

Paradigms and Postmodern Politics from an Islamic Perspective

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The paradigm shifts from the 1950s to the 1980s in political science are best explained with reference to the encounter with the Other, an encounter which has three stages: first, the self-confident representation of the Other which is characteristic of modernity; second, the fear of and desire to control the Other which is characteristic of the end of modernity; and third, the hyperrealization and trivialization of the Other which is characteristic of postmodernity. This encounter with the Other takes place within a larger discourse context or episteme. The epistemic shifts, then, must also be considered.

Paradigm Shift

Foucault's concept of archaeology includes the idea that scientific systems are valid within their own contexts. Thus each piece of historical data must be judged and assessed in its own stratum or context. In a less sophisticated fashion, Kuhn has taken this idea of historical context and cultural relativism and come up with a theory of scientific revolution. Kuhn correctly identifies the science textbook genre as the received history of normal science, a genre which incorporates the myth of the steady cumulative process of science.

The textbook mythology traces the history of great white men and great experiments as they contributed their energies to the irresistible march of scientific progress. Kuhn demonstrates that Aristotelian dynamics or caloric thermodynamics are in fact internally systematic and scientific and are therefore just as valid as contemporary dynamics or thermodynamics. In reference to their "fit" with nature, an earth-centered astronomy is just as valid as a sun-centered astronomy. What happens is that when the questions change, and questions are asked which strain an earth-centered astronomy, a paradigm

shift (or revolution) may ensue. Of course those scientists interested in the new paradigm convince themselves that the old paradigm was wrong, and they then contribute to the mythology of the textbooks by showing how science is progressing ever upwards. Similar mythologies readily designate a number of centuries as the Dark Ages, or at best the Middle Ages, and thereby legitimize modernity as a period of light at the expense of the other period. In fact, Frederick Jameson calls the predilection for periodization a hallmark of modernity.

The mechanism identified by Kuhn as scientific revolution is passive and innocuous. The abundance of the passive tense in his description of the structure of scientific revolution belies his naive and uncritical perspective on scientific progress. The “wonderfully simple and cogent schema for the process of scientific discovery”¹ is provided by the anomalous card experiment. This experiment involves showing people a series of cards, some of which are anomalous (such as a red 6 of spades), for short periods of time. When the cards are flashed very rapidly, people are able to identify the anomalous cards quickly and confidently—but erroneously. It is only when they have more time to look at the cards that they begin to doubt what they have seen. Some are able to see that the card was anomalous, and some, even over a long period of time, remain uncomfortable and unable to describe the anomalous card. This experiment tells a lot about psychology and a lot about Kuhn, but nothing about scientific revolutions. And yet it is Kuhn’s only explicitly identified force of paradigm change and scientific revolution.

Scientific systems are demonstrably valid ways of looking at the world and, as such, are equally valid within their contexts because they are internally systematic and logical. This is Foucault’s finding in his study of the birth of the modern clinic and his archaeology of knowledge. Kuhn adds that scientific systems, as they relate externally to the world, are valid insofar as they provide explanations for the questions asked. When the questions change, however, the paradigm is disturbed and normal science may give way to revolution. This revolution in turn establishes its own normalcy. The mechanism suggested by Kuhn is that somehow somebody looks a little longer at an event, perceives the anomaly that was previously identified correctly and dismissed (erroneously), and inaugurates a new normal science. This is absurd, and it is a perfect proof that Kuhn is as immersed in his own textbook mythological world as are the normal science practitioners. The key to a paradigm shift is the shift in questions, and this of course is a social and political event. Kuhn, however, completely ignores politics and seems unable to realize that societies throw up questions and problems to be solved. Kuhn

¹Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

still lives in a cozy world where anything and anyone may be sacrificed in the name of Western scientific progress.

One small, tiny, almost imperceptible anomaly which we might perceive if we are not completely enraptured in our myths is the coincidence of scientific endeavor with state power needs. The science of trajectory and parabolic motion, for instance, coincides with cannon warfare in Europe and is well explained with a Marxist or radical critique. The fact that the vast proportion of scientific research is paid for by the state and finds immediate military applications is such an "anomaly." The Navy's grant of \$113,000 for research on homing pigeons seems innocuous enough, but the goal of the Navy is to find ways to communicate after a nuclear war. Stephen Hawking's explorations into the gravitational field, potentially as significant as Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, are bought and paid for by the Pentagon. Hawking may want to unlock the key to an atheistic universe, a perfectly reasonable scientific goal, but the Pentagon wants to know how gravity varies over the earth's surface in order to achieve a better accuracy rate for its missiles. Scientists may dance all they like, but the piper will be paid.

It is almost impossible to find an instance of "pure" research in Western scientific circles, and it is almost impossible to find research which follows an agenda not in complete harmony with increasing state power. For Kuhn, however, these anomalies are invisible, and he has no problem maintaining the myth that science somehow moves without reference to politics and economics. Scientists who notice the anomaly are silenced, even though in the 1970s they had some voice (for instance, Nowotny, Rose, Lewontin, Kamin, and those looking at the liberation of science). If Kuhn's structure of scientific revolution were really accurate, the silenced scientists could relax and simply wait for the anomalies to become visible, inaugurating a new normal science. But since this new normal science would be pitted against state power and the exploitation of populations and environments, we can be sure that future history books will not read (in Kuhn's passive voice), "and then Drs. So and So discovered how science was being diverted from service to humanity to service to state power, and other scientists soon duplicated their experiments, bringing into being the new science of liberation and emancipation." Kuhn's theory lacks a political parameter and it is therefore faulty in description; it lacks a political parameter and it is therefore faulty in prediction. If Kuhn were right, these anomalies would change science; but since he has no political parameter, he cannot perceive that state power will continue to maintain the myth of progress, to make the link between power and knowledge invisible, and to silence the voices of protest calling for a just world.

