

## ISLAM AND THE WEST: A PRINCIPLED OPPOSITION

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“Islam and the West” is the sensation of our times. The two apparently dissimilar sides of this expression are commonly framed in terms of a socio-political opposition, hostility, and clash. However, the real roots of this opposition can be found to lie in the metaphysical foundations of the worldviews of both Islam and the modern West. When these roots are properly understood, the opposition becomes more profound and the nature of the two sides is laid bare. The article in hand makes this foundational comparison and concludes by seeing the West to be an embodiment of *shirk*, which is the counter pole of *tawhīd* that is the essence of Islam. Such a profound revelation of natures and realities increases the discernment of the seeker of truth in our time, helps in making religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, relevant in the modern world, and facilitates the establishment of a traditional and integral Muslim community.

**Keywords:** *Islam and the West, religion, tradition, modernity, tawhīd, shirk, metaphysical principles, pseudo-principles*

### *Introductory*

“Islam and the West” is a simple expression, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is the *cause célèbre* of our age. The unprecedented interest in the subject of “Islam and the West” betrays the presence of an enigma that is at the root of much of the underlying intrigue and fascination. For on the one side of the expression is the name of a religion, while on the other side is a term ostensibly denoting a direction, a geographical area, a political order, or at most, a civilisation. Hence, it would appear that it is the un fascinating case

of comparing and contrasting apples with oranges. But, contrary to appearances, the fascination begins when we go deeper and understand the terms in a more realistic and existential way.

Islam is not just any religion. It is the last great Abrahamic *tradition*. Islam is growing faster than any other religion<sup>1</sup>. At least one in every four people on earth is a Muslim. But, beyond the level of quantity, in the realm of quality, Islam has most adherents who truly believe in their religion and strive to live it—both in their personal lives and, more visibly, in their social lives. It is this ability within Islam to have its adherents acknowledge the truth of its doctrines—and to not just stop there but to go ahead—and will that knowledge on the plane of action that gives it a special vitality and vigor.

The West is not just a civilisation. It is the most recent and greatest humanistic *ideology*. The West is encroaching on traditional civilisations and is gaining ascendancy in all parts of the world at an unbelievable pace. Vast numbers of people, regardless of their formal association with a religious tradition, are becoming infatuated with the West and its productions, which promise greater ease, pleasure and empowerment. It is the ability of the West to get people to believe in the idea of progress and to drastically change their personal lives in line with it, as well as to relegate political control to those who work towards it, which gives the West its phenomenal and aggressive proliferation.

When a religion that is alive meets an ideology that is insidious and aggressive, there will naturally be antagonism and opposition. This is abundantly clear with even a quick glance at contemporary history. Hence, while the main problem of our times may appear to be a political standoff and opposition between Islamic movements and Western powers (and their proxies), it is actually something more profound. The real problem has to do with the ability to understand or not understand the nature of truth and the consequent nature of action. As all actions, whether individual or social, are based on knowledge or understanding, when the basis of knowledge changes, knowledge itself changes along with the accompanying actions. Islam, being the last religion for this cycle of humanity, has best preserved the traditional understanding of knowledge with its basis on a Single Absolute Truth. The West, representing the unusual break from tradition that was ushered in by the Renaissance, has a modern and now post-modern understanding of the “truth” that has led it to promoting various types of relativism and subjectivism. How can the nature of Islam, on one side, and the West, on the other, be better understood? Given that these two have differing bases of knowledge, what overarching paradigms can be employed to further this understanding? These are some of the questions and issues that the paper in hand addresses.

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1 <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

### *The Paradigms for Comparison and Opposition*

To get a better understanding of the principled differences between Islam with the West, some comparisons can be of use. Paradigms, opposites, and dichotomies such as, East vs West, Tradition vs Modernity, Religion vs Secularism, Sub-culture vs Dominant culture, as well as narratives based on Historicism (like the Clash of Civilizations, the Ascendency of Western Liberalism—including imperialist motifs such as ‘Manifest Destiny’, ‘White Man’s Burden’) are beneficial and shed light on the many dimensions of the opposition at hand.

The East is where the sun rises and is symbolically associated with the light of truth. The West, as the avant-garde civilization which ushered in the Renaissance and, with it, the decline and demise of the truth, can be symbolically associated with the night of falsehood (Parsania 2006: 152). In this estimation, Islam, being known to be the final religion for mankind, is definitely eastern, while the West is definitely western.

