The Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today

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Introduction

Within the Islamization of Knowledge school, the idea of the Islamization of Knowledge has always been understood as an intellectual and methodological outlook rather than as an academic field, a specialization, an ideology, or a new sect. Thus, the school has sought to view issues of knowledge and methodology from the perspectives of reform, inquiry, and self-discovery without any preconceptions, doctrinal or temporal constraints, or limitations on its intellectual horizons. The school is keenly aware of the workings of time on ideas as they pass from stage to stage and mature and is therefore the first to say that the Islamization of Knowledge is not to be understood as a set of axioms, a rigid ideology, or a religious movement. Rather, in order to comprehend the full meaning of the term, it must be viewed as designating a methodology for dealing with knowledge and its sources or as an intellectual outlook in its beginning stages.

An ongoing critique and the attempt to derive particulars from the general are essential to the process of development. The initial articulation of the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking and the workplan was therefore produced in general terms. At that early stage, the focus was on presenting a criticism of both traditional Muslim and western methodologies and then introducing the Islamization of Knowledge and explaining its significance. The first edition of the *Islamization of Knowledge* pointed out the principles essential to any attempt to fashion an Islamic paradigm of knowledge based on the Islamic worldview and its unique constitutive concepts and factors. It also addressed, briefly, the intellectual aspect of the Islamization of Knowledge. The main focus, however, was on the practical aspects of producing textbooks for use in teaching the social sciences, as this was considered the first priority at a time when the Muslim world was losing its best minds to the West and the western cultural and intellectual invasion. Accordingly, twelve steps were identified as the basis from which the preparation of introductory social science texts might proceed.

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The workplan and the principles elaborated in the first edition of the *Islamization of Knowledge* were met with a great deal of enthusiasm, as these represented a novel intellectual endeavor. There was wide acceptance for the new ideas, and many scholars were quick to endorse them. Indeed, the popularity and appeal of the Islamization of Knowledge were such that several academic institutions immediately attempted to give practical form to its concepts. Some people, however, were unable to discern the essential methodological issues in the Islamization of Knowledge, perhaps due to the pragmatic manner in which Islamization was first articulated. As a result, they considered it little more than a naive attempt to replace knowledge with knowledge that had somehow been Islamized. In addition to such critics, there were those who sought to ridicule the effort and those who were in the habit of interpreting everything they read in terms of their own preconceived notions. Some people went so far as to view the undertaking as an attempt by Islamic fundamentalists to somehow transform culture and the world of ideas into tools for the attainment of political power. Undoubtedly, it was this view that led some people to consider the Islamization of Knowledge as an ideological, as opposed to an epistemological or a methodological, discourse.

Likewise, those captivated by contemporary western knowledge and its supposed generation of scientifically objective and universally applicable products assumed that the Islamization of Knowledge was symptomatic of a state of conscious or unconscious denial of the "other." To them, the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking reflected an attitude of self-affirmation through the attempted characterization of everything of significance as Islamic. Some saw it as a manifestation of the Islamists' desire to control everything in the state and society, including secular knowledge or the social sciences and humanities in particular, by making scholarship and academics their exclusive domain and stripping from the Marxists, leftists, and secularists in the Arab and the Islamic worlds their right to practice their scholarship or, at the very least, to speak with authority on anything having to do with Islam or Muslim society. In reality, however, such ideas never occurred to any of those involved in the beginning of the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking.[1] In fact, no mention of any these matters has been made in any of the school's literature.

The Islamization of Knowledge school is not blind to the fact that it may take decades before the methodological and epistemological issues involved in this proposition are clarified in a definitive manner. Indeed, such matters cannot be outlined in a declaration of principles, a press release, or a party manifesto. Instead, they should be understood as landmarks on the road to the sort of learning that will assist the reform of the Muslim mind in such a way that the Muslim world can address its own crisis of thought and participate actively in the attempt to deal with the crises of thought affecting the rest of the world. Moreover, those involved in the Islamization of Knowledge realize that intellectual undertakings, especially at this level, represent the most difficult and complex activity of any society and that their fruits may not be seen for decades or even

generations. Even then, they rarely come to an end, for knowledge is limitless and Allah's creation is greater . . . and for every learned person there is one who is more learned. As the essence of knowledge and its foundation is method, in the general sense of the term, the message of Islam is said to be a complete way of life rather than a specific set of guidelines, except for those very few fundamentals that are unchanging and unaffected by the differences of time and place.[2]

The scholars of our school of thought do not seek to provide a strictly inclusive and exclusive definition in the classical manner when they speak of the Islamization of Knowledge. Rather, this process is spoken of in general terms only and, in fact, should be understood as a loose designation calculated to convey the general sense of the undertaking and its priorities. Take, for example, the definition proposed by 'Imād al Dīn Khahīl:

> The Islamization of Knowledge means involvement in intellectual pursuits, by examination, summarization, correlation, and publication, from the perspective of an Islamic outlook on life, man, and the universe.[3]

or that of Abū al Qāsim Hajj Hammād:

> The Islamization of Knowledge is the breaking of the connection between the scientific achievements of human civilization and the transmutations of postulative philosophy, so that science may be employed by means of a methodological order which is religious rather than speculative in nature.[4]

He defined the Islamization of Knowledge as

> . . . the Islamization of applied science and of scientific principles as well. This may be accomplished through an understanding of the similarities between the principles of the natural sciences and those of nature itself. This, in fact, is the foundation upon which all religious values are based. Therefore, the philosophical references in scientific theories may become "Islamized" when they negate the postulative aspect of those theories and recast them in terms of the natural or the universal, which carries with it the notion of a divine purpose to all existence and movement.[5]

Thus, Abū al Qāsim, like all of the other scholars involved in this undertaking, asserts that the Islamization of Knowledge is not a cosmetic addition of religious terminology and sentiment to studies in the social sciences and humanities or the grafting of relevant Qur'anic verses onto the sciences or disciplines intended for Islamization. On the contrary, the Islamization of Knowledge may be viewed as a methodological and epistemological rearrangement of the sciences and their principles. Moreover, it is not to be understood as a blanket extension of personal conviction to

all of the disciplines in an attempt to lend a sort of religious legitimacy to the accomplishments of human civilization. Nor should it be understood as a negation of those achievements by the logic of empty semantics.

