APPENDIX

24 February 2006

Dear Professor Zygmunt Bauman,
I hope you are doing great and I really appreciate your kind permission to know your contact details. I am very interested in your work on culture, modernity and postmodernity. I was awarded the Excellent BA in English language and literature in May 1999 and the Excellent MA in semiology and literary theory in Nov. 2004. My MA thesis was on Paul Ricoeur and the challenge of semiology. In fact, my interest in your work grew at a rapid rate when I discovered that your thought has much sway on an Arab intellectual called Abdelwahab Elmessiri. I'm currently preparing a proposal for a PhD dissertation at Cairo University on The Cognitive Mapping of Modernity and Post-modernity. Kindly find attached a draft of this proposal. I look forward to reading your comments and critical remarks before I submit the proposal to the English Department at Cairo University.
Kind regards
Haggag Ali

25 February 2006

Dear Haggag Ali,
You put me to shame – it is only from you that I learned of Elmessiri's work (indeed, of his existence...)! I gather from what you wrote in your synopsis that he is an important, original thinker whose ideas should enter the mainstream of the 'Western self-scrutiny' discourse. Which of his works are available in English or French? I'll be obliged for any information.

Again from your synopsis I got the impression that there is a lot in common in Elmessiri's and mine 'cognitive maps' alongside quite a few important distinctions; an ideal situation for a fruitful critical comparison - from which a 'third' map can emerge (and the more of them, the better; I believe cognitive maps to be complementary rather than in competition – you can't have a 'theory of everything,' each theory being a stage light that draws some aspects of action out of dateness while casting other aspects in shade). I am looking forward to the results of your study.

One correction came to my mind when browsing the text: I embraced Claude Levi-Strauss' version of structuralism because he exploded the concept of culture as a self-enclosed and cohesive totality, as it was treated before, and replaced it with a vision of a matrix of possibilities and a potentially infinite string of permutations. In this sense I'd agree, not disagree with Elmessiri if he views structuralism as 'liquid modern' avant la lettre...

With best wishes
Zygmunt Bauman

28 March 2006

Dear Haggag Ali,
I am awfully sorry that, being pressed for time, I can't answer all your profound and demanding questions as they deserve. You will find attached my answer to the first question – but being as busy as I am for the moment answering of the other two would have to wait until long after you've (hopefully!) finished your dissertation! You can however find some oblique answers to those other questions in my little books on globalization and Europe.
With apology, and the best wishes of completion of your study
Zygmunt Bauman

1. In *The Rule of Metaphor,* Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the role of metaphor in our perception of the world and I have noticed that your writings are based on metaphors. To what extent do metaphors play a crucial role in your writing?

Were they still around and stooped to read my writings, ancient sages would be among those 'some' inclined to call my use of metaphors frivolous…. They (Plato most famously) held metaphors in rather low esteem, exiling them from the realm of pursuit of truth and relegating to the 'catch as you can' territory of rhetoric – even though they were anything but averse to lavishly availing themselves from the metaphors' cognitive capacity!

One uses metaphors, the ancients believed, as mere adornments of speech; as trinkets one could rather do without for the sake of clarity. Just as the Bauhaus people and other zealous modernists wished to cleanse buildings of all and any non-functional detail, they would cleanse the reasoning of metaphors. The sole purpose metaphors might serve, they insisted, was for the speaker to entreat and charm the listeners, to gain their applause, and obtain approval that is prompted by whipped up emotions instead of being solidly founded in alerted and watchful reason.

This is not however what metaphors do; or at least not the only task they may perform. In case of an unfamiliar experience in need of an adequate conceptual net to be caught and examined, metaphors render an enormously important service: they serve imagination and comprehension. They are the indispensable scaffoldings for imagination and perhaps the most effective tools of comprehension.

Let's recall for example that the core-concept of sociology, the concept of 'society,' was introduced into the emergent social-scientific discourse as a metaphor. Thus far almost synonymous with 'company,' evoking 'companionship,' 'fellowship,' 'association with one's fellow people in a friendly and intimate manner,' the term 'society' was applied to an abstract totality anything but 'intimate' and not necessarily 'friendly' – and all that in order to grasp and visualize the invisible and intangible roots of the new and unfamiliar, yet unnamed pressures/ dependencies of, and to mentally map the lines of dependency too extended and too far reaching to be experienced 'at the first hand' and subjected to direct sensuous scrutiny. Through the metaphor of 'society,' it had been suggested that the unfamiliar condition could be absorbed into the familiar cognitive frame, that it was less alien or

strange than otherwise would have been deemed, and that the already learned and tried forms of action could be still deployed to good effect. That operation was instrumental in making an aggregation inaccessible to senses, the abstract totality of population-within-a-nation-state, into an '*imagined community*.' It had as well the performative ('perlocutionary,' as Austin would say) function: it chimed well with the effort of the nascent modern state of the 'primitive accumulation of legitimacy' era to capitalize on the nostalgia its population displayed for the 'lost community.' The very fact that by now the metaphorical origins of 'society' have been largely forgotten and 'society' feels no longer as a metaphor when applied to the large, anonymous aggregate of state subject, testifies to the success of that operation.

