MAN, SOCIETY, AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE ISLAMIST DISCOURSE OF SAYYID QUTB

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Sayyid Qutb's conceptions of man and society inform and are themselves informed by his theory of human and divine knowledge. Our aim in this dissertation is, first, to highlight the intricate relationships between Qutb's ontology and his epistemology, and, second, to point to the active context of Qutb's discourse: how did his theory of man, society, and knowledge relate to his language of political dissent and his strategy for change and revolution? Qutb remains an enduring influence on young Muslims and has left a deep mark on the discourse of politically activist Islamism. An underlying concern that runs through our analysis will be to address the question: why is Qutb still relevant? The answer we provide highlights the inseparability between Qutb's conception of human nature, his paradigm for the just and ideal society, his theories on mundane and revealed epistemology, and his strategy for social and political reform. We shall argue that the Qutbian discourse endures because Qutb offers his co-religionists a powerfully integrated conception of the "Islamic solution" that achieves a unique blending between the values of "authenticity" and those of "modernity". Qutb's writings articulate an unapologetic "life-conception" of Islam that insisted on standing on par with other "life-conceptions"; Muslims could take pride in knowing that Islam exhorted development, but with an eye towards maintaining a "balance" between the "material" and the "spiritual", unlike communism and capitalism, which neglected "spirituality" in favor of "animal materialism"; the "Islamic conception" outlined by Qutb provided the reader with a conceptual framework within which a sophisticated critique of colonialism could be carried out. Moreover, Qutb also provided the modern Islamist with a vocabulary that gives voice to the economic and social concerns of an emerging lower middle class aspiring to fulfill its mundane dreams in modern, mid-20th century Egypt. The language Qutb used in his works was not the language of the elite intellectuals, whether Westernized modernists or traditional 'ulema. Qutb consciously articulated his thoughts in a language easily accessible to a readership literate enough to read his works, but not necessarily trained to actively penetrate the arcane corpus of the 'ulema. Upon reading Qutb and contrasting his language with that of his predecessors, it becomes clear that Qutb, more than any other thinker in the Egypt of his days, articulated a conception of Islam that consciously attempted to lay the foundations for an Islamic epistemology on the basis of a putatively Islamic ontology, denied the authority of "foreign life conceptions", claimed for Islam universal validity, asserted the active character of the "truly Muslim", decried the economic injustices which the masses were enduring, and rejected the traditional conception of the state as intrinsically benevolent. In short, his was a powerful call to merge the values of authenticity — unapologetic anti-imperialism, anti-elitism, and the insistence on the centrality of Islam — with the values of modernity — the impulse for asserting a comprehensive world-view,

the pretension to universal validity, and the positive valuation of action and change in the context of welfare liberalism beholden to the will of the people.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father. Thankfully, he lived to learn that I finished my degree.

To my father, Abulfath

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[s] Qutb, S. (1948) 1970. <u>Social Justice in Islam</u>. Translated by John B. Hardie. New York: Octagon Books.

[m] Qutb, S. (1951) 1993. *Ma'rakat al-islaam wa al-ra'smaaliyyah* Beirut, Lebanon: *daar al-shuruuq*.

[u] Qutb, S. (1951) 1983. <u>Islam and universal peace</u>. American Trust Publications.

[d] Qutb, S. (1953) 1978. *Diraasaat islaamiyyah*. Beirut, Lebanon: *daar al-shuruuq*.

[h] Qutb, S. (1960) 1974. <u>This religion of Islam</u>. Delhi, India: Markazi Maktaba Islami.

[f] Qutb, S. (1960) 1974. <u>The future belongs to this religion</u>. Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami.

[k] Qutb, S. (1962) 1980. *Khasaa'is al-tasawwur al-islaami wa muqawwimatuhu* Beirut, Lebanon: *daar al-shuruuq*.

[ke] Qutb, S. (1962) 1991. <u>The Islamic concept and its characteristics</u>. Translated by Mohammed Moinuddiin Siddiqi. Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications.

[i] Qutb, S. (1962) 1993. *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*. Beirut, Lebanon: *daar al-shuruuq*.

[t] Qutb, S. (1964) 1978. <u>Milestones</u>. Beirut, Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House.

Chapter One: Introduction

Sayyid Qutb stands today, more than thirty one years after his execution by the Egyptian Nasser government in August 1966, as a towering figure in the world of modern political Islam. [1] As Yvonne Haddad notes, "a great deal of what is being published [by Muslim revivalists] at present is either inspired by [Sayyid Qutb's] writings, plagiarized from his books, or is a commentary on his ideas." [2] Shahrough Akhavi goes so far as to claim that "Qutb's role in inspiring Islamic revivalist movements since the late 1960s might be even greater than that of Ayatollah Khomeini." [3] Qutb's writings on Islam, and especially his last major book, _Ma'aalim fi al-tariiq_ (Milestones along the path), [4] have consistently enjoyed widespread popularity and readership since their original publication in the 1950's and early 1960's. [5] Writing in a lucid and highly didactic style and in an accessible idiom that sharply contrasted with the turgid and learned language of the '_ulema_, [6] Qutb continues to strike a sensitive chord with a whole generation of young Muslims who find irresistible his message of immediate action and his unapologetic rejection of all that is "un-Islamic". [7] Qutb's execution for his alleged leadership of an underground organization left a deep impression upon many who surrounded him in his life and many more who came to read him after his death. [8] Qutb's name, when invoked by present-day Islamists sympathetic to his call, is almost always paired with the word "_shahiid_" ("martyr"). [9] Indeed, he has come to represent more

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[1] See (Abu-Rabi' 1991; Taylor 1988; Nettler 1994; Musallam 1993; Shepard 1989).
[2] See Haddad (1983, p. 81).
[3] See Shahrough (1995, p. 403).
[4] Sayyid Qutb (1964 [1983]).
[5] See Kepel (1985, pp. 36-69).
[6] Diyaab (1988).
[7] See Musallam (1990, p. 70).
[8] ibid.
[9] Shepard (1996; p. ix).

than the mere sum of his ideas and ideology, and has instead assumed the symbol of the powerless Muslim confronting the all-powerful authoritarian state.[10] As Kepel notes, even during the few years after Qutb's execution, "[a]mong the Muslim Brethren hagiography was the rule, despite the notorious differences some Brethren had had with the audacity of Signposts [Milestones]."[11] Since then, Qutb's conception of "Islamic society" (*mujtama' islaamii*) and his views on the nature of man, society, and religion, have profoundly shaped the nature of the Islamization discourse not only within Egypt and the Arab world, but throughout much of the Muslim world. [12]

To be sure, Qutb's enduring influence cannot merely be reduced to the power of his ideas or the appeal of his writing style. The symbol of Qutb "the martyr", perhaps more than the content of his ideas or the allure of his style, evokes in his followers vivid images of injustice committed by the all-powerful, iniquitous prince against the powerless, pious Muslim.[13] By the same token, however, Qutb cannot be reduced to a mere symbol of moral courage and political resistance. The attraction felt by the young reader encountering Qutb for the first time cannot be adequately explained by pointing to the tragic symbol of Qutb the martyr; we must also turn to the text itself and the context within which that text is being read. But then at once we come head-to-head with the basic hermeneutic problem of interpretation: we cannot assume that "the text" — i.e., Sayyid Qutb's corpus of work — is an epistemologically transparent and contextually invariant artifact of communication. "What Qutb meant" is itself a problematic proposition; to accept it uncritically is to assert that Qutb spoke with *one* unequivocal voice, that he maintained a consistently coherent discourse, and that Qutb himself had a

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[10] Abu-Rabii' (1996).
[11] Kepel (1985, pp. 59-60).
[12] Nettler (1994).
[13] For a striking example of Qutbian apologia, see Al-Khalidi (1991).

clear and conscious understanding of what he "meant".   More
seriously, its acceptance may rest on the assumption that the
original author — in our case, Sayyid Qutb — and his readers
share the same understanding of the context surrounding them.
That is, it may rest on the assumption that the context of
writing and the context of reading are identical. But this is
clearly an untenable proposition, especially for a writer whose
influence has stretched to societies and eras radically
different from that of the mid-20 th century Egypt in which and
for which he wrote.

    We shall turn in the last section of this chapter to a
more detailed discussion on the methodology we have adopted for
our analysis of Qutb. For now, let us begin by noting that
Qutb's enduring influence cannot be traced to one single cause.
Indeed, the central aim of this dissertation is to illustrate
precisely the intricate interconnection of Qutb's ideas and the
relationship between his thought and the material and
intellectual contexts within which he wrote. Qutb himself
offered his reader a comprehensive conception of life that
insisted on the inter-related nature of reality. In this
dissertation, our aim is to show that Qutb's theories of man and
society inform and are themselves informed by his theory of
human and divine knowledge. Part of our concern will be to
highlight the conceptual framework of Qutb's thought, but our
aim will also be to point to the active context of Qutb's text,
and more specifically, to ask how did his theory of man,
society, and knowledge relate to his language of political
dissent and his strategy for change and revolution.   Qutb
presented his co-religionists with an unapologetic "life-
conception" of Islam that insisted on standing on par with other
"life-conceptions" — Islam, it turned out from reading Qutb, is
the true universal order, not communism or capitalism; Muslims
could take pride in knowing that Islam exhorted material
development, but with an eye towards maintaining a balance
between the material and the spiritual, unlike communism and

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capitalism, which neglected spirituality in favor of "animal materialism"; the "Islamic conception" outlined by Qutb also provided the reader with a conceptual framework within which a sophisticated critique of colonialism could be carried out. Moreover, Qutb provided the reader with a vocabulary that gave voice to the economic and social concerns of an emerging lower middle class aspiring to fulfill its mundane dreams in modern, mid-20th century Egypt. The language Qutb used in his works was not the language of the elite intellectuals, whether Westernized modernists or traditional '*ulema*. Qutb consciously articulated his thoughts in a simple language easily accessible to a readership literate enough to read his works, but not necessarily trained to actively penetrate the arcane corpus of the '*ulema*. Upon reading Qutb and contrasting his language with that of his predecessors, it becomes clear that Qutb, more than any other thinker in the Egypt of his days, articulated a bold, unapologetic conception of Islam that denied the authority of "foreign life conceptions", claimed for Islam universal validity, asserted the active character of the "truly Muslim", and decried the economic injustices which the masses were enduring. In short, a call to merge the values of authenticity — unapologetic anti-imperialism, anti-elitism, and the insistence on the centrality of Islam — with the values of modernity — the impulse for asserting a comprehensive world-view, the pretension to universal validity, and the positive valuation of action and change in the context of welfare liberalism beholden to the will of the people.

On "Islamization"

In The Revenge of God, Giles Kepel advances the thesis that at least within the context of the three 'Abrahamic' religions — Islam, Christianity, and Judaism — a "renewal" in religious interest took place in the 1970s ("a decade of cardinal importance for the relationship between religion and

politics," Kepel writes). He further claims that "[t]hroughout the 1960s the link between religion and civic order seemed to grow increasingly tenuous."[14] Facing the "disaffection of the flock towards its pastors and the faith some religious institutions then strove to adapt their message to the 'modern' values of society."[15] Kepel goes on to assert that "[a]round 1975 this whole process went into reverse. A new religious approach took place, aimed no longer at adapting to secular values but at recovering a sacred foundation for the organization of society." In the case of Europe, the mission was now the "second evangelization of Europe"; in the case of Islam, it was "no longer to modernize Islam but to 'Islamize modernity'."[16] In Kepel's reading, whether Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, the "phenomenon" of religious "resurgence" and the new relationship between religion and politics can be best explained within a "context of worldwide discrediting of modernism that was the hallmark of the 1970s."[17]

Kepel's conclusions are indeed disappointing coming from a scholar who "spent a dozen years in observing present-day Islam in the field."[18] To begin with, Kepel is well aware that Islam as a source of political and social action has never truly subsided: in Egypt, for instance, the very Islamic groups that "erupted" on the scene in the 1970s were the direct historical descendants of Hasan Al-Banna's Muslim Brotherhood of the 1930s. Recent history teaches the basic lesson that Islamism — i.e., the injection of Islam in society and politics, whether by the state or by popular movements — is not a sudden phenomenon, but one that ebbed and flowed depending on immediate political machinations that exerted large amounts of energy in alternatively suppressing it and promoting it.[19] Second, Kepel

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[14] Kepel (1994, p. 1).
[15] ibid.
[16] ibid., p. 2.
[17] ibid., p. 3.
[18] Ibid., p. 2.
[19] See Beinin, Joel and Joe Stork (1997, pp. 8-10).

has little reason to assert that the "resurgence" of religion in the context of Islam and that of "Europe" is essentially the same. Kepel may very well be correct in his proposition that the "second evangelization of Europe" is a reaction against "the irresistible trend towards secularization" (although his categories of "Europe" and "secularization" beg analysis), but he is surely mistaken to propose that the Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamic groups turned to Islam out of disappointment with "modernism". As Kepel himself shows in an earlier monograph, the promises of modernization were never delivered in any significant degree to the average Egyptian, let alone delivered in the same sense that they were delivered to the European.[20] If Islamists did indeed turn to Islam out of disappointment, it must have therefore been out of a disappointment with the *failure of delivering* on the promises of modernism, not because "modernism had failed", as Kepel suggests.

Kepel would have been more accurate if he had directed his comments on "revival" not to putatively dormant religious feelings but to scholarship on religion in general and Islam in particular. Indeed, the phenomenon of the "Islamic resurgence" (or, as its is more commonly called, "Islamic fundamentalism") has attracted the attention of scholars and specialists at least since the late 1960's and early 1970's,[21] but the last twenty years or so (beginning with Kepel's "decade of cardinal importance for the relationship between religion and politics," i.e., the 1970s) have witnessed a veritable rush of books and articles concerned with the "resurgence of Islam" as a social and political force in Muslim societies.[22] To appreciate the nature of the change that has taken place in the field over the past two decades, however, one must go beyond a crude gloss over the number of publications on the subject.

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[20] Kepel (1985).
[21] Mitchell (1969); Berger, Morroe (1970).
[22] Esposito (1983); Choueiri (1990); Esposito (1995).

The notion that Islam can be a mobilizing force for social and political change has only recently come to be fully recognized.[23] Drawing from preconceptions and biases of late 19th century and early 20th century Orientalism, scholars have for a long time approached the study of Muslim societies armed with the following two premises: first, the religion of Islam represents the main obstacle to modern progress and development, and, second, "modern progress and development" can be defined only in the vocabulary and values of Western European liberal secularism.[24] In rejecting Orientalist positions, many non-Orientalist scholars have correspondingly formulated a double retort: not only is Islam not *a priori*, static, and anti-progressive,[25] it possesses the capacity to provide disenchanted, indigenous Muslims with an authentically homegrown framework for change that challenges and rejects the assimilationist vocabulary of modernism.[26] While many Orientalists blamed Islam and Islamic jurisprudence for the "backwardness" of the Muslim world, non-Orientalist scholars pointed to contingent phenomena as causes of Muslim weakness. The former invoked the essence of Islam, the latter the accident of history. Correspondingly, two recommendations for the reform of Muslim society presented themselves: an essentialist proposal that posited as pre-requisite to any future possible social and economic development a separation between religion and politics;[27] and a historicist proposal that suggested a more nuanced material, political and economic rehabilitation program grounded on an inclusive accounting of the local realities of Muslims' conditions. [28]

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[23] Babeair (1991).

[24] According to the French sociologist Raymond Charles, "Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is an obstacle to free thought, social change and economic development." Quoted in Abu-Hudaba, Abd Al-Wahaab "*Al-hayaat a ijtimaaiyyah kamaa sawwarahaa bad al-mustashriqiin*", in Saabir, Muhyi Al-Diin and Al-Rashiid, Muhammad Al-Ahmad (1985) *manaahij al-mustashriqiin fii al-diraasaat al-arabiyya al-islaamiyya*; p 147.

[25] Shariati (1987).

[26] Al-Qaradaawii (1985).

[27] Hanafi (1970).

[28] Binder (1988).

The field as it stands today has, by and large, abandoned the essentialist approach and has come to analyze the situation of Muslims in the light of historical and local circumstances. However, a new divide has now emerged, this time between two perceptions of the nature and causes of the current Islamic "resurgence". The first explains the "resurgence" in what might be characterized as "socio-psychological" terms. It acknowledges the socio-economic and political context within which the "resurgence" is taking place, but at the same time, it explains the rallying power of the call for a "return to Islam" in terms of a society-wide escapism that seeks to soothe the desperation and despondency of the masses through self-glorifying slogans and impossible promises of an unattainable utopia.[29] On this view, the "resurgence" of Islam is a pathological phenomenon that can be cured as soon as the requisite reforms are undertaken to eliminate the causes that have driven the Muslim world to their state of despair. [30]

The second view on the "Islamic resurgence" reserves judgment on the "naturalness" or otherwise of a "return to Islam". Here, usually, an explicit distinction is drawn between the phenomenon of Islam's "resurgence" at the popular and cultural levels, and the various Islamically inspired political movements, the so-called Islamic "activists" or "fundamentalists".[31] Therefore, it is held that along with economic, social, and political upheavals, Muslims are also undergoing a cultural "identity crisis". [32] A return to Islam on this view cannot be explained simply as a reaction triggered by intolerable living conditions. One must also view this "resurgence" as the indigenous solution to the perceived threat

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[29] Qureshi (1983).
[30] Fukuyama (1992). Fukuyama writes: "The current revival of Islamic fundamentalism, touching virtually every country in the world with a substantial Muslim population, can be seen as a response to the failure of Muslim societies generally to maintain their dignity vis-a-vis the non-Muslim West"; pp. 235-6.
[31] Choueiri (1990).
[32] Esposito (1995).

posed by an ineluctable infiltration of Western norms and values.[33] Along the political dimension, the Islamic "resurgence" is held to owe its success to the viability of Islam as an effective vehicle of dissent. If Muslims have turned to Islam in time of turmoil, it is because Islam has proven to be the only medium through which the entrenched political establishment can be truly challenged from the grass roots level.[34]

The "socio-psychological" reading on the origins of Islamic movements by and large prevails within the European and US foreign policy circles.[35] In academia, however, the consensus seems to converge towards the second, more discerning view. No doubt this has occurred thanks, at least in part, to a greater involvement of Muslims themselves in the debate and the articulation of the narrative on "the resurgence of Islam". But, in addition, if the "resurgence of Islam" today has not been systematically dismissed as a pathology, it is partly because the assumptions that informed the Orientalist view have themselves suffered a severe re-evaluation. Modernism as an ideology of development, resting on the twin pillars of creeping secularism and the spread of the scientific spirit and functional instrumentalism, has for quite some time now been waging a rearguard battle.[36] The worldwide "resurgence" of religion as a social and political force at the close of the 20th century[37] has all but refuted the functionalist prediction that religion would out of necessity lose its meaning and relevance as society crosses a critical threshold of development and differentiation.[38] At the same time, science and technology themselves, the putative cornerstones of modernist ideology and rhetoric, have come under sophisticated scrutiny. The idealist

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[33] Huntington (1993); Ahmad (1983).

