Contrasting Epistemics: Tawhid, The Vocationist And Social Theory

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Mona Abul-Fadl

Rationale and Context

The idea of a Contrasting Episteme, as it is conceived in a series of essays on this theme,[1] is suggested as an approach to grounding the matrix of inquiry in the social sciences in a new spatial zone of conceptual affinities. By carrying the debate in the disciplines to its epistemic foundations, and by conceding the possibility of divergences within these foundations along the lines of basic types, it becomes possible to postulate alternative valid conceptions of social science compatible with different intellectual traditions of inquiry. In the field of the Islamization of knowledge, a critical awareness of such alternatives is all the more necessary for partisans and skeptics alike. Given the critical reconstructionist orientation of that movement it is important to know what it finds objectionable in a given system of knowledge (and its products), and on what basis it justifies its claims to an alternative system, as well as to define the contours of such an alternative.

The claim that the prevailing intellectual tradition which conditions the various disciplines of social and humanistic studies is anaemic in values, or that it is contested simply in terms of value-incompatibility, is too facile to justify a movement for cultural reconstruction on the scale envisaged. It leads to the naive contentions that all that Islamization requires is to add a dose of Islamic values (which ultimately constitute a universal and general

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[1]The present essay is adapted from a monograph on the same subject due to appear under the title, *Disencumbering Social Theory*. The approach was first presented in a seminar at the Institute in August 1987 and was accompanied by a visual presentation at the AMSS Annual Conference in Plainfield, Indiana in October of that year. Subsequently, the idea was further developed in the course of preparing for an International Conference on Epistemology and Social Theory sponsored by the Institute of Humanomics and held at the University College of Cape Breton, Sydney, NS, Canada, October 7-9, 1989. Another paper on "The Implications of a Shift to the Tawḥīdi Episteme for Contemporary Social Theory," was written in this context.

ethical code) to whatever exists to produce the desired orientation. Thus, an Islamic Sociology, an Islamic Anthropology, or an Islamic Economics is simply a compound of the existing discipline plus the values, designated "Islamic," as an additive. Some have identified this with a positivistic current in Islamization.[2] Others have warned against the temptation of subscribing to "double-barrelled" terminologies and have cogently argued the need for a sounder conceptualization in the field.[3] Quite apart from ignoring and misconstruing the socio-cultural and organic dimensions of disciplines of human inquiry, this view overlooks the structural dimension of a given system of knowledge and, while fending for values as components of the system, it underestimates their role in its structuring.

It is here that the idea of a Contrasting Episteme is developed to integrate knowledge systemically by assuming a holistic view of culture and relating knowledge to a given culture. However, because cultures are historically evolved, and as such they are contingent, there is an equal danger of foundering on the reef of a self-defeating cultural relativism and abrogating the uncontestably universalistic premises which the Islamization movement must on principle endorse. Hence "Islamization" is not something exclusively destined for Muslims and Muslim societies on the assumption that culturally speaking East is East and West is West, and that what is good for the West is not necessarily the ideal for the East. Such might be the conventional folk wisdom in both East and West but it is not our position here. Rather the assumption is that Islamization has affinities with a culture-*type* that is historically compatible with a variety of settings and peoples, and that can be contrasted with another culture-*type* which may be equally reproducible in multiple contexts regardless of historical origins. What do we mean by culture types?

For didactic purposes, culture-types are postulated as intellectual constructs which are invested with their relevant properties, and seen in terms of their consequences for knowledge and action, for disciplines and society. Thus, while a Contrasting Episteme is aware of the historicity of culture, it also subscribes to elements of commonality within cultures. It seeks to devise an index for assessing contemporary knowledge in select domains based on

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[2]See my synopsis of "Trends in Islamic Social Sciences," published as a Call for Papers for the AMSS Annual Conference in *AJISS*, Vol. 5, no. 2, December 1988. Some earlier reservations on the Islamization Workplan were argued in these terms. Z. Sardar, "Islamization or Westernization", *Inquiry-Afkar* and, his compact overview in "Islamization of Knowledge: State of the Art Report" in *An Early Crescent: The Future of Knowledge and Evironment in Islam*, ed. by Ziauddin Sardar (London: Mansell, 1989), pp. 27-56.

[3]Merryl Wyn Davies, *Knowing One Another — Shaing an Islamic Anthropology* (London: Mansell, 1988) where she addresses the issue in terms of changing internal paradigms within the discipline. (Ch. 1) and develops it in the specific context of naming and classification in an Islamizing discourse. (Ch. 6) esp. pp. 142-150.

abstracting these commonalities round two basic podes. These become generic to the human condition, irrespective of particular histories or socio-cultural settings. The convergence and divergence which arises around each pode is a matter of conceptual affinity, not historical identity. This formulation should assure the culturalist approach a dimension of universality and offset its particularistic associations. What follows is essentially an elaboration of this theme in the context of a more general concern with reviewing the premises of contemporary social theory and instituting a discourse in the field from an Islamization of knowledge perspective.

Initial Projections

The task of a Contrasting Episteme is to delineate the culture-types in a manner that would generate a momentum of cross-cultural exchange which goes beyond the us/them dialogies. As such it is more than a normative approach to engaging different cultures in a common discourse.[4] It is also taken up as a critical strategy for probing dimensions of knowledge and knowing in a dynamic social context where the awareness of self and other develops in a problematic historical setting. It is innovative enough to open up new perspectives of inquiry, yet it is familiar enough to be adopted and adapted with ease to different challenges. Above all, it appropriates an idiom of inquiry which attempts to transcend the conventional confines of arbitrary and historical dualisms. This last consideration underlies the necessity of a transition from discussing modes of knowing in the abstract, as objective categories, to such modes as they are incorporated in cultural and historical models—ie. as they are historically institutionalized and as they come to constitute the conventions for social discourse. As social theory is ultimately shaped in this kind of discourse, the link between episteme and society is evident. Crossing the barriers to understanding between different conventions of social discourse, is a condition for discoursing intelligently and intelligibly on some of the common problems of contemporary social theory. The importance of a Contrasting Episteme as a strategy of inquiry derives from its potential contribution to this end.

