultural amputation, as the Muslim historian and theoretician was abstracted from his sociocultural setting and conceived in terms of an odd genius in a primitive culture that would anticipate the coming of modernity itself. Little could it be realized that Ibn Khaldūn belonged to a lineage of great system-builders in a cultural matrix that generated such architects. Like Ibn Taymīyah, al Ghazālī, al Rāzī, or before them, Imām al Shāfi'ī, each would leave his synthesizing imprint in an area of knowledge that would have its relevance for a contemporary Islamic social theory, were it only to be adequately reinterpreted and developed in the context of our times and needs. In the prevailing orientalizing scholarship of our day, little could it be realized how the new science of human civilization (*'ilm al 'umrān al basharī*⁶⁰) was conceived in the spirit of such a synthesis. In this case, the new science drew on the inductive sciences coming from hadith scholarship, and the deductive sciences cultivated in the *uṣūlī* (*uṣūl al fiqhī*) tradition of

⁵⁹Insights relevant to an epistemic perspective have recently come from Fuad Baali and Ali Wardi, *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Thought Styles* (Boston: G. Hall, 1981) with a social knowledge approach, and Aziz Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London: Third World Center for Research and Publication, 1981), and *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Routledge, 1982). Azmeh's pioneering initiative at deconstructing semantic fields and paradigmatic contexts, both within the *Muqaddimah* itself and within the orientalist scholarship on Ibn Khaldun may well constitute the work of "radical revisionist intent" he claims it to be, but it is certainly not a work without "malign intent." With consummate skill, he reconstructs the whole from the parts, using metaphors of decentering and dislocation, only to tear down an edifice dismissed for its logical limitations and historicity. Like the compulsive Nietzschean decadence that inspires it, the work is totally alien to the spirit of the tradition and worldview it dissects. It tells us more about Azmeh's calibre as a scholar whose genius is more attuned to the orientalism he is critiquing than he realizes. The Khaldunian repertory of scholarship, as much as its original, retains its perennial value for scholarship in both the Islamic and the western traditions.

⁶⁰Appropriately rendered into German as *kulturwissenschaft*. Cf. Heinrich Simon, *Ibn Khaldun's Science of Human Culture*, trans. Fuad Baali (Kashmir and Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1978).

inquiry. Ibn Khaldūn applied this integrated methodology to the domain of conventional historiography, which by his time had grown into a voluminous body and tradition of a wealthy cumulation of historical narrative.

Given the proclivities in the Islamic tradition of learning to investigate critically the possibility of a methodological/systematic structure for verification and for evaluating the truth of the reported event or its transmitted narration, the conditions for the conception of the new discipline were rife. If it had not been Ibn Khaldūn, it would have been another figure, although there were admittedly precipitating factors that made the Muslim West a hospitable medium for this development. As far as the objective concern for ascertaining the reliability of information goes, it should be remembered that this concern lay at the roots of a tradition of scholarship and devoted inquiry that had developed in the culture mode associated with historical Islam. Its direct impetus came from the orientation and habits of mind and the moral injunctions inculcated by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The first stirrings in this direction of cultivating a tradition of inquiry activated by the concern for integrity and veracity was, not surprisingly,⁶¹ developed in the immediate vicinity of the sciences that grew up around the Qur'an and the Sunnah.⁶² These would constitute the core and nucleus of an authentic and unrivalled tradition of learning in Islam—one that would be perverted in the course of its transmutation to another mode of cultural inquiry and immobilized alternately through fossilization and contamination within its immediate culture medium.

The culprits in misrepresenting a tradition are neither the westernists and orientalist nor the Muslims who have followed, knowingly or otherwise, in their tracks. Rather, the problem lies in the matrix, which structures all research and inquiry in the field and which proves to be hopelessly inadequate whenever it comes to processing the semantics and

⁶¹To date, perhaps the exemplary source on this subject to bring out the nodality of the Qur'anic nexus for the multifaceted cultural efflorescence in its intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, moral, philosophical, and religious dimensions is Isma'il al Faruqi and Lois Lamy al Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1986), part 4. See in conjunction with chapters 4 and 5.

⁶²Hadith scholarship, connoting a tradition of meticulous, objective, and systematic inquiry, retains its significance for intellectual reform: Z. S. Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (London: Croom Helm, 1982). In modernist circles, the Sunnah was seen to pose certain methodological problems that needed to be addressed before it could be taken as a source for such reform: Yūsuf Qaradāwī's *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al Sunnah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1992) addresses this concern from within a tradition that remains intractable. Cf. Shaykh 'Abd al Ghānī's, *Hujjyat al Sunnah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1993). The movement to critique and reconstruct the modern Islamic episteme takes its logical axis from a rediscovery of its authentic sources, including the authoritative Sunnah, in terms of new methodologies that are to be generated in this process of rediscovery in the context of modernity. Tāhā J. al 'Alwānī, *Islāh Manāhij al Fikr* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1992) and *Ilm al 'Ilm: Muqaddimah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1994).

the epistemic and social fields of experience in other cultures. While the dimensions of relativism and universalism have been debated in contemporary social theory,⁶³ the challenge is to rethink the matrix of inquiry against this problematic, not the reverse. This is particularly needed if the globalization of social theory is not to become simply another arm in the imperialistic epistemology⁶⁴ and if we are to supersede the present stage of cultural hegemony politics to a dynamic stage more conducive to cultural parity.