Metaphorical juxtaposition has also another effect – largely unintended, though not necessarily for that reason cognitively useless, let alone harmful. On both sides of the juxtaposition, many a feature of juxtaposed objects is left out of sight: a similarity is suggested, not identity – and in the case of similarity differences are not denied, only bypassed and, so to speak, 'relegated to a lower league.' Metaphor takes, simultaneously, *pars pro toto* and *totus pro parte* – transforming the shapes of both invoked realms: noting and exposing existing similarities not as much as conjuring up a new 'third' object. Metaphorical juxtaposition is an act of selection and discrimination: some features are drawn into limelight, some others cast in shadow ('bracketed away'). While the traits of the first kind are assigned prime importance, the other traits are obliquely ascribed lesser relevance – and it is on the first that the attention is focused explicitly or tacitly. They are suggested to 'play the first fiddle,' to 'set the tune,' even to determine the rest of the object's traits. In all cases, metaphor 'prejudices' the perception of the object it tries to comprehend.

Each metaphor is for that reason 'reductionist' - partial or even partisan. This is however, I believe, a feature of all cognition. The metaphors' claim to distinction derives solely from rendering that universal feature *easier to spot*; it is an irony, or bad luck of the metaphors, that they tend to be reprimanded and denigrated for what could and should be counted among their great assets, not liabilities. Metaphors

draw into light the sorry lack of an 'overlap,' indeed an ineradicable disparity between words and 'things,' knowledge and its object – as well as the inevitably 'construed' nature of objects: that limitation of all cognition that once spotted turn into most effective stimuli to further cognitive effort, but could otherwise stay undetected to the detriment, not the benefit of knowledge (remember, for instance, Thomas Kuhn's 'anomaly' triggering scientific revolutions…) For the cognitive efforts, for the intellectual assimilation and recycling of changing experience, for the articulation of the properly revised modes of life, the 'leftovers' of metaphorical juxtapositions are powerful fertilizers, while the hazy area surrounding the spotlighted bits is a most fertile ground for investigative action.

For the kind of sociology which I've chosen and try hard to practice, (a sociology addressed to the actors of life dramas rather than to their scriptwriters, directors, producers and stage managers, a sociology moved by the urge to participate in the on-going interpretation of their experience and of the strategies they construct and deploy in response, a sociology aimed at enhancing the scope of the actors' choices and to assist them in making the choices both reasonable and effective) such 'hazy areas' are natural habitat and so metaphors are among the principal tools: metaphors have the crucial advantage of opening new sights while simultaneously exposing their limitations, their incurable non-comprehensiveness and non-finality.

Georg Simmel (in *Bruchstücke aus einem Philosophie der Kunst*), having noted the profusion of vibrating, unclear contours and blurred borderlines in Rembrandt's paintings, praised those apparent violations of painting standards as manifestations of the painter's desire to grasp the true individuality of his (human!) objects which can never be reached through piling up crisply reproduced 'distinctive features' (which, unlike human individuality, are as a rule common to many human beings and so hardly ever unique). Descriptions of human experience fail (indeed, are chronically and incurably incapable) to meet the scientific standards of *Eindeutigkeit*. But then humans are not ideal objects for scientific treatment, which humans invented in order to tackle, overpower, conquer and master the non-human reality

while preserving immunity of their own freedom from its bonds and so our, human, freedom to act....

Yet another of Simmel's precepts addressed to the arts (this time from *Der Fragmentcharakter des Lebens*) I believe to be applicable to sociology in equal measure. If it is true, says Simmel, that by their nature arts aim at composing a complete, exhaustive, all-embracing universe – it is also true that every historically given form of art is able to attain that purpose only in part: no historically finite set of artistic forms will ever embrace the totality of the world's contents (that is, let me add, to grasp, lock up and seal the infinity of possibilities which human worlds carry or bring into being). Metaphors are good for thinking because they lay bare this dialectics of intention and performance and are not frightened by what they expose while doing it....

To conclude: I believe that thinking with the help of metaphors is not an activity for which one should feel obliged to apologize – unless one needs to apologize for being human, alive, and living among humans.

The desperate efforts of many a scientist to cut off all metaphorical roots and hide all traces of kinship with 'ordinary' (read: non-scientific, inferior to scientific) perception and thought are (perhaps an inevitable and certainly expectable) part of a more general tendency of science, all too-evident since Plato commanded philosophers to venture out of the cave, to put a distance between itself and the 'common sense' of *hoi polloi* (Gaston Bachelard famously dated the birth of modern science by the appearance of first books that did not start from a reference to a common experience available to all).

Scientists were in this respect successful, though in part only. Some sciences, having fenced off for themselves or designed from scratch a realm of 'empirical data' inaccessible to non-insiders (that is, to the rest of humanity), may also design a language similarly free of all semantic bonds with ordinary life and ordinary experience, and composed instead of custom-made terms with no past and no lateral associations. In the case of such sciences the postulate of banishing metaphors is perhaps plausible and feasible; it is also pragmatically useful, as it offers an additional benefit of underscoring and reinforcing the exile of

common sense and its common carriers. Let us note, however, that as the sciences' independence from common experience has acquired material, fleshy, technically armed, imperturbable and unassailable founda- tions that to be secure no longer need an active defense by a discursive superstructure – the crusade against the selective/reductionist and somewhat 'imprecise' metaphors have lost much of its vigour and is running fast out of steam. Voices that some decades ago would be condemned as heretical, are nowadays sounding ever louder.