A Contrasting Episteme is predicated on a distinction between two different outlooks which structure a worldview and are projected in its adjuncts in the social world. These are referred to as "culture-modes". Culture modes are seen to cluster round two basic types which may for the purpose at hand

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[4]This is a theme which is developed in my paper on "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme: *Tawhīdī* perspectives on Social Theory" (Forthcoming) where the implications of the different orientations are examined in the context of cultural borrowing/diffusion.

be designated as the nodal poles of the cultural spectrum. The one (nodal mode) is conceived to take its bearings from a *horizontal axis*; the other from a *vertical axis*. The one refers to a flat bearing as of a plain—the other to a spherical or conical optic—as with a lens. The one is *unidimensional*, the other is *multi-dimensional*. The one is postulated on the *autonomy of human reason*, the other places this autonomy beyond human reason; *divine revelation* is axial to the latter mode and the circuit of human consciousness operates within its framework, unlike the case in the former where divine revelation is incidental or marginal and is itself made to be contingent on human consciousness. In the one mode, the phenomenal/visible world (the life-world and society) is a *self-sufficient, self-subsistent entity* which begins and ends with itself in the here and now; in the other mode, that of the vertical bearing, the life-world exists in time and points beyond itself: history is only a fraction of an extended temporal zone which spans the hereafter and relates it to the here-and-now. These are a few of the salient features which may stand out in a crude initial plotting of the epistemic chart along its contrasting with a general distinction which can be made between the secular and the *tawḥīdī* paradigms.

To understand the promise, as well as the challenges, of a strategy deploying a Contrasting Episteme and, to be able to grasp its implications for social theory, two questions should be asked. First, in what way does this strategy assure us a new perspective on knowledge and human understanding? Second, how can this strategy be effectively related/integrated to contemporary social theory in a manner that would be likely to affect its premises and its practice? To answer the first question, it will be necessary to reconstitute our understanding of the chart of human knowledge and in doing so address some of the issues relating to commensurability between sources and means of knowledge, as well as to types of knowledge and aspects of belief and verification. This will be approached at a basic level and with the purpose of providing a *tawḥīdic* projection of the subject in view.

In the language of some contemporary thinkers, though in a very different context, the current chart could be divided into two areas of thought, the "thinkable" and the "unthinkable." Given the medium of the dominant positivist culture, the *tawḥīdic* projection falls in the gray area, or the unthinkable. Charting the episteme from a *tawḥīdic* perspective would thus constitute the first major stride to filling out the blank and restoring a missing dimension to the modern mind. This dimension would secure it elements of a holisticism and a sense of proportion which it currently lacks. The idea however is to further locate the profile of a culture-type associated with this epistemic matrix and to relate it to alternative possibilities to understanding social theory. The nexus to this alternative is structured round a "vocationist" perspective on social science. The assumption here is that a *tawḥīdic* matrix of inquiry,

identified as it would be with a given culture-mode, converges with the conception of social science as a vocation and with its practice as such.

Once the vocationist perspective is assumed in social science it reinforces the critical sensibility in favor of a stance that is at once more disinterested and more engaged. This may be qualified as a posture of an enlightened engagement. The problems with contemporary social theory here come to be seen against a perspective which enhances the prospects for their resolution at a higher plane of activity. The *tawḥidic* matrix provides promising accesses to this plane, and the new practice of social science as a vocation assures the motivation needed to explore these accesses. This, however, leads to other aspects of the inquiry into a Contrasting Epistemics which will be developed elsewhere. In the presentation which follows the discussion will be confined to two principal topics: charting the episteme and introducing the thematic of social science as a vocation.

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Charting an Episteme

There are fundamentally two ways of learning about the world and ourselves: one is by relying on direct observation and discursive reasoning or contemplation and the other is indirectly, by relying on the authority of transmitted knowledge. The instruments of knowledge on the other hand, are common to both sources: we rely on our eyes literally to see that which can be seen or observed, in the one case, and in the other, we rely on our ears to hear that which can only be heard or passed on orally, and in both cases we take recourse to Reason, to infer from what we observe, or to reflect upon the meaning of what we hear. The Qur'an identifies these instruments and points to a sequence as well as a relationship among them in a context invoking a reasoned and responsible faith. 'Oh you who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand! Pay heed to God's message':

> *For it is He who has endowed you with hearing, sight, and minds: yet how seldom are you grateful!*

Again,

> *Say: it is He who has brought you into being, and has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and hearts: yet seldom are you grateful.* [5]

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[5] 23:78; 67:23; cf. 16:78 and 32:9.

In all cases too, the natural inclination is to learn *about something*, in order to *act* upon it—a further intimation of moral responsibility. One mode and posture involves us in an active mood, so that we go out to observe the natural/phenomenal world in order to learn what we can that we may then apply what is learnt to our life in this world; the other presupposes the passive stance, where we receive that knowledge we get, that we may then observe it in our conduct in the life-world. Yet even that latter type of hearsay knowledge is contingent on an active orientation, or a kind of attuned disposition, which is the condition of all learning and the *sine qua non* for all doing.

Knowledge and Responsibility

Knowledge and action raise the issue of responsibility. This too is invoked in the divine instruction in a positive and a negative sequence. One of the favored supplications which echoes in the heart of every believer is: O my Cherisher and Sustainer, make me of those who listen and follow the best of what I learn.[6] Obversely, one of the foremost admonitions meted out to believers is that of *"Whenceforth say thee that which ye do not observe in your action!"*[7] In all cases the supplication and the admonition are enjoined in a context that makes the faculties of hearing, sight, and reasoned understanding explicitly responsible.[8] Morality is born in the course of a choice to listen and to observe in the one case, and in the other, it consists of learning the facts about the phenomenal world and applying them to the "good end." This is the process of discovering the laws of the universe, the "natural laws," which recur throughout the Qur'an as *sunnat allah fi al khalq.*[9]

Commensurabilities

The scope of knowledge also differs. Where learning is direct, the object is the physical, or the observable world, the world of things, and the visible order. Where knowledge is transmitted, the scope is primarily that of the

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[6] Cf. 39:18.

[7] 61:2; Cf. 26:226.

[8] Surah 17:36 enunciates the precept of responsible knowledge: *"Pursue not that of which you have no reliable knowledge: Verily, (thy) hearing, sight, and reason/heart are ultimately accountable for every such pursuit* (On the Day of Judgement)."

[9] *Sunnat allah* suggests a patterned order, a sequence, a regularity, a system, and causality; it applies to the realm of creation, including both nature and history. In fact, the specific references focus on the latter as with the following examples: 33:38, 62; 35:43; 48:23; where the reference is direct, while in the case of natural phenomena, causality is more often implicit in the account.

unseen but it could subsume the "sensate" and that which is seen as well. The "unseen" as a category refers to that which is absent from the range of the material vision, whether for reasons of intrinsic intractability, or on account of super-/ex-temporality; this absence from the present, the immanent, or the contingent constitutes the *ghayb*.[10] While any kind of belief, knowledge or conviction presupposes an element of faith, the belief, knowledge and conviction in the *ghayb* is a categorical act of faith—and it is acknowledged as such in the Qur'an.[11] The world of the *ghayb* is predicated on a number of basic suppositions centered on the existence of a realm of knowledge which is not immediately accessible to direct human learning but which is, nevertheless, relevant and essential to the human condition in this life-world. It is because of this relevance and essence that human perceptions are open to this kind of learning and are disposed or attuned to receiving knowledge about it. This is the positive disposition which has characterized human nature from time immemorial and which has given rise to contentious speculations about man's innate religiosity.

