

# *The Gate of Ijtihad: An Introduction to the Study of Epistemological Bias*

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## WHAT IS BIAS?

**H**UMAN BEINGS' lives consist of gestures, deeds, behaviors, incidents as well as thousands of other taken-for-granted acts. Apart from such basic physiological functions as breathing, for example, everything else done has its own significance and is the outcome of a (conscious or unconscious) selection representing the adoption of some and the rejection of others. A few examples will illustrate the foregoing.

### *Examples*

- In some cultures, only two or three colors are distinguished, and therefore the natives can see only these colors. Some other cultures are not familiar with the concept of the Self and when a person is asked about his life story, he usually relates his grandfather's. Cultures also identify different levels of causality (material, mystical). To utter such a sentence as "Look at the snow," an Inuit child has fifty different words for "snow," each describing a different form or case of snow. That is why such a child would actually "see" in the snow more than what a "snow specialist" from a different culture, using a different language, would.

A hurricane hit an Inuit tribe and a family was dispersed for a few hours. One woman was missing for a year and when ultimately found, she was sewing herself a dress. Despite the hard life she had to live and despite the fact she was living all alone, she did not forget to embroider her dress as is the tradition in her culture. This means that such a 'primitive' woman discovered intuitively that the aesthetic component is necessary for the

welfare of human beings. Otherwise, why would she have done such a thing when all she needed was physical warmth and survival? A utilitarian pragmatist would describe her behavior as backward and a mere waste of time.

- A friend of mine lived in an African country for some years. One day he was visited by four friends who, rather than chatting with him, just sat silently without uttering a word. After a while, he started to worry and wondered what they wanted. “Nothing,” one of them said. “We’ve just come to be in your presence.” In that part of the world, it seems, silence is considered more eloquent than words. So, my friend learned a lesson about the function of silence and, since then, has become wiser.

- With other tourists, I stood before the barbed wire wall separating the two halves of the Egyptian and Palestinian town of Rafah. The occupied part of the sad town was under curfew, which turned it into a ghost town. The only visible sign of life was three Israeli armored cars moving together. A fourth luxury car would be speeding by every now and then. Impressed by the scene, a smart journalist from Cairo remarked, “Look at the Israeli armored cars! They’re moving in perfect discipline; and the military governor’s car never stops checking on them. The Israelis’ efficiency is really admirable.” An Egyptian soldier guarding the border gate overheard the conversation and burst out laughing. “The Israeli armored cars move together out of fear,” he corrected. “Despite the curfew, everybody is still scared to death of the Palestinians,” the soldier added. “And the military governor is in more panic than they are, which explains why his car runs at this mad speed.”

Then the Egyptian soldier went on relating stories about the heroic behavior of the oppressed people of Rafah, who resist the occupation and support each other through acts of mercy and collaboration. During the curfew, one household runs out of flour, so they throw their neighbors a paper ball message which is received by another family, which in turn throws it to another till it lands in a house that has a surplus of flour. Immediately then, a sack of flour flies from their house to another till it lands in the house of the family that needs it. Pointing to the gate we stood by, the guard said, “As for this gate, it is Saladdin’s Gate through which he passed to liberate Jerusalem centuries ago.” What a difference between inner defeat transforming everything into a sign of downfall, and inner victory transforming the very same objects into signs of triumph. What a

difference between bias in favor of disgrace and humiliation, and bias in favor of honor and dignity!

- During my tenure in the Department of English Language and Literature, King Saud University, a faculty member presented research he had done for promotion to the rank of professor. A number of his writings dealt with the image of the Arab in Jewish American novels with explicit Zionist attitudes. In its pursuit of objectivity, the University decided to send the papers to Arab and non-Arab scholars for evaluation. An American stated that Zionism is only a “buzzword,” and declined to evaluate the papers. This was his way of saying that there is no such thing as Zionism, which would be a viewpoint worthy of consideration had the children of the intifada (who lost eyes, limbs, and family members) not found it difficult to accept. Their wounds are not mere buzz wounds.

- When I obtained my Ph.D. from Rutgers University in the USA, my academic supervisor David Weimer was especially enthusiastic about my dissertation. It dealt with a subject considered then quite novel, namely the end of history and of man. In my research, I contended that the problematic of the “death of history” (as I called it then) is implicit in the materialist Western outlook. Then I compared William Wordsworth, with his historical imagination, to Walt Whitman, with his anti-historical imagination, concluding that while in the USA Whitman is called “the poet of American democracy,” he is in fact the poet of dictatorship and fascism and an advocate of the death of history and of man.

With high recommendations, my supervisor sent my dissertation to a number of publishers. They all refused to publish the work, sometimes for comical reasons and sometimes for no reason at all. In his response, the representative of one particular university press said that the research was a unique academic work, pioneering in the field as an integrated comparative work on romantic criticism in England and the USA. However, he concluded by saying that his press would not publish it because the author of the dissertation had criticized one of the American sacred cows (meaning Walt Whitman), which was “naturally” unacceptable behavior.

- On its front page, an Arab newspaper published an eye-catching headline about an accident involving a train and a car in India, which caused the death of more than 50 people and the injury of 100. On the society page of the same issue, statistics were presented to the effect that

one-third of all children in England are born out of wedlock. And one is tempted to ask: How could a news item about a car accident be more important than a news item concerning one-third of British babies who were deprived of the right to caring parents? Why should the first item be put on the front page while the latter is relegated to a humble social corner together with the news about marriage and divorce of a sex queen or a movie starlet?

- When white colonialists invaded Africa, they considered the naked women they saw there a sure sign of a primitive, underdeveloped life style (at a time when Western women wore very elaborate clothes covering themselves from head to toe except at formal evening receptions or dinner parties). The same Western people now regard nudist camps as a sign of open-mindedness and a high level of development. This means that in less than half a century the Western mentality shifted abruptly from one extreme to the other, from bias in favor of covering up to bias against it. That is why many Western women now wear revealing styles of dress and those who object to this, even from a purely aesthetic point of view, are considered old-fashioned and narrow-minded.

#### DEFINITION OF BIAS

Every human behavior has cultural significance and represents some epistemological paradigm and perspective. A paradigm is a mental abstract picture, an imaginary construct, and a symbolic representation of reality that results from a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. The mind assembles some features from reality, rejecting some and keeping others, rearranging them in an order of priority to make them correspond to reality. According to the nature of the paradigm, it can exaggerate those elements which it deems essential and underplay all other elements. A materialist economic paradigm, for example, excludes non-economic, non-materialistic factors, whereas a humanist paradigm would include other elements and factors.

Each paradigm has an epistemological dimension. In other words, behind each paradigm – the process of inclusion, exclusion, reconstruction and exaggeration – there are intrinsic criteria, a set of beliefs, hypotheses, presuppositions, axioms and answers to the total and ultimate questions<sup>1</sup> that make up its deeply-rooted fundamentals.

The dictionary defines ‘bias’ as advocacy of a particular point of view. The word *mutahayyizan*<sup>2</sup> is mentioned in the Qur’an (8:16). Ancient dictionaries disregard the term and modern ones disagree on its meaning. *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ*, a dictionary published by the Arabic Language Academy, defines bias as ‘joining one team against another’. It includes the meaning of adopting some people’s view and rejecting that of others. It is this definition that is adopted in this paper. However, the concept of bias will be made clearer through naming some of its salient characteristics.

#### BIAS IS INEVITABLE

A. Bias is associated with the very structure of the human mind, which does not record events precisely and accurately, with no selectivity or creativity, as a machine would do. The human mind, as noted earlier, is not passive, but rather vital and highly selective. Perception is not random but it is a process that follows a specific pattern whose aspects can be partly identified.

B. Bias is organically bound up with language and is also language-specific. No human language contains all the vocabulary needed to describe reality with all its components. This means that choice is inevitable. It has been proven that each language is capable of describing its own reality more effectively than others. The modes of expressing the idea of time differ from one language to another. Moreover, metaphors are part of the very structure of language (e.g., eye of the needle, leg of the chair, foot of the mountain, etc.). It is noticeable that the signifier and the signified overlap; the relative constancy of signifiers (as part of the fixed linguistic system) is also observable, as well as the rapid change of many signified at a degree that exceeds that of signifiers. The significance behind all of this lies in the fact that human language is not an unbiased tool, unlike the language of algebra and geometry, which can adequately describes the world of unbiased facts and things, yet fails to express the simplest human feelings.

C. This means that bias is a basic component of the human *donnée* and is associated with the humanness of man and woman, i.e. with the very existence of the human being as a non-natural creature that cannot be reduced to the general laws of nature. Whatever is human includes within it a degree of individuality and uniqueness and, therefore, bias. If culture is

defined as “all that the human being has created (in contrast with what is already given by nature),” then the cultural aspect is necessarily biased. At times, even natural objects embody bias, since it is man who discovers them, even if by chance. This is by no means haphazard but rather the result of an active human perception. When people discover a natural object, they give it a name, i.e., enter it into the network of human knowledge and transfers it from the world of nature into the world of humankind.

#### BIAS IS INEVITABLE, BUT NOT ULTIMATE

The inevitability of bias (and the fact that it is bound up with what is human and cultural) should by no means be a reason for grief or frustration. If disentangled from its negative sense, bias is not at all a defect. The problematic of bias can then be re-evaluated from a different perspective. Thus, instead of placing my bias over against the bias of the other, bias can be re-defined as the inevitability of human uniqueness and the possibility of freedom of choice. This implies a paradox, it should be admitted; yet such is human life. This paradox is a framework for what I term “common humanity,” as distinct from the “one humanity” advocated by the Enlightenment.

Common humanity is the human potential which is part of our *fitrah* (instinct). However, when it is realized, its realization differs from one individual to another, from one people to another, from one period to another, and from one civilization to another, both in form and content. Hence, both potential unity and the inevitable rich variation that does not negate people’s common humanity. Human beings were created by one God with a single *fitrah* in common. The Creator, however, wished that they not be one nation, but rather a variety of peoples and tribes, each with its particular set of choices. This does not necessarily mean that they should be in conflict with each other, nor does it mean that the one has to negate the other; after all, the possibility of communication and mutual understanding is always there. “Had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community” (Qur’an, 42:8); yet He wished that we be different so that we might compete and communicate. Despite its limits, human language is capable of achieving successful communication and of expressing truth that can help overcome bias and build epistemological paradigms which, though they arise from a particular cultural

experience, can render communication both successful and fair to all concerned.

#### SELF AND OTHER

The Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS)<sup>3</sup> was an Arab but was sent to the whole of humankind, and that is why he warned against pride, xenophobia and ethnocentrism: “There is no superiority for either Arab or non-Arab except by virtue of one’s piety.” This is a non-negotiable moral absolute. The identity of a non-Arab is different from that of an Arab and their biases are, therefore, different. Yet there is a common ultimate point of reference, namely, piety. That is what we mean by saying that bias is inevitable but not ultimate. It is inevitable in the sense that it cannot be avoided, but not ultimate in the sense that it is the final destiny; rather, the ultimate is the common humanity and the moral values that precede any form of difference or bias.

#### FORM OF BIAS

1. There is bias in favor of what one believes to be the truth. This is commitment. When one is biased towards the truth, one is enthusiastic and motivated, but is ready to subject himself and his judgments to the value system and to the truths that exist outside him. In this case, one is also ready to test the result of his search, for he does not believe that his (biased) judgment is the final absolute verdict, for it is, first and foremost, an *ijtihad*; and of this he is quite aware.

2. Bias in favor of falsehood can take different forms. Bias toward the Self is one example. When people make themselves the only acceptable point of reference, the idea of a transcendental truth is dropped, and they cannot be judged from any point external to them. This form of bias is associated with bias for power, which means that when one is victorious, one enforces one’s own will; if one is defeated, one becomes a pragmatist who accepts the rules of the victorious Other, without necessarily accepting the truthfulness of the other’s statements or judgments. Power is the only arbiter, and therefore such a defeated pragmatist impatiently awaits a change in the balance of power in his/her favor. Therefore pragmatic accommodation, far from bringing about peace and harmony, results in endless conflict.

3. Some biases are explicit and conscious, others are implicit and unconscious. Conscious bias is that of someone who intentionally chooses an ideology, sees the world through it, then propagates it and mobilizes in its favor. Unconscious bias, by contrast, happens when someone internalizes an epistemological system with all its premises and priorities, and unconsciously sees the world only through it.

Explicit bias manifests itself in cheap propaganda. In effect, the recipient of such propaganda can readily identify its claims. The recipient of implicit bias, by contrast, is unconsciously influenced by it. There are instances, however, when conscious bias is presented in an implicit way, with the recipient being heedless of it. An example of this is in commercial advertisements, in which the extremely conscious advertisers promote their product by, for example, forging some association between sex and their commodities, which leaves a deep impact on the innocent, unaware recipients who are treated as if they were Pavlov's dog.

The same thing happens on the political and moral levels. Western movies implicitly pander to numerous Hollywood-biased values, such as violence and suspense. Such values stem from a Darwinian perspective and would be revolting were they presented directly. Westerns and Tom and Jerry cartoons, for example, present these same values in the form of "innocent" entertainment, as if they do not embody any values or any barbarous epistemological paradigm.

4. Bias can be classified according to its degree of acuteness; it might be acute and explicit as is the case with socialist realist fiction, which always depicts the working class as victorious whereas the bourgeois hand is always declining, vanishing and being replaced by the rising forces of the proletariat. There are, nevertheless, bourgeois intellectuals who are aware of the inevitable laws of history, who shake off their class affiliations and throw in their lot with the working class. Such fiction always ends with the inevitable triumph of that revolutionary alliance between the workers, the peasants and the intellectuals, who believe in the ultimate and inevitable victory of the proletariat.

Bias is not always this explicit, of course. One might be biased in favor of a certain doctrine and support it, yet realize the difficulties involved in its application. Degrees of bias differ from one field to another. Different disciplines show various degrees of bias. It all depends on how closely related a given sphere of life or science is to the cultural identity of a com-

munity. Thus it is strongest in the fields of religious beliefs, traditions and human relationships represented in arts, literature and thought. Fields representing an average degree of bias include technology and industry. In such “pure” sciences as physics, mathematics and biology, bias is at its minimum.

5. There is also bias within bias, that is, when a researcher adopts one specific view within a comprehensive epistemological paradigm, which results in a sort of double bias. For example, great stress is placed in the Arab world on French and British theories of sociology while their German counterparts are ignored, despite the fact that all three belong to the tradition of Western sociology. The bias here is not toward Western sociological theory in general, but to one specific trend within it.

6. There is also the inverse; that is, when a researcher is biased in favor of a number of contradictory ideas belonging to incompatible epistemological systems, which are indiscriminately adopted due to a lack of any deep epistemological outlook. Some Arab poets, for example, adopt some of the central premises of the Enlightenment calling for the use of reason, adopting a very optimistic outlook. However, when some of them move from the realm of theory to the realm of literary creativity, they write pessimistic modernist poetry, stressing irrationality and the absurdity of reality. Similarly, a Western secular writer may admire some of the religious ideas of Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism, espousing all of them, yet without realizing some of the basic differences between these religious systems.

7. There is partial bias and total bias. An example of the former may be seen in a Western writer who admires a particular Oriental writer or artistic style, but who does not fully comprehend the underlying epistemological paradigm. An interesting example can be found in Arthur Fitzgerald who translated into English the *Rubāʿiyyāt* of ʿUmar al-Khayyām, the renowned Persian poet. Fitzgerald selected from Persian Islamic civilization what suited his taste as a Victorian artist and found something interesting about this Persian poet, who felt alienated from his world. Another example can be found in some Arab poets who admired Shakespeare and translated many of his plays and poems, selecting from among his ideas what matched their taste without adopting his vision of the universe; one of them, for example, appended a happy ending to Hamlet in which virtue is rewarded as it should be in a just, non-tragic world.

Partial bias may be seen in the self-confident individuals who operate within the framework of their own vision and stand on its grounds. They have specific biases and select from the world what they need to support them. They hold the scales in their hands and fear no imported ideas or objects, but weigh what they import on their scales, according to their own criteria. These people are not against borrowing from other cultures and can benefit from them. What they are really against is having their own concepts weighed for them by scales thrust into their hands by others, talking about themselves in the third person, or closing the gate of *ijtihad* regarding the Other. These people move within an open and flexible framework rather than within a closed and inflexible one. Their ideas stem from their own intellectual and cultural grounds and they never submit to what one Western thinker has termed the “imperialism of categories,” meaning to import from the Other not only some of their views and contributions but even their basic analytical categories and vision of the universe, and therefore to weigh matters on the scales of the Other rather than on their own.

One’s own *ijtihad*, stemming from the Self, does not contradict the scientific outlook, for natural science does not deal with totalities, absolutes, or final ends (the scales), but rather with parts and procedures (the weighed), leaving values, truth, and ultimate ends for human beings to determine according to their own beliefs. Those who submit completely to the Other are, in fact, importers of others’ choices, visions and analytical categories; natural science neither encourages nor prohibits that.