In order to put this interpretation of the meeting with the Other into a political science paradigmatic context, let us consider an article by Richard

K. Ashley² which is an attempt at self-criticism from within the realist school of thought. Ashley is arguing that neorealists (i.e., Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Krasner, Robert Gilpin, Robert Tucker, George Modelski, and Charles Kindleberger) have lost the power of the realist paradigm by becoming statist, utilitarian, positivist, and structuralist. Although Ashley is firmly set in political science and very much concerned with criticizing constructively, his respondents were uniformly critical of his endeavor. Let us look at his argument and the criticisms leveled at him and then place this discussion into the larger framework of the interpretation of a meeting with the Other.

The linchpin of Ashley's argument is found in his quotation of Pierre Bourdieu:³ "The theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to impose the principles of the construction of reality is a major dimension of political power." Every one of the criticisms given by Ashley has beneath it this idea of power and knowledge and the construction of reality.

The first thematic criticism of Ashley is that of statism. Ashley shows that the state-as-actor position is a metaphysical commitment prior to science and exempt from criticism. The neorealists assume that the given order is the natural order and implicitly take sides amid contending political interests. Their utilitarian conceptual bias lets them put priority on the individual rather than on the collective, and their rationalist bias assumes that one particular kind of means-end rationale is universally valid. The social order becomes an arena where actors have equal opportunities and where mutual expectations among rational, egotistical actors are played out.

Along the lines of Gurr's voluntarism, neorealists believe that institutional change occurs spontaneously as a consequence of the changes in the competing demands and capabilities of the actors. By ignoring the real political forces which change institutions (or create them), neorealists are able to see their own complicity with political power as benign and the results of political choices as a spontaneous effect. A corollary of this benign ignorance is that the state's power is legitimized by the voluntary participation of its citizens, and world systems are legitimized as spontaneous effects of changing needs, all under the aegis of a benevolent world order manager. Their positive bias excludes any discussion of forms of social consensus which might themselves be value-laden, historically contingent, and susceptible to change. Not recognizing that both the object and method of their study is value-laden

²Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neo-realism," *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1984).

³Bourdieu wrote *An Outline of a Theory of Practice*, which was the result of his fieldwork with the Kabyle in Algeria, but as Edward Said has remarked, it lacks any reference to French colonialism.

(namely the maintenance of dynamic tension and status quo structures of dominance), the neorealists are convinced that they study that single (and simple) world which exists without relation to the observer. It is, simply is, they want to say, and we are simply studying it. Since only rational goals are meaningful in this neorealist framework, actors are condemned to communicate on instrumental terms. We become instruments to be controlled and coerced, because our only form of protest is . . . passivity. There is no method of protest which is not immediately labeled as terrorist, and so this kind of positivism profoundly limits the range of possible voices.

The structural aspect of neorealist errors has four components, what Ashley calls the four p's. They deny history as process, they deny the significance of practice, they limit power to merely a matter of capability, and they deny the art of politics. The neorealists, in sum, assume that the given order is the natural order, limit political discourse, negate variety across time and place, subordinate practice to an interest in control, and assume that ideas of social power are beyond responsibility.

Gilpin's response to Ashley is utterly feeble. There are a number of self-criticisms which Ashley himself puts forth. But Gilpin's response consists of two themes. First, Gilpin remarks that he did not get the English translation of Ashley's article. This is in reference to a sentence where Ashley puts eschatology, hermeneutics, and discourse together and which proved to be too recondite for Gilpin. The second theme is one of huffy self-justification. Gilpin's last paragraph deserves to be quoted in toto. Gilpin is led "to make a confession." He smugly writes:

Ashley is correct. I am "a closet liberal." I do believe in the liberal values of individualism, liberty, and human rights, and I do want my country to stand for and to stand up for these things. I do believe, further, that we social scientists should study war, injustice, and yes, even imperialism, in order to help eliminate these evils. I do have faith that knowledge as a general rule is to be preferred to ignorance. But I most certainly do not believe, as Ashley alleges, in automatic progress. On the contrary, I am not even sure that progress exists in the moral and international spheres. Indeed, there have been transient international orders that have been more benign and humane than others. I count the British and American eras of world dominance among them, despite the Opium and Vietnam wars and other abuses of power. It is, in fact, precisely this issue of automatic and evolutionary progress that divides most realists from most idealists. Whereas the latter tend to believe that technological advance, increasing economic interdependence, and

the alleged emergence of a global community are transforming the nature of international relations, I for one lean toward a belief in Morgenthau's perennial forces of political struggle and the limits that they place on human perfection. To me at least, this moral skepticism joined to a hope that reason may one day gain greater control over passions constitutes the essence of realism and unites realists of every generation.⁴

Gilpin's idea of liberalism completely ignores the power of ideology, for it is only in a liberal ideology that the myth of liberty, human rights, and Mom and apple pie can be sustained. Conservatives, operating at the end of modernity, are much more likely to concede that they live on top of terrible violence and in a system maintained by terrible violence. But they are able to believe "better than us." The liberal meets the Other, performs incredible violence, and insists it is all for liberty, justice, and the American way. Gilpin's line about "yes, even imperialism" is a giveaway. We are not to believe that Gilpin is unaware that America is an imperial power, or that it has fallen (occasionally) into evil acts. It is limpid ideology, again, which allows Gilpin to believe that basically America is a force for good in the world. Any kind of logical or systematic testing of this claim is impossible. Any attempt at counting people killed, counting cultures destroyed, or assessing the risk of nuclear, biological, and chemical destruction is precluded in this liberal ideology.

Rest assured that Gilpin prefers, as a general rule, knowledge over ignorance. But then he seems to think that Ashley was dichotomizing idealists and realists, which is completely off the mark. Ashley is not at all in the John F. Kennedy school of technological progress, where technology is going to usher in a new world. Neither is he in the same school as Richard Falk, seeing interdependence and an emerging global community as signs of an impending moral order. As for Gilpin's line of "I count the British and American eras of world dominance" among the more benign and humane imperial times, what did we expect? Radical political scientists suggest that the "occasional" evils of Britain and America are not at all lapses or mistakes, but the result of their fundamental forces and policies. Vietnam was not a mistake: it was an outcome of basic forces in American foreign policy formulation. The issue is not why it happened, but why did it happen then and where else is it happening?