Rather, these definitions have been proposed for the purpose of lending clarity to the issue and describing its characteristics and distinguishing traits. These were never intended to be precise delineations in the classical mold. In fact, we prefer that the Islamization of Knowledge not be limited to the confines of a hard and fast definition. After all, the Islamization of Knowledge is the foundation of the *tawḥīdī* episteme, which holds that the universe has a Creator who is One and Unique, the Originator of all things and their Provider, Observing yet Unobserved, Subtle and All-knowing, Unfathomable and beyond human comprehension. He has charged humanity with His stewardship and taught it what it knew not. He made revelation and the natural world principle sources of knowledge, so studying them within a framework of pure *tawḥīd* would result in the production of proper, discerning, and purposeful knowledge.

Therefore, when we present our ideas on the issue and attempt to formulate principles, we do so by the logic that our proposals are no more than landmarks or indicators for the benefit of scholars interested in producing academic work from an Islamization of Knowledge perspective. These first steps are the result of a variety of experiences in dealing with the practical and theoretical aspects of the Islamization of Knowledge. Undoubtedly, as researchers continue to work with these indicators, or with any of the six discourses explained later in this paper, they will clarify the issue further, postulate its principles, and test its intellectual and academic efficacy.

The Reality and Importance of the Islamization of Knowledge

The Islamization of Knowledge represents the intellectual and epistemological side of Islam that began with the Patriarch, Ibrahim, and was completed by the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad. Indeed, the final revelation began with the words: "Read . . ." and ended with the verse, "Today I have completed your religion for you . . . ." The epistemological aspect of Islam was first evinced in the revelation of the following verses:

Read! In the name of your Lord who created, created humans from a clot. Read! For your Lord is Most Bountiful, He who taught by the pen, taught humans what they did not know. (96:1-5)

It was continued in the revelation of the opening verses of Sūrat al Qalam:

Nun! By the pen and what they write . . . (68:1-2)

and in the opening verses of Sūrat al Raḥmān:

> The All-Merciful! [Who] taught the Qur'an, created humankind,
> and taught them expression . . . (55:1-3)

From the above verses, it may be deduced that humanity has been commanded to undertake two different kinds of readings and to understand its situation in the universe through an understanding of how the two complement one another. The first reading is the book of Allah's revelation (the Qur'an), in which all matters of religious significance are explained,[6] and the second is the book of His creation (the natural universe), from which nothing has been omitted.[7] To undertake a reading of either without reference to the other will neither benefit humanity nor lead it to the sort of comprehensive knowledge necessary for the building and maintenance of civilized society or to knowledge worthy of preservation and further development or exchange. In fact, such a one-sided reading will never enable humanity to fulfill its role as the steward of Allah (*istikhlāf*) or the keeper of His trust (*amānah*). If this destiny remains unfulfilled, humanity will never be united in faith or guided, and the divine purpose behind creation will never be realized. Never will the earth be united in worshipping Allah, and never will the stars join the rest of creation in bowing to His will and praising Him:

> There is not a thing but celebrates His praise: And yet you do not
> understand how they declare His glory. (17:44)

Indeed, any disruption in any aspect of human life is an indication of imbalance in the way the readings were undertaken. Perhaps only one reading was done, or perhaps the two were not done together, or perhaps there was a preponderance in the scales by which matters are measured. It could also be possible that the wrong methods were used:

> To each among you have We prescribed a law and a way. (5:48)

Under such circumstances, nothing will begin to go right unless and until equilibrium has been reestablished through a balanced and complementary reading of the two books. Clearly, each reading must be considered an epistemological fundament and a creative source that may not be ignored. It is impossible that a discerning and sound society could exist without joining these two readings and integrating them in a comprehensive manner, for a society that ignores the first reading in favor of the second will lose sight of its relationship to God and its responsibilities of stewardship, trust, and accountability to a higher authority. The result is a society that grows self-centered and overweening and comes to believe that it is independent and free of the Unseen. Such a society will inevitably set out to spin for itself a web of speculative philosophy that, ultimately, is incapable of enabling it to attain true knowledge. On the contrary, such

knowledge will lead its people, under the best of circumstances, to become like

> those who know but the outer aspects of worldly life, but who, in regard to the afterlife, are very negligent. (30:8)

The philosophies produced by such societies are powerless to answer the ultimate questions and generally dismiss everything beyond their sensory perceptions as supernatural. Such philosophies are also prone to suggesting utterly baseless replies to these questions, leaving people to wander and stray. Even in regard to God, people nourished on such philosophies think of Him as just another element of the supernatural. If He actually created the universe, so their reading goes, He did so all at once and then forgot, or ignored, whatever He had created and left it to act and react mechanically in accordance with previously established natural laws. This type of reading, even if undertaken by people who consider themselves religious, will never on its own lead to true and accurate knowledge of God. Rather, if such people believe at all, they believe in a god who is the way they want him to be, often equating him with the powers of nature itself. Such faith, generally speaking, jumbles doctrines of incarnation with *shirk* (associating others with God) and idolatry and often leads to theories, such as dialectical materialism, that deny the existence of any creator or to those, such as the theories of natural selection and evolution, that are both unacceptable and inadequate as alternatives to belief in God.