In its current sense, modernity is seen to be a set of attitudes and modes that are the result of the rejection of the past, the progress of time, and the increase in man’s knowledge of the universe through experimental science. Tradition, on the other hand, is seen to be a set of beliefs and practices that are based on nothing but the past—behaviours passed down from generation to generation and established as rituals to be blindly emulated. As such, “modernity” has come to imply all that is “good” and “tradition” all this is “bad”. In fact, it is almost an accepted fact today that ‘new is good’, and ‘old is bad’. In this usage of “tradition” and “modernity”—which is the common and popular one—Islam would be seen to be ‘traditional’ and hence bad, whereas the West would be seen to be ‘modern’ and hence good.

But, there is to be found on the other hand, at least among some scholars, an alternative definition of the concept of tradition. This definition finds its roots in the etymology of the word. The word “tradition” comes from the Latin *trāditio*, *trādition*, from *trāditus*, past participle of *trādere*, to hand over, deliver, entrust. Its use in religious contexts follows more the Greek word *paradosis*, which implies the organ or mode of the transmission. In this meaning, it is not just the case of “human speech being passed on from generation to generation”, but rather, sacred deposits transmitted mainly in an oral fashion and founded primarily on Revelation, and secondarily on the authority of the *magisterium*, which in the case of Islam is equivalent to the Infallibles. Hence, in this meaning it is close to the Arabic word *naql*, which also means to pass on, report, relate, transmit; but in its religious context it is inextricably bound to the Qur’ānic revelation and the ideas of *sunnah* or *‘itrah*.

Hence, tradition is seen as a reality that is connected, in a continuous way, to an original source, and from which it gains its substance. Modernity in contrast, is not connected to anything but a hypothetical future and hence is without any real cognitive content and any substance. In this estimation, Islam clearly represents tradition and is substantial and the West represents modernity and is insubstantial.

'Religion' is said to be derived from the Latin *ligare*, meaning 'bind', 'connect', with the prefix *re*, meaning, 'again'. Hence, 'religion' is *re + ligare*, meaning 'to reconnect'. The purpose of religion then is to reconnect man to the Absolute source of all being, God. The doctrines and the methodology of religion are mandated so as to achieve this goal of the reconnection with God. In all cases the authority for both the doctrines and the methodology, both the *theoria* and the *praxis*, begins and ends with God. Without Him, there is no real knowledge and there are no norms. He is the alpha and the omega, the absolute and the infinite, and ultimate being.

Secularism is the rejection of religion and religious authority. It denies religion its totality and attempts to relegate it to the sphere of the purely personal and hence subjective. By so doing, it lays claims to a social order separate from religion. But, not being itself founded on any principles that could be considered objective and absolute, secularism remains open to a debilitating scepticism on the noetic plane, and to a moral anarchy on the normative and behavioural plane. As such, the situation of the liberal-secular edifice that the West represents is extremely precarious and not anything to aspire towards. On the contrary, the intellectual and ethical substance of Islam is an ideal that inspires the Muslim world even today.

Culture has a great effect on society and its members. That part of culture that is common to a society is called the 'dominant culture' or 'mainstream culture'. Other parts of culture that pertain to a particular group, guild, or profession are called 'subcultures'.

The subcultures that exist within or alongside a dominant culture are in most cases compatible with it. In some cases, it is possible that the beliefs, values, rules, and norms of a subculture run contrary to the dominant culture, in which case it is known as a 'counterculture'. Given the ascendancy of the West and its attendant culture in the contemporary world, it can be categorised as a 'dominant culture'. The eastern, traditional, and religious world view being on the decline and particular to theists who consciously and actively follow their religion, can be considered a 'sub-culture'. Due to the incompatibilities between the world views of the West and Islam, the culture of Islam in most parts of the world appears and behaves as a 'counterculture'. As such, the emphasis on quality over quantity, truth over falsehood, and goodness over evil, is what gives these Muslim sub-cultures their ability to

survive and persevere through conditions that are not otherwise favourable to their subsistence.