Rethinking contemporary social theory against a redefinition of its scope and the restitution of the vertical bearings knowledge and being implicit in conceptual vistas of a contrasting episteme has suggested limitations and constraints, as well as possibilities and opportunities. Neither the conflictual ethos nor the binary reductionist matrix need be unqualified parameters for a social theory which is preeminently historicist and lends itself to critical construction, as suggested in this essay. The requisites for a more generative social theory call for a new understanding as well as a new resolve: an ability and a willingness to see, for example, that a dualistic and schismatic conception can hardly be expected to handle the load coming from a unitary conceptual matrix without splitting it, and the realization that a fragmenting and reductionist matrix cannot deal with the experiences and the meanings conceived in a holistic and integrated tradition without distortion.

To be able to address the challenges attending the reconstruction of social theory, it will be necessary to reconsider the paradigm of inquiry with an eye on expanding current perceptions of the scientific community, or the Habermasian speech community, beyond a parochialism or neo-tribalism masquerading in the garb of a flawed sense of modernity. Once this has been accomplished, the necessarily expanded sphere of knowledge and interests represented in that community will reflect on a reorientation in the horizons of inquiry, and social theory could then capitalize on fresh currents of alimentation in addition to existing latent sources and

⁶³Cf. Ernest Gellner, *Relativism and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁶⁴Abdel Wahab al Messiri "Imperialist Epistemology." On globalization, see R. Robertson, "Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central Concept," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. M. Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990); I. Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth Century Paradigms* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991); Roland Axtmann, "Society, Globalization and the Comparative Method," *History of the Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (May 1993): 53-74. Bearing in mind the ideological constraints and restricted audience he is addressing, Samir Amin's recent writing also provides some relevant insights from our contrasting epistemics perspective, especially where he contours the "developed Arab-Islamic version" of medieval tributary culture against its "peripheral western version" and where he traces the construction of the Eurocentric culture: *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

energies. Needless to say, the revitalizing of social theory is a function of a qualitative expansion in the community of inquiry, without which it would be impossible to escape the vicious circle and voracious appetite (for wasteful energy consumption) that inheres in the morbid dynamism of the oscillating culture.

An Overview from the Median Culture

What can a perspective coming from the median culture offer to contemporary social theory? Where the concern has so far been with locating some of the problem areas that could provide the negative stimulus or propellers to a shift away from the dominant paradigm, the focus for a sequel to this essay will be on the gravitational properties that might attract attention to the median culture as a potentially valid and promising source for restructuring the field. For the benefit of economy, three areas could be charted out. The first one refers to *epistemic sources and modes*, the second to the *framework for social order*, and the last to *relating practice to precept*. A generative inquiry could thence be structured round three regenerative instances conceived in terms of mutually impacting and reinforcing energy flows: reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

In the first instance, reason is reconciled to revelation once the latter has been rehabilitated as a reliable source of knowledge for recharting the episteme. The next instance takes us beyond the polarization of binaries juxtaposing the individual to the community, so that the fictive chasm separating and fragmenting the units of social inquiry is bridged. The third instance sheds light on the yields of the shaping social theory as the cognitive and the affective dimensions of social inquiry are reintegrated to the benefit of a theory reconciled with practice. A nodal point on which to focus an overview in this perspective can be one where issues of rationality and legitimacy intersect. These are prominent among the issue areas that have come to engage social theory in the West over the past decade in the wake of the challenges posed by the disillusionment with modernity. They are also pivotal for an inquiry that takes *tawhīd* for its axis.

The discourse in contemporary social theory is significant not only for the light it sheds on the substantive issues at stake, but also for the ethos or mood it conveys. The overall mood may be perceived *tout court* to be one of pervasive cynicism. With an infusion coming from its exposure to a paradigm of thought and conduct drawing on the much neglected and underrated sources of an alternative culture medium, social theory stands a chance of realizing its stunted potential as an area of practical moral inquiry and a guide to understanding and implementing, or bringing about, the global moral order in a world of increasing complexity, where there is no option of "going back" to a primeval simplicity.

The task of a social theory rethought in the light of a *tawhīdī* episteme is to make this option a possibility. Contrasting epistemics is suggested as a strategic access to this task of critical thought and construction in the new paradigm of inquiry based in an expanded speech community. By cultivating an awareness that goes beyond the current critical disaffection in the field against an exploration of the potential of the neglected sources, it would be possible to break the gridlock of the eternal returns and revisitations within the same closed circle which end up reinforcing the cynicism and disillusion. With an "Enlightenment" spared its "Despair,"⁶⁵ and with the tensions between a "pessimism of the intellect and an optimism of the will"⁶⁶ duly resolved, the stalemate in contemporary social theory, whether in its conservative or its radical wings, would be overcome. If a change in mood is part of what an overview from the median culture could bring to the current discourse, an important threshold in rethinking social theory would have been crossed. The condition, however, for landing on the right foot is to overcome the arrogance of our learning.

⁶⁵Cf. Geoffrey Hawthorne, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Social Theory* (Cambridge: 1987).

⁶⁶Cf. Allen Carlin, "'Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will.'" The expression was first used by Gramsci.