[34] Burgat (1993); Taylor (1988).

[35] See for example Pelletreau, Robert H., Jr., Daniel Pipes and John L. Esposito (1994).

[36] Ezrahi (1990); Lindblom (1993).

[37] Lawrence (1989).

[38] Bell (1973). Bell himself revises his functionalist optimism in Bell (1976.

image enjoyed by science — i.e., the conception that "progress" in scientific knowledge is determined by purely intellectual effort and ingenuity -- has been seriously undermined by studies that insist on examining the activities of scientists and technologists with the same critical lenses through which all other social phenomena are studied. [39] The notion that science is essentially and primarily informed by pure thought and ideas, and that therefore the activities of the scientist in his or her quest for knowledge are of little interest to the sociologist (but of interest to the historian of ideas, whose task is be reduced to piecing together puzzles and tracing relationships between ideas and theories) [40] has been belied by many historians, sociologists and anthropologists of science who have come to conclude that, indeed, the very course of scientific research and the ideas that are commonly attributed to an imagination unsullied by the course of daily human life, undergo the same manipulations, pressures, and negotiations prevalent in the rest of social activity. [41] In this intellectual atmosphere, therefore, it has become increasingly difficult to assert categorically that the re-emergence of religion to a position of social prominence is a manifestation of atavistic anti-rationalism. [42]

Islamization and scientific modernity

        The negative assessment of the Islamic "resurgence" endures still, however. According to the late Algerian writer Rachid Mimouni, "fundamentalism is the enemy of intellectuals and culture. Its discourse appeals to the passions rather than

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[39] Bloor (1976).

[40] The founder of the sociology of knowledge as a distinct discipline, Karl Mannheim, exempted mathematics and the natural sciences from his field of scrutiny. See, Mannheim, Karl (1936).

[41] In the history of science, the contextualized reading of the history of science was ushered in earnest with the publication of Kuhn (1962 [1970]). In the anthropology of scientific knowledge production, two notable early works are Latour, Bruno and Steve Woolgar (1979); Knorr-Cetina, Karin (1980); Latour, Bruno (1987).

[42] Gellner (1992).

to reason, to instinct rather than to intelligence." [43] As'ad Abu
Khalil, on his part, contrasting "fundamentalists" with
"classical Islamic scholars", accuses "the political literature
of modern Islamic fundamentalists [of manifesting] a fear of
reason". "The celebration of reason in the Islamic/Arab
heritage," he complains, "differs markedly from the denigration
of reason that characterizes contemporary Islamic fundamentalist
literature."[44] Another Algerian writer, Rachid Boudjedra, goes
even further in his Le Fis de la haine and passionately declares
that "the West... is by and large an entity that supports us,
that rejects any form of fundamentalism, no matter where it may
come from. Artists, thinkers, humanists, men and women of good
will and of sound judgment are with us, against the [Islamists
of the] FIS; they are with us who are also men of good will, who
champion progress and modernization, who are open toward the
world and towards the universe...."[45] Small wonder, then, that,
science and technology, in the eyes of many still the symbols
and legacies par excellence of modern Western civilization,[46] are
declared by the "progressive" quarters within the Muslim world
to be under the direct assault of Islamic "obscurantism". The
argument is often advanced that should Islamists eventually come
to have a say in governing, science and technology, already in a
disastrous state within the Muslim world, will be dealt their
deadly last fatal blow. According to the late Mohammed Abdus
Salam, the only Muslim scientist Nobel laureate, Islamists are
nothing more than "men (without spiritual pretensions) who claim
to interpret the Holy Qur'an, issue excommunication fatwas...
and give their view on all subjects — politics, economics, law —

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[43] "Comme tous les mouvements populistes, l'integrisme est ennemi des intellectuels et de la culture.Son
discours fait appel a la passion plutot qu'a la raison, a l'instinct plutot qu'a l'intelligence." Mimouni
(1992 p. 51).

[44] AbuKhalil (1994 pp. 687-88).

[45] "L'Occident, c'est aussi, dans sa majeur partie, une entite qui nous soutient, qui refuse tout
integrismed'ou qu'il vienne. Artistes, savants, humanistes, hommes et femmes de bonne volonte et de bon
sens, ils sont contre le FIS. Avec nous qui sommes aussi des hommes de bonne volonte, de progres, de
modernite, ouverts sur le monde et sur l'univers, atteints de cette maladie rare mais combien salutaire: la
passion de l'homme." Boudjedra (1992, pp. 95-96).

[46] Tibi (1993, pp. 73-102).

in their Friday sermons." If science and technology are to prosper in the Muslim world, he warns, the politicization of Islam "should be stopped."[47]

The consensus currently holding among observers of the state of science and technology in the Muslim world today is perhaps best expressed in the words of Abdus Salam. "There is no question," he observes, "but today, of all civilizations on this planet, science is the weakest in the lands of Islam."[48] Beyond this negative basic assessment, however, sharp disagreements persist on both the causes that have led to this state of affairs and the remedies necessary to rescue Muslims from their scientific and technological underdevelopment. At least three broad positions can be identified, which I tentatively characterize here as "normative", "structural", and "indigenous".

The normative position implicitly mirrors the Orientalist point of view outlined above, but explicitly takes as its starting point what it considers to be the reluctance of Muslims to approach the world with the requisite "scientific frame of mind."[49] Here, "Muslims" are accused en masse of either having remained passive and submissive in the face of the challenges of scientific modernization and infiltration of Western imperialism, clinging instead to static tradition,[50] or of rallying behind the fanatic reactionaries of "Islamic fundamentalism", who seek nothing less than the banishment of rationality from Muslim society.[51] In its extreme pro-science

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[47] Hoodbhoy (1991, pp. xi-xii).

[48] ibid. p. 28.

[49] Hoodbhoy, Pervez (1991).

[50] Rahman (1982).

[51] Qureshi (1983). In his The failure of political Islam, Olivier Roy in many instances exhibits a startlingly Orientalist reading of Islamism. In a section titled "Rejecting methodology, Rejecting the Modern University", Roy explains that the "general protest against school and university exams" (a proposition he leaves woefully unsubstantiated) "implies the rejection of access to knowledge as a compelled, normalized reading process. The exam simultaneously denies self-proclamation, the figure of the master, and the image of knowledge as truth founded in transcendency. On an exam, the relationship to knowledge is analytic and presupposes a graduated progression that can be measured in years. The

and pro-technology form, this position holds that "[m]odernity is a goal to be struggled for; it is intrinsic to man's rational nature and not to a colonial import."[52] Moreover, "[m]odernity and science go together in our age, and science is the supreme expression of man's rationality."[53] The way to salvation, according to this position, is to adopt the norms and values of the scientific and technological culture. In its less extreme manifestation, this position proposes that "an Islam rethought, reformulated, and revitalized can respond to the modern, rationalized conscience to the extent that it associates itself with new dimensions of effectivity and reason."[54] Often, the educational system is targeted as a strategically crucial point of reform. Placing the blame on a tradition that promotes unreflective imitation and leaning by rote and discourages, or at least is unable to instill, original thinking, the solution offered lies in radical educational reform.[55]

Related to the normative position is the structural view that shifts attention to the material and structural condition of Muslim societies. According to the proponents of this view, underdevelopment is a consequence of government policies that have, by and large, neglected to build the economic and industrial infrastructures essential for the establishment of a genuinely techno-scientific society.[56] On this view, the structuralists regard religion as an obstacle to progress. At best, Islam is reduced to a religious "ethic" and removed from the socio-political front the better to facilitate the firm grounding of scientific and technological roots of modern

rejection of examination is a challenge not to the notion of the progressive acquisition of knowledge (nothing is more gradual than a Sufi initiation), but rather to the idea that knowledge can be decomposed, classified — in short, that it is a process of reduction not grasped all at once as a whole," pp. 98-9. It does not occur to Roy that perhaps the rejection of the exam, when it is rejected, is a manifestation of a more mundane protest against the general injustice of the educational system, and that a student rejecting the legitimacy of the exam is merely exerting what little power he has against a system he deems unjust.

[52] Hoodbhoy, Pervez (1991, p. 136).
[53] ibid.
[54] Djait (1974, pp. 126-27).
[55] Daud (1989).
[56] Tibi (1988).

society.[57] But unlike the normativists, structuralists reject the notion that scientific and technological rehabilitation in the Muslim world can be achieved through a normative reform. On the contrary, the belief is that "[o]nly a normative Westernization of society, not a structural transformation in the sense of industrialization, has taken place. Pre-colonial, traditional social structures no longer exist but have been dissolved into structurally deformed social constructions, which in the disciplines of international relations and sociology of development are termed 'structures of underdevelopment'." [58] The solution, then, is a massive structural overhaul of Muslim society and the adoption and replication of Western economic, social, and political models to bring about a congruence between internalized norms underlying social structures.

The third viewpoint contrasts sharply with the previous two. Here, the blame for the state of Muslims is placed not on the norms or habits prevalent in Muslim societies, or on "underdeveloped structures", but on scientific and technological instrumentalism itself. "The fact that science and technology in its present form did not develop in Islam is not a sign of decadence," insists Sayyed Nasr, a leading proponent of this view, "but the refusal of Islam to consider any form of knowledge as purely secular." [59] Here also we can find a spectrum of opinions. In its strong form, the "indigenous" position invokes a new form of essentialism, where the Islamic worldview is held to have worked within the collective subconscious of Muslim society against the infiltration of the secular spirit of modern science and technology. A metaphysical and irreconcilable disjunction is therefore stipulated between the Muslim psyche's conception of life and the worldview quietly smuggled in within Western scientific knowledge. If science and technology have not spread, it is only because for such an

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[57] Arkoun (1988).

[58] Tibi (1988, p. 43).

[59] Hoodbhoy (1991; p. 50).

infiltration to be successful, a fundamental cultural metamorphosis must take place, i.e., the shedding of Muslims of their Muslim identity. The remedy, then, lies in an Islamization of knowledge: i.e., the grounding of knowledge on Islamic principles.[60]

The political context of Islamization

The long-standing Islamization of modern Muslim society debate offers the science and technology researcher a unique, real-life case where the relationship between the epistemological and the political can be vividly highlighted and brought to the foreground in its full and startling complexity. The effort to Islamize modern society — i.e., to somehow reconcile "modernity" and "Islam" (whatever the terms may be taken to mean) is at once an epistemological challenge, a political gambit, a cultural move of self-assertion, and a direct assault against the notion that modernization is uniform and context free. To believe in the possibility of Islamizing the modern is to affirm that humans, through conscious effort, can shape what they know, and what they can know. It is a rejection of the notion that knowledge is merely discovered, rather than produced by humans through effort, exertion, and the cooperation of humans with each other and with the machines and the structures they build around them. Paradoxically, then, what at first may seem to be an anti-humanistic effort — the infusion of the sacred (Islam) into the profane (modernity) — is in essence a deeply humanistic enterprise: the effort that the Muslim is to undertake is one of interpretation, of self understanding. What does it mean to be a Muslim? What does it mean to act in an Islamically informed way? How is the Qur'an relevant to what surrounds me today,

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[60] Anees (1987); Sardar (1985).

now, here in this perplexing world? How am I to apply the lessons of the Prophet in my everyday situations? Not that these questions have only now begun to be asked by Muslims. [61] On the contrary, Islam, in the various forms it has come to assume, has maintained through the centuries a central position within the Muslim ethos. But what is worth noting about the contemporary context, and especially about the last two decades or so, is a decided devolution of religious authority from the established clergy (*'ulema*) and the charismatic mystical master (*sayyid*), to the lay person. [62] Indeed, Gellner's eternal swinging pendulum back and forth between an "emotional Islam" of the masses and a "pharisaic Islam" of the urban orthodoxy seems to have been disrupted, and with this disruption, the spell of Muslims' long standing quietist submission seems to have been broken. [63] Up to the end of the seventies, and prior to the Iranian revolution, one may have argued that the pendulum may have indeed stopped, but that it was now resting — and in fact, had been resting for decades, and would continue motionless — on the side of an orthodoxy closely allied with a powerful state — a state rendered more authoritative thanks to the instruments and the rhetoric of modernity. [64] Bernard Lewis, for example, argued in 1976 that "Islam is a very powerful but still an undirected force in politics.... [T]he lack of an educated modern leadership has so far restricted the scope of Islam and inhibited religious movements from being serious contenders for power." [65]   Since then, however, events within the Muslim world, most spectacularly in Iran, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Jordan, and even traditionally quiet Morocco, [66] have come to prove such analyses and predictions wrong. The cohabitation (since they have really always existed

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[61] Esposito (1995).

[62] See, Abu-Rabi' (1996, p. 5); Roy (1994, pp. 89-107).

[63] Gellner (1970-71).

[64] Binder (1988, p. 81).

[65] Lewis (1976).

[66] Burgat (1993). For a general overview, see Bagder (1994).

side by side) of "High" Islam and "Low" Islam [67] (to borrow
Gellner's vocabulary) seems to have come to a new defining
moment: a young and educated modern leadership has emerged, and
has come to challenge, peacefully and militantly, the status-quo
power structure and its sustaining political culture. [68] And what
marks this new leadership (as well as the movement it
represents) is its combination of a call to retrieve a
putatively buried original orthodoxy (the Medina's early
incarnation of Islam's true spirit) with a new breed of
populism, inverting the old equations and identifications:
mystical Islam, the masses' version of Islam, is cast aside for
a purer, simpler, more faithful, and therefore more orthodox,
version of the creed, while at the same time the religious
establishment, the standard bearer of orthodoxy, is fingered and
derided for its violation of Islam's basic essence as the
religion of Justice, for its collaboration , and its officious
role as legitimator of the powerful against the powerless.

At the same time, on the individual level — the domain
where the mystical *sayyid* ruled — Islam seems to be shifting
away from its status as static, stable and permanent tradition
to a new role of a dynamic authority with which the Muslim is
to consult, one on one and collectively, to answer the pressing
mundane problems of everyday life. With this new orientation
towards their religion, Muslims have come to view Islam not
merely as the mainstay of who they are, but also as the
legislator and the vehicle of what they do and what they should
do to solve their problems, whether emotional, intellectual, or
political. Islam then becomes a world-view, in the full meaning
of the term, as well as a modus operandi, rather than a
confined perspective; Islam becomes an encompassing whole that

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[67] Gellner (1992).

[68] Abu-Rabi' (1996, p. 4). One must also not neglect to mention that the old Orientalist tradition, the
ancestor of the binary view of Islam, that considers Islam as a monolithic bloc, qualitatively antithetical
to another opposing bloc, the "West", still survives, even within the world of academia. For one of its
more vociforous manifestations, see Perlmutter (1992). For counter-arguments against uni-dimensional
characterizations of Islam, see Al-Azmeh (1993). For a discussion on the emerging new generation of
educated Islamists, see Marty and Appleby (1992, pp. 129-210).

insinuates itself into the profane and asserts its relevance upon all aspects of life, rather than one point of view restricted within a well delimited field of action and thought. Inevitably, then, questions were bound to be raised on the relationship between what Muslims believe and what they know, and between what they know and what they should do. The epistemological challenge against the *ulema* has gone hand in hand with the emergence within the Muslim of a political conscience. The first truly organized Islamic grass root movement, the Egyptian *Ikhwaan* (Muslim Brotherhood) in the early 1930s, represented both a confrontation against the *'ulema* order and a protest against social and political inequality in Egypt at the time.[69] Since then, the Islamic world has been rocked repeatedly with chronic insistence from dispossessed Muslims demanding economic justice and political representation. This outcry has manifested itself most spectacularly through what has come to be commonly called "Islamic fundamentalism". In this climate of strife and persistent stagnation, issues over who knows what and who has the right to dictate what needs to be done have remained at the center of debate among Muslims. The *'ulema*, with their close ties with the power elite, have seen their popular legitimacy erode and their political relevance greatly diminished. At the same time, those voices among Muslims that identified the State and the elite, with their long-standing self-identification with colonial culture, as the primary enemy of the dispossessed Muslim, saw their audiences surge in numbers and in energy.[70] Within this context, ambiguity and midway positions have found no ground to stand on: the *'ulema* and the State have felt directly threatened by the emerging popular protest and have understood that their survival (sometimes literally) could be sustained only with a radical elimination of the challenge; the challengers, on their part, growing more and more convinced that the *'ulema* and the State were agents, or at least puppets in the hands, of foreign and

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[69] Kepel (1984). For insight on the *'ulema* class, see Hourani (1991).
[70] Kepel (1984).

anti-Islamic powers, have adopted increasingly radical demands for political revolution. The mix of the two extreme voices has produced a highly charged political context where the distinction between policy and politics has all but been obliterated. To adopt a policy line is to affiliate oneself, willy-nilly, with a political orientation, and vice versa. Within the European and the American contexts, this latter proposition may serve a useful point of departure for academic debate — how much of what goes under the guise of instrumental policy is politically motivated? What are the rhetorical strategies of concealment used by the politician, the scientist, the journalist, the propagandist, to hide the political character of his actions and pronouncements? And so forth. In the context of Islamic countries (and Third World nations in general), the relationship between policy and politics is a starkly trivial reality: one is always painfully aware of the under-girding (and always parasitic) power dialectic beneath every and all questions of policy. No question may be legitimately asked — whether it is over the problem of "overpopulation" or whether it pertains to the proliferation of television satellite dishes — without delineating the political dimensions that surround it, inform it, and ultimately shape its resolution.[71]

Sayyid Qutb's political and intellectual contexts

Sayyid Qutb Ibhaahiim Husayn Shaadhilii was born in September 10th, 1906 in the village of *Musha* in the *Asyuut* district, some 235 miles south of Cairo. He was a second child, and a first male born. At the age of six, Qutb was sent to a modern primary school (*madrasa*) instead of the more traditional Qur'anic school (*kuttaab*). Qutb's awareness of Western ideas, his contact with nationalist and anti-British feelings, and his

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[71] Hourani (1993, pp. 144-5).

intimate familiarity with the traditions and practices of village life can be traced to the earliest days of his childhood.   His father, Al-Haajj Qutb Ibraahiim, was a delegate of the nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil's National Party and thanks to his subscription to the party journal, _Al-liwaa_' (<u>The Standard</u>), Qutb came to gain a political awareness of the colonial dimension of the Egyptian condition. By the age of ten, not unlike bright students of his age at the time, Qutb had committed the Qur'an to memory. Four years later, in 1920, Qutb left _Musha_ to continue his education and joined his maternal uncle Ahmad Husayn 'Uthmaan in Cairo. Through the latter, Qutb came in contact with the liberal nationalist Wafd party and fell under the influence the secular literati of the liberal Egypt of the 20's and 30's.   Most notably, Qutb developed a close relationship with the influential Wafdist journalist and literary critic, 'Abbaas Mahmuud Al-'Aqqaad, and became one of his most ardent disciples. It was Al-'Aqqaad's brand of criticism and literary style that shaped Qutb's sensitivities as a man of letters (_adiib_).   In 1929, Qutb entered _Daar Al-'Uluum_, in which he distinguished himself as a first-rate literary critic and a devout defender of Al-'Aqqaad's new school of poetry, _Diiwaan_. By the age of twenty six, in 1932, Qutb had published his first serious literary work: The <u>Mission of the poet in life and the poetry of the present generation </u>. In 1933, he graduated from _daar Al-'Uluum_ with a bachelor degree in Education, Arabic Language and Literature. During the next six years, Qutb worked as an elementary school teacher in government schools, after which he was transferred to the Ministry of Education, where he worked in various capacities, but mainly as an advisor to the ministry on cultural issues and as a school inspector. During his years in the Ministry, Qutb began to write on social and political matters. By 1945, Qutb had taken his distance from partisan politics, and began to make his mark as a nationalist and a social agitator on the intellectual scene.   In 1948, Qutb was sent abroad by the Ministry of Education to "study the curriculum of American universities".