Just as in the above case of the dominant culture versus the sub-culture, where the West represents the former and Islam the latter, there are other narratives in which the opposition between Islam and the West is not in principle, but rather it is in fact, and hence it is not an “equal” opposition but is rather a “one-sided” opposition. Most of these narratives are historicist in nature and do not have much cognitive content. In the book *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama argues that with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy, humanity has reached “not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989: 3–18). In response to this book, the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis put forth by Samuel P. Huntington argues that future wars would be fought between cultures. But, he argued, these culture wars will be “particularly prevalent between Muslims and non-Muslims” (Huntington 1996: 207–210), and he speaks of the “bloody borders” between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations.

### *The Principles of Islam*

Islam is a religion. In particular, it is the last true religion sent by God through his final messenger, Muḥammad (upon him and his Progeny be Peace), for this historical cycle of humanity that we identify with. As a religion among all other divinely mandated religions, Islam shares with them the essential qualifications of a religion.

Religion is *dīn* in Arabic and comes from the root “*d-y-n*” which etymologically means obedience, abasement, submission (Jawādī Āmulī 2001: 32). Usually religion is defined as, ‘a general belief in some supernatural source for the world and the behaviour appropriate to this belief’. While irreligion is said to be ‘a general belief that the world exists by chance or is the result of purely natural causes and phenomena’. A better definition of what could be termed a *true religion* is, ‘the correct intellectual *discernment* of and belief in Reality as such, which mandates a practical *method* based on traditional authority’.

The intellectual discernment aspect of religion is *primary* (*aṣl*) while the practical method is *secondary* (*farʿ*), hence the *Uṣūl* (roots) and the *Furūʿ* (branches) of religion. The roots are the ‘*aqāid* or beliefs and principles, while the branches are the *aḥkām* (and *akhlāq*) or practices and precepts. Or, to put it in philosophical terminology, religion, and hence Islam, has an aspect of *theoria*, and an aspect of *praxis*.

Religion came into existence at the same time as man came into existence. The first man, Adam (‘a) was also a prophet who came with religion. All true religions have three beliefs as their roots or *uṣul*: The Origin (the One God, *tawhīd* or *mabda‘*), the Medium (the prophets of God, *nubuwwah*), the End (the Return to God, Judgement and Afterlife, *ma‘ād*). These three fundamental beliefs respond to the most basic questions that man has with regards to existence: Where did everything come from? Where is everything going and to what end? What should be done in the meantime?<sup>1</sup>

In the most metaphysical of understandings, the three fundamental beliefs arise out of the single principle of *tawhīd*.

### *Theoria*

The intellectual discernment of and belief in Reality as such defines the *theoria* of religion and is at the foundation of any true religion that is from God, the Real, the One. The discernment and knowledge of Reality and the Real, or *theoretical wisdom*, becomes all the more significant when attention is paid to the subject and object of the knowledge and wisdom in question. The ultimate knower and source of wisdom is God. As such, theoretical wisdom is essentially and ultimately the *knowledge of God*, in all its senses. The etymology of the word “theoretical” and “theory” confirms this fact. The Greek noun *theoria*, and the verb *theoreo*, [to look at, to behold, to observe; to perceive; to consider, to contemplate], along with the root *theos* [god, deity, divine being], come together in the word *theory* to imply the co-meanings “to contemplate the divine” and “divine contemplation”. God’s Self-contemplation is the absolute and highest form of theoretical wisdom. Hence, God seeing Himself is us “seeing” Him; which means that God is at the root of all knowledge, He is at once the crux, the object and subject of knowledge.

The lower stages of this wisdom pertain to His contemplation of Himself through His creations, starting from the purely immaterial ones, such as the angels and the intellects, all the way down to the entirely material ones such as the heavens and the earth and all that is in them of physical objects. This hierarchy of the divine contemplative agency can be seen in the classical sub-division of theoretical wisdom into metaphysics<sup>2</sup>, mathematics, and physics.

1 The Shī‘a add two more to the three for emphasis and to forestall any potential misunderstanding: The Justice of God (‘*adālah*, which is an immediate necessary corollary of *tawhīd*, understood fully and properly) and Imamate (*imāmah*, which is a necessary corollary of *nubuwwah* seen from the outside, and is essentially *walāyah*—the inner reality of *nubuwwah*—seen from the inside).