For example, Noam Chomsky, a radical, advises liberals not to bother telling politicians that their peace plans in Central America are really worsening

⁴Robert G. Gilpin, *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 304.

the situation. He also counsels them to avoid focusing too much on present foreign policy evils by urging them to adopt a historical view of American foreign policy. The tendency to look only at present evils seduces the liberals into thinking they only have to vote the rascal out to get America back into its predestined role as the torchbearer of humanity. Instead, a historical look at American foreign policy shows that the incredible violence and widespread destruction of people, environments, and societies is part and parcel of America and not just an occasional aberration. That radical institute—Congress—documented foreign military activities every year from the mid-eighteenth century on. Other historians focus on the genocide of the original population, the expansion of frontiers, and the theme of destiny as forces of American foreign policy. I have come to the conclusion, along these lines, that ideology is the real focus of an analysis of America. Why is it that the *New York Times* can sneer at Soviet elections without the slightest recognition that in Louisiana seven out of eight House seats had one candidate, and that 98 percent of House members who ran for reelection in 1988 won?⁵ America is engaged in a tremendously violent war, perhaps all the more violent because it is largely invisible to Americans. As a Brazilian socialist leader remarks:

I will tell you that the Third World War has already started—a silent war, not for that reason any the less sinister. This war is tearing down Brazil, Latin America and practically all the Third World. Instead of soldiers dying there are children; instead of millions of wounded there are millions of unemployed; instead of destruction of bridges there is the tearing down of factories, schools, hospitals and entire economies. . . . It is a war by the United States against the Latin American continent and the Third World. It is a war over the foreign debt, one which has as its main weapon interest, a weapon more deadly than the atom bomb, more shattering than a laser beam.⁶

USAID food policies actually cause starvation; IMF regulations actually transfer wealth from the poor to the rich and to the North. These are not mistakes, and Gilpin is not going to eliminate them by studying whatever he is currently studying. This is a broadside against political science paradigms, untidy as it is, with too much mixing of different levels of analysis. In this scattershot technique, the only bullet that needs to hit home is the criticism that political science paradigms in the West are almost without exception completely oblivious of their ideology and completely immune to serious

⁵See *The Nation*, April 17, 1989.

⁶Quoted in *The Nation*, April 17, 1989.

and radical criticism. By putting the paradigmatic shifts into their larger context of epistemic change, a more radical and overarching criticism may become possible.

Epistemic Change

As with periods, epistemes are not clearly delineated but, unlike periodization, a treatment of an episteme makes no value judgments. Without placing value on periods, we may avoid Jameson's critique that all cultural analysis involves a buried or repressed theory of historical periodization. We may describe epistemes as ideational and spatial realms which may be characterized by a particular worldview and a driving, overarching paradigm. For Michel Foucault, the epistemes are Classical and Modern, or Classical, Early Modern, and Late Modern. The lack of precision in dates is irrelevant, because the concept of episteme is a theoretical device of perspective designed to bring out ideas about discourse. For Jean Baudrillard, the author who suggests we "Forget Foucault," epistemes are orders of simulacra. The presimulacra period is that of the feudal economy. The first order of simulacra is the Renaissance with its organizing scheme of representation and counterfeit. The second order of simulacra is the industrial economy with its infinite series and value of production. We are now in the third order of simulacra, that of the model, where the model drives everyone and everything into a response game of total cybernetic control, where repression becomes partially replaced by seduction.

Although these epistemic changes are quite well worked out for the West, they are blatantly Eurocentric. This deficiency is less pronounced in their analyses of this recent episteme, because we have penetration and globalization of the dominant culture to an unprecedented degree. But as we shall see, Kellner faults Baudrillard for missing the fact that the fodder for the third order of simulacra consists of Third World countries still operating under the second order of simulacra with production and repression.

Less sophisticated but no less insightful is the division by Jeremy Rifkin of the age of pyrotechnics and the age of bioengineering. A lay thinker who is very active in court battles and the movement to halt bioengineering, Rifkin asks that ethical questions be asked now, at the beginning stages, rather than later when it may be too late. Let us start with his epistemic changes.

Humanity has lived with pyrotechnics for millennia. We have always burned the past (fossil fuels, coal) in order to secure some control over the environment. Through meat eating and pyrotechnics we have procured chunks of the past (all the food that went into the animal and all the energy that

made the tree grow) for our own development, and through community living we have bargained off some of our individual freedom in exchange for material security. Rifkin draws upon a number of interesting ecological works to support these arguments (parts of which are standard fare for Shāh Walī Allāh and Ibn Khaldūn, for example). Accompanying this analysis, Rifkin argues that we have always seized upon a paradigm or descriptive device for which we have made excessive claims. We allow the idea that this perspective of ours is the actual way the universe operates in order to drown out competing claims. The actual idea is not the product of anyone so much as it is a social idea which latches on to a particular book or formulation. This is the case with Darwin.

Rifkin demonstrates that the entire argument of evolution is for all intents and purposes missing from Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. What we have instead is a growing worldview coalescing on *The Origin of Species*, in which evolution is barely mentioned, and sweeping Darwin away with it. This is the exact opposite of what Kuhn and others like him think—that the lone scientist spots an anomaly and soon everyone rallies round. The social comes first, and discourse produces the experiments and works according not to the scientist's logic, but rather to the society's. It is therefore no surprise that an Islamic science will gather ideas and experiments as much at odds with and different from the prevailing science as the prevailing dominant culture is inimical to Islam.

In order for the Industrial Revolution to really take off, a population convinced of the values of industrialization was needed. Without any conspiracy theory, what emerged were ideas acceptable to many people which happened to dovetail with industrial requirements. Ideas of efficiency, time, and "industriousness" supported the industrialization process. Only because the landed nobility was also able to benefit from industrialization did the revolution take off, Rifkin argues. As the widespread poverty and degradation of urbanization driven by industrialization required an explanation, Darwin's explanation of the survival of the fittest became not the greedy and cruel doctrine that it is, but the religious image of chaff separated from wheat, of the inevitability of progress, and the need to sweep away inefficient people and ecologies.