Within the framework of such a one-sided reading of the natural universe, the world may assume the form of mutually opposed powers. Based on the resulting distorted reading, individuals may suppose themselves divine and answerable to no one but themselves. Supposing, with their limited knowledge and understanding, that they are in control of their surroundings, such individuals will worship themselves, make their desires their guides, and attempt to derive their values from nature. For such individuals, religion becomes no more than something to be used when the need arises, to fill a psychological gap, or to fulfill a subliminal desire:

> Nay, but man transgresses all bounds when he looks upon himself as self-sufficient. (96:7)

When humanity becomes so presumptuous, it becomes so overbearing and tyrannical that it destroys the environment by polluting the land, sea, and air by means of its own activities. When the natural order is disrupted, the earth is inundated with diseases of excess and perversion. Entire continents are enveloped by hunger, destitution, pestilence, and destruction, and the majority of people are forced to live in misery:

> Those who turn from remembering Me shall live lives of misery. (20:124)

It may happen that the second reading, that of the real-existential, is ignored by those undertaking the first reading (the revelation). When this happens, great imbalances result, such as the development of an aversion to the world and worldly pursuits that will encourage people to become ascetics and to lose the ability to participate in and contribute to society. As a result, individuals will fail to undertake their responsibilities as stewards and keepers of God's trust. In other instances, such a loss of equilibrium will deprive people of the ability to engage in independent and creative thought. When people begin to believe that human beings are not really capable of independent actions, they no longer value their own deeds and, ultimately, conclude that there is no meaning to their existence. Ideas such as these are in complete contradiction to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

To neglect the reading of the natural universe or to fail to balance and complement it with the reading of revelation will often lead to confusion in regard to important issues of faith. Often, those who read only the book of revelation suppose that the true elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the concept of deity requires the negation of the value of human actions, the rejection of belief in free will, and a mystical denial of the positive role fashioned by God for humanity. Anyone who reads the writings of people who hold such ideas, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, will find that they are thoroughly confused about what constitutes human, as opposed to divine, deeds, the meanings of free will and predetermination, and issues of cause and effect, among others.

In conclusion, the two readings must be combined for, if they are not allowed to complement one another, the result is certain to be an imbalanced understanding of reality. This is why the Islamization of Knowledge is such an epistemological and civilizational necessity, not only for Muslims but for humanity in general, and may be considered a solution to the global crisis of contemporary thought. With the adoption in the West of rationalism as the basis for thought, western civilization found itself confronted with the problem of defining methodologies in ways based on its own scientific progress. Marxism, for example, was an attempt to fashion a western scientific methodology based on dialectical materialism. Clearly, however, neither Marxism nor any other liberal, positivistic, or secular western schools of thought has been able to provide answers to the issues besetting western society and the rest of the contemporary world.

The crisis is especially vexatious for Muslims. By virtue of our submission to western intellectual, cultural, and institutional influences and the impact that these have had on our lives, we are now full partners in the worldwide crisis. Our relationship with the West is no longer marginal, as some continue to believe. We and the rest of the world have accepted the West's methodology, worldview, and perspectives on history, science, knowledge, culture, progress, and so on.

What, then, is this Islamization of Knowledge proposal? What solutions does it offer to the crises of thought that presently plague the world, and how may these solutions be brought about?

The Islamization of Knowledge may be brought about, as indicated earlier, through combined readings of the two books and the establishment, on the basis of their similarity and complementarity, of a methodology for research and discovery. Indeed the Qur'an, like the natural universe, bespeaks and directs toward the other: The Qur'an is a guide to the real–existential, and the real–existential is a guide to the Qur'an. Moreover, true knowledge is attained only through a complementary reading—a "combining"—of these two sources. One reading is that of the Unseen, in which revelation is accompanied by interpretation and the attempt to discover its universals and the ways in which they manifest themselves in nature, while the other reading is an objective reading of the real–existential in light of the universals expounded in the verses of revelation. The reason for revelation, then, is to settle from the general to the particular and to link the absolute to the specific, to the extent that relative human rational abilities allow. The reading of the categorical real–existent represents an ascent from the specific and the particular toward the general and the absolute, also to the extent that relative human rational abilities allow. In this way, the supposed differences between the teachings of revelation and the objective truths of the natural universe may be seen as nonexistent, as emphasized in the first few verses of Sūrat al 'Alaq:

Read! In the name of your Lord who created, created humans from a clot. Read! For your Lord is Most Bountiful, He who taught by the pen, taught humans what they did not know. (96:1-5)

When these two readings are undertaken separately, the results may be perilous. Those who rely solely upon revelation, ignoring knowledge of the real world, will transform religion into something mystical that accords no value to humanity or nature, rejects cause and effect, and ignores the usages of society, history, psychology, and economics. The ultimate result of such a reading is that thought becomes rigid and inflexible and ignores the elements of time and history. Quite often, this approach is thought to be religious, when in fact it has nothing to do with religion.

Those who undertake only the second reading are actually rejecting—or ignoring—the unseen presence of the Creator and Manager of the natural universe. As a result, they arrive gradually at a positivistic understanding of knowledge, which, in turn, influences the makeup of society in the negative manner that we witness in contemporary western civilization: All notions of anything being sacred have been stripped away, and everything has been deconstructed and reduced to its minimum. This is why western society, from its vantage point on the verge of extinction, often views existence itself as a worthless commodity. This further explains the West's preoccupation with "ends": the end of history, of civilization, of progress, of modernity, or of humanity itself.