One most recent example of such voices should suffice: S. Phineas Upham's article ('Is Economics Scientific? Is Science Scientific?' in the 2005 issue of the *Critical Review*). It develops Nancy Cartwright's description of nature as 'tending to a wild profusion' and follows her call to 'construct different (scientific) models for different (cognitive) purposes' (exactly what metaphors do!) as 'no single model serves all purposes best.' Rightly, Upham suggests that if in the case of 'natural sciences' (fortified, let me repeat, in a secure shelter of experience inaccessible and forever unfamiliar to the 'ordinary folks') such idea may be still viewed as a partisan, contentious standpoint, it is surely the sole and incontestable choice for the study of humans – as the behaviour of human beings is a domain that is too large, too complicated, and too unpredictable for any model to predict…. This is why *different models* have *different functions*, and why *no one model can perfectly correspond to all permutations of the reality of human behaviour*. (Italics added).

But this is precisely what the metaphors do – consciously and openly. This is why they obey more faithfully than their detractors the injunction to be 'better mindful of the provisional nature of models, and scorn any tendency to sanctify laws derived from even the most pleasing or useful models.'

I admit that using metaphors we set ourselves somewhat less ambitious, less pedantic or perfectionist goals than did modern sciences in their *Sturm und Drang* phase of independence wars (and the early social science when struggling to be admitted into their company). But I deny that this means that using metaphors is a sign of a lesser and inferior knowledge. Using metaphors derives from and signals our responsibility towards the prospective human objects/participants of activity known

under the name of 'sociology' – activity that is the sole source of whatever authority we may claim and acquire. It signals refusal to act under false pretences, to bid for greater authority than realistically can be claimed, and above all to distort the subject-object communication (yes, communication, since both the subject and the object are human and both have tongue) in the subject's (that is, the sociologist's) favour. This is not only the matter of choosing a cognitive strategy; it is also (and yet more importantly) an *ethical* choice, a decision to assume responsibility for the voluntary or involuntary, subjective or objective responsibility of sociologists, and an act of assuming a moral stance towards the vocation and its prospective beneficiaries.

Siegfried Kracauer (in *History: The Last Things Before the Last*) points out that as the 'parochial security gave way to cosmopolitan confusion,' there is a 'widespread feeling of powerlessness and abandonment,' of 'being lost in uncharted and inimical expanses,' which – dangerously – 'stirs many, presumably the majority of people, to scramble for the shelter of a unifying and comforting belief.' He then proceeds to praise Erasmus for being 'possessed with fear of all that is definitely fixed,' since he believed that 'truth ceases to be true as soon as it becomes a dogma.' Knowing that 'none of the contending causes is the last word on the last issues at stake,' one needs, as Kracauer insists, to seek 'a way of thinking and living which, if we could only follow it, would permit us to burn through the causes and thus to dispose of them – a way which for the lack of a better word, or a word at all, may be called humane.'

Well, from such observations, much as their topicality must strike the 21st Century reader, the benefits of thinking with metaphors do not necessarily follow…. Or do they?

2. The garden metaphor prevails in most of your writings on solid European modernity and you have used it in connection with the attempt to fight ambivalence but the application of this metaphor excludes the attempts of European imperialism to turn the rest of the world into a useful substance/matter that can help Europe establish its modern garden or earthly paradise. Would you please elaborate on this point?

3. You have used the hunter metaphor in connection with liquid modernity to place a great emphasis on the fragmentation of identity in what you refer to as the modern liquid era. Don't you think that this metaphor can be used in connection with solid modernity and the European attempts to perform hunting practices in the rest of the world to achieve its utopian dreams?

I am looking forward to your answers and elaborate discussion.

CONVERSATION WITH ABDELWAHAB ELMESSIRI

This conversation was conducted over almost 18 months, starting from January 2006 to early June 2007. I had been working with Prof. Abdelwahab Elmessiri during that period and had the chance to raise all questions, which he kindly answered. In June 2007, I travelled to Germany on a short-term doctoral scholarship and I kept editing the conversation. Then I travelled to Turkey and my studies helped me raise new questions in relation to modernity and secularism. In both Germany and Turkey, I devoted much time to the study of the thought of Eric Voegelin and I told Elmessiri about the amazing similarity in their methodology, assumptions and conclusions. Therefore, I referred to the influence of Eric Voegelin on Elmessiri in a few pages in my PhD dissertation. During my stay in Turkey, Elmessiri sent me some articles that could help me see the convergence of his thought with and its divergence from that of Voegelin. Elmessiri asked me to send him the conversation on his thought and that of Bauman so that he could edit it before including it in my PhD dissertation.

Wednesday, May 14, 2008 at 12:30 pm

Dear Haggag,

Assalamu Alaykum wa Rahmatuh Allah wa Barakatuh

Kindly find attached the articles that might be useful in the comparison between me and Eric Voegelin. There are some articles, only in Arabic; we will translate them and send them to you once translated.

Please send me the conversation that compares my thought to that of Bauman so as to edit it and send it back to you.

By the way, I have read your PhD dissertation [first draft] and I find it really an outstanding work. May Allah bless you and Peace be upon you.
Kind regards,
Dr. Abdelwahab Elmessiri

Saturday, May 17, 2008 at 7:29

Dear Haggag,
Kindly find attached the edited conversation. I believe now that you know my ideas more than I; you can edit the conversation as you like.
Kind Regards,
Dr. Abdelwahab Elmessiri

Tuesday, June 3, 2008 at 2:02 am

Dearest Prof. Messiri,
Thanks a lot for your concern and the details of the coming conference on Abdul Aziz Hamouda. I still have two requests:
First, I do appreciate if you edit the last question in the interview that will be included in the thesis.
Second, I appreciate if you recommend some names of other Arab or Islamic intellectuals who touch on the idea of gnosticism or secularism in a similar way to yours and Voegelin's. This is very crucial to the postdoctoral project.
With warmest greetings,
Haggag

Elmessiri did not answer this email; he was then very busy and exhausted and passed away one month later, 3rd July 2008.

