

# Contemporary Thought in Egypt

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Philosophical issues are usually neglected when the issues of the Islamic reception and confrontation with the Western world are faced. Most attention is paid to sociology or history or to culture subjects. But epistemological qualms troubled Muslim thinkers from the very beginning of the reforming path. Egypt can be chosen as a privileged observatory for this kind of question, considering the role it played in the contemporary history of the Arab world.

Liberal and nationalistic thinkers, living in the first decades of the twentieth century when Egypt was more or less openly a British protectorate, showed sometimes a very poor awareness of the potentially destructive contradiction which arises from the mixing of too many different cultures. To be sure, their open-mindedness marked a radical transformation and a real change in Egyptian culture and politics, and there is no need to pursue this topic here. It would be enough to remember the names of 'Ali Abd a Raziq, Ahmad al-Sanhuri, and Taha Hussein. Unfortunately, acting as sincere interpreters of a new and changing world, they became the occasionally unconscious upholders of foreign control and intellectual subordination of Egypt. No doubt, colonization implies a substrate, ready to receive the new form, as Malek Bennabi sharply argued; but excitement for outside spiritual –and material – achievements can make intellectuals capable of forgetting their own origin. Taha Hussein's view, for instance, of Egypt as a sort of failed European country is deeply misguided. Thus, we can understand the warning of the radical Islamist Sayed Qutb:

We should not go to French legislation to derive our laws, or to communist ideals to derive our social order, without first examining what can be supplied from our Islamic legislation which was die foundation of our first form of society. . . . Our summons is to return to our own stored-up resources, to become familiar with their ideas, and to proclaim their value and permanent worth, before we have recourse to an untimely servility which will deprive us of the historical background of our life and through which our individuality will be lost to the point that we will become mere hangers-on to the progress of mankind.<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1). S. Qutb, Social Justice in Islam, trans. J. B. Hardie (New York, 1980): 15-16.

However, we will not speak here only of politics but firstly of epistemology, even though a judgment about some political issues is obviously implicit.

It is not fortuitous, in my opinion, that Islamic reformism "the and modernism set up a constructive confrontation with modernity on the basis of a reappraisal of Ibn sīnā or Ibn Rushd's classic rationalism and especially Mu'tazilite rationalism, which was clearly indebted to its Greek heritage. I this is particularly true in Egypt. A long tradition of studies and researches aiming to demonstrate revolution of intellect in Arabic philosophy" and its Greek roots enriched Egyptian historiography, from Ibrāhīm Maclkur and 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī to 'Atif al-'Irāqī.<sup>(1)</sup>

Muhammad 'Abduh's *Risālat al-tawhīd* is a philosophical meditation on anthropology and theology. 'Abduh argued about God's existence and essence in quite Ibn Sīnan (but also Ghazzālīān) terms, as the following short passage proves:

De même que le contingent a besoin d'une cause pour être appelé à l'existence, il en a besoin d'une pour continuer à exister; car nous avons démontré que le contingent n'est pas prédisposé par lui-même à exister et qu'il n'entre dans l'existence qu'à la suite d'une cause efficiente extérieure à lui.... Il est évident que l'ensemble des contingences est également contingent, et tout contingent a besoin d'une cause qui lui donne l'existence, donc l'ensemble des contingences a besoin d'un créateur... Ainsi il est prouvé que les contingences qui existent ont une cause efficiente dont l'existence est nécessaire..... L'existence de l'être nécessaire est la source de l'existence de tout contingent.... Toute perfection de l'existence, qui peut être conçue comme attribut de l'être nécessaire, doit lui être attribué.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1). I choose, among the many titles I could quote, I Madkhour, *L'"Organon" d'Aristote dans le monde arabe* (Paris, 1934); 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Histoire de La philosophie en Islam* (Paris, 1972); 'Atif al-'Irāqī, *Thwrah al-'aql fi'L-falsafat al-'arabiyah* (Cairo, 1984).

(2). M. 'Abduh, *Risālat al-'I'tawhid: Exposé de la religion musulmane*, trans. B. Michel and M. Abdel Raziq (Paris, 1978): 21- 6 passim.