Thus, humanity is divided between mysticism and positivism, even though the first verses of the Qur'an refute clearly the mystical, in the western sense of the term, as being a part of the Unseen (*al ghayb*). In

fact, the first verses clarify the link between the Unseen and the second (objective) reading of the real–existential, which is recorded by means of the pen. These same verses, when they link the real–existential to revelation, reject the speculative ends that result from a one-sided reading of the real–existential. Thus, the balanced "reader" is the individual whose faith in, and understanding of, revelation on the one hand and understanding of the real–existent and the principles that determine and govern categorical real–existents on the other, qualify him/her for the responsibilities of stewardship.

It is impossible to estimate, in terms of human suffering, the damage caused to modern society by the rift between science and religion that has been allowed to occur in its educational institutions and curriculum. Yet, even so, humanity has shown little interest in producing students who are grounded in both. Obviously, the reason for this is that modern society has adopted the western attitude of separating the two, so that students of theology attend seminaries and students of science attend colleges of engineering. In the Muslim world, where western influence is all-pervasive, the same rift exists between schools and colleges of Shari'ah studies and theology and colleges of practical and applied sciences, or social sciences and the humanities.

This attitude of separation is responsible for the rift between religious values and contemporary knowledge. For us, as Muslims, this attitude is perilous for the reason that it drives a wedge between the Shari'ah sciences and the social sciences, which have been developed largely in accordance with a one-sided reading of the real–existential. The Shari'ah sciences, for their part, have contented themselves with descriptive and lexical studies of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and largely ignored the real–existents of societal phenomena and their spatial and temporal effects.

The dominant western cultural paradigm has cast the social sciences and humanities in a positivistic mold that excludes the axiological verities of revelation. This narrow paradigm is responsible for drawing humanity into a debate over the conflicting dualities of mysticism and positivism, which, in the process, inflates the place of the self at the expense of religious and ethical values. This, in turn, has led to the spread of individual liberalism and the ensuing social and communal turmoil.

The Islamization of Knowledge is primarily a methodological issue prepositioned on the identification and articulation of the relationship between revelation and the real–existential. In its essence, that relationship is one of integration and permeation that clarifies the comprehensive manner in which the Qur'an deals with the real–existential and its governing and regulating natural laws (*sunan*) and principles. Indeed, knowledge of those *sunan* is invaluable to an understanding of the principles of Qur'anic methodology.

To summarize, then, the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking may be pursued only by those endowed with a vast knowledge of the Qur'an and a firm grounding in the social sciences and humanities.

The Six Discourses

In what follows, a brief description will be given of each of the six discourses that form the present focus of attention for the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking.

The First Discourse: Articulating the Islamic Paradigm of Knowledge. This discourse, which is concerned with identifying and erecting a *tawḥīd*-based system of knowledge (a *tawḥīdī* episteme), is based on two fundaments. The first one is that of the conceptual activation of the articles of faith and their transformation into a creative and dynamic intellectual power capable of presenting adequate replies to what are known as the ultimate questions. This may take place through a perceptive understanding of theology and the elements of its methodology. What, for example, is the benefit, at an epistemological level, of faith in Allah, in His angels, books, and prophets, or in the Day of Judgment? What is the methodological significance of these articles?

All ideas, not to mention all sciences and civilizations, are based on a particular worldview or understanding of its beginnings, ends, and principal elements, whether seen or unseen. Thus, the rejection of a Creator, the adoption of a position of neutrality on whether or not a Creator exists, or the rejection of any article of faith presupposes a worldview that is entirely different from that of the believer. While the Muslim mind is generally content to view the articles of faith as matters of personal conviction that do not reflect on or influence anything related to methodological or intellectual issues, the Islamization of Knowledge outlook, in keeping with the higher purposes of the Shari'ah and the character of Islamic teachings, is based on the idea that these represent the foundations of the societal and epistemological paradigm sought by Islam. At the same time, it should be clear that no society or reformation of society may take place without an epistemological and methodological basis. Indeed, whatever Islam has accomplished has been based on its unique vision of elements like the unseen, the universe, life, and the rest of the belief system located at the base of that worldview.

The second fundament of the Islamic (or *tawḥīdī*) episteme is the elaboration of the paradigms of knowledge that guided historical Islam and its legal, philosophical, and other schools of thought. This must be done in order to link those with the intellectual output of the past and to evaluate the extent to which they contributed to the dynamism and comprehensiveness of that output. Such an elaboration will also assist in defining the relationship between those paradigms and the various intellectual trends and crises faced by the Muslim world at different periods in its history. A further benefit is the determination of the extent to which those paradigms influenced the development or decline of thought in those periods. In addition, an effort must be undertaken to discover and clarify how limited or partial epistemic systems drew from the comprehensive *tawḥīdī* episteme mentioned above. This process will serve as an

introduction to the feasibility of developing partial systems for the various social and applied sciences based on *tawḥīd* and a complementary reading of the two books while, at the same time, borrowing from the paradigms that were prevalent in earlier stages of Islamic history and those developed by western and contemporary thought.

The Second Discourse: Developing a Qur'anic Methodology. The methodological shortcomings presently besetting the Muslim mind make its reconstruction via the development of a new methodology an absolute necessity. While a Qur'anic methodology may spring from the *tawḥīdī* episteme and be based on its premises and principles, its prolonged disuse makes the effort required for its activation more akin to discovery than recovery. A Qur'anic methodology will enable the Muslim mind to deal effectively with its historical and contemporary problems, for it is a means to attain truth and to understand and analyze phenomena.

In addition to its link to methodology, a paradigm will have at its base what Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir called the "premethodological" that, he explained, involves matters like culture, language, and psychological and intellectual disposition. The composition of methodology, furthermore, includes philosophy and tools. The philosophical element springs from the epistemic, theological, and cultural paradigms, and the same is true in regard to methodological tools. In spite of Suyūṭī's legal maxim—that which may not be forgiven if it were an end may be forgiven as a means—the means for dealing with phenomena or the tools used for research, whch at first may not appear to be subject to cultural or religious considerations, in reality are never completely free of those considerations. Therefore the advancement of Islamic methodology will proceed through its search to establish its own philosophical foundations and its discovery of appropriate methodological tools that accord with those foundations. Certainly, the landmarks of such a methodology will be derived from the religious and cultural premises of the *tawḥīdī* episteme.