The Conversation:

1. In a correspondence with Zygmunt Bauman in February 2006, he commented on my PhD proposal stating that he felt that you are an original thinker whose ideas are worth incorporating into the mainstream discourse on 'Western self-scrutiny.' He even went so far as to request whether your works are available in English or French. He also asked why a prominent Arab intellectual,

meaning yourself, had decided to use his critical skills as a professor of English
literature to map the modern and the post-modern worldviews?

Though I believe in neither determinism nor fatalism, I do believe that we are part of our historical and cultural context, one that has been shaped for the last 200 years by western modernity and its imperialistic ambitions to put an end to both history and geography. In my early writings that go back to the 1970s, especially *The End of History* (1973) and *The Earthly Paradise* (1979), I represented modernity as a worldview that promotes the dream of perfection and the establishment of an earthly paradise, a dream shared also by both Nazism and Zionism. Of course, the Arab-Israeli conflict has played a crucial role in my decision to represent a new critique of modernity, one which is more comprehensive and includes all Gnostic movements that search for final solutions to establish a perfect society. At that time, however, I was very surprised that before the late 1980s, western scholarship rarely approached Nazism and Zionism within the critical discourse on modernity. After getting my doctoral degree in poetry from Rutgers University in 1969, I was introduced to Mohamed Hassanein Heikal who was then the editor-in-chief of the Egyptian daily newspaper *Al-Ahram*. When he discovered that I was extremely interested in Zionism as a worldview that has much in common with western modernity, he advised me to devote myself to the study of Zionism.

In mapping modernity, I was much influenced by humanist Marxism. At the beginning I embraced historical materialism and the materialist interpretation of human existence. However, I was attracted much to Marxism because it had strong theoretical foundations and offered me at the time a humanist critique of man's alienation in the modern world. However, with the decline of leftist movements and the rise of political Islam, I came to abandon the materialist interpretation of history, embracing instead an Islamic paradigm which I developed, a paradigm that places a distance between the creator and the created, the creator and nature, and finally between man and nature. I came to realize that Islam represents a worldview that rejects the materialist Promethean and Faustian outlook. It calls for balance between man and the universe rather than establishing paradise on earth or putting

an end to history or harnessing man and nature in the service of the powerful. In other words, I discovered the humanism of Islam.

The expression 'End of History' has of late been widely used. It means that history, with all its complexity and simplicity, would at some point reach its end, becoming completely fixed, devoid of conflicts, dualities and specificities. Man will then entirely dominate his environment and himself, and he will find final scientific solutions to all his problems and sufferings. Scientific knowledge, according to this view, is the knowledge that will make us control the law of necessity and will give us the capacity to found a scientific Zion, that is, a technocratic, technological utopia. We note that those who proclaim the end of history base their ideas on a narrow scientific view and operate within the framework of a concept of a rigid causality. They imagine that science will lead to a comprehensive, complete and certain knowledge. It is ironical to note that these hypotheses have lost their credibility in scientific circles which have become increasingly aware of the indeterminacy of natural phenomena and the physical uncertainty of the sciences. Nevertheless the attempt to reach a high level, if not complete, certainty still prevails among many scholars in the field of the human sciences.

The problem of the end of History is latent in many philosophic systems, but it has become a basic theme in Western civilization after the Renaissance as the nature-centred outlook gained ground. We may say that the utopias of the Renaissance in the West are a manifestation of this theme. Most of them are technological, technocratic utopias standing outside the course of human history, because they are allegedly managed in an entirely rational manner, on the basis of an awareness of natural and scientific law that is not related to social historic or man-made laws. The laws of reason were supposed to be identical with the laws of nature, and therefore the 'rational' came to be synonymous with the 'natural' or 'materialistic' or as I prefer to say 'naturalist–materialist.'

The rejection of history manifests itself in a more complex fashion in the age of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment view of history manifested itself in both Hegelian and anti-Hegelian philosophies.

While anti-Hegelian philosophies have an explicitly anti-historical stance, the case is slightly different when it comes to Hegelian philosophies, which often refer to historical laws, historical epochs and inevitabilities. However, I argue that, Hegelian philosophies are no less antagonistic to history than the anti-Hegelian ones, for Hegelianism presupposes the existence of an Idea which has no material or relative existence, which propels history, society, mankind and nature. This Idea has many names: Absolute Idea, Absolute Mind, the Infinite Spirit, etc. This non-divine Absolute, however, is not motionless, for it can never know itself, nor can it realize itself fully outside nature, time and history. This is achieved through a dialectical process in the context of which opposites interact and interpenetrate and are eventually reconciled and synthesized. The idea of humanity as an independent unique phenomenon within the system of nature is thereby eradicated. It was therefore rightly said that Hegelianism has no place for duality nor does it separate the material from the ideal, the natural from the human, or the sacred from the temporal, for everything will eventually be reduced to one element, material in fact, spiritual only in name. Hegelian thought only considers reality in relation to the idea of the end of history, when the Absolute Mind will be embodied, and even incarnated, in nature and the general law is realized in history, a time which will mark the end of dialectics and of human suffering, when man will find final solutions to all his problems and fully control all things. However, one of the ironies of this situation is that the moment of total control is itself the moment that will mark the victory of simplism over complexity, of one-dimensionality over multi dimensionality, and of the natural over the human.

