

## Islamization of Knowledge: A First Step to Intergrate and Develop the Muslim Personality and Outlook

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It is hereby necessary for me to emphasize the importance of acquiring knowledge. We should remind ourselves that Prophet Muḥammad (ṢAAS) is asked in the Qur'ān to pray for an increase in knowledge (*Rabbī zidnī 'ilman*). The Prophet (ṢAAS), himself has emphasized the value of knowledge and highlighted the importance of acquiring knowledge, both for Muslim men and women. He said, "Acquire knowledge from cradle to grave." Indeed he stated further that the acquisition of knowledge is a *duty* imposed on every Muslim man and woman. As a matter of fact, the best life, considered from a Muslim perspective, would thus appear to be the one that is devoted to the acquisition of knowledge, which may be regarded as a sacred religious duty imposed on every Muslim man and woman.

Although this injunction was given 1400 years ago, it has been only in the recent past that the world has begun to realize its importance. Of course the world today believes in knowledge and mankind strives to acquire it, but the all-important question is what is it that may *truly* be called, from the Islamic viewpoint, "knowledge", as opposed to pseudo-knowledge. Knowledge must be of truth and reality or of what the Qur'ān calls *Ḥaqq*. It must be acquired for the purpose of utilizing it in the *service of* life so that life is lived by mankind according to the aims and purpose for which it has been created and the mission which it has been assigned to fulfill. Small wonder that one of the prayers of Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS) was "O Allah may I see things as they are." This prayer necessarily distinguishes the reality of things from mere appearance of them. After all, much of what appears to man may only be the source of illusion unless by clear perception, reasoning and the criterion of revelation.

The knowledge imparted today in our universities and other academic centers of learning is the product of the contributions that various thinkers, scientists, philosophers and artists have made to man's awareness of who he is, what his relationship is with Nature, his own life and the course of human

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history. At one time, at the base of all knowledge lay the religious intuitions and insights of the masters of human wisdom—the great prophets, sages and saints and such other God-inspired men. These were the men who had expounded truth, from a source higher than the ordinary man's perception, experience or understanding of what goes on inside or around him.

With the passage of time religious consciousness ceased to be recognized as a decisive influence in the growth of human knowledge. Indeed, in the post-Protestant period, and more particularly in the last 300 years or so, religion has fallen into disrepute and has even been “explained” by anthropologists as the source of superstition, or conformity to meaningless ritual and of uncritical acceptance of diverse dogmas which have no relationship with either reality or truth. About the middle of the nineteenth century AC, the most important controversy faced by the protagonists of religion and science was the rival claims of religion and science as sources of knowledge. The relative validity of these twin sources of knowledge became a fashionable topic of discourse and the believers in the institution of religion were more or less put on the defensive by the scientists who, as “philosophers” of science, presented a world-view which supposedly answered all the metaphysical questions which were traditionally understood from a religious perspective. Various disciplines such as epistemology, cosmology and ontology, rational psychology and natural theology took the place of religion. The first of these disciplines, answers the question “Is knowledge possible?” The second, “What is the structure and the principle in terms of which to comprehend the nature of cosmos around us.” The third, “What is the nature of reality.” The fourth, “What is the nature of soul or of human consciousness,” and finally the fifth one, “What is the nature of Divinity and its relation to man.” By answering these questions, the philosophers claim to have done all that religion professes to do for man.

These disciplines co-existed in the pagan era of ancient Greece, but after the advent of science they began to claim that they were the exclusive custodians of ultimate truth. Indeed the time came that God, Who had been accepted as maker of man and the universe and to Whom all things owe their existence and their eventual destination, was declared an illusion and religion labeled the “opium of the people”. Atheism went beyond agnosticism. The latter had only said “We do not know if God exists,” but the former said firmly and loudly that *we know that God does not exist*. The Constitution of the USSR makes the preaching of atheism a constitutional duty—in keeping with Marxist thought. Suffice it to say for the present, that scientific knowledge, by the close of nineteenth century AC in Europe, had begun replacing the religious teachings—the inviolable basis of which could be traced back to the revelation establishing the institution of universal religion for mankind.