8. One of the most important new forms of bias which has no parallel in previous cultures is what might be called “the bias of our material reality against us.” Western colonialists have penetrated the Muslim homeland, destroyed the houses that expressed Muslim cultural identity and needs and, with their architectural designs, done away with the ancient cities that reflected the Islamic value system. In their place, other cities were built that manifested the colonialists’ own values such as speed, competence, and competitiveness and that helped them control the colonized. Streets have been widened in order to cope with the many fast cars that race down them, a case which presupposes the existence of cars as a concrete necessity and final *donnée* (given fact).

Muslims might have built cities on the assumption that there are more pedestrians than car passengers and that there are more public than pri-

vate transport users. Modern cities with their wide roads embody an administrative view that suggests the need for a powerful administrative center (or national central government) with control over all its subjects. This is why wide roads in European cities of the 17th Century used to be called in Latin *via militares*, i.e., meaning military roads, because they made every populated area more easily accessible to government forces which could then suppress and “re-orient” the people whenever necessary, keeping them in subjection to what the authorities deemed to be the “public interest” (which in fact meant the “supreme interests of the state or the colonialist”). Narrow roads and street alleys, let it be remembered, only allowed the passage of people rather than vehicles or military forces.

Modern Muslim houses are designed with materials which allow the entrance of a maximum amount of sunlight which, in this hot weather of ours, necessitates the use of air conditioning! Consequently, there arises the need for a large number of commodities that have become part of the “necessities of modern life.” If one does not use a car, one’s time (and life) is lost; if one cannot afford an air conditioner, one sweats profusely and one’s productivity level plummets.

The present workday in the Arab world shows a distinct bias in favor of Western culture (from which it was adopted). For Muslim culture, it would be more suitable to start the working day immediately after the dawn prayer<sup>4</sup> and end at noon. People could then socialize in the late afternoon and go to bed immediately after the evening prayers.<sup>5</sup> I am not forwarding this proposal as “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” I am simply suggesting that we study its feasibility, taking into consideration the resulting saved energy and the psychological comfort that is likely to result from the compatibility between biological and ecological rhythms.<sup>6</sup> Research should tell us whether such a working day scheme is workable. The expected result might be controversial, but there is certainly no need to give in to the imported system which is biased against our own interests and bio- and eco- rhythms. It might be an instance of liberating the Self from dependence on the Other; creativity might then flow.

#### BIAS IN FAVOR OF THE WESTERN CULTURAL PARADIGM

Bias toward the Western cultural paradigm is one of the most widespread forms of bias worldwide. Here are some examples.

• When I arrived in the United States in 1963 to attend a summer course at Yale University, I was invited to watch a Shakespearean play. I was dressed rather informally, but an American professor remarked that I had to wear a collar and tie. “Doesn’t Shakespeare deserve it?” he whispered. Because I loved and respected Shakespeare, I returned to my room and dressed in the way recommended. The professor appreciated my good manners. However, before going back to Egypt in 1969, I happened to go to the stage again with some friends, armed with my collar and tie. They cracked a few jokes, since such formal dress had become (in the span of a few years) old fashioned and a sign of stuffiness. I realized then and there that one’s clothes were not merely a covering of the body but rather a sign – a whole language. Since then I have decided to speak my own language and not just parrot others. From that time onward I was determined not to copy ready-made fashions, but rather to make up my own mind and, as much as possible, to make my own decisions.

• As a child I noticed that one of the main sources of tension for a middle class Egyptian housewife was her set of china saucers, consisting of a dozen or half a dozen matching pieces. When a servant or a guest broke a plate or a plate broke by itself, this was considered disastrous since it also broke the symmetric geometric pattern of the set. For some unknown reason, the love of such patterns was ingrained in us from childhood.

That is why I suggest that we change our strategy of impressing others by breaking away from symmetric geometric patterns, replacing them with incomplete, asymmetric patterns that are more suited to human life. Perfection is after all, God’s alone. First of all, why should the set be bound to the numbers 6, 12, or 24? Why not 7, 8 or 9? Why should all the pieces be identical? Can’t each plate be unique? At least this would never make the breaking of one plate a disaster because no symmetric geometric pattern would be violated. Moreover, the presence of different plate forms would imply variety and plurality. We live in the age of pluralism, do we not? This would also allow a friend to present a gift in the form of one plate with its saucer, with the result that each set would have its own character and be suffused with memorable uniqueness. I know beforehand that my suggestion will find no support among middle-class ladies. Who am I, after all, to call for a change in their tastes or to challenge such well established ideas?

Alternatively, what if a French fashion designer decided to “go back to

nature” and point out, for example, that the colors of peacock feathers should be the fashion? Wouldn't people follow his suggestion? And if said designer decided that the “return to nature” meant that the skirts of women should be appended by “tails” or tail-like appendages so as to stress the human-animal continuity; would any one dare oppose the fashion? Of course not! But why should my noble human suggestion be rejected while the insane instructions of fashion designers are accepted?

- Visit an Arab middle-class household and you will immediately notice that there are dining rooms, salons with gold-plated seats and sofas, in addition to the living rooms and the bedrooms. By contrast, a traditional Japanese house might have only two or three rooms furnished with very simple mats. One room would be used as a dining room and a living room during the day and be transformed into a bedroom in the evening. It is obvious that the Arab middle class have deserted the traditional Arab house with its wide internal parlor, its high fences and its diverse furniture. The 19th century Western concept of houses has been adopted instead. This began when the Westernized Arab aristocracy (of rich landlords and court officials) wished their countries to be “part of Europe,” as a result of which they deserted their heritage and became obsessed with everything Western. Western designers were thus asked to recreate the environment so as to fulfill the aristocrats' Western dreams. As usual, some members of the middle class were quick to fall in line though they had neither the knowledge nor the financial capability necessary for the change. The style was adopted to fit the limited budget of the middle class and the small space available to it. The result was a style of furniture that foreigners in Egypt used to call “Louis Farouk” (that is, neither a pure French style such as “Louis XV” or “Louis XVI,” but rather, a decadent imitation thereof).

What this means is that Egyptian household furniture has not simply been transported in a truck from Damietta<sup>7</sup> but, rather, imported from the West through a very complicated historical process. Furniture is not mere objects positioned in one's home, but rather an embodiment of a specific conscious cultural choice on the part of the Arab aristocracy, which has adopted the Western paradigm in architecture and furniture. For the middle class, it is an unconscious cultural orientation.

It is interesting how unconscious bias can contradict an individual's daily reality. The area available for living for the Egyptian middle class is

too small to provide space for such Western-style furniture. It, therefore, becomes an irritant for the family because it is too expensive and needs a larger space than is available. Hence, it is stored in a house whose inhabitants move with difficulty in the narrow lanes left for their mobility. Meanwhile, the housewife fiercely wards off the assaults of the children (and indeed other family members) on the gold-plated salon, which should stay closed except for the visits of important guests, an event that may not happen more than once or twice a year. This means that the room represents an absolute waste of possessions and an assault on the daily comfort of its owners. The dining room enjoys a better fate since the family manages to transform it into a study in which they use the table as a big desk with a place for everyone; hence the traditional paradigm enforces itself as a substitute for the imported one.

Now let us have a look at the chair, that ordinary piece of furniture made of wood, iron or plastic, standing on four legs and used to sit on (or occasionally stand on to reach for something high like an electric lamp, for example). It is believed to exist everywhere and is, therefore, taken for granted as a necessary piece of furniture.

When universities were built in the Arab Gulf states in the 1960s, it was “natural” to adopt chairs in the auditoriums and classrooms. Perhaps no one ever thought about the history and origin of chairs, their sizes, or their heights – all was taken for granted. Perhaps no one ever thought about the fact that the chair’s usual height hurts one’s backbone and, that therefore, it ought to be lower so as to provide more comfort and save on materials. Or perhaps no one thought of just sitting on the floor and sensing some cultural identity. Perhaps no one thought about the fact that Westerners used chairs to avoid sitting on the cold and wet ground, which explains their lack of interest in carpeting. This is, of course, the very opposite of our environment. Given the hot, dry weather, carpets are an essential cultural object. Nevertheless, chairs have come to symbolize progress despite the historical fact that until the 9th century, the Slavs offered human sacrifices while sitting on chairs. Meanwhile, their Arab and Chinese contemporaries sat on the floor and possessed civilizations of the highest sophistication.

An official in an Arab airport perhaps did not know these facts when he once saw me sitting on the rich carpets in the VIP lounge. “This is not civilized behavior,” he whispered to me with certainty. Too tired to argue

the point, I threw myself into an armchair, leaving him in his ignorance. This argument should by no means suggest that I am calling for the abandonment of chairs in our Eastern societies; it is, rather, a call for the opening of the gate of *ijtihad* concerning the use of chairs, their sizes, their heights and their possible substitutes. Is not this likely to result in discoveries that might contribute to the history of humankind? Or should we wait for some Western inventor to discover how harmful chairs are to people's backs and to the world's forests; then, and only then, would we hurry to implement his commands!

- Universities were built of stone in the heart of the desert (and were provided with air conditioners) in modern French and Italian styles (I must hasten to add, quasi-French, quasi-Italian, and quasi modern styles). Houses were built in the same fashion, but they had to be veiled since the realm of private life is still private, indeed sacred. To solve this problem, high fences were built around these quasi-Western houses, the result being that the house looked more like a prison (the traditional Arab house protected privacy by looking inward rather than outward; hence the walled-in garden). And just as the dining room conflicts with the real needs of the Egyptian middle-class family, the Western modern style of architecture conflicts with the needs of Muslim consumers. The result is alienation resulting from the enforcement of an architectural style that does not belong to one's cultural lexicon.

- In many Arab capitals one sees new blocks of flats that look like a queue of boxes or a freezer. If at all decorated, the decoration is most probably Corinthian columns, floral designs, or possibly even Arab ornamentation; however, Arabic calligraphy is never included. Even the street signs are now computer printouts. Arabic calligraphy used to be taught at school, but "progress" caught up with the Arab world and calligraphy classes were canceled, and with them was canceled the realization that calligraphy is an art form. Worse still, some calligraphers find it shameful to declare their profession, which has now become associated with billboards advertising chocolate and detergents. This may be regarded as negligence or an indifference to the heritage, and so it is. But if you look at the matter more deeply, you will realize that our vision of arts has been adopted from the West. Calligraphy, which used to be one of the most lively of Arab arts, has suffered a decline because it is not deemed a fine art from a Western perspective.

• Most of us have grown up in a “progressive” cultural environment in which it is believed that the most serious problem for Egyptian education is the stress on memorization. It is also occasionally hinted that memorization gained such centrality on account of religious education and the central status of the Qur’an. I myself believed this until 1963, when I started studying for my MA at Columbia University. There I was asked to memorize some Romantic poems. When I asked why, I was told that memorization was “one of the best techniques to build rapport between a student and a text.” Later on, I learnt that the Japanese educational system does not reject memorization altogether; indeed, it utilizes it as one of its educational methods.

I came to realize that in specific disciplines the student needs to learn some basic principles and precepts by heart. Then I started to question my old and absolute “progressive” certainty. I realized then that the rejection of memorization is in fact a malicious, brazen-faced rejection of the Islamic heritage. Had such a heritage been approached with due respect and awareness, we would have probably realized how memorization could have been utilized in developing the critical sense itself.

• The modern history of Arabic drama started with tragic, comic, historical and pastoral plays translated from French and English. Then Western theories of drama (ranging from Aristotle to Brecht and Artaud) were also translated. Consequently, to us, drama meant nothing but the Western conception of it; the audience sits in front of a stage, and the show starts by drawing the curtain and ends when it is closed. Actors try to create for their audience the illusion that their dramatic world is similar to the real external world. Stemming from this, we started to write “modern” drama and failed to identify and develop the dramatic forms in our own heritage. We failed to realize that the biography of Banū Hilāl (*al-Sīrah al-Hilāliyyah*) was not merely a lyrical or even a narrative play, but was, rather a sophisticated first-class play in which the dramatic mingled with narrative and lyrical elements.

Had we studied Japanese theater (*Noh* and *Kabuki* plays), we would have discovered a completely different theater. This is a theater in which the actors mix with the audience rather than face it. Perhaps had we studied the history of the Japanese theater (and the Indian, the Chinese and non-Western forms in general), the history of the Arabic theater would have taken a very different course, and we would probably have

discovered the dramatic forms in our heritage (the magic box shadow plays, the biography of Banū Hilāl, etc.). We would have taken our point of departure from these elements, developed them and thus generated new and more creative dramatic theories. Is this not better than simply mimicking the dramatic creations of the Other in a way that is pathetic at times, and ridiculous at others?

#### DOMINANCE OF THE WESTERN CULTURAL PARADIGM

All the aforementioned examples indicate clearly that our heritage was abandoned in favor of the Other's without realizing the implication of this behavior and without any creative critical study of our heritage and theirs, and our culture and theirs. We have adopted this cultural paradigm and avidly consumed its cultural products and transplanted them into our "alien" soil without much awareness of the implications of our deed and its impact on the fabric of our society, life-style, and values. How did this come to happen?

It is a basic fact confronting modern man that the Western cultural paradigm occupies a central position in the minds and hearts of most people and thinkers the world over. The Western cultural paradigm, by virtue of its simple and materialist approach to humankind and nature, has achieved brilliant victories on the materialist level. By the annexation and conquest of lands, the application of this paradigm initially afforded Western peoples a high standard of living. The victorious Western cultural project was translated into an ever expanding sense of self-confidence on the part of Westerners and into their solid belief that their concept of the world is the highest point of development that the human race has ever achieved. They believe that human history has thus reached its zenith in modern Western history, that Western sciences are universal, and that the Western cultural paradigm is valid for all time and place, or at least in modern times and places.

The Islamic world entered into a bitter conflict with this cultural formation right from the start. The Ottomans defended the "land of Islam" in the Arab East and elsewhere against the colonialist assault. This explains why Western imperialism circumvented the Ottoman empire, occupying parts of Africa and India and the New World. With the crisis of the Ottoman Empire, however, Western armies started to invade the Islamic East. The arrival of Napoleon's forces in Egypt (1798-1802) marked the

beginning of the West's attempts to dismember this Empire and the Islamic world at large. This was followed by the annexation of the Turkish emirates on the Black Sea by the Russians and the British invasion of Cyprus (and later of Egypt). Thus the Islamic world was ultimately divided among Western imperialist powers.

For the reasons mentioned above, catching up with the West has become the essence of all so-called revival projects (called *al-Nahḍah*, or renaissance) in the "Third World," including the Islamic world.

1. This can be seen most clearly in secular liberal thought, to which "Renaissance" meant primarily the importation of Western thought and theories and the adoption of the Western cultural paradigm for better or for worse. Arab and Muslim societies, therefore, were to be "reformed" so that they would live up to the standards of the Western paradigm. This trend was represented by the liberals of the "renaissance generation" such as Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayyed, Shibli Shemayel and Salama Musa, among others. Some of these intellectuals were Westernized to the core and were so alienated from their identity that they called for such theatrical frivolities as wearing the European hat, writing Arabic in the Roman alphabet, and teaching Greek and Latin in secondary schools. Others were more moderate and kept away from such puerile antics; but representatives of both tendencies, the extremist and the moderate, were ultimately uncritical propagators of Westernization and advocates of modernization according to Western ways.

2. Another example can be found in the attitude of Arab Communists, Marxists, and Socialists. Despite their critical attitude to capitalism and economic and social liberalism, Arab leftists generally accepted the underlying cultural and cognitive paradigm of modern Western thought. Their critiques, therefore, were confined to the politico-economic aspects of the capitalist system, but never extended to the cultural cognitive paradigm itself.

3. Beginning in the 1940s, the Western cultural paradigm witnessed a retreat in the Arab world. This was represented by the rise of such Islamist movements as the Muslim Brotherhood and national socialist parties such as *Miṣr al-Fatāt* (Young Egypt). It was also reflected in the gradual crystallization of nationalist thought and in the rise of political organizations attempting to transform this thought into a concrete reality. All such movements were aware, in one way or another, of the existence of a Western

paradigm alien to them and, therefore, they stressed Arab identity and the significance of their heritage, both national and religious.

Despite the significance of such endeavors – that they form a retreat from, and a revision of, the Western cultural paradigm and greater affinity to the Eastern heritage – their target, whether declared or not, was always to “catch up with the West” and, in the meantime, retain as much as possible of Muslim identity and develop it in such a way as to make it consistent with modernity. This trend is, in reality, but another attempt at adopting the Western cultural paradigm, taking this time the form of remodeling Arab identity along Western lines while preserving external Arab forms. Arab heritage was thus to be re-discovered from a Western perspective, and even reformulated retroactively. Accordingly, for example, the Mu‘tazilites were re-labeled as rationalists, al-Jurjānī as a pioneer of semiotics and stylistics, and Islamic art as abstractionist. By the same token, alienation can be seen in the poetry of the Kharijites. Abū al-‘Alā’ was a pioneer of the philosophy of skepticism centuries before Descartes (or perhaps it was al-Ghazālī); and Ibn Khaldūn “discovered 80% of the rules of dialectical materialism,” to use the very words of an Arab Marxist philosopher in a lecture which he devoted to a defense of the Arab heritage. According to him, Ibn Khaldūn was a Marxist even before Marx was born. It was only, therefore, due to this imperfect, latent Marxism (which later reached completion in Marx himself) that Ibn Khaldūn had any legitimacy, not because of his Arab Islamic thought or his contribution to sociological theory (a contribution whose underlying epistemological premises are at odds with Marxist epistemology). Consequently, the Arab Islamic heritage is important only insofar as it approaches the Western cultural paradigm.