2. In mapping the Enlightenment as a major narrative category of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman referred to it as a Gnostic narrative that attempted to achieve transcendence but this attempt was transformed into a form of transgression against transcendence, whether materialistic or metaphysical. To what extent do you agree with this vision?

The philosophical discourse on modernity relies on code words, which convey an integrated worldview. These code words, neverthe-

less, can stand as an obstacle between ourselves and knowledge. As employed in Arab analytical discourse, the term 'Enlightenment' is inextricably tied to the concept of modernity, especially the faith in the ability of the human mind to acquire the knowledge it needs to illuminate most, if not all, phenomena and things, depending on an understanding of material reality. It is precisely for this reason that we can call the Enlightenment 'solid rational materialism,' one that attempts to give centrality to man and to establish universal ethical systems without reference to the existing religious traditions. The Enlightenment, in this sense, gave centrality to the human subject and expected him to transcend both the world of nature and his own natural self. This worldview gives man enormous self-confidence and opti-mism in regards to his present and future.

But this idealistic vision was accompanied, paradoxically, with the perception of man as a child of nature. The dream of the human self that can apprehend reality and dominate and reshape it was replaced by a self that had been deconstructed and reduced to material elements. Man becomes an indivisible part of a material becoming with no fixity, unity, transcendence or meaning. The philosophers of the Enlighten-ment proved to be nothing but promoters of 'dark Enlightenment,' a hermeneutics of doubt, which denies the reality of subject and object and reveals that materialist rationalism leads, in the final analysis, to materialist irrationalism.

The discourse of the Frankfurt School revolves around the 'tragedy of the Enlightenment' and the 'cold night of the Enlightenment.' It shows how the Enlightenment invited man to regard nature as usable matter. The Enlightenment project was an attempt to liberate man from his fear of natural forces. However, the progress in controlling nature is accompanied with an erosion of man's inner emotional life and feelings. As nature is ever more efficiently broken down to facili-tate its exploitation, man is deconstructed and the human whole gradually disappears. This is the Enlightenment dialectic: progress in dominating nature is matched by the fragmentation of man. Western literature was conscious of the dark aspects of the Enlightenment. Romantic literature for example was a protest against man's increasing

isolation from the world, as well as against the natural sciences, which converted man into dead matter. Modernist literature dealt with man from a dark Enlightenment perspective. Themes such as isolation, suicide, worry, a sense of the absurdity of existence and the meaning-less of nature, man's inability to transcend his reality and his absorption into vast entities that crush him and direct his existence, all sprung from the modernist novelist's awareness of, and protest against, the dark Enlightenment.

3. In his mapping of the role of les philosophes, Bauman refers to them metaphorically as gardeners and legislators who were obsessed with establishing perfection and an earthly paradise. How do you perceive them and other leading western philosophers?

In almost all of my writings, I prefer to refer explicitly to *les philo-sophes* and other western philosophers as materialists who promoted monistic and simplistic interpretation of the complex reality of our existence. Thomas Hobbes was perhaps the first to identify the dark theses immanent in materialist rationalism when he stated that the state of nature was a state of war of all against all and that man was a wolf to his brother man. The social contract between men was not a product of their intrinsic goodness but their excessive fear of one another and desire for survival. They establish a state to rule over them for their own peace of mind. Machiavelli agrees with Hobbes on this point. Spinoza and Newton, however, described a completely mechanical world: the self dissolves in the mechanical motion of the universe. John Locke described the mind as a *tabula rasa* on which sense impressions are accumulated as knowledge. Bentham states that's man's morals are tied to his motivations and instincts alone. The Marquis de Sade, Darwin and Freud all argued that man has a wolf lurking within him and that his civilized self is but a frail shell concealing this inner dark-ness. Jung believed that there is no individual self but rather a collective self freighted with original paradigms. Nietzsche crystallized the foun-dations of the dark Enlightenment when he described the self as a trick used by the weak to smother the innocence and spontaneity of the powerful. It imposes illusory ideals of a fixed existence on the world of

becoming. However one chooses to describe it, as a mask, a myth, a fairytale, an ideology or a linguistic coinage i.e. the self is not real. Marx, in his non-humanist materialist moments, adopted a largely similar position. He, too, believed that the independent human self was an illusion and that behind the independent individualist façade lay an ongoing class struggle and the means of production.

4. But how can we put Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677), Isaac Newton (1643-1727), Jan Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778), Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and many others in one and the same category, though they belong to different historical periods and intellectual trends?

This is a very important question and its answer is the key to my intellectual output. In approaching western modernity, we are expected to transcend historiography, embracing instead the notion of para-digm. The explanatory power of paradigms lies in the fact that they go beyond differences and minute details to establish similarities among seemingly different theories and philosophers. These similarities can provide us with a dominant motif and a common worldview. Hobbes claimed that 'man is a wolf to man' and that reality was no more than an arena where a 'war of all against all' raged incessantly. Machiavelli was a materialist utilitarian who advocated the instrumentalization of all things, including man. Copernicus and Newton refuted the centricity of Earth and replaced it with a heliocentric vision of the universe. A number of other materialist philosophers, such as Spinoza, mounted a comprehensive deconstruction of the human self and developed a mechanistic materialist vision of man and the universe. The same motif can be traced in Locke's concept of the human mind as a *tabula rasa*, one that records, mechanically and automatically, an accumulation of sensory perceptions from which it forms thoughts and then complex ideas. Behaviourist psychology is no exception as it promoted this materialist and mechanical conception of man and the mind.