The textbooks that are prescribed in the universities today bear the indelible

imprint of outstanding irreligious thinkers like Darwin, Freud, and Karl Marx. Such dubious contribution to contemporary thought is also reflected in the textbooks of sciences like Physics and Chemistry. These thinkers have presented a picture of the universe from which God has, so to speak, been ejected, and all the phenomena in nature and history now explained in terms of mechanical causation.

I shall not include, in this context, pre-Darwinian philosophical controversies because that will take me too far afield. For the present, I shall consider only three thinkers in demonstrating some of the false assumptions on which the edifice of modern knowledge has been raised. The knowledge which they have given to us about life and the mind of man and his social behavior is currently being put forward as though it were an invincible oracle which man has to accept in order to understand his place in the scheme of things. The state of natural, biological, psychological and sociological sciences is unduly influenced by the dominating philosophy of these atheistic and materialist thinkers of the recent past and it is a great tragedy that Muslim students are made to tolerantly study their philosophies about these solemn and grave issues, thus prejudicing their response to life and to the universe.

The natural sciences rely on inductive method for observing unanimities in nature, and set them forth in the form of mathematical formulae. The findings of sciences like physics and chemistry do not necessarily have to depend on the ultimate view of the nature of man and the universe. The theory of matter, and motion or the concept of time and space, or the character of chemical change, such as crystallization etc., do not present any sharp conflicts between the scientific view of reality and the one which is presented by religious approaches to the physical and chemical aspects of matter. In my opinion, the Einsteinian view of the behavior of moving particles—or the ultimate constituents of matter—regarded from Islamic perspective, is false. But I cannot in this address deal with that aspect of my argument because falsity of theory of relativity does not seriously interfere with the views about the nature of life and mind which Islam advances for the benefit of the believers. In this sphere—that is life, mind and social behaviour—difficulties do arise from a false generalization which biologists, psychologists and social scientists put forward when they set out to apply the knowledge they claim to have gained, and suggest that it is to be regulative of life and mind, both pertaining to the nature of the individual and his destiny.

The findings of the modern nuclear physics, of course, have been utilized for the making of thermo-nuclear weapons of destruction. Modern chemistry has been used for promoting the techniques of chemical warfare by perfecting devices for releasing poisonous gases or making available to nation-states other lethal means for destroying life. The pursuit of knowledge in itself is not to be discredited on that account; it is only the use or abuse of that

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knowledge which is the point of our concern. Modern man uses the divinely bestowed gift upon man, viz., to know the nature of things, not for the purpose of serving life but for destroying it. This is so because scientific knowledge does not necessarily make us more human. The inductive method is not plainly available for application since the causation at work here is not mechanical so much as it is teleological. The fact that we are made to see by the scientists, the nature of life, mind and man's social behavior as though they subsisted in their own right, outside the framework of religious or revelational criteria, we become subject to error. When we come to tackle the problem of understanding nature of life or nature of the human mind or nature of man's behavior as the member of a social group or when we reflect on the meaning and goal of history, we should keep the above fact in mind.

When Darwin published his book on the *Origin of Species* in 1275 A.H. / 1859 A.C., the patterns of thinking began to be re-formed from the principles of evolutionary biology that he taught. The eighteenth century scientific thought was dominated by the machine, but the later nineteenth century thought came to be dominated by the way living organisms were working and evolving, as theorized by Darwin and his followers. As has so often been remarked by historians of Western thought: "Eighteenth century philosophical mind was concerned with systems of *order* but the nineteenth century thought was concerned with the *patterns of growth*".

In what was alleged to be an "age of enlightenment," it was somehow thought that progress would come through power which man had acquired over the forces of nature and that the knowledge that had been gained by the biologists and social scientists about man's behaviour would enable them to radically change the enterprise of life. Later, when Darwin published his famous book on *The Descent of Man* in which he claimed that man has descended from anthropoids, he virtually questioned what was believed, on the basis of Western religious teachings, concerning the genesis of man viz., that he had been created by God in his own image. To the popular mind, that was the most startling implication of Darwinian theory about the emergence of man. He had virtually challenged the contention of the Bible, that man had been created by God. But the *full* impact of the Darwinian theory could only be evaluated in the light of the classical view that had viewed anything that was fixed, final, and permanent as somehow being *superior* to that which changed and passed away. The end of each form was inherent in it from the very beginning and nothing could be derived from it that was not already existing in the archetypal plan or design. For example when an acorn is planted it grows into an oak. The process is repeated again and again but the end-product, the mature tree, is a thing which somehow always existed in potentiality in the acorn. This was the view of Aristotle and of the medieval thinkers. But when Darwin showed that *species* themselves *move*, he completed the destruction of the

old view. The old worship of the fixed and the permanent, gave way to a new investigation of *change*. The old preoccupation with the *destiny* or *final purpose* gave way to an equally intense preoccupation with the mechanisms of change.