4. Surprisingly, the attempt to catch up with the West is echoed profoundly in the practices of some Islamist movements. Some Islamist thinkers accept, consciously or unconsciously, the Western cultural paradigm, or many of its aspects. They even turn this paradigm into a model to follow and a silent point of reference, so much so that, to them, the Islamic renaissance project is the shortest way to catch up with the West. Some of them even go as far as to claim that the Islamic project is the best and most effective way to adopt and apply the Western cultural paradigm to the Islamic world. This could be done after having embellished said paradigm with such additions as fasting and prayers, the separation of women from men

and enforcing *ḥijāb* (women's veil). Again, Islam is re-discovered to make it conform to the Western paradigm. So we discover that many scientific laws exist in the Qur'an. Thinkers compete to offer evidence that Islam had already given women their rights and that it had reached, a long time ago, the recently discovered rules of "modern" organization. The fatal significance here, again, is that Islam gains legitimacy inasmuch as it approaches the Western cultural paradigm. In other words, the Islamic paradigm is being subtly Westernized from within, with no cultural invasion from without.

The basic feature of all the aforementioned cultural projects – despite their apparent ideological differences – is that the West has been taken as the ultimate point of reference. In other words, they have all internalized the West's view of itself and of its cultural project. The West has therefore become the cultural formation that has outrun us, and that we have to catch up with (or, according to the aforementioned Islamist view, the paradigm that Muslims had actually founded and which they have to re-adopt in the present day). It is assumed that there is one fixed point that all societies endeavor to reach, that there is one single method for managing societies and determining the conduct of humankind, and that there is one single view of the human race and the universe. According to this perspective, the West has been transformed from a geographical area and a cultural formation that has its own specificity and individual concepts into the area from which stems modern universal and human thought, a case which has given a great deal of legitimacy to the idea of catching up with the West. Western science, consistently sought by the educated Arabs and Muslims, has thus become a "modern universal science," and the intellectual submission and subordination to the West is termed "belonging to the modern times."

Consequently, Arab intellectuals have showed a bias for the Western heritage, neglecting their own heritage and the heritage of humankind at large. For example, no one cares for Japanese or Chinese cultures and no one is genuinely interested in Swahili, the language spoken by most of the residents of Eastern Africa, despite its close association to Islam and Arabic. By contrast, everyone competes to study "world [namely, Western] heritage," never questioning its underlying cognitive categories, historical roots or the social mechanisms that led to its emergence. A researcher's job has thus become to receive the information that is termed "interna-

tional,” but which is in fact Western. This is then reproduced in the form of studies and books that never go beyond the scope of Western concepts and only contribute, if at all, to the development of Western science and knowledge, and which estrange the researchers themselves from their native Islamic and Arab culture.

A group of educated (as opposed to cultured) people has been formed in the Muslim world that occupies leading and important offices, such as journalists, teachers, university professors, media personnel, and translators, all of whom have completely absorbed the Western cultural paradigm without realizing its actual implications. They take it as a set of noble ideas and have become excellent propagators of its value system, sometimes consciously but quite often unconsciously, yet always without full understanding of the implications of what they propagate. Such people are always good at studying and obtaining university degrees, but show very limited critical thinking and scanty understanding of epistemological paradigms. (This is not surprising, since critical thinking requires special awareness of the Self and the Other, in addition to a high degree of self-confidence and special critical faculties; intellectual qualifications that few people possess.)

This sector of educated people is the most dangerous, for they are the most active. They reshape the value system along Western lines and propagate the Western cultural paradigm with all its biases. The Renaissance in Europe, as they were taught, was the age when the arts and literature were revived and humankind was placed at the center of the universe (rather than the age of Machiavelli and Hobbes, the beginning of the Western imperialist formation, and the genocide of millions in North America). The French Revolution, to them, is the revolution of liberty, fraternity, and equality and is associated with the Declaration of the Rights of Man (not the first truly secular revolution when humans started to worship abstract reason so unquestioningly that the revolutionaries resorted to terrorism to reshape reality in the way that would accord with this “reason.” Little do they know that the French Revolution set up a central government that liquidated all ethnic and religious enclaves and invaded Egypt and Palestine). Progress, they firmly believe, is the basic fact in the history of mankind (unaware of the high price which sometimes exceeds all the achieved material benefits). They consider Nietzsche to be the greatest philosopher of humankind (rather than the philosopher

of the death of God and of the human race). Finally, they believe that structuralism and deconstruction are mere schools of literary analysis (not methods of thought that reflect an anti-humanistic attitude).

Members of educated “elites,” whether those who studied abroad or at home, absorb the Western cultural paradigm thoroughly, then render into Arabic all that they have read (in books or articles) without discrimination or scrutiny. Worse still, they have taken over the universities and started teaching Western science in exactly the same way native Westerners do, from the latter’s perspectives and using their methods. Curricula are designed following the example of the “international” – that is, the Western – style.

#### BIAS TOWARDS THE MODERN WESTERN CULTURAL PARADIGM

A cultural paradigm is usually an embodiment of a full cognitive paradigm containing a value system. Here are some illustrative examples.

- Moving the hands as one speaks is a sign of enthusiasm in Middle Eastern countries, but in other countries (at least in Western Anglo-Saxon culture), it could signify coarseness and denote the lower ethnic and class origin of the speaker. Gestures are in the former case an expression of a deep desire to communicate with the Other as well as a feeling that the verbal language is incapable of fully expressing one’s views and emotions. In the context of a contractual civilization, what cannot be expressed verbally should be ignored. Therefore, gestures are considered offensive or even threatening. Immigrants, for example, not yet familiar with the cultural idiom of Anglo-Saxon civilization, still move their hands as they speak. That is why people are taught to use gestures very rarely and only at a very crucial point, and they are warned against gesturing all the time. There is a whole outlook underlying the use of gesture, unconscious though it might be.

- Some Japanese and American anthropologists once studied the behavior of groups of monkeys living under the same conditions. The American anthropologists divided the monkeys into groups of equal numbers and started to record their body movements and accumulate information about them, comparing the behavior of individual monkeys. The Japanese anthropologists, on the other hand, divided their monkeys into family groups and gave names to each family and a name to each

individual monkey. Each team noticed that the monkeys dipped potatoes in water before eating them. The American scientists concluded that some monkeys wash potatoes; meanwhile, the Japanese team interpreted this behavior as follows:

- Only some families, not all of them, washed their potatoes.
- Monkeys did this because they liked the taste of potatoes with salty water.

Both teams observed the same phenomenon, but interpreted it in a different way. While the American anthropologists worked within the framework of “a general, abstract monkey” or “a mere number of monkeys” with no family ties or individual features, the Japanese team, in contrast, used the family as a unit of analysis. That is why the former passed generalizations on some individual members of the species, whereas the Japanese saw the monkeys’ behavior as an acquired cultural behavior (of specific families). In other words, it is a type of behavior specific to the monkey families that acquired it. Thus, whereas the American scientists studied the behavior of the monkeys in terms of the concept of utility, the Japanese saw it within the concept of security and happiness. The divergence of results emerges from the difference of presuppositions. Whereas the Americans saw the monkeys as mere objects of study and observation, the Japanese established an intimate relationship with the monkeys, which made them amenable to seeing the monkeys’ specific characteristics and individual characters.

- As you walk through the market, you step on someone’s toes by mistake, and immediately say, “I’m very sorry indeed.” The response may differ as follows: “Never mind, Sir. You see, the market is so crowded today, you couldn’t possibly avoid stepping on my toes.” “God help us all!” he/she might even add. Another response might go, “In which bank do you think I can cash this *sorry* of yours?” meaning: Where on earth can I get the material equivalent of your apology? An observer might be stimulated to comment, “Such a rude reply.” Another might as well think, “What a realistic response!”

- If we stop and analyze the previous utterances, we realize immediately that there is a belief on the part of the one who apologized that this

is a worthy behavior that has “value,” since it expresses human solidarity. Value is an immaterial quality that cannot be measured and that goes beyond the world of matter, the world of buying and selling and fixed “price.” It is despite this, or perhaps because of this, “a matter of great consequence.” Seekers of material equivalents of the word “sorry” have only one reference, namely, the bank and money. (What is termed in philosophy, “the material world,” is not confined to money but means the world of sense perception and that which can be measured.) For the latter, value, that inner moral concept, is non-existent; to them there only exists the perceived material quantity, price, which has nothing to do with inner human feelings.

- Plutarch (ancient Greek essayist and biographer) says, “When the candles are blown out, all women are fair.” This is an interesting statement which we hope that the writer meant to be a dirty joke that does not represent his world outlook. Before blowing out the candles and after lighting them again, there are many moments – a whole life – of joy, sorrow and emotionally neutral time. Thus, he who says that *all women are fair when the lights are off* is a complete materialist (pornographic in the epistemological sense) who sees the human being as a mere physical body and overlooks the moments preceding and following the blowing out of candles, when a person’s complex humanity is manifested, and during which he searches for peace and tranquility. All women, in the last analysis [as the materialist would say], when the lights are off, are nothing but usable matter. This is one of the lessons of the “Enlightenment.” The paradigm here is a pessimistic, nihilist one in which bursts of laughter conceal cries of pain, just as ‘Umar al-Khayyām used to curse time while getting drunk as a means of concealing his philosophical nihilism and (his sense of the) absence of meaning in the universe.

- The following conversation frequently takes place in several cultures:

A: What work do you do, Madame?

B: I’m just a housewife.

A: Have you done anything today?

B: No, Nothing at all.

This is a type of conversation that I frequently heard in the USA in the 1960s before the rise of the women’s liberation movement. Such a con-

versation, which may still be heard here in Egypt, can be decoded as follows: “What work do you do, Madame?” “Work” means employment outside the home, and since “doing” has been defined as something performed outside one’s house in the realm of public life and in return for some kind of wage (a definite price), any work in a woman’s private life with a high human value (such as raising her children or looking after her family) is not “work” at all. That’s because it is done at home (in the realm of private life) and wages are not paid. It cannot be measured and is not a quantity. If a woman says that her work as a mother at home fulfills her human identity, this is considered a mere appeal to defunct human values and to an outdated, metaphysical concept of human nature. These are not “scientific” things; they do not belong to the world of matter and quantity. Do not then assert that a mother’s work at home might be much more useful to society than her office work, since the course of history indicates that all women have to do their work in the public realm and for remuneration; everybody has to pant in the market or in the factory. If I accept such an argument, and it has to be accepted anyway, because this is the predominant “scientific,” “objective” materialist discourse, I am just a housewife. The work I do is not “productive labor.”

“Have you done anything today?” Despite the fact that I have cleaned my house, cooked the meals, seen my elder son off to school, fed my younger daughter, received my husband on his return home and generated inner peace in all of them, this is mere domestic activity for which I am not paid and, therefore, I have actually done nothing at all.

In an apparently innocuous conversation of this type, the word *work* has been charged with an ideological content; it has lost its “innocence” and has become a term that cannot be fully understood except within the context of the secular cultural paradigm of modern Western civilization, which sees work as something performed in the realm of public life and for which one is paid. Man here is *homo economicus*, a producer and a consumer, nothing more, nothing less. He may also be *homo erectus*, and even *homo faber*, but he is a maker who produces without love, without hatred. No *homo sapiens*, he is nothing but *homme la machine* (Man the machine, as described by a leading enlightenment thinker).

Private life, by contrast, is the realm in which some human acts cannot be measured, and therefore lie outside the scope of objective science. Gradually, we begin to learn that the poor housewife, supposed to have

done nothing from a materialist perspective, has certainly done much valuable work from a more complex perspective. However, if she has internalized the materialist cognitive discourse, she has to leave home to have “work,” earn a salary and regain her lost self-respect. The whole family might collapse, the children might be juvenile delinquents or lose self-confidence and confidence in others, the specific characteristics of civilization might be lost (for it is the mother who really imparts to her children the specific values of her own culture), but it does not matter, for these are secondary issues. Or as it is often reiterated, “everything, in the last analysis, is economic.” Just like the man in the market story who said, “In which bank can I cash this *sorry*?” Or perhaps like Plutarch when he said, “When the candles are blown out, all women are fair.”

- An IMF official stated that large areas in Africa could be rented as dumping grounds for chemical, nuclear and other types of waste generated by Western societies in return for generous amounts of money that could be used to help the continent in its development programs. Such statements expectedly caused much consternation and the IMF denied them, but the high official himself reaffirmed his statements and added that he was expressing the key philosophy of his organization. This economic (materialist) perspective regards the whole world as mere matter that can be utilized; the only acceptable thing is the tangible price one gets, not some pale, abstract human value.

- A friend of mine who was a high official in the IMF was sent to Egypt on a mission to implement a huge development program. When he met the young people of the village where he was supposed to carry out his project, they warned him that lots of medicinal herbs, whose medical benefits were still to be discovered by modern pharmaceutical science, and animal species, mostly unknown to scientists, would all be threatened with extinction. He was also alerted to the disintegration of the family that might result from his “development program.” “So what did you do?” I asked him. “Nothing! I had a specific plan which could not be put off.” My friend obviously is biased toward prompt procedural efficiency at the expense of environmental values and social balance, and did not care much for the human cost his “development” program would exact from the inhabitants of the region to be “developed.”

- The following story was published in a newspaper. A journalist was on a safari with her husband in an open zoo in Ethiopia when suddenly

the door of their car opened and the husband fell out, whereupon some lions attacked him. The wife tried to help for a moment but failed. She then remembered her job as a journalist with a camera and immediately recorded the unique moment. Her rare photo was later used in a photograph contest and, of course, won the first prize for the sharp wit, accuracy and speed of action. The award was biased towards the materialist values of efficiency, speed and maximal utilization of material reality, disregarding such values as mercy and family solidarity.

- An automobile manufacturer produced a new car that was considered fabulous except for one simple defect: it turned over on curves and killed its passengers. The company thus decided to recall it from the market. A smart accountant, however, by computing the matter in a precise economic way, discovered that the compensation the company would have to pay to its victims was far less than the costs of recalling the cars and fixing them. Therefore, he advised the company against recalling the cars. The corporation, being a rational, economic entity, acted according to this sound economic advice and chose to compensate those who were killed and injured. Here again, the smart, rational, economic means of calculation won at the expense of the less economically rational, but more humanly moral values. It did not really matter whether the fabulous cars destroyed a good number of human beings so long as the manufacturer's coffers were full (albeit a bit blood-stained).

- President Eisenhower sent a confidential memorandum to the Nuclear Power Authority (NPA) asking it to refrain from issuing any statements or releasing any data about the dangers of nuclear radiation and experimentation. I thought for a while that such a memorandum was possible only during the "dark ages" of the 1950s, but then I heard the following story.

- In December 1993, *Newsweek* reported a statement by the US Secretary of Energy to the effect that between 1963 and 1990, the USA had conducted 204 underground nuclear tests and never publicly admitted to any of them. The magazine also reported that beginning in the 1940s, the NPA had exposed 600 US citizens to radiation in experiments that aimed at measuring its effects on the human body. More than 10 people were injected with plutonium, mostly without their knowledge. The impact of this tradition of death has persisted, since there are around 24 metric tons of plutonium, used to make nuclear bombs, stored in 6 states; these

represent a serious threat to American citizens and are difficult to get rid of. Six million pounds of nuclear waste are still stored in leaking basins.

- The sins of the past keep on haunting the present. Experimenting on human beings represents the most dangerous aspect of all. Eighteen people were exposed to nuclear experiments, including housewives, youth, adolescents, aged people, and even a 4-year-old boy. This study, which was conducted on a national level from 1945 to 1947, aimed at determining the speed at which plutonium travels inside the human body. If that is what is done to American citizens in their home country, think of what could be done to people of the underdeveloped countries? One of the people experimented on was hospitalized for treatment for some pains. Doctors told him he was to receive “an experimental medication,” but in fact he was injected with plutonium 239, which gave his body an excessive dose of radiation equal to 46 times the total amount of radiation an ordinary person can be exposed to over an entire lifetime. This human guinea pig survived till 1984 with skin diseases, digestion problems and a state of drowsiness and lethargy that left him helpless and unable to perform any job for the rest of his life. Speaking to *Newsweek*, his cousin compared this heinous act to some of the practices of the Nazis for which they were tried and sentenced to death. He was absolutely right, for the Nazi regime was materialistic to the core and believed in the value of experimentation and the accumulation of data, regardless of absolute values or the damage that might be done to human beings. Nazi scientists conducted unethical experiments, notably on twins who were separated one from the other, after which one of them would be tortured and sometimes killed without telling the other, in order to test the latter’s reactions. Apart from the entertainment value of such experiments, a great deal of “useful, very useful” scientific data were accumulated. But can we utilize this data, disregarding the fiendish method used to collect such knowledge? Should absolute moral and human values be overlooked? These are some of the questions being raised.