Rifkin has extensively documented how evolution as a doctrine is now being seriously questioned. The fossil evidence is simply not there. Scientists are turning their backs on decades of pious acceptance to question evolution completely. But more than that, Rifkin shows how evolution will die as this present generation dies, because the next generation of scientists are the kids today who spend most of their lives in front of TVs and computers. They play with Transformers and know what Mutants are. Their world is

fundamentally different from ours: it is the biogenetic age they will usher in. He says, "Our children are beginning to conceptualize the world in a fashion . . . fundamentally different from anything we can readily identify with," because our children "are the first sojourners of the second great economic epoch."⁷ When we had a hammer, the whole world looked like a nail to us; to those with a computer, the whole world looks like a program to be reprogrammed.

Computers are not coming in without radically altering the way we think. Knowledge and humanity eventually become reduced to information. The Qur'an on a disk is nothing but bytes assembled in a way that can be easily processed differently. It is nothing but a series of bytes placed on a tiny circle of plastic. A person is nothing more than the information that makes him or her up so that, as Carl Sagan says, if you had all the information making up a cat you could essentially transport that cat through an electronic medium to another part of the universe. Essentially we are nothing but information. Knowledge is essentially information put together "selectively." What has happened to essence in this age?

The next generation of scientists will no longer accept Darwin and his fairly static view of species. They will not need to sit around watching species evolve: they will change them themselves. The computer, the TV, and many books already are convincing this generation that things are infinitely malleable and transformable. There is no such thing as a person; it is just a genetic code which happens to be shaped in a particular way, but which can be mutated *ad libitum*. "Proponents of human genetic engineering contend that it would be irresponsible not to use this powerful new technology to eliminate serious 'genetic disorders.'"⁸

Of course, these are the same people who have found genetic causes for everything unpleasant, from insanity to crime to disease. We need only remember Foucault to be terrified at how human sciences with their biological science alliance and decision about what comes under the legitimate sphere of control and examination are becoming ever-more pervasive, a true "interrogation without end." This is all happening quietly. The successful implantation of bioengineering into "the psychic life of civilization is attributable to its going largely unrecognized in its new guise. The new eugenics is commercial, not social. In place of the shrill eugenic cries for racial purity, the new commercial eugenics talks in pragmatic terms of increased economic efficiency, better performance standards, and improvement in the quality of life."⁹

⁷Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny* (New York: Penguin, 1985): 19.

⁸Ibid., 231.

⁹Ibid.

We now have an age dominated by the computer as metaphor and temporal theory, where “the evolution of information is tantamount to the evolution of life. With this newly constructed cosmology, Prometheus can now end his long agony and Adam and Eve can return to the Garden.”¹⁰ We have a choice, perhaps. We can choose to engineer the life of the planet,

creating a second nature in our image, or we can choose to participate with the rest of the living kingdom. . . . Not once in the long history of Western civilization have we ever said no to securing our own future. We have organized ourselves and the world, then reorganized, then reorganized again. . . . Each time we were looking for something of overwhelming import, something we hoped would not be denied us—our immortality. We have spent the world hoping to buy our permanence, only to discover that our everlasting presence is to be found in what remains untouched, not in what we use up. This is the lesson, if there is one, in the long journey of self-deception that Western men and women have taken over the millennia.¹¹

Baudrillard brings out some of these issues in a more sophisticated manner, but while Rifkin still hopes for change Baudrillard believes that postmodernity has already arrived in force. As we mentioned, his orders of simulacra start with the presimulacra era of the feudal economy, characterized by zero mobility and total clarity: fixed positions, strongly hierarchical, whatever was was.

Then we had the Renaissance and the rise of the bourgeoisie, where the caste system breaks down. This age is dominated by representation and counterfeit with a governmental centralizing strategy designed to secure political and cultural legitimacy. The theater and stucco are metaphors of this age in that they represent reality. The Renaissance, in breaking with a fixed feudal, medieval hierarchy of signs and social positions, introduced the artificial and democratized world of signs that gave value to artifice (stucco, theater, fashion, baroque art, political democracy) and thus exploded hierarchies and order with the natural law of value.¹²

With the Industrial Revolution, a new episteme arises (the second order of simulacra), characterized by the rise of Man, who appropriates from Nature the position of Grand Referent. Now we have the human sciences and the objectivity of Science, Technology, and Production, which become the new

¹⁰Ibid., 239.

¹¹Ibid., 252-3.

¹²Cf. Douglas Kellner, “Postmodernism as Social Theory” in *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 2-3 (June 1988).

values and referents. The cinema and photography are the metaphors of this order of simulacra, and in the infinite series is the industrial law of values.

With the third order of simulacra, the postmodern, postindustrial era, we enter the world of models directing social functioning, digitality, DNA, and the genetic code. The exchange value which operated before now becomes a programmed rhizome which governs life. The rhizome is a postmodern root. We used to talk of a root as an objective, unambiguous causal factor for consequences. The rhizome is a root which spreads along just under the surface of the ground, and true to its postmodern style it admits of no start, no end, and no verticality which can connect the surface meaning with a deeper meaning. In this world we have the structural law of value, which operates in a neocapitalist cybernetic order aiming at total control. The models derived from sex manuals, cookbooks, urban models, and the media all combine to bring our lives under cybernetic control. When we all follow the model perfectly, from our cells to our houses, then the computerized control of our lives is complete. In the land of either yes or no, X or Y, America or the Soviet Union, there can be no other response.

The TV is the metaphor of postmodernity. When the TV programmer takes the images taken from cameras which have already been taken from scenes most probably enacted and reenacted for the TV, he/she modulates the image, beefs up the color at one end of the spectrum, strengthens this signal, edits this and that, all of which makes the "real" more and more distant until what in fact exists is not real so much as it is model. It is hyperreal, where the real is volatilized, pushed to the stratosphere in an explosion of images in a mirror facing a mirror facing a mirror facing a mirror until infinity, so much so that the "real" is less real than the image, where the model is more real than the thing, and meaning implodes.

The spectator at France's Beaubourg Museum is craning his/her neck to look at the plastic models copulating. He/She is staring at them intently, at their surface reality—it's so real looking—and their total clarity. The couples are hyperreal, more real than real, infinitely visible because they are completely immediate. This is what Baudrillard calls obscene. There can be no passion or romance or lust, because such feelings require some depth. The sex act requires some fantasy, some representation. But postmodern sex is directed by the model (the sex manual) and becomes hyperreal. In the MTV world of postmodern sex, the body is utterly cold and superficial and obscene, devoid of any significance, simply another sign to be exchanged. There is no use value or exchange value: only a value of sign which can be exchanged. A Ferrari, a girl, a cigarette—all signs without depth and without use. The 1950s male driver liked his sports car as an extension of his sex, but to the postmodern driver the car is a computer with an ever-changing TV horizon

passing by his screen. Completely divorced from the road, or danger, or the thrill of speed, the postmodern driver buys a car not for driving but for its value as sign. You *have* a BMW; you don't drive one.

Gai Eaton writes that the Greek rationalistic ideas (transmitted along with Muslim thought) shook the Church to its foundations, and the Church could neither absorb nor refute the new thinking. As a result, all the pent-up forces in the Christian world exploded, and this explosion propelled the West into a new direction. The dynamism of the conquest of nature and the overthrow of God is a consequence of deviance, and Eaton says that the rejection of the essential allowed Western man to concentrate on the trivial, so that—as with Mussolini—they knew how to make the trains run on time.¹³ Modernity, *pace* Baudrillard, may also be seen as a controlled explosion (colonialism, imperialism, space exploration) all motivated by the release of excess energy.

If the postmodern condition implies a lack of depth, an apotheosis of the surface, modernism in hindsight can be seen as a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” where politics, culture, and social life are seen as the epiphenomena of economy, or desire, or the unconscious. Depth models were used to demystify reality, to show the underlying reality behind appearances, the factors which constituted the fact. Modernism meant the destruction of appearances (the representations of the Renaissance), and postmodernism is the destruction of meaning. Baudrillard even calls himself a theoretical terrorist, one out to destroy meaning and annihilate the real and the represented. Meaning is to be destroyed because meaning requires depth, a hidden dimension, an unseen substratum; but in postmodernism everything is visible, explicit, transparent, and obscene. However, as Edward Said has noticed, the technique of surface historiography has been a copout, for it allows postmodern thought to drift along in a historically amnesic manner.

Postmodernism as the implosion of all boundaries and distinctions (between all binary opposites) means the end of all positives, grand referents, and the social; the Real, Meaning, History, Power, Revolution, and the Social all must be discarded. The postmodern era signals the end of Man, that great referent. For Foucault, Man arose, along with the concept of the human sciences, from a discourse created in the classical age of representation. When language dies, so too must Man. This is anti-humanism: the end of the artificial device of Man as this or that, economic or political, *homo faber* or *homo pictor*. For the Muslim, the end of Man means that perhaps once again human beings will remember the divine, will remember Islam. And certainly the destruction of the Man made by Feuerbach and Marx is a necessary prelude

¹³Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (London: George Allen and Union, 1985), 20.

to the recognition of Islam.¹⁴ When Foucault talks to the face of Man etched in the sand but disappearing when the tide comes in, the Muslim remembers that when everything is effaced, only His face will remain.

For Baudrillard, the rhizomatic and schizo-analysis still belongs to the final phase of imperialism and the great ideology of liberation, because these techniques still assume that there is something to be saved from, some true place to which to return. But giving up the parapet of representation means accepting an immanence such that the word may never mean the world, but that the word must be the world. By rejecting the priority of perception, postmodernism posits the mutuality of word, world, and mind. As Stephen Tyler remarks, seeing is always mediated by saying.¹⁵ In this idea of immanences, the mind generalizes itself in the world. Ihab Hassan insists that no religious overtone should be allowed to taint the word "immanence," but in fact the theory of immanence is completely religious. The danger of these views, and especially that worked out by Teilhard de Chardin, is addressed by Titus Burckhardt:

As a symptom of our time, Teilhardism is comparable to one of those cracks that are due to the very solidification of the mental carapace, and which do not open upwards, towards the heaven of true and transcendent unity, but downwards towards the realm of the inferior psychism: weary of its own discontinuous vision of the world, the materialist mind lets itself slide towards a pseudo-spiritual intoxication, of which this falsified and materialized faith—or this sublimated materialism—that we have just described marks a phase of particular significance.¹⁶

As Roy Boyne remarks, "The postmodern condition derives from the desperate search for the meaning that will validate the effort and striving to progress, which still defines the Western socialization process from start to finish, combined with the knowledge or feeling that all findings are bogus, all results falsified, all products disposable."¹⁷ As Abul-Fadl remarks, "There is something pathetic about the plight of Western man, for it seems that he is resolved on shackling himself to the tethers that confine him to his gilded

¹⁴Cf. Eric A. Winkel "Remembering Islam: A Critique of Foucault and Habermas," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (September 1989).

¹⁵Stephen A. Tyler, *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* (Wisconsin: University Press, 1987).

¹⁶Quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature* (Malaysia: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1986): 80.

¹⁷Roy Boyne, "The Art of the Body in the Discourse of Postmodernity," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 2-3 (1988): 528.

cage.”¹⁸ We know what this modernity has done to humanity. As to its effect on social science, we concur with critical thinkers in our dissatisfaction with a social order based on a self-perpetuating system of inequality and injustice. It is this essentially negative order which is being justified when the postmodernists speak of universality and modernism. Such is a critique of modernity: but what has postmodernity done to politics?