The vision of life and of nature that Darwin had presented was one of a universal battlefield where only those who were able to adapt themselves to the changing environmental conditions survived. The inevitable consequence of this view was that, after Darwin, there was a tendency to accept the state of natural warfare as ultimately beneficent, and the only source of progress.

As any one can see, this approach to life is at war with the teaching of religion which calls upon man to pursue a prescribed path of rectitude, so that he may realise his *destiny* or *final purpose* for which he has been created. Far from engaging himself in a sort of cut-throat competition, he is called upon to *co-operate* with his fellow-men and to co-ordinate his activity with others in order to bring relief and redemption to mankind as a whole. Thus, Darwin and his followers, like Herbert Spencer, paved the way for their disciples to believe in ruthless struggle, for the survival value itself lay in successful competition. As early as 1266 A.H. / 1850 A.C., Herbert Spencer had said that the poor were unfit to survive and should be eliminated. In his words. "The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and make room for (the) better." Even defects in mental or physical constitution could be properly penalized by extinction. Accordingly, he opposed all devices to help prop-up weakness and enable it to survive—including such things as free education, *poor laws* and state-supported public health. To the same effect were the views of John Stuart Mill, who said: "Every restriction of competition is bad and every extension of it is always an ultimate good". The American economists went much further: "Competition," said Andrew Carnegie, "may be hard for the individual but it is best for the race because it ensures the survival of the fittest in every department." "Millionaires," said William Graham Sumner, "are product of natural selection, acting on the whole body of man to pick out those who can meet the requirements of certain work to be done. . . . If we do not like survival of the fittest we have only one other possible alternative, that is, the survival of the unfittest. The former is the law of civilization and the latter of anti-civilization."

Just as Darwin's theory of evolution reduced life to the interplay of chance and variation, concepts of struggle for existence and successful adaption to environment brought out the survival of the fittest. Also toward the close of nineteenth century AC, a school of psychology was founded by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who reduced the mind to a strange storehouse of repressed infantile wishes and desires and all mental diseases were regarded as being the result of the frustration of any tendency that continued to struggle for expression. All this repression, said he, influenced thought and action. The most

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casual slips of tongue or onset of pain, the forgetting of familiar names, or all sorts of oddities and blunders that interfere with our deliberate purpose, reflect real but unacknowledged motive. In a subsequent work suppression was described not only as a conflict of present forces but as the most recent manifestation of a history of emotional conflict which goes back to an origin in the sexual maladjustments of a little child. Even the perversions of adult life, e.g. sadism or simply continuations of infantile responses which have never been repressed and even the dominating and submissive tendencies, are regarded as aspects of sexuality. Concepts like auto-eroticism, Oedipus complex, libido or narcissism were trotted out in order to explain the mind away in mechanical terms.

The method that Freud evolved for treating these neuroses and other forms of psychotic maladjustments was based on the method of encouraging the patient to allow the ideas, uppermost in his mind, to freely express themselves, thus enabling the sub-conscious layer of the patient's mind to exhume his repressed sexuality. He claimed to cure his patients by bringing to the surface what had been shelved into the dark recesses of their unconscious. Undoubtedly man's sub-conscious does contain dark and demonic forces, but they are kept in check by the supreme presence of heavenly power. But if faith in the divine is demolished, as attempted by the Deist philosophers of the eighteenth century AC, any tampering of the unconscious, could only release those dark forces which ultimately take possession of the soul-life of man and make evil appear good. All the violence which goes on in the world today, and even the permissive character of modern society, is traceable to the impact of the science of psychoanalysis.