In reality, it appears that Qutb's outspoken publications, and especially his 1948 book <u>Social justice in Islam</u> had displeased the Palace, which had intended to incarcerate Qutb but had yielded to the intervention of Qutb's connections within the Wafd party on his behalf. Instead, Qutb was sent to America for an indefinite period of time.

According to Salaah Al-Khaalidii, it was on the liner taking him from Alexandria to New York that Qutb "rediscovered" Islam. Not that Qutb had rejected his faith or had openly challenged it. But during his years of youth in Cairo, his love for literature and criticism, and later his political and social concerns, had distracted him from his religion. "I felt like a small speck in the immense ocean," Qutb is quoted to have said during his sudden crisis of religious consciousness, "among the crashing waves and the infinite blue surrounding us. And nothing but the will of God and his solicitation, and the laws He laid down for the universe, could have guaranteed the safe passage of that small speck among the terrible ocean waves." [72] We will let pass here the question of whether Al-Khaalidii's account of Qutb's sudden religious conversion is accurate or exaggerated. On Al-Khalidii's view, Qutb rejected America and returned to the faith even before he set eyes on the other side of his journey, "the land of lust, desire, and the forbidden." [73] But what is clear is that by the time Qutb returned from his exile in America in 1951, his commitments to Islam and his rejection of "materialist" culture were explicit and fully articulated. His rejection of American society was apparently so sanguine that the Ministry of Education forced him to resign from his post.

According to Kepel, it was not long after his return, late in 1951, that a Muslim Brother, Saalih 'Ashmaawii, recruited Qutb to the Muslim Brotherhood. "I was born in 1951," Qutb is

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[72] Al-Khaalidii (1986, p. 22).
[73] ibid.

quoted to have said later. Al-Khaalidii, however, explicitly rejects Kepel's claim and asserts that it was not until 1953 that Qutb officially joined the Brotherhood.[74] Whether Qutb joined the Brotherhood in 1951 or 1953, what is clear is that during the few months before and after the July 26, 1952, Free Officers' coup, Qutb did hold various consultations with the Nasser camp. The latter, obviously, sought the support of the popular Brotherhood (then, in its hey day, claiming around two million adherents[75]) with whom Qutb had established a tight (whether official or not) relationship, while Qutb and the Brotherhood, hoped to prepare the ground for a state-sponsored thorough Islamization of the Egyptian educational system in particular, and Egyptian society in general.[76] But the partnership was short-lived. By early 1954, Qutb was sent to jail along with the Brotherhood's Supreme Guide (*al- murshid al-'aam*), Hasan Al-Hudhaybii and "thousands" of Musim Brothers on charge of "engaging in dangerous activities, menacing national unity, threatening the peace, and entertaining illicit contact with the British and plotting with them against the nation."[77] Qutb's first incarceration lasted a mere three months. But not more than six months later, on October 26th of that same year, 1954, an assasination attempt on the life of Gamal Andel-Nasser was attributed to a Muslim Brother, Mahmoud 'Abdul-Latiif. The incident, whether or not staged by the Nasser security apparatus,[78] provided Nasser with the perfect occasion to clamp down on a mass movement that was increasingly slipping out of his control. And indeed, Sayyid Qutb, along with thousands of Brotherhood members and sympathizers were rounded up and jailed. On July 13, 1955, after a hasty trial, Qutb was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor. Qutb remained in prison until May 1964, when he was released upon the intervention of the president of Iraq, 'Abd Al-Salaam 'Aarif. Less than one year

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[74] Al-Khaalidii (1986, p. 324).
[75] Mitchell (1969).
[76] Yunus (1995, pp. 152-176).
[77] Al-Khaalidii (1986, p. 345).
[78] Kepel (1985, p. 41).

later, however, on August 30 th, 1965, addressing an audience of Arab students in Moscow, Nasser announced that his security services had uncovered a plot hatched by the Muslim Brotherhood against the state. Mass arrests once again followed, and again Sayyid Qutb was arrested, but this time on the serious charge of leading the violent overthrow of the government. He was sentenced to death, along with two of his companions, and hanged on August 29 th, 1966.

The prison ordeal and the terrible years of torture suffered by Qutb in Nasser's camps are crucial in understanding Qutb's thought. Indeed, five of the eight works Qutb wrote between 1951 and 1966 were written in prison. A charting of his ideas from 1948 — the year he started writing exclusively on Islamic topics[19] — to 1966, clearly displays a marked hardening in his views on Islamic reform from a position of gradualism and piecemeal negotiation with he prevalent order, to one that rejected any compromise with the prevailing status quo, political, social, or otherwise.[79] In this conflict between, on the one hand, Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood and on the other the Egyptian Nasser regime, the meaning of modernization occupied center stage. What did it mean to modernize Egypt? What did modernization entail, and how was this modernization to be achieved? Needless to say, the answers proposed by Qutb and his followers diverged sharply from those of Nasser's agenda. The former protested that the modernization proposed by Nasser worked to marginalize and further enfeeble an already perilously weakened Islam,[80] insisting that successful rehabilitation had to begin and end with the grounding of all society on Islamic principles.[81] Nasser, on the other hand, denounced Qutb's and the

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[79] Sivan (1985, 40, 48).

[80] As Sivan notes, "the [Muslim Brotherhood of yore was quite preoccupied with 'indigenous evils' such as the then-called 'Westernization' of schools and laws. Yet, even this type of challenge... underwent a quantitative and qualitative change on the 1950s and 1960s. The doubling in size of the school system during the first decade of the military regime meant that cohorts of youths... were exposed to a modern curriculum, including a Pan-Arab version of history.... Religious instruction shrank in scope and quality in elementary and high school, its place taken by civics and family planning education." ibid., p.51.

[81] Musallam (1993, p. 70); Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 85).

Brotherhood's opposition to his program as a rejection of the progressive and the modern.

Qutb's discourse, however, was by no means exclusively informed by the parameters of a two-way dialogue between, on the one hand, the voices of secular modernism, as embodied in Nasser and secular nationalism, and those of Brotherhood Islamism. The answers Sayyid Qutb formulated to the problem of social reform of Muslim society stood also in notable contrast to the language of late nineteenth, early twentieth century Islamic reformism (*islaah*). The latter adopted a discourse that heavily emphasized the compatibility between Islam and the scientific-technological world-view, as they understood them. They went to great lengths "proving" that Islam was not only not inimical to the modern "scientific spirit", but that in fact it wholeheartedly embraced and encouraged them. In doing this, the early reformers were grappling with two forces they viewed as destructive of a weak and vulnerable Muslim world at the time: the static traditionalism of the ' 'ulema — the orthodox clergy — and the infiltration of the colonial into Muslim lands. To rescue Islam from the "static backwardness" of the former and to check the spread of Western powers, early reformers such as Jamal Al-Diin Al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Mohammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) directed their energies to the promotion of scientific knowledge and technological know-how in the Muslim world. Without the latter, and the power and strength they bestowed upon their possessor, these reformers were convinced, Muslims were incurring what they perceived to be the imminent prospect of total annihilation — both, cultural and physical — at the hands of the mighty colonial occupiers.[82]

Sayyid Qutb, writing some forty years later, faced a fundamentally different set of circumstances. Britain the invader no longer represented the invincible behemoth of half a

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[82] Badawi (1978); Kedourie (1966); Keddie (1968).

century ago, but a weakened villain whose pinnacle as a world dominator had passed.[83] After the Free Officer's Coup of 1952 in Egypt and the overthrow of King Faruq's monarchy, Egypt found itself at a watershed moment in its history as a nation: which of the various identities was it to embrace: the Arab nationalism of the Nasserits, the brand of Islamism advanced by Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood, or some other alternative? In his books and writings, Sayyid Qutb relentlessly called for the adoption of Islam as the basis of the modern Egyptian state and formulated his program through a discourse that starkly contrasted with the defensive tone characteristic of early reformers. While the latter devoted a great part of their arguments to apologetics and to showing "compatibility" between Islam and modernization (by this in effect promoting modernization, rather than defending Islam, since it was science that needed defense at the time, rather than Islam[84]), Qutb made it a point to always place himself on the offensive. This fundamental difference between present-day Islamic activists and earlier reformers is most striking in how each side treats the question of science and technology. The early reformers viewed science and technology with awe and felt the necessity to apologize for the weakness of Muslims in scientific and technological fields (thus placing the blame on Muslims and exonerating Islam itself) and making reforms in science and technology the centerpiece of their arguments. Sayyid Qutb, in contrast, insisted that the salvation of not only Muslims but all humanity lay first and foremost in moral and religious rejuvenation, giving science and technology an instrumental role, but subsuming both of them to the basic tenets that informed his broader reformative agenda.

Very little by way of truly original thinking can be found in Sayyid Qutb's work. A great number of the most fundamental ideas upon which Sayyid Qutb builds his world-view — and, as we

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[83] Keddie (1968, pp. 81-82).
[84] Badawi (1978, pp. 11-17, 57, 65).

shall see throughout this dissertation, Qutb does weave a strikingly didactic conception of life that tightly and systematically binds together man, society, and knowledge — had already been articulated and had served as hot points of contention in the already long-standing Islamic reform debate by the time Sayyid Qutb, half a century later, decided to begin writing on Islamic topics. As Nikkie Keddie rightly points out, [85] Jamaal Al-Diin Al-Afghani alone — the paucity of his writings notwithstanding — can legitimately claim original paternity to the lion's share of the main themes that defined the tumultuous debate that was to follow him over the role of Islam in the challenging task of surviving, and prospering in, the brave new world of modernity that had burst into Muslim lands uninvited. Al-Afghani's most important pupil, the Egyptian Muhhamad 'Abduh, originally a close adherent to Al-Afghani's aggressive anti-colonial line, gave the debate a new twist in his later life: the survival and prosperity of Islam in the face of the staggering challenge of modernity it faced rested on the awakening from the laconic and ignorant state into which Muslims had fallen; Muslims needed to learn their religion anew, to break off the shackles of a constraining and self-justifying tradition; the enemy was within, 'Abduh insisted, and it is their own selves they must reform if Muslims truly wish to gain their rightful place at the helm of humanity. Al-Afghani wrote and spoke at a time of rapidly ascending imperialism, but he had also lived in a world where the Muslim *ummah* still enjoyed a measure of sovereignty and power. The Ottoman empire, though gravely ill, was nevertheless still a presence to be reckoned with, and Muslims, if nothing else, still had a Caliph to carry on the moral leadership of their *ummah*. 'Abduh, although surviving Al-Afghani for only eight years, wrote in a context that had already accepted the defeat of Muslims as a given, as a starting point from which a new kind of struggle was to be waged. Muslims were first to educate themselves, by all means

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[85] Keddie (1968, 96-7).

possible; they were, first, to learn the true spirit of their religion, and, second, to acquire the new sciences the colonial had brought along with him. The struggle was for the long haul, and any attempt to hasten it was deemed by 'Abduh not only pointless, but outright foolish and dangerous.

'Abduh seems to have been greatly traumatized by the 1882 British suppression of the nationalist 'Urabi revolt and the disastrous consequences Egypt had suffered as a result: the invasion of Egypt by the British forces. He had himself personally felt the wrath of the British through exile to Paris, where in 1882 he had briefly joined Al-Afghani's effort of resistance through the publication of the bi-weekly _al'urwa al-wuthqaa_. Little immediate success resulted from that effort, and upon his return to Egypt, 'Abduh vowed to devote his energies to an educational project that targeted the radical reform of Egypt's most influential of educational institution: the religious university of Al-Azhar. The subtext to 'Abduh's reformist stand was clear enough: there was much to learn from the new-found sciences, and much to change in the methods and habits of mind to which Muslims had become accustomed. This subtext survived 'Abduh and deeply informed the reformism debate until a new tone began to overrun it in the voice of the third great figure in the history of modern Islamic reform: Rashid Ridha (1865-1935).

A student of 'Abduh, Rashid Ridha began as a great admirer of both Al-Afghani and 'Abduh. Initially, Ridha exhibited enthusiasm for resistance — as promoted by Al-Afghani — to increasingly encroaching Western infiltration of Muslim lands; he saw the West as the morally responsible agent in the despoilment of Muslim wealth, opposed the ownership of Egyptian land by Europeans, and decried what he considered to be the deliberate policies that the West promoted — policies that increased Egyptian debt as it consolidated Western financial interests.   After the 'Urabi revolt, Ridha began to preach a

more conciliatory position towards the British: like his master, he feared the further backlash by the British in reaction to another nationalist uprising, and consequently sought to gain Muslim independence from the colonials by way of education and cultural reformation. The success of Europe itself, Ridha seemed to believe at this stage of his thinking, was a consequence of such factors as moral and cultural norms and habits, education, organizational ability and the Reformation movement in Europe.[86]

But not long after the death of 'Abduh, by the start of the First World War, Ridha began to drift away from 'Abduh's normative view of the Muslims' plight and instead adopted a structural view of the Muslim crisis that eventually led him back to his original pro-Al-Afghani, resistance position. The violence of the war seems to have shocked Ridha back to his earlier hostile position towards the West. The Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1912, in particular, seems to have represented a turning point for Ridha: Europe must be confronted and fought, it was now obvious to Ridha;[87] Europe could never be trusted again, since it obviously had two faces: the face it assumed at home in Europe — that of science, technology, progress, respect for the law, humanity, kindness and fellowship — and the face it took on away from home — the face of aggression, greed, arrogance, and hypocrisy.[88] At home, the secret behind Western success, and by the same token Muslims' weakness, Ridha attributed to what he called in one word "associations". Ridha deployed a rather broad meaning of the term "associations": in it he lumped charities, corporations, political parties, and whatever other group that organized itself to promote some public-oriented interest.[89] The world of Islam, according to the later and more confrontational Ridha, relied on individuals to

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[86] Shahin (1992, p. 42).
[87] Ibid, p. 83.
[88] Ibid., p. 75.
[89] Ibid., p. 46.

promote its causes and advance its ideals, rather than on associations and organizations that transcended and therefore could survive those individuals. The shift to a structural perception of the Muslim crisis in the eyes of Ridha, then, went hand in hand with a shift *away* from a normative reading of that crisis. On the contrary, Ridha came to energetically oppose voices in the Islamic reform debate that echoed the modernist proposition that Muslim strength can be attained only through whole-cloth appropriation of Western culture. The example of Japan in particular was repeatedly invoked by Ridha to drive home the point that material strength could be achieved without committing cultural suicide. Rather, Ridha argued, it was the very impulse by Egyptian "Westernizers" to unconditionally imitate and appropriate the West that was driving Egypt to a position of increasing weakness and dependency. What the Muslim world needed was not "Westernization" but "modernization": which meant for Ridha the appropriation of scientific knowledge and technical know-how independently of the Western culture into which that knowledge and know-how happened to be embedded.

By drawing a clear distinction between "Westernization" and "modernization", insisting that the two not only are not equivalent but even incompatible in a context where Westernization by necessity lead to an increasingly dependent, and therefore weakened, Muslim world, Ridha was able to advance two major lines that were to become the foundation of most future non-apologetic Islamist thinking. First, he was now able to argue for the universality of scientific knowledge and technology without at the same time feeling compelled to justify and present innovation in Islamic terms. If science is not essentially Western, then its appropriation need not be justified at every step and in every case. And second, by abstracting science over culture, Ridha was able to exonerate Islam from responsibility for the Muslim condition. But more than that, aghast at the savagery of the First World War — an indication, Ridha's eyes, of the desperate moral deficiency from

which Europeans evidently suffered — Ridha went further and proposed that Islam was the only moral hope for humanity. Europe may have proven its ability to lead the world scientifically, but it had failed, in the eyes of Ridha, to present the world with the moral leadership so necessary for the survival of humanity.

Together, then, the three classical figures of reformism Al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and Ridha — outline the major dimensions of most Islamic thinking that was to follow them. Al-Afghani embodies the line of thinking that views the world in confrontational terms: the Muslim world is under assault and it is essential that Muslims unite in reaction to the mortal danger that faces them. Muslims must make use of whatever tools they may to carry on their struggle. 'Abduh represents the line of thinking that insists on self-evaluation: Muslims must first reform themselves; they must educate themselves and substitute the true religion of Islam for the static ritual Islam of tradition; they must do so, however, gradually and patiently trust that they will ultimately prevail. Ridha, on his part, embodies a more sophisticated thinking that combined both of these lines as the age of modern nationalism began to take shape in the Muslim world. The worlds of Al-Afghani and Ridha were just that: two different worlds; Ridha saw the Ottoman empire crumble, and with it the possibility of a united Muslim front capable of stemming the tide of the giant powers from the north. He understood that Muslims were in need of self-reformation, but he also came to believe that such reform was not enough: confrontation with Europe was unavoidable if Muslims were to rid themselves of the heavy weight of European domination.