Robert Caspar had pointed out Muhammad 'Abduh's Mu'tazilite out-look many years ago, in particular regarding human freedom of act and will. <sup>(1)</sup> the novelty of Muhammad 'Abduh's position did not enable him, however, to join Ahmed 'Urābi's revolutionary movement in 1882 aiming to overturn the status quo. In this case, a modernistic approach and enlightened attitude did not convince a very independent thinker to choose an uncompromising political position.

Ahmed Amen (d. 1954) was actively engaged in Egyptian culture and politics: he was a university professor, Director of the cultural centre of the Egyptian Ministry of Education (1945) and later of the Cultural Section of the Arab League (1947). In his major work, *Duhā al-islām* ("The Morning of Islam"), first published in 1933, he complained about the early disappearance of Mu'tazilism as an irretrievable misfortune for Islam, underlining that

the Mu'tazilites gave free rein to intellect [*'aql*] in its investigations of all [scientific] problems without setting any bounds. They regarded intellect as the way to truth [*al-baqq*] in its investigation of heaven and earth, God and man, great and little. There is no field which the intellect cannot attain, [because] the intellect was created to know and have knowledge of everything - even what lies behind nature and matter. <sup>(2)</sup>

Amin's goal was the revival of Muslim cultural heritage, making of it a way for the intellectual and moral recovery of all Arab and Islamic people. Although he was a somewhat open minded person, he was not fully free from a traditional outlook. Amin praised the Mu'tazilites for their rationalism and demonstrative skill, but he preferred them to philosophers in the strict sense merely because they are men of faith, while the philosophers are inclined to view religion as not always consistent with rational and theoretical presuppositions.

But besides these "old" modernists, substantially the same positive evaluation of Mu'tazilism arises as a common feature also in Fu'ād Zakariyyah, Zaki Najīb Mahmud or Hasan Hanafī's reflections, even though western

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(1). R. Caspar. "Le Renouveau du Mu'tazilisme". *Mélanges de l'institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire*, 4 (1957): 141-201.

(2). A. Amin, *duhā al-islām* (preface by Taha Husayn) (Beirut, n.d.), 3: 68.

scholarship does not wholly agree about the supposed strict rationalism of the Mu'tazilites.<sup>(1)</sup>

The influence of Mu'tazilism poses a crucial question: which kind of "rationalism" developed in the Islamic philosophical world? Which kind of "rationalism" should be cultivated in the *contemporary* Islamic philosophical world? Does there exist a unique kind of "Islamic" rationalism? Does it arise in *contemporary* times? Does a reconstruction of Islamic thought suitable for modernity mean or -perhaps better- does it require a reconstruction of its religious dimension? The debate has been particularly alive in Egypt, even though a great deal of comment arose also in other parts (Persia and India) of the Islamic world. It goes without saying that this confrontation with modernity affected Arabic minds as well as other Muslims, and imposed on Arab thinkers the *duty* of answering the Western challenge and discovering -if possible- an even more Arab, more Islamic way of thinking. This led Arab philosophers to a troublesome relationship with their own heritage which they are mostly inclined to consider nor appropriate for contemporary issues. It means, moreover, that political claims cannot be obliterated in a larger methodological and philosophical reform grounded on Islamic revivalism, mainly because the reconstruction of politics in theory and of political systems in practice must reckon with the Islamic ideological framework.

It is true that, looking briefly at the eastern Muslim world, an Indian philosopher and poet like Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938) lived his relations with Europe and European (Western) culture more quietly. Neither his mystical nor his theoretical attitudes were completely upset by European (Western) thought. Indeed, he was persuaded that the core of European technical advancement is basically Islamic.<sup>(2)</sup> Alessandro Bausani stressed more than once that Iqbal was not an enemy of Europe, albeit he expressed some surprise at the contradiction existing between the Westernizing culture of Iqbal and his condemnation of democracy. "The *shayatin* (devils) of democracy," Iqbal writes, "are nowadays the kings of politics: vile earth does not need me any more."<sup>(3)</sup> This kind of contradiction is unavoidable for an Islamic culture

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(1) See for example C. Bouamrane: '(on ne saurait faire tout uniment des Mu'tazilites les 'rationalistes' de l'Islam... Leur visée est d'abord apologétique; ils sont par la d'authentiques mutaklimumun.... la valeur accordée à la raison ne signifie pas qu'ils lui reconnaissent un droit absolu face à la révélation" (C. Bouamrane and Louis Gardet, Panorama de La pensée islamique (Paris, 1984): 42.

(2) M. Iqbal, The Reconstruction of religious Thought in Islam (Lahore, 1981).

(3) M. Iqbal, poema Celeste (Javednam), Italian trans. A. Bausani (Bari, 1965): 301; and

confronting outward categories. Democracy is a revolutionary ideal; it was born from the French Revolution. But Islam did not experience such a revolution.

Perhaps Iqbal's distinction between a materialistic Europe and a spiritual Orient can be judged hasty or naive, of at least philosophically out of date. But it is quite characteristic that Iqbal was convinced of a convergence of Bergson's *doctrine de la durée* with the Islamic doctrine of time. Accordingly, Nietzsche would have been ready to accept the mystery of Divine Law moving away from a misunderstood conception of morals learned in corrupted Europe, and he became angry mainly because Europe failed to provide him with suitable moral answers. These perhaps too open attempts at "Islamicizing" European (Western) thought can surely be considered from the viewpoint of reformist modernism, but do they reveal any desire for imitation or flattering of European superiority? In his famous lectures about the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam, Iqbal was able to stress that

There is no basic incompatibility between religion and science. Although philosophy can certainly examine the principles of religion, it cannot treat religion as something inferior to it. Religion presents a view of the whole person, while philosophy and science deal just with aspects of the whole.  
(1)

The superiority of religion over philosophy and obviously over science - underlines the independence of religion of all external influences. But does this conclusion solve the dramatic contrast between tradition and modernity? Many Arab authors, however, did not recognize this superiority and so damned themselves to bow to the idols of science and progress. Arab-Muslim philosophers often did not succeed in reorientations Islam away from foreign and imported patterns.

If it is not trivial to repeat that a major problem in contemporary Islamic thought is the reconciliation of the urgent necessity of exploiting Europe in progressive ideas in epistemology and scientific research with faithfulness to a past heritage, it is equally worth underlining that this proper was particularly worrying in the Arab world and, obviously, in Egypt, where several thinkers nourished a kind of intellectual submission. This is the case of men like Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayed (d. 1963), whose sincere liberalism, inspired by Western philosophical and sociological traditions going back to John Stuart Mill and other similar thinkers seems to deny an autonomous weight to Islamic heritage. P. Vatikiotis suggests, in quite triumphant terms, that

He cannot be credited with any originality of thought; yet he was original

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see p. 87.

(1). Iqbal, *Reconstruction*: 131.

in the way he tried to transmit European ideas, and in the manner in which he ventured to use these ideas as the basis for the construction of principles to guide the formation of a modern nation in Egypt. Ahmad Lutfi did not provide Egyptians with metaphysics or an integrated intellectual system. Rather he laid down for them the basic rules for the reasoned criticism of society. Above all, he tried to impress upon his compatriots that a society without a system of values and a set of principles to guide it towards certain goals would remain hopelessly backward. And these could be acquired by modern European education.

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If this is true, then we can draw a few negative conclusions as well: firstly, that it is lacking in values and principles; secondly, that the repudiation of all the Islamic past and tradition is unavoidable; thirdly, ilia! European education and culture are assumed as meta-historical and not subjected to any sort of criticism. Obviously, Vatikiotis' own view suggests a rather deformed image of Lutfi al-Sayyid's work. Yet Lutfi al-Sayyid stands very far from a real Islamic renaissance, if we take European ideas of freedom, nationality and individualism as the only effective path to modernity. It is ironic that the same author, Vatikiotis, charges Islamic modernism and political thought with inconsistency just because it refused to accept Greek rationalism!<sup>(2)</sup>

Indeed, the solutions Egyptian Muslim thinkers put forward are not always satisfying, even when we take a more favorable attitude than Vatikiotis. We can pick out here at least a couple of contrasting trends. On the one hand, some scholars tried to overcome difficulties by discovering a kind of abstract liaison between Islamic and Western (especially classical) thought. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud, former Shaykh of Al-Azhar, divided the true value of *falsafah* into theoretical (about God) and ethical investigations. But these values already belong to mature Islamic thought, which he calls more properly *hikmah*. *Falsafah* is introductory to *hikmah* regarding both intellect ('aql) and practice (*irtiyād*).<sup>(3)</sup> It is more or less the same with *Iqbāl*, but we need to be <sup>careful</sup> not to forget the historical dimension. For instance, in the following passage where Aristotle, al-Kindi and Kant are, so to say, sanctified by the Holy Qur'an: There is no doubt that rational people would agree with Aristotle that "Every order bespeaks the intelligence behind it." Similarly, al-Kindi, the first Muslim philosopher, considered that the evidence of craftsmanship in a door, couch or chair, with its design and perfected order, does not reveal its maker any less than the universe reveals its omnipotent Creator..... Al-Kindi adds that

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(1). p. Vatikiotis, 'The History of Modern Egypt (London, 1991): 240.

(2). p. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (London and New York, 1987): 1 quote from the Italian translation, *Islam: stati senza nazioni* (Milan, 1993): 69.

(3). See Abd al-Halim Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-falsafi fi'l-islam* (Cairo, 1984).

the external manifestations and phenomena that register upon the senses give the clearest indication of the design of the First Planner..... The above manner of demonstration is the method which Kant, the greatest philosopher of Germany, declared to be the clearest and strongest proof of the existence of God. It is the way that has been followed by many thinkers from East and West. All these proofs of the existence of God may be summed up in the following verses in the chapter of the Qur'an called "The Great News": "Did we not spread the earth as a bed, and raise the mountains as pillars? And did we not create you in pairs and appoint your sleep for a test, and appoint night as a mantle and the day for your livelihood? And did we not build above you seven mighty heavens ...?" (78:6)<sup>(1)</sup>

On the other hand, there is secularism, I more or less strong rejection of original Islamic presuppositions. Unfortunately, the secularism of such a famous person as Fu'ad Zakariyya<sup>(2)</sup> seems to betray the real meaning of Islam: it is absurd to reject the radical tendencies in Islam merely by opposing democracy and political freedom to its inner conservatism. Does there really exist a universal pattern of Westernization? Fu'ad Zakanyya' argues that the Arab world and its thought decayed for two main reasons: blind deference to tradition (*turāth and taqlid*) and an inability to historicize the past. He writes:

Nous autres musulmans avons grand besoin de quelqu'un qui nous dise, comme les philosophes de la Renaissance: "Si vous avez devant vous la nature et les problèmes des hommes, pourquoi faut-il que toujours vous reveniez aux textes des ancêtres? Pourquoi faites-vous de la pensée héritée une autorité indiscutable? Pourquoi ne pas affronter les situations nouvelles avec votre raison?"

Scion moi, cette incapacité du monde arabe à historiciser sa relation au passé consume la cause première de son sous-développement intellectuel.<sup>(3)</sup>

Probably, Fu'ād Zakariyya' is too optimistic regarding the Western attitude to realize rationalism in every field of common life:

Certes, en Occident aussi, la production scientifique avait pour destinataire initial une petite élite; mais elle fut reconnue par celle-ci, elle s'est diffusée peu à peu au sein de couches de plus en plus larges et: sous une forme plus ou moins élaborée, a fini par faire partie du sens commun. Rien de tel dans la *turāth* arabo-musulman: aucun de ses produits n'a accédé à ce statut de culture de masse qui fait que l'on dit par

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(1). 'Abel al-Hlalim Mahmud, *The Creed of Islam* (London, 1978): 34-5.

(2). F. Zakaryyah, *Laïcité ou Islamisme* (Paris and Cairo, 1989).

(3). *Ibid*: 38 and 48.

exemple dn l'français qu'il est cartésien.<sup>(1)</sup>

If Fu'ad Zakanyya' is right, all the Western world would be perfect, will out racism or dogmatic troubles, in a natural state of paradise, with science solving every problem and granting everyone a happy and affluent life. But hypostatization and my theorization of an assumed absolute truth - either secularism or scientific rationalism- become themselves a kind of *taqlid*.

Zakī Najīb is more concerned with salvation -or at least a reconsideration- of his Islamic background. He is a "logical positivist", so that it is only natural that he stresses the importance of logic. He claims that Arab Classical thinkers turned their attention to Aristotle's rational solutions immediately after him ;<sup>(2)</sup> Meanwhile, he argues, quoting Descartes and Francis Bacon, that Western rationalism was able to develop to a great extent scientific and technological progress<sup>(3)</sup> -a thing Islam cannot do. Islam remained backward with respect to this astonishing scientific advance for several reasons. First of all, the Islamic world witnessed too many oppressive and autocratic political regimes, where freedom of expression and ideas were forbidden. As an example, the author tells the story of Ibn Hanbal and the *mihnah* under al-Ma'mun's caliphate.<sup>(4)</sup> Moreover, too often the (dead) past ruled over the (living) present ("*Sultan al-mādī 'alā'al-hādir huwa bi-mathabat al-saytarah yafriduha al-mawti 'alā'al-ahiya*"). Francis Bacon and his doctrine of *idola theatri* (*awhum al-masrah*) are used<sup>(5)</sup> to prove that belief (*al-wahm*) restricted the Muslim from true thought.

After a rather tough condemnation of dead heritage, Zakī Najīb asks a twofold question: how can we connect Arab with Western thought? How can we relate ancient Arab thought to the contemporary?

The most original section of Zakī Najīb's work is when he points out the *dynamism* of reason and philosophy: this dynamism means, from an epistemological point of view, the passage from the known to the unknown, the passage from the past to the present in a comprehensive refoundation of silences

Zaki Najib writes: "As to the definition of intellect I wish to note .....,it is a movement by which I am carried from witness to witnessed, from proof to

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(1). Ibid: 55.

(2). Zaki Najb Mahmud, *Tajdid al-fikr al- arabī* (Beirut and Cairo,1982): 313; see also

p 317

(3). I bid: 23-4.

(4). Ibid:42ff. More or less, the same remark in F. Zakariyyah, *I.acité ou Islmisme*: 49.

(5). Zaki Najib Mahmud, *Tijdid al-fikr al-'arabi*: 51.

proven, from premise to consequence...., The most important word in this definition is movement (*harukah*)".<sup>(1)</sup>

Philosophy is the disclosure of secrets, receptiveness of novelty ("*al-falsafah hiya ikhraj al-asas al-kāminah fi afkarinā*"),<sup>(2)</sup> so that the greatest goal of intellectual effort must be us encounter with modern science: this is, of course, the goal of Arab intellectual ambitions which started from the very beginning of the last century ("*nasha'at lanā sirā'āt fikriyyah jadidah.... wa ahammu tilka al-sirā'āt al-fikriyyah.... hiya tariqat al-liqā allati nawā'im fi hā bayna 'ulum hadithah*").<sup>(3)</sup> Obviously, the Arabs' task could be made easier through the renaissance of intellect (*al-'aql*) which moulded the best Classical Muslim culture. Indeed, Muslim thought can go beyond Western achievements; as M. Chartier put it: "la connaissance sensible, cheminant a pas de raison, qui a pour mission de scruter et d'organiser le monde des phenomenes, et une connaissance extra-sensible, qui a un rôle de temoin de ces ideaux sans lesquels l'homme perdrait de vue le but ultime de sa vie".<sup>(4)</sup>

This last conclusion does not prevent secularists from pointing out that the innovation of Zaki Najib's views consists in their distance from tradition. Celebrating the thinker after his death (Zaki Najib died in September 1993), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd wrote that he was aware of the "living and energetic knowledge of the West against the frozen and stagnant knowledge of *turath*". In Zaki Najib's opinion, turath would not be able to solve even one problem ("*al-turath la yahllu mushkilah wahidah min mushkilatinā*") concerning freedom (*hurriyah*) and successful entrance in the epoch of science and industry (*dukhul fi 'asr al-'ilm wa'l sinā'ah*).<sup>(5)</sup>

Mohammed Aikoun is perhaps more refined than Zaki Najib in writing that Islamic thought leaves a large area of shadow in its *impensée*.

This "impensee dans la pensee islamique [est] sur tous les mouvements de pensée qui ont accompagne, en Occident, la naissance et l'irresistible croissance de la civilisation industrielle". Arkoun argues that "on ne peut entretenir un lien vivant avec la *turath* si l'on n'assume *totalelement* la modernité; inversement, on ne peut contribuer de façon originale a travailler la modernite, si l'on continue a

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(1). Ibid: 310.

(2). Ibid: 263.

(3). Ibid: 269.