2 Also known as the “First Philosophy” or theology in its highest sense.

### ***Being: The Origin-End (Objective Truth)***

The *theoria* of religion and reality is founded on the knowledge God, who is the Real, the Absolute, and hence it is founded on Being as such. This means that Absolute Being is ultimately identical with Knowledge. This also means that Absolute Being is the Alpha and Omega of existence as it is the Unicity Source of all existents and hence all truth. According to religion then, God necessarily exists and is the Truth and the ground for all objectivity.

This ontological cum epistemological principle of the fundamentality of Being gives validity to all human knowledge and its potentially objective nature. It can also be said that it allows for the existence of meaning and communication. Without it everything would be absurd and in vain.

The Unicity of the Absolute (*tawḥīd*) then is the fundamental principle of religion in general and Islam in particular.

### ***Tawḥīd***

*Tawḥīd* literally means “to know or consider as one”. Normally translated as “monotheism”, the term “unicity” would perhaps be a better translation of the word. In theology, ethics, and mysticism, it is used in different senses to signify the unity or unicity of God in some particular aspect. These different meanings or senses of *tawḥīd* are sometimes, somewhat paradoxically, called “Types of Tawḥīd” or “Levels of Tawḥīd” (Miṣbāh Yazdī 2006: 72), they are as follows:

#### *Negation of Multiplicity*

That God is not more than one; that there are not two, or more ‘gods’. This is the belief in His simple *unity* or *al-waḥdāniyyah*.

#### *Negation of Composition*

That God is not composite of parts, whether actual or potential. This is the belief in His single *simplicity* or *al-aḥadiyyah*.

#### *Negation of Attributes Independent of His Essence*

That God’s attributes are not extraneous to His Essence. This is the belief in His singular *integrity* or *nafy al-ṣifāt*.



### *Affirmation of Unity of Acts*

That God's acts are done independently by Him without any "other" input. It is the belief in His sole *agency* or *al-tawḥīd al-af'ālī*. It follows from the fact that all "other" things are nothing but relations-with or nexus that have no independence or reality in themselves to play any part in His acts. Any real display of an existential attribute is entirely through the existence that is given [or manifested] by God; and He is the ultimate owner of all things. All power to do and act is subsumed within and under the omnipotence of God and is said to be vertically below or hierarchically subordinate to His infinite power. This leads us to the next type of tawḥīd.

### *Affirmation of Independent Efficacy*

That God's creatures act through dependence on Him—their efficacy whereby they act and affect one another is by the permission of God and with His power (that He has given to them [or manifested through them]). This leads to the belief in His immanent *efficacy* or *al-ta'thīr al-istiqlālī*.

### ***Transcendental Consciousness (ma'rifah) and the Vision (shuhūd) of Reality***

The self-contemplation and self-knowledge of God is mirrored and manifested on a lower level as *ma'rifah*. Hence, *ma'rifah* is an intrinsic modality of knowledge that is closest to the pure consciousness of Absolute Being. By a direct act of seeing and envisioning, the *ma'rifah* of the soul is tantamount to the *ma'rifah* of the source, reality, and 'lord' of the soul. The tradition from the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) in which he said "He who knows his soul, knows his Lord" (Al-Ṣādiq 1980: 13) bears this out.

*Ma'rifah* is manifest in the human realm through those intrinsic instincts that drive man to look for things that are beyond the material realm. For certainly, man has innate desires, the desires for truth, goodness, and beauty. The factors which motivate man to look into Islam and matters of religion are based on these innate desires or impulses: the impulse and need for truth, as religion offers answers to man's most basic questions about existence and accounts for more of reality; the impulse and need for goodness, as religion offers ways by which man can acquire the highest benefit and avoid great harm; the impulse and need for beauty, as religion offers arts and artefacts that are divine in appearance and effect<sup>1</sup>.

1 Some modern thinkers add the "religious impulse" (and now even the "God gene"!) as a fourth innate desire or instinctive impulse, but in so doing they belie the presumptions of modern thought in which religion is not connected to objective truth and has to be put in a separate category.



Hence, to not seek religion means that a person is not truly human. This is because man innately seeks perfection. Human perfection is acquired by free-willed actions based on the intellect. In other words, the practical precepts of the intellect are based upon its theoretical principles, the three most important being: *tawhīd* (knowledge of the Unicity or Beginning-Origin *mabda'*), *ma'ād* (knowledge of the End-Destination or Return-Destiny), and *nubuwwah* (knowledge of the Medium and Way that informs a destiny of felicity)<sup>1</sup>.