Methodological remarks and outline

Habermas writes that the task of the interpreter is to "[learn how] to differentiate his own understanding of the

context — which he at first believed to be shared by the author
but in fact falsely imputed to him — from the author's
understanding. His task consists in gaining access to the
definitions of the situation presupposed by the transmitted text
through the lifeworld of its author and his audience." [90]
Schleiermacher before him proposed that interpretation is both a
scientific and an artistic activity. The "scientific" aspect of
interpretation consists in what Schleiermacher calls
"grammatical interpretation": the competent reading of the
original author's language, the syntax of his grammar and
structure of his style, and the meaning of the words used by the
author. The "artistic" aspect of interpretation consists in the
acquisition of an empathic understanding of the author's mood,
personality, and character, along with the context surrounding
the author during his writing: i.e., "knowing the inner and the
outer aspects of the author's life." [91] The challenge of the
interpreter, in Schleiermacher's view, is to acquire technical
competence to master the original author's tools of
communication (language) and psychological competence to
penetrate the author's inner self and "gain an immediate
comprehension of the author as an individual." [92] Hans-Georg
Gadamer rejects both Habermas' and Schleiermacher's theories of
interpretation. Gadamer does accept Habermas's imperative that
the interpreter differentiate his own context of reading from
that of the author's writing: "[t]here is a clear hermeneutical
demand to understand a text in terms of the specific situation
in which it was written." [93] Gadamer also accepts as necessary
the acquisition of technical competence for interpretation and
finds unproblematic "Schleiermacher's brilliant comments on
grammatical interpretation." [94] Gadamer, however, altogether
rejects the notion that the task of the interpreter is primarily
to rediscover the original author's intent. "When we try to

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[90] Habermas (1981, p. 131).
[91] Schleiermacher (1977, p. 113).
[92] Schleiermacher (1977, p. 150).
[93] Gadamer (1985, 299).
[94] Ibid., p. 164.

understand a text," Gadamer writes, "we do not try to recapture
the author's attitude of mind but, if this is the terminology we
are to use, we try to recapture the perspective within which he
has formed his views. But this means simply that we try to
accept the objective validity of what he is saying. If we want
to understand, we shall try to make his arguments even more
cogent."[95] More strikingly, Gadamer insists that "[t]he horizon
of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer had
originally in mind, or by the horizon of the person to whom the
text was originally addressed. What is fixed in writing has
detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its
author and made itself free for new relationships." [96]

In this dissertation, we take our methodological starting
point from Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics. We agree with
Gadamer that the interpreter's task is not primarily the
unearthing of a putative original intent and we accept his
rejection of pure a "historicism" that stipulates that a text is
a purely historical artifact ascribed to a well-defined
historical context. Such radical historicism is even less
acceptable when the objects of interpretation are the works of
an author such as Sayyid Qutb, i.e., a writer whose books have
exerted enduring influence since their time of original
publication. In fact, Qutb himself offers us a methodology of
interpretation not altogether alien to Gadamer's: Qutb views the
Qur'an both historically located (it was an answer to the
specific needs of the "Original Community") and trans-
historically relevant and open to contextualized
reinterpretation. Qutb illustrates, through the frequent
direct, and one might even say brazen, invocation of discrete
Qur'anic verses (unlike the tradition, which insisted on reading
the Qur'an in the context of the large corpus of accumulated
commentary (*tafsiir*)), the type of active hermeneutic
involvement Gadamer champions. Of course, Gadamer and Qutb part

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[95] Ibid., pp. 259-60.
[96] Ibid., pp. 356-7.

ways when one understands that Qutb's active hermeneutics is grounded on the proposition that the Qur'an never poses a problem of meaning because it addresses man in an "intuitive" language that transcends historical contexts. Gadamer rejects not only the alleged existence of fixed historical entities subject to archeological rediscovery, but also the notion that an essential reality can endure beyond history.

For our present purposes, we will take to heart the following from Gadamer: "a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as the reconstruction of the original would be no more than the recovery of dead meaning." [97] At the same time, we recognize the validity of the following statement from Habermas: "[t]he interpreter has to assume that the transmitted text, notwithstanding its initial inaccessibility for him, represents a reasonable expression, one that could be grounded under certain presuppositions." [98] Hence, our challenge is to recognize that "understanding" is not equivalent to "recovering", but at the same time, that an essentially accessible rationality is behind the original act of writing the text.

Quine proposed that "assertions startlingly false on the face of it are likely to turn on hidden differences of language." [99] The challenge in reading and interpreting Sayyid Qutb, however, is not the seeming falsehood of his propositions or the opacity of his vocabulary, but the opposite, and perhaps even more challenging, problem of misleading transparency: his writing is so accessible on the surface that the problem of "understanding" consists in sustaining a reflexive interrogation of seemingly unproblematic concepts, terms, and argument structures. Indeed, an important subtext of our analysis of Qutb will be that the Qutbian discourse, disguising itself in the garb of scriptural Islamism, endures precisely

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[97] Ibid.,; p. 149.
[98] Ibid., p. 133.
[99] Quine (1960 p. 59).

because it mobilizes a conceptual framework and vocabulary grounded on some of the fundamental concepts of modernity: anthropocentrism, a universal ethic, the freedom of religious conscience, the freedom of choice, the belief in change and action, the centrality of information and communication, to name only a few. Qutb also endures because he was among the first to articulate a sophisticated and non-apologetic analysis of the nature of imperialism and colonialism that went beyond the often simplistic and even manipulative discourse of nationalism. Qutb pointed to the local elite as the sustainers of a new, more pernicious, and enduring kind of imperial domination. Now, perhaps more than ever, the implication of the local elite in sustaining the power relation between a dominant West and a Muslim world still beholden to that West is well established. The problem for us, then, is not in taking a leap of faith in interpretation: i.e., imputing to the original author's utterances of an "immanent rationality", as Habermas puts it; the seeming transparency of Qutb's language challenges us with the opposite task of maintaining a critical distance from the Qutbian discourse and of challenging that discourse.

Habermas writes that "[t]he interpreter cannot understand the semantic content of a text if he is not in a position to present to himself the reasons that the author might have been able to adduce in defense of his utterances under suitable conditions." And then he goes on to state that "the interpreter absolutely cannot present reasons to himself without judging them, without taking a positive or negative position on them."[100] We shall indeed elucidate, where possible, the reasons behind Qutb's arguments — i.e., what he might have adduced in defense of his utterances. But it is not in such an elucidation that we see our main critical task. Instead, as a first step — to use Gadamer's phrase — we shall try to make Qutb's arguments

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[100] Habermas (1981 p. 132).

"even more cogent" and present the reader with a structured presentation that highlights the broad framework of Qutb's discourse. Of course, such structuring will always introduce an element of artificial order and coherence that is not necessarily present in the original body of work. This is even clearer when the subject of interpretation is an author such as Sayyid Qutb whose own methodological commitment, both stylistically and ideologically, is integrative and wholistic. But if we are honestly to engage the original author in criticism, we must present his arguments in the most coherent of lights and challenge those arguments on their own grounds.

It is with these general methodological principles in mind that we undertook the reading, interpretation, and criticism of Sayyid Qutb's theories of man, society, and knowledge. We have avoided taking Qutb to task on his own definitions, but instead have attempted to elucidate those definitions and to locate their function and role in his arguments. In this elucidation, we have primarily relied on a comparative technique through which we try to highlight Qutb's definitions by comparing the role of those definitions in his arguments to the role of similar premises in the arguments of other authors. What did "science" mean for Qutb? Our answer is informed by comparing the role played by "science" in Qutb's larger argument with the role "science" played in the arguments of other thinkers, such as Al-Afghani, 'Abduh, Ridha, and Mawdudi. "Philosophy" for Qutb was equated with *analytical* philosophy; he underscored its "*speculative*" character and it "*intellectualism*", but also its "foreign" origin; Al-Afghani, by contrast, focused on the "*rational*" character of philosophy and, in his view, the spirit of "*criticism*" it engendered: for Al-Afghani, what was lacking in the Muslim world was the spirit of criticism that challenged the established tradition of imitation; the Muslim world already possessed a rich philosophical tradition in the discipline of *falsafah*, and, in Al-Afghani's eyes, philosophy presented a strategically propitious starting point that linked the past

with the future. In short, by comparing the role "philosophy"
played in Qutb's argument and the role it played in Al-Afghani's
argument, we avoid the unsolvable problem of "semantics" — which
Schleiermacher tried to solve through what he called "emphatic
psychologism" — through an emphasis on the *pragmatic* role of
concepts and definitions. In our attempt to elucidate Qutb's
premises and definitions, we shall also carry out a comparative
analysis between Qutb's own works and the differences in
emphases and assumptions that exist between those works. Qutb's
intellectual output between 1948 and 1965 is significantly
affected by the terrible turmoil that Qutb endured. His
concerns in his early books are not the same as those of his
later books. Therefore, it is crucial to remain alert to shifts
in meaning — for us, in *discursive function* — between his
various books, and to highlight them whenever we encounter them.

   Our reading of Qutb will focus exclusively on his
published books. We have consciously avoided examining other
forms of intellectual output from Qutb, e.g., letters, newspaper
and journal articles, precisely because we believe that writing
is a *pragmatic*[101] act and not merely a "means" of communicating
ideas. Our concern, as we said, is not with what Qutb "really
meant" or "really thought", as such, but with the effect he
actually had and continues to have on his readers. The crucial
question for us, then, is: "why does Qutb endure?" When Qutb is
read today, it is his books that are read, and so to his books
we must turn to gain some understanding of the reasons behind
his continuing influence.

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[101] By "pragmatic" here we have in mind the view of language promoted by the school of thought on
language and linguistics initiated by C. W. Morris (1938) that studies language through the acts people
perform to communicate with each other and to link to the world surrounding them. Examining
communication from the pragmatic point of view means, in a broad sense, taking seriously the proposition
that *people* are involved in the communication; a semantically oriented study of language, by contrast
(and again, in broad terms), would focus on modeling the objects of the world (including concepts and
ideas), their attributes, and the relationships that between those objects; a syntactically driven study of
language, on the other hand, focuses on the form of language, its structure, and the relationship between
patterns of expression and meaning. See, Levison, S. C. (1983).

The dissertation is structured as follows: the first two chapters focus on Qutb's theory of man and society. Chapter 2 examines the concepts central to Qutb's definition of the human: an innate nature, the capacity and impulse to believe, and the centrality of belief-based action in the fulfillment of human nature. Chapter 3 examines Qutb's definition of society: what is the natural social order and what makes an order unnatural? Qutb equates the natural with the "Islamic" and rejects "non-Islamic" orders as unnatural — as "*jaahilii*", as Qutb puts it. Qutb pinpoints the essence of *jaahiliyyah* in the usurpation by man of divine sovereignty — what Qutb terms "*haakimiyyah*". The Islamic order, by contrast, is that social order that places limits on the power of man over man and recognizes the ultimate sovereignty of God over all humanity. In the spirit of our pragmatic methodology, we have anchored the first part of our analysis — chapters 2 and 3 — on Qutbian terms — *fitrah*, *'aqiidah*, *harakah*, in chapter 2, and *jaahiliyyah* and *haakimiyyah*, in chapter 3 — the better to highlight the function of those concepts and to communicate to the reader in an immediate fashion some of the original Qutbian language and paradigmatic context. It is also for this reason that we have provided, whenever deemed relevant, the original Arabic terms of English translations, since translation, especially in heavily ideological discourse, is always a challenge.

The second part of the dissertation will examine Qutb's views on knowledge. In parallel with the structure of the first part, we first examine in chapter 4 Qutb's views on "human knowledge" — i.e., knowledge that Qutb deems within the legitimate purview of human activity. This is what Qutb calls the "abstract" or "material" sciences, i.e., the natural sciences. Chapter 5, on the other hand, examines Qutb's views on those areas of human inquiry that trespass beyond what Qutb considers the licit boundaries of the human intellect. These are those disciplines that attempt to answer questions that only the Divine Creator may address and solve for man. Qutb has in

mind the humanities and the social sciences, e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology, comparative theology, and so forth. Such disciplines, in Qutb's view, clearly infringe upon divine sovereignty (*haakimiyyah*) and are the root of what renders a social order un-Islamic and unnatural (*jaahilii*).

The last chapter concludes this dissertation with a discussion that highlights some of the tensions in Sayyid Qutb's positions and arguments. As we said, our aim is not to challenge Qutb's premises and definitions, but to pinpoint their discursive function and to differentiate between the role they played in the Qutbian discourse and the role similar premises and definitions played in other discourses.   Where we will be critical is in our analysis of the coherence and cogency of Qutb's arguments. But even then, our aim will not be to enumerate Qutb's "failures in thought", but to highlight tensions we detect and to explain, when possible, their presence. In this critical task, we will bring into our discussion the criticism by other writers of Sayyid Qutb's arguments and positions and subject that criticism, in turn, to our scrutiny.

The reader will find two appendices at the end of this work. Appendix 1 provides the reader with a glossary of Arabic terms, while Appendix 2 contains a time line of the most important dates up until 1970 in modern Egyptian socio-political history and in the life of the Muslim Brotherhood, and in the life of Sayyid Qutb from his birth to his death in 1966.

Chapter Two

Human nature, belief, and action: Qutb's model of the individual

Introduction

It is tempting, upon first reading him, to dismiss Sayyid Qutb as a throwback thinker.[102] As we saw earlier, Qutb owes his most basic ideas to the intellectual and religious context he inherited and in which he thought and wrote: the rejection of philosophy as a method of religious cognition was part of mainstream Muslim orthodoxy since the time of Al-Ghazali (d. 1111);[103] the idea that Muslim society was living in a state of *jaahiliyyah* had already been foreshadowed a few centuries earlier by the medieval Ibn-Taymiyyah;[104] the relevance of, and even urgent necessity of adopting, Islam in the quest to reform and set upon the right course all of humanity had been explicitly asserted in modern terms at least half a century earlier by Muhammad 'Abudh;[105] the compatibility between Islam and modern scientific knowledge and technology were essential themes since Al-Afghani;[106] and, perhaps most importantly, the notion that, to survive the perilous challenges they were

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[102] For a rebuttle to the proposition that Qutb's thought is unoriginal, see Abu Rabii' (1996, pp. 209-11).
[103] On Al-Ghazzalii's *tahaafatu al-falsafah* , see: Hourani (1962).
[104] I say "foreshadowed" because Ibn Taymiyya's qualification as *jaahilii* pertained mainly to the ruler, i.e., to government. See his Public policy and Islamic jurisprudence.
[105] 'Abuh wrote: "The Islamic Shari'ah is universal and eternal. A corollary of this is that the Shari'ah suits the interests of humanity at every time and in any place whatever the nature of the civilisation." Quoted in Ridha, Rashid M. (1931, vol. 1, p. 614).
[106] In his "Lecture on teaching and learning," Al-Afghani invokes none other than the legendary 11 th century figure of Al-Ghazali, an icon in Orthodox Sunni Islam, to assert the compatibility between Islam and science: "As for Ghazaalii, who was called the Proof of Islam, in the book Deliverance from Error he says that someone who claims that the Islamic religion is incompatible with geometric proofs, philosophical demonstrations, and the laws of nature is an ignorant friend of Islam." Keddie (1983, p. 107).

facing, Muslims had no choice but to return to the purer Islam of the "Original Community" of the Prophet, had already been a commonplace in modern Islam since 18 th century Wahhabism.[107] Qutb inherited this rich heritage and adopted its main themes in his articulation of the "Islamic solution." Qutb, however, went far beyond a mere appropriation of discrete themes: he fashioned an astonishingly integrated framework that reinterpreted long-standing ideas in a setting radically different from the context within which those ideas were originally articulated.   To be sure, the Pakistani Abu Al-A'la Mawdudi exerted crucial influence on Qutb's intellectual development, and was perhaps the single most important factor in orienting Qutb towards the didactic methodology and style.[108] But it would be a mistake to reduce Qutb to Mawdudi, or to the Egyptian version of the great Pakistani thinker. As we shall come to see in the course of this dissertation, Qutb and Mawdudi lived lives and suffered fates that radically differed from each other. Neither one can be reduced to a set of ideas or a system of thinking, let alone to a common set of ideas they might have appeared to share. A comparison of the two thinkers strongly reaffirms the truth of the proposition that ideas have no internal logic that compels them to forge one course in exclusion to other alternatives. Mawdudi and Qutb did at one point share a common conception of the "Islamic solution". They both lived in an age radically different from that of Al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and even Ridha.   Principally, Mawdudi and Qutb lived in an era where nationalism was coming of age: Pakistan was asserting its identity in the wake of its birth and its traumatic separation from India, while Egypt was fashioning for itself a new presence in the tumultuous world of ascending Arab nationalism, Third-Worldism, and receding colonialism.[109] Moreover, Mawdudi and Qutb thought, wrote, and acted in an

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[107] See, Smith (1978, pp. 41-4).

[108] Binder (1988, pp. 171, 174); Haddad, Y. (1983a, pp. 26-27); Haddad (1983b, pp. 85, 89).

[109] Taylor (1988, pp. 20, 54, 103). However, it must be noted that the infuence of the colonial context on Mawdudi's thought was greater than that on Sayyid Qutb's thought. See Sivan (1985, p. 27).

intellectual milieu that had been deeply infiltrated by Western thinking:[110] they had read translations to their respective native languages of Western works, and, as we shall see, their puritan call for a return to the "Original sources" notwithstanding, the influence of Western thought on them can be clearly detected.

However, the respective contexts of Mawdudi and Qutb differed from each other in a fundamental way: both Mawdudi and Qutb were facing another phenomenon their predecessors had not faced, the phenomenon of the indigenous modern state; but while the first, living in a context where space, however narrow, was accorded him for political expression and action, eventually came to preach what he came to term an "evolutionary revolution",[111] Qutb, by contrast, evolved in a context of an unyielding suppression and persecution by the state of his Islamic movement that deliberately frustrated the possibility of compromise and political mediation, and inexorably pushed him towards the dead-end of radical rejectionism.[112] The latter context exerted great influence in fashioning what is truly original in Sayyid Qutb's thinking: the new emphases he laid on certain concepts and methods — emphases which together formed a synthesis that went beyond the original conceptions of Mawdudi.[113]

It is from the social and political givens of his context that Sayyid Qutb takes his point of departure: the shadow of the hegemonic state loomed increasingly larger in his thinking as the standoff between the new Egyptian state — exerting social and political control to a degree the Muslim world had not seen

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[110] For Mawdudi's familiarity with Western thinking, see Nasr (1996, pp. 11, 15, 33, 51, 71).
[111] ibid.
[112] As Gilles Kepel points out, "it was in Nasser's concentration camps, symbols of pharao's despotic regime, that a man called Sayyid Qutb charted the renewal of the Islamicist thought of which the contemporary organizations are to a large extent the legatees." Kepel (1985, p. 23, 27-8); on the impact of the prison years on Sayyid Qutb's intellectual and political orientation, see Sivan (1985, pp. 40-47).
[113] Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 139). Abu-Rabii' objects to reducing Sayyid Qutb's ideas to a synthesis of those of his intellectual influences, e.g., Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss), A. Al-Nadwii, and A. A. Mawduudii.

before — and the Islamist opposition intensified. [114] The new hegemony, initially sympathetic to the popular Muslim Brotherhood and hoping to recruit it for the purpose of promoting the cause of the new nationalism of the Free Officers,[115] quickly grew impatient with dissent.   State nationalism seemed to go hand in hand, in Egypt as everywhere else in the Arab world, with a centralized, authoritarian state that imposed its control over all aspects of society and that saw in any sector that escaped its direct infiltration a danger to be eliminated.[116] In the discourse of Sayyid Qutb, a basic theoretical structure and vocabulary pre-existed the Egyptian watershed moment of 1952. But between that year and the time of the publication of Sayyid Qutb's Milestones (1964), the steady consolidation of state power and the periodic persecution of the Islamist opposition lead Sayyid Qutb to a conception of the plight of Muslims that placed at the heart of the crisis the problem of power: what right did the state possess in claiming authority over the simple citizen and what were its prerogatives over society? By the time of Milestones, Qutb's answer was unequivocal: the sort of hegemony that the state claimed for itself could not be tolerated in Islam; only God could possess such authority. It is important to understand that it is this conclusion, more than anything else, that stands at the basis of Sayyid Qutb's thinking by the time Milestones is written and that informs his political theory, his theory of man, nature, and human knowledge.