(4). M. Chartier, "La Rencontre Orient- Occident dans la pensee de trois philosophes egyptiens contemporains". *Oriente Moderno*, 53 (1973): 641.

(5). N. H. Abu. Zayd in *al-Musawwar*, 3598 (24 September 1993): 44-6.

confondre *turāth* histotrique et *turāth* mythologique".<sup>(1)</sup>

This is not the place to discuss Arkoun's thesis thoroughly; while I admit I do not fully agree with him, I suggest that the main fault of thinkers like fu'ad Zakariyya' and Zaki Najib is just the confusion between historical and mythological *turāth*. I know I am going far beyond Arkoun's intentions in pointing to a historical *turāth* which is both rich and constructive: the world of Islam was erected on its basis. Mythological *turāth*, on the contrary, consist of apparently anachronistic rules and impositions many philosophers regarded as oppressive and restricting the free development of Islamic thought. But it is just a mythology, like other mythologies: science, technology and uninterrupted progress (the so-called "magnifiche sorti e progressive", in the words of a sceptical Italian poet, Giacomo Leopardi). In any case, I think that the crisis of contemporary Islamic thought cannot be reduced to a mere crisis of Islamic philosophy, because we must acknowledge that its problem is essentially political and its solution essentially revolutionary, assuming revolution is a radical change of the present situation. We would have to consider in a different light Nasser's political experience, in admitting that the 1967 disaster signified the closure of a whole historical epoch, but also that Nasser's defeat and the failed improvement of social and economic situation in the Arab countries created more scope for an Islamic radical challenge.

Another major negative feature of both Fu'ad Zakariyya's and Zaki Najib's thought lies perhaps in their inadequate awareness of the criticism advanced against the new positivism and scientific objectivity by epistemological anarchism (Feyerabend) and the so-called "weak thought", which means the denial of a strong, metaphysical dominion of being; and absolute reason.<sup>(2)</sup> Feyerabend, on the other hand, argues that unanimity of opinions is appropriate for mythological thought where tyranny and oppression are destroying free scientific research: a real objectivity in knowledge needs a multiplicity of opinions and truths; no one can claim to master any truth,

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(1). M. Arkoun, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris, 1984): 59 and 57.

(2). See G. Vattimo and p. A. Rovatti (eds) *Il pensiero debole* (Milan, 1983): "la razionalità deve, al proprio interno, depotenziarsi, cedere terreno, non aver timore di indietreggiare verso una supposta zona d'ombra, non restare paralizzata dalla perdita del riferimento luminoso, unico e stabile, cartesiano. 'Pensiero debole e allora certamente una metafora. ... E' un modo di dire provvisorio, forse anche contraddittorio. Ma segna un percorso, indica un senso di percorrenza: e una via che si biforca rispetto alla ragione-dominio, comunque ritradotta e camuffata. . . . Una via che dovrà continuare a biforcarsi" (p. 10).

because humanism involves a variety of contending views.<sup>(1)</sup> In the same new logical positivism (we can think of Wittgenstein), we often discover a very questionable rationalism underlying either the inability of answering philosophical and scientific questions (we must be silent when we cannot speak about something)<sup>(2)</sup> or the contradictory multiplicity and irreducibility of psychological and linguistic world pictures.<sup>(3)</sup>

fu'ad Zakariyya and Zaki Najib were so concerned with establishing a convergence between Arab thought's values and Western ones, coupled with an enthusiastic evaluation of the latter, that they let pass unobserved the most striking difficulties the same Western philosophical tradition found in itself. After Nietzsche no one can accept philosophical statements being sure of asserting, beyond any doubt, epistemological truth and morality.

In Hasan Hanafi Islamic rationalism finds a phenomenological and anthropological solution which is perhaps the only really "open" version, being "aimed at". We have a sound reference in Husserl's *Krisis des europaischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phanomenologie* and in his theory of phenomenological *telos*. The Italian editor of this important work, Enzo Paci, wrote that "if we admit that truth is reality, [oppressive] apparatuses will win power. If we let unreal truth become in ourselves the life of truth, victory will be of all the men in the world."<sup>(4)</sup> It means that phenomenological truth alone is our way of improving the social situation and erasing injustice.