To explain the reason more fully, it can be noted that man innately seeks perfection. Introspection into our inner desires reveals that the root of all of them is the impulse towards perfection. No one likes that an imperfection should be attributed to him and strives to remove them, and before being able to remove them, he hides them. This inclination, when it is directed properly (i.e. towards the Perfect and in line with the original nature that He put in man), is the source of all human perfections. But, if it is not directed properly (i.e. towards other than the Perfect and in breaking with the original nature that He put in man), it is the source of false-perfections; that is, feelings of grandeur, ostentation, seeking fame, power and position.

Human perfection is acquired by free-willed actions based on the intellect (rational precepts). Beings of the other kingdoms have other modalities. Minerals are fixed in their states of perfection and cannot be further perfected. Plants find perfection through factors that are externally determined. Animals find perfection through choices that are somehow “free-willed” but which are tied to their basic instincts and are limited in scope to natural needs and the extent of their sensory organs. Humans, while having mineral, plant, and animal aspects, have two extraordinary particularities: their free-willed desires are not limited to their natural needs but are rather, supranatural—seeking infinite space and eternal time; their intellectual researches are not limited to their rational genius but are rather, suprarational—seeking absolute truth and spiritual realization. Hence, just as plants reach their perfection through their particular biological processes, and animals reach their perfection through their special sensorial perceptions and instinctual motivations, human beings acquire their perfection through their unique intellectual discernment and wilful determination—whereby they discern the multiple states of being and choose the higher over the lower. Hence, to be human is to go beyond the mineral, plant, and animal levels of being and to seek levels that are proper to the human state—the first of these levels is that of the “rational” and according to this level man uses reason (not just instincts) to come up with the practical precepts that he should follow to live in this world.

The practical precepts of the intellect are based upon its theoretical principles. For free-willed actions are means to reach ends which are only

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1 Can be compared to ontology, anthropology, and methodology [epistemology].

as good as their ends are good. But, as the ends are valued according to the role they play in facilitating human perfection, the intellect can only judge human actions when it knows what human perfection is and the levels that it has. This is to say that the intellect knows what man truly is: his origin, his present state, and his end. This knowledge corresponds exactly to the theoretical principles upon which the practical precepts depend spoken of earlier.

In conclusion, if man innately seeks perfection, then it behooves him to understand and to see where his true perfection ultimately lies. This is to see reality as it is, and this is to understand, to gain *ma'rifah*. To not seek *ma'rifah* is to default to the sub-human. The Qur'ān expresses these sentiments very clearly:

And those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat as the beasts eat,  
and the fire is their abode (Qur'ān 47: 12).

Leave them that they may eat and enjoy themselves and (that) hope  
may beguile them, for they will soon know (Qur'ān 15: 3).

### ***Knowledge ('ilm wa fiqāhah)***

The next level down from *ma'rifah* is the level of *'ilm* or 'knowledge', which is consciousness congealed in discursive thought. It is, by nature, little and limited, and is only effective if it leads to the awareness of this very nature, and hence to the higher levels of knowledge.

To explain, a limited and finite being cannot immediately become aware of the nondelimited and infinite reality of the Absolute. Hence, it must be provided with approximations that allow for cognitive consonance and the opportunity to grow in being until a greater approximation is possible. These approximations are the different sciences or the different levels of knowledge. For them to be true knowledge and true science, it is quintessential that they are not closed systems; rather they must be open-ended. For those who partake in such knowledge, where it is not self-serving and a goal in-itself, are not veiled by it and achieve higher and higher levels of consciousness, or *ma'rifah*.

### ***Praxis***

Praxis is the Theoria embodied. The connection between theory and practice is perhaps one of the most profound of knowledges. If God is removed

from the world, He is no longer God and is not the Lord of the Worlds. But God cannot be anything other than the Lord of the Worlds. And hence, he is connected to the world and all that is in it. He is connected to all things and with regards to those things that have no consciousness, His lordship is ontological, objective, inertial and macrocosmic. But with regards to those creatures that do have consciousness, those who whom He created with His attributes of knowledge and awareness, His lordship is anthropological, subjective, agential and microcosmic.