5. But does the notion of paradigm in this sense justify the reduction of the entire output of a specific philosopher to an oft-quoted phrase?

As a professor of English literature, I was much influenced by the New Critics who came into prominence in the 1950s. I was very much attracted to the idea of 'close reading,' one which enables the critic to trace key phrases and metaphors that can help a literary critic to reach the specific meaning of the text, without claiming it to be the final and the only valid interpretation. It is hardly surprising that I have used metaphors as the best method to trace the dominant paradigms in western thought. I came to discover that the paradigms can be defined as the result of the ability to weave comprehensive and dominant metaphors into a consistent whole. The paradigms I have formulated did not come into existence overnight but they are the product of an intensive and extensive reading of western philosophy. I come to the conclusion that western thought can be understood through two major metaphors or paradigms: the mechanical and the organic. The latter compares human beings or the entire human existence to a plant or an animal while the former compares human society to a self-sufficient machine. However, both metaphors belong to a materialistic paradigm that is believed to be self-operative and self-generating. During the 19th century the mechanical metaphor, promoted by Newton and mechanistic philosophy, was replaced by an organic metaphor, but the materialist paradigm remained the same. Darwin explained that man had arisen as a single link in the chain of evolution, descended not from the divine but from a lineage of apes in accordance with the laws of biological evolution. He was followed by Marx and Adam Smith, who both asserted that society was essentially a conflict governed by economic materialistic determinants. Next came Freud, declaring that the conscious and the unconscious were governed by the laws of mechanical and biological movement, and that it is primarily our unconscious that drives us, which is itself governed by dark forces, like sex. Not only are we descendants of apes, the ape lurks in our depths and dominates all we do. Freud also argued that we never become aware of the truth within ourselves, but rather what appears to be the truth.

6. You attempt to uncover the significance of the dominant paradigms in western thought in relation to modernity and the Holocaust, how is the Holocaust different from, for example, the Spanish inquisition or the Crusades?

The Holocaust can be regarded as a paradigmatic moment of western modernity, a moment that uncovers an immanent possibility of the modern urge towards perfection and efficiency. Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Modernity and the Holocaust* that the Nazis after *Kristallnacht* discovered that they could not achieve their objectives through a series of well-orchestrated popular pogroms, for it would have taken too many years to exterminate the Jews. Moreover, pogroms require popular agitation and involve emotions, emotions of hatred it is true, but emotions nevertheless. The Nazis were iron-fisted secular modernizers who developed an extremely rational purist model of fast mo- dernization. Therefore, they could not tolerate emotions or any other elements that would slow them down or that would hinder their full and rational utilization of the natural and human resources at the fastest possible rate. Therefore any human being deemed parasitical and useless, from the standpoint of the rational Nazi state and from the standpoint of the equally rational Nazi science, had to be dealt with. The category of 'the useless' – also referred to as 'useless eaters,' 'disposable' and 'transferable' – included gypsies, homosexuals, Slavs, intellectuals with the wrong kind of ideas, handicapped children, old people, and Jews. Neither the Spanish inquisition nor the Crusades embraced an ideology that would exterminate a whole race to establish paradise on earth.

7. Is this the reason behind your mapping of Gnostic totalitarianism as one of the major consequences of modernity, one that has given rise to Übermenschen and Untermenschen?

Your use of the German words here is very crucial because, as I said before, the Nazi Holocaust is a paradigmatic moment and the use of these German words has thus a more explanatory power. Modern man, despite all talk about equality, sees humankind from the same dualistic vision. On the one hand, there is the *Übermensch* (superman),

Nietzsche's man, the peak of natural development that has its own law. There is also the member of the ruling technocrat elite, the possessor of the gnosis who will solve all problems. On the other hand, there are the masses, the common people, and the bureaucrats, who receive orders and blindly obey them, then execute them without any questioning; they represent the *Untermensch* (sub-man), who moves in the space previously chosen for him.

The modern Western man implemented the same strict dualistic vision on the population of the globe, therefore, there is the Western man, the possessor of the gnosis who has all the rights on the one hand, and on the other, there is the rest of humankind who has no rights, yet exists to be matter that is functionalized and no more than a means. In Gnostic thought, a spiritual man has no relation to our time or place. He found himself in this world by mistake and therefore he always remembers his divine origin and feels alienated from his surroundings. As a consequence, he refuses the world, his human state, the dialectic, the dualistic vision, death and the unity of body and soul, i.e. he refuses his finality and he longs for the state of pleroma, when dialectic and dualism will be purged.

As for modern Gnostic man, he is an alienated man, without a homeland and in a state of continuous conflict with nature. He found himself in a world not of his own making, and he always dreams of a scientific technocratic utopia where the complete scientific domination over nature will be realized and all dualisms will be purged after the accumulation of scientific knowledge. However, for both the spiritual man and the modern man, the concept of return is a basic one in Gnosticism. The spiritual man returns to the state of pleroma and merges with it. His true human essence, which is the divine essence, appears, as there is no difference between god and man, because the part merges with the whole and the whole is the pleroma.