Hanafi's phenomenological teleology is built on two main aspects: firstly, a new concept of *tawhid* intended as the anthropological realization of social justice: God is a principle of equality to whom men are moving in their historical piaxis ("*Allāh huwa al-mubda' al-wahid al-shāmil alladhi yatasāwā amamibi jami' al-'ibād fa'l-shahadah laysat qawlan bal 'amalan wa thawrah*")<sup>(5)</sup>; unicity (*tawhid*) means the process of unification just as liberty is

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(1). P. K. Feyerabend, "Against Method", paragraph 3, in M. Radner and S. Winokur (eds) Minnesota Studies in the philosophy of Science, 4 (Minneapolis, 1970): 17-130.

(2). L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 1st ed. (London, 1921), paragraph 7.

(3). L. Wittgenstein, *philosophicus Untersuchungen* (Oxford, 1953).

(4). E. paci, "Prefazione" to E. Husserl, *La crisi delle scienze europee e La fenomenologia trascendentale* (Milan, 1975): 18.

(5). H. Hanafi, *al-Yamln wa'l-yasār fi'l-fikr al-dini*, fifth volume of *al-Din wa'l-thawrah fi Misr* (Cairo 1989): 54.

liberation<sup>(1)</sup>; and, secondly, the concept of 'intersubjectivity as pluralization of cultural subjects<sup>(2)</sup>: against colonialism, exploitation and the double opposition of Orientals and Westernization, "life in horizontal" means that all the makers of culture and science must claim their right to be acknowledged as active subjects of history. This is why Hanafi wrote that

L'Islam est la religion révolutionnaire par excellence. Le tawhid est un processus d'unification dans le futur du fait accompli dans le passé. Il veut dire la liberté de conscience, le rejet de la peur, la fin de l'hypocrisie et du dédoublement. "Dieu est grand" signifie la destruction du despotisme. Tous les êtres humains sont égaux et toutes les nations sont égales devant le même principe ... La vocation de l'homme est de transformer la parole de Dieu, la révélation, comme structure idéale du monde.<sup>(3)</sup>

Hanafi argues that the ancients (*al-qudamā'*) were wrong in seeking to obtain a scientific knowledge of God's Essence, because God is the Absolute (*mutlaq*) and sciences are accustomed to transform the absolute into the relative ("al-'ilm mawdu'uhu wa minhajuhu wa ghāyatuhu tahwil li'l-mutlaq ilā nisbi").<sup>(4)</sup> Even though we wish to insist on the relativity of science, this statement does not imply a defeat of reason. Indeed, it is strictly Islamic, because it places God's reality beyond any theoretical grasp. This statement clearly leads to an active transformation of pure philosophy into ethical and anthropological engagement (*'amal*). The same God is praxis: "Allah laysa nazaran- Logos- bal 'amal- praxis -".<sup>(5)</sup>

What is Hanafi's philosophical attitude to Westernization? An intriguing historical issue arises here, or rather the issue of historiography and Orientalism. In general, he sharply criticizes historical method when applied to philosophy, on the ground that this method tends to throw doubt on speculation (*nazar*). Hanafi's criticism hits in particular Western Orientalism. Orientalists are not able to give up their "national" (*qawmi*) concept of science, which is obviously "European". Orientals, for instance, by applying a surreptitious historical

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(1). Al-Hurriyyah taharrur in H. Hanafi, *Min al-'aqidah ila'l-thawrah* (Cairo, 1988), 3: 380.

(2). See my interview with the author, "Per una nuova Lettura dell'Islam moderno: intervista ad H.H.", *Islām: Storia e Civiltà*, vol. 39, (2) (1992): 69- 79.

(3). H. Hanafi, "Des Ideologies modernistes à l'Islam révolutionnaire", *Peuples Méditerranéens*, 21 (October-December 1982): 12.

(4). *Min al-'aqidah ila'l-thawrah*, 1: 82.