Faith and Validation

Wherever the access to this knowledge is obstructed or whenever this knowledge is missed, historical man, created *insan*, has resorted to reason in order to speculate, and has strained his senses to reach out into an extra-sensory realm in search of the answers which would give meaning to his life-world. In each case however, in the case of positive, acquired knowledge and in the case of transmitted, learned knowledge, the *reliability* of the knowledge acquired/received is contingent on proof, or verification; and for each kind of learning a distinct methodology for such validation is required. In Qur'anic parlance reliability is intrinsic to knowledge, particular to that kind of knowledge of basic realities which structures entire perceptions. There

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[10]Muhammad Asad refers to *al-ghayb* as "realm which is beyond the reach of human perception" and points out that it is this concept that constitutes the basic premise for an understanding of the call of the Qur'an and of the principle of religion . . . as such "for all truly religious cognition arises from and is based on the fact that only a small segment of reality is open to man's perception and imagination, and that by far the larger part of it escapes his comprehension altogether." *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al Andalus, 1980) Appendix I, p. 989.

[11]In the opening verses, following the supplication in the *Fatihah*, people are classified into three basic types: believers, ingrates who deny God, and hypocrites; belief in *ghayb* constitutes the first criterion of God-Consciousness. (2:3); it is by virtue of this initial leap of faith, that God delivers His promise of immeasurable reward in the hereafter to believers. (50:31-33; 67:12) The realm for this sublime exchange is clearly one of reciprocity: it is an exchange suspended in a "metaxy:" delivered in the present, redeemable in the future, and occupying an ex-temporality—an "in-between"—which is predicated on trust and promise.

must be some reasonable proof of credibility, and some criterion for authoritativeness, in order for knowledge to be, or else it is nothing but vain speculation: In contesting the validity of claims to rival deities and ways, the deniers of the truth are urged to bring forward their proof and evidence in support of their claims.

"Say: Bring forth thy proofs if ye are truthful"[12]

Otherwise their entire position on vital issues would rest on pure speculation which avails them nought of the Truth.[13] The responsibility attendant on knowledge is contingent on this validation and one's obligation is accordingly to 'check one's sources.' This applies to all kinds of learning, including learning about the moral order.

A characteristic disposition must also accompany learning and dispose it towards validation. This may be rendered as a categorical inclination, or an essential openness, to knowing and this constitutes the primary pre-requisite without which no knowledge of any sort would ever be possible. This inclination is premised on trust or faith (*imān*) and is rooted in an elementary sense of benevolence. Creation is for a purpose and the world is essentially good. It assumes a belief in the existence of something which can be known or learned about, that this pursuit is a worthwhile pursuit, indeed, that there is a moral compulsion to find out or to learn about it. In this sense, faith is the cornerstone of any act of learning, whether by observation or by hearsay.

However, in order that *imān* as an initial and conditioned openness may result in a form of binding knowledge, it requires a further category: that of *tasdīq* ie. confirmation. This is a category which involves all the senses: beyond inclining towards it, is acting in the direction of ascertaining the truth. It is in doing and not just in being, in acting and not just in knowing, that this involvement is complete. Hence, the Beloved Prophet's response: *"imān* is that which is firmly lodged in the heart and actively corroborated by the deed."[14] The term for this corroboration is *saddaqa*, literally that which is "affirmed in its truth."

In this way, in the *tawḥīdī* episteme, belief and action are two faces of the same coin. On the one side is a grounded and confirmed belief; the obverse,

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[12]2:111; cf. 21:24; 27:64.

[13]For rich juxtapositions between truth (*haqq*) and real knowledge (*'ilm*) on the one hand and conjecture and speculation (*zhann*) on the other, see examples in the Qur'an: 10:36; 53:23 and 28:45:24; 4:157; 2:78.

[14]In the Qur'an itself the concept is a rich one which has been used in a wide and integrated semantic field. For usage in the conceptual context mentioned here, ie. confirmation, authentication cf. 2:89; 3:81; 10:37; 5:46, 48. The immediate context of this usage relates the place of the final divine message of guidance to its antecedents.

is a purposeful and responsible act. There is no autonomous space for a 'bios theoretikos,' while the vita activa presupposes and is contingent on an engaged knowledge, ie. a knowledge which is committed to a moral existence. In this episteme, thinking is the acting out of the disposition to learn about and to understand the life-world. Thinking is accordingly that active category which links knowledge to being; and Will is the twin resolve which underlies all morality: Morality is not constituted of values but of the realization of values. It is the informed, pre-formed, and re-formed will which activates such abstract, reflexive categories as "knowing" and "being" and puts them into the transitive, interactive and procreative mood to engender belief and action.

This condensed and passing overiew of a rich and dense topic which has engaged the best of Muslim minds in the past is intended to provide the background for the discussion which follows. It paves the way for distinguishing cultural modes/models assumed in a discourse on a "Contrasting Episteme." The contrast here does not refer to the distinct modes of knowing in the sense introduced above. For it assumes that positive or acquired knowledge and transmitted knowledge are generic, natural modes to the human condition. Rather, the distinction is between the conventional discourses which are set up as models of credibility and reliability at any given moment. The question then becomes which model accommodates or incorporates the natural modes of knowing, and how this is done.

A model which incorporates these modes and apportions or proportions them to one another is basically a stable one, while one which overlooks one mode, or misappropriates the one against the other is basically flawed. What constitutes positive knowledge in the one case and transmitted knowledge in the other, how the one and the other are ascertained, what constitutes the sources and methods for each, and how the proportions are defined are the details which are not the object of this modest essay. Instead, the focus is on bringing into perspective the possibility of a distinction between conventional modes of discourse in different epochs and among different people. On the basis of this distinction, culture modes, or culture types will be postulated and abstracted from historically known or current contexts.

A further qualification is needed in order to understand the thrust of this distinction. Human reason and divine revelation are historically integral categories and constituent of all conventional cultural discourse. However, the fundamental distinction between what will be termed a secular paradigm of knowledge and a tawḥīdī episteme is postulated on the place and role of revelation in the one and the other. The secular paradigm projects the primacy of an autonomous human endeavor to set the terms of the conventional discourse. Obversely, the tawḥīdī paradigm takes revelation as central to the terms of this discourse. In the secular mode, the status of transmitted knowledge

is generally ambiguous, and within that latter category, attitudes to revelation are even more ambivalent. In contrast to this, transmitted knowledge has a definite/concrete place in the *tawḥīdic* mode. In addition to setting the terms of the more general framework of the epistemic discourse, divine revelation assumes a key role in classifying transmitted knowledge itself and contributing to its concreteness.

The implications of these qualifications for a self-conscious and critical social science might best be conceived if, in charting the episteme, we took recourse to the alternating set of intellectual constructs postulated at the outset of our inquiry as "culture-types."