Man is the greatest of the creatures who have consciousness and was inspired with something of God's Spirit. This spirit-intellect in man is the source of his consciousness and gives him relative freewill. It allows him to choose in a paradoxical way "other" than God. Man has to have this choice as he is made in the "image of God" and must have an intelligence that can choose to distance itself from God and the Origin, just as God Himself "chooses" to manifest Himself through the origination of contingent existents that are "not Him" and that are distant from Him. He does so, so as to see Himself. But, seeing Himself fully means to also see His aspects of knowledge and power. So creation is like a mirror for God in which He sees Himself, and to say that he sees Himself as a *knower* or a *seer*, the mirror is not purely inert and an object, but rather, it also must be in some way a 'seer' and hence a subject. God must see His eye in the mirror and if He is to see His eye in a real way, it has to in some way "see Him back". This eye of God is man, in particular the *perfect man*. The same line of argument can be used for God's aspect of power, which gives him freedom. Hence, if man is going to represent the absolute freedom of God, he has to have something of that freedom in a relative way. Hence he must have the freedom to choose to not to choose. Which is to choose other than the truth. It is not a real choice, but it is a tendency, an illusion and a part of the *ghurūr* and deception that is mentioned in the Qur'ān. All of this implies the existence of a being that is a creature of God but that is not fixed in its ontological level of being.

### ***Becoming: Return to the Origin (Objective Goodness)***

This being, through its relative freewill, can through the application of the same, *become*; it can choose to move towards God and its Origin, or to move away from God towards the pole of nothingness. This is the idea of *becoming*. This is where praxis comes in, as it is the case of a being who can become. Hence, man is the greatest of beings as he has the ability to become. If he were to choose those acts that move him towards God and the truth, he would participate in objective goodness (becoming *ṣālih*).

### ***Nubuwwah or Prophethood***

The highest of those that are good amongst God's creatures and those who have taken their becoming to its pinnacle are the perfect men that are the farthest from the lower limitations of the terrestrial world; these are the *anbiyā* (lit. the far off, distant, remote; prophets). They, as the highest representatives of God, are the paragons of those who have returned to the Origin. Upon their fully conscious and wilful return, they are mandated by God to call others to acknowledge and obey God and his prophets. They become a paragon and model by which these others can also take part in becoming, moving closer to the Origin.

### ***Walāyah or Spiritual Connectedness and Authority***

The inner essence of *nubuwwah* is the idea and reality of *walāyah*, as that which makes the representative of God to be the representative is his connectedness with the divine. Hence, it is not an easy idea to speak about as it enters into the explicit awareness of the divine nature of man. The people who have *walāyah*, the "*awliyā*", are godly men, divines, or "god-men". Esoterically, they are the face of God, the eye of God, the hand of God.... *Walāyah* is in some sense the modality of becoming, of becoming connected to God through human beings and representatives.

### ***'Ulamā' or Knowers and Scholars***

The *praxis* of Islam entails connecting to God—the all-Intimate or *al-Walī*—through His *walī* and intimate. Hence, just as we had in the *theoria* the stages going from *'ilm* to *ma'rifah* to the station of *tawhīd* and unification, we have in the *praxis* stages, whereby the *'ulamā* lead to the *awliyā* who lead to the *anbiyā* and Allah. The *'ulamā* are the practitioners of the *'ilm*. They have *walāyah* or authority over the people below them, just as there are those above them that have *walāyah* over them. They are facilitators who help people connect to God by expounding the Way and by representing His representatives. The greatest of the *'ulamā* who are connected to the *awliyā* compose what might be considered the "living magisterium" of Islam.

### ***The West***

If the modern west were to be defined in terms of its source and starting point, then it would definitely be the Renaissance, which represented a breach from the received wisdom of the ages. Traditional civilisations on the other

hand, including that of Islam, were founded on the wisdom traditions based on those individuals who were sent, continuously, by God as prophets to teach mankind the truth of doctrine and the goodness of its method. In the modern post-Renaissance west, hereafter referred to as ‘the West’, these teachings based on revelation were denied and truth was seen initially to be based on purely sensorial and empirical evidences, while the method of living was to be derived by the researches of the human mind. Later on, the truth was seen to be purely a human construct, and man was the creator of “truth”.

