

ISLAM AND THE POST-MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Islam and the Present day Crisis

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The concern of the present paper, as is indicated by the title is to discuss the various elements that constitute post-modern mind and deal with their bearing upon Islamic ideology. But at first it seems almost necessary to say a few words about the title itself. This will not only clarify many confusions but also supply the worth of and warrant, if any, to the whole discussion of this paper.

One may indeed find it questionable to add adjectively the word “post” to the word “modern” because of the tautological import that the whole epithet eventually turns to have. It may be said that the term “modern” by itself signifies what belongs to present, and there is, therefore, no need to modify it by adding any other word in order to distinguish it from the things belonging to past or future. Now, in ordinary sense it is quite true to say that the epithet “modern” carries all meaning that can be possibly had from the epithet “post-modern”. But technically the case is otherwise. The phrases like “modern thought” and “modern consciousness” purport meanings which are radically different from what is here meant by “post-modern consciousness”.

What is called modern era had its seed time in the twelfth century and emerging fully in the sixteenth century has ended up with the time of two great wars. We are now living in a post-modern age which has nothing in common, in its philosophy, sciences, sociology, religion, politics, etc., with the so-called modern age. As a matter of fact, the post-modern is as distinct and different from modern as distinct and different was modern with

medieval. The purpose of the present paper is to bring into light those new challenges which this post-war era has thrust upon an Islamic intellectual and which he must take account of in order to make his religion plausible and palatable to modern man.

Every culture provides for man a certain attitudinal orientation for life and world, a *Weltanschauung* or worldview which is formed by the general philosophical and scientific conditions of the time. Now the fundamental task of an Islamist is to point out the inner contradictions and inconsistencies to which the alien *Weltanschauung* of his time is exposed and then positively give Islamic solutions which can surmount these contradictions and remove the evils that inevitably result by the presence and prevalence of that inconsistent *W: Weltanschauung*. But it is a matter of great regret that the Islamist of today, as a rule, has failed to accomplish this task. He indeed appears to be not even fully aware of the great changes that have taken place in the various domains of knowledge.

It is not to say that an Islamic economist is not aware of the recent theories in economics or a Muslim scientist is ignorant of the new developments in his subject. His failure, instead, consists in his not having fully apprised and assessed the philosophical implications of those new theories which have so profoundly affected the attitude of man towards his life and world.

All the great works that have, in recent past, been done towards renovating and reconstructing Islamic ideology have their background in nineteenth-century thought. Although anachronistic for that matter, they have justification in the fact that the people whom they addressed were (besides the ignorant or traditionally educated believing community) largely those ingenious modernists (particularly Muslims) who, although living in a post modern world, were, mentally, in the main, strictly modern. These people were either under the influence of capitalist democracy profused with

the ideas of secularism and nationalism, or convinced of communism, or weary of both. By presenting Islam

as a complete code of life, it was tried to establish that Islam is not merely a religion in the sense in which Hinduism or Christianity are religions, but a parallel (and superior) ideology which can serve as an alternative to both capitalism and communism. It is true that there are still people who think in that old and outmoded way, for which reason it is useful to retain that approach in presenting Islam. But it would not be disputed that we are now to move ahead. We should understand and interpret Islam anew—in the light of new life conditions, new realities and new facts. We should probe and penetrate into the new maladies and malaises which ail the contemporary society and find out Islamic solutions of them.

What the modern man of the West had in common with his medieval counterpart was faith in an objective and impersonal truth in accordance with which he has to mould his whole life. He had a certain worldview which provided him with a moral code of action, a political theory and a summum bonum for life. Besides, he made spectacular progress in the realm of knowledge in general and in science in particular. All this accompanied by his political successes has made him overconfident and assertive. But the case with the new man is entirely different. He is a defeated, disturbed and demoralized person. The contradictions and con-fusions that his civilization has carried from its beginning are now completely exposed before his eyes. He is no longer enchanted by the great slogans like progress, liberty, science, etc., which used to fill his predecessors with great excitement and ecstasy.

The contemporary man has no faith in the objective truth and any talk of ideology or ethical code is for him nonsense. But on the other hand he cannot dispense with them for after all he is a creature with spirit and social instincts. The predicament of post-modern man is that he has lost faith in the very thing which is his absolute existential necessity. The absences of an ultimate concern has plunged him into a severe crisis—the crisis of

meaninglessness as it is now-a-days fashionably called. Islam is confronted today with not a boastful and aggressive civilisation, but, instead, a civilisation which is fairly willing to admit its follies and fallacies and failure. The task of an Islamic intellectual is accordingly to tell in what way should Islam react to and overcome this situation.

The Analysis of Crisis What characterises, in the main, the post-modern mentality is its “scepticism,” “nihilism” and “relativism” in all spheres of life—in knowledge, in metaphysics, in ethics and in politics. The whole foundation of medieval culture was grounded in one word “belief,” then the whole foundation of modern culture was grounded in one word “doubt”. Man said, “I doubt,” and the story of new civilisation began. Man doubted, but he was in his spirits as to the possibility of eventually finding out the ultimate truth. He still doubts, but he is no longer confident—nay, utterly hopeless, towards this possibility. And in this lies his basic psychological trauma. A sense of complete despair and disillusionment permeates his whole being. The state of affairs is obviously not a result of any accident but has its deep philosophical, cultural and historical roots in the following we shall, very briefly, attempt to peep and penetrate into these roots.

The first man who challenged the authority and thereby laid the philosophical foundation of modern culture was Descartes of France (1596-1650). Descartes thought he should doubt in every thing—in God, in the physical world and even in his own existence. Authority (books, prophets and priests) ensure their existance, but they cannot be relied upon for they are too many and have often contradictory claims. Senses are other claimants to provide knowledge of them. But they are equally susceptible to doubt as we are often deluded and deceived by them (we see water in deserts while there is no water, we see a stick crooked while immersed in water although it is straight and so on).

Is then there no possibility of having real knowledge? Descartes says no. For when we doubt in everything, there is at least one thing which cannot be

doubted, viz the existence of the doubter. Doubt implies thinking and thinking cannot be performed without the existence of the thinker. "I think, therefore, I exist" was for Descartes an indubitable and self-evident proposition from which other equally certain propositions followed.

Descartes built through this method an edifice of self-evident truths in which the existence of God and physical universe was conspicuously affirmed.

Descartes' method is called rationalism and it characterised for a long time the Continental thought until it finally collapsed. British temperament, on the other hand, devised and developed another method, the method of empiricism, to arrive at certain knowledge. Its founder was John Locke (1632-1704) who agreed with Descartes in his refusal to submit before authority but disagreed with his opinion about the possibility of pre-experience knowledge. Our primary knowledge comes through sense-experience and for any knowledge to be true it must seek its testimony in experience. Experience accompanied with the power of inference is the source of all knowledge. We experience, for example, colour, tastes, smell, etc., which suggests that there are physical things in the outside world causing these sensations to our mind. Our own existence is affirmed by the simple intuitive experience that we have about ourselves. God also exists because everything in the world is caused by some other thing and the whole world, therefore, cannot exist without a cause. The ultimate cause of the world should be an omnipotent, omniscient and eternal being which is God. God, world and self are till thus proved through this method.

The third and by far the most important side of this tide which stood against the authoritarian knowledge was science. The concern of this new tide was not like rationalism or empiricism to seek grounds for belief in the existence of self or God or world. It was concerned merely to comprehend and uncover the great abysses and mysteries of the universe. It assumed the empiricists' justification of physical world and used the techniques of

deductive and inductive reasoning in forming generalisations. Methodically it aimed at breaking what Francis Bacon, the harbinger of scientific method, called the “idols of mind,” i.e. the presuppositions and prejudices that a tradition-bound man entertains.

Medieval Christianity had its own peculiar view about knowledge. Knowledge, according to this view, was conceived as something already given wholesale in outline in books and in detail in the minds of pious ecclesiasts even the purely scientific hypotheses explaining the phenomena of the universe were assimilated to sacred texts and were given a religious colouring. Ptolemy’s theory of geocentrism and many other Aristotelean ideas are cases in point. Science metamorphosed this conception of knowledge. Its primary task was to understand the nature of the universe bit by bit, objectively and dispassionately, without plunging into matters which are not subject to experiment and analysis. The conclusions of this new method in the long run were, or at least as it appeared then to be, fatal upon first the notion of God and then of the universe itself.

Rationalism, empiricism and science were thus, as methods, three substitutes of religion by means of which modern man hoped to arrive at the knowledge of truth. Now his betrayal consists in the realisation that not any one of them is capable of doing so. Logical reasoning contains an inner contradiction besides being prosaic, tyrannical and ruthless Empiricism, when carried to its logical conclusion, gives way to agnosticism. And science, in the last, is foundationless inasmuch as it bases its results upon inductive generalisations. This betrayal has changed the entire outlook of man with which he used to see the phenomena of life and universe. Contemporary man is anti rationalist, anti-empiricist and anti-scientist. The past one hundred years have witnessed the growth of a number of theories in different branches of knowledge which contradict the claims and conclusions of rationalism, empiricism and science.

Take, for example, first the Cartesian method of rationalism. "This method involved a discursive scheme in which a true and self-evident proposition entailed another true and self-evident proposition which itself in its turn entailed an equally true proposition, and the process continued indefinitely. There was constructed by this means a superstructure of propositions all true and certain and connected with each other by the principle of logical entailment. But there was hidden in it an assumption— assumption about the self-evident character of laws of thought (e.g. the same thing cannot at the same time be and not be). It was thought that these laws are true by themselves and need not be proved. But for one who was unwilling to start with such an assumption, rationalism as a method was unsatisfactory. Any method which claimed to supply genuine knowledge must be free from presumptions and prejudices. Rationalism failed to conform with this criterion and was, therefore, rejected.

Descartes's rationalistic method was criticised from another side also. This method, passing through Spinoza, Leibniz and others, culminated into the panlogism of Hegel in which reason was given almost the place of God. "What is rational is real and what is real is rational," was the main dictum of Hegel. Hegel conceived a rational World-Idea which, unfolding itself through a dialectical process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, determined the course of history. This idea was almighty and omnipotent and all the individuals, however great and powerful, were merely puppets in its hands. This was obviously a grave relegation of individual's existence. Kierkegaard, a junior contemporary and once a follower of Hegel, stood against it. He denied any reality besides man's individual existence and thus pioneered the philosophical movement of existentialism (also called irrationalism) which is a contrast of rationalism and logism.

Hegel's other contemporaries who attacked his logistic philosophy were Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who gave priority to will upon reason. Will, not reason, was according to them the primary principle in terms of which human life could be rightly explained. Their emphasis upon will

foreshadowed the twentieth-century Bergsonian voluntarism which was also a form of irrationalism. And since that time almost all the new philosophical schools and movements that emerged and prevailed in America, Britain and Continental Europe (e.g. Pragmatism, Neo-Realism, Logical Positivism, etc.) were, in some way or other, reactions of rationalism.

The greatest blow to rationalism, however, came from the Freudian discovery of the unconscious. Freud, as is known, in his therapeutic studies of the cases of hysteria and other forms of insanity, arrived at the conclusion that these are caused by some repressed desires of which the victim, in normal conditions, is not conscious. The nature of these desires is such that we think them wicked. Our socially determined conscience suppresses them and they remain lying like a prisoner in a dungeon, bursting out occasionally and causing scandal. Even our normal actions, which we ingeniously suppose as products of “thinking,” have, in fact, their source in those suppressed desires. We are indeed governed more by passion than by reason. The function of reason, in actual fact, is to help us hide what our most natural desires and drives are, by connecting a system of false beliefs and ideas. It is thus an unnatural and harmful phenomenon which leads ultimately to serious psychological illnesses and even to insanity.

These various philosophical and psychological criticisms proved devastatingly fatal to rationalism. It, however, continued holding place till the twenties of this century when it was finally completely superseded and swept away by pragmatic and neo realistic philosophies, but this was not the case with empiricism. In less than a hundred years from its start it was found that, when carried further in its arguments, it makes knowledge impossible. The argument was roughly of this form. According to empiricism, anything capable of being asserted is that which has its ultimate ground in sense-experience. A thing which is not experienced and which it is impossible to experience is non-existent. Now, what we experience when we say we know a physical thing (e.g. a table) are certain sensible qualities such as colour, shape, sound, etc. The table itself which we say bears these qualities is

experientially unknown and, therefore, non-existent. Mind too does not exist because what on the subjective side we experience are particular bits of sensations, each separated and independent, not any mental entity which subsists them. Mind and matter both are thus incapable of being asserted. Therefore the whole notion of knowledge collapses.

But if the logical conclusion of empiricism is scepticism, science is also cut off from its roots. The scientific method consists in explaining the occurrence of an event in terms of the pre-ceding event of which it is supposed to be an effect. This under-lies the assumption that a cause event necessarily entails its effect event. But, according to empiricism, no such categorization is possible. The experience of prick and the experience of pinching the needle are two altogether different and independent events and no logical connection can justly be sought between the two. It is true that the experience of pinching the needle is always in the past followed by the prick. But this does not logically prove that in future also the same will happen. The proposition, “all crows hitherto seen are black,” cannot entail the proposition that “all crows are black”.

Science, in fact, bases itself upon the inductive method in which one generalises a conclusion which is drawn from only a limited set of observed phenomena. It is, therefore, logically incredible; what at best science can claim to do is to provide a set of probable knowledge, by no means certain and universal.

This conclusion was first drawn by British philosopher Hume when he wrote:

“My intention then... is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis that all our reasoning concerning causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of sensitive than cognitive part of our natures. I have proved that the very same

principles which make us form a decision upon any subject and correct the decision by the consideration of our genius and capacity . . . when carried further and applied to every new reflex judgment, must be continually diminishing the original evidence, at last reduce it to nothing and utterly subvert all belief and opinion. If belief, therefore, were a simple act of thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment.”²⁷

The denial of causation and induction, thus, not only slackened the foundation of scientific knowledge but of knowledge as such and the Western mind faced for the first time a crisis. The dilemma in the words of Bertrand Russell was this:

“The great scandals in the philosophy of science ever since the time of Hume have been causality and induction. We all believe in both but Hume made it appear that our belief is a blind faith for which no rational ground can be assigned...

“Science as it exists at present is partly agreeable and partly disagreeable... If we emphasize the fact that our belief in causality and induction is irrational, we must infer that we do not know science to be true, and that it may at any moment cease to give us the control over the environment for the sake of which we like it. This alternative is however never purely theoretical; it is not one which a modern man can adopt in practice. If on the other hand we admit the claims of scientific method, we cannot avoid the conclusion that causality and induction are applicable to human volitions as much as to anything else... The out-come seems to be that the rational justification of science is theoretically inadequate, there is no method of securing what is pleasant in science without what is unpleasant. We can do so, of course, by refusing to face the logic of situation; but, if so, we shall dry

²⁷ “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” in A.J. Ayer & Winch, Eds., *British Empirical Philosophers*, p. 445.

up the impulse to scientific discovery at its source, which is the desire to understand the world. ...”²⁸

At this juncture a philosophy which could reconstruct the bases of knowledge became the need of the hour. The philosopher who first attempted this task was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) of Germany who, in his own words, was awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by Hume.

Kant’s reconstruction consisted in synthesising rationalism with empiricism and developing a metaphysics on the basis of what we call our more sense. He agreed with empiricists’ contention that what we can know of things are merely their apparent forms; their real nature remains hidden behind these appearances. But the apparatus through which we see them is such that the order in which things are arranged is genuinely revealed to us. This apparatus comprises space, time and different logical categories such as quantity, quality, relation, etc. Just as a person wearing a pair of blue spectacles sees everything blue, in the same way all our knowledge is determined by our objective constitution. And precisely for this reason we can be sure that all our experiences are universally true.

Aside from this we all possess a moral sense, i.e. we all believe that there are certain moral laws universally true and valid, e.g. truth speaking is good, stealing is bad, etc. Now, the presence of these moral laws demands justice which is that a person should be given happiness or torment proportionate to his virtue or vice it is clear that only Providence can ensure this justice. It is also clear that justice in most of the cases is not affected in this life. There should, therefore, be another life after death in this world. Besides, God must have also endowed men with freedom of will since otherwise there would be no such thing as virtuous or wicked action. God, freedom of will and future life are, thus, three basic assumptions that are needed in explaining the moral phenomena.

²⁸ Russell's article “Is Science Superstitious?” in his Sceptical Essays, pp. 43-44.

Kant's reconstructive philosophy, although sublime and profound as it was, could not satisfy anyone and people very soon rejected it. In the following century Hegelian philosophy swayed the academic environment and consequently the problem of reconstruction of knowledge was thrown into background. But in the twentieth century it was again taken up by another philosophical giant, the great Bertrand Russell.

Russell's alleged aim in philosophy was to find out some objective and impersonal truths which religion was unable to give him. He first tried mathematics. But at a time when his work in this field was completed, his own pupil Wittgenstein showed the mathematical proposition as utterly devoid of any informative content. He then came to science. But science in its existing form was exposed to Humean criticism, i.e. it assumed the existence of physical things which Hume had shown to be non-existent.

Russell thought if he could construct functional substitutes of these physical things (and also of mind) which are strictly experiential, then the great riddle in the way of scientific knowledge can be removed. He dedicated his whole philosophical career of about fifty years towards this end. But success eluded him. He admitted his failure in no dubious terms when in the last he wrote:

“My philosophical journeys have been, in some respects, disappointing. When I was young I hoped to find some religious satisfaction in philosophy; even after I had abandoned Hegel, the eternal Platonic world gave me something non-human to admire. I thought of mathematics with reverence and suffered when Wittgenstein led me to regard it as nothing but tautologies. I have always ardently desired to find some justification for the emotions inspired by certain things that seemed to stand outside human life and to deserve feelings of awe. I am thinking... in part of the edifice of some impersonal truth, especially truth which, like that of mathematics, does not merely describe the world that happens to exist. Those who attempt to make a religion of humanism do not satisfy my emotions. And yet I am unable to

believe that in the world as known, there is something that I can value outside human being... And so my intellect goes with the humanists, though my emotions violently rebel. In this respect the 'consolations of philosophy' are not for me."²⁹

Russell's admission of his failure was not the admission of an individual; the whole philosophical modernity admitted its defeat in him. The setback to philosophy was so serious that it abandoned its age long task of building a system of truths and knowledge. Today a curious sense of hopelessness and helplessness prevails among the philosophizing people, although very few of them are willing to admit it. The two major tides of contemporary philosophy, existentialism and linguistic analysis, are both antagonistic to metaphysical system building. This is not because, as their creators often pretend to hold, that metaphysics is dispensable, but because the disheartening experiences of the past have led them to a place where they are no longer confident about the possibility of having a sound system of it. Existentialists have engaged themselves in discussing the existential problems of an individual quite isolating him from his society and universe of which he is an unalienable part. Linguistic philosophers, on the other hand, are busy in analyzing, logically and/or linguistically, what, in the words of Bertrand Russell, "silly people say about silly things," turning, thus, philosophy into a nescience.

The fact, however, that science has been shown philosophically foundationless, was a phenomenon which could perturb only a few people belonging to purely philosophical circles. The objections to science were too theoretical to give any jerk or jolt to the scientists or educated men in general whose slumbers were far more deep and dogmatic. Science during this time made tremendous progress and this was all what a practical man could desire. Scientists too, therefore, as good practical men, thought it unworthy to pause

and reflect over such non-practical problems. What, however, made their pleasant dreams turned into frightful nightmares was the death of Matter-god (the Idol, in the language of Scriptures which followed the demise of God in the nineteenth century.

In pre-modern times, Western man believed in a God who was present everywhere, knew everything and controlled all the affairs of the world. But with the dawn of the era of Enlightenment, when science took hold of the minds of the people, the first thing to fall a prey to it was God. Like a continental king, he was first tolerated, then made powerless and in the last completely banished.

Previously, intelligent people believed in God because they were astonished by the extraordinary beauty and grandeur of the cosmos. There must be an intelligent Creator, so they thought, to produce such a harmonious and adjusted universe. Bacon who pioneered scientific method and criticized religion tooth and nail was a believer and reproached those who dared disbelieve. So did Copernicus and other philosophers and scientists of the time.

But then it was discovered that all the equilibrium and adjustment that we see in the universe is due to natural laws; God is not at all responsible for them. The world was like a machine, self-contained and self-governed, and of which every part was related and conditioned by some other part. All the events of the world were caused by some preceding event and nothing could happen miraculously. But, after all, there was the need of some-one to start the machine, to make the laws of Nature start functioning. This place was assigned to God. Newton, Kepler, Galelio, all believed in God, but a God having no power to interfere in the affairs of the world.

But this state of affairs could not continue for long people who held a mechanical view of the world and at the same time believed in God, were logically as well as scientifically inconsistent. It was argued that when natural laws sufficed to explain all the occurrences and happenings of the universe,

then why to assume gratuitously the existence of an outside creator. Deism, thus, which had, come by replacing theism, gave place to atheism. Nature which up to this time was an humble and obedient creation of God became herself God. She could no longer say to anyone as she previously did in Voltaire: “My poor son, shall I tell you the truth? I have been given a name that does not suit me at all. I am called Nature, and I am really Art (the Art of God).”³⁰ The new devotees praised the glory of Almighty and Sovereign Nature:

“O Nature, sovereign of all beings and ye, her adorable daughters, virtue, reason and truth remain forever our revered protectors. It is to you that belong the praises of human race; to you appertains the homage of the earth. Show us then, O Nature, that which man ought to do, in order to obtain the happiness which thou makest him desire. Virtue, animate him with thy beneficent fire. Reason conduct his uncertain steps through the paths of life. Truth, let thy torch illumine his intellect, dissipate the darkness of his road. Unite assisting deities your powers, in order to submit the hearts of mankind to your dominion. Banish error from our mind; wickedness from our hearts; confusions from our footsteps; cause knowledge to extend its salubrious reign; goodness to occupy our souls; serenity to occupy our bosoms.”³¹

Man rejected the belief in God as superfluous and superstitious and replaced Him by creating another deity, Nature (or Matter). But this apotheosis, in the words of the Qur’an, was a kalimah khabīthah (bad saying) and like a shape khabīthah (bad tree) it could not get a firm root,³² and very soon crashed and collapsed. Relativity physicists discovered that there are in our world no such things as the substantial and extended small particles, the atoms. The universe is made, instead, of highly abstract entities (or

³⁰ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Article “Nature,” quoted from Randall, *Making of the Modern Mind*, p. 275.

³¹ Holbach's *Systeme de in Nature*, Chap. 14, quoted from Randall, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

³² The Qur'an, xiv. 26.

nonentities) which it is impossible to conceive or comprehend; they can only be calculated through a very long and intricate procedure of mathematics.

The matter thus died and, with its death, the whole mechanical worldview which characterised chiefly the modernity became incredible. Scientists were driven out from their cosy and close-knit world to a world where only chaos and confusion existed. The notion of absolute time and absolute space was replaced by a relative space-time which made the notion of uniform and unbreakable natural laws impossible. They ceased to have the characteristic of determining the course of events since they overlapped and admitted discontinuity and leaps and jumps.

The death of Matter-god played havoc with the modern educated man and enhanced greatly his feeling of disgust and disillusionment. Man murdered God Who created him but could not save the god which he himself has created. The sword of science which killed God was sharp enough to kill matter also. Man fell short of both God and Idol. The poet could no longer say:

“Now I have decided I would worship the stone-idols so that when become weary I can strike my head and die.”

Man is by his nature a worshipping animal. God is for him a psychological necessity which he cannot dispense with. Godlessness, in human context, amounts to nothing but to restlessness. Man of today is rootless and the realisation of this is a great scandal for him.

Another factor, besides the death of Matter-god which has plagued the modern educated mind, is the collapse of the idea of progress—the idea that things are getting better and are better than before. Modernity is, indeed, characterised as much by its progressivism and optimism as by its faith in reason and science. The medieval past of the West was in one sense optimistic and forward-looking but in another sense conservative, even reactionary. It was optimistic in that it conceived a messianic future in which

all the evils and vices will be removed and man will be spiritually as well as materially perfected. But it was conservative because it did not believe in gradual progress; the golden period of history, according to it, will be realised by the descent of a Messiah. What lied at the root of this conservatism was its idea of essential wickedness of man. But in the era of enlightenment people rejected this idea and replaced it by the idea of essential goodness of man. Man was essentially a rational being and reason could not be anything but good. So, it was concluded, as the rationality will expand, things will be automatically improved. From Fontenelle and Condercet of the eighteenth century to the Utopian socialists and Marxists of the nineteenth century there is a whole chain of writers who sang the lullaby of progress. Some samples are as follows:

“Nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties ... and perfectibility of man is truly infinite; and progress of this perfectibility, from now on independent on any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.”³³

“The imagination of poets placed the Golden Age in the cradle of mankind, in the ignorance and brutality of earlier times. It is rather the Iron Age which should be reflected there. The Golden Age of human species is not behind us; it is before us. It lies in the perfection of social order. It is for us to clear the path.”³⁴

The scene, however, grew less picturesque and turned eventually grim and gloomy when some historians in their study of archaic cultures arrived at some very dismal and disheartening conclusions. Already in the early decades of the nineteenth century people had started studying and formulating the laws of historical dynamics, i.e. the laws to which the progress of any society

³³ Condercet, *The Progress of Human Mind* (1794) quoted from Sidney Pollard, *Idea of Progress*, p. xii.

³⁴ Saint Simon, *The Reorganisation of European Society* (1814), quoted from Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

is subject. Their results converged, as a rule, upon the view that the direction of the historical movement from one stage to other is always towards betterment and perfection. The French positivist August Comte, for example, conceived human history as divided into three stages, the first and second of which were religious and metaphysical respectively. The third and last stage which was scientific was, according to him, the pinnacle of human progress in which man breaks all the fetters of dogma and prejudice and uses his intelligence and energy towards the realisation of a happy and wholesome social life.

But the conclusions of Comte and others like him were mere results of their romantic loyalty to their age then based upon a genuine insight into world history. With the widening of historical vision, people grew less optimistic and more skeptical towards the prospects of progress and perfection. The tendency culminated in the writings of social historians like Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee who prophesied the inevitable doom of Western culture.

The gist of the writings of the “philosophers of doom” was that every culture has its definite life span in which it emerges, flourishes and then decays and dies. Western culture, to be sure, is no exception to this general rule. Already having passed its prime and efflorescence, it has now entered the stage where nothing can save it from its inexorable fate to decline and perish. Spengler, for example wrote:

“...He who does not understand that this outcome [of the end of Western Culture] is obligatory and insusceptible of modification must forgo all desire to comprehend history, to live through history or to make history. ...That the 19th and 20th centuries, hitherto looked on as the highest point of an ascending straight line of world-history, are in reality a stage of life which may be observed in every Culture that has ripened to its limit. ...”³⁵

³⁵ O. Spengler, *Decline of the West* (C.F. Atkinson, Tr.), I, 38-39.

These gloomy prophesies appeared being confirmed and vindicated when the two world wars played havoc with the Western society. The gigantic mass killing, the resulting disintegration of different social institutions and economic depression accompanied with an ever-increasing feeling of fear and anxiety led even the most optimist people to deem the doom of Western civilization imminent and inevitable. As a result, a paralysing and devitalizing cynicism and pessimism pervaded the whole Western. It is often contended that the picture above depicted is not true for the man of present-day society. Man has recovered from its economic bankruptcy and there is now more stability and peace in socio-political spheres. He is gradually forgetting his painful past and is breathing a new air of hope and confidence. The great suffocation of 'thirties and 'forties has ended and a fresh wave of optimism is blowing down in the nook and corner of contemporary society. But such speculations, one may say, are not results of any authentic insight into the existing realities of human conditions. From the viewpoint of the genial happiness of the individual, the situation has gravely deteriorated and worsened. It is true that man of today is economically more affluent, politically more stable, socially more at peace, technologically more advanced and militarily more strong, but what all these achievements are worth when they are helpless to ensure a free and fearless life for man?

They have even proved counter-productive. Man in the post-war era is more suspicious, fearful and insecure than he was at any time, in his past history. Even the more prosperous he is economically or powerful socially or politically, the more restless and anxious he is existentially. He is an intellectual giant but at the same time an existential dwarf. His science, his technology, his economic planning, instead of serving him, have made him a helpless slave. In a highly industrialized society he is treated as a machine whose only object is to serve the bigger machines. His actions have ceased to be his own. They are dictated and determined by what Erich Fromm in his *The Sane Society* has called "anonymous powers". They lack creativity, productivity and originality.

Man does not now feel himself the centre of the world. He is not the master of his acts or of the consequences of those acts; these have become his masters whom he obeys and whom he even worships. The depersonalizing effects of a highly technological environment has reduced his being into nothing. He has become robot-like, if not a robot. An absolute lack of commitment and conviction has created in his being a great emptiness, a void, which he often tries to fill by indulging into sex or drugs or now- 'a-days into “yoga”. He is dissatisfied, apathetic and bored. He lacks joy and happiness and a sense of futility and a vague feeling that life is meaningless permeates his whole being. The phenomenon is what is now-a-days called “alienation”. It pervades each and every section of society and completes the pictures of ideological nihilism which is the basic ailment of the post-modern man.

What is even more perturbing is the fact that this nihilism in matters of ideology or worldview, has extended, largely as a natural consequence, its black shadow upon the realms of ethics and politics as well.

When Western man severed his relation with medieval Christian tradition, its effect was not only felt in metaphysics. The realms of ethics and politics were equally affected. Man pursued an entirely different course in regard to his political organisation and forged quite new ethico-political ideals. Politically the two systems, which could survive the vicissitudes of highly turbulent and precarious political situation, are, as we know, capitalistic democracy and communism. But both the systems are looked at by post-modern man unfavorably, even contemptuously. The new man is quite disinterested in and apathetic towards the democratic ideals of liberty, peace, competition, etc., on the one hand and the communistic ideals of equality, economic freedom, etc., on the other. The reason is simply that both have subjected him, overtly or covertly, to the tyrannical and ruthless power of lifeless, mechanical environment and have thereby enhanced to a very high degree his sense of alienation and estrangement.

The situation in the realm of morals is even worse. After rejecting the religious morality of other-worldliness, Western man set himself for mundane materialistic pursuits. But this brought him only a greater amount of agony and anxiety. The result is that man has lost faith in the very idea of morality. To-day he is more governed by “drugs” than by canons and conventions of social ethics. There is a deep-felt crisis, “the crisis of values” as the academicians fashionably call it. In philosophical literature this crisis is best expressed and epitomised in “the death of God” theology of Nietzsche, in the loud colloquies of Dostoevsky’s “Underground Man” and in Sartre’s “Nauseatic” experiences.

Nietzsche’s proclamation of death of God was in fact not meant as much to create a metaphysical scandal as to alarm people about the grave consequences to which they are inevitably led by their banishment of God from their general philosophy of life. In *The Gay Science*, for example, he wrote:

“The greatest recent event—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian God has ceased to be believable—is now even beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe . . . and what must collapse on that this belief has undermined.... All that was built upon it, leaned on it, grew into it; for example, our whole European morality.”³⁶

The problem was that when there was no God to command an ethical code, on what grounds can man be subjected and subordinated to moral law. Nietzsche offered his own solution of “Superman ethics,” but it was such that any sane person would fight shy of to accept. The problem, therefore, remained at its place. With the turn of the century, especially in the aftermath of two wars, it grew more and more pressing. Albert Camus in his novel *The Plague* depicts the character of an atheist, named Tarrau, who once spoke to his friend Rieux: “It comes to this.” Tarrau said almost casually: “What interests me is learning how to become a saint.” Dr Rieux, surprisingly

³⁶ Walter Kaufmann, Ed.; *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 447.

replies: “But you don’t believe in God.” “Exactly,” says Tarrau, “came one be a saint without God?—that’s the problem, in fact the only problem I’m up against today.”³⁷

The question “Can one be a saint without God?” epitomises the whole dilemma in which contemporary man finds himself bristled.

The same question was put, even earlier, by Dostoevsky in his famous novel the Brother Karantazov. Smerdyav says to his brother Ivan, “If there is no everlasting God, there is no such thing as virtue and there is no need of it.”³⁸ He freely acts according to this principle and goes as far as to kill his father.

An antagonism towards metaphysics and ethics and politics, together with an absolute skepticism in knowledge, is what characterizes, in the main, the neo-modern psyche. But there is also a third, and not least important, element to which we must now turn our attention. This is the idea of “relativism,” i.e. the idea that whatever is true is true for a certain time and place. It is a belief that any system of truth and value has, for its structure, a peculiar reference to its socio-temporal setting which delimits its validity and vitality to that setting. No truth or value system can justly claim to have relevance beyond the milieu in which it is burgeoned and blossomed. All the ideologies of the past, preached by prophets or postulated by philosophers, are, according to this idea, historically conditioned and the traditional notion of a universal, absolute and objective truth is nothing except a myth,

The idea of relativity of truth has, in recent decades, come to claim a very wide acceptance; many even take it as a liberating precept to be earnestly preached and propagated. In a less theoretical form it expresses itself sometimes into ideological pluralism and cosmopolitanism and sometimes into our much-discussed nihilism. For through its one aspect it may lead one

³⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 796.

to become liberal and permissive believing in a plurality of truths, all being equally credible. But, through another aspect it can also lead people to doubt and distrust every system and truth and finally the very idea of truth. This will be our latter conclusion.

It may be remarked that, as such, the idea of relativism is not quite a new one. Hindu antiquity has been familiar with it in its concepts of “Adikari Bheda” (the adaptation of the truth to the relative maturity of student) and “Sarva Dharm Sambhav” (possibility of all religions being true). The Jainists have this idea embodied in their doctrine of “Anekant veda” (the doctrine that reality is multi-faceted). Some Muslim sufis too, quite contrary to their religious belief, have shown allegiance to this idea. In ancient Greece, the same idea found expression in the philosophies of Protagoras and other sophists. In modern times, it is epitomised in Nietzsche’s saying that “Facts do not exist, only interpretations’. Pragmatic philosophies of William James, Dewey and Schiller hold the same even with a greater force and poignancy. But the main force to this idea came with the appearance of two new methodological tides, namely, Social Darwinism and Historicism in the realm of social studies. Today we have a separate discipline of “Sociology of Knowledge” (Wissenseseziologie, in original German) to study the differences in human thought with reference to the difference in their social contexts.

That the idea of relativism, although as old as the history of thought itself, remained a subterranean current is due to the fact that until fairly recent times people entertained a good faith in the possibility of having an objective and impersonal system of truth. Their minds were colonised by the great system-builders like Plato, Aquinas, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. The relativists were treated by these mental imperialists as being not more than occasional trouble-creators. They were suppressed and crushed without much difficulty. But, when towards the close of the nineteenth century, there was accumulated a plethora of these systems each claiming for itself to possess the whole of truth, people, naturally, grew weary. The result in due course, was that they ceased to have an unconditional faith in either of them.

This opened the way for the later general acceptance of this idea on an enormous scale. It found among its philosophers and popularisers persons of no less stature than Nietzsche, Durkheim, Marx, Mannheim, Dilthey, Freud and Schiller.

The main argument that the advocates of relativism invoke in support of their theory stems from the anthropomorphic determination of knowledge. There is, they argue, an inevitable intrusion of subjective element in all cognitive processes which constricts the possibility of their being completely objective, impersonal and non-human. When man perceives reality it is always through a certain perspective which comprises the peculiar sort of perceiver's cognitive apparatus, his socio-historical environment, the language he speaks and his bias and prejudices and interests. Man cannot by any means eschew this perspective. Kant had shown that all the categories in terms of which man apprehends outside reality, even the space and time, are in his own mind. Besides, man is born and brought up in a social setting which influences and determines to an immeasurable degree his vision of truth. He cannot get rid of these influences and consequently cannot perceive facts quite objectively. Objectivity in the province of knowledge and truth is, therefore, a sheer myth and nothing more.

Apart from the anthropomorphic element, there are also at work certain social forces which prevent man to have an uncoloured vision of reality. In Marxian philosophy these forces comprised entirely economic factors. Marx tried to establish that the politics, religion, philosophy, art, morality of any epoch are in fact an outcome of the method of production and distribution prevalent in that epoch. His notorious notion of class-struggle underlied the idea that the two classes, the bourgeois and proletariat, have varied economic interests which affect their philosophies of life and lead eventually to conflict. Otto Bauer, a Marxian sociologist of knowledge, held the view that the perception of reality of a given class is determined by its work-experience. Bourgeois are idealists since their function is merely to chalk out grand plans

which are carried out by others. But proletarians come in direct contact with physical reality and are, therefore, materialists.³⁹

The French sociologist Durkheim and his followers went even further. They held the view that even the most abstract things in the domain of knowledge, viz. the logical concepts, have a social origin, not quite being innate or empirical generalizations as the rationalists and empiricists claim them to be. Durkheim, in his celebrated work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious We*, undertook to discern that the concepts such as logical classes, species, genus, substance, space-time, etc., reflect and are modelled upon the social organisation of primitive tribe. He writes “At the roots of all our judgements there are a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life; they are what philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of understanding: Ideas of time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc. . . . they are like the framework of intelligence. Now when primitive religious beliefs are systematically analysed, the principal categories are naturally found. They are born in religion and of religion. ...”⁴⁰

Thus the hierarchy of genus, species and clans are representatives of the corresponding hierarchy of tribe, phratry and clan in the primitive society. The concept of a logical universal whole of which everything is part is derived from our primitive conception of the unity of society. Our notions of time and space too have their ultimate source in the factors which are religious and, therefore, social. The division of time into days, weeks, months, years, etc., “correspond to the periodical recurrences of rites, feasts, and public ceremonies.”⁴¹ Similarly, the special distinctions of here, there, left, right, up, down, etc., are the distinctions that have emerged from the fact that 'different sympathetic values have been attributed to various regions.’⁴² And, since all the men of a single civilisation represent space in the same

³⁹ G.W. Remmling, *Road to Suspicion*; p. 24.

⁴⁰ 14. P. 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

way, “it is clearly necessary that these sympathetic values, and the distinctions that depend upon them, should be equally universal, and that almost necessarily implies that they be of social origin.”⁴³

These relativistic theses appeared being further confirmed when some philosophers of history challenged the feasibility of scientific method in the study of historical objects like art, religion and philosophy. The scientific positivist method, as we know, bases itself upon the realistic assumption in which the studying subject and the object being studied stand apart as opposite poles without admitting any possibility of contact or interaction. Now, this method is perfectly fit for the study of the lifeless material objects. But philosophy, art and religion are not objects. They are works. They are human creations and man always lives in history. The strictly historical nature of man disqualifies scientific analysis as a tool in the understanding of the man-made things. In order to have real insight into the human works of a particular age, one is required to establish a genuine communion with them. He has to divest himself with the concepts, value-standards and categories which are characteristic of his own age “to learn to substitute for them the corresponding concepts, value-standards, and categories of the period under examination”.⁴⁴ This whole procedure presupposes the view that no standards or concepts have a timeless validity. The relativistic conclusion, therefore, very conspicuously follows.

Islam vs Crisis Scepticism, nihilism and relativism are, thus, as is evident from the above description, three main ingredients of postmodern mind. There is an absolute and omnipresent doubt that haunts every section of society and every aspect of human life. The questions now arise: in what kind of relationship does Islam stand to this situation? What may be the nature of response that an Islamist can offer having been faced to it? Should he succumb, or make compromises or oppose it wholesale? Moreover, in the

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 9-13.

⁴⁴ Paul Kecskemet's Preface to Karl Mannheim's, *Essays on the Sociology of knowledge*, p. 5.

case of conflicts, what may be his basic task that he should under-take in order to make his religion relevant and reasonable? The rest of the paper will be devoted to the answers of these questions. It may, however, be made clear that no detailed solution of the problems will be offered here. What is intended is merely to indicate in outline the nature of the work towards which efforts should be directed.

It may be said at the outset that Islam stands in complete antagonism to the sceptical and nihilistic ethos of the new world. Scepticism, as we have seen, amounts to a total denial of knowledge—knowledge of God, knowledge of the world and knowledge of one's self; and nihilism is the state of one's being completely disoriented in the matters of truth and value. But Islam, quite the contrary, is a positivist and world-affirming religion. It takes for granted the existence of physical universe and persuades (though not prove;) people for the belief in God and a super-sensory angelic world. The universe, although perishable ultimately, is, nevertheless, a creation of God and enjoys, therefore, at least a partial reality.

“Say (O Muhammad, unto the idolators): Disbelieve ye verily in Him Who created the earth in two Days, and ascribe ye unto Him rivals? He (and none else) is the Lord of the worlds.

“He placed therein firm hills rising above it and blessed it and measured therein its sustenance in four days alike for (all) who ask.

“Then turned he to the Heaven when it was smoke and said unto it and unto the earth: Come both of you, willingly come both. They said: We come obedient.

“Then He ordained them seven heavens in two Days and inspired in each heaven its mandate; and we decked the nether heaven with lamps and rendered it inviolable. That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Knower” (xli. 9-12).

Human soul or self too is a reality which God has vouchsafed to man through an especial act of favour and grace.

“And (remember) when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter’s clay of black mud altered, so when I made him and have breathed into Him of My Spirit, do ye fall down yourselves unto him” (xv. 28-29).

Islam affirms the knowledge that man receives through senses or intellect or intuition.

“Lo! We create man from a drop of thickened fluid to test him; so we make him hearing, seeing” (lxxvi. 2).

“God hath made everything . . . ; then shaped him, and breathed of His spirit unto him and gave you hearing and seeing and heart: what little thank do ye return?” (xxxii. 6-8).

“And by the soul and Him who perfected it. And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it” (xci. 7-8).

Besides, there is an especial knowledge, 'ilm, that God imparts to man by revealing it to His chosen people, the Prophets, through some mysterious angelic agency.

“And thus have inspired in thee (Muḥammad) a spirit of Our Command. I hou knowest not what the Scripture, was nor what the Faith. But we have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path” (xlii. 52).

In a word, Islam, as against the new spirit of faithlessness and non-commitment, is a religion of absolute faith and total commitment. It exhorts its followers to fully submit to their Creator and Sustainer God, Who is also the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

“Allah it is who appointed for you the earth for a dwelling-place and the sky for a canopy and fashioned your shapes, and bath provided you with good things. Such is Allah, your Lord. Then blessed be Allah, the Lord of the worlds: He is the Living One. There is no God save Him. So pray unto Him, making religion pure for Him (only). Praise be to Allah, the Lord of worlds” (xl. 65).

So far as the idea of relativism is concerned, it is as repugnant to Islam as it is dangerous for society. A logical extension of its conclusions and their practical applications can result into nothing less than a complete return to barbarism and social anarchy. Relativisation of truths and values on a collective plane logically leads to their relativisation on individual plane. For, a person differs in his interests and attitudes as much as a society differs from another society. If one concedes to the demand of each society to have its own personal system of truths only on the ground of unavoidable peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, then he is bound to make the same concession for the individual also. There should, consequently, be as many truths as the number of individuals. This may put the whole social existence of man in peril.

It is cautious to note that not only secular academicians but those belonging to religious circles also have succumbed to the idea of relativism. Contemporary Hinduism is completely under its sway, partly under the impact of ideas imported from the West and partly because its own treasure is devoid of any single objective system of truths or values. What it has in the name of religion is a maze of philosophical theories, profound and sublime no doubt, but at the same time polluted with the superstitious dogmas and myths and unpracticable and even dangerous rites and rituals. This state of affairs compels its followers to take a relativistic stand in ideological matters and depreciate and derogate objectivity.

Christianity too, especially its liberal and protestant section, advocates this idea. But what is most surprising in this context is that even the Catholic

Christians, quite contrary to their violent objectivism of the past, have started showing allegiance to it. There is today a very common tendency among Catholic theologians to give, at least on an academic plane, assent to the truth-claims of other religions, while for themselves sticking to their own. Almost similar is the case with Buddhism. Buddha is too well known for his serene reluctance for the questions which are, in their nature, metaphysical and non-ethical.

But Islam cannot take any such attitude without liquidating its independent personality. Islam is a religion with complete objectivity in metaphysical as well as ethico-political realms. "There is only one religion acceptable to God which is Islam," is one of the quintessential propositions of the Qur'an. Reality is one and there can be only one true interpretation of it and this is Islam. All the Prophets since Adam down to Muhammad (peace be upon them all) have preached, practised and propagated this truth. All other religions, philosophies, theories, besides Islam, are satanic connections which only disrupt the peace and harmony of man's life in this world while exposing him to the eternal torment of the Hell in the other world.

Islam's insistence upon ideological objectivity is, in fact, quite reasonable. Man cannot dispense with it so long as he is a member of a frame of reference in which different individuals through their behavioural interaction build an outside and objective socio-political structure. The political organisation of every nation assumes, overtly or covertly, an objective world-view upon which it bases its notions of rights and duties, crimes and punishment, etc. No society can eschew formulating these notions unless it is willing to expose itself to the danger of complete annihilation. It is, therefore, no surprise if Marxian philosophy, one of the greatest advocates of the "suspension of belief" view, has turned, when made the political theory of an actual government, so violent in the emphasis on ideological objectivity. Democracy too, although allowing individuals freedom in certain aspects of life, has subjected them to a worldview which may or may not be their own.

The point is that if relativism is true, then all individuals should be given equal opportunity to live their life according to their own whims and wishes. The utilitarian justification of objectivity on collective plane, of which Nietzsche and American pragmatists have been the advocates, is incredible since it never happens that a whole society or even a majority of its members consciously agree upon the usefulness of a particular ideology so as to make it the creed of the State.

It, however, needs be made clear here that Islam is not opposed to relativism as such. It may, in fact, be in perfect agreement with the latter in its contention that all human interpretations of reality contain an inevitable human element which mars their status as a fully objective and impersonal theory. Obviously man cannot eschew his prejudices and interests, nor can he comprehend reality in all its intricate multiple aspects. Relativism is, therefore, a genuine doctrine inasmuch as it emphasizes this fundamental fact. But where it goes wrong is its view that all truths are relative. Islam, on the other hand, holds that only human truths are relative. Islam itself having its source in a Being, Who is completely free from human limitations and handicaps, cannot be bracketed with human ideologies whose relativity is beyond doubt.

It seems that, whether it is relativism or nihilism, the source of all evils lies in man's scepticism towards the possibility of knowledge. With the ramshackle of foundations of science, as we have seen, man has lost all faith in knowledge. The critique of reason has deprived him even of the criteria upon which he used to test or attest the truth-claims of different theories. The faithlessness in knowledge leads him either to look with indifference towards all ideologies or to ascribe them only a partial and provisional validity.

If so, then the most fundamental task for an Islamist be comes to provide knowledge a new basis. It appears that it is only by reconstructing

knowledge that one can restore and rehabilitate man's confidence in the truth, in the objectivity of truth and 'finally in Islam itself.

It may be remarked that the question of reconstruction of knowledge is posed not for quite the first time in Islamic history. The very same problem was faced, almost exactly nine hundred years before, to great Imām Ghazālī with the difference that in the latter case the sceptic was in Ghazālī himself and the exponents of reason and science were Muslims, not, though indirectly of course, the people of alien culture. In his short philosophical autobiography *Al-Munqidh Min al-Ḍalālī*, Ghazālī has related in very lucid detail how he renounced the world and set himself for the pursuit of truth at a time when he was at the pinnacle of his worldly fame and success.

At the time he was an acknowledged theologian revered and respected by all. But he became disgusted with the controversialist, pedantry and sectarianism in which the theologians of his age were inextricably caught. He found authoritarian knowledge incredible and endeavoured to find out certitude in the realms of sense-experience and reason. He thoroughly examined these two sources of knowledge but found them too unsatisfactory. His critique of knowledge is remarkably the same to what today, nine hundred years after, philosophers make of it. Sense-experience, he concluded, is fallible and reason foundationless. A serious doubt crept into his heart which grew stronger in due course and, for about two months, as he himself says, "I was not, it is true, explicitly or implicitly by profession, but morally and essentially a thoroughgoing sceptic."⁴⁵ He then turned to mysticism. He wandered for a long time into deserts, engaged in prayers, fasting, meditations and other devout practices taught by sufis. At last the truth reached him, not, as he says, through "a concentration of proofs and arguments," but through "the light which God caused to penetrate into my hart—the light which illuminates the threshold of all knowledge."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Claud Field, Tr., *Confessions of Ghazali*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Ghazālī, as is evident from the above, based his reconstruction upon a sort of mystical intuitionism which, however, to be modest, can find very meagre support from the Qur'an. The Qur'ān's approach to knowledge, it seems, is through and through of what may be called "commonsense reasoning" in which some-thing is established through a simple inference. For example, the existence of God is established simply by pointing to the extra-ordinary order and arrangement in the cosmos, implied in which is the inference of an indivisible Creator from the visible phenomenal world. The new reconstructions, it seems, must be based upon this simple procedure of reasoning, not upon a mysterious intuitionism which is (at least) non-Qur'ānic, besides being in-comprehensible to common man.

Anyway, even if Ghazālī's approach is sound, it stands in need of reformulation. What Islam needs today is another Ghazālī who can dive deep into the abysses of Western as well as Islamic wisdom and construct a philosophy which could rehabilitate men's faith in knowledge—knowledge, historical, scientific, rational as well as religious.