The structure of Islamic methodology in general, or what may be termed the foundations of that methodology, must be grounded in authentic scholarship rather than in the attempt to be different simply by opposing contemporary western methodology. The purpose behind developing an Islamic methodology should be the achievement of harmony between the elements of the Islamic paradigm of knowledge, regardless of any notions of rapprochement, comparison, confrontation, imitation, or whatever. In addition, such an undertaking should strive to enable the Muslim mind, through integrative methodology, to practice ijtihad and to be intellectually creative. Certainly, the construction of this methodology should be considered a major priority and an essential precondition to the four following discourses in the same way that the previous discourse should be considered an essential precondition to this discourse.

The Third Discourse: A Methodology for Dealing with the Qur'an. This element may be considered the third pillar on which the Islamization

of Knowledge stands. Development of such a methodology may require a review and reorganization of the Qur'anic sciences, even to the extent of discarding some traditional areas of study that played a role in the past. The Arab individual of the past understood the Qur'an from within the special characteristics of his/her simple and limited social and intellectual natures. Clearly, these stand in stark contrast to the nature of contemporary civilization. When the revelational sciences (those that mainly revolved around the Qur'an and the hadith) were first formalized, the dominant mentality among Muslim scholars was descriptive in nature. As a result, they concentrated on analyzing the texts from perspectives that were primarily lexical and rhetorical. Thus, at that period in Muslim intellectual history, the Qur'an was understood in terms of interpretive discourse (*tafsīr*).

At the present time, however, the dominant mentality is that of a methodological understanding of issues through disciplined research, employing criticism and analysis, into topics of significance for society and their various relationships. This requires Muslims to reconsider the disciplined means by which they are to interpret the texts of revelation and to read the books of revelation and the real–existential. The Qur'an, furthermore, needs to be liberated from the sort of interpretation that neglects the dimensions of its absoluteness and its verification, and safe-guarding, of previous revelations. Indeed, such interpretations have been susceptible to the relative, either in the form of *isrā'īliyāt* (stories and narratives based in the Jewish or Talmudic tradition and then adapted, in a variety of manners, to fit Qur'anic situations) or as *asbāb al nuzūl* (narrations concerning the specific events occasioning the revelation of Qur'anic verses).

This link to the relative did not stop at qualifying general terms by means of specific occasions, but extended even to linking the Qur'anic revelation to a specific spatial and temporal framework. The end results were clearly contrary to Islam's universality, the finality of the Prophet's mission, and the Qur'an's sovereignty, all of which require the Qur'anic text to be absolute and unqualified in its appeal to the Muslim mind of every time and place. Indeed, the Qur'an will remain forever rich in content, its wonders will never cease, its recitation will remain fresh forever, and it will continue to exceed the ability of humanity, regardless of time and place, to comprehend it completely.

The Qur'an, as the explanation of all things and a guidance, mercy, and good tiding for the Muslims (Qur'an 16:89), is the only originating source in Islam, whereas the Sunnah is an explanatory source that provides further elaboration on the meaning of the Qur'an. God has pledged to preserve the Qur'anic revelation and to clarify its meanings:

> Verily, We shall bring it together and recite it. Then, when We recite it, follow its recitation. Thereafter, shall We be responsible for its explanation. (75:17-19)

No other source of knowledge, culture, or civilization is protected by God or surrounded by so many divine pledges. As the Qur'anic text is guaranteed against alteration and distortion, its authority is complete and its sovereignty is absolute:

Whatever matter you differ over, its ultimate disposition is with Allah. (5:49)

This is why reconstructing a methodology for dealing with the Qur'an as a methodological source of knowledge for the natural and social sciences will empower those sciences to contribute effectively to human life and to the crises that are now confronting it. Such an undertaking is certain to return values to the balance of these sciences and to link them to the higher purposes for which creation was intended by its Creator.

The Fourth Discourse: A Methodology for Dealing with the Sunnah. The construction of a methodology for dealing with the Sunnah constitutes the fourth discourse in the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking. As the major source for clarification and explanation of the Qur'anic text, the nature and the role of the Sunnah must be thoroughly understood. Without the Sunnah, it would be impossible to elaborate on the methods or the lore required for making significant contributions to human society or to apply Qur'anic values to real–existent situations. The period of prophethood and the time of the Companions represented a time during which direct contact with the Messenger was possible. The Muslims of that time could know and emulate whatever he said or did. For example, he said: "Take the rites of hajj from me . . ."[8] and "Perform *ṣalāh* (prayer) as you see me perform it . . . ."

Emulation and compliance depend upon practical action, and when such action is present, no difficulties will arise in regard to application. Thus, the Prophet's deeds and words narrowed the distance between the hidden wisdom of the Qur'anic way and the existential, although they did so in terms of the particular mental, linguistic, and intellectual abilities of the people he addressed. The narrators of hadith, whose only concern was to ensure the preservation of the Prophet's every word and deed, then transmitted this information to the best of their ability, for it represented the methodology by which disputed issues could be solved via revelation. This explains the incredible magnitude of the Sunnah, which allows us to follow the Prophet in his daily actions, whether at home or away, at war or at peace, as a teacher, a judge, a leader, or a simple human being. The Sunnah further affords us the opportunity to witness and interpret how the Prophet dealt with and combined the Qur'an and the real–existential.