Modern ideologies are ideologies that return to the absolute and merge with it; the romantic poet returns to nature and merges with it, the populist returns to the people and merges with them, the Zionist returns to the land and merges with it, the revolutionary intellectual returns to the working class and merges with it in order to establish

the communist society, which is the state of pleroma. All secularist societies, despite all obstacles and difficulties, are in a state of infinite continuous progress that ends in utopia. After the process of merging, the true essence of man appears – the Jew for example, can only become a true Jew in the Promised Land – and man can only discover his essence and conquer his alienation after this process of merging.

Gnosis is the radical solution to all problems of the universe, a solution that has no disparities and explains everything: evil, the creation, the return, the beginning and the end. Therefore, it is characterized by solid and absolute interpretation that covers all possibilities, enables the spiritual man to decode all codes and realize complete freedom and merge with the pleroma. It must be noted that gnosis is always linked to numbers and mathematical patterns. Revolutionary, scientific, and secular ideologies are a continuous search for an interpretation of everything through science and for a utopian technocratic solution. The dream remains a dream with quantitative mathematical scientific formulas without any disparities, covering all possibilities. The aim of revolutionary scientific gnosis is knowledge of the law of necessity, dominance over the universe and total control. The moment of total control is technocratic utopia or the technocratic Zion; comprehensive society, everything has been brought under control, the parts have merged with the whole and are subjugated to it, and no man suffers any problems or struggle, history ends and paradise on earth appears – and the return to the myth is noted again in the modernist thought and literature and in modernism's anti-historical tendency.

We can say that the system underlying all comprehensive secular ideologies, including Nazism, Marxism, Liberalism, Zionism, is what might be termed 'unilinear evolution,' that is, the belief that there is a single scientific and natural evolutionary law to which all societies and human phenomena conform. Progress in reality is nothing but a cumulative process of materialistic rationalization, namely a reformulation of human reality after the model of nature-matter, so that all the qualitative, complex, ambiguous and mysterious elements are eliminated. Reality is thereby turned into mere matter that can be utilized, and into a one-dimensional being that can be instrumentalized.

It would then be possible to utilize both man and nature very efficiently. After taking this step, the process of rationalization, including standardization and levelling, gradually escalates until the dream of technological utopias is fulfilled. Everything is programmed and man himself is controlled from within and without. Total rationalization is achieved through progressive stages which all human societies undergo. Hence the Western passion for dividing history into neatly separate stages).

The escalation of rationalization and its application on a world-wide scale is globalization, whereby the whole world is brought under control and turned into mere matter that can be utilized and instrumentalized. Max Weber predicted that rationalising processes would lead society to the condition of the workshop and drive it into an iron cage. The image of the iron cage is quite appropriate but stands some revisions, for the modern world is actually run in accordance with a triadic rhythmic sequence: the workshop (where man produces), the market (where he goes shopping), and places of recreation (where he rids himself of his surplus energy, tensions, complexes and dimensions). It is a rhythmic sequence that would absorb economic and libidinal men, and would satisfy all their simple, natural, one-dimensional desires, that are totally unrelated to any human complexity.

8. Post-modernity was seen as the way out from the consequences of modernity. But you never conceived of it as a mode of transcendence. On the contrary, you always maintain that it is a radicalization of modernity and the notion of the one-dimensional man. Why have you taken such a negative attitude towards postmodernity?

I always argue that post-modernity is the philosophical outlook that affirms the absence of any principles that could serve as a final point of reference, the erosion of both the subject and object and their boundaries, and the hegemony of moral and epistemological relativism. Post-modernity is the ultimate revolt against Hegelianism and it is the crystallization of what came to be termed the 'anti-philosophical trends' within Western philosophy. This means in fact the disappearance of reason, the faculty which allows man to accumulate meaning

and achievements. This represents what someone called 'the memory of crossword puzzles,' that is, scattered information without any link. The feeling arises that we are in an eternal present, constant change without past or future, repeated experiments without depth or meaning. History is transformed into mere rigid moments, a flat time without depth, coiled around itself without features or significance. The present is identical with the past and the future, and simultaneous with them, just as the self is identical with the object and man with things. Hence, the post-modernist talk about substituting small narratives for the grand narrative. Man is incapable of reaching a comprehensive over-all historical outlook shared by all mankind. He is only capable of going through partial experiences which he can narrate with varying degrees of success and failure, but in no way does his narrative reach the level of a general history of mankind because it has no legitimacy outside the limits of his own experience.

Post-modernity may not produce evolutionary linear paradigms or final solutions. It may not proclaim the arrival of an earthly paradise or a technological technocratic utopia, but it too in its own way is proclamation of the end of history and the end of man as a complex social entity capable of free moral choice. He is replaced by uni-dimensional man, either revolving around a point of reference immanent in the phenomena surrounding him, or surviving with no point of reference whatsoever. He is centred either around his self-referential natural self that has nothing to do with anything external to it, or around abstract non-human wholes unrelated to man as we know him. Such man has no memory and lives in the moment only, within his small narrative. Someone summed up post-modernity as an active forgetfulness of historical memory. It is an inflated blown up way of proclaiming the end of history. We can say that if Fukuyama has 'discovered' and proclaimed the end of History, then post-modernity has 'murdered' it.

9. Zygmunt Bauman argues that post-modernity promotes seduction rather than repression. Also Fredric Jameson places a great emphasis on post-modernity as representing the cultural logic of late capitalism. Where do you stand in relation to these views?