The chief grounds of objection to this science have been stated by Prof. Murphey in his famous *Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology*. He says:

The chief grounds of objection have been, the concept of the unconscious, and the quasi-animistic language which speaks of libido, censorship, and ego, the emphasis upon sex specially infantile sexuality, which is distinctive of Freud's approach and the impossibility of experimental or statistical control of complicated factors unearthed by the intricate and arduous process of psychoanalysis. The "unhappy divisions" existing among practitioners have contributed to such distrust. But while so much uncertainty and open hostility attach to these doctrines, and indeed in many quarters (to) the whole movement, terms like "rationalization", "compensation", "defence mechanism" and "projection", are rapidly becoming current. Not only such specific concepts, but the habit of thinking in terms of a struggling personality divided against itself, unaware of many of its own motives, and seeking through devious channels satisfac-

tions which it cannot or will not clearly define, has become a prominent feature in that general transition from structural to functional problems which has already engaged our attention.

After the mind of man was thus mutilated, the philosophy of materialism, at the hands of Karl Marx and company, rejected the autonomy of the human spirit, reduced whole spheres of reality to *matter and motion* and that all changes within society were ascribed to the interplay of the force of economic production and distribution of wealth. Marx maintained that the course of history was pre-determined and that power could not be wrested from the hands of the ruling elite within the state except by force and violence. He elaborated his theory that a revolution would overtake the capitalistic society because, based on the theory of *surplus value*, rich classes will become richer and the poor classes will become poorer—compelling the poor to strike at and dismantle the wielders of power, establishing thereafter a dictatorship of the proletariat which will last until a classless society comes into being. As a result of this view of history, practical application of the social sciences began to be founded on the premises of economic forces which were considered to be decisive in determining the course of history. The category of conscious pursuit of “purpose” which ordinarily seems to influence the behavior of man, was rejected as being totally irrelevant. The state was deified and an apotheosis of the gospel of force was dramatized as providing relief and redemption to the down-trodden toiling millions. The war cry was: “Workers of the world to unite: you have nothing to lose but your chains.”

I have reviewed briefly the impact of *Darwinism*, *Freudism* (science of psychoanalysis) and *Marxism* to be able to argue that principal sectors of human knowledge that deal with *life, mind and history* are being approached today in terms of premises which are mechanical in character and that certain artificial assumptions do not fit in within the framework of values which Islam upholds. Anyone going to the university necessarily has to look at these branches of human learning, that is, the biological, psychological and social sciences in terms of the approach that has been made by these thinkers whose work I have briefly outlined. I have done so to be able to say that their basic standpoints and findings run completely counter to the view of life, mind and history recommended by Islam, the universal religion of mankind.

It is strange, is it not, that the world of Islam which commenced the fifteenth *Hijrah* century of its own history, is not even cognizant of the contradiction in the lives of the Muslim students who are sent out to study modern knowledge? They are involved in a situation where they have to keep their religious convictions in one part of their being and convictions resulting from their studies in the universities in the other. They cannot possibly appear to

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be one integrated personality, but instead a house divided against itself. The challenging task before Muslim thinkers today therefore is to *rewrite standard textbooks* on principal branches of human learning to make them consistent with the basic principles that are discernible in the Qur'an regarding the nature of human life, mind and its social behavior. This is not the place to attempt any exposition of what these principles are and how radically they differ from those that at present are governing the disciplines to which I have made a reference. I concede that the problem is difficult to resolve, but it is equally clear that it should be speedily dealt with by the *'Ummah*. Our students must have unity of outlook which, with respect to Islam must harmonize with the natural constitution of man and his role in human history.

Much of the dissatisfaction expressed against Islam by modern educated Muslims is a result of the kind of textbooks they have read and so-called scientific thoughts, presented to them in the name of modern knowledge. We, therefore, would like to sponsor a world-wide movement for securing recognition of the paramount need and so reorganize the elements of modern knowledge and to purge it of the deleterious elements, which are currently at war with the sanctity of our religious beliefs and practices and tend to give to the believers a sort of schizophrenic personality, so that when they are in a religious mood they do not unconditionally accept principal contributions of modern knowledge and when they are thinking about modern knowledge, their religious beliefs do not undergo a sort of heretical transmutation.