In addition, the Sunnah reveals the characteristics of the reality with which the Prophet had to deal. Obviously, that reality is considerably different from the reality confronting us today. This realization leads us to construct a methodology based on how the Prophet applied the teachings of revelation to real situations, rather than ones based on imitation spring-

ing from deference or taqlid. In other words, the way of true emulation is quite distinct from the way of taqlid.

The Messenger's Sunnah represents the embodiment of a methodology for applying the Qur'an to the real–existential. It is not an easy matter to comprehend many of the issues brought up by the Sunnah if one does not understand the circumstances that were prevalent at the time and place of the Prophet's mission. This is also true when one seeks to follow the Sunnah or emulate the Prophet's example, in terms of its particulars, without first constructing a methodology for emulation that is capable of systematizing the Sunnah in an objective manner by placing its particulars within a methodological framework.

For example, even though the Prophet prohibited sculpture and the graphic representation of the human form and characterized portrait artists as the most severely punished on the Day of Judgment, this should not be taken as the basis of a position toward the entire realm of aesthetics. Such a position would clash outright with the Qur'anic teachings about how the prophet Sulaymān understood the matter: the Qur'an records that he recruited the jinn to produce all manner of sculpture for him. Contemporary debates on the subject will never be resolved through recourse to historical particulars, nor will such recourse answer those who maintain that they feel no inclination to worship pictures and question why, then, there should be a prohibition on representing the human form. Certainly, particularized fatwas or legal responses that permit one sort of picture and prohibit another will solve nothing. Rather, what is required is a methodology that takes into account such elements as the Prophet's saying, made several times: "Had your tribe not been only recently involved in idolatry, I might have done . . . [this or that]."[9] At that particular time, the Prophet was seeking to abolish idolatry among a people for whom it had become a way of life and to replace it with the simplest and purest form of *tawḥīd*.

Clearly, what is required is a systematic methodology capable of regulating these issues and reading them in a disciplined manner. Using such a tool, Muslims will be able to deal with the Sunnah in a methodical manner and not merely as a collection of particularized responses to specific questions and circumstances that, all too often, are transformed by the litigious into conflicting statements, much as if they were legal opinions voiced by different imams.

During the period of Qur'anic revelation, the Arabs embraced the concept of emulation and took the Prophet as their exemplar and as the one who embodied for them a certain way, in accordance with their conditions and spatial and temporal circumstances. It was within this particular framework that the concepts of *ma'thūr* (reported) and *manqūl* (transmitted) originated. Over the course of time, the narration of hadiths continued without reference to the circumstances or situations that occasioned the events recounted or to other elements that would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of their true import. In general, hadiths were treated in the same way the texts of the Qur'an itself were treated: lexical considerations were given the greatest priority. In an attempt to

diminish the effects of this approach and to escape the confines of the strictly *ma'thūr*, some took recourse in esoteric or symbolic interpretations. These undertakings, however, only exacerbated and confused the situation further, for what was required was the construction of a systematic methodology for dealing with the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Only such a methodology would be able to consider the particulars of those texts from a comprehensive methodological perspective and in the light of Islam's higher aims and purposes.

The intellectual mentality searches constantly for a scientific ordering of issues and attempts to construct a methodology for dealing with all aspects of those issues. Within such a methodological framework, the processes of analysis, criticism, and interpretation assume a more comprehensive and penetrating role in dealing with universal and particularized phenomena. Such a methodology, while allowing for consideration of the higher purposes of the Qur'an, will liberate research from the confines of taqlid, esotericism, and attempts to graft historical applications onto present-day situations. Old solutions in new guises are still old solutions and will never engender the needed reform or serve the higher purposes of Islam's universal message.

The Fifth Discourse: Reexamining the Islamic Intellectual Heritage. Renewed attention must be given to the Islamic intellectual heritage. This treasure must be understood critically, analytically, and in a way that delivers us from the three spheres that usually influence our dealings with it: total rejection, total acceptance, and piecemeal grafting. These three spheres represent obstacles not only in the present, but for the future as well. A critical and methodologically sound reexamination of this heritage should be able to overcome these three spheres and to establish a system in which the Islamic paradigm and its methodology can deal effectively with issues that, although not the focus of study, may shed light on how the Muslim mind has dealt with social and other phenomena in the past and, therefore, on how it may deal with contemporary phenomena.

As the intellectual heritage of Islam is the product of the human mind, it is subject to the relative considerations of the when, where, and who of its origins. Even so, its links to revelation, itself above all relative considerations, make the intellectual heritage of Islam closer to the truth than intellectual traditions that do not spring from the revelation. Finally, however, it is necessary to understand our intellectual heritage as ideas, treatments, and interpretations of a historical reality that differs significantly from our own. In our reexamination, we must discern the objectives that the heritage sought to serve and then evaluate the methods used, if not the solutions suggested, for their utility in our own time and place.

The Sixth Discourse: Dealing with the Western Intellectual Heritage. If the Muslim mind is to liberate itself from the dominant paradigm and the ways in which it deals with that paradigm, it must construct a methodology for dealing with western thought, both past and present. Outright

rejection or wholesale acceptance of that paradigm, as well as the cosmetic grafting of elements without reference to a systematic methodology or to social and cultural differences, will not benefit the Muslims.

The Islamization of Knowledge Undertaking

These are the steps or, more specifically, the six discourses from which the concept of the Islamization of Knowledge may proceed. At present, we find ourselves confronted by a ubiquitous positivism that, in the name of scientific research and progress, promotes the idea that science may be served by breaking the relationship between the created and the Creator. This is accomplished, in part, by proposing ideas about existence that seem to conflict with much of our Islamic thinking. In fact, these ideas may or may not actually be inconsistent with Islamic teachings or principles.

