

The Imperialist Epistemological Vision

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There is a view that imperialism, as a historical practice, constitutes a deviation from western civilization and its conception of the universe, and that the adoption of the imperialist solution, which involves exporting problems to the rest of the world and hegemony over other nations, is inconsistent with being a liberal, humane, and enlightened civilization that has accepted democracy as philosophy of government, laissez-faire as its economic order, and rationalism and humanism as universal philosophy. It is our contention, however, that these varied philosophies do not stand in contradiction to the imperialist epistemological vision. Rather, there is a close link between these philosophies and the imperialist vision, which will be fully understood once we turn to the epistemological level. In order to be aware of such a link, it has to be recognized that all of these philosophies are secular in nature, in the sense that they do not admit of any philosophical system outside the domain of the materialistic order.

In our view, secularism is not a separation between religion and the state, as propagated in both western and Arab writings. Rather, it is the removal of absolute values—epistemological and ethical—from the world such that the entire world—humanity and nature alike—becomes merely a utilitarian object to be utilized and subjugated. From this standpoint, we can see the structural similarity between the secular epistemological vision and the imperialist epistemological vision. We can also realize that imperialism is no more than the exporting of a secular epistemological and ethical paradigm from the western world, where it first emerged, to the rest of the world.

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Factors behind the Emergence of the Imperialist Epistemological Vision

The following factors constitute the underlying reasons for the emergence of the imperialist epistemological vision and its effects:

First: Ever since the Renaissance, materialistic secular philosophies have increased their hegemony over the western mind. The westerner has claimed that God does not exist or that He is, in fact, dead. If He does exist He has nothing to do with epistemological processes and ethical control. The westerner has also announced that nature is no more than matter subject to laws of motion and that it is capable of being defined, measured, classified, invaded, utilized, and subjugated. This is the essence of humanistic thought. Furthermore, humanity itself is part of nature, of this material world, and, as a material unit, human beings can be transported, used, and pressed into service for generating energy. In this, human beings are defined as producer and consumer, seller and buyer, invader and invaded, dominator and dominated, as well as conqueror and conquered. That humanity differs from nature in that they are able to dominate and control it means that humanity is, in the final analysis, part of it. This is what is called, in this context, the "normalization" process by which humanity becomes an integral—indeed organic—part of nature with no distinctive standing or status. Human desires are part of nature or matter. Such beliefs or concepts became widespread and deeply-rooted as rational utilitarian philosophies held increasing sway during the eighteenth century.

Second: The increase in the hegemony of materialist philosophies has been accompanied by a disregard of ethics, which are considered both immaterial and unquantifiable. Ethics have become synonymous with benefit and enjoyment, and the purpose of life is to find this benefit and enjoyment as well as to increase production and profit. Such purposes are characterized by being materialistically quantifiable and, indeed, measurable and as having nothing to do with the transcendental or spiritual. Furthermore, ethics have lost all absoluteness and are reduced to relative social facts attributable, in their entirety, to materialistic roots. Indeed, attempts have been made by utilitarian philosophies to establish ethics based on scientific laws and accurate mathematical calculations.

Third: Political science in the West, particularly in the cases of Machiavelli and Hobbs and following the increase in the secularization of political theory, used to emphasize that the human being's existence

has neither ultimate objectives nor absolute goals. Rather, the good was interpreted as that which was in the highest interest of the state. But if enjoyment (as defined by the utilitarian ethical theory) is the end behind individual's existence, and serving the state's interest (as defined by the political theory) is behind collective existence, then any increase in, and the sheer expansion of, production becomes the absolute good and the means to reach the earthly paradise. In this way, the state acquires its weapons and humanity increases its material gain or enjoyment. There is no question that a capitalist economy, founded as it is on production, increasing production, and dominating markets, has contributed to entrenching this vision and rendering it an integral part of the acquisitive European's conception of human nature.