In the post-modern world, the West decided to resort to seduction rather than coercion. I often describe post-modernity as a 'liquid non-rational materialism' because it represents the epistemological framework underlying the New World Order. It is an outlook that denies the centre and does away with referentiality. It refuses to give history any *telos* or to give man any meaning or centrality. It discards all ideologies, it denies history, and it denies man. It is a world in a state of flux. As Frederic Jameson, the Marxist American critic maintains, the post-modernist spirit is an expression of the capitalist spirit. Here, capital has cancelled all specificities as well as the coherent self within which history and personal depth are unified. General exchange value has replaced the original value of things.

Though Jameson's analysis of post-modernity is very original, I prefer to substitute the term 'capitalism' with 'comprehensive secularism.' The reference to general exchange value which cancels specificities is not a reference to capital as an economic affair but rather to capital as an epistemological mechanism that deconstructs and demolishes anything that is unique, specific, profound, sacred or charged with mystery. It is therefore a mechanism hostile to man because it is hostile to history and civilization. Capital here is the mechanism which drives man out of the complex world of civilization and history into a simple unidimensional world of nature. It is the mechanism leading to the dominance of the monist material natural law. It is the most important instrument to desacralize man, though it is not the only one, for in the age of post-modernism there are other mechanisms, the most important of which are pornography and the pleasure industry.

10. Critics hardly attempt to establish any relationship between post-modernity and Zionism. Why are you keen on foregrounding the similarities between them? Is it only a matter of ideology and prejudice?

Contrary to the anti-Semitic tract that was conjured in the critics' minds, my encyclopaedia on the Jews, Judaism and Zionism was no campaign of denunciation or vilification; nor did it cater to a propagandistic agenda for 'rallying forces in defence of Arab rights.' Rather,

it was an attempt to comprehend and explain Judaism and Zionism through the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction and the development of new paradigms capable of encompassing the various aspects of these phenomena in their totality and specificity. Indeed, in Zionist literature there is an acute awareness of this convergence between anti-Semitism and Zionism. Herzl himself spoke of 'our friends the anti-Semites,' and Balfour was perfectly conscious that his Zionist bias was rooted in his own anti-Semitism and the desire to rid Europe of the Jews as the solution to the 'Jewish question.' It was only a small step from Balfour to Hitler. Both wanted to achieve the same end – to rid Europe of the Jews – but whereas Balfour's solution was to pack them off to the British colonies, Hitler's was the concentration camps and the gas chambers. Then again, Hitler did not have the luxury of foreign colonies, Germany having been stripped of its colonial possessions following World War I (although in fact Hitler had contemplated a Balfour-like solution in Mozambique).

Some critics believe that to 'humanise' the Jews is to acquit Zionism and to sympathise with its advocates. Nothing could be more erroneous. Our conflict with the Zionists is not a trial and we are not bringing suit against them. What we are, or should be, trying to do is to understand them and their behaviour so as to be able to deal with them better in war or in peace. 'Humanise,' moreover, is by no means equivalent to 'sympathise.' I am reminded in this context of Mark Twain's famous remark that "Jews are members of the human race, worse than that I cannot say of them." Colonialism is a human phenomenon, as are racism, exploitation and other evils; and as part of the very core of human existence we can observe and attempt to explain most of their aspects. To attempt to explain and understand is a far cry from condoning these ills, and we must make the effort to comprehend if we are to grasp reality and therefore change it. Conversely, without this effort, all we have are hollow slogans, and the struggle to counter these ills becomes suicidal, because it entails hurling ourselves blind and unprepared into an obscure and raging storm.

11. Al-Ahram Weekly published in its issue 30 March–7 April your article 'Pattern on the Sand' next to Zygmunt Bauman's 'Many Cultures, One Humanity.' Do you see any common grounds between your mapping of modernity and post-modernity and Bauman's in this article?

As I pointed out in the article, our cognitive map of modernity can be best introduced through two major anecdotes. The first one is related to an Algerian "shaikh" who was once told that the French forces had come to his country to spread modern Western civilization. The answer came, brief and revealing: "Why then, did they bring all of this ammunition with them?" The shaikh perceived, at the very onset, the relationship between Western imperialist modernity, and the framework of conflict from which such modernity emanates. This revelation has been perceived by many others since then. The second anecdote is related to the protagonist of that marvellous novel *The Season of Emigrating to the North* written by Sudanese writer El-Tayyib Saleh. The protagonist underlined the dominant pattern of Darwinian modernity when he said: "I hear... the sound of the Romans' swords in Carthage, and the clash of spurs of Allenby's horses stampeding the earth of Jerusalem. The boats glided across the Nile waters, for the first time carrying guns not bread. Railways were built to carry soldiers, and schools founded to teach us to say yes in their language."

Reading Bauman's article, I come to realize that his mapping of modernity and post-modernity is still endowed with a humanistic touch and a comprehensive interpretative paradigm that marked his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*. What is unique about this article is that it condemns all Manichean visions of the world, all of which call for a holy war against satanic forces, reducing economic, political and social conflicts to an apocalyptic vision of the last, life and death confrontation between good and evil. As Bauman suggests these tendencies recognize no differences between civilizations or faith systems and we can easily find them in the 'West' as often as in the 'East,' and among the Muslims as easily as among Christians and Jews. As Bauman points out globalization is only confined to capital, finance, trade, criminal mafias or terrorists. We are really in need of positive globalization to really share the same humanistic ambitions.