Here, the issue is not that we should search our religious teachings for matters that seem to agree with such ideas, solely for the purpose of being able to say "we already knew about that" or to reject summarily such ideas as disbelief (*kufr*). In principle, the position of the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking toward the natural sciences is anything but ecclesiastical or an attempt to follow the examples of others. Indeed, their experience in dealing with knowledge and progress differs considerably from our own. Were the Qur'an to be considered theology and no more, then only one reading—the first one—would be permitted. That this is not the case is made clear by the fact that God has commanded us to undertake two readings. This is why we are not interested in disputing science, for we realize that the revelational truths in the Qur'anic verses (*āyāt*) are the same truths found in the signs (*āyāt*) of God's creation. If misconceptions, supposedly based on scientific principles, should appear, our duty is to reexamine or exonerate those principles.

This task is, in fact, the basis of the concept of the two readings. When, in the past, religion was challenged by purely rational and positivistic thought, it never sought to defend itself through the practical and applied sciences and the different theoretical schools that supported them. Thus Muslims, as a nation charged with guiding humanity, must reexamine science in order to deliver it from the clutches and influences of mistaken theories so that science may be used and regulated by the logic of the two readings.

The undertaking that we, as Muslim social scientists, advocate is a noble undertaking, even if some believe that it falls within the specific geographical and religious framework of Islam. In today's world, we are a part of the reaction against the invasion of the experimental and applied sciences in much the same way as our predecessors of the last two centuries reacted against the cultural invasion of the West and its emphasis on pure reason. Today's confrontation, however, is with an experimental and positivistic mentality that has rearranged the natural and social sciences. Our options are therefore limited: We may either adopt feeble dog-

matic positions or positions based on the Islamization of Knowledge, which seeks to orient and direct the natural sciences in accordance with a comprehensive Qur'anic outlook on the natural universe and, at the same time, to reconstruct the natural and social sciences in consonance with that outlook. In fact, most of the approaches found in the experimental sciences continue to be qualified by the particular rather than characterized by dimensions of the universal. The universal dimension, however, is one that is embodied by the Qur'anic revelation:

> Verily those who dispute over the signs of Allah without His vouchsafing them authority, those are the ones whose breasts are filled with naught but pride; and never will they attain what they wish. So seek refuge in Allah, the All-Hearing and All-Knowing. Verily, the creation of the heavens and earth were greater than the creation of humankind. Yet, most of humankind know not. (40:65)

The Islamization of Knowledge undertaking is both universal and Qur'anic. In the face of impetuous religiosity and the failure of modern civilization, the Qur'an stands out as the sole source qualified to direct a comprehensive methodological and intellectual undertaking that will be able to make a continued contribution to knowledge and society. The present battle of civilizations represents a trial for us in our understanding of the Qur'anic methodology and in our ability to safeguard society by means of its application to the social sciences. It is our position that, via the complementarity of the two readings, the element of balance may be restored to science, the social sciences, and society. At the present time, science has arrived at a stage in which phenomena may be reduced to infinitesimally minute or galactically expansive proportions. Phenomena may no longer be understood in the same way they were understood by our predecessors. Phenomena are commonly regarded as what used to be visible before the technological revolution opened up the worlds of microscopic and electronic sensing devices. Whereas earlier generations visualized the atomic level in terms of grains of sand, the atomic and subatomic levels of today are purely microscopic:

> So I do call to witness what you see and what you see not. (69:38-39)

Furthermore, whereas our predecessors understood time as a progression, today we understand it in terms of qualitative and classifiable—not merely quantitative—change. This essential difference is at the core of the difference between objective and rational causation, as it was understood in the past, and the scientific causation of the present.

The Islamization of Knowledge, therefore, must not be understood as idle theorization, but as an undertaking that has come to restore balance to knowledge through the two readings and to liberate human thought from the enervating clutches of ecclesiasticism and mysticism on the one

hand, and from the positivisitic framework for scientific thought, which seeks to separate the created from the Creator, on the other. Each extreme has had dreadful consequences for human life and society. The Islamization of Knowledge may be understood as a methodological and paradigmatic introduction to a worldwide societal alternative that seeks to deliver both Muslims and non-Muslims from their present crisis. Such an undertaking will obviously require a great deal of outstanding study and research, beginning with studies of the Qur'an, and carried out in the light of new understanding and perspectives. This responsibility falls to the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking and to the generations required to bring it to fruition.

Without a methodological understanding of the Qur'an (within the framework of its complete and integrative structure) to equal our methodological understanding of natural phenomena and their movement (within the framework of their particular structure), the Islamization of Knowledge will remain an impossibility. Moreover, as we attempt to explain the issue to the world, we should expect to be beset by any number of difficulties, one of them being that the present-day intellectual mentality is ill-disposed toward writs claiming the status of "revelation." In some instances, these may be tolerated by intellectuals, but only to a point. For the most part, however, the sacred and the transcendental are relegated to the domain of personal conviction, which renders anything stemming from such literature scientifically unacceptable. Thus, contemporary knowledge considers the unseen beings referred to in these books, as well as the accounts they give of the past, as contrary to positivistic history and an objective scientific understanding of the world.

Such an understanding, however, is the result of an incomplete grasp of the two readings, which have as their overall goal the comprehension of natural and real–existent phenomena guided by the higher truths of revelation, and not by a reading of these phenomena on their own. The result of such a one-sided reading will leave us in the realm of positivism and its deconstructed and relativistic ideas about existence. The danger of such a reading is that it leads to fragmented and partial, as opposed to holistic, thinking. When the two readings are allowed to complement one another, a natural progression occurs from the part to the whole—from the qualified to the absolute. Thus every rejection of the "metaphysical" or the "transcendental" is, in fact, a rejection of the first reading, that of revelation, which considers the transcendental a fundamental element in its method, not only as a matter of faith but as an indicator of a greater universal existence. This, in turn, is indicated by the second reading or that of the real–existent.