### *Ideology*

Truth being reduced and then denied, or, to say the same thing, made relative in the West, means that there is no real *theoria* as there is no absolute to see or be seen as it objectively is. In its place there are manmade versions of what might be reality. This product of human reason in its attempts at trying to comprehend and systemize reality, especially concerning the human will and the dos and do-nots of human society came to be known as “ideology”. As such man-made ideologies do not take into account the whole of reality and hence are not objective in principle, they are essentially just convoluted attempts to recreate reality on the level of the mental, and are nothing but phenomenological cum linguistic artifices that have no real authority or substance. Allah says in the Qur’ān:

You do not worship besides Him but [mere] names that you and your fathers have coined, for which Allah has not sent down any authority. Sovereignty belongs only to Allah. He has commanded you to worship none except Him. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know (Qur’ān 12: 40).

### *‘Adam (Nothingness: Relativism, Subjective “Truth”)*

In dealing with such a reduced cum non-principled way of thinking of “reality”, the “truth” is said to be subjective and, whether in the sense of the relativity of truth or the relativity of knowledge, its ultimate reference is pure “nothingness”. Hence, the ideology of the West is not built on being, as it is in the *theoria* of Islam, but rather on *nothingness*. In the proof of the existence of God called *Burhān-i Şiddiqīn*, it is explicitly stated that the idea of nothingness is contradictory. To say “nothing is” is absurd, and the self-evidence of this leads to the necessity of being. Figuratively speaking, and in Islamic terms, a person cannot just say ‘*ilāh*’ by itself, you have to negate it and say ‘*lā ilāha*’ which then logically, immediately, singularly leads a to *Allāh*.

### ***Shirk (Atheism—agnosticism—scientism/materialism)***

This way of considering nothingness as something is a negative way of looking and can simply be identified as *shirk*. Hence the modern isms of atheism, agnosticism, and scientism (materialism) which come from asserting that: there is no Absolute, the Absolute is relative [to my imperfect knowledge], and the relative is the Absolute. All of these are tantamount to considering or setting up some contingent existent alongside or in the place of the Absolute, who is One and has no compeer.

### ***Ghافلah (Distraction: Information and entertainment)***

If in Islam the knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of the doctrine cum objective reality of the unicity of the Absolute Being (*tawhīd*), on all its levels, was the prime directive (Imām ʿAli 2007: Sermon 1) and *raison d'être* of human existence, in the West it is not *maʿrifah* but rather *ghافلah* (negligence) that is given precedence. This is because *shirk* and its tendency towards nothingness is not anything that is real and that can be objectively known; but because man instinctively desires to know, this search for knowledge where the object is “nothingness” must be deflected and must fully involve him in something (i.e. in *ghurūr* or deception) so that he does not become aware of its inherent futility, hence the distraction that is the ultimate result of information and entertainment in the West.

### ***Lahw wa laʿib (Science and technology)***

If in Islam the inner and higher knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of Absolute Being, God, is approached by being made outer and lower in the forms of *ilm* and *fiqāhah*, in the West the “higher principle” of distraction by information and entertainment is made presentable and tangible by means of science and technology. Science allows the cult of information to be presented as “knowledge” and its physical products in the form of technology allow the modern man to be occupied in play and diversion (*lahw wa laʿib*) and all sorts of vanities until he dies.

### ***Activity***

In Islam *praxis* was the embodiment of *theoria*, whereby a method employing the will manifests the doctrine understood by the intellect. For if the truth is to be the ultimate reality, then it must radiate and be the totality, and knowledge must be realized as power. In the West the pole of the will is not centred on the principle of an absolute and objective truth (as in the case of *theoria*), but rather it is connected to a relative and subjective “truth” (as found

in any ideology), implying that the result will be *activity* that is neither founded and grounded, nor directed and teleological.

### ***Nowhereness: Progress (Subjective “Goodness”)***

If in the praxis of Islam there is a *becoming* whereby the human being that is endowed with the spirit-intellect increases in being and moves to return to the Origin (and hence the End) which is the objective Truth and the Absolute, then in the West there is a *nowhereness* whereby the human being uses the power of his intellect to choose nothingness and stray away from the objective Truth and the Absolute and progress towards a subjective “truth” that is fraught with multiplicity and dispersion. Of such human beings and this proclivity in man, God says in the Noble Qur’ān:

Indeed, your efforts are diverse (Qur’ān 92: 4).

So where are you going? (Qur’ān 81: 26)

### ***Ṭughyān (Technocracy—democracy—tyranny)***

If in Islam *nubuwwah* exemplifies par excellence the way of becoming and movement towards the Origin and Absolute, then in the West *ṭughyān* (exorbitance) involves the ways leading towards nowhereness. These ways are marked by a tendency to exceed the proper bounds of the way that leads to the Absolute, and are hence based on taking that which is relative to be the criterion and the authority. In democracy, which is revered and even worshiped in the West as a god and a principle above all principles, the opinionatedness and whims of the majority of created and relative human beings is ostensibly taken as the criterion of the will and the demarcator of progress. In tyranny, actual or effective, once again it is the will of one person or a select group of people who are not connected with the objective Truth and the *nubuwwah* in any real way that holds authority. Technocracy is another form of this tyranny in which the select group of people who are in control are technicians, especially scientists and technical experts with no true knowledge of the *theoria* and *praxis* of any religion.

### ***Communication / Consumption***

In Islam *walāyah* was the dynamic principle of *nubuwwah* that allowed for all human beings to partake of grace and participate in the ideal of becoming



and gaining proximity to the objective Truth by recognizing and following the representatives of the *anbiyā* (prophets) in a real way. In the West it is the modern means of communication through television, internet, and social media that acts as the means by which the *ṭughyān* (exorbitance) is made to appeal to the masses and by which they are consumed on all levels—both psychologically and physically; sometimes they are consumed and infatuated psychologically about their physical well being and pleasure, at other times, they seek all sorts of physical means to try to bring about psychological states which they deem to be happiness.

### ***Politicians and the Rich and Famous***

If in Islam it was the ‘*ulamā*’ and the *fuqahā*’ that represented the *anbiyā* and the *awliyā*, then in the West, it is the politicians and the rich and famous that popularly represent the scientists and the technicians. The average irreligious person is infatuated by such people and they are the ones who appear to be in control of him. As such leaders, by the ruse of democracy or tyranny, are actually leading their followers away from the Truth and God, they are in the service of the arch enemy of God, Satan.

Indeed the satans inspire their friends to dispute with you; and if you obey them, you will indeed be polytheists (Qur’ān 6: 121).

### ***Conclusion***

As was previously noted, in most parts of the contemporary world, the secular-liberal culture of the West is predominant and through various means and methods it seeks to dominate all sub-cultures that are not in line with its ideology. While it is thought that the dominance in question is mainly a function of material superiority, both in terms of the socio-political presence and control of the modernist majority over the religious minority, as well as the corrupting influence of the materialist mentality, it is rooted in something deeper and on the level of principles; it is the “intellectual” basis of the modern way of looking at reality, what we called their “ideology” above. Without the depth and integrity that this principled understanding the West brings, human societies are open to being easily influenced by the dominant and corrosive culture of the West<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> “[The third measure in responding to the West] is a sagacious and wise program. For this arena is not one in which a person can just rush headlong and go on the offensive. Planning

But, it is not enough to understand the West and hence be able to negate it, for a purely negative approach would not lead to anything positive. The negation of the pseudo-principles of the West must be followed by an affirmation of the true Principle of religion in general and Islam in particular. It is only in this way that the principled opposition between Islam and the West can bear fruit and lead to the cultivation of the seed of truth that Islam is and its growth into a stout and firm tillage that delights its adherents and enrages those who believe in the West.

Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in worship], seeking Allah's grace and [His] pleasure. Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration. Such is their description in the Torah; and their description in the Evangel, is like a tillage that sends out its shoots and builds them up, and they grow stout and settle on their stalks, delighting the sowers, so that He may enrage the faithless by them. Allah has promised those of them who have faith and do righteous deeds forgiveness and a great reward (Qur'ān 48: 29).

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is needed, research is needed, a wise plan must be prepared, and this affair must be approached with wisdom. This program must be based upon an extensive knowledge of the particularities and characteristics of this *neo-jāhiliyyah*. If we do not correctly understand the particularities and characteristics of this *neo-jāhiliyyah*, we will not be able to confront it, we will not be able to combat it". Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Day of Mab'ath, 1443/ March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 (internet)

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