Recapitulating on a Theme

The different epistemes, or the ways of knowing about reality, lead to their corresponding systems of belief and action which structure society and history and come to be filtered through a modulating optic of "lifestyles" and civilizations. The one will be referred to as the Oscillating Culture and the other as the Median Culture. The latter falls on a *vertical axis* in the epistemic chart while the former falls on a *horizontal axis*. The Oscillating Culture is generally identified with a secular paradigm of knowledge and being because it has no reference outside itself.[15] If it takes man for its center it is assumed to be "humanist;" and if it takes nature, or the cosmos, or history for its referent it is assumed to be "naturalist" or anti-humanist. In reality, the Oscillating Culture is more noted for the absence of a core than for any fixity of such, and it is more or less given to the persistent search for one, although at times it has tended to degenerate into the refutation of the very idea of a center.[16] This accounts for an intrinsic "dynamism." This dynamism however tends towards a morbidity and is more simulated than real. It marks the restive quest for an evasive center and referent. It is alternately marked by the periodic reversals and surface ruptures which give rise to an illusive vitality and foster a generative abundance. In this way, there is also something characteristically "modern" about this culture type.

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[15]The secular humanist paradigm is built into an anthropocentrist worldview. This theme is addressed in my *Disencumbering Social Theory*. For the general literature on the subject, see Kate Soper and Duncan Homer.

[16]This contention inspires some of the radical and nihilistic movements associated with post-structuralist and deconstructionist schools of thought.

The Median Culture[17]

This is all in stark contrast to a Median Culture medium. There, change, which is intrinsic to temporality, is modulated by an element of constancy assured by the continuity or the reliability of an established frame of reference. This suggests the presence of a dimension of authority which evades the Oscillating Culture, not because the latter has no acknowledgeable authority, but because the nature of this authority is perennially challenged and frequently assumes an evasiveness which makes it defy location. In the Median Culture, the most notable feature is the pervasiveness of a center which is known and knowable, and an acknowledged core which constitutes a *nodal reference point* for the operational social/historical dynamic in this medium. The result is that there is an inherent sense of measure and proportion which is assumed to govern all change and action and to assure it direction. Its dynamic assumes a generative momentum which enables the operants in the system to identify or to relate co-ordinates and the variables in it. In the Oscillating Culture, the dynamic there was contingent on a persistent tension of polarities and a recurrent polarization of tensions ultimately giving way to an apotheosis of relativism. In contrast, the necessary tension in a median dynamic is mediated by the potential immanence of the Absolute and the transcendence of the relative in a medium which significantly maintains the distinction between the one and the other while affirming the relationship of both. By "immanence" here we simply mean the relevance of the absolute to actuality and by "transcendence" we mean that the implications of the relative stretch beyond the immediate or the contingent.

These culture types provide alternative accessing mediums for approaching social theory and carry with them practical implications for inquiring into any of its cognate fields. They constitute reference points in re-structuring our conceptions in social theory in the present *pre-architectonic* phase of

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[17]Our conceptualization here is inspired by the Qur'anic notion of community (2:143). Yusuf Ali renders the *ummatan wasatan* as "justly balanced community" and invokes connotations of "intermediacy". (p. 57, n. 143); M. Asad renders it as "community of the middle way," lit. "middle-most community" and explains it in terms relevant to our own usage here as "a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes," and that embodies in worldview and institutions a code construed round a denial of excesses and an affirmation of life-integrating values derived from the ultimate value of the oneness of God, or, *tawhīd*. (p. 30 n. 118), ie. the middle is not defined in relation to the extremes, but stems from an intrinsic organizing value, and is consequently self-defining and knowable, and is not contingent on its position in a continuum of changing variables. Cf. Fazlur Rahman uses 'median' for *wasat*. *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980); Frederick Denny's qualifications on ummah as an axial term and the inferences he draws are consistent with our median culture construct. See "Ethics and the Qur'an: Community and World View", R. Hovannisian, ed., *Ethics in Islam* (Malibu: Undena Public, 1985) esp. pp. 106-107.

our inquiries in the field. In what follows we shall first review an access to the field in terms of proposing a vocationist perspective on the understanding that this is before a critical profile of contemporary social theory is projected. In the process, some of the implications for reconstructing the premises of a social theory predicated on a "vocationist" ethic will also be considered.

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Social Science As A Vocation

Speaking in the voice of a Muslim social scientist, one may note that the nature of our concern with the Oscillating Culture is an intimate one which arises from "within," although one might conceivably have the advantage and the prerogative of reading it from without as well. This element of detachment is possible not because we are, in the idiom of a godless era, "cosmic orphans"[18] and, as such, that we might claim to have landed our Archimedean Point in the expanse of a cosmic exile. Rather such a detachment is possible because we have access to the Median Culture. To the extent that we are anchored in its security, whether as "vocationists" or as pious Muslims, we can afford to reflect upon the Oscillating Culture, with neither the cusomary *Angst*/panic nor despair. We do so with a legitimate concern where there can be no room for indifference and even less for glee. Added to this concern is a keen interest in procuring a leverage within that culture because we are convinced that there is something of value that can be brought to it from an "Alternative perspective." By definition, the alternative must be outside the current; and the assumption is that only an outside perspective can break the impasse in the culture which supports and is supported by the dominant paradigm.

The Vocationist and the Missing Medium

Theoretically, the Muslim social scientist is, historically the "Other." As such, when compared with his counterpart in the European/Western culture zone, he is presumably privileged with a ready accessibility to that alternative vantage point. By academic training and formation, however, the Muslim social scientist is just as much a part of the globally dominant culture as

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[18] ". . . of uncertain beginnings and an indefinite ending . . ." as Loren Eiseley deduces from an inscription in the Dead Sea Scrolls: "None can there be, can rehearse the whole tale," which really tells us much more about human finitude than about human abandon. See Introduction to Part IV: The Cosmic Orphan, in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Propaedia: Outline of Knowledge and Guide to the Britannica*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975) pp. 139-141.

any third world social scientist might be. To this extent then, the distinctions among social scientists working in the medium of contemporary social science are blurred. Addressing an audience in a predominantly Western forum of scholarship, one is inclined to stress our common need/duty as scholars working within the parameters of the dominant medium to turn to the Median Culture as a viable alternative which needs to be explored in the modern context and to have its virgin resources tapped accordingly. In this sense, as the reference to the Median Culture proceeds within the semantic field and referential codes developed in the context of the Islamic tradition, ie. within the parameters of Muslim experience and civilization, it will be possible to learn from and about a medium of the *tawḥīdī* episteme, which will then be open to interaction.

To be at all meaningful and effective, this interactive learning process will have to be conducted in the *vocational spirit*. The latter calls on social scientists to abandon the biased stance, whether this is dictated by requisites of their profession or by denominational, confessional, or other ethnic affiliations. This biased stance, it may be recalled, can be exerted for or against a given position. In the positivist phase, this bias was exerted in favor of the autonomy of human reason, and against any openness to external criteria of validation. In the present post-positivist phase in the social sciences there is less confidence as to what position to opt for in advance of the quest. But there is still considerable hesitation to abandon the bias against external sources of validation of criteria of belief and legitimation. There are factors which impel the social scientist to opt for the vocational perspective and which draw on a conscientious and realistic assessment of the current state in the discipline. The social scientist is aware of a certain superfluity and a redundancy which no amount of assumed expertise or recourse to methodological diligence and acumen can shield.

Conscience and Action

The vocational social scientist is one who lives the crisis of the profession and, beyond that, the crisis of the times. His or her conscience and integrity combine with intelligence to invoke a sense of moral responsibility which induces social scientists to use their training to the best of their abilities to do what they can from their professional position or their station in life in order to alleviate the situation. Depending on their position and their authority, they will apply themselves in a practical or a theoretical capacity. The first instance of a morally responsible stance is to acknowledge the critical condition, or the malaise. But this is hardly sufficient to absolve the conscience or to assuage the intelligence. In exploring alternatives and ways to improvise and reform, the need is to muster the courage to step out of the dominant paradigm

and to step into new and at first unfamiliar grounds. The moment potentialities are sensed and possibilities are unearthed, the initiative to effect the leap should be taken. This is why it is significant to understand the Median Culture for what it is: as a distinct possibility and potentiality for improving on oneself, and not to see it in terms of a self-abandoning to the other. Perceiving it as the historically cultural other would encumber and trammel the process of stepping in. The inhibitions and constraints attendant on such a frame of mind would throttle any possibilities and opportunities.

The challenge to the vocationist is to divest himself or herself of all kinds of prejudices and preconceptions as far as this is possible. For this constitutes the psychological and sociological baggage which hinders the advance into the new culture realm. He or she will have to be able to give of themselves in order to be able to take of that realm. A contrasting episteme conceived in the *tawhīdī* view gives the vocationist the benefit of the doubt in his or her own ability to overcome many of the binding constraints. This is hardly the "ungrounded hope" of some post-modern thinker or other,[19] but it is a grounded conviction backed by historical experience. This legacy testifies to the validity of a proposition inscribed into the epistemological outlook of the Median Culture. The challenge to overcome the constraints of the profession is itself further reinforced by the gravity of the consequences at stake in the event of a continued indifference or inability to respond to the needs of contemporary societies. Not only might social theory steadily marginalize itself beyond all relevance, but the survival of these very societies as we know them may well be a matter of time. The hope for reviving both lies in the emergence of the vocationist—whose stock and surety can be drawn from the wellsprings of that Median culture-medium.

The Dynamics of the Shahādah: A Dialogy of Rupture and Community

In *tawhīd the cornerstone of this epistemological system is found in the shahādah*: There is no deity but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. This confession of faith subsumes a mechanism and an attitude as well as a methodology for learning/knowing; it also enshrines a substantial code of the kind of knowledge or learning entailed. In the context of addressing the possibilities of acquiring the disposition and the habits of mind of the vocational

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[19] Such as in Rorty's position that "loyalty to itself is morality enough" and that communal solidarity need not be grounded in any transcendence drawing on history or philosophy (or revelation). See Paul Roth, "Politics and Epistemology . . ." in *History of the Human Sciences* Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1989): 171-191. This article provides a useful synopsis of two contrasting positions within the prevailing epistemic discourse in American circles. See relevant remarks in my forthcoming essay. "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme."

social scientist, the aspect to emphasize in this code and methodology is the instrumental, or the procedural aspect. The creedal formula suggests a way of proceeding by diverstiture and investiture: to empty out, or to clear the slate, and to fill in, or to inscribe it afresh; a moment of "rupture" which precedes and precipitates an emergent community.[20] If we took that rupture as signifying an imminent liberation from the clutch of the prevailing modes of thought at any given moment of time, and if we further assume that "community" implies a normative and cognitive pattern of knowing shared among its members, then the inferences here are clear. This was, in fact, the learning mode instituted in the first school of thought instituted by the Prophet. In the circle of his early companions in historical Arabia we are authoritatively informed of this method of instruction from a hadith which runs along these lines. "Whenever we went to the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be peace, he would empty us out and fill us up afresh . . .," empty us of our dregs and replenish us in the truth.[21]

A *tawḥīdī* episteme recognizes and acknowledges the learned impositions of culture and society, as well as the pressures resulting from inner drives and passions. It does not, however, concede to their overwhelming power, nor does it subscribe to any kind of determinism in the name of a lame sociologism. The litmus test lies in the presence of the disposition, or the awareness and the resolve to proceed independently. To this extent a *tawḥīdī* episteme has a deeply liberating impact on the psyche of the social scientist and it funnels his or her creative potentials accordingly. The social scientist will need to become a *tawḥīdīst* in vocation, so to speak, in order to be able to experience that liberating impulse and realize that potential. This has nothing to do with confessing to the faith or with opting for the primordial state and

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[20]Cf. Maurice Causse, "Theologie de rupture et theologie de la communaute," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, 44 (1964): 60-80, cited and discussed in F. Denny's, "Ethics and the Qur'an . . ." op. cit. Exploring the semantic range of the Qur'an in a concrete historical context points to significant sociological as well as ethical implications as Denny and others show. cf. Izutsu, T., *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966) and *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964). Beyond semantics is the epistemological level with its socio-political implications. See more on this theme in the context of a political inquiry in my paper on Paradigms in Political Science: Tawḥīdī Projections" (Part 2) prepared for the Political Science Seminar at IIIT, December 15-17, 1989.

[21]I am indebted to Dr. Ṭāhā Jabir al- 'Alwānī for bringing this hadith to my attention and extrapolating upon it in the context of defining the task of *islamiyāt al ma'rifa wa islah manāhij tafkīr al-muslimīn*, ie. of the Islamization of knowledge and the reform of the ways of thought of Muslims in our own times.

accepting the revealed *dīn*. Clearly, from the doctrinal standpoint,[22] as much as from any other rational or academic stance, this is a purely private concern for the individual to decide on, a matter entirely contingent on one's intent and will and solely judged by God; it has little to do with the vocational status or the community of scholarship to which we are here referring.

Learning about and assuming some of the mechanisms and dispositions attendant on a *tawḥīdī* episteme is the condition for grasping the substance, relevance and implications of the Median Culture. In short it is the condition for being able to relate to this medium in a meaningful and practical manner. Vocationists will need to do this if they are to fulfill their measure whether in terms of their own self-expectations and self-image, or whether in terms of the expectations of a community which sees its salvation in the integrity of its intellectuals. Otherwise, they will be little better than accomplished Orientalists of an outdated era. If classical social theory with a Weber or a Marx could afford this luxury—and waste—it can hardly do so today.

The Implications of the Vocation

The perspective of a Contrasting Episteme provides the opportunity to develop the vocation of the social scientist in ways hardly possible otherwise. It does so by enabling the scholar to discard the constraints inherent in a confrontational mode of perceptions, or in a conflictual matrix of conceptions, and it allows him or her to substitute it for a more congenial perceptual mode and matrix. The congeniality of the latter system of learning derives from the way it integrates thought and understanding about social and historical realities, in as much as it integrates patterns of mind and being, thought and action in a domain which includes the "intersubjective," which is the concern of the social theorist. In this domain where it is no longer feasible to postulate social reality in terms of dualisms and fictitious boundaries, it becomes imperative to define the matrix which conditions the interface of continuity and discontinuity within the socio-global order of human community and aggregation. This is where the perceptual/conceptual orientation provided in the *tawḥīdī* episteme acquires its psycho-sociological congeniality which assures it a constructive dynamic in its approach to socio-human realities. While it recognizes diversities it also reconciles them within a unitary and

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[22]Cf. Qur'an, 2:256; There can be no compulsion in the faith is the cardinal imperative which preserved the integrity and dignity of the person and safeguarded the alternative faith communities of other religions throughout the making of Islamic civilization. Misconceptions induced by taking the Book and the Sword to have been the symbols of the spread of the Faith are conflated with misunderstanding temporality in Islam. There, the ethical order presupposes the political order: and spirituality in Islam is consonant with a public order enshrined in the shari'ah and protected by the state.

a unifying frame of reference. Commonality, as the original and predisposing premise in the human condition, comes to embrace diversity and to give it its ultimate referents which ensure the relational affinities of the distinct parts to one another and at the same time to the whole. This perceptual and conceptual point of departure has its consequences for reformulating the matrix of inquiry whether in the field of sociology, political economy, or political science in ways which may only be briefly considered here.[23]

This matrix would, furthermore, need to be conceived holistically. Ultimately, this is the more realistic conception too. We are not made up of disparate limbs and organs mounted together on a skeletal frame. There is an organic unity which holds the whole together externally, and an *interiority* or an *innerliness* which instils it with essence, identity and meaning—and that too while differentiated, cannot be cut off from the whole. There is no reason why the life-world, temporally and spatially projected, should not conform to this principle. The integrating and structuring point, or the nodal centering referent is provided in the *tawḥīdī* framework and can only have its attendant consequences for the social and political order in any given context. Ignoring this modulating, regulating and mediating fulcrum, the system is vulnerable to all kinds of "violations" bordering on anarchy, or tyranny, or *anomie* and distraction. These are the kind of symptoms which social science as a vocation will need to address. In the one case and the other, in the polity and in society, there is room for reformulating the matrix of inquiry; and in both instances there is a possibility and an opportunity which follows for reconstructing historical realities to attenuate the biases and impositions which are bred in the current episteme.

Before engaging in a critical reading of aspects of the current episteme from a standpoint of the "Median," let us briefly pause to consider what this standard and standpoint might imply at the general level. As already suggested earlier on, a *tawḥīdī* episteme is taken to characterize and engender the Median Culture. To relate this episteme to the empirical order calls for some elaboration at the conceptual level. Analytically, this entails refering it back to its constituent categories and proceeding thence to indicate its composites. These could then be applied to the different interrelated domains in a given inquiry. Note that the conception of this interrelatedness is partly the function of the episteme itself. How can such abstract condensations be rendered into more familiar language? This takes us from metatheory into theory and opens the way to employing the semantics of the field. In the *tawḥīdī* mode of conceptualizing there is a singular tripode that assures its consummation. *Dīn, Minhāj*, and Shari'ah provide the basic referential constituents which need to be taken

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[23]Consult theme in forthcoming essays: "Disencumbering Social Theory" and "The Meaning of a Contrasting Episteme. . . ."

together so as to grasp the integrality and holistic aspects of that episteme. In a way, they are correlates, each supplements and completes the other to generate and sustain a distinctive and original semantic field.[24] Ideally, in this field, *dīn*, in the generic sense, denotes a complete way of life and its subsumes the ways of thought. Not every *dīn* however, is necessarily integrative in its functions, or at least not to the same degree. The complete *dīn* is that which assumes this function successfully and is acknowledged by its followers in this sense at the personal and the social levels. The merits of *tawḥīd*, in a sociological perspective, lie precisely in the measure of its integrating and unifying potential for the realms of social being.

Reconstituting Sociology

In the light of this "covering principle" and whether as *tawḥīdī* epistemists or as vocationists, if we were to differentiate the way of life into its respective domains of emphases, then the same principles informing the whole will also be expressed within these spheres, at the different levels. For example, social life could be conceived holistically as a web of relations between men and women as social individuals performing various roles. Conversely, it could be seen as the nexus of such relationships as might interweave the different groups in society. In this way, the broad spectrum of social life is brought within the purview of the same rules. The value-system which orders these relationships, whether in their functional roles or in their personal relations, serves to integrate the social system conceived as a whole as well.[25] The same hierarchy of values will order their relations within the constituent units, beginning with the family. At this general level, there can be no distinction between a private and a public morality. Rather, within a broad framework of "permissible structures" in a system of "open alternatives" any of a variety of groups or institutions, or any order of multiformities, can legitimately co-exist and contribute to the dynamics of a complex and multi-dimensional social order. The warp and woof of the system which ensures it coherence and cogency would be sought in its substantial rather than its formal

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[24]For a conceptual grid of Islamic social thought see *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*, op. cit., Ch. 4; and for articulating and interrelating the specific concepts mentioned here see esp. pp. 101-112.

[25]Muhammad al Tahir Ben Achour, the late Tunisian 'alim of Zaitouna University, for example, is one of the few Muslim thinkers writing in the classical school to distinguish the social system, *al-haiʼah al-ijtima'īyah* from its individual constituents, and to hint at the implications of values for the system as a whole in grasping the structural requisites of social reform. *usul al nizam al ijtimā'ī fi al islam* (Tunis, 1976) pp. 42-43.

constitution.[26] The place of the constituents within the system, whether as individuals or groups, is determined by their affinity to an order in which they are socialized and to which, in principle, they voluntarily submit. In this conceptualization the normative and the ethical are integrally assumed in the structural and functional conception of society. At the same time it singles out the specific characteristics of a sociology developed in a *tawḥīdī* perspective as a discipline which is grounded in an ethical matrix understood as a realistic sociological proposition, and not just as an idealization or an abstraction of social reality. The tenor of the discipline is just as significant for its orientation and scope as its content and formal structure could be and this distinguishes between the practice of a new sociology from its conventional mode.[27]

Recovering the Polity

On another plane, the vocationist will be able to point out that there is no parallel Leviathan, nor any of its analogues, in an Islamic contractual theory of polity and political obligation. It will be clear that carrying this covering principle to a domain where coercion is pre-eminent involves a re-orientation to that very domain. The integrating principle assumed in *tawḥīd*, is totalistic (without being totalitarian!) and, accordingly, it provides for all the elements in the system including the coercive element. There is no question of indifference or ambiguity to power whether it is conceived as an enabling agent, or as a legitimate nexus of enabling relationships, to secure the public order in an instant of last resort. But the dimension of *tamak-kun*, rendered as the equivalent of *potestas*, cannot be seen outside its substantive referents of *ḥaqq* (Truth, but also dues, rights), and *'adl* (justice), subsuming the precept and principle of *auctoritas*. The value-system and hierarchy which sustain the social order serve to integrate and unify its differentiated domains. They also serve to define them in relation to one another and so assure them of measure and restraint. This has its implications for distinguishing approaches to politics.

There are two possibilities for conceiving the polity paradigm in this mode: the one uses the idiom of Contract and the other that of Power Politics.

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[26]The exemplary exposition of Hammudah 'Abdel 'Ati in *The Family Structure in Islam* (American Trust Publications, 1977) derives from its successful application of a methodology which combines the normative and the sociological as much as from its attention to examining the implications of the Islamic holistic value framework for integrating the behavioral and normative aspects of the social system.

[27]This is not to be confused with a sociology with a "humanist face" as advocated eg. in (Bowman, ed. *Humanistic Sociology* (N.Y.: Meredith 1973). Within the Median culture the difference is paradigmatic.

The notion of a contract evokes a system of reciprocities (ie. obligations and rights), which are in principle identical for society and polity. There is no dualism or double-coding here, rather the difference, should such a difference exist, is one of an economy of scale and modality, rather than an economy of morality. The other approach calls for redefining power in terms of the contractual matrix of reciprocities on the one hand, and in the perspective of ends, or the purposes of the *jama'ah* collectivity as temporal community on the other. In this sense, power assumes the role of a reinforcing principle, not a generating or a founding principle. The precept that whatever is necessary to implement a devotional duty acquires the status of an obligatory devotion by proxy perhaps best explains the relationship of power to morality in the Muslim ethos.[28] This explains why power was conceived in the legacy of Muslim jurisprudence as a providential agent, and not a necessary evil. Whatever ambivalences and reservations might have prevailed towards politics, they were related to its exercise and usurpation or abuse, not to its ontological status. In the dominant Muslim paradigm which was constituted of the time-honoured *jumhur al fuquha*, and which was generated amid the mainstream culture of *ahl al sunna wa al jama'ah* deferred to the ideal of the polity—which it conceptualized as *khilāfah* (vicegerency/delegation) and not *mulk* (kingship)[29]

If, on the other hand, politics is understood in the sense of the primacy of physical coercion or of the threat of its application, as it is understood in the Weberian sense and in its Marxian parody, then the place of such a power-political concept in the foundational "myth"/structure of the Median Polity is only secondary. In terms of the ordering value-system power is no

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[28]Cf. This *fiqhi* precept «ما لا يتم الواجب إلاَّ به فهو واجب»
rendering governance integral to the community and a pillar of the social order has been invoked by contemporary scholars (like Ben Achour (op. cit. pp. 206-207) and others through an uninterrupted Sunni tradition dating back from the earliest treatises in *usul* with *imam al-haramein* al Juwaini's *ghiath al umam* (478 A.H.) — a manuscript preserved in Dar al Kutub in Cairo — the modernist "politicization" has merely brought in a new idiom or rhetoric of the state in Islam, not its reality. Conversely, as *al-shahid* Isma'īl al Fārūqī points out in a comment on Muhammad Iqbal's idea, the state is rather "the necessary extension in space-time" of an Islamic spirituality. *The Hijrah: The Necessity of its Iqamat* or *Vergegenwärtigung* (Kuala Lumpur, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1983) p. 21.

[29]One might rethink ibn Khaldun's broad distinction in his *Prolegomena* (808 A.H.) between the two concepts along the lines of a legitimate/moral polity grounded in the notion of a *siyāsah shar'iyah* and that of a power polity, or a dominion/imperium aspiring at best to a rational civic culture, as in the *siyāsah madanīyah*. Professor Bernard Lewis' recent literary excursion in (*The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988) may be recommended for its expected erudition and readability, quite apart from the appeal of its subject. But it is often misleading, trivializing and wanting in conceptual, as distinct from an analytical, "valour."

ground for self-justification and in principle it cannot be seen outside the system to which it is subordinated. In a sense, it constitutes a subordinate as well as a co-ordinate, which derives its legitimacy from its place and role in the whole. Within such a context, power is valorized to become either positively valued and on a par with truth and justice, or simply corrupt and corruptible: synonymous with excess and tyranny. External coercion taken as the manifest will of the sovereign state, or in any other self-adulating posture, cannot be the foundation of the social order, and certainly not of the community even qua political community.

The vocationist will also realize that the same reasoning which might be critical of a discriminatory appreciation of power which sees it as "right" for the state and "wrong" for the individual is bound to affect related notions of legality. This kind of appreciation condones a system of double standards — consecrating Antigone's dilemma[30] — and paves the way for an arbitrary division between public and private morality. The issue is periodically reformulated, more explicitly and trenchantly in the context of feminist political theory where the focus is on reinterpreting the bases of political obligation.[31] A dubious and ungrounded public morality frequently becomes the battle-ground of suspicious, outraged, and vocal segments of a public whether they are motivated by a heightened bout of gender-consciousness or simply spurred on by an alienated and confrontational psyche. In contrast, here again, in the Median Culture, it is the same nodal and integrating value-system which sets the limits on the nature and scope of its legal norms, and commands a residual allegiance throughout the socio-cultural order. The idea of the Shari'ah or the (divinely-ordained) order of legitimacy illustrates the point. In its absence, there can be little justification for the State. Conversely, outside its normative and contingent role in safeguarding and implementing the Shari'ah it can have no ultimate recourse to any other "reasons of state" (raisons d'etat) to justify its power. Unlike the Rechtstaat of German idealism, the state is not the dispenser of the law and can, therefore, make no claims of autonomy on its behalf. In a similar manner, it would be realized, the conception of the law in the shari'ah polity cannot be tailored or conceived in terms of positive law.

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[30]Antigone was a woman in Ancient Greece who died at the altar of conflicting loyalties torn between her duties to her household and her city. She is taken as a symbol of a presumably perennial contradiction between morality and power. Feminist political thought has been revisiting the myth. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Meditations on Modern Political Thought* (New York: Praeger, 1986); cf. other relevant articles *Hypatia*, vol. I, no. 1, Spring 1986.

[31]See one of the more recent contributions on the subject by Nancy Hirschmann, "*Freedom, Recognition and Obligation, A Feminist Approach to Theory*," in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (December, 1989): 1227-1244; An apparently provocative book (W. Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988) projecting visions of a post-masculinist politics gives an idea of where the debate is headed. See review by Emily Gill. ibid., pp. 1359-1360.

Islamic fiqh, or jurisprudence, is not law in the positive sense of the term, but it comprises an ethical-legal system which, in a sense, is far more comprehensive and more binding than any proclaimed positive Law. Its mode of operation, in its conception, generation and application, and the modalities or formal channels or structures for its implementation are different. So too, where the physical compelling dimension exists, it does so within the framework of a legitimately constituted polity which has nothing to do with the normative sovereign entity of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau. Even the historical variants of the Muslim polity, in their lesser and greater degenerate proximations to the norm, continued up to the colonial interlude to fall within the range of the Median Culture mode.

This is not in any way to suggest that politics in Muslim history was any the more principled than it might have been elsewhere. It is intended to draw attention to the existing possibilities, at the conceptual and the historical levels, for alternative structural and normative foundations which might be worth investigating. In considering aspects of political sociology in the culture-type medium in question, the vocationist would find it appropriate to do so within an internally consistent framework conceived in terms of that culture-type. This, it may be readily acknowledged, was a dimension which was often missing in the contemporary sociology of Muslim societies. Its absence was ironically justified in terms of a scientistic conscience, ie. in terms of a presumed objectivity which in fact appropriated the ideology of the dominant culture—whether in its rational-liberal or in its materialist-historicist variants.

In recognizing that objectivity was not the monopoly of the dominant culture, and in proposing alternative referents for historical/sociological inquiry, the vocationist opting for a Contrasting Episteme would come to see new possibilities for explanation and for understanding. These would not be confined to Muslim socio-historical entities but, in principle, they would be extendable to other such entities as well. Strictures on politics in Muslim history could be contextualized and tested elsewhere. All round, the prospects for a general sociology would be considerably enhanced by the insights and gains acquired in the crystallizing perspectives coming from a Median ground. This should decidedly appeal to the sensibility of the vocational social scientist. After all, the latter has a different scale of priorities and conceives of a different spectrum of opportunities than those of the professional scholar.

Reappraisals:
Scaling the Dross

As the conception of a Contrasting Episteme becomes the prelude and condition for its application to any given area of inquiry, the transition from one level to another is effected. In turning to an alternative perspective, one

also locates its correspondences in understanding society and polity, and the scope of social science is explanded, its nature revamped. At first glance it will seem as if this expansion is merely quantitative, the mutation indiscernible. It suggests that merely another window has been opened on a field no longer the monopoly of one set of assumptions and their corollaries. On closer scrutiny, however, the possibility of a qualitative shift in social theory is imminent. The premises of inquiry will shift. With them new focii will be discerned and found to be relevant to social theory and to lead to questions hitherto either ignored as irrelevant and deemed meaningless under a misconceived scientific canon that claimed to be indifferent to values; or else questions could arise that were simply not thought about in the context of social theory and that, once raised, could become suitable vantage points for redressing it.

Moreover, a *tawḥīdīc* episteme reconstituted into its conceptual and analytical matrix, and projecting the standards of a Median Culture-type, can provide an opportunity for reconstructing society and polity as well as social theory. This is due to inherent bridging propensities and orientations in this matrix which, when adequately operationalized, could conceivably reduce the gap between theory and practice or empirical and normative inquiry. In another germane sense too, a social theory drawing on this reconstituted matrix would go beyond reinterpreting existing polities and societies in terms consistent with their particular socio-cultural foundations and political economies, to providing a universalist dimension to allow for interrelations and comparisons. A culturally sensitive inquiry would assure the premises of contextualization necessary in the former, while a *tawḥīdīc* sensibility would secure this contextualization against its own limitations. By relating it to a universalist and universalizing ontology, it would rescue it from a constricting parochialism attendant on a self-indulging culturalism. These observations, however, bear closer scrutiny and some of them are followed up at greater length elsewhere. Here they are offered by way of extending horizons of inquiry, and stimulating further research rather than by way of providing any conclusive generalizations in a field which is only just beginning to be charted.

Meanwhile it should be kept in mind throughout that the social science which is the object of our concern could be redefined here as that vocation sought and pursued in the light of ascertainable public goals and universal and encompassing standards. Like all public pursuits evolved in a setting mediated by the values of a *tawḥīdīc* culture, the practice of social knowledge defers to an overarching purpose which harmonizes it with the other activities in the life-world as they would be projected in a given socio-political order. This is the logic derived from a code of legitimation and justification identified by a paradigm of realizable ethical imperatives and has historically been acknowledged in the idiom of Muslim jurisprudence as *al-maqāṣid*

al shar'iyah.[32] A corporation employing a team of experts to investigate a certain social problem could be engaged in either commissioning a vocationist enterprise, or it could be providing a commercial service. This would depend on the kind of goals it sets for itself as much as upon the socio-political context in which it was running its enterprise. Similarly, if a materialist profit and loss calculus is applied as an end in itself in assessing the results of an inquiry, then the exercise is no longer inscribed within the limits of the vocationist. The criteria needed should extend to a qualitative index taking its bearings from a futurist orientaton, one prescribing a moral as well as an eschatological economy. There are clearly other ways in which these standards and goals could be elaborated upon, but this will suffice to make the point.

This would also suggest that in the process of attuning themselves to the requisites of their vocation, social scientists will be testing their "mettle" and ingenuity in other ways. In opting for a new practice and an original perspective bringing its own ethos of inquiry with it, they will be on their way to reformulating the terms of contemporary social theory and renegotiating the terms of the current social discourse. In doing so they will, in all likelihood, be blazing the trail for a new generation of social scientists. In this way too a Contrasting Episteme holds the key to the future of reconstructing a civilization field, and not just to contributing to the cognitive sanification of a set of disciplines. This is, however, to aspire to an ideal as much as to an ordeal. As such, it merits its own "research program" in the sense used by Imre Lakatos.

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[32]Most developed in the fiqh of Andalusian al-Shāṭibi, *al-muwafaqāt*, and takcn up in contemporary Islamic thought by Muhammad al Tahir Ben Achour in his masterly and enlightened exegesis on the Qur'an. *Tafsir al Tahrīr wa al Tanwīr*. Not surprisingly he has some original insights into social thought. At present a second generation of scholarship is contributing to a vital reconstruction in progress of a socio-*fiqhi* tradition of inquiry. See eg. Abdel Meguid al Naggar, *fiqh al-tadayyun* (2 vols., No. 22 *kitab al-ummah*, Qatar, 1989).