Postmodern Politics

How has the postmodern world changed politics? Rifkin gives a few pages of ideas on postmodern politics, concentrating on the move from a spatial politics to a temporal politics, and this is a very promising distinction. However, he does make a fundamental error when he talks of control. First let us see what he has to say about postmodern politics. He writes:

The age of biotechnology will effect a fundamental change in how we govern ourselves. Gradually, the orthodox notion of rule as a spatial conception will give way to the idea of governance as a temporal conception. We are already at the beginning stages of a historic transformation from “rule by territory” to “management by system.” The electronics revolution and subsequent advances in the information sciences and in communications will allow people to penetrate geographical borders with the same ease that we now penetrate biological borders. Information webs are now capturing human populations, bringing them under the control of a new type of imperialism, one that can sweep across space and invade the interior landscape of any region of the globe with impunity. With satellite communications people find themselves beholden to systems that extend beyond the geographical boundaries of the state. Transnational corporations and other economic networks are now spanning the globe, wresting populations from traditional geographic loyalties. The result is that the nation-state is gradually being subsumed by new “patterns” of social discourse. Space is no longer a limiting factor. It no longer separates and divides people as effectively as in the past.¹⁹

With the end of territoriality, the nation-state’s demise is set. Rifkin seems to be unaware that his ideas about the demise of the nation-state and the

¹⁸Mona Abul-Fadl, unpublished manuscript.

¹⁹Rifkin, *op. cit.*, 235.

rise of interrelations and interpenetration are fully supported by many international relations theorists. Rifkin continues:

The new imperialism is temporal and cybernetic. The key to political power in the coming age is the effective exercise of control over the information systems for the many processes that connect living organisms with one another and their environments. In cybernetic language, positive feedback replaces imperialism and negative feedback replaces colonialization.²⁰

Rifkin astutely notes that exchanging power for security is the nature of politics, hence the easy acceptance of total cybernetic control. But Rifkin makes a mistake about control, in that total precise and individual control is impossible. As Nicolis and Prigogine remark in their study of dissipative systems, energy cost is associated with the complexity of the metabolic pathways to be controlled, and therefore it is physically impossible to reach total individuated control.²¹ In the same way Borges' emperor learns that it is impossible to make an exact map of his kingdom, it is physically impossible to control the new cybernetic realm in every detail. Borges' emperor found that the absolutely exact map he wanted made, one which would be on the same scale as the real terrain (1:1), took all the time and energy of his subjects. This does not preclude a total control in general, but it does preclude control over each activity. This idea comes from quantum physics, where the idea is that if the entire initial state were known, then the system at time $t+1$ could be predicted.

But it is physically impossible to pin down a subatomic particle's position and momentum. If you get the momentum pinned down you lose precision on its position. If you get the position pinned down you lose precision on its momentum. The resulting uncertainty is a fundamental fact of the quantum world. You simply cannot talk about an electron's position AND momentum in any precise terms. Sound familiar? The grand referents of the Newtonian and classical worlds—position, momentum, Man, Nature—all disappear in the postmodern and quantum world. Whereas Durkheim believed that since human beings exert, by definition, no individual influence on society, it must be possible to create a law of society (a natural law of people as it were). But according to postmodernity and quantum physics, people are like little dust particles. They have no ability to influence events, certainly, and we

²⁰Ibid.

²¹G. Nicolis and I. Prigogine, *Self-Organization in Non-equilibrium Systems: From Dissipative Structures to Order through Fluctuations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977): 447.

can identify forces on them and eliminate those external forces. But the dust particle and the person both operate under isotropism, where any one direction is as likely as any other direction. The dust particle in effect has no forces acting on it and cannot "decide" to go anywhere, but there is no way to predict where it is going to go. Prediction in the postmodern and quantum realms is impossible; probability is the name of the game.

The expenditure of energy required in observing a quantum event has its own impact on that event. So observation itself is participatory. There is no detached observer, no objective and outside reality. In the quantum realm we participate in reality and, as we saw with postmodern discourse, the word and the world are mutualities. But if the actual control of every atom or every person is impossible, it is still true that at the macrolevel control is quite possible. And so while postmodern society cannot be directed, it nevertheless is going somewhere.

Rifkin's idea of control and (implicitly) repression, then, is a holdover from modernity. What has happened since then is that we have seen a move from repression to seduction, where seduction is the way to get people to do things without force. The power of persuading people that your interests are their interests is the key to new forms of power-knowledge and exploitation, something which Galbraith has pointed out as well. Repression is panoptical power, diffused (made invisible) in institutionalizations of knowledge-based expertise. Foucault resurrects Bentham's panopticon, that office in the center of a prison, for instance, where all the cells face the warden who is hidden in the panopticon. The prisoners do not know if the warden is actually in the office, but therefore must act as if and assume that he is really watching. Thus power is made invisible; the power which used to be centered in the stick or fist or gun is now diffused and made invisible.

Furthermore, the human sciences arise and make the soul the object of study and examination. In the classical period the body was the subject of punishment, and when you did something wrong your body was punished. And that was that. But the soul is a wily thing, and so when Western human sciences descended on it the soul became subjected to interrogation without end. The body, ironically, became the prisoner of the soul. The panopticon was equally suited to the barracks, the hospital, and the school, and so it is no wonder that the barracks, the hospital, and the school came to resemble the prison.

Seduction is different. Seduction is the ability to make models, to make people do things. Repression is outlawing sex: seduction is providing a sex manual. Repression belongs to the second order of simulacra while seduction is postmodern. But repression is still there when seduction does not work (as with nonconsumers). Seduction makes legitimization irrelevant, freeing

intellectual debates by making it irrelevant.²² With the TV series on the Loud family, panoptic surveillance evolved into a system of deterrence where the distinction between active and passive was abolished, resulting in an implosion of meaning. When the characters of "Moonlighting" talk to the camera/audience, far more than author-audience direct conversation is taking place. By shifting between passive entertainment to talking about being entertained to the significant gaze at the audience from David, the audience does not "know" that this is a game or that it is entertainment, that David is an actor, that he is a "real" person acting. In short, what results is an implosion of meaning, where there is no privileged or outside position from which to discuss meaning. All is immediate and mediated; all is pure screen.

Bauman shows why empirical research is no longer in vogue. When the work of integrating society shifted from the technique of repression to seduction, the responsibility for integration shifted from state bureaucracies to the market. It is thus no wonder that sociology has tried to adapt market and public relations techniques to seduction. Sivanandan makes the point that the CIA used Coca-Cola public relations techniques in its attempts to discredit the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and justify its invasion with its PSYCHOPS (psychological operations).

What response does the audience have? The resistance of silence or hyperrealization is used by the masses, which Baudrillard seems to have romanticized. He claims that they send the information back to the system, double it, reflect meaning without absorbing it, engage in a strategy of refusal of meaning and sense where they cry with the Talking Heads, stop making sense. Baudrillard observes the masses traipsing into the Beaubourg, not being uplifted or made cultured, but instead appropriating the art on their terms by simply reflecting it back. The art does not mean anything, does not do anything to them; they simply reflect. For Baudrillard, this is a triumph against the bourgeoisie. It certainly is a pyrrhic victory at best. At any rate, the result of mass media inundation is a mass responding to nothing but a mediated reality which is far from real, where the proliferation of information and media have made the masses an apathetic silent majority.

But it is a mistake to forget the very real consequences of postmodernity. There is still repression and there is still an Industrial Age. Ryan astutely notices that we must not fall into Eurocentric traps even in postmodern thought. He notes that reproduction has not replaced production. "Those computer chips are still produced by factory labor in Third World countries like Malaysia, the material basis of the First World's Information Age. And that labor is predominantly female, since women workers are more 'pliant' and less likely

²²Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, "Is There a Postmodern Sociology?" *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 2-3 (1988).

to unionize.”²³ This observation clearly demonstrates the motive for the West in industrializing the world: it most certainly does not come from any benevolence. “The information that most corporations rely on has to do with such things as accounting, which is to say with the tracking of efficiency based on wages paid and prices extracted, with, in other words, the very material world of production that informationism supposedly displaces.”²⁴ So while the world of discourse may have changed, we still find plenty of remnants.

The sad fact that it is still women and the Other who suffer is not alleviated by postmodernity. “Women workers in Malaysia are lured to factories by the promises of money for cosmetics that allow them to refashion themselves according to prevailing advertising images of female beauty, and they are ideal workers because of the internalization of representations from the culture that induce in them social attitudes of obedience and conformity.”²⁵ These cultural influences were apparently powerful before the advent of Islam and then were glazed over with an Islamic terminology. Ryan agrees that capitalism is indeed simulational, but the execution of an efficiency model such as the austerity program of the IMF can be as murderous as a death squad.

The pervasive quality of media communications and its ability to penetrate everywhere changes politics. American culture has become global, and through the market it colonializes the earth. We have “fast food for the culture of cooking, ready-made clichés for the act of thinking, style for content, sound in place of music, noise in place of sound, reading shorn of reflection, an easy superficiality for uneasy depth, sentimentality passed off as love, individual greed in place of collective good—corporate American culture is a surrogate for culture.”²⁶ The arms open to industrialization and the international economy lets in the media and the informational discourse which then subsumes and eventually extinguishes indigenous culture. “And tourism is not just a vehicle of that culture, but its vanguard: a defoliant that destroys the native culture as it advances, clears the ground for corporate industry to replace it with theirs.”²⁷

It is no longer appropriate to talk about a politics which is not at the same time a sociology or an economics. The postmodern culture of the computer has intermixed and blended the academic disciplines such that it is impossible to understand the contemporary reality of human beings without a comprehensive view. Kellner points out that the fragmentation of the

²³Michael Ryan, “Postmodern Politics,” *Theory, Culture, and Society*, p. 567.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 556.

²⁶Sivanandan, “The New Imperialism,” *Race & Class* 30, no. 4 (1989): 12.

²⁷Ibid., 13.

disciplines and their abstraction is a symptomatic expression of an academic division of labor "unable to conceptualize fundamental trends of social development or to demonstrate relations between the economy, state, society, and culture. A tendency of postmodern thinkers is to subvert boundaries between disciplines, discourses, and position."²⁸ Against the Enlightenment view, we must recognize with Foucault that politics is all-pervasive.

But when Foucault talks of power configuring knowledge, he is not simply equating the two. As he remarked, *savoir* is not a mask for *pouvoir* in his analysis. Foucault explains that "the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former."²⁹

What is the political response to a power-configuring knowledge? Flynn suggests that Foucault is putting together a propaedeutic of a politics of suggestions and exemplification rather than one of prescription and legitimization. This conforms to the postmodern conviction that there are no truths or objective realities, and therefore an acceptance of the heterogeneity of rules and the willingness to debate presuppositions locally is required of a postmodern politics. We need a *diskurs* and a paralogy, a lively and local debate over the rules of the game and a search for dissent. The discourse then becomes an ambilectic, never allowing itself to be tied down to one definition and one dialect. Or for Baudrillard and the more nihilistic postmodern thinkers, the only discourse is the idiolect, incomprehensible to everyone except the speaker. Where to from here? What Islamic response is there if the postmodern condition is as it has been described? How does the Muslim talk to someone who is convinced that there are no objective truths? If the descriptions of the quantum realm are accurate, do they confirm that there is a postmodern society, and that the postmodern society operates as does the subatomic physical world?

Conclusions

The Muslim is quite clearly alienated from his or her world, and the intellectual even more so. Although the traditional Muslim is still able to appropriate technology as a tool, the intellectual is less anchored in the eternal realities of Islam. The traditional Muslim who drives a car sees it as nothing but a tool. He/She saves the plugs and files them when they get black. But the intellectual Muslim is likely to perceive the car as a continual reminder that the ummah has fallen behind. And he/she is quite likely to toss the plugs

²⁸Kellner, op. cit., 241.

²⁹In Flynn, "Foucault and the Politics of Postmodernity," *Nous* 23 (1989): 191.

with his/her modern Western neighbor. How can a Muslim be anything but alienated when he/she drives instead of walks the half mile home from the mosque? Is his/her life ruled by any clock but that of the alienated West? Are his/her rhythms anything but those of the modern world?

We live in a society increasingly characterized by a postmodern discourse. The dominant discourse is that of America, owning as it does almost 90 percent of the world's media and having a great influence over even those media not under its direct control. But still providing the fodder for the discourse are the industrializing nations, who have been cruelly tricked into believing that they will benefit from joining the civilized nations of the world, unaware that the civilized nations have long since passed by their paltry industrial aspirations and will always maintain a position of superiority. As Gai Eaton remarks, decadence is greatly to be preferred to deviance, and what we see around us is the most fervent activity directed to the deviance of materialistic utopian planning.³⁰

The colonialistic process is far more advanced and pernicious now. Development is the new colonialism. As we rhapsodize about science, do we not consider that the vast majority of technologies and scientific products are designed to solve problems that modernity itself caused? Medical technologies are almost exclusively suited only to those problems of modernity, i.e., stress, obesity, and cancer. Why should we develop so as to get super new cancers so that we can be really behind in medical technology? The West has an epidemic of crime, and its cause is deduced to be caused by "a lack of police, a lack of burglar alarms, and a lack of prisons," because "we are good at expanding our police force, making burglar alarms, and building prisons. However, we have no idea how to create a coherent society in which crime does not exist."³¹

What do Muslims mean when they say they need science and technology? In health care, hundreds of medical people believe in preventive medicine and that the vast majority of health care problems, even in overdeveloped America, can be solved with societal changes and inexpensive, simple remedies. How much more so in traditional Muslim communities, where we find in the Sunnah a full range of health care practices which suffice to provide the healthiest possible life. You cannot blame Islam if Muslims live in filthy conditions and ignore their *dīn*. What drugs do these Muslims think we ought to have? Do we need a supercomputer? The supercomputers in America are used in the most destructive and violent applications: in the

³⁰Eaton, *op. cit.*, 20.

³¹E. Goldsmith, "The Great Misinterpretation," presented at the International Congress on Third World Debt and Environmental Destruction, reprinted in *Aliran* 9, no. 8 (September 1989).

military and in the vicious exploitation of nature's resources. How about transportation? The single-driver automobile so every Muslim city may look like Los Angeles? How about the media? A Qur'an on every disk so that it can be ignored or at best altered? How about a few minutes of recitation before the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?

A handful of people in the West are coming to their senses, trying to make a world where we may recover our relationship to our environment, a world less hostile and less polluting and less alienating. Their ideas lack the transcendental clarity we all need. They mean well but they do not have the direct connection to divine truth which is now preserved only in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Meanwhile Muslims, who should be cooperating with them and helping them remember Islam, clamor for the latest modern goodies. You cannot have the car without pollution, the shifts in the factory, the alienation from the environment, and the sedentary life that goes with it. Would any of us consign 'Āishah to a graveyard shift? And yet how many Muslim women, who should be leading productive lives, are forced by their dependent status in an economy tied into the international economic system to labor in the factories? And if we are lucky enough to escape the modernizing Third World for the postmodern First World, what will happen to our spirit and soul when we see the real volatilized, as Baudrillard says, when one's *īmān* is as acceptable as one's *kufr*, both equivalent and both meaningless?


In her article "Islamization as a Force of Global Cultural Renewal,"³² Abul-Fadl talks of reviving our structured resources for a cultural renewal. It is refreshing and encouraging to see the calm and reasoned acceptance of tradition and the inner dimension of Islam in this time when the most intellectually sophisticated Muslim thinkers are one in the abuse of the past and the rejection of any emphasis on the soul. We hear that the entire period from *al khulafā' al rāshidūn* until now must be swept away,³³ and that the preoccupation with our inner malaise is the reason why Muslims "fell behind." Tradition is that which all traditional societies constructed as the spirit met the spatial. We do not accept that something is good because our forefathers were doing so, as Allah clearly forbade this in the Qur'an. Rather, we recognize that Islam is the only tradition which has reached us in its original pure form, having remained uncorrupted since its revelation over fourteen hundred years ago.

Let us take a careful look at the science and technology we want. There

³²Mona Abul-Fadl, "Islamization as a Force of Global Cultural Renewal," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (December 1988).

³³But see the response of Maryam Jameelah in the *Muslim World Book Review* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1989).

are a number of thinkers who talk of the new concepts of defense (notably Johann Galtung) which are not at all like the old ones. Are we so fixated on old modes of defense that, while we may keep some of the foreigners outside our gates, their discourse and values have seeped into the tiny holes we did not know to cover? There is no technological fix, there is no political solution; we must understand the traditional forms and the inner dimension of Islam so that we can re-form our lives in the contemporary world. But this re-forming will not follow the lines of the West—most of us agree on that in theory. But it takes a very powerful critique to see just how much is part of the West. This very powerful critique seems to be coming most often from the circles of radical postmodern thought with a *tawhīdī* epistemic foundation, from traditional wisdom (perennialism), and from some Sufis. Before we plan the destruction of the last traditional Muslim and his or her habitat (*imārah*), let us understand what Islam is for that person. All of our planning must be toward making, as Kirmani remarks, the *imārah* conducive for the *ubūdīyah* of *insān* and his/her comfort, not toward some computerized version of Madinah suited to a postmodern informationalized world.



من إصدارات المعهد العالمي
للفكر الإسلامي

كيف نتعامل مع
السنة النبوية
(معاليم وضوابط)

للدكتور
يوسف القرضاوي

تقديم: د. طه جابر العلوانى

كتاب يعتبر دعامة في بناء منهج فهم السنة النبوية.. ويعرض
لأهم قواعد فهم السنة النبوية المطهرة.. ويعمل على توجيه الأمة
إلى قضايا فهم السنة.. ويجعل دراسات السنة وفهمها تأخذ مكانها
اللائق بها..

غلاف عادي: ٧٠٠ دولارات

١٨٥ صفحة