The automobile company referred to earlier is no different from Eisenhower or the scientists who conducted secret nuclear experiments in the USA or the experiments in Nazi Germany. Nor are they different in any fundamental way from the woman who took a photograph of her husband while he was being devoured by lions. They all share the sinister ability to transform the entire universe into useful, desacralized matter.

This is the essence of the materialistic view of reality; it denies the absoluteness and sanctity of man, stressing the primacy of matter over mind, using analytical categories derived exclusively from matter (such as length, height, depth, density, speed, etc.), and excluding all other less tangible properties.

#### NATURE OF THE MATERIALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The modern Western cultural paradigm, utilitarian and rational-materialist, is the paradigm underlying all the aforementioned examples. It is, in fact, the paradigm underlying most of human knowledge, sciences, and attitudes. It manifests itself in human terminology, axioms, research methods, and procedures. Adopting such terminology or methods without the requisite consciousness of their implicit epistemological dimensions necessarily leads to the unconscious adoption of their underlying epistemological assumptions. This materialistic paradigm is the most dominant because Western imperialism has successfully conquered and divided the whole world and, consequently, internationalized its own cultural paradigm, imposing it on numerous societies through force, enticements, and natural dissemination. This has led to the misconception that this Western paradigm is universal. The most common forms of bias in Eastern societies are, therefore, in favor of this particular Western cultural paradigm. Several examples have been given of such bias and a hundred others might be added.

The following is a description of some of the salient characteristics of the modern Western cultural paradigm and the resultant biases:

1. The (modern materialist) Western epistemological paradigm is based on the assumption that the center of the universe exists within it and not beyond it; in other words, it is immanent, not transcendent. This means that either God does not exist at all or that if He does, He has nothing to do with humankind's epistemological, moral, semiotic or aesthetic systems which exist within the world of temporality. This leads to the eradication of the Creator – created (and consequently of the human-nature) duality. In other words, a metaphysics of immanence has replaced the traditional metaphysics of transcendence.

2. At first, and as a result of this world outlook, humanism emerged. It considered the whole of humankind the center, if not the god, of the universe. Renaissance literature celebrates this human centrality. Despite its immanence, humanism retained a measure of duality (humankind versus nature, though given the materialistic framework it was also humankind and nature, or even humankind in nature). However, this duality was quite tenuous, since the materialistic system is by definition monist and cannot sustain any duality. Matter is the ultimate center, anything else is a mere reflection of the movement of matter, a mere epiphenomenon. However, right from the beginning one could hear the angry rumblings of the true materialists, who knew the logic of matter, the law of nature, and the monism of the materialistic epistemological paradigms. Hobbes, Machiavelli, and later the philosophers of the Age of the Enlightenment announced that human beings are no different from vegetables or machines. Then came Darwin, Nietzsche, Engels, Freud, and Derrida, who all deconstructed humankind as we know it and reconstructed it in a way consistent with the laws of matter, the ultimate point of reference. The materialist outlook sees the universe as made up of atoms wandering in space, according to the mechanistic view, or as a coherent solid whole, according to the organic view, or otherwise of an amalgam of the two. The universe is controlled by complete, hard causality in the sense that A will always eventually lead to B. The whole universe is a continuum, whose circles are intertwined, with no gaps separating them. Creatures are subject to an evolutionary, progressive movement that is impervious to regression. That is why all creatures are subject to change since everything in the final analysis has ultimately the same essence – matter. In this world of matter, there is no substantial difference between humankind and nature. If humans were any different from nature, this would disrupt the continuum of the material natural order. That is why the materialist outlook stresses that the common features of humans and animals (perhaps even of inanimate objects) are much more important than those features that set them apart.

What this means is that human and natural phenomena form one con-

tinuous whole, the same laws applying to both, in equal degree. Human phenomena are not unique; they might be more complex, but they are ultimately governed by the same laws of matter that go beyond any religious, moral or human objectives. Human beings are thus an inseparable part of the material-natural order. Humans are natural beings (natural humans) who belong to nature, emerge from it, live within it and have no existence or will independent of it. Therefore, they are reduced to the world of nature-matter and its inexorable laws. They have no will or human purpose (*telos*) independent of the neutral motion of nature-matter, which is indifferent to them. The duality of humankind and nature, which forms the very basis of Western humanism, is thereby eradicated.

It may be noticed that this natural-material system started by drawing “natural” things from the world of humans to be placed in the world of things. Then humans themselves were drawn from the human sphere to be hurled into the world of natural laws. The modern Western epistemological materialist paradigm started by proclaiming the death of God in favor of the centrality of humankind, yet it ended with the decentering of humankind, leveling it down with nature and matter and “mute, insensate things.”

This is the inner logic of materialist monism – that all creatures (human beings included) are subject to the same blind laws of things. This is the over-arching, central idea of the Western epistemological project: that there is one single law, one single culture, one single humanity, whose unity derives from the fact that it is an organic part of the natural system, having no existence outside it. This leads to the rise of the unity of science and knowledge (Muslims prefer to call it the “monism of science and knowledge”) which fails to see any difference between humankind and nature.

Taking this paradigm as its point of departure, an epistemological and moral outlook was postulated and priorities were defined. Let it be noticed that the very movement of the materialist intellectual system is toward the eradication of the Creator–created duality and the humanistic human-nature duality. This is the ultimate demise of the metaphysics of transcendence and the final triumph of the metaphysics of immanence. Certain conclusions regarding the human mind follow from this initial monistic materialistic premise:

(1) The human mind is an inseparable part of nature-matter, and is able to register data received from it efficiently and objectively. However,

it is unable to go beyond it or be independent of it. Just like nature, the human mind is limitless, but it is also passive and neutral and lacks any independent boundaries. The attributes of the human mind are indeed the same as the attributes of nature.

(2) The human mind is able to register only the general, common traits of phenomena. Such features are natural-material, and they alone can guide the mind in its attempt to reach general abstract laws.

(3) Existence is material and therefore it can be perceived and understood in its entirety through the five senses. Anything else is a mere illusion. Consequently, reality (both human and natural) could be rationally gauged, and eventually subjected to a precise programming (this is the essence of technological utopia). The world becomes mere useful, de-sanctified matter. All things (human and natural) are seen as equal, which means that all things are relative.

(4) What is unknown in nature (both physical and human) will eventually become known through the gradual accumulation of data. The area of the unknown will diminish, and accordingly, the area of the known will gradually increase, a process which will eventually lead to a complete or semi-complete knowledge of reality (both material and human), which will lead in turn to a full or semi-full control of said reality.

(5) The human mind is able to recreate humankind and its social and material environment in such a way as to make it conform to general natural laws derived from the study of the world of nature and things. This is called "rationalization," i.e., the standardization of reality by imposing on it the monist materialist paradigm, so as to instrumentalize and control it completely, turning it into mere useful matter which can be utilized in the most efficient manner.

Leaving the epistemological system behind, let us now have a look at the moral system. Within the context of the materialist system, there is nothing sacred, absolute or teleological. The purpose of human existence in this universe is the accumulation of information leading to full control over the universe, the conquest of nature, and the maximum manipulation of its resources. In order to achieve this, everything (including humankind and nature) must be thrust into the net of hard causality so that they might be explained away and subjected to the laws of nature. Human beings, in this case, are not the vicegerents of God, nor are they honored by Him; they are, rather, mere natural, material beings.

Moral codes are non-existent, since the only purpose of life is profit and pleasure, in addition to the maximization of production and consumption. The cycle of production and consumption should go on unabated without a *telos*, in a fashion reminiscent of Nietzsche's "eternal return" or pagan cyclical history. An essential aspect of the materialist outlook often neglected by many Western and non-Western studies of modernity is that on the level of historical practice, the materialist outlook has translated itself in the form of Western imperialism. Human beings, as indicated earlier, were first placed at the center of the universe, arrogating to themselves the position of divinity. Therefore, in keeping with the metaphysics of immanence, they deemed themselves limitless, self-referential, bound by no values external to themselves. Power, accordingly, became the only criterion whereby human beings were classified. Therefore, rather than humanity in general being the center of the universe, Western (white) humans arrogated to themselves that position. Instead of a world run in such a way that it could benefit the whole human race, it became useful matter to be utilized by the white race for its advantage. Thus, humanism degenerated into imperialism. The troops of Western humans marched all over planet earth, perpetrating genocide against the native inhabitants of the American continents and transferring millions of native Africans from their homeland to be used as mere muscle power on American plantations. Thousands died in the process of this inhuman transfer and the rest were devastated after their arrival in the new world. Military forces were deployed all over the world, destroying indigenous economic, political, and cultural structures. Asia and Africa were transformed into sources of cheap labor, raw materials, and markets yielding high profits. Through direct military domination, the Old International Order was imposed on the world, only to give way to the New International Order that is being imposed through direct military domination complemented by the recruitment of the local ruling political and cultural elites in the service of Western interests.

#### BIASES OF THE MATERIALIST EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM

All the biases of the modern Western epistemological paradigm emanate from its materialist monism.

(1) Bias towards the material and natural at the expense of the immaterial and human is the most prominent. It manifests itself in the

attempt to explain what is human in terms of the natural and material. Humankind is thereby made amenable to control and quantification. Social phenomena are subjected to the methods of research used in the experimental and physical sciences themselves. The idea of the unity of science is an epistemological and moral manifestation of the eradication of the man-nature duality; it is the methodology through which materialist monism is imposed on all phenomena and the logic of material things is imposed on humankind; the whole world is reduced to one material dimension. The transition from the human to the natural results in a bias against teleology and in the discarding of the moral, psychological – or in short, the human – dimensions, since human beings are the only creatures in this universe known to have a free will and who seek to find a purpose in the world and the only ones who follow moral codes to organize their conduct. Then there arise deterministic theories that explain the whole universe, from humans to mosquitoes, in a scientific, deterministic manner. As for humankind's dreams, moral longings and free will, these are deemed non-scientific, and teleological.

(2) Within this framework, there is a bias toward the general at the expense of the particular. The dominant hypothesis is that the more a phenomenon is divested of its specificity and the higher the level of generalization, the more scientific and accurate we become. Phenomena have to be divested of any human or teleological specificities which form a gap in the natural continuum, till we ultimately reach a level of generalization said to be scientific and universal, where all gaps are filled and all dualities are eradicated.

This is the level at which the general may be attained. It is actually the law that links (indeed equates) the human with the natural, subjecting the former to the law of the latter. This means that the specific curve of any phenomenon, i.e., the specific characteristics that underlie its uniqueness, forms an obstacle to scientific study, since it slows the process of abstraction that ultimately leads to the attainment of general natural laws.

(3) There is a bias towards the perceptible, the measurable and the quantitative against the imperceptible, the qualitative, and that which cannot be measured. Western science has limited the scope of research to the world of the five senses. This explains its relative disregard for the complex, the qualitative and the indefinite. That which cannot be observed by the five senses, easily measured and subjected to statistical quan-

tification thus falls outside the scope of modern science. Moral and teleological issues should then be discarded and neglected, for they don't fit in that mold.

(4) There is a bias toward the simple, the mono-dimensional, and the homogeneous against the complex, the multifaceted, and the heterogeneous. Thus there is a bias toward simple interpretations that reduce phenomena to one or two variables or principles. Human conduct is interpreted via simple models. This explains the distinct predilection in favor of causal monism (explaining phenomena in terms of one decisive cause) that is inextricably bound up with the unity of sciences and materialist monism. There is, therefore, an obsessive search for a single center immanent in matter and for a single reason that would explain the universe and that can be taken as the basic core and reference of all. This center is, more often than not, identified as an economic variable (material utility [Bentham] – profit making and accumulation of wealth [Adam Smith] – the development and growth of the tools of production [Marx]). It might also take other forms, such as Freud's *eros*, Carlyle's heroes, the Nazis' Aryan race, or the promised land of the Zionists. This causal monism originating from materialist monism reflects a powerful rejection of "the different Other," since the presence of the Other necessarily means the diversity of paradigms and human laws.

(5) There is bias toward the objective against the subjective. Objectivity means that the researchers have to divest themselves of their own specificities, moral obligations, passions, and human totality, turning their minds into a blank sheet (*tabula rasa*) that registers 'facts' and observes details with complete detachment and passivity. Phenomena under investigation are turned into mere objects. This objectivity extends to human phenomena, which the objective researcher has to observe with complete detachment and neutrality. Human beings become an object of study no different from natural objects. This leads to disregarding inner motives that the human subjects, consciously or unconsciously, project on phenomena surrounding them.

It should be observed, however, that causal monism manifests itself in an oscillation between two poles. First, there is the quest for method and neutrality in procedures and a wish to arrive at simple, general laws devoid of any teleology. These laws thrust everything into the iron cage of monistic causality and absolute continuity that cannot be disrupted at any

point and that leaves no gaps. Of course, such an attempt is doomed to failure, particularly when human phenomena are the subject of study. Absolute objectivity is therefore replaced by an equally absolute subjectivity which leads to a denial of the existence of general laws and to a belief in complete discontinuity, since subject is completely divorced from object. In other words, humankind moves from materialist rationalism (modernity and the enlightenment) into materialist irrationalism (post-modernism and nihilism) and what one historian of Western ideas has termed the “dark enlightenment.” It is to be noted that this oscillation takes place between two varieties of monism: the monism of reason, hard causality and absolute control, and its extreme opposite, the monism of unreason, fluid non-causality, and total loss of control.

Bias against the teleological, the specific, the complex, and the subjective is necessarily a bias against distinct human features in favor of natural materialist features. Other types of bias emanating from the materialist paradigm can be seen within this framework: bias toward motion against stillness, toward accumulation and continuity against discontinuity, and toward the straight line and the full circle against curving, zigzag lines and incomplete forms.

(6) This anti-human bias is also reflected in the structure of terminology. The optimal terminology is the general, the accurate, the quantitative, the descriptive, and the non-figurative. Terms are quite often borrowed from the description of natural objects, and then applied to the realm of the human. Based on all these biases toward the precise against the ambiguous, all sciences attempt to be exact in order to fill any gaps that might disrupt the postulated natural material continuum. Accordingly, the language of algebra becomes the model, wherein there is no gap between the signifier and the signified, or the name and the named, wherein A is A, and B is B. The result is an increasing tendency toward the use of a mathematical paradigm which seeks to represent reality in terms of numbers and quantities, in both the physical and the human sciences.

The researcher has to rely on tools of quantification as questionnaires, statistical indices, mathematical models, etc. This can be achieved only by splitting up the coherent totality of phenomena, atomizing and anatomizing them, reducing them to their basic components and specifics in a way that transforms their internal qualitative uniqueness into external quantitative properties.

(7) Furthermore, it should be noted that the bias in favor of precise definitions and the requirement that a definition be exclusive and inclusive is also a form of bias in favor of Western terminology. The modern Western epistemological project is the only one in the world that has developed its theoretical framework, its methodology as well as its research procedures and tools. It is also supported by a large number of cultural, political, and military research institutions that are able to document any idea, propagate any concept, and ban or marginalize any piece of information. By contrast, all alternative epistemological projects (including the Islamic) are still in the formative stage. Despite the presence of an Islamic world outlook, it has not yet been developed into a theoretical framework for conducting research, with all the other elements concomitant with it (research tools, case studies, and a body of information investigated and analyzed from an Islamic point of view). This is the nature of the present moment in our civilization, the moment of a new birth of alternative paradigms. (The same applies to intellectual dissent in Western civilization. It is represented only by a handful of thinkers and thus still lacks an integrated theoretical system and powerful supportive research institutes to adopt, develop, and defend its theses.) Insisting on complete clarity as well as precise, inclusive-exclusive definitions (especially when it comes to human phenomena) would necessarily lead to the adoption of Western concepts and terminology. A degree of ambiguity should then be acceptable (bearing in mind that ambiguity is not synonymous with vagueness in much the same way as complexity is not synonymous with contradiction), as should procedural definitions and initial interpretive hypotheses. Once our epistemological paradigm with its terminological structure reaches a level of crystallization on a par with the level reached by the Western epistemological system, it will then be possible to demand more precise definitions (which need not be exact in the Western sense).

The bias against the teleological, the particular and the non-continuous (and in favor of the non-teleological, the general, the materialist monist, the exact, etc.) is meant to expedite the process leading to a full control of reality. For that which can be subjected to materialist monism can be readily reduced, simplified, standardized, and thrust into the network of hard causality. On the other hand, that which cannot be subjected to this reductive process resists instrumentalization and is thus

usually marginalized, placed in categories such as “unnatural,” “not important,” “anarchist,” “not a fit subject for research,” etc.

#### MANIFESTATIONS OF THE BIASES OF THE MATERIALIST EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM

##### 1. *Material Progress: The Central Bias*

“Progress” is the cornerstone of Western modernity. Modernization takes place for the sake of progress; development serves progress, construction and destruction projects, five-year plans, drastic changes. etc. – all are done in the name of that magical entity known as “progress.” Ask a child in a narrow alley in a small town in Cairo or on a wide avenue in New York, an old man on a boulevard in Paris, or a young man driving a truck on a highway in China, all would agree that we have to progress, for without progress we would perish.