If the world is to emerge from its current crisis of thought and civilization, it needs to comprehend the natural, as well as the metaphysical, dimensions of existence in their entirety. Bringing about this awareness is the responsibility of the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking. Such an undertaking is undoubtedly as considerable as it is ambitious. Beginning with the two readings, its goal is no less than Islamizing human knowl-

edge, so that truth may prevail and guidance may become widespread. This, in summary, is a representation of the Islamization of Knowledge's raison d'être. The overall goals of the undertaking may be summarized as follows:

The First Goal: This may be understood as restoring the link between knowledge and values or, more precisely, returning knowledge to the realm of values, from which it was expelled by positivism. It is now clear to humanity that the separation of knowledge and values was a serious mistake. Any observer of the development of contemporary knowledge will notice that the intellectual output of Europe and the United States has begun to show signs of concern, in nearly every discipline, with topics related to knowledge and values. Indeed, certain postmodernist trends represent this concern, particularly in view of the complete failure of modernism and its uncompromising partition of knowledge and values. The Islamization of Knowledge undertaking seeks to make this issue one of universal concern by laying out its philosophical and strategic frameworks, providing the means necessary for its achievement, and establishing the guidelines required to connect scholars with truth rather than speculation. Therefore, efforts expended on theorizing will not be wasted on the attempt to separate knowledge from values, or the self from the subject, but on distinguishing between truth and reality as well as between suspicion and supposition. The rule in this case may be derived from the following Qur'anic verse:

And let not your dislike of a people lead you to be unjust. Be just! Surely that is closer to heeding God. (5:2)

The Second Goal: The Islamization of Knowledge undertaking also seeks to bring about an interplay and exchange between the reading of revelation and the reading of the real–existential. This is to be done in such a way that the end result will be harmony between humanity and all other elements of creation, all of whom are governed by the same natural laws (*sunan*) and strive toward the same end, namely, to worship their Creator and recite His praise. This means that the social and natural sciences will be linked, but not in the way envisioned by the so-called logic of positivism, which holds that if the social are to be considered true sciences, they must be based on the same methodology as the natural sciences.

Rather, the Islamization of Knowledge approach is to return both of these fields to a single philosophy, one that fuses and interacts with the reading of revelation while, at the same time, strives to discern the general principles regulating both sciences. This philosophy, moreover, engenders a sound understanding and respect for nature that, in turn, leads to good treatment and overall benefit rather than the environmental destruction and natural resource squandering caused by the beliefs that nature must be conquered and that the wilderness must be tamed. On the contrary, the

Islamization of Knowledge encourages humanity's interaction with nature, for the latter was created to serve the former and, in its role as a trust, is an important factor in humanity's stewardship (*istikhlāf*).

The Third Goal: Finally, the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking seeks to find solutions to the problem of ends posited by the static philosophies in which contemporary western scholarship is mired—philosophies that speak constantly of the end of history, of liberalism, of the world.[10] This is done in order to avoid answering those questions that all human philosophies, because of their refusal to consider revelation, have failed to answer, such as "what is the purpose of the universe" and "where will it end."

Marxism sought to delimit an imaginary end that was to occur when true communism would spread over the world and each individual would work according to his/her abilities and be recompensed according to his/her needs. Liberal capitalism, however, views its own success as the end of history. The Islamization of Knowledge and its proposed systems and paradigms are in no way concerned with such theatrical ends or imaginary scenarios for the continued existence of humanity and its civilization. On the contrary, the undertaking completely negates the idea of ends as an intellectual problem, preferring instead to widen its horizons, as the problem of ends is wide open and limitless. The Prophet said: "When the Last Hour comes, and one of you has a seed in his hand, then go ahead and plant it, if you can."[11] Evidently, he meant to emphasize that no one, regardless of the signs and indications, should suppose that the end has come or seek to place a limit on human life and society.

This is the Islamization of Knowledge as we understand it, in its present state of development. It is a call for a global Islamic cultural and intellectual mobilization for the purposes of rethinking the foundations of human society and then rebuilding it. The end result of this process is the realization of felicity now and in the hereafter and the rescuing of humanity from a future in which destruction looms large.

Endnotes

1. The Islamization of Knowledge, as understood by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, is a systematic methodological concept that the Institute, its branches, and representatives are attempting to develop and realize in practical terms. It appears, however, that the concept in general is one that has appealed to several different quarters and that these, in turn, have produced in its name (or in similar names they have chosen either with or without care) various publications. The Institute in no way considers itself responsible for the work done by such groups or for their views. In fact, the work they have produced fails to express the issue in terms of the methodology and comprehensiveness that characterize the Institutes's concern with it as evinced through its literature and publications.

2. These include such matters as the pillars of faith, the prescribed duties, the acts of worship, the prohibited acts and substances, or the things referred to by certain scholars as being "known to be an essential part of Islam."

3. 'Imād al Dīn Khalīl, *Madkhal ilā Islāmīyat al Ma'rifah* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1991).

4. Abū al Qāsim Ḥajj Ḥammād, *al 'Ālamīyah al Islāmīyah al Insānīyah* (Beirut: Dār al Masīrah, 1980).

5. Ḥammād, *al 'Ālamīyah*.

6. See Qur'an 12:111.

7. See Qur'an 6:38.

8. This was related by Imām Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 218, on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh.

9. This was related by al Nasā'ī in his *Sunan*, the "Book of Zakah," hadith no. 900, on the authority of 'Ā'ishah.

10. Once such an "end" is seen to have reached its end, the terminology changes to "post-." In either case, however, the emphasis remains the same [trans.].

11. Imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal related this hadith in his *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 184, on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik.