Remembering Islam: A Critique of Habermas and Foucault

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Introduction

Jean Baudrillard suggested we "forget Foucault" because his status as one of the greatest thinkers of the West in this century belied his commitment against state power. A similar criticism may be levied against Habermas, whose ideal communication community merely reproduces and perpetuates so-called modern secular Western epistemologies. If we take seriously the anarchic thought of Habermas and Foucault, we conclude that the epistemologies created in the past few hundred years are pernicious, pervasive, and truth-distorting. But their vision of the possible world which would emerge after the death of these epistemologies is extremely restricted and inadequate. I suggest we "remember" Islam as the divine guidance of God (SWT), which provides the basis for a truly emancipatory meta-critique. The extension of an Islamic critique into the realm of anarchic thought gives it more precision and sophistication.

Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective [1981][1] lays the foundation for an Islamic critique of Western epistemologies and the rebuilding of the Islamic sciences by exposing the inadequacies of Western epistemologies and by outlining the guidelines along which Islamic epistemologies must direct the intellectual power of Muslim scholars. The contributors to *Social and Natural Sciences* denounce the modernized and socialized versions of Islam arising in this century. These versions borrowed their essence not from Islam but from the capitalist, neo-colonial West or from the Marxist-Leninist East. I suggest we characterize the first part of this Islamic critical endeavor as anarchic in that it recognizes the Western epistemologies are neither benign nor local, but in fact carry interest-full, imperialist, dominating designs on

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[1]Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī, Abdullah Omar Naseef, eds. *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective* (Hodden and Stoughton, 1981).

resources, societies, and knowledge itself. Specifically, I see three kinds of anarchic critique behind *Social and Natural Sciences*: that against the nation-state; that against secular Western world views; and, more subtly, that against power politics from Mu'āwiyah to his latter-day successors. By characterizing this theme of critique as anarchic, we engage the Western tradition of anarchic thought. The Islamic critique of *Social and Natural Sciences* destroys the claims of Western epistemologies as interest-free, objective, and complete. The shortcomings of Hegel, Comte, and Talcott Parsons are well described. But there are thinkers in the West, namely Michel Foucault and Juergen Habermas, whose anarchic thought similarly refutes claims of disinterested truth, objectivity, and completeness. I therefore propose to extend the Islamic critique to two of the greatest twentieth century thinkers in the West, Foucault and Habermas.

This enterprise builds further an Islamic critique in this way. From the perspective of Islam, the Muslim is immediately guided to ask certain questions about theoretical claims, claims of history, and views about human nature. From this perspective, he or she adequately criticizes and refutes claims that a reduction to material data can be a complete description of reality, for example. But from other perspectives, usually a radical perspective sensitive to power and domination in society. Foucault and Habermas also refute many claims of Western epistemologies, consequently, this enterprise extends the Islamic critique because it differentiates more clearly a critique which is Islamic from a critique which is merely radical. This enterprise also locates a further point from which the critique of Western society may be conducted. By locating a point beyond the criticism of positivism, for example, an extended Islamic critique addresses specific recent modifications of Western epistemologies. I see the role of the analysis of anarchic and radical thought of Foucault and Habermas not as one contributing to the Islamic critique, but, rather, as one extending its precision and sophistication. Edward W. Said has made great advances in understanding the *episteme*,[2] or knowledge-realm, which, through forms of language and oppression, denies the existence of Palestinians. He has also carried out excellent research on Orientalism, the colonial, paternalistic misconceptions of Western people toward Arab and other Eastern peoples. This research refers explicitly and in general terms to Foucault and anarchic, radical thought in the West. This article co-opts anarchic and radical discourse for the refutation of modern man, but in turn rejects the same thought by accepting the resolution of Islamic epistemologies. In Islam, all knowledge is placed firmly in infinite God; no pseudo-source

[2]One definition of *episteme* is "an invisible pattern that serves as a fundamental regulatory mechanism for the formation of knowledge" Karlis Racevskis *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) p. 22.

of knowledge is accepted. Technically similar, the rejection of pseudo-sources of knowledge is one success of anarchic and radical discoveries in the recent West. But Islamic epistemology is different, even in its first stage of stripping bare the false claims of sources of truth or knowledge, because the Islamic intellection begins with the acceptance that there is no god but God, and the subsequent identification and rejection of false sources of truth. After this identification and rejection, closure is again achieved, but this time at a slightly higher, more sophisticated level. Thus, there is no confirmation from anarchic epistemologies, no consistent framework for comparison. Instead, by extending the Islamic critique to new descriptions of modern Western society, we add vocabulary and precision to Islamic critiques, which remain complete and unswerving affirmations of health for humankind, racked in the modern world by physical, spiritual, and moral illness.

Two representatives of this anarchic and radical thought are Juergen Habermas and Michel Foucault. Both rebut efforts to summarize or classify their work. Especially with Foucault, such encapsulization is seen as the very negation of his thought, which is designed to unravel set ways of thinking. To some degree, however, we may engage these thinkers in their rejection of the modern Western *episteme*. After a short introduction of the two thinkers, and a summary of the Islamic critique of Western epistemologies up to these two thinkers, we proceed to a detailed analysis of particular aspects of their works.

Juergen Habermas writes in difficult German. His thought processes are very logical and well-considered, but his arguments are often very complex and difficult to grasp. There is probably no single Habermas theory, although there are many continuities. I intend to confine my analysis to one book, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, ("Knowledge and Human Interests"), which traces the development of Western thought and is the groundwork for much of his later, more refined work.[3] He characterizes in this book the search for a true philosophical system as the search for a presuppositionless theory which would avoid circular hermeneutics. He notices that many systems are indeed logical and consistent, but they all rest on *a priori* assumptions (*i.e.*, assumptions made before the systematic argument actually begins). Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, is bound to be circular, it seems, because all interpretative proofs in fact refer to some previous proof for their validity. The latter proof is then really an assumption, but an assumption which makes sense if you agree with what it supposedly proves. So, the value of the system rests on assumptions which are acceptable only because they

[3]cf. Thomas McCarty, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, (Boston: Beacon Press), p. xvi, who mentions that this book is not Habermas' final statement. But while the technical details have been revised, the basic premises remain unchanged.

make good proofs after you have accepted the validity of the assumptions. These hidden assumptions, of course, become a tool of domination for an elite, and thenceforth no reassessment of the *a priori* assumptions is possible. How can one get out of this circular mess which perpetuates a *status quo* of domination and represssion? The solution Habermas achieves is ideal communication without presuppositions (or Ideal Speech Situation, or ISS). Imagine a society where debate was freely entered into by all members. For those members who previously had no voice (minotiries, women, "Third Worlders"), imagine a "psychoanalysis" which recovers previously suppressed dialogue. This ideal society hears all human interests and proceeds, through debate, to generalize these interests, to get them worked out, and, through compromise, accepted by everyone. The result of these generalizations is a supposition, a *post hoc* assumption. The beauty of such an ideal communication community is that any supposition can be later rejected easily without upsetting any fixed structure or pattern. No revolution is needed; there is no need to tear out vested interests seeking to maintain the *status quo*. This system allows for change, modification, or replacement of any of its suppositions and assumptions. Ontology, the science of truth and essential being, for Habermas, is in ruins, but out of the ruins comes the ideal communication community, where truth is not objective but is instead that which the community determines it to be. Truth is then true in that it is emancipatory and positive.

From an Islamic perspective, two objections immediately arise which we address in detail later. First, interests cannot always be generalized, or at least the generalization of interests is not proof of its truth content. Second, truth is grounded not in society, as for Habermas, but in God. Two other points emerge. First, the recognition of human interests in knowledge and society leads to a promising rejection of previous Western epistemologies which were positivistic, objective, and material. Second, the working out of interests within the community needs to be set next to the "ummatic" critique of Islamic social science.

Michel Foucault [died 1984] writes in very engaging French. Although he uses some neologisms, he ingeniously offers very imaginative and creative ideas using a standard vocabulary. As with Habermas, Foucault does not have a single theory. In fact, Foucault pioneered the idea that the author has no relation to his work after it is written; from then on, the author has no more significant interpretation of the work than any other reader. Foucault very clearly locates the forces which created modern society by examining the change of two *epistemes*, from the Classical Age to the Modern Age. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he makes a case that all history must be analyzed in terms of its own period. He shows the absurdity of submitting a medieval medical text to a modern framework; he also rejects a value judge-

ment ranking one society in one time above another society. His study of the origins of modern psychology and medicine locates an interest in enveloping irrationality with rationality so that unreason and madness could be first described (and entrapped) in rational terms—and then silenced. Both Habermas and Foucault are intrigued by psychoanalysis, which they believe is a means to get at suppressed dialogues. A patient represses his desire and covers that desire by speaking in symbolic language. But the symbolic language signals the psychoanalyst to dig beneath the surface to extract the patient's real feelings and make the symbolic discourse meaningful. Foucault writes that "psychoanalysis advances in making the unconscious speak, through the conscious, in the direction of that fundamental region where the relations of representation and finality come into play."[4]

Much of Foucault's work aims at releasing events and people from constrictions placed by culture and society. This releasing is called by Foucault "archaeology", where we unravel and dig out ideas that were silenced from accumulated and limiting patterns of knowledge. History is as much what we choose to talk about as what we choose to ignore. Archaeology is the later attempt to find truths which history has spoken over and silenced. Foucault defines archaeology as that which seeks "to untie all those knots that historians have patiently tied; it increases differences, blurs the lines of communication, and tries to make it more difficult to pass from one thing to another".[5]

Foucault's ideas offer a sophisticated critique of Western society. He reaches a vantage point but, unlike Habermas, he does not see where society should go or is going. Instead, he sees that modern man is ephemeral and will disappear; we used to have human beings without Man and we will once again have human beings without Man. Of course an Islamic critique also rejects the rightful existence of modern, secular Man. This Man is an aberration, completely separate from what humankind was created to be. Although Foucault does not move in any direction after reaching his vantage point, his critique is a strong tool for locating the knowledge configurations which produced modern man. He writes that

> Meanwhile, it is comforting and a profound relief to think that man is nothing but a recent invention, a figure who is but two centuries old, a simple wrinkle in our knowledge, and one which will disappear when it will have found a new form.[6]

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[4]Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) p. 385, (my translation).

[5]Michel Foucault, trans. by M. F. Tavistock, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1972), p. 170.

[6]Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, op cit., p. xxiii, my translation.

The ephemeral nature of man is reflected in the fleeting definitions of the academic disciplines. The late Professor Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī made the point that, although the academic disciplines "have achieved autonomous status in the universities only during the last century, the forces which led to their emergent success are about two centuries old."[7]

There are numerous points from which to date the birth of the modern world in Europe and the death of the traditional world. In essence, the turning point is when the Church's control of knowledge dissemination was broken by thinkers who overturned knowledge by pulling the subject of knowledge and the goal of inquiry out of heaven and placing them squarely on Man. Full of their fanatic belief that they had life and a new birth, and perceiving the period before as dark and infinitely distant, thinkers named this upheaval the Renaissance. The Renaissance is that abhorrent time when man, having opened up a completely novel field – himself – begins to explore the physical world and achieve a myriad of "successes." Frustrated with the discipline and submission required of all true seekers of knowledge, this newly modern Man became arrogant and big-headed, convinced of the possibility of achieving immortality without God. In medicine, as Foucault points out, the corpse becomes the all important focus of the scientist. The cold, spiritless body lying on the slab will now define life itself. The stiff corpse is exclusively man's property, not God's, and thereby modern Man redefines his relationship with the universe. He is now lord of a universe that is material, visible, and susceptible to machine logic and intuitionless thought, to wisdomless science. René Guenon (Shaykh 'Abd al Wahāb) characterizes this new direction as "humanism." This does not mean kindness and gentleness; rather, it means a complete rejection of God and the concepts of creation, guidance, and submission. He writes that

> there is one word which was honored in the Renaissance, and which summarizes the entire program of modern civilization. This word is "humanism;" it means in fact to reduce everything to purely human proportions, to abstract all principles of superior order, and, we could see symbolically, to turn from heaven under the pretext of conquering earth. The Greeks, whose example we were supposed to be following, had never been so far away in this sense, even at the time of their worst intellectual decadence, and at least the utilitarian preoccupations were never put in first place with the Greeks, as will happen soon with us in the modern world. "Humanism" was already the first form of what would become contemporary "laicism;" and, desiring to ground everything in

[7]Ismā'īl al Fārūqī, *Social and Natural Sciences*, op cit., p. 9.

> human measure (taken for an end in itself), we have ended up by descending, from stage to stage, to the level of that which is the most inferior, and [we have ended up] by no longer searching for anything but the satisfaction of needs inherent in the material side of nature; this is a search very much illusory, finally, because it creates always even more artificial needs which it cannot satisfy."[8]

Tied into this is the idea that the source of knowledge and truth comes not from the heavens but from human and material realities. (Contrast this with Feuerbach's ideas in *The Essence of Christianity*, where the wine which symbolized Jesus's blood in the eucharist is made into the symbol of Wine, and bread, previously elevated to Jesus's Flesh, is "elevated" to plain bread.) From a perspective of sacred science, Guenon criticizes modern science.

> This same science of which [the modern world] is so proud represents nothing but a simple deviation and is a caricature of true science, which, for us, is identified completely by what we have called "sacred science" or "traditional science." Modern science, proceeding from the arbitrary limitation of knowledge of a certain order, and which is the most inferior of all, that of material or sensate reality, has lost, by the fact of this limitation and the consequences which immediately follow, all intellectual value, at least if we give "intellectual" its full meaning, if we refuse to participate in the "rationalist" error, that is, to assimilate pure intelligence to reason, or, which comes to the same thing, to deny intellectual intuition. What is at the bottom of this error, is at the bottom of a great many other modern errors, and is the very root of the entire deviation of science, as we have explained, is that which can be called "individualism," which is the same as the antitraditional spirit itself, and whose multiple manifestations, in all realms, constitutes one of the most important factors of the disorder of our age.[9]

Foucault reaches a similar point with respect to his analysis of man, but he does not carry his ideas as far as Guenon, who re-proposes a sacred science.

Let us summarize the limitations of some of the first social scientific theories in the West. Comte and Durkheim believed that social phenomena,

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[8]Rene Guenon [1962], *La Crise de la Monde Moderne, (Luzac and Company, 1975) pages 31-32, my own translation.*

[9]Rene Guenon, ibid, p. 88.

because they were so complex and numerous, were not subject to individual influence. Therefore, because no one person could influence social phenomena, it must be possible to discover general, objective, and universal general laws of society. The concept was that behind the confusion of social events and language, patterns could be discovered, patterns which were general and universal precisely because they existed beyond any individual's control.

A similar idea of nomological social science (the search for general, universal laws) is seen in the works of Marx. He believed that societies, capital, and language were all the product of past societies, capital, and language. This was in contradistinction to the "Robinson Crusoe" view of economic activity, where economic success is attributed to an individual's hard work, as if he existed alone on an island. Of course this "Robinson Crusoe" view ignores structures and beneficial patterns as well as advantageous ownership positions in production, while concealing the contribution of past wealth and the exploitation of an entire working class or an entire peripheral country.

Marx's structuralist approach enabled him to reject the superficial self-understanding of elites and instead locate conflict between rich and poor in the structure of production. Thus, if you understood material existence to be true philosophy, and if you could identify people by their position in a structure of production (as workers or owners), then you could correctly perceive the locus of the true struggle for emancipation. Add to this a knowledge of economic history and the stages through which work and technology have progressed (modes of production), and you could begin to perceive that material life was heading toward a final stage where workers in fact owned the product of their labor, where everyone could self-objectify, and where people could fulfill themselves through labor. One common thread running through these paradigms, labeled positivist and structuralist, is the ignoring and qualifying of the self-understanding of the actors involved. In Foucault's eyes, this means clamping down a particular kind of reason which reason cannot comprehend, namely, madness. From this perspective, we understand Foucault's fascination with and concern for Van Gogh, Nerval, Artaud, and others. (Artaud delved periodically into Eastern mysticism and Sufism; at other times, he was confined in mental hospitals.)

In the 1920s and 1930s, some leftist intellectuals in Europe began to perceive that the communist experiment in the Soviet Union was turning totalitarian. An entire left movement began, with intellectuals exploring ways to bring the material benefits and emancipation of Marxism to society without a concomitant expansion of state power and totalitarianism. Forty years later, in the U.S., a similar movement began, this time to counter the consumer oriented and increasingly aggressive "establishment." Although Godfrey Hodgson's *America in Our Time* has demonstrated that the counter-culture

movements in the U.S. stemmed from materialistic roots and maintained an enmeshment in consumerism, nevertheless some intellectual offshoots of the 1960's counter-culture movements reveal a commitment to individual autonomy, self-definition, and anti-materialism. In a way, both the European Left movement and some of the American counter-culture movements are similar in that they both began with disillusionment, in Europe with communism gone totalitarian, and in the U.S. with technological progress and material success gone consumer and imperialistic.

In the U.S., some counter culture intellectuals began to question the ability of the establishment to understand the social and political aspirations of blacks and people in the Third World. Project Camelot, an operation funded by the U.S. government to get social scientists to understand the instruments of insurrection, seemed to epitomize social science research in the U.S. as manipulative, imperialistic, and dishonest. These people believed they had to discover new ways to communicate and conduct science, because the usual forms of discourse had been co-opted or repressed by materialistic, sick people. At the heart of this intellectual questioning of the *status quo* is the discovery that language had very much to do with oppression. Language, and, worse still, the study of language, seemed to serve to oppress people trying to become emancipated. Language itself, feminists believed, served to repress women and keep them down. The making *burgeoise* of language made language itself a basic tool of repression. Only by perceiving the structure of society could the repression itself be perceived. Foucault's major focus is language and discourse. Habermas talks of the need to recover previously suppressed dialogues through a kind of psychoanalysis. The idea is that the structure of society and language has made many people linguistically and economically incompetent, or, in Foucault's terms, silenced. The very structure of society itself renders many people uneducated, without self-esteem, unable to express ideas, unable to get things of value. If politics has to do with the way things of value are distributed in society, then these are people unable to compete in a political world.

The entire program of Project Camelot called into question the idea that science may legitimately be instrumentalist, that we do, and ought to, learn in order to control. In its most sophisticated form, this radical or anarchic criticism becomes what Foucault calls bio-technico-power. If you look at madmen and incompetents from this perspective, you see that perhaps they are rejected because they are simply unable to function in a materialist, "rational" modern world. The crux of the anarchic criticism is that the modern world's way of thinking—logical, rational, instrumental—is a recent, aberrant form of domination.

Another problem perceived by anarchic critics was the view in modern science of the rational, value-maximizing man. The criticism was that the

view of rationality was limiting the range of analysis because the rationality in question, instead of being universal, was actually the product of a specific, local, recent world view. How, they argued, could analysts with a Christian, Western view of rationality adequately understand Africans, Indians, or Buddhists? And do people really value-maximize? Do people really have such a clear view of their goals and the means available to them? Is value-maximization yet another fancy term perpetuating the *status quo*? Positive, structured, instrumentalist science was thus pronounced impoverished. In order to rebuild philosophy and rid social science of its positivism, instrumentalism, and false objectivism, Richard Bernstein resurrected Aristotle's *praxis* (the idea that politics was not theory, and therefore not an absolute science, but rather the art of deciding at the time what to do in complex situations). He also resurrected Dilthey's Kulturwissenschaft (the systematic argument that the human sciences were completely and essentially distinct from the natural sciences, and that the attempt to use natural scientific methodology in social sciences was fundamentally misleading and erroneous) in order to show that there is something fundamentally wrong with putting human activity on a quantitative grid. This is a new philosophy, a new anthropology: the study of human beings which is not positivistic, not instrumentalist, not strictly structuralist (like Althusser's theories), and makes no universal claims of objectivity. This new anthropology rejects the notion that a complete understanding of human activity may ignore the self-conception and self-description of involved people. In this way, positivism, the idea that we are able to recognize nomological patterns in human activity, is rejected. Similarly, the idea that science ought primarily to understand human activity in order to change or direct it is rejected. This approach is not strictly structuralist because while the critique is aided by structuralisms in finding those who benefit from and those who suffer by virtue of their position in societal structures and patterns, the nomological aspect of Marxist structuralism is often rejected. In other words, this approach demands a sensitivity to structures in society which are not apparent, lying as they do beneath the surface. (This is in fact Levi-Strauss' definition, where he says his approach stemmed from a synthesis of geology and Marxism and culminated in the image that a good structuralist would recognize simple, hidden, underground forces creating complex, surface, visible social phenomena).

Moving toward a full, interpretative description of society, many of the thinkers in this new movement appropriated Weber as a founding father of social science. Because Weber's work is partly a response to the nomological, grand theorizing of Marxism, his interpretative sociology is seen by some to contribute to non-positive, non-instrumental, non-structural analysis. Thus Geertz and others espousing a "thick description" employ some Weberian concepts. But there are two major criticisms of Weber. The first is that Weber's

theory is overly individualistic (and thus subject to a Marxist critique which takes Weberian analysis as simply the case of the bourgeoisie justifing themselves and their wealth unscientifically). The second is that his concepts are often analytically vague (such as his ideal types). This second criticism is especially damaging to Parsonian structural-functionalism, which revolves around supposedly unambiguous conceptualizations. About Talcott Parsons, Ilyas Ba-Yunus notes that his conceptualizations serve the interests of those seeking to maintain the *status quo*. Furthermore, this approach equates modernization with Westernization; *i.e.*, industrial institutions cannot be developed and maintained without a quick emergence of *institutions* which characterize Western societies– for instance, materialism, secularism, democracy, and devotion to work.[10]

Into this arena of philosophical debate enter Habermas and Foucault. As the postwar leader of the Frankfurt School, Habermas tries to counter forces of totalitarianism from the right (fascism) and from the left (communism). His project is to direct society to free the oppressed people who were identified by Marx without engendering a totalitarian state repressing other people and to encourage freedom of thought without allowing another dominating reign of an epistemology which is presuppositionless-full. As the torch bearer (despite his protestations) of the French radical left (although with his share of critics), Foucault tries to identify the forces which created the present *episteme* and to unravel meaning previously silenced by this *episteme*. If one goal sits at the top of the agenda here, it is probably the attempt to understand the relationship between knowledge and power (or interests) and the fleshing out of social designs which would prevent oppression (be *contra* power) but still be true to knowledge. Their failure lies, in the end, in their positive view of philosophy (positive because it assumes that philosophy must fit human nature) which starts off skewed with an inadequate understanding of human nature. Let us now approach in more detail Habermas and then Foucault, with special attention to their views of human nature. My thesis is that Habermas and Foucault do not extend their radical, anarchic perspectives far enough to realize that, although they have rejected the pitiful, limited, distorted god of Europe, they are not able to say that God is dead. While slightly better than the fanatics of Progress and Technology, they ignore the richness of traditional society. For Foucault, this is more damaging: Foucault could not unravel the meaning and unsilence the millions upon millions of voices which affirm, and still affirm, the unity of God and the complete example of His Prophet Muḥammad (ṢAAS).

Perhaps the most visible theory of philosophy, and one very prone to attack, was logical positivism, and it is against this theory that the radical

[10]Ilyas Ba-Yunus, *Social and Natural Sciences*, op cit., p. 25.

or anarchic critiques attained sophistication. In essence a coldly rational, exploitative theory, logical positivism was attacked by those intellectuals who strove to locate meaning in human practice and activity. Richard J. Bernstein returns to Aristotle's conception of ethics, and especially the primacy of *praxis* leading to well-tempered reflection (*phronesis*). Ethical behavior, in this scheme, is not a "science," but is instead an approach to practice. The truth of things ethical is therefore not objectively apparent and is also not subject to scientific, quantitative methodology. Rather, the truth of things is to be found in the pursuit of the golden mean through practice, using mature self-reflection.

An entire movement, called post-modernism, attempts to rebuild the academic fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology using these insights. One scholar describes post-modern anthropology's foundation thusly:

> Discourse is the maker of the world, not its mirror. . . . It ends the separation of word and world-created by writing and sustained by language-as-logos, that "univocal picture" protected in word from the standpoint of the all-seeing transcendental ego whose real message is that the world is a fable.[11]

A technique of discourse is then *praxis*. The Frankfurt School takes this concept of *praxis* and applies to it a neo-Marxian perspective. In such a perspective, *praxis* is that struggle for emancipation which only comes through action, because the elites have co-opted science, theory, indeed the entire *episteme*. Accordingly, a conclusion reached is that if theory and science work to reinforce the status quo, then those who wish to become emancipated must find their truth through the struggle for autonomy and responsibility.

For Aristotle, *praxis* is an approach to fields of study or endeavor that applies when *theoria* is inappropriate. Bernstein adds to Aristotle by drawing on twentieth century phenomenology and hermeneutics, insisting that in fact *praxis* has the same status as *theoria*. Bernstein makes this argument drawing from Dilthey's insistence that the study of human culture is ontologically different from the study of physical nature. In this perspective, Dilthey's *Naturwissenschaft* simply requires theory, and therefore is to be judged according to the criteria of theory, while *Kulturwissenschaft*, which requires practice, must be judged with the criteria of practice. But the pervasiveness of theory in society, and the belittling of practice and human meaning, prods some neo-Marxists to identify theory as part of the superstructure of ideology and therefore see practice, not theory, as liberating and emancipatory. While Marxists generally stress technological fetters repressing workers, neo-Marxists

[11]Steven A. Tyler, *Post-modern Anthropology*, 1986, p. 23.

bring out the idea of psychic fetters silencing and making incompetent all non-elites.

The linguistic revolution of Noam Chomsky[12] fundamentally questioned the assumption that words (de Saussure's paroles) uttered are drawn from a storehouse of language (de Saussure's langue). Instead Chomsky argues that people have an innate knowledge, some kind of world-ordering technique for which it is possible to write a universal grammar. From this innate knowledge, competent speakers continually make new words and new phrases. Political activism is then seen as the way people, through language and social interaction, create a new world. Through practice and activity people question presuppositions and myths, create new myths, and socially create what is truth.

Habermas' project has been described as a hermeneutic/phenomenological view focusing on communicative interaction. Habermas believes that in communicative interaction, as one scholar writes,

> social actors achieve an intersubjective understanding of themselves and of their world. In addition, communicative interaction is the means by which people establish mutually agreed-upon criteria for determining ideals.[13]

The methodological cornerstone of this system is a presuppositionless epistemology.

Habermas transcends the bane of systematic philosophers – the hermeneutic vicious circle – first by noting that all previous epistemologies begin with a presupposition, a belief that there are *a priori* concepts with innate validity. But this positive belief is harmful and repressive. Instead, Habermas transcends the hermeneutic circle by asking that societies choose presuppositions which are continuously and freely debated. One scholar explains that Habermas

> is arguing that the domain object (facts) themselves are intersubjective meanings constituted in a sociocultural matrix which must be interpreted by social action.[14]

Habermas recognizes the idea that there are structures of inequality. He recognizes the need for praxis to get at truth. Systematic philosophies always

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[12]Noam Chomsky is also a champion of human rights, including the rights of Palestinians. He has been a vigorous critic of U.S. state power in Vietnam, Central America, and occupied Palestine.

[13]Sabia and Wallulis, eds. *Changing Social Science: Critical Theory and Other Critical Perspectives* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1983) p. 143.

[14]Dickens, in Sabia and Wallulis, *Changing Social Science*, op cit., p. 143.

start with incontestable presuppositions, *a priori* statements which do not allow for evaluation. Habermas avoids this problem by allowing society to continually re-evaluate its presuppositions in a free dialogue situation. The truth of things then lies not in some objective methodology, but in the "invitation to debate," in which free society finds relevance for itself.

But while Habermas astutely locates the Western world's theory of knowledge in social theory, and specifically in power relations, he does not disown his Greek and classical European assumptions that there are no fundamentally irreconcilable differences in society. One scholar (Moon) notes that we cannot

> avoid accepting an irreducible plurality of possible value systems. I do not think it possible to show that a consensus on values would necessarily emerge in an ISS (Ideal Speech Situation). The basis of Habermas' argument turns on the idea of "generalizable interests" as a basis for the validity of norms.[15]

Habermas' conception of a realm of non-authoritarian and unconstrained dialogue, similar to Marx's unfettered community society, "an ideal speech situation involving a consensus theory of truth,"[16] assumes that all diversity can be compromised.

Habermas begins one argument in *Erkenntnis und Interesse* with the idea that humans must sustain their life through work and interaction. But there is a "micro" dimension, a psychosocial level, to human beings in society, which for Habermas means that people are subject to Freudian instinctual renunciation. There is also a "macro" dimension of human beings in society, and this is simply the Marxist understanding that relations of production structure society. Habermas emphasizes the distortion such structuring causes to human expression. The macro dimension means that people work and interact under the pathological compulsion of deformed communication, where communication is distorted by relations of production. This necessity of sustaining life, or the interest of self-preservation, necessarily takes the form of the interest of reason. Here is where knowledge and power interest synthesize. For Habermas, then, reason must be freed from both Freudian instinctual problems and distorted relations of production.

Thus both levels, the micro and macro, must be altered. This change, Habermas suggests, only develops through critique and confirms itself through

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[15]Moon, in Sabia and Wallulis, ibid, p. 181.

[16]Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) p. 164.

the practical consequence of critique, becoming thereby *metacritique*. The emancipatory process of freeing social consciousness by allowing for practical discourse "has no pretensions to possess the truth," says one scholar. "It is intended as an invitation to debate."[17]

Habermas distinguishes two levels needing to be altered by debate. The first level is that of naked survival (cold pragmatism), the second sophisticated survival. What appears as naked survival, he argues, is always at its roots a historical phenomenon, a social reality, for it is subject to the criteria of what society intends for itself as the good and true life. As the social forces of production get more sophisticated, the issue is not naked survival, the force driving the organism to adapt to its environment, but rather a complex survival. This argument, distinguishing naked and sophisticated society, seems to borrow from Durkheim's ideas of mechanical and organic solidarity. For Durkheim, societies become increasingly interactive and the division of labor becomes increasingly specialized. A society which divides labor into smaller and smaller, increasingly interdependent parts, and makes the elements (citizens) interact more and more often, should become stable and peaceful. Such a sophisticated society becomes increasingly, in Durkheim's terms, "moral." Of course the proliferation of interactions also serves to remove power and autonomy from the individual and increase state power exponentially. In Samuel P. Huntington's view, this is the process of institutionalization, which in effect is the passive acceptance of decreasing autonomy in the face of Westernization and modernization.

Interests are thereby linked to the function of ego adapting to external conditions through learning processes, initiated into the communication system of social life-situation (*Lebenswelt*) by conflict between instinctual aims and social constraints. This opens up the issue of learning processes. Even assuming that what people learn is correct within their society, on what grounds can it be assumed that what they learn is good for themselves? This also ties into a second criticism of Habermas by Moon which engages E. F. Schumacher's ideas on ecology. Schumacher, in *Small is Beautiful* (politics as if people mattered), contracts traditional society's integration with and respect for nature with modern society's destruction and manipulation of nature for mankind—which only includes highly polluting, aggressive, consumer sections of certain countries.

Believing ontology to be in a state of ruins, Habermas argues that the truth of statements is not in ontology, but is linked to the intention of the good and true life. Hermeneutics therefore needs to be brought into practical, social dialogue. The endeavor of societies ought to be to create a context

[17]Garbis Kortian, *Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Juergen Habermas*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p. 134.

of free dialogue where, through novel uses of language and practice, people become emancipated. But one scholar (Dickens) argues that Habermas has rejected the power of language itself to emancipate. Instead, people in the ideal society would still be unemancipated, even though they all debated freely. Dickens writes that Habermas' revisions fail "to link up with the practical domain of communicative interaction, leaving us with only a communicative reformulation of liberal pluralism."[18] Tied into this idea, that Habermas has not sufficiently provided for emancipation before the debates, is the criticism that a genuine search for human nature seems to be missing. Moon remarks that "our conception of what is in our interests depends upon our conception of the self,"[19] and this conception could very well not be amenable to generalizable interests. From an Islamic perspective though, the conception of self is utterly opposed to that of modern Western epistemologies and thus any "truth" worked out within such societies must be declared a rejection of our nature and *shirk*. The framework Habermas proposes for dialogue is unacceptable. Writing about ecology, Moon argues that "what is in dispute in this case is not different interests but conflicting moral ideals and world-views."[20] Clearly this argument extends to Islamic world-views.

We see, then, that Habermas has successfully challenged the Western *episteme* which represses and exploits and opens the way for imperialism and racism. But even though Habermas is a champion of the left, nevertheless his analysis is simply not radial enough. He does not follow his own criticism far enough. From an Islamic critique, the Muslim thinker extends a critique, which is technically similar to anarchic thought, all the way to the forces which created the scientific framework for the rejection of Divine guidance and the elevation of Man. Habermas concerns himself, in the end, with technical problems of communication. He has not given serious thought to human nature, to traditional society, and—is this asking to much?—to Islam. A great proportion of the world's people are Muslim; Islamic civilization has provided some of the most important scientific discoveries and cultural successes; Islamic thought has contributed to all aspects of human endeavor. Critical social theory remains entrapped in an *episteme* which rejects out of hand, or ignores, vast numbers of silenced people with ages of history and culture. Its violation is not flagrantly racist, imperialist, or exploitative. But, in the end, devastatingly, this critique serves to perpetuate a pernicious intellectual matrix which gives Man lordship, removes all human responsibility, and erects an almost impenetrable wall against prophetic warning. From an Islamic critique, the central responsibility of societies is to inform and prepare

[18]Dickens, in Sabia and Wallulis, *Changing Social Science*, op. cit., p. 154.
[19]Moon, in Sabia and Wallulis, ibid, p. 154.
[20]Moon, in Sabia and Wallulis, ibid, p. 187.

people for eternity and the meeting on the Day of Judgement with God. Not only has modern society completely abdicated its responsibility. Worse still, modern societies obviate the individual who perceives God's signs and remove from that individual all of the terms and vocabularies with which he or she might discuss God's signs. Gai Hasan Eaton explains that in light of the deviation of modern society, no compromise or cooperation is moral. He writes about the comparative and conciliatory approach to modern society that

> what is questionable is the propriety of diluting truth for the sake of meeting error halfway and of applying evolutionary theory to the marks of eternity embedded in the matrix of the temporal world...There is a limit to how far men can go in interpreting the Divine Word in terms of a language from which all the appropriate words have been excluded. If people have gone away from the central place that is their real home, then charity requires that they should be shown the way back. To imagine one can take the centre out of them—while they stay where they are—is folly.[21]

Habermas does not develop the techniques with which to fully critique modern Western epistemologies, but Foucault does. Edward W. Said finds Foucaultian analysis extremely valuable in portraying the discourse of Israel and the West as one which is the second half of Israel's control over Palestinians. By discovering how resistance to genocide, religious persecution, and state power of inhuman dimensions is reduced, in the Israeli-West discourse, to mere anti-Semitism, Said hones the techniques which Palestinians might use to further their cause. Foucault talks to struggles which "are a refusal of the abstraction of economic and ideological state violence which ignores who we are collectively, or individually, and also a refusal of scientific and administrative inquisition which determines who you are."[22] As a silenced people, Palestinians are simply numbers to be controlled. One poem of resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestine especially confirms Foucault's idea: Mahmud Darwish's *Bitāqah Hawīyah*. I find in Foucault a sensitivity to the pernicious trend in the modern world toward a profusion and inundation of state power. Because Foucault's analysis is more radical, because Foucault attempts more than Habermas to unravel silences, he is to be faulted more for his failure to understand the traditional world. The people in the Renaissance believed themselves, rightly, to be a vast distance away from the Middle Ages (the Dark Ages), even though the span of time was measured in decades.

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[21]Gai Hasan Eaton, *The Keys to the Kingdom*, (London: Bodley Head, 1977) page 180.

[22]Michel Foucault, quoted in Karlis Racevskis, *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect*, op. cit., pg. 20.

The period of the middle ages, as Seyyid Hossein Nasr has remarked, was as far away from the Renaissance as it is from the modern world. This inability of Foucault to go beyond the caricature of the "Dark Ages" is inexcusable for someone so skilled at locating the distinctions between a seventeenth century Classical *episteme* and a later modern *episteme*. One critic of Foucault, Baudrillard, engages in a theoretical terrorism designed to "unveil the pretenses, the deceits, and the tautologies of the value systems that constitute Western civilization."[23] Baudrillard argues that Foucault is insufficiently anarchic, that he does not go beyond the "simulacra" of modern society. His argument, Racevskis summarizes, is that modern society depends upon a strategy of simulation, on the production of simulacra—that is, of certain effects of truth intended to hide the fact that truth does not exist. . . . Scandals, such as Watergate, are useful to hide the inherent scandalousness of the entire system."[24]

One theme in Foucault's work is the pervasiveness of an *episteme* which has in a way created a concept of Man which is limited by a narrow, power-interest reason. This narrow, strictly empirical conception of Man is called an anthropology. Foucault sees that this power-interest has distorted language and created modern, empirical, rational Man; when this *episteme* slides away, language will re-emerge and Man will disappear. Foucault does not see what comes next, but he is very hopeful that human beings will once again be open to different ideas and different ways of communicating. In this section, I argue that Foucault's analysis locates well the forces which created this present modern *episteme* and which maintain it, but that his ignorance of the vast numbers of people in the world who are competent linguistically, in their Islam, prevents him from seeing beyond the modern world either to the traditional world or to, *in shā' Allah*, a next world where God's guidance is heeded.

Let us examine his *Les mots et les choses*, "words and things." From Foucault's historical (really "archaeological") analysis comes a conclusion that Man is a recent invention. "Taking a relatively short chronology and a narrowly defined geographic area—Europe since the 16th century—we can be sure that man is in it a recent invention."[25] Foucault then says that this invention of Man has only occurred in the modern world. One of the keys to this *episteme* is the notion of Same, the words correspond to things, and that if things are restricted to empirical and "reasonable" things, then language is also restricted to empirical and "reasonable" things. Intuition, spirituality, mysticism, madness—all these aspects of human existence are confined to

[23]Karlis Racevskis, ibid,, p. 151.

[24]Karlis Racevskis, ibid, p. 160.

[25]Michel Foucault, Les mots et les choses, op. cit., p. 261, my translation: the following excerpts are from this same passage.

things empirical and reasonable which language can discuss. The confinement, then, is both a prison and a silencer. He writes (with some sarcasm) that

> it is not around him and his secrets which, for a long time, in obscurity, knowledge has slithered. In fact, among all the mutations which have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, of difference, of characters, of equivalents, of words-in short, in the middle of all the events of that great history of the Same–just one, that which had begun one and a half centuries ago and which is perhaps about to close, has let the figure of man appear.[25]

What has allowed this strange and ordered concept of Man to appear "was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge," meaning the very structure of epistemology itself had to be shaken to allow for a confined, imprisoning conception of Man. "Man is an invention which the archaeology of our thought demonstrates easily to be of recent date," he writes. And indeed, from an Islamic perspective, the Renaissance, the industrial revolution, the capitalization of society itself, all of these changes are seen as aberrations of society. The structure of what is believed to be true changed drastically and harmfully, and the result of these changes is a conception of Man which abdicates responsibility and rejects divine guidance. For Foucault, the result of those changes is a limited, oppressed Man; for the Muslim, this criticism is extended to humankind's nature as created by God and invested with tremendous responsibility.

Continuing in this same passage, Foucault writes that

> if these frameworks were to come to disappear as they appeared, if by some event of which we can no more than sense as a possibility, but of which we understand at the moment now neither the form nor the promise, (if) they would slide away, as happened at the turn of the 18th century with the foundation of classical thought–then we can well bet that man will be erased, like a face made in sand at the edge of sea.[25]

Truly the conception of man is like a face made in the sand, and the sea will rise to wipe out all traces of it. With the ephemeral and misguided conception of man erased, wiped off forever, perhaps the possibility will arise for the Islamic reintegration of human thought and endeavor, fulfilling the role of *khilāfah al ard* and all the responsibility this implies.

Foucault also examines the inherent contradictions and failures of an "anthropology." Although Foucault ignores revelation, he recognizes a

knowledge beyond the narrow confines of empirical reality. He says "It is without doubt not possible to give transcendental value to empirical contents, nor to displace to the side a constituent subjectivity, without giving way, at least silently, to an anthropology."[26] What has happened inevitably, he argues, is that lowering or reducing things with transcendental value to merely their empirical contents leads to an "anthropology." If the reduction is implicit or hidden, then it leads "silently" to an anthropology, which he then defines as

> a way of thinking where the rightful limits of understanding (and as a consequence, of all empirical knowledge) are at the same time the concrete forms of existence, precisely such as are given in the same empirical form.

This process is a vicious circle, because the set of all knowable knowledge is reduced to that which is empirically accessible, and then this limited knowledge is identified as the complete "describer" of Man's concrete form of existence. The "signified" must be empirical; this reduces the "signifier" to empirical bounds. Language is thus distorted to allow for this travesty of materialism, where supposedly everything reasonable is empirical and can therefore be described empirically. This critique is extended, in the Islamic critique, as we saw in Gai Hasan Easton's statement that "there is a limit to how far men can go in interpreting the divine Word in terms of a language from which all the appropriate words have been excluded."

A final passage from Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* reiterates some of the ideas we considered above. He writes that

> all this modern *episteme*—that which was formed toward the end of the 18th century and serves still as the positive base of our knowledge, that which has constituted the singular mode of being of man and the possibility of empirical understanding—all this *episteme* was linked to the disappearance of Discourse and its monotonous reign, to the fall of language at the side of objectivity and to its multiple reappearances. If this same language resurges now with more and more insistence in a unity which we must, but cannot yet, think, isn't it the signal that this entire configuration will fall, and that man is about to perish, as the being of language shines more strongly at our horizon?[27]

The fall of this entire configuration may inaugurate a worldview which allows

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[26]Michel Foucault, ibid, p. 261, my translation.
[27]Michel Foucault, ibid, p. 397, my translation.

for divine guidance; or it may inaugurate yet another distortion of human nature and the integration of knowledge and revelation. But God knows best.

For Foucault, the language of this entire configuration imprisons people as surely as a jail confines its inmates. And indeed, this is a world where sexuality, diet, sleep, leisure, and work are all confined through an erroneous and pernicious configuration of knowledge, which increases state power and decreases individual autonomy. The vast machinery of repression which distorts language and knowledge is most visibly manifested in the prison, where inmates must eat, sleep, rest, and work according to the regulations of the state, and where their sexuality and family life is negated by an all-powerful state. In fact, the modern world is worse than such a prison, because even the transcendental or spiritual is controlled and silenced. By reducing the unseen world to material dimensions, and thus silencing it, state power and control extends to the spiritual realm too. There can be no spiritual patience for someone physically restricted if the very possibility of spiritual succor is denied and silenced.

State power is not a new phenomenon, and below I argue that the Sunnah of the Companions (RAA) provides the basis for identifying political power which works against Islam. But the pervasiveness, and hidden, covert, aspects of state power may be new. A traditional society, with its large portion of intelligent generalists who have studied Islamic law, its decentralized bases of power, and its firm commitment to serve God, has many techniques to confront and prevent centralized state power. But now, with the sole focus of societies resting squarely on Man, the entire configuration of knowledge works toward centralized state power. Success, which must be measured materially in a material worldview, only comes about through participation in a bureaucratic, centralized state power. Education also requires thorough service to this power. You would have to be mad, unsuccessful, or unreasonable—in the terms of this modern *episteme*—to raise a child with the values vouchsafed by Islam for fifteen hundred years, indeed by Islam since the first human being appeared. In Islam, rightful categorizations are the individual, the family, and the Ummah. The modern nation-state is nothing but an extension of the modern *episteme's* method of centralizing power and preventing knowledge from including the unseen realm. Kalim Siddiqui in *Social and Natural Sciences* writes that

> all nation-states are the product of Western civilization and its period of colonial dominance. Their purposes, structures, and behavior patterns are all alike whether the nation-state happens to be in Europe. . . ., in Africa, Asia, or America.[28]

[28]Kalim Siddiqui, in *Social and Natural Sciences*, op cit., p. 23.

The level of the nation-state is one inadequate for solving the political problems of this century, especially those of nuclear proliferation, ecology, and ethnicity. The resurgence of local politics, religious revival, and regional cooperation signal the dissatisfaction people feel with the nation-state. The nation-state is not recognized in Islam and in fact detracts from the potential power of the Ummah. Although this idea is acknowledged by many Islamic thinkers and revivalists (Sayyid Qutb, Mawlānā Mawdūdī, and others), the pervasiveness of the modern *episteme* has not always been clearly seen. Left thinkers accede that it is not possible to run a Marxist economy in a capitalist world-system. How much greater is the resistance of the modern world to the establishment of the Ummah as the leader of human societies, or to the implementation of God's law in society, or to the stubborn refusal of Muslims to cede?

Islam gives tremendous power and responsibility to the Muslimūn and Muslimāt. No man or woman must (or may!) bow to another. Concurrently, Islam requires cohesiveness and cooperation among the members of the Ummah. Neither individual autonomy (in submission to God) nor the Ummah's social cohesiveness may be sacrificed, neither aspect of Islam may be, even temporarily, forfeited for "worthy" ends. I find this concurrent, integrated facet of Islam eloquently described by 'AbdulḤamīd AbūSulaymān in *Social and Natural Sciences*. Speaking about the second aspect of Islam, that of the integration of the Ummah and its importance, he mentions that "students of history and political theory have never succeeded in correctly understanding the cause and meaning of Abu Bakr's decision"[29] to fight the backsliders. "When tribesmen rebelled against his authority and stopped the payment of *zakāt* to the central authority of the Islamic state, the question for him was not one of faith. . . . For Abū Bakr, the question concerned the social system." Many people who have no idea how Abū Bakr (RAA) lived, see the Ridda War as some personal plan for aggrandizement. In fact, Abū Bakr (RAA) lived a life which was a model of piety, quiet reflection and devotion, and firm understanding of the duties incumbent upon an Islamic leader. He succeeded in convincing the Companions that God required an Islamic leader to maintain the social and political strength of the Ummah. Abū Dharr al Ghifarī (RAA), as 'AbdulḤamīd AbūSulaymān recounts, embodied the vision of Madinah with his statement that "All wealth, especially and including the new-conquered wealth, belongs to Allah." This statement opposed Mu'āwiyah of the Quraysh tribe, and

> the confrontation led to the revolts of al-Husayn, Ibn al-Zubayr, Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakīyah, and Zayd ibn 'Ali, all of which were brutally crushed. Practically all great thinkers of Islam in

[29] AbdulḤamīd AbūSulaymān, in *Social and Natural Sciences*, ibid p. 109.

the first century and a half following the *Rashidūn* caliphates were alienated from the state leadership and sympathetic to the opposition.[30]

The imams who strengthened the study of the Sunnah al Nabī (ṢAAS) met with torture, imprisonment, even execution. As members of the 'ulama they were charged with the criterion of Prophetic practice. With this criterion they sought to restrain rulers and centralized power. The opposition to state power, which includes a clear vision of its pervasiveness, and the study and implementation of Prophetic practice is a duty especially required of the *'ālim*, who is required to first describe the modern world and then to apply the criterion of the Qur'an *(al Furqān)* and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ṢAAS).

[30] AbdulḤamīd AbūSulaymān, ibid, p. 105.