Fourth: With the expansion in market economies via such mechanisms as supply and demand and competition, an individualistic view based on struggle and conflict has prevailed in society. This has led to an absence of mutual sympathy among individuals and an increase in nonpersonal relations and contracts. All intermediary institutions, such as the church and the family, have collapsed. This has led to the emergence of an individual who works preeminently for his or her own immediate self-interest and independent motives, an individual with no profound inner values or any degree of balance in his or her composition. Such an individual is part and parcel of nature as it is defined and can be seen to be a product of his or her immediate economic motives and untiring pursuit of enjoyment. That is how individual power has come into existence as a fundamental mechanism for settling disputes and, given the absence of absolute values and any ethical or spiritual frame of reference, this is completely understandable.

Fifth: Parallel to all this has been the so-called faith in infinite progress, which stems from the belief that natural resources are endless and that humanity's ability to control, suppress, and employ these resources is also endless. Given this faith in infinite progress, ultimate expansion and growth become a debatable and essential issue.

Sixth: Added to all of these factors is the westerner's ignorance of the cost of progress, inasmuch as this secular endeavor began with the invasion and suppression of nature and the claim that material happiness alone is true happiness. This perception has obsessed the westerner to the extent that even when the price list of progress has become flagrantly clear (be it at the material level in pollution or at the moral level in alienation and social erosion), it continues to be ignored. Consequently,

the westerner continues to invade without ever heeding indications of the limits of humanity and nature.

These factors—the materialistic view of humanity and nature, the reduction of reality to the invadable and the measurable, the prevalence of an individualistic view based on conflict, faith in progress, and denial of the price of progress—when taken together, have led to the emergence of the imperialist epistemological vision. This vision takes its point of departure from the view that the world (humanity and nature alike) are pure matter, and that the *raison d'être* of humanity—or rather specifically of the westerner who sees himself or herself as the center of the universe—on earth is to continue to increase its knowledge of the laws of motion and human nature as well as to dominate them by continuous, endless progress until everything (humanity and nature) has been subjugated to reason and to the law of quantification, itself a law that receives its legitimacy from materialistic scientific epistemology.

Furthermore, increased control over reality could be expressed in terms of a process of rationalization and secularization. The aspect of rationalization is concerned with means and not at all with ends. In this sense, it is a procedural rationalization, although it is possible to argue that the rationalization process, as part of the concept of material benefit, has not been procedural but, rather, an essential mechanism for turning the world into something material and turning reality (natural as well as human) in its entirety into an organic integrated part consisting of a network of material economic interests. In this way, the world becomes much like a factory and a marketplace: every part of it is calculated and controlled, excluding, as it were, all such nonmaterialistic considerations as transcendental, absolute, or distinctive, matters that, in other words, could not be measurable or controllable.

With the westerner's renunciation of the transcendental absolute and commitment to endless expansion and the legitimacy of the use of power, all self-limitations are no longer recognized or accepted. Such an individual, therefore, is ready to pursue permanent expansion and increase his or her hegemony until the whole world is devoured. The end result is the supremacy of individualistic ideologies, invasion, hegemony, and domination for the purpose of devouring the world. The westerner's model has thereby become that of Dr. Faustus, who would devour all knowledge (even when this would end in self-destruction), that of Macbeth, who would settle down on the throne (even if that ends up with insomnia), or that of Don Juan or Casanova, both of whom would "devour" all women (even at the loss of every human emotion). This imperialist trend has culminated in Darwin's social philosophy, or in that

of Nietzsche, when power and the will to power have become the only acceptable metaphysics and the only epistemological and ethical point of stability.

In its wake, there emerged the ethnic theory, the theories of ethnic differences, and that of the white man's burden—all of which have been backed up by "scientific" theories about skull size, skin color, and the degree of productivity, as well as the relation between all of this and the insatiable European and his or her racial and ethnic supremacy. Indeed, these theories have provided this European with the psychological justification required in the process of the invasion and annihilation of others.