It would of course be erroneous to propose that the whole of Qutb's thinking can be causally attributed to this, or any other, *one* idea. The contrary is in fact the case: Sayyid Qutb's writings maintain a remarkable degree of continuity

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[114] Kepel (1985, p. 26).

[115] For details on the "short honeymoon" between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers, see Mitchell (1969, pp. 105-15); Al-Khaalidii (1991, pp. 293-5).

[116] On state control of the media and the unprecedented inflitration of the arteries of society by the state, see Sivan (1985, pp. 62-64); for the new breed of Arab state totalitarianism, see Kepel, Gilles (1994, pp. 26, 35, 37, 46); see also Shepard (1996, p. xxxviii).

during his Islamist phase. As Ibrahim Abu-Rabii' notes, "Qutb's phase of thought during the period 1952-1962 is an extension, and not a negation, of the previous phase." [117] The Sayyid Qutb of Social justice is no alien to the language of Milestones, even if the two works are oriented in fundamentally different directions. Qutb's concern in Social justice regarded the assertion of Islam's relevance over the two competing world-paradigms that he felt threatened to impose themselves on the Muslim mind at the crucial few years following the Second World war: Capitalism and Communism. It was the threat from without — the "West", both capitalist and communist — that Qutb sought to refute in Social justice.[118] The primary concern in Milestones, on the other hand, is with the threat from within — the all-mighty state that claimed sovereignty over all aspects of life.[119] Nevertheless, both works dealt with the one common fundamental problem: the usurpation of divine authority, the unhappy condition in which humanity found itself as a consequence, and the project of reinstating divine authority as the only way of restoring humanity to a state of happiness. It was the usurpation by man of divine sovereignty, the hubris of humanity — i.e., the assertion that human beings could do without the guidance of God in the administration of life — that for Qutb inexorably lead to the denigration of human dignity and to the exploitation and the cruelty of man over man, whether the usurper is foreign or domestic. The notion that man can, unaided by revelation, fathom his own condition and promote his welfare through reason alone directly flowed from this hubris. The "Islamic solution", as Qutb formulates it, by contrast, proposed a more humble man: one who understood that he was created with a mysterious nature he could never fully understand

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[117] Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 139).

[118] Sayyid Qutb opens Social justice by pointing out that "in Egypt and in the Muslim world as a whole we pay little heed to our native spiritual resources and our own intellectual heritage; instead we think first of importing foreign principles and methods, or borrowing customs and laws from across the deserts and from beyond the seas," p. 1.

[119] See Sivan (1985, p. 27). While in Social justice, the call was to rescue Islam and assert its relevance among other systems, Milestones opens with a call to rescue all of humanity: "Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice,"[t7] Qutb writes.

on his own; that he was a creature who needed to trust and believe in the guidance of divinity; and that he was a creature privileged over the rest of creation and placed on this earth to act and do good.   In short, although Qutb never reverses himself altogether on fundamental concepts and positions, he does progressively shift emphases and does bring to the fore certain positions that had occupied only a marginal space in his earlier discourse. [120]

     The first section of this chapter will focus on the notion of *fitrah* — human nature — and the place this concept occupies in Qutb's overall system of thought. The second section examines Qutb's argument that given the nature of human *fitrah*, the human being must accept the reality of belief and must understand that belief is a necessary condition of being human. The last section treats of Qutb's focus on the centrality of willed action in the life of man. Man can never attain full self-understanding on his own, but he can increase it by believing in the word — and for Qutb belief can be attained only by *acting out* the word of God.

2.1 Human nature — fitrah

     The radical shift that occurred between the modernist thinking of late 19th century Islamic reformism and the Islamic activism of Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi can be clearly detected in the striking inversion in the valuation of human nature that occurred between these two poles: the modernism of the 19th century viewed "human nature" negatively, while the later Islamism of Qutb viewed it as a positive source of energy that, should man respect its impulses, would guide him to a balanced and sustained state of happiness. Al-Afghani consistently warned against the evils of human nature, positing

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[120] For insight into the types of shifts Sayyid Qutb's discourse underwent during his Islamist period, see Shepard (1996).

that only knowledge and education can be relied upon to lift man from his otherwise "bestial" impulses. "For man is very cruel and ignorant," Al-Afghani wrote in his attack on "The Materialists", and since the earliest time, this cruelty and ignorance caused "the evil and corruption that are the destroyers of the social order." Religions, in the various forms that humanity came to know them, were an answer precisely to the evils of human nature: "to this treacherous, greedy, bloodthirsty creature there were supplied beliefs and qualities in the earliest period by means of religions. Tribes and peoples learned these beliefs. As a result they enlightened their minds with that knowledge which is the cause of happiness and the foundation of civilization." [121] Elsewhere, in his "Commentary on the Commentator," Al-Afghani asserts:

> man is man through education, and all his virtues and habits are acquired. The man who is nearest to his nature is the one who is farthest from civilization and from acquired virtues and habits. If men abandoned the legal and intellectual virtues they have acquired with the greatest difficulty and effort, and gave over control to the hands of nature, undoubtedly they would become lower than animals. [122]

Knowledge, then, religious or otherwise, is the guard against the otherwise irresistible impulses of man's bestial nature.

Sayyid Qutb's perception of human nature is precisely the opposite. The concept of a positive human nature — *fitrah* — occupies a central position within the Qutbian discourse. For Qutb, God the creator and the ultimate sovereign has given existence to this world through an act of pure will, has created man as a privileged member of His creation, and has

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[121] Keddie (1983, pp. 140-1).
[122] Keddie (1983, pp. 126-7).

endowed him with an essence that is fundamentally good and constructive. In this scheme, four concepts form relationships with each other that fundamentally shape Qutb's main arguments: God, man, creation, and *fitrah* . God the omnipotent and omniscient creator has brought to existence a world as He has pleased. He has chosen to regulate that world according to a set of laws and regulations. He has also created man. Man occupies a privileged position among God's other creations, is endowed with a free will, and his mission is that of a "caretaker" — *khaliifah* — over what God has provided for him on this earth. In His benevolence and generosity, God has created a world that is fundamentally hospitable to man and has endowed him with a nature, such that if it is observed and respected, it will guide him to act and to behave in ways that guarantee him happiness in this world, but if neglected and violated will cause him untold unhappiness and misery. This human nature, this *fitrah*, and the natural order in which God has decided to arrange the world are in perfect harmony with one another by virtue of God's benevolence towards man. Man, on the other hand, given the free will God has granted him, may choose to act in accordance with *fitrah* or he may choose to act in violation of it. Moreover, man has no access to the nature of *fitrah* or its essence. Only God possesses such knowledge. Man's only source of guidance regarding what conforms to *fitrah* and what violates it resides in what God has chosen to tell man: the Word of God, i.e., the *Qur'an*, and to some extent the model of God's Prophet, the *siirah*. God is therefore the creator of *fitrah*, the natural order, and man. Between *fitrah* and the natural order obtains a divinely ordained harmony. Between man and *fitrah* obtains ignorance of the latter by the former without divine mediation. Between man and the natural order may obtain happiness and harmony, or misery and discord, depending on how man chooses to act. And between man and his Creator must exist a willingness by man to receive the guidance generously offered by the Creator, if man desires to act in conformity with *fitrah* and to avoid its violation.

For Qutb it is crucial that man and his Creator share in common a freedom of agency. Respecting *fitrah* is a matter of choice, according to Qutb. By the same token, the Creator has *chosen* to create both human nature and the laws that regulate the universe as He has seen fit. He may have chosen to create another *fitrah* and another natural order, so that it is "fortunate that there is harmony between the human natural properties as created by God and the natural properties of the universe."[f123-4] Moreover, the Creator may even elect at any point in time to substitute a new order for the one that prevails now. In <u>This religion of Islam</u> (1960), Qutb writes:

> Naturally God is capable of transforming human nature (*fitrah*) by means of the religion of Islam or any other method. But — may He be exalted! — He has chosen to create man with his present nature in accordance with His own wisdom.[h3]

The universe, in other words, is the outcome of an act of pure divine will; it is the result of God's *iraada*: "[t]he universe came into existence when God willed it." Also part of God's *iraada* is that this universe submit to *one* particular order: "He ordained certain natural laws which [this universe] follows and according to which all its various parts operate harmoniously."[t162] Blending two conceptions of God: on the one hand, the Mu'tazili's creator of immutable laws — the proverbial god-watchmaker [123] — and the *Ash'ari* interventionist

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[123] The first ideas of the *Mu'tazilah* school were articulated in late 7th century, early 8th century, by Hasan Al-Basri (d. 728). As a philosophical and religious movement, it was established at Basra, Iraq, in the first half of the 8th century by Waasil ibn 'Ataa' (d. 748). The main doctrines of the Mu'tazilah that will interest us here and which set them apart from what was later to become established Muslim orthodoxy are: the rejection of applying any type of anthropomorphism in the interpretation of the Qur'an; the stipulation that the Qur'an was created; the rejection of absolute predestination and, consequently, the insistence on human free will; the possibility of attaining all knowledge through human reason; and the refusal to a sinner, no matter how sinful, a non-Muslim, i.e., a *kaafir*. A just god who ordered the world such that man could comprehend it on his own and who therefore could make a choice between good and evil actions was central to the *Mu'tazilah* school. See, Arberry (1957).

agent god,[124] Qutb presents us with a view of a harmonious world regulated by perfect laws, but at the same time, a world answering to an authority higher than the laws that regulate it:

> Behind this universe there is a Will (*mashii'a*) which administers it, a Power (*qadar*) which moves it, a Law (*naamous*) which regulates it. This Law keeps a balance between the various parts of the universe and controls their motions; thus they neither collide with each other nor is there any disturbance in their system.... This will continue as long as the Divine will wishes it to continue. The whole universe is obedient to God's Will and His Dominion; it is not possible for it to disobey the Divine Will and its ordained law for a single moment. Due to this obedience and submission, the universe continues to go on in a harmonious fashion, and no destruction or disturbance can enter into it, unless God wills it.[t162-3]

Equally central to Qutb's argument is man's freedom of action. Qutb seems to be fully aware that by stipulating the freedom of human action, he is treading on the ancient grounds of long-standing battles. The question of the "balance between the domain of the free Divine will and the domain of limited wills of human beings," Qutb reflexively notes in <u>The Islamic concept and its characteristics</u> (1962), "is the famous dilemma that has appeared, in one form or another, among all religions, all philosophies, and all mythologies...."[ke116] On the one hand, Qutb goes on, "Islam affirms that the Divine will is absolutely free, that it is the active agent, and that there is no other active agent," but "at the same time Islam assigns a positive role for man's will... and gives him the highest role

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[124] The establishment of Ash'arism is credited to Abu Al-Hasan 'Ali Al-Ash'ari (d. 935). Originally a follower of the Mu'tazilah school, Al-Ash'ari rejected many of the main tenets of the Mu'tazilah, and most significantly the assertion of the attainability of all knowledge through human thinking and the notion of human free will in the rationalist Mu'tazili sense. Ash'arism maintains that "all acts are created and produced by God but attach themselves to the will of man who thus 'acquires' them." See Rahman (1979).

on earth, the vicegerency of Allah." Or, again: "the very
existence of man, his freedom of choice and his power to do
things... are all according to the all-encompassing Divine
will;" and yet "Allah's decree operates among a people...
through the will of individual members and through their actions
within their own selves."[ke166] In typical *Ash'ari* fashion,[125]
Qutb never fully resolves the dilemma he poses but instead
promptly suspends further speculation on the matter: resolving
the eternal tension between Divine Will and human freedom "is
beyond human comprehension," he declares.   "The Islamic
concept", he goes on, "suggests that we leave such matters to
the One with absolute knowledge." Suffice it for the Muslim who
wishes to "reconcile the concept of the comprehensiveness of
Allah's will with his concept of Allah's justice in judging
human beings... [to assume] that in Allah's reckoning, some
proportion of freedom has been allotted to man's will, which
makes him responsible for his actions and hence liable for
punishment and deserving reward, without permitting this
allotted freedom to conflict with the comprehensive Divine
will."[ke119]

To understand the importance of the notion of *fitrah* in
Qutb's writings, we need to turn to a theme that occupied
central stage throughout Qutb's writings: the universal nature
of the Islamic message and mission. Islam, for Qutb, is not an
historically circumscribed divine call, nor is it a particular
communication between God and a chosen people. Rather, it is a
civilizing mission whose aim is nothing less than the salvation
of all humankind. It is not merely the reform of Muslim society
that Qutb targets, but the reform of all of humanity — a
humanity that is "at the edge of the precipice," as he famously
puts it in the opening sentence of <u>Milestones</u>. Viewed in such
terms, Islam's mission is to reform *any* society, *any* culture,
and at *any* point in history. In other words, Islam's object of

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[125] The formula "*bilaa kayf*" (literally: without asking "how?") is attributed to Al-Ash'ari.

reform is the purest form of social abstraction: an entity
independent of both time and space. It is this very abstraction
that Qutb mobilizes when he puts forward *fitrah* as the secret
behind Islam's original success.

Throughout his Islamist writings, Qutb remained
consistently emphatic that the rupture between the historical
pre-Islamic era of *jaahiliyyah* and the era of Islam was sudden,
dramatic and irreversible. As Haddad notes, Sayyid Qutb "is the
most noted advocate of the interpretation of Islam as
revolution."[126] The advent of Islam in Qutb's narrative is the
"Great Revolution" in the history of mankind, the ultimate
world-paradigm shift.[127] The pre-Islamic, *jaahilii* order has
little in common with the Islamic conception of life, society,
and man, and whatever it may have in common with it is not an
indication of similarity between the essentially Islamic and
the essentially *jaahilii* , but rather the contingent
manifestation of the essence of Islam within the corrupt, man-
made, *jaahilii* order.[128] This divorce between the Islamic and
the *jaahilii* came to have far-reaching consequences on the
political methods advocated by the politically frustrated
Sayyid Qutb of <u>Milestones</u>. The Prophet, serving as a model of
action, is emulated in his *hijrah* — his flight — from his native
jaahilii society: not only is the essence of Islam completely
antithetical to the *jaahilii* order, but its very adoption and
consecration within an earthly community necessitates that the
nascent Islamic order detach itself from its surrounding
context. This, of course, has all the basic ingredients for
revolution: rejection of, and severance from, the status quo,
and the adoption of an alternative utopia essentially

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[126] Haddad (1983a, p. 17). For a catalog of Qur'anic verses invoked by Qutb to support his call for Islamic
"revolution", see ibid, p. 29.

[127] See <u>Islamic Studies</u> (1953), where Qutb writes that Islam was an "emancipatory movement" (*harakah
tahriiriyyah*) and "an active, revolutoinary creed" (*'aqiidah thawriyyah harakiyyah*).

[128] In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb writes that "the roots of the two trees are entirely different", Qutb, S. [1964]
(1978) <u>Milestones</u>. Beirut, Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House.; p. 247.

antithetical to the prevailing order. [129] And indeed, the original flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina served Qutb well in formulating a paradigm of resistance and struggle. However, what is equally clear is that the notion of a break from *jaahiliyyah* played a central role within Qutb's discourse and argument well before Qutb began to advocate his radically revolutionary strategy for social reform, so that it is unlikely that his emphasis on the break from *jaahiliyyah* was subservient to the political strategy of revolution to which only later in his intellectual life came to subscribe. For instance, we find Qutb devoting more than a third of <u>Social justice in Islam</u> (1948), his earliest and least revolutionary Islamically oriented book , to the "Original Community", illustrating through its example the centrality of "justice" in the Islamic conception of society.[s139-227] Qutb is emphatic that the break between *jaahiliyyah* and the "Original Community" was radical. And yet, within this work, one can hardly argue that Qutb is advocating anything resembling the strategy of unyielding and violent overthrow of the prevailing order that he came to adopt in his <u>Milestones</u>. On the contrary, Qutb is quite clear that what he has in mind is not revolution but cooperative and long-term reform and, as Binder puts it, still entertained a "meliorative faith in the asymptotic convergence of theory and practice."[130] In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb stipulated as the two pillars upon which the establishment of the truly Islamic order *jihaad* and *da'wah*: struggle and exhortation. And by *jihaad*, Qutb had mind a primarily political and strategically informed notion of struggle, rather than the broader and usually politically reticent meaning prevalent in orthodox and historical Islam. [131] In the earlier <u>Social justice</u>, by contrast, while *da'wah* was indeed one of the pillars upon which the Islamic order can be

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[129] For a discussion on the post-Qutbian invocation of a radical interpretation of the notion of " *hijra*" by Islamist groups in the Egypt of the 1970's, see Kepel (1994, pp. 78-91).
[130] Binder (1988, p. 188).
[131] Hourani (1993, p. 151); see also Lewis (1988).

established, in place of *jihaad* we find Qutb advocating the more traditional *tashrii'*, legislation, as the second pillar:

> [The Islamic] form of life will depend upon legislation and exhortation, those twin fundamental methods of Islam towards the achievement of all aims.[s250]

Qutb then goes on to make another important point revealing of his gradualist bent of mind early in this period of his life as an Islamic reformer. While in the later <u>Milestones</u> Qutb advocated a two-step process of reform: the establishment of a community of true believers first, followed by an active struggle by this community against the prevailing *jaahilii* order, in <u>Social justice</u>, Qutb seems to advance a two-pronged strategy of reform that seeks to *simultaneously* reform society both practically and spiritually: *tashrii'* and *da'wah* are to be carried out at the same time:

> We must, then, establish our Islamic theory in individuals and societies, at the same time as we set up the Islamic legislation to regulate life. And the natural method of establishing that philosophy is by education.[s250]

It is clear, then, that the centrality of the essential break by the "Original Community" from the *jaahilii* order in Qutb's discourse is not essentially dictated by the exigencies of political or social revolution. What seems to be the case is that the notion of a radical break between the pre-Islamic *jaahiliyyah* and the post-*jaahilii* Islamic order provided Qutb with an exemplar with the aid of which Qutb could argue for the trans-cultural and trans-historical, and therefore universal, nature of the Islamic call. The historical turn from *jaahiliyyah* to the Islamic order is sharp and sudden; it is also a fundamental turn, a watershed moment that separates two mutually antithetical orders. The Islamic event, i.e., the turn from *jaahiliyyah,* therefore, is neither historically nor

culturally grounded. The actors in that Seventh century drama —
the Arabs of Mecca and Medina — Qutb insists, did not owe their
"unique triumph" to the genius of Arab culture; instead, that
"[Unique Generation] relied for its success above all on the
capacities of human nature (*fitrah*) for responding to the
divinely ordained path — which profoundly corresponds to human
nature — rather than being overwhelmed by superficial
impressions."[h41] An essential, unvarying human nature and the
correspondence of the divinely ordained path with that nature
are then offered as the explanation behind the "Original
Success".

An essential explanation of the "Original Success" of
Islam, resting on the notion of an unvarying human nature, opens
the door for Qutb to many of the most important axes of his
discourse: the universality of the Islamic call; the essential
compatibility of Islam with anything that promotes the happiness
of mankind; the simplicity of the Islamic message; the
centrality of the human being in the Islamic conception of the
world; the uniqueness of the human condition and the sharp
distinction that exists between, on the one hand, the human and
the rest of creation, but also on the other hand, between the
human and the divine. To these themes, and many other, we shall
turn in the following chapters. For the moment, let us observe
that *fitrah* also conveniently provides Qutb with a way of
casting his call for revolution in politically mobilizing terms.
By reducing the success of the original period to its adherence
to *fitrah*, while at the same time insisting that *fitrah*
exists within all human beings, Qutb in effect attempts to make
the case that the success of the "Original Community" can be
reproduced by anyone at any time, and therefore that the truly
Islamic society can be re-established, no matter how far afield
the prevailing order may have strayed from the Right Path. By
the time of This Religion of Islam (1960), the need to inspire
action was strong enough to motivate Qutb to write the
following:

It is important for us to know that those people who
represented a higher humanity, unique models in their
submility... [and] who realized the divinely ordained path
in their own lives in this remarkable manner, were
nonetheless human beings, who had not left the bounds of
their nature or essential disposition. [h38]

Qutb then goes on to stress that, first, this "Original
Community", in its cooperation with innate *fitrah*, did not
impose upon itself exertions beyond its capacities; what it
accomplished it did under "natural" conditions. Qutb is
insistent on highlighting the "ordinary" character of the
"Original Community" in their struggle to answer the call of
fitrah, so that he may make the following point: by realizing
that the "Original Community" possessed no abilities beyond
those within the reach of simple human beings, mankind can then
take heart in its struggle to overcome its own present
weaknesses and shortcomings. "It is highly important to realize
this fact," Qutb insists, since "[i]t gives mankind a strong
hope for the resumption of struggle; it makes it the duty and
right of mankind to strive for that bright and feasible ideal,
and to continue striving. It causes mankind to gain in self-
confidence and to trust in its own inner nature and hidden
potentialities...."[h38]

An essential and unalterable *fitrah* provides Qutb with
the basic elements of his argument that Islam's is a universal
call. This argument is of central importance not only to the
substance of Qutb's discourse — as we shall see in Chapter 3 —
but also to the unapologetic tone that characterizes that
discourse and fundamentally distinguishes it from that of
earlier reformers. His "expositions of Islam," in Cragg's
words, "are declarative, not apologetical." [132] Muslims not only

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[132] Cragg (1985, p. 55).

need not apologize for their religion; they instead must actively and positively promote it as the only way to salvation for all of humanity. This was the subtext that crucially informed Social justice: Muslims were in possession of a complete system of life that combined what was good in the prevailing human orders of the day — mainly Capitalism and Communism. This system was ready to be implemented and to it the whole of humanity needed to turn. By the time of Milestones, the essential subtext had changed. Although Islam still remained the salvation of all of humanity — and in a sense, the urgency of Qutb's appeal to humanity became even more pronounced by the end of his life — the crucial theme that informed that work was the necessity of immediate struggle against the tyranny of those who had usurped divine sovereignty and had assumed godlike powers. Central to this theme was the necessity of drawing a sharp boundary between the realm of the human and the realm of the divine.

The bifurcation between the human and the divine is a theme we will frequently encounter in our analysis of Qutb's writings. Qutb's insistence that a sharp line separates man from God is at the heart of the most important of Qutb's dichotomies: the essential differentiation between the Islamic order and the prevailing *jaahiliyyah*. The Islamic order respects God's exclusive sovereignty over all of creation, while the essence of the *jaahilii* is precisely the usurpation of that sovereignty by mere men. To this theme we will turn with more detail in the next chapter. For the purposes of the present chapter, we will note that the sharp separation between the divine and the human closely coheres with the sort of *fitrah* that Qutb advances.

Qutb advances a *fitrah* which, if tapped into, will painlessly guide man to lasting happiness. But he also advances a *fitrah* about which man not only possesses very little knowledge, but, more importantly, is unable to reach on his own

any useful degree of understanding of that *fitrah*. For Qutb, knowledge of *fitrah* and its inner workings is unattainable; *fitrah* is elusive and man cannot fathom its mysteries on his own. History, according to Qutb, is littered with the abysmal depths to which man has fallen as a consequence of trying to rely on his own to unravel the mysteries of human nature. The result in every case was a civilization that violated *fitrah* and subsequently suffered the consequences of this violation. Qutb's favorite example on this score is the "demise" of Christianity as a true religion and its "marginalization" from the mainstream of every day life once that initially divine, and therefore *fitrah*-compatible, message was corrupted by the hand of man.[133] Probably unawares, Qutb borrows a line initially articulated in 19th century liberal Europe and later adopted by many Islamic reformers, most prominently by 'Abudh. As Hourani notes, "['Abduh] was influenced by the distinction drawn by such scholars as Strauss and Renan, as well as by Tolstoy, between the 'real Jesus' and his techings, and the Christianity evolved by St. Paul and the Catholic Church."[134] It is this view of Chistianity that Qutb inherits and mobilizes in his attempt to argue the "unnatural" character of the Christianity that is being practiced today. Initially a genuine divine religion, pure, simple, and free of the influences of other, worldly and man-made systems, Christianity eventually suffered the misfortune of corruption by pagan traditions and conceptions. Unlike the *Qur'an*, which is deemed by Qutb, in strict accordance with Muslim mainstream orthodoxy, to be the literal and uncorrupted word of God, transmitted from God to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel, and directly from the Prophet to the

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[133] The "corrupt" character of present-day Christianity, in contrast to Islam, is a trope often invoked by Qutb throughout his works. As we shall see in later chapters, Qutb's proposition that original Christianity was in its essence Islamic — i.e., its message was exactly that of Islam — is markedly at odds with the conception of Christianity held by many modernists before Qutb. Al-Afghani's Christianiy is essentially oriented towards the personal and the spiritual and represents an "earlier" phase in humanity's development.

[134] Hourani (1962, p. 143).

Muslim community,[135] the Christian Gospels by contrast were but "stories which came from different and conflicting sources." Not only did the Gospels have to wait a full generation after Christ to be written down, Qutb points out, but the very language in which it was originally written remains a matter of dispute among historians.[f41] And, even more importantly for Qutb, the principal propagator of the Christian faith to the Gentiles was himself a "Roman heathen converted to Christianity":

> Paul's conception of Christianity was adulterated by the residues of Roman mythology and Greek Philosophy. That was a catastrophe which inflicted Christianity since its early days in Europe, over and above its disfiguration during the early period of persecution when the prevailing circumstances did not allow for examining and authenticating its religious textual bases.[f42]

But the "greatest calamity of all" was to follow with the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Far from being a genuine submission to the Christian call, Constantine's conversion was motivated primarily by political and strategic considerations. With the official adoption of Christianity by the Romans,

> idolatry and polytheism entered Christianity by means of hypocrites who assumed high posts in the Roman empire. They pretended to be Christians, though they did not heed the dictates of religion in the least, nor were they ever faithful to it.[f44]

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[135] The Ash'ari conception of the Qur'an posits that the word of God is uncreated and eternal, in sharp contrast to the Mu'tazili conception that the Qur'an is created, and hence, by implication, subject to the accidents of history.

A disfigured creed, the ideological ideal of Christianity became as a result:

> burdened with elements of so-called "mysteries" quite alien to its nature as a Divine religion. Accordingly, the Christian conception, as modulated by successive graftings at the outset, and as edited by the general and private religious Councils later on, became unable to give authoritative Divine interpretation to the nature of existence and its genuine relation to the Creator. Nor could it elucidate the reality and attributes of the Creator, or the nature of human existence and the proper goals of mankind These elements must be correctly assessed so that the social order deriving from and dependent upon them will be sound and correct as well.[f48]

In short, the only way to salvation for man is to follow the divinely ordained path, a path that has access to the mysterious human *fitrah* and that recognizes that it is beyond man's capacities to grasp the nature of that *fitrah*. This path does not reveal *fitrah* to man by describing its nature to him. Rather, it *directly* guides him to comply with that *fitrah* and to act in harmony with its basic principles. Man may draw general conclusions about the basic characteristics of *fitrah*, as Qutb does not hesitate to do: that it is "immutable", [136] "resilient",[137] that it is a "mover" [138] within each man, that it obeys perfectly regulated laws and that it "craves". [139] But beyond general characteristics, according to Qutb, man can never hope to unravel its mysterious workings.

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[136] Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) <u>The future belongs to this religion</u>; p. 80; Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) <u>This religion of Islam</u>; pp. 42, 75.
[137] Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) <u>This religion of Islam</u>; p. 42; Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) <u>*Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*</u>; pp. 5-7, 64, 88.
[138] Qutb, S. [1962] (1991) <u>The Islamic concept and its characteristics</u>, p. 73.
[139] ibid, p 114; Qutb, S. [1951] (1983) <u>Islam and universal peace</u>; p. 19.

Man's essential inability to ever fully grasp his own nature is circularly explained by Qutb by pointing to that very nature: it is part of man's nature to live in a balanced state between knowledge and ignorance. More specifically, man needs to strike a balance between what he can grasp through his intellect and what lies beyond what he can fathom. Between the two states, knowledge and ignorance, Qutb stipulates the compromise of "belief": a compromise that, at least Qutb's eyes, acknowledges and respects the gap that separates man from his Creator.

2.2 Belief - 'aqiidah

A position that places Sayyid Qutb at the fringes of mainstream Islam — and squarely within the camp of radicalism — is his instance that a "truly" Muslim society has never existed in its full form after the time of the Prophet and the first Rightly Guided Companions. [140] As Sivan notes, with Qutb, "it is no more just a question of decline." [141] Today, in Qutb's opinion, the world is populated by mere nominal Muslims, living in nominally Muslim countries and headed by nominally Muslim rulers. [142] In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb equates present-day society, whether Muslim or otherwise, with the pre-Islamic, *jaahilii* order. "The Muslim community has long ago vanished from existence and from observation," Qutb outright declares, "and the leadership of mankind has since passed to other ideologies and other nations, other concepts and other systems."[t12] Not since the Prophet's days, and the few years following his death, under the guidance of Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and 'Ali, has the Muslim *ummah* lived in the full spirit of Islam. Since then, those who call themselves Muslim have strayed from the Right Path and have adopted systems of life other than the one

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[140] Qutb, S. [1964] (1978) <u>Milestones; pp. 21-35.</u>

[141] Sivan, E. (1985) <u>Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics,</u> p. 65.

[142] Qutb, S. [1964] (1978) <u>Milestones; pp. 21, 32.</u>

ordained by God.   Most importantly, they have accepted for a
source of legislation some power other than God.   In doing so,
they have committed the greatest sin that can be committed in
the Muslim religion — *shirk*: they have associated some other
entity with God, hence compromising in their belief God's
absolute sovereignty.   Qutb is insistent on equating submission,
or even acquiescence, to a legal or a social system with
worship. For Qutb, the post-"Original Community" has not merely
strayed from God's way: it has drifted from believing in God's
absolute rule over all of Creation.   For all their surface
differences, Muslim societies today are all unbelieving, and
therefore equally un-Islamic:

> Among Muslim societies, some openly declare their
> "secularism" and negate all their relationships with the
> religion; some others pay respect to the religion only
> with their mouths, but in their social life they have
> completely abandoned it.   They say that they do not
> believe in the "Unseen" and want to construct their social
> system on the basis of "science"....   There are some other
> societies which have given authority of legislation to
> others beside God.   They make whatever laws they please
> and then say: "this is the *sharii'ah* of God."   All these
> societies are the same in one respect, that none of them
> is based on submission to God. [Islam]... considers all
> these un-Islamic and illegal. [t155]

It is therefore clear what first step needs to be taken
for re-establishing the truly Muslim order: re-injecting
Muslims with the firm belief in the absolute sovereignty of God.
For Qutb, submission to a power other than God's is in itself an
act of unbelief, so that "[a] Muslim community can come into
existence only when individuals and groups of people reject
servitude to anyone except God;"[t146] again: "no individual or
group of individuals can be truly Muslim until they wholly
submit to God alone in the manner taught by the Messenger of

Allah."[t166] Even in his least radical work, <u>Social justice</u>,
where Qutb is still far from dismissing all present-day
societies as non-Islamic, we can clearly read the centrality to
Qutb's thinking of belief in Allah's sovereignty:

> Islam began by freeing the human conscience from servitude
> to any one except Allah and from submission to any save
> him.... Since Allah is One, His worship is also one, and
> to Him alone must all men turn. There is no object of
> worship except Allah, nor can men take one another as
> Lords apart from Him.... Islam has an intense interest
> in this belief, and the *Qur'an* emphasizes it in various
> passages.[s32-3] [143]

The centrality of the belief in the absolute sovereignty
of God crucially leads Qutb towards a strategic choice for the
installation of the Islamic order. Qutb's focus throughout most
of his writings is on the reform *of society*, and in his later
writings, on the *political* reform of society, and not on the
reform of the individual: in this also Qutb deviates from
mainstream Muslim orthodoxy. Tradition by and large "rejected
the suggestion that religious works and piety are directed at
any objective other than the spiritual salvation of man." [144]
The individual, albeit central to both Qutb's conception of the
Islamic order and his strategy of making that order a reality,
is not the ultimate object of Qutb's gaze. When Qutb sets his
attention on the individual, it is within the larger framework
of the final goal that animates Qutb's discourse: the
installation of the Islamic order. It is important to note that
Mawdudi's basic strategy of reform is fundamentally the same:

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[143] Note that Qutb, in conformance with tradition, does not claim that Islam is the first religion to insist on the abslute sovereignty of God; in <u>The future belongs to this religion</u> (1960), Qutb writes: "Then Muhammad (peace be upon him) came with Islam, not to revoke the previous Divine laws, but to corroborate and encompass them, because Islam is the last and most comprehensive message from God to all mankind;"[f27]
[144] Nasr (1996, p. 65).

"the only way open for reform and resuscitation," Mawdudi
wrote, "is to rejuvenate Islam as a movement and to revive the
meaning of the word 'Muslim' anew."[145] Mawdudi and Qutb share the
same orientation towards the communal, and in both one can
clearly see the instrumental mobilization of individual faith
for the service of the greater cause of establishing the Islamic
order. As Nasr observes, "[i]n Mawdudi's formula, although
individual piety featured prominently, in the final analysis, it
was the society and the political order that guaranteed the
piety of the individual."[146] Qutb's instrumentlism towards the
individual believer is also patently clear, especially in
Milestones. The work itself is a manifesto that explains to the
believer the essence of the Islamic order and the nature of the
arduous challenge that awaits those who are willing to struggle
for the cause of bringing Islam to life, and that traces the
broad lines of strategy to follow in the long struggle; it is
not a document for inculcating belief nor one for cultivating
the spirit.[147]

Ironically, however, the individual occupies a crucial
position in Qutb's argument. It is not to the ' *ulema* or the
enlightened that Qutb writes his books — certainly not his last
works — but to those who are "truly" animated by " *laa ilaah
illaa a-llaah*" — the belief that there is no God but Allah. As
Moussalli notes, " Qutb's rejection of elitism in its
intellectual as well as political manifestations, provides an
opportunity for people to establish an Islamic state without
waiting for the appearance of a mystical figure, the philosopher
or the prophet, but through the actions of common Muslims."[148]
The Islamic order will become a reality only once true belief

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[145] ibid., p. 55.
[146] ibid., p. 57.
[147] Unlike Mawdudi, however, Qutb did not seem to rely on the power of his didactic presentation to
impress upon his reader the validity of his propositions. One of Qutb's central themes, as we shall see
shortly, was precisely that belief cannot be inculcated apart from action: and by action Qutb meant *social*
action, i.e., action that promotes the growth and health of the Islamic order. See, Binder (1988, p. 201).
[148] Moussalli (1992, p. 81).

penetrates Muslims, and not before. Those Muslims who wish to build Islamic structures and impose Islamic laws before a genuinely believing community has been established are in effect calling for nothing less than "that Islam change its character, its method and its history and be reduced to the level of ordinary human theories and laws."[t60] Islam's method, Qutb insists, views societies as an emerging reflection of its individual members: if the members are believers, then the resulting order is a legally Islamic order, and if not, then it is *jaahilii* . We can detect Qutb's anti-structuralist strategy of reform since the very beginning of his Islamist phase. In his earliest Islamic work, Social justice, Qutb writes:

> Political theory (*siyaasatu al-hukmi*) in Islam stands on the foundation of conscience rather than that of law. It stands on the conviction that Allah is present at every moment alike with the ruler and with the ruled, watching over both.[s99] [s(a)108]

With these words, Qutb articulates a political theory that is much closer to the Shi'i conception of legitimate government than the classical Sunni position. [149] While in its early years, mainstream Sunni political theory held that the legitimacy of the ruler rested on the twin criteria that the ruler lawfully ascend to the Caliphate and that he rule justly once he is Caliph (the epitome of the just ruler in the Sunni tradition was the second Caliph, 'Umar), through the centuries, the first criterion of accession was in essence dropped, while the second was whittled to the minimum requirement that the ruler display respect for the norms of Islam. [150] Qutb never fully discards this conception of government — i.e., government by the pious — but by the writing of Milestones, his argument for the piety of rulers has turned into one for the belief of the "simple" Muslim. The piety of the ruler is desirable, but since the

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[149] Enayat (1982, p. 5).
[150] Lewis (1988, pp. 98-100).

thrust of <u>Milestones</u> is precisely the argument that the *jaahilii* ruler — i.e., the ruler who usurps God's sovereignty — can be deposed legitimately, and must be deposed to restore the divine order, it is clear that Qutb has gone beyond the traditional Sunni conception of government by the pious. The concern has turned to the installation of the Muslim community, where *laws* are legislated in conformity with the spirit of the physically existing Muslim society: "Only when such a society comes into being, faces various practical problems, and needs a system of law, then Islam initiates the constitution of law and injunctions, rules and regulations."[t58]

Unlike <u>Social justice</u>, then, where the method of government is explicitly articulated in the terms of classical Sunni pietism (mainly for the purpose of drawing a sharp distinction between Islamic political theory and the theories of Western legalism), in <u>Milestones</u>, the pietism is deployed by Qutb in his articulation of the method of change. Qutb extends Islam's mission beyond simply converting man to the belief in the exclusive sovereignty of God, to include inculcating man with a more radically belief-centered methodology of change: "One should understand that this religion has come to change not only the beliefs and practices of people," he writes, "but also the method of bringing about these changes in beliefs and practices."[s71] And Islam's method calls for establishment of true belief, through concrete action in the everyday life, through struggle, and through continual interaction between members of an emerging community of true believers. In this paradigm, the individual is the building unit upon which the future society is to be established.

Islam, Qutb insists, is consciously unapologetic and uncompromising on the matter of belief. The Muslim should not compromise belief, even if such a compromise should seem to him beneficial for the Islamic cause in the short term. Invoking the example of the Prophet, Qutb notes in <u>Milestones</u> that

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Muhammad had before him an array of options that would have been far easier to take had his aim been to merely establish and consolidate power. For instance, Qutb notes, "Muhammad — peace be on him — was capable of kindling among his compatriots the fire of Arab nationalism and would thus have united them. They would have responded gladly to this call, for they were weary of continual tribal warfare and blood feuds. He would then have been able to free the Arab lands from the domination of the Romans and Persian imperialism and would have been able to establish a united Arab state."[t43] But, Qutb observes, this is not the way the Prophet carried out his mission:

> [T]he All-knowing and All-wise God did not lead His Prophet — peace be upon him — on this course. He led him to declare openly that there is no deity but God, and to bear patiently, with his Few Companions, whatever trials came to them.[t43]

Qutb then goes on to note that at the time of the Prophet, "Arab society was devoid of proper distribution of wealth and devoid of justice."[t44] Had the Prophet's aim and end been to impose Islam by any means, he could easily have incited the poor majority to rise against the wealthy minority, rather than "confront the society with the Message of the Unity of God, which remained beyond the reach of all except a few noble souls."[t45] Moreover, after having consolidated his power, the Prophet could have easily "used his position to impose the belief in the Unity of God, for which task God had appointed him as His Prophet. Thus, first making human beings bow before his authority, he could have made them bow before the True God."[t45-6] But, again, God insisted that His Prophet not compromise on the method of Islam's propagation: Islam was to be established on true faith alone, on the free and genuine acceptance by individuals of the complete sovereignty of God, and the submission of man to God alone. It is precisely for

this reason, Qutb notes, that Islam insists on never compelling belief:

> War has never been a means of forcing people to embrace Islam.... The only use of force through the long history of Islam... was in order to give people freedom of choice and eliminate the injustices of oppressors who tried to usurp God's divine right to rule and deny Muslims the right to preach their religion.[u14] [151]

In its essence, Qutb argues, Islam is an emancipatory movement (*harakah tahriiriyyah*), a "revolutionary creed" (*aqiidah thawriyyah*) against any oppressive order (*taaghuut*), and considers as its first and primary mission the liberation of the individual conscience (*dhamiir*).[d-31][152] It is fundamental to Qutb's discourse that Islam's essential mission consist first and foremost in the voluntary and non-coerced conversion of individual belief: man must truly believe that no one and nothing has sovereignty over this world except its Creator, God. That is why, Qutb argues, Islam refuses that a war be waged for the purpose of forcing anyone to enter into Islam.[d-37] Islam's method should never deviate from the Qur'anic injunction: "there should be no compelling in matters of religion" ("*laa ikraah fii al-diin*"). Conversion of others should be sought through patient preaching and wise advice giving *(al-da'wah allayyinah wa al-maw'idhah al-hasanah*).[d-40] In <u>Social justice</u>, we find Qutb advocating various methods for

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[151] To further strengthen his point that Islam never imposed itself by force, Qutb invokes a strategy that is often deployed in Islamic apologetics: he cites a non-Muslim historian. In <u>The future belongs to this religion</u> (1960), Qutb writes: "Sir T. W. Arnold in his book <u>The Preaching of Islam</u> mentions many examples of te tolerance of Muslim conquerors towards the defeated Christians in the first Hegira Century. He confirmed that such tolerance persisted during the successive generations and concluded with conviction that the tribes that embraced Islam did so freely.... Arnold's conclusion and others like it refute the idea that Islamic wars were declared to compel people to embrace the Religion or to colonise and exploit others or to humiliate them."[u14-5]

[152] The term "*dhamiir*", loosely translated as moral conscience and which has a literary/psychological conotation, is typical of the vocabulary employed by Sayyid Qutb in his early, pre-Islamist work. See Shephard (1996) for an excellent discussion on the "Islamization" that Sayyid Qutb's language underwent through the five editions of Sayyid Qutb's<u>Social justice.</u>

encouraging belief, or at least interest in Islam's message, that in his later works, and most notably in <u>Milestones</u>, he came to emphatically reject. In <u>Social justice</u>, the Islamic method that Qutb describes interacts with a man less essential and more fragmented than the man of <u>Milestones</u>. In <u>Social justice</u> Qutb speaks of an Islam that "stimulates the will," that "warns, exhorts, depicts."[s84] Islam's aim is to "persuade the conscience in the case of every duty it prescribes" and "appeals to the conscience, persuading it of its responsibility, and seeking to raise it above its normal scope."[s84] More remarkably, Qutb writes:

> [Islam] kindles love for holy wars (sic) (*jihaad*) by
> inciting the conscience to accept it, by depicting it in
> glowing terms, and by emphasizing its justice and the
> glories it brings to a society. [s85]

The discourse of <u>Milestones</u> has little room for such language. There we find Qutb insisting on an unconditional adherence to Islam driven exclusively by a complete submission of man to God: Islam must be accepted not because man finds it attractive or appealing on some particular ground, but exclusively because man truly believes in the absolute and exclusive sovereignty of God. Once instilled with true belief, man will naturally, and voluntarily, accept without need for further proofs or arguments what God has revealed:

> The love of the Divine Law (*sharii'ah*) should be a
> consequence of pure submission to Allah and of freedom
> from servitude to anyone else, and not because it is
> superior to other systems in such and such details.[t63]

Islam, therefore, need not persuade man of its attractiveness, at least not in the discursive sense of "persuasion" used in <u>Social justice</u>. What persuasion is necessary, it must be carried out to instill in man the

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fundamental belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. Indeed, although Qutb does retain in <u>Milestones</u> some of the discursive character of Islam's interaction with man, now the aim of that discursive interaction is primarily aimed at instilling in man total submission to God, rather than in impressing upon man the attractiveness of the Muslim religion. Referring to the "Original Community", Qutb writes:

> During the Meccan period, the *Qur'an* explained to man the secret of his existence and the secret of the universe surrounding him. It told him who he is, where he has come from, for what purpose and where he will go in the end, to Whom he will return, and what his final disposition will be.[t38]

Clearly, the sort of discourse that Qutb is referring to here is not one of convincing the prospective believer of the validity of Islam; it is instead a discourse that informs and answers man's existential questions. Qutb takes the creedal starting point of the reform mission seriously. We find little in Sayyid Qutb of Al-Afghani's instrumental mobilization of religion or creed. Al-Afghani, in the true spirit of the elitism of Muslim *falsafah*, lauds the beliefs promoted by religions (and it is significant to note the plural "religions" here), but his argument is always articulated on grounds of the *utility* of entertaining such beliefs, not on their innate validity or truth. The belief in the nobility of man, the belief in the nobility of the community to which man belongs, and the belief in a better afterlife, all promote a greater good and advance mankind in its road to civilization, and for this reason, must be advanced and propagated. Al-Afghani himself does not seem to necessarily believe that such propositions are factual. We saw earlier that, concerning human nature, Al-Afghani entertained a rather bleak outlook. "Education", not an innate capacity to do good, is what promoted civilization. But then again, it was also another of Al-Afghani's tenets that the

philosopher and the layman were not to be preached to in the same language. [153]

Sayyid Qutb's position on the acquisition of belief also stands in sharp contrast with that of Muhammad 'Abduh. Like his master Al-Aghani, 'Abduh held that belief itself can be attained only through reason: it is reason that convinces us that God exists and that He possesses some of his attributes. Reason informs us of the certainty of the afterlife and enables us to distinguish between good and evil acts. [154] 'Abduh goes farther than that and asserts that intellectual capacity correlates in a positive relation with belief in a transcendent god. [155] 'Abduh does set limits to the extent of reason's capacities: [156] there are certain truths which, unaided, reason may not be able to attain. [157] However, a crucial difference separates Qutb from 'Abduh: while 'Abduh stipulated that the "certainty" of God's existence and the authenticity of God's messenger can be asserted only through reason, Qutb insists that the starting point for arriving to such a conviction is a visceral acceptance of God sovereignty. Indeed, central for Qutb is the assertion that man has very little access to knowledge about his own nature. Such knowledge can be attained only from the solicitous guidance of the Creator. In his book, <u>The Islamic concept and its characteristics</u> (1962), Qutb puts forward an idea that will become central in his later <u>Milestones</u>:

> It is not possible for the conscience of man to settle
> issues concerning the universe, his own self, the purpose
> of his life, his role in the universe, and the
> relationship between the individual and society, without
> first settling the issues of his belief.[k17e]

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[153] Keddie (1983, p. 9).
[154] 'Abduh, Muhammad (1980).
[155] Badawi (1978, p.54).
[156] ibid., p.55.
[157] Hourani (1962 p. 147).

And later, he adds:

[M]an, by his very nature (*fitrah*), cannot live in this
world as a detached, free-floating speck of dust. He must
relate to the world in a definite manner by formulating an
idea concerning his place in the scheme of things. In the
final analysis, it is his belief-concept (*'aqiidah*), which
in his own way determines his place in his surroundings
(*'aqiidah tufassiru lahu maa hawlahu wa tu fassiru lahu
makaanuhu fii maa hawlahu*).[k18e]

Only through belief can man live in a balanced state
between knowledge and ignorance. It is part of man's *fitrah*,
Qutb argues, to crave for knowledge; but equally deep and
intense is his recognition of the mysterious, the unknown, the
unfathomable:

A belief system in which there is no element of the
unknown or anything greater than the limited understanding
of man can hardly be called a belief. The human soul can
find little appealing in such a system, because there
would be little to excite its curiosity or satisfy its
sense of mystery.[k109-110e]

This is why, as we shall discuss with greater detail in
chapter 5, any attempt to approach man's existential problems
from a sociological perspective is deemed futile and destructive
by Qutb. The fatal sin of "modern *jaahiliyyah*" for Qutb is the
hubris of knowledge: the idea that man can attain true knowledge
of himself and the nature of his existence. A sustained target
of his criticism in this "modern *jaahiliyyah*", and, in Qutb's
eyes, one of its most articulate and intelligent spokesperson,
is the French scientist and philosopher, Alexis Carrel (1873-

1944).[158]   Rejecting what Qutb understood to be Carrel's call for a deeper understanding of man, Qutb writes that

> The mode of life of the people will not be reoriented to
> meaningful change simply by an increase of knowledge.
> What really counts in this respect is an increase in sound
> Faith. Faith, because the essential psyche of man is
> sustained only by true belief.[f114]

In other words, efforts at gaining more knowledge about man in an attempt to address man's basic existential questions are fundamentally misguided because they negate an essential reality about human nature: man *needs* to believe in the unknown. More specifically, man needs to strike a balance between what he can grasp through his intellect and what lies beyond what he can fathom.

For Qutb, then, belief is an ontological reality: it is not a byproduct of man's allegedly imperfect cognitive capacities; it is a necessity given the nature of *fitrah*. In addition to acquiring knowledge about the world, man must also *believe*. It is already a matter of fact, in Qutb's view, that man, whether Muslim or not, by necessity lives with deep-seated, if not always consciously perceived and acknowledged, belief systems. For Qutb, man perceives the world from an essentially ideological perspective that rests on one fundamental idea: "all of man's life, both personal and social, depends on a concept, i.e., on an underlying belief-concept...."[k35e] More explicitly, Qutb writes:

> [A] strong tie exists between the nature of the belief-
> concept (*al-tasawwur al-i'tiqaadii*) and the nature of the
> social system (*tabii'atu al-nidhaami al-ijtimaa'ii*). This

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[158] See, Antier (1994).

bond cannot be broken, and is stronger than any other
bond.[ke18]

We must take careful note of the determining role Qutb
assigns to the belief-concept in shaping the nature of social
systems. This will help us understand two points very important
for Qutb: first, that to change a social system, the creedal
basis of that system must first be changed. And for Qutb, such
a change can be carried out only by changing the belief of the
individual members of a society. And second, given that every
social system is creedal in its essence, any attempt to change
that system will touch on the fundamental beliefs and
conceptions held by the members of that social system. As a
result, one will have to face great resistance and violent
hostility. The first point addresses the method of inculcating
belief through active interaction with the world; the second
addresses the necessity to struggle in the face of the
inevitable reaction of the *jaahilii* order. We will discuss the
first point in the remainder of this section, while the second
point will be taken up by the last section of this chapter.

Inculcating the belief in God's absolute sovereignty,
according to Qutb, needs to be carried out "gradually". Always
looking back to the "Original Community" as a model, Qutb
observes that the *Qur'an* was delivered piecemeal to the Prophet
and the Original Muslim community for a reason:

The *Qur'an* did not come down at once but took thirteen
years to construct and strengthen the structure of faith.
Had God wanted, he would have revealed the entire *Qur'an*
at once and then left the Companions to learn it for a
period of approximately thirteen years so that the
Believers would master the "Islamic theory".[t67]

Instead, God revealed the *Qur'an* gradually, insisting that
what it taught be applied and lived first, before further

revelations were delivered. As we will see in the next section,
it is essential to Qutb's argument that Islam's method of
fostering belief be action-based. Qutb argues that belief
(*'aqdiidah*) and action (*harakah*) are intimately bound. Without
harakah, *'aqiidah* cannot be nurtured, while at the same time,
without healthy *'aqiidah*, constructive *harakah* cannot be
undertaken: to build and consolidate belief, one must enact
one's initially tentative convictions and interact with the
world ; and, at the same time, to do good, to act in such a way
that one discharges his duty on earth (his *khilaafah* mission) —
i.e., caretaker of God's earthly creation — one must be a true
believer. This is why, Qutb argues, Islam's message was
revealed gradually. Qutb cites the following Qur'anic verse to
support his point:

> We have revealed this *Qur'an* little by little so that you
> may recite it to people at intervals, and We have revealed
> it gradually.[159]

According to Qutb, God's aim was to establish the
foundations of a truly believing community and, at the same
time, to give life to a belief by linking it to concrete action:
"Gradualness and teaching at intervals is desired, so that a
'living community' based on its beliefs may come into existence,
and not merely a theory"[t70] And more specifically,

> He wanted faith to grow with the progress of the
> community, while the practical life of the community was
> at the same time a mirror of the faith' (*kaana yuriidu an
> yabniya al-jamaa'a wa al-harakah bi al-'aqiidah, wa an
> yabniya al-'aqiidah bi al-jamaa'ah wa al-harakah*).[t67]

Therefore, any method that undertakes the teaching of
Islam without penetrating "into the veins and arteries of a

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[159] Suurat Banii Israa'iil, 17:106.

vital society" but instead attempts "to show the superiority of the 'Islamic theory'... is not only erroneous but also dangerous," since it threatens the success itself of the Islamic mission.[t68-9] The *Qur'an* itself, Qutb often repeats, came down "[o]ne verse or a few verses" at a time "according to the special circumstances and events and... would answer questions which arose in the minds of people, would explain the nature of a particular situation, and would presecribe a way of dealing with it."[t28-9] The revelation of the *Qur'an*, as depicted by Qutb, took place in a context of interaction between an emerging believing community and their god, rather than in a context where that community passively received a static word unidirectionally ordained by God. Qutb is so insistent on assigning an active role to the believer that at times he flirts with stepping out of Muslim orthodox bonds by using language that comes close to depicting Qur'anic revelation in terms that give the "Original Community" a constitutive role, if not in the actual content of the revealed word, at least in what questions were raised and what problems were addressed:

> The *Qur'an* did not come down all at once; rather it came *down according to the needs of the Islamic society in facing new problems*, according to the growth of ideas and concepts, according to the progress of the general social life, and according to new challenges faced by the Muslim community in its practical life.[t29] (emphasis added)

Mawdudi's views closely match those of Qutb on this score. Indeed, the Qur'an that emerges from Mawdudi's writings is a wordly book: "Mawdudi subsumed the spiritual significance of the Qur'an, truncating the scope of the holy book in favor of a narrow interpretation."[160] It is a Qur'an tailored for action and was historically revealed "piecemeal", the better to

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[160] Nasr (1996, p. 55).

facilitate its application. With Mawdudi and Qutb, we are
indeed a long way from the Ash'ari belief that the Qur'an is the
eternal, uncreated word of God!

     As we briefly mentioned earlier, Qutb holds that any
society, whether Islamic or *jaahilii* , is built upon a world
conception: what Qutb calls "*tasawwur*", a basic paradigm/world
conception that on the one hand addresses man's fundamental and
unvarying existential questions about his relationship with the
universe, his role in creation, the mystery of his origin and
the destiny that awaits him, but also informs his relationship
with other fellow human beings, with society at large, and with
the physical world that surrounds him. "Communism", for example,
Qutb insists, "is not a "mere social order"; it is in reality an
"ideological ideal, expressed in terms of 'dialectical
materialism', based on the material aspect of this world and the
existence of material contradictions which cause world evolution
and revolution."[f20] The same holds for all other systems of
life: they are creedal in their essence and express not merely a
structural ordering of life, but a view that informs man's
conception of himself and his relationship with the universe.
In fact, as mentioned earlier, Qutb goes further and holds that
"every system or order of life is a 'religion' for that
life,"[f20-1] equating acceptance of a system of laws to a
submission and even worship of the legislator of those laws.
Qutb concludes that "obedience to laws and judgments is a sort
of worship, and anyone who does this is considered out of this
religion"[t108]

     The broad definition of "religion" that Qutb uses — a
definition that loosely counts as "religions" man-devised social
systems — is an important move in Qutb's argument. First, it is
a typically Qutbian stand that consciously rejects adopting an
apologetic or defensive position: assigning the label "religion"
to other systems is to insist that the terms of the debate and
analysis of society and man be carried out in the Islamic

vocabulary, as conceived by Qutb. Qutb wants to talk about
societies in terms of creed, i.e., in terms that take man's
world-conception as the fundamentally constitutive matter of
societies, rather than use a structural, sociological language,
where — at least in Qutb's conception of the sociological
perspective — man is assigned a passive, or at best a secondary,
role in the analysis. But perhaps more significantly, calling
all creedal systems "religions" enables Qutb to sharpen the
nature of the challenge faced by Islam. Islam is facing
religions, entities that Islam can easily recognize and deal
with at the ontological level. Islam already has a rich
vocabulary and a set of well-defined constructs and rules, for
dealing with other religions. The informed Muslim knows how to
interact with members of other religions, how to treat them, and
how to view them as Others essentially similar to him, on the
one hand, given the unvarying primordial *fitrah* that all
humans share, but on the other hand fundamentally different from
him on the matter of creed. We see the full blossoming of this
religious view of systems most vividly in <u>Milestones</u>, where the
concept of *jaahiliyyah* — a concept rich in religious meaning and
evocative of pre-Islamic imagery — occupies center stage in
Qutb's argument.

By the same token, one must note that the sword of casting
belief systems in religious terms is double edged: depicting and
characterizing all social systems in religious terms leads Qutb
to talk about Islam in terms of a world conception that goes
beyond the traditional notion of Islam as a *diin* (religion).
Qutb writes that "[w]e may... contend that each system of life
is a 'religion' in the sense that religion functions in a
society as the philosophical mooring that determines the fiber
of life in that society."[f19] The "world conception" and
"philosophical mooring" that Qutb invokes allegedly encompass
all aspects of life and infiltrate all dimensions of the world
order, both the personal and the social. They essentially
define, and almost determine, the economic, the social, the

ethical, and the political spheres of life. In other words, we have here a strikingly "modern" depiction of both society and religion — and in the technical sense a "totalitarian" one at that. As Abu Rabii' notes, "Qutb's understanding of the Qur'an is neither esoteric nor metaphysical, but conceptual and ideological."[161] A decidedly socio-scientific vocabulary is moreover deployed to describe the relationship between society and its "world conception". "There is a strong correlation between the social order and the ideological ideal," Qutb writes; " Still stronger than correlation is the basic biological emergence of the social order from the ideological ideal"[f17] The key terms to note are "correlation", "social order", "ideological ideal" and "biological emergence". These terms are not part of the orthodox *fiqh* lexicon.