(5). *Ibid*: 88.

method (*minhaj ta'rikhi*) distorts the thought of men like Suhraward, willing to concentrate on his Greek or Indian or anyway external inspirations and so ignoring his Islamic and orthodox background.<sup>(1)</sup>

In his last important work, *Muqaddimah fi 'ilm al-istighrāb* ("Introduction to the Science of Westernization"), Hanafi tries to pave-the way for a factual transfer from the illusory knowledge of an alien world (the East) by the 'Orientalists' -officiating priests of a transcendental "Orientalism"- to an analogous, equally illusory, knowledge of the West another alien reality, analyzable by "Westernization".<sup>(2)</sup> Indeed, the main philosophical and ideological problem to overcome is the surreptitious opposition between the ego (*anā*) and the aliud (*ākhir*), a distinction meaningful only from the point of view of a triumphant and victorious culture over the others (the culture of imperialist Western countries over Africa and Asia for instance), while a real phenomenological perspective implies at inter subjectivity leading to a true transcendence of exploitation and racism.<sup>(3)</sup>

Secondly, the history of Western philosophy, which Hanafi draws from Greek antiquity to contemporary times, shows a progressive decadence and atomization of its coherence. The last stage would be the dissolution of European conscience with the triumph of an irrationality mainstream.

In order to demonstrate this assumption, Hanafi argues for a cyclical development of history and historical thought, both in the Western world and in the Oriental (and especially Islamic) world, in successive periods of about seven hundred years. In Islam, the first phase went from Hijrah to Ibn Khaldun, who represented the critical consciousness of Islamic culture at its apogee. After a second phase of decadence corresponding more or less to Ottoman supremacy and failure and subsequent modernization and submission to Westernizing patterns, the fifteenth century of Islam (1400 A.H. corresponds to A.D.1980) marked the setting forth of a new *nahdah*. "We are observing," Hanafi writes, "the end of the second and the beginning of the third stage, the end of colonialism [*isti'mār*] and the beginning of liberation [*taharrur*]. We are contemporaneous to the movements of liberation and we witnessed Arab

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(1). All these arguments are found in H. Hanafi, *Hikmah al- ishrāq wa finuminulujjiya*, included in *Dirārsāt islamiyyah* (Beirut. 1982): esp. But the author deals with them also in his thesis *Les Methodes d'exése: essaisur la science des fondaments de la comprehension* ('ilm usul al-fiqh) (Cairo, 1965): cxli-cl.

(2). H. Hanafi, *Muqaddimah fi 'ilm al-istighrab* (Cairo, 1991).

(3). *Ibid*: 695ff .

revolution, along with Palestinian loss."<sup>(1)</sup> Of course, temporal boundaries must not be kept too strictly, because history is a changing process; but general patterns are clearly discernible.

Comparatively, Western history, which started six hundred or more years before the Muslim era, is now living at die very beginning of decadence entering its third phase. After attaining the peak of power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Western (but we can say perhaps better "Christian") world is running into a descending parabola coinciding with Islamic awakening and rising. The ideological and philosophical crisis of Western outlook and life is proved by the great hold on common and intellectual minds of nihilism (*falsafāt al-'adam*).

The death of God (*Lāhut mawt al-ilāh*), the death of spirit(*al-mawt fi'l-ruh*) in arts and culture "gave expression to a hidden crisis of European consciousness" ("*tu'abbir 'an azmatt dafinah fi'l-wa'y al-urubi*").<sup>(2)</sup> Husserl was aware of this emergency and declared it in his *Kriss*, arguing that the crisis of European sciences is properly the crisis of European humanism ("*azmat al-wa'y al-urubi bil-insaniyyah*").<sup>(3)</sup>

In these circumstances, what room is there for the third world in general and the Islamic world in particular? In the Third World, we have recently perncnced national independence and the construction of autonomous economic systems, among which Hanafī cītes Arabic socialism as a third way between capitalism and Marxist socialism.<sup>(4)</sup> Indeed, Hanafi applies to the Third World a deeper awareness of history, because China and India, Persia, Mesopotamia and Egypt developed in seven thousand years of uninterrupted tradition and civilization.<sup>(5)</sup> In the new phase of history now starting, however, those cultures and civilizations, which from the Middle Ages moved from East to West, must come back to the East again: this is the promise of a new world.<sup>(6)</sup>

This analysis underlines the importance of dialogue in a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities. This dialogue must be aware, anyway, that the Islamic mind is seeking a new resolution and probably, when achieved, the new resolution will bring forth a complete *boulevérsment* of intellectual outlook and political conditions.

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(1).Ibid: 698.

(2). Ibid: 715.

(3). Ibid: 718.

(4). Ibid: 735.

(5). Ibid: 737.

(6). Ibid.: 768.