Let us have a look at Damanhur, my hometown in Egypt. There is a general consensus that some kind of progress in this small town has been achieved. Look, for instance, at the number of telephone lines used, the size of roads, the number of cars, the amount of protein consumed, the pace of life, etc., all of which point to a definite degree of progress achieved; and yet and yet ... In my early childhood, children used to go out in the afternoon to make beautiful colorful kites which they would fly in the then blue sky. Mothers would make us balls from old socks that had been darned many times over. We all played together, for everyone, rich or poor, could make himself a kite or a ball from old socks. Therefore, the moment of play was also a real moment of freedom from class conflict and social inequality (even for a few moments). Nowadays, play time escalates class conflict, since poor children still play with kites and old sock balls, whereas the rich ones buy Fisher-Price battery-operated toys, then watch them passively as the toys do all the playing on their own. The toy (the thing) becomes the center of activity, and man becomes a passive recipient (a thing). With rising levels of progress, video games are being gradually introduced. They are considered the highest point of progress yet attained, but they also generate a sense of solitude and alienation never before experienced. The human being (*al-insān* in Arabic) is the one who seeks the company of others (*yasta'nis*). In other words, these games abort a very important aspect of a person's humanness.

The tension level in Damanhur was much lower when I was a young boy. Most of the people had afternoons free and were, therefore, able to communicate and socialize. Does the shortage of spare time explain the increase of tension? Or is it the pollution of land, sea, and air? Is it the gradual disintegration of the traditional family structure that used to provide people with a reasonable degree of security? Perhaps it is the noise that vehicles produce day and night. What happened to the clean and tilled parks of Damanhur (all now covered with cement) where we used to listen to music? Where is the fish park (with gold fish in some of its basins)? Where is the Municipal Club, where a gas station now stands? And the Arboretum which included a large number of rare plants? All were swept away by “the inevitable course of progress.”

In the evenings, we used to sit on the roof to sing songs, tell horror stories or commit our human share of sins. We had time to watch the stars or just sit and chat. In our routine dealings, we experienced how the whole community was based on solidarity, not contract. In Ramadan evenings, along would come Mohammed al-A‘war, the newspaper vendor, who in Ramadan acted as *al-misaharātī*, the man who played his drum and sang to wake us up for the *suhūr*, the pre-dawn meal. He sang pretty folk songs and once told me the story of a camel in Madinah the Luminous (*al-Madinah al-Munawwarah*) which ran away from the butcher who tried to slaughter it and sought asylum with the Prophet, who granted it protection. Since then the camel has become one of the images etched in my imagination. During the last ten days of Ramadan, al-A‘war sang his farewell song to the holy month: “Nothing is left but farewell. Nothing is left but the beautiful.” My late mother would wake me up before *suhūr* to listen to him. The man would stand on the road with his assistant holding a lantern in hand and a name list in the other. I would listen as my name was called, then go back to sleep and dream.

A realist who has lost the ability to dream, revolt, and change reality needn’t tell me that I am a romantic dreamer. I know how harsh life is in Damanhur for the poor and the oppressed; but I also know that human evil cannot be overcome by material progress (as imagined by some simplistic materialists). I know that Damanhur was not a paradise, but instead of such infantile polarization of past and present, and instead of succumbing to material reality, we need desperately to open the gate of *ijtihad* in order to understand the epistemological biases underlying the

Western concept of progress, then count the gains and losses, the price and the prize.

To start with, it should be realized that the concept of material progress is the cornerstone of the modern materialist Western epistemological outlook. It is the ultimate point of reference, the very *telos* of existence, and the answer it provides to such ultimate questions asked by the human being as: Who am I? What is the purpose of my existence? Is it the recommendation of virtue and the condemnation of vice (from an Islamic perspective), is it moral discrimination between good and evil (from a humanistic perspective), or is it rather the escalation of the cycle of production and consumption, selling and buying, profit-making and the pursuit of pleasure? The concept of progress within the context of the modern Western outlook has a definite starting point and is characterized by some salient features.

(a) Like most other modern Western philosophical and epistemological concepts, the concept of progress is dependent on the concept of nature-matter. Progress, like natural laws, is an inevitable process that takes place despite the will of individuals and can in no way be contravened.

(b) Progress is a unilinear process that follows a natural law that applies to all societies at all times, in all spheres of life, in a homogeneous sequence.

(c) The concept of progress presupposes the existence of a single human history rather than a common humanity that manifests itself in a variety of historical and cultural forms. Hence, the belief that what is good for one historical and cultural formation is good for the others, and which we might term "historical Pantheism."

(d) Progress may take place according to various sequential developmental stages that differ in their details; however, they lead ultimately to the same objectives and achieve the same goals.

(e) Western societies, particularly those of Western Europe, are considered the peak of this universal, evolutionary, unilinear, natural process and are, therefore, the model to be imitated.

(f) The idea of progress is based on the assumption that human knowledge can be accumulated indefinitely.

(g) With the accumulation of knowledge, human control over reality increases steadily.

(h) Natural resources are not limited or finite.

(i) The human mind is infinite and limitless, which makes infinite and limitless progress possible.

However, there are dark aspects to this idea of progress that need to be pointed out:

(a) Many of the assumptions on which the Western materialistic concept of progress is based have been proven invalid. It has been discovered that natural resources are limited, the human mind is finite, and mobility could be detrimental to one's psychological health.

(b) Even on the level of theory, the concept of progress has many sinister aspects (from a human and a humanistic point of view). Like nature-matter, the process of progress has no human or teleological objective and no definite moral content. Progress, after all, is a mere movement or process. A human being usually moves from one place to another with a purpose or objective, but in the materialist Western concept, progress is merely an aimless process (or a process that leads to the production, then consumption of material goods, *ad infinitum* on the level of theory and *ad nauseam* on the level of practice).

(c) Progress becomes self-referential, which means it becomes an end in itself. We then begin to progress simply to achieve more progress. Progress, therefore, is not only a predetermined course, it is also an ultimate value.

(d) This frantic, purposeless movement is actually neither neutral nor innocent. Since a human is defined as a natural being with natural materialist (general) needs, progress (like nature-matter) is indifferent to traditional (ethnic, religious or moral) specificities and is defined as the maximization of (material) profit and pleasure (to the exclusion of other ends).

This accounts for the fact that indices of progress are defined in general materialist terms such as the number of telephone lines used, the number of cars and their speed, the length of roads and the frequency of human mobility (the more mobile the human is, the more "advanced"). Such criteria often focus on measurable and quantifiable objects; values that cannot be quantified or measured are discarded.

The idea of progress, considered a natural general law, and the West regarded as the peak of progress, both lead to the tacit acceptance of the premise that the epistemological paradigm underlying the modern Western cultural formation is superior and universal and that it is the standard

norm to be adopted by all societies. The values and objectives of Western human beings, rooted in their specific historical and social experience, are projected onto the whole world, a process which inevitably leads to a wholesale application of Western theories to all sociocultural formations without regard for the specificities of each society and the rich diversity of different cultures. This results in disregard for non-Western socio-historical experiences and the significance of the non-Western Other, who is banished outside the boundaries of science and history or even outside the boundaries of existence (not in a literal material sense, but in the sense of a distinctive existence that manifests a specific identity).

The whole world, excluding Western Europe and North America, is referred to as non-Western and gradually, all the non-Western nations are adopting the Western model and using the Western paradigm to evaluate themselves. It is a form of cultural genocide that came on the heels of the physical genocide of the indigenous populations of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and some parts of Africa.

In a television interview in an Arab country, I heard the manager of the national airline say that the frequency of individuals' mobility is a sign of progress. After referring to international rates of mobility in "advanced" countries, he added solemnly, "God willing, we will reach this rate soon."

Stemming from such foolish, parrot-like mimicking of the Other's epistemological paradigms, Western technology is avidly and blindly copied without realizing the real price of this type of "progress." The close association between this technology on the one hand and the value system and culture of the producing societies, on the other, is also overlooked. It must be remembered that technology is not merely machines and equipment; rather, it is the creative generating power used to develop the methods of production and to improve the means of dealing with the environment to satisfy human needs. It is, therefore, only transferable within these narrow limits. The concept of gross national product, dominant in most, if not all, countries of the world, manifests a material concept of progress with its underlying bias against social, environmental, moral and psychological considerations. Concepts associated with the idea of progress, such as "raising the standard of living" and "improving the national income," are tied up with the Western materialist epistemological paradigm.

It is therefore time to calculate the price of progress. It should be

noticed that the fruits of progress are immediate, perceptible and quantifiable. The price, however, is delayed, initially imperceptible, and cannot be easily quantified. Similarly, the fruit of progress is interwoven with its price, which is why our indices of progress have to be changed and broadened. Let us have a glance at the various ills resulting from “progress.”

- trivial commodities which add nothing to one’s knowledge and deepen one’s sense of alienation;
- disintegration of family life;
- the way we deal with senior citizens;
- decrease of time spent with one’s family;
- the shrinking of direct human communication because of the use of the computer and similar equipment;
- psychological ailments such as depression;
- increasing crime and violence in the so-called “advanced societies”;
- escalated spending on armaments and other means of destruction (it is historically unprecedented that what humankind spends on means of destruction far exceeds what it spends on means of production);
- the possibility of destroying our planet either suddenly (through nuclear weapons) or gradually (through pollution);
- the impact of tourism and mobility on the social fabric of societies, on their cultural heritage, and on the environment;
- a growing sense of inability to perceive reality and change it (post-Modernism);
- a growing sense of alienation, loneliness and estrangement;
- drug addiction;
- pornography (the material cost of producing it and the moral, human, and ultimately material costs of its consumption).

Let us monitor all of these negative effects and attempt to quantify their material and moral cost. Take, for example, family disintegration and the resultant absence of adequate family care for children (especially infants). This disintegration exacts a heavy toll on society (rising levels of anxiety among children and adolescents, school vandalism, juvenile delinquency, a rising need for costly psychological therapy, etc.).

At the same time, let us undertake a radical shift by including happiness and a sense of security among our indices of progress. An immediate counter-argument will claim that such values are relative, changeable, subjective, and cannot be measured, whereas progress should be objectively measured. Does this mean that progress is one thing, and happiness and security are another? If so, then what does progress achieve for humankind – materialist expansion, or human fulfillment? At this moment, the concept of progress is revealing its true materialist nature; instead of indices derived from the human realm (happiness and security), indices derived from the world of things (speed, productivity, etc.) are adopted, without regard for whether they realize happiness or cause misery to humankind.

Even at the materialist level, there are problems. In this respect, I would like to put forward a new analytical concept which is implicit in many studies, but perhaps never named, namely, the concept of “cosmic regress versus industrial progress.” Ever since the Renaissance Western humans have been propagating the idea of progress, underscoring its immediate and obvious benefits. Yet the delayed, not so clear negative results which have lately become manifest, were either downplayed or completely disregarded. Among these is the destructive impact of progress on the environment. This is but one example of “cosmic regress.” The adjective “cosmic” here indicates the whole planet earth, not any particular geographical area, and the whole human race, not a particular people or race, are threatened with destruction. Therefore, rates of industrial progress must be counted against the average of cosmic regress, namely, the damage caused by industrial progress to planet earth and mankind, remembering that the West is the region that profits most from this “progress,” whereas the whole world has to foot the bill. Therefore, the balance sheet of progress has to take into consideration such ecological phenomena as the depletion of the ozone layer, pollution, nuclear waste, the green-house effect, the increase of carbon dioxide, etc.

Such a complex, far-sighted method of calculating gains and losses has already been adopted in evaluating pesticides. At one point, the amount of pesticides used was an indication of “progress.” Later on, however, it was discovered that the damage they cause to the environment (cosmic regress) far exceeds their immediate economic benefit. Thus, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, which once encouraged the use of pesticides, began advising against them; the use of pesticides which once was

an indicator of progress became an indicator of backwardness. Hence, the balance sheet of progress, materialistic and economic as it is, will never be precise so long as it neglects the cost of cosmic regress.

Some statistics estimate that the real cost of an industrial project is negative if the indirect environmental costs are taken into consideration. The Western industrial project has achieved success only because others are footing the environmental bill. The fact that some countries have managed to catch up with Western levels of production and consumption accounts for the high frequency of sad news about natural catastrophes (floods, long hot summers, cancer, etc.)

The new thought of the Greens and other environmental rights activists with their theories of sustainable growth (growth that does not harm the environment and its natural resources, and which therefore can sustain future generations) is an indication of the growing recognition of the heavy price of progress. It is hoped that such a critical attitude may succeed in spurring people to discover new forms of industry that are less burdensome on human beings and their environment.

### 2. *Darwinism (or Nietzscheanism)*

The cult of progress reveals its materialist face through a set of governing values that control the life of the secular human being such as “the struggle for survival,” “survival of the fittest or the strongest,” “man is a wolf to his brother man,” “ethics is a mere ploy used by the weak to undermine the strong,” and the glorification of the strong man or “the superman.” Values such as these stem from the materialist Western outlook that reached its peak in the works of Darwin and Nietzsche. They make no distinction between the world of humankind and the world of nature-matter; on the contrary, they underscore the fact that the materialistic biological values of conflict and struggle govern both nature and humans, both the jungle and human culture. Physical (biological) survival, according to this outlook, is the ultimate purpose (*telos*) of life on earth. The only vehicle of evolution is permanent, fierce conflict; the only arbiter for both humankind and nature is power, for it forms the overall epistemological and moral framework.

### 3. *The Market-Factory Metaphor*

The same Darwinian-Nietzschean materialist perspective expresses itself in the form of a key metaphor synonymous with the concept of nature-

matter, namely, the view of the world as a market and a factory. It is an outlook that originates from materialist monism, where everything becomes useful matter. The whole world is like a machine and the purpose of existence is to control everything and utilize it; both physical nature, which is seen as raw material (*natura naturata*) and human nature, are seen as mere productive energy. Commodities are produced to be sent to the market, where people are seen as a mere purchasing power that buys commodities and consumes them. The mechanism of the market and commodities presupposes a predictable, standardized world and an equally predictable, standardized human who is subject to firm, inexorable laws. The best that economic humans can achieve is to produce in order to consume and consume in order to produce, serving only their own interests and struggling against others, unburdened by any ethical or epistemological values or traditions. Just like nature-matter, the market-factory is a rigid entity that moves inexorably forward, impervious to human teleologies as well as to all human values.

#### 4. *The Central State*

One of the most important types of bias stemming from the Western epistemological paradigm is the bias in favor of the secular central nation or state. This bias is associated with the concepts of rationalization, progress, control and unity of sciences. With the belief in the unity of sciences and the mind's ability to accumulate information and recreate reality in accordance with natural law, the belief was reinforced that science could guide societies and rationalize them. The central state was believed to be the supreme agency to realize this objective by means of comprehensive plans to unify, standardize, and quantify social reality, eliminating all ethnic and linguistic enclaves so as to control and utilize this reality and to develop the infrastructure necessary for the achievement of all of these goals in both the material and the human spheres. In the material sphere, the market is unified, roads are built, and measurements are standardized. In the human sphere, central, specialized bureaucracies are established to orient individuals to become citizens and transcend all other loyalties, owing allegiance only to the state. In this respect, it could be said that the citizen is but a variation on the natural and economic human, a one-dimensional entity that can be explained within the framework of materialist and causal monism.

This means that the state itself stems from the concept of nature-matter and materialist monism. This is but another manifestation of the eradication of the human-nature duality and of the continuous movement towards a natural materialist monism which robs human society of its vitality, transforming it into a huge machine whose movement can be readily predicted since it follows general laws and central plans.

It is noteworthy that the state always prefers to deal with macro units rather than with the micro units of family and local groups, because bureaucracies cannot deal with specific and unique units. It can deal with humans only insofar as they are public citizens, with generalized needs and predetermined dreams, not with humans as private individuals with specific needs and unpredictable dreams. Therefore, it is understandably biased in favor of the external at the expense of the internal, the contractual at the expense of human solidarity, and the public at the expense of the private.

The so-called sovereign individual (the citizen-natural human) – divorced from any groups or institutions (such as the family) which would mediate between him and a monolithic state – becomes the only social unit. Nevertheless, these sovereign individuals gain their identity and self-image through the market, the media, or organizations (schools, five-year plans, government agencies, etc.) which carefully orchestrate needs and aspirations of human beings and plan their dreams for them. In other words, they fall an easy prey to prefabricated self-images and dreams.

##### *5. An International Consumerist Culture*

One of the most dangerous results of the materialist Western epistemological paradigm is what might be called “the materialist consumerist international culture.” This is a culture with Western (or American) origins, but its forms are neutral in the sense that they have no distinctive color, flavor or character. This quasi-international culture has its specific products such as the hamburger, a type of standardized food cooked exactly the same way, leaving no room for personal creativity. It is a type of food that one eats alone, perhaps while walking (just like the natural human). There are also blue jeans, which consist of a piece of coarse blue cloth, preferably tattered. They are considered very practical since one can wear them for almost every occasion. There is also the T-shirt on which is printed an advertisement (Drink Coca-Cola), a statement of

identity (“I Love Cairo”), an attitude (“I Love Blondes”), etc. Regardless of the content of the statement, it presupposes that the human is just a space that moves, a purely externalized creature whose external appearance is the same as his/her internal reality, whose surface and skin are the same as his/her depths and conscience. An additional example can be found in disco music, Batman and Rambo. Most of these cultural products originated in the USA but developed their own autonomy and dynamism, acquiring gradually all the traits of nature-matter with its indifference to human specificity and inner being.

The danger behind this culture lies in the fact that it panders to something latent in human beings, that is, their infantile desire to lose the very boundaries that define their identity and to retreat from the complex world of tragedy and comedy, self-transcendence and moral choices to the simple, one-dimensional world of hamburgers, T-shirts, and Batman, none of which belongs to any time or any place and all of which are devoid of historical, moral or human content. Such a consumerist culture is not only hostile to Oriental civilization; it is likewise hostile to Western civilization itself, and to any cultural forms that aspire to transcend the material and natural (which is why I term this consumerist culture “anti-culture”).

#### MECHANISMS FOR SURMOUNTING BIAS

Having studied the various types of bias, particularly bias in favor of the modern Western epistemological and cultural paradigm, let me suggest some of the mechanisms that can help one surmount such biases.

##### *I. Realizing the Inevitability of Bias*

We started off by stressing the first premise, namely, the inevitability of bias. It can be argued that realizing this simple fact is in itself the first step toward overcoming it, for if we become aware of bias, we do not accept “facts” passively, believing in their absolute objectivity. Denial of the very existence of bias is intrinsically biased in favor of a specific materialistic perspective which views the human mind, and man in general, as an inseparable part of the natural system, an ineffective and passive entity, not independent from the laws of nature. The simple mind of the human being is seen as entering into a simple mechanical relationship with a simple reality.

However, this is a false image; the mind of the human being is undoubtedly limited, yet it is active. It does not transcribe reality in a passive, objective way; rather, it encounters a complex, diverse reality, then engages in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction, for it includes and magnifies some of these aspects, excluding or marginalizing others, and eventually abstracting an epistemological paradigm through which it perceives the world. As such, the human mind achieves a degree of independence for humankind from the laws of nature immanent in matter. This means that perception of the same reality differs from one person to another according to one's individual experiences, cultural heritage, historical memories, symbolic and semiotic systems, aesthetic and moral values, etc. All of this makes individual and collective bias inevitable. In this sense, recognition of bias implies rejection of the notion that reality and the mind are simple and that there are general abstract laws that can be applied indiscriminately to nature and to all human beings regardless of their cultural and social contexts. It is an affirmation of the creativity and vitality of the human mind and of the complexity of its motivation; it is a defense of the centrality of humankind against infantile materialist philosophies that proclaim the unity (and monism) of nature-matter and draw a picture of a faceless universe, not fundamentally different from a human's condition when still an embryo before becoming a full human being, a *homo sapiens*.

There is nothing new in what I am claiming. The human sciences, no matter how objective, reflect certain biases. This is a well-known fact in the social sciences, tacitly or explicitly accepted by the majority of the practitioners in this field. Only extreme behaviorists, operating in terms of the abstract general laws of nature-matter, would deny the inevitability of bias.

Moreover, it is admitted by many that the philosophical formulations of the laws of physics as well as the classification and interpretation of some of the conclusions of scientific experiments are biased. Such formulations are used in interpreting scientific experiments, after which they are considered an organic part of scientific law, even though there might be no necessary relationship between the scientific experiment and the philosophical formulation of physical laws. If physicists look at the movement of an atom and see that it moves in a way that does not follow any familiar pattern, they can then state that "the universe is chaotic and

subject to chance.” By contrast, they can also state that “the human mind is limited, however vital, and therefore incapable of full comprehension of the universe.” Because of the materialist atheist monist paradigm underlying Western science, the first formulation, emphasizing the ideas of chaos and chance, has gained currency even though the latter has more explanatory power. It is even more “scientific” since it leaves the door wide open for *ijtihad* and creative thinking. Unlike the claim in the former statement, the latter does not allege that all the experiments needed for the observation of the movement of the atom have already been conducted or that the available measurement tools are the best possible.

Among the distinctive features of Western analytical categories is that they operate almost exclusively on the political, economic, and social levels; they hardly ever reach the epistemological premises underlying human discourse which form answers to the ultimate questions facing humankind such as: “What is progress?” or “What is its human content?” Such questions are hardly ever asked except in moments of crisis. Instead, people ask: “How can progress be achieved? How can it be attained?” The last set of questions assumes progress as an unquestioned category, a kind of *a priori* or absolute *donnée* which uniformly turns out, on closer scrutiny, to be the materialist monist paradigm. If our analytical discourse goes deeper to the epistemological level and if we ask questions such as, “What is the goal of progress?”, “What is the ideal a given society is trying to realize?” and, “Is progress effective on both the material and human levels, or on the material level alone?”, the epistemological paradigm underlying the Western concept of progress will reveal its more sinister aspects.

## II. *Comprehensive Criticism*

Our theoretical effort to discover bias should never stop at the partial level of practice, but must include the whole theoretical structure of Western philosophy. We end up “patching up,” that is, borrowing concepts from here and there, where the modern Western outlook is applied in one field and not in another. This sometimes takes the form of borrowing Western concepts while modifying only some aspects of their moral and epistemological content and at others, trying to prove that the borrowed Western concept has a parallel version in our heritage so as to justify its adoption. This is a process of retroactive Westernization, since

it leads to a wholesale adoption of Western epistemological paradigms, though the terminology has been changed and the rationale for adoption has been altered.

The process of patching up is based on the belief that the modern Western outlook is natural, universal, and ultimate, and accordingly all that is needed is to embellish it, or perhaps rearrange some of its components. A more radical, complex and comprehensive outlook should be based on the assumption that there is no single historical or cultural course. There are, rather, numerous different historical and cultural courses, based on different premises and operating within different frameworks. Such a pluralistic outlook can only be reached through a comprehensive study of the Western cultural formation in relation to other formations.

### III. *Highlighting the Inadequacies of the Western Epistemological Paradigm*

Emancipation from the hegemony of the Western epistemological paradigm requires that we highlight some of its shortcomings. The following are some examples.

#### I. A PARADIGM HOSTILE TO MAN

It should be noticed that the modern Western epistemological paradigm implies anti-human tendencies, since it does not recognize humankind as a distinctive phenomenon in the universe or the human mind as a creative, vital force. Human beings are denied any centrality in the world (their vicegerency from God, if we were to use the Islamic idiom). This assumption runs counter not only to our view of ourselves as responsible and free beings, but also to our very concrete, existential experience. It is hard to believe that there is no substantial difference between humankind and the larva, that they are in the final analysis (as the materialists claim) one and the same, and that humankind can be reduced to the level at which one and the same law applies to all beings. When we recognize no differences, dualities or hierarchy, we should also know that we are in the leveling world of materialist monism, where the general and the natural replace the particular and the human.

All unique human boundaries collapse, along with human identity and the complex world that contains Self and Other, and wherein human beings exist as responsible creatures who choose between good and evil.

A faceless, flat universe with no boundaries emerges, for materialist monism cannot cope with complexities, boundaries, multiple levels and identities, i.e., it cannot cope with what distinguishes human beings as human beings and what sets them apart from all other beings. The Western epistemological project denies not only the existence of God; it likewise denies the existence of humankind. The death of God, so proudly proclaimed, is actually a proclamation of the death of humankind.

## 2. THE WESTERN CULTURAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROJECT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REALIZE

It should be noted that the Western project for bridging the gap separating humankind from nature (so as to reach general laws that would explain all phenomena) is both superficial and impossible. Epistemologically, this paradigm presupposes the simplicity of the human mind, of the reality the mind perceives, of the linguistic signifier, of the human signified, and finally of the relation between the two. It also presupposes that the gradual accumulation of knowledge will lead to a general diminution of the unknown and a gradual expansion of the area of the known, and that the unknown is ultimately knowable. An arrogant conclusion follows from all of these simplistic initial premises: that humankind's knowledge, and therefore control, of reality will be complete at some point. It would be generous to call this hypothesis infantile and ridiculous. A desultory glance at the world at the present time would be sufficient to rebut the initial premises and the conclusions based on them.

The Western epistemological paradigm attempts to reach a level of generalization unwarranted by the level of knowledge attained at the moment of generalization. Take the concept of "social class," which Marx defined on the basis of such materialist criteria as income and the tools and relations of production. This analytical concept is an expression of the attempt to reach a so-called scientific term: precise, universal, general, quantitative, that disregards any teleological aspects and does not appeal in any way to a concept of human nature.

Marx and Engels did not know much about the rest of the world when they developed the concept of "class." Worse still, it seems that Marx's knowledge about the nature of the social and political structure in an Eastern European country such as Poland was meager. The term was, however, treated as a concept of universal applicability. Later on, when

Marx started to learn more about the Orient, he discovered social structures dissimilar to those he was familiar with. He then resorted to a Hegelian formula on the basis of which he referred to modes of production in China, India, Persia, Japan, Egypt, etc. as “the Asiatic mode of production.” This ridiculous classification is tantamount to saying, “I really know almost nothing about the Orient, but I’ll still go ahead and make some generalizations about it.” Imagine some scholar trying to understand the long and complex history of China, India, Egypt, and Japan in light of this sweeping Marxist generalization. Would he understand anything? Would this concept be of any analytical or explanatory value?

On the practical level, the Western cultural project – based on the ideas of control of resources, maximization of production and consumption, and continuous infinite progress – has run into what I call a “cosmic wall.” If the peoples of the Occident, who make up only a small percentage of the world population (20%), consume more than 80% of the world’s natural resources,<sup>8</sup> this means that said project is a model which can be neither imitated nor repeated. To make my point clear, let us imagine that China and India adopted such a paradigm for development. It would naturally translate itself into a life style characterized by ever increasing levels of production and consumption. Imagine the cars used by one-third of the world’s population, now that they have become “advanced,” starting to burn fuel and oxygen! Then imagine Brazil embarking on the same course of action: the Brazilians would be obliged, in their own national interest and to sustain their own life style, to fell the rain forests which produce one-third of the earth’s oxygen! This is undoubtedly a sure recipe for the suffocation of the entire human race.

### 3. STUDYING THE CRISIS OF MODERN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

It is now imperative that we develop a general theory of the crisis of Western civilization and the Western paradigm of a materialist modernity. If the modern West has achieved its absoluteness and centrality through the material and cultural victories and successes it achieved at the early stages of its development, it is now time to reexamine critically these victories and successes, highlighting the shortcomings that became more pronounced through the varied applications of the materialist paradigm over a long period of time. It could be argued that since the late 1960s, the

main features of this paradigm have more or less fully emerged and the different links of the paradigmatic sequence have been realized. It has ceased to be a mere utopian ideology or a set of ideas to be propagated; it has now become a cultural material structure whose intended, positive results in the short term have been observed, as well as its unintended, negative results in the long term. Many Western thinkers have given up their optimism regarding Western modernity, and Western civilization has lost a great deal of the self-confidence it had till the First World War. It also has lost the sense of its centrality and universality. This is quite natural and expected in view of the intensifying crisis of Western modernity (two world wars, amassing weapons of mass destruction, the ecological crisis, and an increasing sense of alienation on the part of Western man from himself and his environment). Till recently such issues were talked about only by poets in their poems, novelists in their novels, and scholars in their specialized academic papers. Since the late 1960s, however, these issues have become daily items in the media.

The crisis of Western civilization is not a figment of our imagination, nor is it a revolutionary fabrication of the “Third World”. It is a theme found in the writings of such Western thinkers as Spengler, Toynbee, and many others. This crisis is manifested in all fields of knowledge and has to be studied thoroughly in its various aspects so that we may arrive at a cogent explanation of the crisis. To achieve this objective, the following questions might be asked:

- Is there a relationship between pornography (the desanctification of the human being), environmental pollution, and the amassing of enough weapons of mass destruction to destroy the world several times over (desanctification of the universe)?
- Is there a relationship between materialist rationalism and the Holocaust? Is not the Holocaust but an application of the principle of material utility to human beings such that the handicapped, the Slavs and the Jews (“useless eaters” as classified by the Nazis) were to be exterminated as useless matter, with survival granted only to the useful and productive?
- Is there a way out of this crisis, or is it “historically inevitable” given the materialist utilitarian premise of modern Western civilization?

#### 4. THE PARADIGMATICALITY OF ABERRATIONS

After examining the Western epistemological paradigm and its crisis, its various manifestations need to be investigated. Let me here raise the issue of what are termed “mere aberrations of modern Western civilization,” namely, some negative phenomena which are associated with it but which are classified as mere aberrations by historians of Western civilization. Among such aberrations are the Western imperialist formation, Nazism and Zionism.

Among the most important mechanisms for overcoming bias is to discover the paradigms underpinning these aberrations. For in point of fact, such aberrations, far from being exceptional irregularities, are actually an organic part of the underlying paradigm of modern Western civilization, and an inevitable outcome of its application to reality. In other words, the so-called aberration is actually consistent with the inner logic of the paradigm.

One of the most effective ways to discover the real nature of modern Western civilization and its underlying paradigm is to study Western imperialism. Such a study might be carried out on the basis of the following question:

Is it at all possible to separate the prosperity and continuous growth of Western societies from the Western imperialist project which divided up the whole world, then plundered it? This plundering process is historically unprecedented both in scope and method. The total amount of what England plundered from India far exceeds the former's gross production during the entire Industrial Revolution. Great Britain not only benefited economically from its colonies, it also exported its social problems to them, including its human surplus (unemployed workers), undesirable religious and ethnic minorities (notably the Jews), criminals who threatened the social fabric, and individuals who had failed to achieve social mobility. All were exported to the Orient together with a huge amount of commodities. Add to all this the manpower, expertise, cheap raw material and antiquities robbed by the colonizing powers. We can also add the oxygen burned and the carbon monoxide which accumulated in the atmosphere between the mid-19th Century (the beginning of the industrial

revolution) and the mid-20th Century (the beginning of industrialization in the Third World). This depletion of natural resources imposed severe limits on Third World countries' ability to develop themselves in the age of ecological crisis and the awareness of the limitedness of these resources. Given these and other facts, can we then separate the so-called "capitalist accumulation," considered the basis of Western progress and "take off," from "imperialist accumulation"? Studying the Western cultural and epistemological paradigm in isolation from the phenomenon of imperialism is a great bias and a fundamental analytical error that must be avoided. Imperialism should, therefore, be introduced as a basic analytical concept in the attempt to study Western society and Western modernity.

Nazism, it must be admitted, represented a rare moment in the history of Western (and human) civilization. It was unprecedented in history that millions were exterminated in such a methodical, "rational," detached manner. However, this rare moment can also be regarded as the paradigmatic moment in which the modern Western epistemological paradigm revealed its ugly face. This can be seen if we place Nazism first in the broader context of the theories of racial inequality that spread in Europe in the second half of the 19th Century and which formed the doctrinal basis of Western imperialism, and second, in the context of the systematic genocide of native Americans and the enslavement of native Africans by Westerners. If we do so, we will find that Nazism – labeled by many as a mere aberration from a humanistic Western civilization – was actually a paradigmatic moment and part of an over-all Western recurrent pattern, different from other similar phenomena only in degree, not in kind.

##### 5. WESTERN VOICES OF DISSENT

We have seen that as Western civilization gradually became aware of its crises, it began to lose some of its self-confidence and started questioning some of its own central premises and underlying assumptions. Western dissident intellectuals started articulating some of this self-questioning, describing the crisis, and even suggesting ways, some radical, some conservative, to surmount it. Such dissident thought should be made use of in our attempt to develop a critical perspective on Western civilization. We

should make available this rich dissident literature which extends now to all fields of knowledge, including literary criticism, linguistics, philosophy, ecology, physical sciences, history, etc. Scanning such literature reveals a rejection of materialist scientific paradigms. Availability of this literature in Arabic and other languages would set the stage for a rich and multi-faceted dialog regarding the Western cultural project:

(a) *Modernity*

There are numerous Western studies on the crisis of modernity and on the nihilism and anti-humanism of modernism. A number of philosophical and literary periodicals, some of them with Christian theological inclinations, have published revealing articles on the topic. There is valuable criticism of modernism even within Marxism, such as in the works of Lukács, Fredrick Jameson and Terry Eagleton. Despite its nihilism, post-modernist thought includes notable criticism of several aspects of the Western modernization and enlightenment project.

(b) *Development Theories and the Idea of Progress*

Several studies on the modern Western concept of development point out that it is a quantitative and materialist concept that disregards quality and the human dimensions of humankind's existence. With the intensification of the environmental crisis, several authors wonder about the limits of growth and progress. The failure of most West-based development projects in Third World countries have also given rise to a literature that demands that the pivotal concepts of growth and progress be questioned.

(c) *The Green Parties and Environment Activists*

This is one of the most important types of counter-thought. As indicated earlier, Western materialist thought is based on the assumption of the limitlessness of the human mind and its ability to conquer and control the world. It is also assumed that natural resources cannot be depleted. Environmentalists, on the other hand, believe in the finitude of the mind and natural resources and the need of human beings to maintain some kind of balance with the world of nature and with themselves. The underlying paradigm of

their thought is notably different from the materialist paradigm operative in mainstream Western thought.

(d) *Revisionist Views of Western History*

There are several revisionist studies re-examining some of the fundamentals of modern Western history and historical thought. The history of imperialism, for example, has been re-written from the point of view of the oppressed colonized peoples whose heritage has been destroyed, their way of life undermined, and their natural resources plundered. Some of these peoples have even been subjected to wholesale genocide. The French Revolution is another case in point. The occasion of its bicentennial witnessed the appearance of scores of volumes in English and French presenting a completely new outlook on this crucial event in the history of Western modernity. Some books highlighted the battle of Vendée (March 1793), in which the forces of the French Revolution launched what is now considered the first systematic extermination (holocaust) of a population in modern history. These forces massacred women and children, young and old in an attempt to eradicate “the enemies of the revolution.”

One study points out that the violence and terror which accompanied the French Revolution, far from being marginal aberrations, were actually a paradigmatic structural feature thereof. Violence, according to this study, was the only available means for the new secular state, having abandoned religion, to recruit the masses and harness their vital energies in its own service.

Other studies refer to the Revolution’s attitude to ethnic and religious minorities and how they were eradicated, either literally or figuratively, i.e., through the elimination of their distinctive cultural features. Another study shows that far from helping France, the Revolution impeded its economic development and slowed its growth, thereby giving England the chance to outrun France in economic growth. Other studies highlight the rise in divorce rates and the number of illegitimate children in France after the Revolution, in addition to similar social aspects which traditional, “enlightened” histories of the Revolution do not care to touch upon.

(e) *Radical Changes in Epistemological Paradigms Underlying the Physical Sciences*

Among the most notable disciplines in which Western dissident thought expresses itself is the philosophical thought underlying the physical sciences. Nineteenth century science was committed to a cumulative, non-generative view of the mind and knowledge. It was based on the belief that through a gradual accumulation of knowledge, the realm of the knowable would expand and consequently the realm of the unknown would diminish until human beings had developed full knowledge of reality, which in turn would give them control over it.

However, all this proved to be an illusion. Ironically, through accumulation of knowledge, the theories, hypotheses, and available data have become so vast, diverse, and at times contradictory, that no single individual could hope to assimilate and synthesize them all. Moreover, the illusion harbored by many that the realm of the known would expand as the realm of the unknown diminished has been completely dispelled. The realm of the known undoubtedly expands; however, the realm of the unknown expands at a far greater ratio. The more we know, the more we paradoxically realize how little we know. This realization manifests itself in scientific concepts, hypotheses, theories, and even scientific laws. In other words, human beings have paradoxically realized their limits through their many successful conquests. The natural sciences have abandoned concepts of hard causality, adopting instead concepts of correlation and procedural definition and aspiring to a partial rather than a complete explanation of phenomena. This conclusion needs to be emphasized so that researchers and scholars might be freed from the fallacy of simple causality.

It is noteworthy that an increasing number of Western intellectuals and thinkers extol multiplicity (pluralism) and denounce Euro-centricity on the level of theory. However, the materialist rationalist monist paradigm (the basis of modern Western epistemology) remains the mainstream operative paradigm that underlies the outlook adopted by the World Bank, UN development agencies, the Pentagon, etc.

#### IV. *Relativizing the West*

The aim of these criticisms is not to expose or deconstruct the West (an exercise worthy of nihilists and Post-Modernists). Rather, they are an attempt to sort out the Western arsenal of knowledge, dividing it into “Western,” that is specific to Western civilization, and universal, expressing our common humanity. The universal elements may then be adopted and adapted to an independent theoretical framework rooted in our concrete historical reality.

To accomplish this, we need to relinquish the belief that the West is central, universal and absolute. Similarly, we need to realize that so-called “scientific laws” propagated by Westernizers are actually the product of specific historical and cultural developments and the coalescing of different elements and circumstances in a unique historical moment. Once we realize this, the West will be relativized, becoming one cultural formation among many. In other words, the West will cease to be universal. This shift requires that we retrieve a truly universal, comparative perspective which emphasizes the specific features and history of the Western cultural formation just as other formations have their specific features and histories.

The comparative perspective does not mean studying how one cultural formation has influenced another (a common practice in Arab academia); it means, rather, the attempt to arrive at a truly complex universal outlook based on the rich and diverse experiences of all human societies. Moreover, it involves an in-depth study of the historical experiences and epistemological paradigms through which human beings have dealt with the world around them and created different cultural forms with their own intrinsic laws whose humanness stems from their specificity, not from a supposed consistency with illusory “general laws” that turn out, on closer scrutiny, to be “Western laws.”

The way to such a complex, truly universal perspective has been eased by the fact that Western civilization has already lost much of its presumed centrality since the rise of other, non-Western cultural centers which may be considered successful even by Western criteria. To achieve this relativization of Western civilization, the following points could be addressed:

### I. IDENTIFYING THE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Max Weber, the versatile German sociologist, has dealt with many issues and social phenomena in his writings. But perhaps the most important of these is the problem of the specificity of Western civilization. He argues that this specificity has manifested itself in a gradual and rising level of rationalization, a process so pervasive that it has eventually encompassed all aspects of human life. This rationalization process is the consequence of certain elements unique to Western civilization: Roman law, the structure of the Western city, some aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and even the development of music. In his view, this process of rationalization is responsible for the rise of what he terms “rational capitalism” (as opposed to the “irrational” capitalism of traditional societies), which has developed objective bureaucratic administrative systems characterized by impersonal, value-free procedures.

Despite the fact that Weber at times celebrated this value-free procedural rationalization as one of the unique contributions of modern Western civilization, he eventually came to see this process as landing human beings in an “iron cage,” a set of strict, blind, rational rules derived from the monist materialist paradigm to which human beings must submit so as to be standardized and programmed. Be that as it may, by underscoring the specificity of Western civilization, Weber (as opposed to Marx and Durkheim, who underscored the concept of general law) well serves us in our attempt to develop an independent epistemological project.

The specific aspects of the development of Western technology should also be investigated in comparison with other types of technology, such as the Chinese, for example, or even the technology of air and water mills in Western civilization itself. One Western historian of ideas argues that Westerners, rather than developing available, and relatively advanced, water and air technology to generate energy, opted for energy generated from fossil fuel because of the imperialist epistemology which they espoused. Whereas the former is based on balance, the latter necessitates conquest and plunder, which would yield immediate and quick results.

### 2. TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF WESTERN KNOWLEDGE

Let us begin with a truism: It is impossible to understand any phenomenon in its full complexity without placing it in its socio-historical context, made up of a complex of elements, biases, symbols, yearnings, etc.

Therefore, a study of the context of Western concepts and ideas will undoubtedly enable us to understand them in their full complexity and specificity. Take, for example, a concept that recurs in many Western studies of the Orient, namely, “the Asiatic mode of production.” This highly general and abstract phrase is obviously an expression of the centrality and universality that Westerners have bestowed on themselves. This outlook came into existence in the 16th Century and developed into explicit racism later in the 19th Century, when Westerners divided the world into two segments: Western, civilized, logical, and complex on the one hand, and non-Western, primitive, illogical, and simple on the other. This racist outlook manifested itself on the epistemological level in the Faustian desire to arrive at comprehensive scientific interpretations of the entire world, leaving no gaps whatsoever. This is manifested in the “scientific” attempt to control reality through a set of cognitive categories which are assumed to encompass all temporal and spatial human reality.

No matter how ignorant it happened to be about Asia and Africa, Western science nevertheless felt compelled to classify them, thrusting them into facile, highly generalized categories such as “the Asiatic mode of production,” “tribal societies,” and the like. In this way it was able to reach the comprehensiveness necessary for its claim of centrality and universality.

### 3. SOME JEWISH SOURCES OF MODERN WESTERN THOUGHT

Some Western ideas have a religious dimension that can hardly be detected by the “objective” researcher (such as the idea of “historical inevitability,” which is more or less a secularization of the Christian view of a providential history). Let us turn first to some of the Jewish sources of modern Western thought. It is agreed upon among students of Western thought that members of the Jewish communities in the West have achieved quite a high degree of eminence within the frame of modern Western civilization. Published research has not, however, sufficiently emphasized what may be termed “the Jewish component” in modern Western thought.

By “Jewish” here, we do not mean Torah or even Talmudic Judaism, but rather that of the Kabbalah (notably the Lurianic Kabbalah of Issac Luria) which, according to Gershom Scholem, has dominated Jewish religious thought since the 16th Century. Kabbalah is a monistic, pantheistic

outlook which sees the Creator as gradually coming to inhabit his creations till they form one substance, with no gaps separating the one from the other, humankind and nature becoming one with God. One might even say that they become God. In other words, the Lurianic Kabbalistic outlook is an extreme pantheistic system that leads to a form of unity (monism) of being, which is no different from materialistic monism. Lurianic Kabbalah is, therefore, a prelude to secularist thought which regards nature-matter as sacred and which defines the human being not as a unique creature but rather as an organic, inseparable part of nature-matter.

The Kabbalists developed their own outlook and view of cosmic and historical cycles, their own view of humans and their dynamism, as well as a whole system of Kabbalistic symbols. Lurianic Kabbalah resulted in what is referred to in Jewish studies as “Messianic Fever,” i.e., the belief that the Jewish Savior (Messiah) is about to arrive. The Messianic tendency is hostile to boundaries, for it views the human being (or the Messiah) as a limitless human being (a god), and quite often manifests itself in licentious tendencies (which abrogate divine and human laws) and ends up abolishing the very boundaries which define human identity.

Rabbis at first confronted the Kabbalah and tried to curb the Kabbalists; indeed, they even accused them of explicit polytheism and hostility not only to monotheism but even to Judaism itself. Some rabbis pointed out that the Kabbalah was an outlook that did not originate from Judaism or the Jewish tradition, but rather from pantheistic peasant Slavic folklore. After a period of resistance, the Kabbalah won the day, and Kabbalistic interpretations of the Torah and Talmud gradually became more prevalent till they became the standard normative interpretations. Worse still, a Christian Kabbalah rose and spread, influencing many Western thinkers, particularly during the Renaissance. Kabbalah is termed “Jewish or Christian” only metaphorically, since it is in fact pagan and pantheistic.

No single study of the Kabbalah has been published in Arabic. A few books have been published about Messianism but without any thorough examination of its underlying philosophical and historical significance or recurrent patterns. The number of scholars and historians of ideas in the West studying the Kabbalah and Messianism is scanty and confined to the field of Jewish studies. Many of them make no attempt to see Jewish Messianic movements in their Western context or within the context of

the Western history of ideas. Therefore, the Jewish Kabbalistic component of modern Western thought stayed implicit and nobody has yet undertaken to study the subject thoroughly and systematically.

Following are some pivotal points which may be examined so that we can identify the Kabbalistic (and, *ergo* pantheistic) component of modern Western civilization, and some of the implicit biases that underlie it.

(a) *Baruch Spinoza*

To many historians of Western thought, Spinoza is regarded as the first secular man, who abandoned his faith (Judaism) and did not espouse a new one. He advocated an extreme version of naturalism that leads to the deification of nature and the naturalization of God. It is quite important to pinpoint the relationship between his thought and Kabbalistic (Gnostic) thought. There are some studies on this topic, but they simply touch the surface.

(b) *Sigmund Freud*

Psychoanalysis, with its many symbols and emphasis on human sexuality, can only be fully understood with reference to the Kabbalah, an outlook, which “eroticized the divine and divinized the erotic.” This is not an unreasonable description of Freud’s outlook which transformed eros into some kind of secular absolute, immanent in matter (the body).

Consider the well-known Freudian classification of the human soul into the ego, the superego, and the Id. It would have been quite important for Arab translators of Freud to know that it is quite likely that the word ‘Id’ is actually derived not from the Latin *Id*, but rather, the Yiddish *Yid* (Jew). It is also believed by some to be an echo of the Hebrew word *Yesod*, meaning “foundation,” one of the ten Sephirots or emanations that make up God and the Adam Kadmon (cosmic human) in the Kabbalistic system. The *yesod* in the picture of Adam Kadmon is sometimes placed at the male genitalia. This means that according to the Kabbalistic system, the Id (which is also *yid*) is the sexual basis of the universe. Several works have been published on this topic. There is even a specialized periodical titled *Judaism and Psychoanalysis*.

Significantly, a serious study was published in Arabic entitled

*al-Turāth al-Yahūdī wa al-Ṣabyūnī fī al-Fikr al-Frowyḏī*<sup>9</sup> by the distinguished Egyptian psychologist Sabri Jirjis. Nevertheless, despite his meticulous and erudite examination of the topic, this excellent study has been neglected, and no scholar has bothered to support or refute it.

(c) *Franz Kafka*

Kafka is considered one of the most notable Western novelists. His absurdist, nihilist attitude can be considered an expression of the crisis of Westerners in modern times. The Jewish Kabbalistic component is evident in Kafka's art and thought.

(d) *Deconstruction*

Deconstruction is at present one of the most notable schools of thought in the West. It is associated with the name of its founder, French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who also happens to be a Jew of Algerian origin. Another prominent pioneer of deconstruction is Edmund Gabes, a Jew of Egyptian origin. The most renowned deconstructionist in the USA, Harold Bloom, is also Jewish. Derrida received some sort of Talmudic schooling with Kabbalistic trends, and was heavily influenced by Emmanuel Levinas, a leading French Jewish religious thinker. Bloom wrote a book entitled *Kabbalah and Criticism*, and a novel that he himself describes as Gnostic. Ironically, all the Arab interpreters of Deconstruction and Post-Modernism have failed to see its "Jewish" component, even though there are several studies by Susan Handelman which deal with the subject quite thoroughly.

V. *Opening up to the World*

It is necessary for us to open up to different world civilizations and benefit from their cultural and intellectual traditions which encompass a rich body of knowledge and wisdom that could deepen our understanding of humankind, society, and nature. The so-called modern Arab Renaissance opened up exclusively to the West, notably to England, France and the USA, as well as, somewhat, to Germany. By contrast, we know nearly nothing about Eastern Europe and completely disregard other non-Western civilizations, namely, most world civilizations. For example, how

much do we really know about the development of the pre- and post-19th Century Japanese economy? This paradigm has taken a course different from its Western counterpart, incorporating into its modernization project some elements derived from the Japanese cultural tradition. How much do we know about Japanese literary genres or dramatic traditions? It can be argued that the history of Arab theater could have taken a completely different course had our literary critics and writers studied the Japanese dramatic tradition, which is fundamentally different from its Western counterpart. Had they done so, they would probably have discovered that many of our folkloric epic poems (*sīras*) are actually not narrative, but rather dramatic poems, and therefore could have served as a starting point for a modern Arab theater that does not necessarily mimic Western theater.

The same argument applies to the non-Arab Muslim world. Knowledge of such “Islamic” languages as Swahili, Turkish, and Persian is confined to a small number of specialists. Our knowledge of the cultural traditions of these languages is, more often than not, obtained from Western sources, even though the history of Muslim nations, with its richness and variety, shows the possibility of establishing a genuinely pluralistic civilization whose pluralism does not necessarily lead to nihilism and absurdist relativism.

Opening up to the world can help rectify the epistemological distortion resulting from the long history of Western colonialism, which made us firm believers in the centrality and universality of the Western outlook. School curricula were rewritten so that our students would study the history of the French Revolution while neglecting the history of the Ottoman Empire which, if mentioned at all, was glibly referred to as “responsible for the decline of Egypt.” The study of Muslim arts and philosophy was replaced with the study of Western arts and philosophy so that the educated Muslim now knows much more about Van Gogh and Jean-Paul Sartre than about Arab calligraphy, the structure of Muslim cities, the artistic idiom in Islamic manuscripts, or the works of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna (Avicenna), al-Ghazālī or Ibn Khaldūn. Even after the departure of Western colonial troops, the local, intellectual, and political elites continued to believe in the necessity of catching up with the West and, therefore, continued in the propagation of Western values and knowledge while marginalizing their own.

Realizing this underlying bias will enable us to deal more cautiously with the knowledge received from any source, be it Western cultural traditions or our own, lest we blindly and passively receive any concept in the belief that it is universal, “natural” and “scientific.” After all, knowledge is the fruit of a continuous human endeavor to discover some aspects of the world. It is an endeavor that will go on forever, for humankind’s limited mind cannot explain away all aspects of the universe. Aware of the fact that there is no single, universal, general law, we should employ our critical reason to discover the underlying epistemological paradigms and philosophical outlooks inherent in the knowledge we receive. In this manner, we can learn to distinguish between what makes for a better life and what deconstructs and subverts it. As a consequence, we will be freed from “facts” that claim to be solid and absolute.

Perceiving underlying biases will highlight how facts are sometimes twisted and utilized in the service of ideologies, and how the accumulation of information is not undertaken impartially but, rather, on the basis of a biased epistemological paradigm. It is this biased paradigm, moreover, which predetermines what should be monitored and what should be overlooked, what is pivotal and what is marginal.