The Internationalization of the Imperialist Epistemological Vision

In theory, the imperialistic epistemological vision, as well as its outcome in terms of rationalization, secularization, expansion, and invasion, could have been confined within western communities had its emergence not been accompanied by what might be called the internationalization process. This process views the entire world as one entity that is not divided into different cultural or economic formations, a phenomenon whose importance should be acknowledged following the emergence of the so-called new world order. This internationalizational vision, or international vision as it is called by some, has contributed to the crucial escalation of the westerner's disposition to imperialism. Several factors have contributed to the escalation of the process of the internationalization of the imperialist epistemological vision:

First: The most important factor contributing to the emergence of the internationalizational or international vision is the very materialistic and scientific vision of man and nature which has led to the emergence of the imperialist epistemological vision. The materialistic vision, as mentioned above, conceives of all things as matter governed by the same materialistic scientific laws. Chinese or Egyptian, oriental or western, man, as much as stars, trees or insects, is only a unit of matter. In a unit of matter, what is important is neither specificity nor identity but, rather, submission to laws of motion. Matter does not act in accordance with laws of history or civilization (different as it may be from one civilization to another); nor does it follow religious or moral laws. Rather, it functions in accordance with general laws of motion. The age of Enlightenment, in its strict scientific epistemological enterprise, was "preaching" the rational man, the international man, the natural man and man's natural right. But this brand of humanity is irrelevant to civilization since it is

based on a general materialistic state—an international state which transcends any specificity, be it national or religious.

Second: Intrinsic to the belief in endless progress is a clear summons to endless expansion. By the same token, the rationalization process, by virtue of being a process of controlling reality, would also lead to the desire to devour the world in its entirety.

Third: The emergence of the European problem can be summed up as follows: a) Capitalism, as is well known, is a system that seeks to augment production. This generated the need to import raw materials and export commodities worldwide, which, in turn, contributed to and promoted the process of internationalization; b) The wealth accumulated by colonial imperialism and redoubled by the Industrial Revolution was not distributed appropriately among all social classes. This, in turn, led to a terrifying social imbalance that generated social tension and threatened internal security in western communities. As a result, society was divided into a destitute majority that produced but only consumed very little because of their poverty, and a rich majority that did not produce and only consumed very little because of their small numbers. This caused cycles of economic recession, in which commodities accumulated due to the low buying capacity of the unemployed (or the employed but poorly paid). The rise in the rate of consumption on the part of the "acquisitive European" went along side by side; and c) An unprecedented population explosion in Europe, which resulted in the emergence of a huge population surplus, itself instrumental in increasing unemployment rates.

Fourth: The communication and information revolutions have contributed to this internationalization process. The Industrial Revolution has facilitated mobility from place to place regardless of ethnic or cultural origin, and, what is more, has made it possible for messages, printed media, and news stories to be distributed throughout the world on the same day.

The combination of these four factors has been instrumental in the formation of the imperialist epistemological vision and induced its diffusion as a solution to the European problem, itself an outcome of the European's greed and surplus population and goods. However, the imperialist epistemological vision did not turn into a historical phenomenon or become internationalized except through the growing influence of the secular national and centralized state. Through its centralized institutions of government, such a state could reach the furthest points in the country as well as every individual. This was vital and

central: if the aims of existence are complete control over and efficient utilization of the natural and human reality, then all human and natural resources in society have to be thoroughly engineered in accordance with measurable criteria. Otherwise, it will be difficult to manage society so that such an objective can be achieved successfully. Indeed, such a centralized state could muster such massive production capabilities that it could achieve massive material progress. This achievement was made possible through reshaping individuals and their identity in concordance with its vision and requirements.

Imperialist Manifestations of Western Secularism

Industrial progress in the West was associated entirely with military progress and the state of war that Europe experienced over several centuries. A centralized government could mobilize armies directly and without any approval or opposition from either the church or the feudal princes. Thus military technology developed in such a way that the gains acquired from waging wars far exceeded its costs (on the other hand, opponents of the imperialist enterprise often argued that the costs of establishing an empire far exceeded its expected gains). Furthermore, western military technology far excelled its counterpart in the east.

Imperialism is but one manifestation of the secular western ethical and epistemological paradigm. Secularism is the underlying theory, and imperialism is its most important practice. Indeed, imperialism is the greater mechanism through which secularism is internationalized. The close correlation between secularism and imperialism could be seen in such brutal actions as the genocide of millions of people in Asia and Africa, which, in our view, does not constitute a deviation from the course of western civilization. On the basis of the materialistic, utilitarian, and rational view that the world is purely matter that could be utilized, oppressed, and transported, it was decided that millions of people should be transferred from Europe to the United States and from Africa to the United States in order to increase their usefulness and augment their productivity.

However, it also has to be concluded that, in principle, if such an operation was difficult to carry out or if it was to be carried out at a high cost, millions of useless people had to be annihilated. This is exactly what happened to the American Indians. While whites were annihilating American Indians, they were simultaneously hunting blacks in Africa and transferring them to a land whose inhabitants had been driven away. Such an operation cannot be understood except in the context of the utilization

and maximization of production. Black Africans, given their muscular strength and cultural disintegration, could be exploited because they had no human rights. American Indians, for their part, did constitute an integrated cultural bloc with its own historical rights, and, despite their extremely weak immunity system that could not withstand all of the microbes carried by the white Europeans, it was very difficult to absorb them in the new order. And in that lay their total destruction.

The Nazi genocide directed against some sectors of the European population was, in turn, no more than a sophisticated application of the imperialist vision. To be sure, the Nazis applied the principle of "material benefit" in assessing the worth of human beings human beings (i.e., gypsies, children, handicapped and elderly people, German soldiers wounded in action, Jews, and Slavs) whom they classified as useless sectors (i.e. useless eaters, as the Nazi phrase goes). These categories were classified into useful elements to be utilized and useless elements, whose fate was to be no better than that of the American Indians. As a matter of factm the carcasses of these useless human beings were utilized in "beneficial" ways: Gold braces were pulled out and turned into ingots, human hair was said to have been used in making shoe-brushes and bones a high-quality fertilizer, and so on.

In order to throw light on the imperialist nature of Nazi genocide, a brief comparison could be drawn between Hitler and Balfour. The two western political figures were the product of a well-defined view of minorities. The view in question is that of the need to dispose of human surpluses—minorities. This, in essence, is an application of the principle of material benefit. The imperialist solution is to dispense with human surplus by exporting it. Balfour exported human surplus to Palestine, whereas Hitler exported it to Poland. However, because Poland was an independent state, it returned the Jews from whence they came. Consequently, Hitler deemed it necessary to dispense with them by unconventional means. In other words, the imperialist epistemological vision was, in both cases, one and the same. What actually changed was the imperialist practices, given the historical and geographical complexities. Hitler was but another Balfour, albeit one that had no Asian or African colonies to which he could send his human surplus.

To be sure, western democracy itself and Western welfare are indeed inseparable from western imperialism. This democracy originated under an imperialist umbrella by which western democracies, via the imperialist solution, could export their respective social problem, overcome the uneven distribution of wealth, and, at the same time, deal with their minorities. Western democracies could also accumulate capital and establish a huge infrastructure that, by stripping the Third World of its

natural and human resources, could achieve social welfare for their respective citizens.

The Impact of the Imperialist Epistemological Vision on the Model of Western Life

The secular imperialist epistemological vision retains a stranglehold over the western individual, even as far as relations with self and with other members of one's community are concerned. Whenever a western person builds his or her place of residence, he or she acts in an attitude entirely submissive to the rationalization process. It is built as if it were a profit-making business, only to move out a few years later. In relationships with the opposite sex, there is no search for stability or peace of mind but, rather, the maximization of enjoyment. This turns a sensitive and emotional relationship into a process of invasion (this is an example of what can be regarded as a culture in which the private/intimate talk of people in mutual love recedes and gives way to the external/imperialist mode of address that is characteristic of invasion and conflict). A western individual is always on the move in order to make a profit and improve his or her standard of living. When old age is reached and he or she is no longer productive, he or she consents voluntarily to be removed to the home of the unproductive elderly, awaiting death in an air-conditioned room. Indeed, the so-called "culture of the disposable" is an imperialist utilitarian culture that consumes, utilizes, and wastes everything: energy, raw materials, songs, the female body, and the ozone. The gradual trend toward imposing automation on every aspect of life, which has become a source of complaint for all western philosophers, is no more than an expression of the epistemology of invasion, despotism, and imperialist rationalization.

This culture of imperialist rationalization subjects the westerner to the worst kind of imperialism—what might be called "psychological imperialism." In other words, one converts oneself into a marketplace that expands "permanently" due to endless ambition and expectation and by means of the industry of dream-making manifested in advertisements (in which sex plays an essential role), fictional tales, and the regulation of the cadence of life itself. This is also done by what might be called the "sensual enjoyment" industries in modern communities: the view of the individual as a set of pure fleshly drives and needs to be satisfied. These industries continue to prepare the individual for an earthly paradise that could relieve him or her entirely of the burden of history. Indeed, the way in which western cities are built incorporates such a rational imperialist vision and manifests it in roads and highways that glorify speed, or daily

traffic that dissipates human and natural energy, pollutes the air, and reduces every aspect to the attraction of markets and stocks.

The imperialist epistemological vision is a relatively stable cognitive model. However, it is also governed by historical development. We have shown above that the greatest mechanism in the implementation of the secular "imperialist" program is the centralized state. One could identify two stages in the study of secularism and the history of capitalism. The first is a stage of accumulative austerity in which the secular individual postponed his or her enjoyment and the satisfaction of his or her desires to a later stage, under the pretext of accumulation, to enable later generations to live happily and comfortably. This is followed by a euphoric consumption stage: the secular individual has decided that the postponement stage had ended and that it is high time to begin the stage of immediate satisfaction without further delay.

It seems that the imperialist model has now reached a euphoric consumption stage. The imperialist epistemological vision in the austerity stage, having stressed ethnic disparity between nations and individuals and the right of invasion on the basis of absolute power, had given rise to the discussion of the white man's burden and to a stream of theories about western identity. However, in the new stage, the discussion centers around a natural individual who is colorless, tasteless, and odorless—a mere flexible, productive, and consumerist person. In fact, human nature itself has come under attack as an absolute that represents a last frame of reference for human thought, which has abandoned all absolute religious, ethical, and epistemological values. It is therefore possible to monitor the impact of the imperialist epistemological vision on several aspects of western life as follows:

1. It has been noticed that references to human nature have disappeared completely from human sciences. Scientific deliberations now take place only through parameters, quantities, and statistical tables.
2. Even literature, the last resort of the human soul, is characterized by the emergence of structural and analytical theories that attempt to expurgate literature from the last of its absolute human values, namely, human nature.
3. We can see that the persistent rhetoric on "human rights," now led by the most imperialist administration in the world (that of the United States) is, in essence, an onslaught on humanity and human nature. The individual, whose rights are allegedly defended, has become an

independent entity unrelated to a family, community, or state. In this sense, he or she is a set of abstract needs defined specifically by monopolies, advertisement and fashion companies, and by several entertainment industries. In this context, the individual is no more than a unit reduced to a receptor of heavy instructions from public institutions that have no individuality and no value other than augmenting profit. These institutions resemble an absolute state that has appointed itself as an absolute power and that has remodelled individuals so that they could play the roles or perform the functions assigned to them. To talk of human rights (in the abstract) is, therefore, to continue the original assault on the intermediary institutions that began in the Renaissance and left humanity completely naked before the state and its institutions.

4. The spread of sexual abnormality is also an assault on human nature, for human sexuality is an ultimate frame of reference through which one could pass judgment on what is human and what is not. In this respect, it should be mentioned that among those human rights defended by the epistemological vision of imperialism is the right to indulge in sexual deviation.
5. In our view, the spread of licentiousness in the western world is not only a purely ethical problem, but rather an epistemological problem. Licentiousness is part of an offensive against human nature and human dignity. The imperialist vision, as mentioned above, has "naturalized" the individual, for it considers him or her as merely a natural being and as matter. Licentiousness is an expression in this direction. Stripping the human body of its clothes is to dismantle its honor and respect and thereby reduce an individual human being (God's deputy on earth in religion's view, and the center of the universe in humanity's view) into mere flesh to be utilized and exploited as a source of sensual enjoyment. Viewed from this perspective, the Nazi genocide of the Jews, that is, converting human beings into stockpiles of employable and utilizable flesh, is but one form of libertinism.
6. Finally comes the ideology of postmodernism (or the ideology of consumption imperialism), which announces the demise of humanity (following that of God), denies the existence of any "center," and negates any frame of reference. It is a state of complete liberty and utter submission to the law of coincidence. It is a philosophical order fully expurgated of philosophy, humanity, and absolutism.

This philosophical laxity is the fundamental feature of the imperialist vision in the new era. Therefore, there is a trend toward the complete erasure of identities (except as a thin decorative shell) and the removal of boundaries. The secular national centralized state will, in turn, begin to erode and gradually give way to multinational companies characterized by their absence of color or religion, taste, or odor of any sort. A semi-universal culture, indeed a civilization, obsessed by sensual enjoyment will emerge. Maxime Rodinson sums up the difference between the two stages of the epistemological vision of imperialism by referring to cocolonizing (from coca-cola) nations instead of colonizing them (or coca-colanism instead of colonialism).

The history of imperialism is, in some respects, similar to the history of the secular national state. In its absolute (i.e., accumulative) stage, the centralized national state used to force nations to become matter and a source of energy. In the democratic (i.e., euphoric) stage, this has changed as western nations have agreed to be no more than producers and consumers. These nations now harbor the epistemological and ethical paradigm they once resisted. The new world order—this new manifestation of the western imperialist phenomenon or the old world order—today is trying to make the nations of the world become engrossed in the vision that they are no more than producers and consumers, that is, usable matter, so that they will enter the iron cage satisfied and contented. The new world order's greatest instrument in the penetrative process is those Third World intellectuals who have been westernized via the information revolution, scholarships, and so-called scientific conferences. The new world order, then, is the complete internationalization of the materialistic secular model as well as its total penetration everywhere. It is also the imperialist epistemological model in the age of universal consumption.

Zionism and the Imperialist Epistemological Vision

As for the impact of the imperialist epistemological model on the Jewish faith and Jewish communities, it could be argued that Zionism is a secular imperialist epistemological paradigm. The impact of Nietzsche on nineteenth-century Jewish philosophers and on the structure of Zionist thought is known to those who research the history of Zionist thought. Furthermore, Zionism is an ideology that believes in the white man's burden. In this context, the white man is a Jew who takes possession of Palestine in the name of human rights. It is a paradigm emanating from the conviction that this very Jew has the right to invade the land and

deport its people (or annihilate them) or employ them in his service. Guided by a deeply-rooted racism, Soviet Jews (who would not choose to emigrate to Palestine) are brought in and Palestinians are prevented from returning to their homeland, regardless of their struggle for that goal.

Israel has managed to make itself a tool, both in intent and in practice, in the hands of western imperialism. It is expected that Israel will change its identity in line with the change in the imperialist epistemological vision and its entering into the age of consumption. In this sense, it is expected that Israel will relinquish a little of its Jewishness and emerge as a peace-loving state ready for economic cooperation within the framework of the new world order. The whole issue is production and consumption, and these have nothing to do with epistemological and ethical absolutes. Therefore, Turkish water, Arab Gulf capital, Egyptian labor, and Israeli know-how will join hands in a sheer material enterprise with no identity or sense of direction. Consequently, there will be no feeling of pain caused by loss of dignity.