#### A PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM

Realizing underlying biases will not necessarily lead to a philosophical nihilism which declares the end of science (and history). Rather, the elimination of bias should be accompanied by the formation of an alternative epistemological paradigm that benefits from all previous human experience (not excluding the Western), and which, at the same time, issues from our own tradition. If identifying the underlying paradigm in the discourse of the Other is not an easy matter, trying to formulate an alternative paradigm is even more difficult. It cannot be accomplished by a single individual; rather, it requires a team working at various levels (observing, classifying, criticizing, abstracting, etc.). A body of observations and insights would then coalesce; and a tentative new paradigm would emerge. Through its repeated use in explaining reality, and through modifying it to increase its explanatory power, it would crystallize, forming a new complex epistemological paradigm which could be used for monitoring reality and for the accumulation and classification of data. Since

the data accumulated and classified is bound to be varied, we can then begin to see what the dominant Western paradigm has either excluded or marginalized.

### *I. Features of the Proposed Alternative Paradigm*

#### 1. STEMMING FROM OUR OWN HERITAGE

An alternative paradigm must stem from our indigenous heritage, where the term “heritage” is used to mean the totality of a given nation’s cultural history encompassing both material and spiritual achievements, whether explicit and recorded, or implicit and orally transmitted. Our heritage could be termed “Islamic,” not in a religious, but rather in a cultural sense, for non-Muslims contributed to this heritage and helped in its formulation. However, it should be pointed out that the basis of the Islamic cultural epistemological paradigm is the Qur’an and the Sunnah,<sup>10</sup> which together offer absolute values and the Islamic answer to the ultimate questions facing the human race.

Our Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) represents our ancestors’ attempts to comprehend this epistemological paradigm in much the same way as the writings of Islamic thinkers are an attempt to comprehend the rules of the cultural paradigm. “Stemming from our own heritage” is by no means synonymous with the literal transcription of earlier contributions; rather, it denotes the ongoing, creative attempt to apprehend the paradigms implicit in different Islamic texts and phenomena. Such a paradigm translates itself into a kind of cultural grammar which can then be used to re-read the Qur’an and the Sunnah and re-examine the cultural heritage in its totality.

#### 2. TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY

We are in dire need of an ambitious, comprehensive, “grand” theory. In the Western context (and within its materialist framework), a grand theory attempts to reach complete certainty, attain final explanations, and achieve comprehensive solutions. It aims at enabling humankind to have an absolute (imperialist) control over nature. When it was gradually realized that the epistemological project aiming at such full control is not possible, a shift took place from the Enlightenment dream and the promise of Modernity to the bitterness of Modernism, which in turn led to post-Modernist nihilism. The development of Western philosophical thought is a reflection of the failure of the project of modernity and the

end of the illusion of complete control, resulting in the declaration of the absurdity of the universe and the end of the human race.

There is no need, however, to vacillate between these two opposite poles of total theory and final solution, on the one hand, and absurdism and nihilism on the other. We can, instead, seek to arrive at a comprehensive theory which we do not expect to give us final explanations or grant us absolute certainty. It is not a “grand theory” in the sense of being comprehensive, final or absolute, but rather a “relatively grand theory” within the limits of what is humanly possible. Such an attempt cannot succeed within a materialist monist framework, for a comprehensive absolute explanation keeps on haunting the imagination of human beings, seducing them into embarking upon an impossible Faustian course.

### 3. THE CATEGORY OF MAN AS A STARTING POINT

Let us start with the humanistic statement that human beings occupy a central position in the universe as unique and complex creatures that cannot be reduced, in their totality, to something lower (nature-matter). Amongst their most distinctive features is the human mind, which does not record nature passively; but rather, perceives and interacts creatively with it. This gives human beings a measure of independence from natural law and a reasonable range of liberty that enables them to look, contemplate and make free moral choices, and ultimately act on the basis of their choice. Human beings are the only creatures who ask about the purpose of their existence in the universe, and are never content with appearances and external realities; they are compelled to go deeper, looking for explanations, developing inner meanings, symbols and codes of communication.

Despite the common humanity that binds all of us, human beings, unlike other creatures, do not follow one universal genetic program, for there are different cultural identities and independent (individual and collective) wills. They are the only creatures capable of remodeling themselves and their environment according to their free moral choice. Their behavior is not a simple or complex reflection of the laws of nature-matter, for they are fundamentally and qualitatively different from it. That is why they form an epistemological gap in the natural-material continuum. They are not an organic, inseparable part of nature; rather, they are a part that can be separated, existing within it, sustained by it, related to it, yet remaining autonomous and independent of it. They may share in some of

its features but they are not reduced in their entirety to it; they can always transcend it, and that is why they are the center of the universe and the noblest of all creatures.

#### 4. NON-MATERIALIST CATEGORY

From a materialist standpoint, the emergence of humankind in nature happened by pure chance through a simple chemical process, which means that the materialist law of chance is ultimate. The duality of humankind and nature is thereby eradicated, all gaps separating humankind from nature-matter are filled, and materialist monism reigns. From this monism issues Western science which makes no distinction between human beings and apes, or any other creature for that matter, and which emphasizes the points of similarity between them at the expense of the points of dissimilarity. A naturalist-materialist-monist epistemology places humankind at the same level with all natural beings, whereas a non-materialist epistemology sees human beings as distinct and unique, with a gap separating them from nature, a gap that guarantees their humanness and uniqueness.

One wonders, why should one reject the category of a complex human being irreducible to nature-matter for the sake of simplicity? Rather than eradicate the humankind-nature duality in the interest of simplification and monism, it might be more in keeping with human reality to reject the materialist analytical categories because they have weak explanatory power when it comes to the category of humankind. Instead, we should adopt cognitive and analytical categories which are at once quantitative-materialist and qualitative non-materialist, derived partly (only partly) from nature-matter, yet transcending it. Such categories can enable us to explain both what falls within the parameters of hard materialist causality and what falls outside them. The non-material dimensions of these categories manifest themselves in our world, yet cannot be explained through exclusively materialist analytical categories.

Non-materialist categories in this sense complement, but do not cancel out, materialist categories. These non-materialist categories are not reducible to nature-matter, since they derive their power of transcendence from one ultimate category that goes beyond the system of nature, and which believers call "God," the transcendent center of the cosmos. He is closer to us than the jugular vein (Qur'an, 50:16) and cares about us and our world and the course of human history; however, there is nothing like Him. God's

very existence is evidence of the existence of Nature and what is beyond it, the measurable and that which cannot be measured. The existence of humankind, as distinct from nature-matter, is dependent and contingent on His existence. As we said earlier, human beings became the center of this planet on account of their human distinctiveness and uniqueness, and their presence is a gap in the natural-material continuum. God's transcendental existence is the solid basis of an irreducible duality, that of Creator and created. This duality is a guarantee that the gap will never be bridged and that accordingly, the duality of humankind and nature-matter will never be eradicated, which calls for an interpretive cognitive category at once materialist and non-materialist. If the supreme duality of Creator and created is eradicated, we are back once more to materialistic monism and to the eradication of the boundaries separating humankind from nature, bringing human beings once more into the world of nature-matter and the various naturalistic-materialistic determinisms which follow therefrom. We are likewise brought out of the realm of freedom and complex moral choice. God's transcendence, in other words, is a guarantee of humankind's humanness and ability to transcend nature-matter.

##### 5. A GENERATIVE (NON-CUMULATIVE) PARADIGM

This suggested alternative paradigm is generative; we believe, as indicated earlier, not in one humanity that can be monitored and examined the way merely natural-material phenomena can be, but rather in a common humanity, a generative potential energy latent in all human beings which takes different cultural forms when realized in different times and places. The multiplicity of these forms sets humankind apart from nature, one nation from another, and one individual from all other individuals. A corollary of this is that even though there is one common basis for our humanness, there is no single ultimate point in history toward which all peoples and cultures move. The idea of one uniform, general law applying to all phenomena, natural or human, is untenable, for it is too narrow to encompass the rich complexity of humankind's historical and cultural existence. The concept of the accumulation of knowledge implies that we will eventually reach the "end of history" and establish an earthly paradise (a technological utopia). However, this concept is narrow and outdated, good for use only when dealing with some limited aspects of the world of things, but of no use when dealing with the realm of the human.

## II. *Alternative Science*

A new science, different in its premises and objectives, can be developed. If the essence of the modern Western scientific outlook is the eradication of the humankind-nature duality, leading to materialistic monism, the essence of the new alternative science is to retrieve this duality by restoring humans as complex beings, irreducible to the natural-material system. Following are some of the features of this alternative science.

### I. INCOMPLETE CERTAINTY AND CONTINUOUS IJTIHAD

The suggested alternative science operates within a flexible, open-ended paradigm whose aim is not to develop hard laws, final, objective answers, or simple algebraic formulas that explain it all (leading humankind to the end of history). It neither attempts to reach full objectivity and neutrality nor sinks into complete subjectivity. Objectivity means an object observed without an observing self. It presupposes a mind that is able to know everything and a simple reality that can be fully comprehended. By contrast, subjectivity means a subject that is completely absorbed in itself to the exclusion of external, “objective” reality. It presupposes a mind that cannot know reality and a reality that cannot be comprehended in any aspect. The concept of *ijtihad* is thus being proposed as a middle point between the two impossible poles of complete objectivity and equally complete subjectivity. *Ijtihad* presupposes that the human mind cannot explain everything and that the attempt to reach complete knowledge is both diabolic and doomed to failure; it likewise implies the impossibility of full objectivity and neutrality or of arriving at general, all-encompassing laws, since the human mind is both limited and creative: limited in that it cannot explain everything, and creative in that it cannot slavishly reproduce everything.

Human reality is infinitely rich and complex as a result of a latent potentiality that cannot be scientifically observed. All of God’s creatures, however simple they might seem *prima facie*, are too complex to be explained away; that is what we mean when we say that every phenomenon contains an element of the unseen. By “unseen,” I mean that which cannot be measured or wholly confined to the hard net of causality or materialist monism. The unlimited and the unknown (and the unknowable) are at the heart of all that is human, and of even natural phenomena (to a lesser degree).

Therefore, the paradigm of the new alternative science aspires to obtain a reasonable amount of knowledge that explains many, but not all, aspects of reality, and a reasonable level of certainty. Instead of “objective” and “subjective,” other terms such as “more explanatory” and “less explanatory” might be used. These phrases alert us to the fact that there is a subjective dimension to all human knowledge (“the inevitability of bias”); at the same time, they affirm the usefulness of this knowledge and the fact that it can be tested “objectively” against a reality external to it. The paradigm underlying these phrases is open-ended, claiming no universality or finality for itself; for there will always be more to know, learn and think about. However, the incompleteness of knowledge and the impossibility of complete objectivity need not lead us to nihilism and relativism, for relativism itself will stay relative because of the existence of the absolute God, the only absolute center that transcends matter.

## 2. NO ROOM FOR FULL CONTROL OF REALITY

The suggested alternative science would not aim at imperialist control of reality; nor at harnessing the whole Planet Earth in the service of human beings (as hoped by Westerners in their illusion of being a god on earth). It recognizes that all creations, people, animals, or even inanimate objects, have their share of dignity, bestowed on them by God. They have been created by Him, and are His handiwork; the essence of this alternative science is that everything in nature has some intrinsic value and that the whole universe has an ultimate purpose: “O our Sustainer! You have not created [aught of] this without meaning and purpose. Limitless are You in Your glory!” (Qur’an, 3:191). Humankind is not alone in the universe; other creatures also have their place therein. The earth has not been given to human beings in order for them to conquer and utilize it with no limitations set on them. Rather, they have been appointed vicegerents by Him Who is Greater than them; hence, they may utilize it but within limits, but they must also do their utmost to conserve it.

## 3. NO REDUCTIONISM OR ERADICATION OF DUALITIES

This alternative science will not try to reduce reality to its materialist components or dimensions, nor will it try to eradicate dualities, for they are but an echo of the ultimate Creator–created duality. It will not stress the whole at the expense of the part or the inverse. It will not stress

continuity at the expense of discontinuity or *vice versa*, since the world is not composed of randomly scattered atoms, nor is it formed of an organic, solid whole; it is, rather, a cohesive whole made up of smaller parts each having its distinctive character, yet which can only be comprehended with reference to the whole. The center of the whole and the source of its cohesiveness exists outside it. That is why it remains a non-organic, porous entity with consequent “gaps.”

This means that the parts are as necessary as the whole, discontinuity is no less essential than continuity, and the particular is as important as the general.

Therefore, this new alternative science will try to ascertain the specific curve of the phenomenon, its diversity and personality, and its general significance. It will also attempt to relate the particulars to the general without necessarily reducing the part to the whole or the particular to the general; nor will it seek to impose continuity on discontinuity. It will, rather, attempt to reach the pivotal point where one phenomenon is related to another, yet remains distinct from it. The particular-general, whole-part, continuous-discontinuous dualities are but an echo of the humankind-nature duality (which is in turn an echo of the Creator-created duality). From the standpoint of the new science these are dualities that cannot, should not, be eradicated, which means, on the level of practice, that the individual and small social units cannot be eradicated in the interest of the state, that the past cannot be ignored for the sake of the present, and that the human cannot be disregarded in pursuit of the natural.

#### 4. REJECTING CAUSAL MONISM

The new alternative science will not be based on the concept of materialist and causal monism or any deterministic monism. Therefore, it will reject the concept of the unity (monism) of science, and instead will underscore the fact that there should be one science for natural phenomena and another for human phenomena, though a complete separation between the one and the other is not postulated.

Instead of causal monism, the new science would operate in terms of causal pluralism, i.e., interpreting and theorizing about natural and human phenomena in light of a variety of causes. This arises from a belief in the complexity of these phenomena that cannot possibly be reduced to

a single materialist element. Phenomena should, therefore, be seen as integrated and multi-faceted, not uni-dimensional. The most important aspects are identified without being placed in any *a priori* hierarchy of causes, and without giving causal primacy to one particular (usually material) element over others.

##### 5. THE STRUCTURE OF TERMINOLOGY

(a) Given the foregoing, there is a need to structure a new body of terminology. The humankind-nature duality necessitates a distinction between the terms used for the social sciences and those used for the natural sciences. Organic metaphors, which imply that the universe is a solid, organic whole in which the part is fused with the whole and the particular with the general and which presuppose the centrality of nature-matter in the universe, should be avoided, for they embody the material epistemological paradigm which reduces humankind to nature-matter.

(b) Such a new terminology aims for complexity but not necessarily precision. This does not necessarily mean that complexity leads to imprecision; rather, it signifies an attempt to be aware of the largest possible number of the components that make up a given phenomenon, some aspects of which can be explained in terms of general laws and some of which cannot.

(c) The new terminology does not reject the use of metaphors as a legitimate means of analysis and expression. After all, figurative language is not a mere decoration, but rather, a complex code developed by human beings to describe certain situations which ordinary prose fails to communicate. There is nothing new about that when we, for instance, speak of “economic man” or the “sick man of Europe”; we are already using metaphors characterized by a measure of complexity and high explanatory power (from the user’s viewpoint).

(d) It is necessary for the structure of the new terminology to include what may be termed “the middle term.” The middle term is an expression of the awareness that reality is as complex and varied as a rainbow in which various colors intermingle with no sharp beginning or definitive end. Beginning, middle or end may be postulated as purely analytical categories, not real things. One can also postulate a point of intensity which points toward some kind of a middle, or center, while blurring at the same time the boundaries between beginning and end.

(e) The level of generalization of the term that suits the described phenomenon at issue should be carefully defined. To try to reach the highest level of generalization always lands one in the world of algebra, geometry, mathematics and the like.

(f) The validity of a term will be determined by its explanatory power rather than by its degree of precision or conformity to any specific abstract criteria.

(g) As a result of such suggested modifications, the door will be opened for the inclusion of new units of analysis, such as the family as a political unit which is no less important than the state. This, in turn, will open broad horizons of analysis by pinpointing, for instance, the cultural significance of the Palestinian intifada that managed to marshal the family to play economic and political roles in the absence of the legitimate state and under the domination of a settler state.

### III. *A Nascent Project*

Even though we have so far confined ourselves to outlining the basic traits of the alternative paradigm on the abstract theoretical level, we should point out that there have been some serious attempts in concrete practice. Most notable among these attempts is the cultural garden for children built by Abdel Halim Ibrahim; Hamid el-Mously's project involving the manufacture of wood from palm tree leaves is another case in point. It might also be relevant to refer to my eight volume *Mawsū'at al-Yahūd wa al-Yahūdiyyah wa al-Şahyūniyyah*.<sup>11</sup> It is an attempt to develop an analytical paradigm for social phenomena that goes beyond materialist monism, using Jews, Judaism and Zionism as case studies.

In this context, reference should be made to the creative contributions of pioneering architect Hasan Fathi, who resisted the so-called international style of architecture, of Anwar Abdel Malek who has endeavored to retrieve the cultural dimension in his historical and social studies, of Hamid Rabi who has developed new political concepts and terminology to help researchers discover their own cultural identity, and of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and its founding committee, notably the distinguished writings of Isma'īl R. al Fārūqī. The sum of these efforts forms a beginning of the alphabet of creativity.