Broadening the meaning of "religion", then, enables Qutb to at once cast Islam's confrontations in traditional terms, with Islamic tradition handily providing him with the rich vocabulary and the imagery necessary to depict and interpret events and situations in a familiar language readily accessible to most Muslims, while at the same time making possible a radically modern re-interpretation of that very same Islamic tradition. The irony of casting the present in the vocabulary of the past, only to find that such recasting cannot be carried out without at the same time casting that very past in the language of the present, is but one example of the tension between the past and the present that runs throughout Qutb's work. Mawdudi also was unable to escape such tensions: "[t]he systematization of Islam," Nasr writes of Mawdudi, "was an 'Islamic view of modernity' more than it was a reflection on the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. The religious underpinnings of Mawdudi's views camouflaged his subliminal modernization of thought and practice, which often worked in ways that were not visible."[162]   As we shall see in chapter 5, the same impulses

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[161] Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 146).
[162] Nasr (1996, p. 63).

seem to be informing Qutb's discourse: while Qutb explicitly rejects and deprecates the social sciences and their methods, he cannot resist borrowing many of their constructs, and at times, their very methods.

2.3 Action — Harakah

So far, we have examined two central concepts in the definition of man in the discourse of Sayyid Qutb: *fitrah* (human nature) and *'aqiidah* (belief). Man is endowed by his Maker with a *fitrah*; this *fitrah* is at once immutable and reactive: it is always present within man, no matter how much man deviates from it in his deeds and behavior, and it is always at the ready to react to man's actions, rewarding him if he acts in conformity with it and punishing him if he deviates from it or violates it. Moreover, in Qutb's discourse, man has no direct access to the nature of his *fitrah*; he can neither describe it nor analyze it. It is in fact, according to Qutb, part of man's nature that he can never attain full understanding of his own nature, and therefore that he can never build, on his own, an ethical and social system that will guarantee him compliance with the demands of that nature. However, man has not been left to fend for himself. His benevolent Maker has sent him a sacred text in which He devises for him the framework of a complete system of life that is in harmony with his *fitrah*. In this sacred text, God has not spelled out a theory or described an abstract system; rather, He has prescribed certain actions, habits, methods, and general principles of ethical and social conduct, and prohibited other deeds and practices. If man chooses to observe God's commands, he will live in compliance with *fitrah*, hence guaranteeing himself a rewarding life here on earth and an even better life in the Hereafter, while if he chooses to deviate from God's word, then he will live in violation of *fitrah*, therefore losing both earthly happiness and Paradise. But for man to adhere to God's

word, man must first truly believe in the absolute and exclusive sovereignty of God over all of creation: man must submit to nothing and to no one besides God. In Qutb's discourse, man must sincerely believe that 'there is no God but Allah' (*laa liaaha illaa allaah*) before he can have access to God's word, i.e., before he can begin to live by the only system of life that will guarantee him compliance with *fitrah*. First, it is an essential part of *fitrah* that man be free from any other man, thing, idea, desire — from anything else except God. Man is a privileged creature, created by God with a freedom to decide and to choose how to act, and only when man truly believes that he answers only to his Maker, and insists on living by his belief, will man be able to fulfill his innate desire to live freely. And second, it is part of human *fitrah* to seek a higher authority, a source of guidance that goes beyond human wisdom. Man is not satisfied with mere knowledge; equally intense is his desire to believe in the unknown, in the mysterious.   Only Islam, Qutb concludes, provides man with a system of life that strikes the right balance between the known and the unknown, freedom and submission, knowledge and belief.

Equally central to Qutb's discourse as the notions of *fitrah* and *'aqiidah* is the concept of *harakah*: action.   Man can develop his faith, and therefore gain the disciplined freedom — i.e., the freedom he obtains by submitting totally to God and to God only — his *fitrah* craves, only by investing his faith in action. In Qutb's conception, man is an integrated being: he is both an actor-believer and a believer-actor: "[Man's] concepts and ideas, behavior and responses, beliefs and actions... are all tied together"[ke104]   When addressing man, God does not expound on a philosophical system of ideas and abstractions; rather, He insists that man *act* his belief. The necessity of action, Qutb notes, is characteristic of all life-conceptions: a *'aqiidah* (belief) 'always motivate[s] people to action, propelling them toward definite goals through the

wilderness of time and the darkness of the way."[ke11] Islam
is no exception to this rule:

> The nature of the Islamic concept is not to remain hidden
> in the human mind. It must be translated immediately into
> action and become a concrete reality in the world of
> events. The believer cannot be content to have his faith
> remain concealed in his heart, because he feels compelled
> to make his faith an effective force in changing his own
> life and the lives of the people around him.[ke155E;ka157]

By virtue of being a world-concept, a life-creed, Islam
assigns man an active role in this world and provides him with a
particular plan of life-action. The Islamic conception as
taught in the *Qur'an* is a practical plan for the purpose of
erecting an Islamic reality. The true believer who has
interacted with the word of God, who believes in God's absolute
sovereignty, will not rest with mere passive belief; that very
belief will continuously keep stirring him to act: "The Islamic
concept keeps the mind of the Muslim restless, always calling
him to action from the depths of his consciousness, telling him
to get up and go out and actualize this concept in the real
world."[k155E] Belief in Islam is never mentioned in isolation
from action: "Whenever the *Qur'an* mentions belief or the
believers, it also mentions appropriate deeds that translate the
belief into practice."[ke156] Faith, for Qutb, cannot be
divorced from the daily life of action. Religion is not
confined to the house of worship, on the contrary, it must by
necessity be involved with the mundane actions of human living.
Having defined "religion" in such broad terms, Qutb takes the
next step of equating practical work informed by the Islamic
conception with religious work. Fulfilling the duties of
religion can be achieved neither through passive contemplation
of God, nor even through the observance of religious ritual; the
duties of Islam can be fulfilled only through action that
translates the essence of the Islamic creed into concrete

reality. In <u>Social justice</u>, Qutb cites the following famous
hadiith:

> It is related on the authority of Anas that he said: We
> were on a journey with the Prophet, some of us having
> fasted and some of us having eaten. We alighted
> somewhere in a day of a scorching heat, and he who had a
> garment gave us its shade, but many of us had to shade
> ourselves from the sun with our hands. So those who had
> fasted lay helpless, but those who had eaten arose and
> went from door to door till they got water for the party.
> Then said the Messenger, 'Those who did not fast have
> this day carried off the full prize.[s9-10]

Qutb then goes on to note that this does not indicate that
the Prophet scorned fasting and prayer, but rather that the
Prophet wished to communicate that "the essential spirit of this
religion is found in this — that *practical work is religious
work*, for religion is inextricably bound up with life and can
never exist in the isolation of idealism in some world of the
conscience alone."[s10] (emphasis added) What Islam abhors
above all else are excess — even excess in worship — and
inaction.   For this reason, asceticism and mysticism are
rejected by Qutb as activities essentially antithetical to the
Islamic conception, both because they upset the balance that
Islam calls for between contemplation and action, and also
because they confine worship to the personal and the spiritual,
rather than invest faith in actions that interact with other
humans and with the rest of God's creation. Still in <u>Social
justice</u>, Qutb relates a story about Islam's second Caliph,
'Umar, to illustrate that a Muslim's piety is not measured by
the extent to which the Muslim observes religious rituals, but
rather by how he acts and interacts as a member of the Muslim
community:

[W]hen a man was giving evidence before him, 'Umar said
to him, 'Bring hither some one who knows you.' So the man
brought another who praised him highly. Then said 'Umar
to the second man, 'Are you this man's nearest neighbor,
to know his comings and goings?' 'No.' 'Have you, then,
been his companion on a journey, whereon he gave evidence
of nobility of character?' 'No.' 'Have you perhaps had
dealings with him in money matters, wherein he showed
himself a man of self-control?' 'No.' 'Then I suspect
that you have only seen him in the mosque, mumbling the
Qur'an, and now and then lowering and raising his head in
prayer. ' 'That is so.' 'Then said 'Umar, 'Away. You do
not really know him'[s10]

Later in <u>Milestones</u>, writing in the characteristically
uncompromising tone that informs the whole work, Qutb goes so
far as to make action a *requirement* for being a "true" Muslim.
It is not enough for Qutb that a community call itself Muslim,
or that its members profess themselves Muslim: it must "act" its
faith, or otherwise renounce its claim to being Muslim:

A Muslim community is that one which is a practical
interpretation of the declaration of faith and all its
corollaries; and the society which does not translate into
practice this faith and its corollaries is not
Muslim.[t142]

It is on this issue that Qutb most obviously breaks with
established orthodox tradition. [163] For the four main schools in
Sunni Islam, a Muslim is one who pronounces the *shahaada* (i.e.,
declares that he believes that there is no God but Allah and
that the Prophet Mohammed is his messenger); [164] no further

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[163] Ash'arism, the historical original formulation of the basic tenets of Sunni Orthodoxy, holds that faith
without works is still valid faith; the believer may be without works, and the Prophet will intercede for
him on the last day. See Hourani (1993, p.65).
[164] Kepel (1985, p. 62).

requirements are necessary. Not all Muslims are of course
considered equally pious; at the least a Muslim is required to
fulfill the five pillars of the Islamic creed: besides the
shahada, a Muslim is also required to pray (*salaat*) five times
daily, to pay alms (*zakaat*), to fast the month of Ramadhan
(*siyaam*), and to perform pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a
lifetime (*hajj*), if one is able to make the trip. But even the
Muslim who observes none of the pillars except the declaration
of faith cannot be dismissed as non-Muslim. In fact, Muslim
orthodoxy explicitly prohibits excommunication (*takfiir*) of a
Muslim by a Muslim. [165]   Qutb, in contrast, not only requires
that the five pillars be observed, but insists that observing
them is not enough. It is not enough that a Muslim fulfill his
religious duties; he must make his faith part of his daily life,
and he must inform his actions by his beliefs.

Qutb, it must be noted, does not explicitly denounce
individual Muslims as *kuffaar*, and rarely does he use the word
"*kufr*" (rejection of belief) as such. What Qutb denounces as
"un-Islamic" are the "social system", the prevailing order, the
"*nizaam*", i.e., Sayyid Qutb's central objects of reform. This,
of course, follows perfectly from Qutb's redefinition of
"religion". As we saw in the previous section, Qutb loosens the
meaning of "religion" to the point where it almost loses any of
its conventional meaning: man-devised social systems are also
religions, in Qutb's view; although a deity is not explicitly
mentioned in man-made systems, a deity is still worshiped, be it
a man, an idea, an institution, and so forth. We saw that this
move enables Qutb to articulate his Islamic solution without
lapsing into apologetics. By assigning the label "religion"
(*diin*) to all social systems, Qutb insists on remaining within
the Islamic framework of analysis and discourse.   Islam is a
religion and a system of life, and any system of life other than
Islam must therefore also be a religion. Those who acquiesce to

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[165] See 'Amara (1986, no. 335, pp. 16-20).

living under it are not mere members of a society or adherents to a culture or a social systems, they are *followers of that creed*. Therefore, someone who lives by a creed other than Islam is a worshiper and a follower of that creed and as a result cannot be considered a true Muslim, since he is committing the cardinal sin of association (*shirk*) of another deity to the one true God.

It is important to note that Qutb's breach with orthodoxy does not stem from his insistence that a true Muslim is one who sincerely submits to God and believes in his absolute sovereignty. On that score, Qutb is technically within orthodox bounds, if one accepts his assumptions. At the least, the Muslim who accepts a sovereign over him other than God is committing the cardinal sin of *shirk*, since he is associating some other entity with God; if he does believe in God and fulfills Islam's pillars, but at the same time lives under a non-Islamic system, the least that can be said, given Qutb's assumptions, is that this Muslim is worshipping two deities: Allah and the deity representing the other social system he follows in his non-religious life. But worse, tradition requires the minimum of *shahada* from the professing believer; someone who rejects Allah's absolute sovereignty or Mohammed's Prophecy has not fulfilled the bare minimum for becoming Muslim, and therefore cannot be a true Muslim; Qutb reasons that the true believer in Allah's absolute sovereignty will not accept any system of life except that of Islam: he will "rebel" against anyone and anything that constrains his freedom to act and believe, and will refuse to submit to any authority other than God; someone who does submit and who does not fight, therefore, cannot be a true believer, but rather a nominal Muslim, and therefore, for Qutb, not a Muslim at all. Of course, Qutb breaks ranks with orthodoxy as soon as he proposes to predicate "Muslimhood" upon the will to rebel, even if he is well within the fold of orthodoxy when he singles out belief in the absolute

sovereignty of God as the foundation and *sine qua non* of Islamic creed.[166]

The "Original Community" — that is, the community of the Prophet and that of his four successors — represents for Qutb the only historically established Islamic society that humanity has ever witnessed.   It is a generation "without comparison in the history of Islam, even in the entire history of man."[t21] No generation since has ever attained the perfection reached by that original community.   Not that there have not existed any true Muslims since the time of the Prophet.   Even in Milestones Qutb argues that "we do find some individuals of [their] caliber here and there in history," but at the same time he holds that "never again did a great number of such people exist in one region as was the case during the first period of Islam."[t21-22]   In   This Religion of Islam , this "Original Community" represented "a period of excellence in the history of this path — and indeed in the history of all mankind."[h35]   It was short-lived and brief in its existence, but it represents no mere ideal that man can measure himself against but never hope to equal.   It is important for Muslims to note, Qutb insists, that Islam did not deploy miracles to impress people into joining the faith.   Islam never depended "for its proof on wonders and miracles," nor did it rely "on strange events for the very heart of its message," but instead relied "on the examination and scrutiny of the evidence of life itself and its facts."[s12]   It is crucial, Qutb notes, that Muslims take note that the Original period "was not the result of an unrepeatable miracle" but rather "the fruit of human exertion made by the first Muslim community" and that therefore it "can be achieved whenever that exertion is again made;"[h36]   or, again, "[the achievement of the Original Community] did not take place through some unique, unrepeatable miracle.   It was achieved — in accordance with

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[166] While Sayyid Qutb places above all other causes the defense of justice, Sunni Orthodoxy holds, in sharp contrast, as supreme the value of maintaining the security of the *ummah*. Hence the iniquitous ruler may be tolerated if he maintains the security of the faithful community.

God's everlasting custom — through human exertion, and within the bounds of human capacities. This precedent indicates the possibility of its own repetition."[h43]

The possibility of reproducing the success of the "Original Community" is at the heart of Qutb's discourse of revolution. The "Original Community" for Qutb is central because it is an event *in history*, and in that event man plays a central role. Qutb stresses the point that the "Original Community" did not rely on miracles precisely to bring man to the fore and to relegate divinity to a secondary role in the establishment of the true Islamic order. Man is accorded such a central role that the very success of Islam in Qutb's narrative depends almost exclusively on human exertion.   Though divinely ordained, Qutb writes that Islam's "realization in the life of mankind depends on the exertion of men themselves, within the limits of their capacities and the material realities of human existence in a given environment."[h2] Qutb is unambiguous when placing the burden of promoting and ensuring Islam's success on the Muslim, and equally unflinching in his assertion that the responsibility for success is human, not divine: "[The divine path] is not brought into being by divine enforcement, in the same way that God enforces His will in the ordering of the firmament and the revolution of the planets. It is brought into being by a group of people undertaking the task, believing in it completely and conforming to it as closely as possible, trying to bring it into being in the hearts and lives of others too."[h6]

Qutb is of course careful to stress that final agency must always be attributed to God. If man is placed at the center of the drama, it is only because God had willed matters to be so. But it is also clear that the thrust of Qutb's orientation points in the direction that opens for man some space for agency and freedom of choice and action — in short, a conception closer to the heterodox *Mu'tazilah* than the mainstream *Ash'ari*. Qutb's

attempt at a way out of the old predestination-vs.-free-will
dilemma is to stipulate that God has intentionally willed both
that man possess a free will and that Islam's nature be such
that faith be contingent upon action. Rather than stipulate in
the classical notion that divine will manifests itself
atomically and discretely in historical actions and events —
i.e., the classical interventionist *Ash'ari* conception — Qutb
makes *fitrah* (human nature) and *tasawwur* (the Islamic
conception) the primary objects of divine will. Created free
from any other power but God, and intentionally endowed with a
nature in complete harmony with the divinely ordained Islamic
conception, man can cultivate his belief, his *'aqiidah*, only
through action. It is in the design of the "Islamic method",
in other words, that belief be a product of action within the
Islamic conception (*tasawwur*). In this drama of belief
cultivation, God's role is not altogether passive, but at the
same time it is not unilaterally controlling; rather, it is
"reactive": God is a helper, administering aid only to the
extent to which man expends effort. It is man ultimately who
has the power to cultivate his belief by acting out his faith.
Or, as Qutb puts it in the dialectical language of <u>Milestones</u>:
"[God] wanted faith to grow with the progress of the community,
while the practical life of the community was at the same time a
mirror of the faith."[t67] And, more remarkably:

> God Most High knows that men and societies are not founded
> overnight, but that it takes as much time to construct and
> develop a faith as it takes to organize a community, so
> that as the faith is completed, simultaneously a strong
> community also comes into existence which is the true
> representation and practical interpretation of the
> faith.[t68]

It is in a similar vein that Mawdudi talks about the
Qur'an. According to Mawdudi, the Qur'an was not sent down for
mere recitation, but as a guide for solving humanity's social

problems.[167] Understanding the Qur'anic message, then, was
predicated upon an active interpretation of that message, i.e.,
its translation into mundane activity. As Mawudi frequently
asserted, "[t]he *chief* charecteristic of Islam is that it makes
no distinction between the spiritual and the secular life." [168]
Islam had a central role to play in the shaping of human action,
and by "human action" Mawdudi meant action in the context of
society. Hence, for Mawdudi, the necessity of involving Islam
in the struggle over the seizure of political power was
unavoidable and necessary. [169]

     The necessity of pursuing an active interpretation of the
Qur'an was not new with Qutb and Mawdudi. We find the theme
explicitly pursued in the writings of both Al-Afghani and
'Abduh. In _Al 'Urwa al wuthqa_, the religion depicted by the two
authors is a decidedly active one: it is a religion that "calls
for intense activity, full human participation, based on the
freedom of will and the concept of moral responsibility." [170] As
Hourani notes, with Al-Afghani in particular, a crucial shift
occurs in the conception of Islam: Islam is no longer viewed as
a religion but rather as a "civilization". Hourani goes on to
argue that "[t]he idea of civilization is indeed one of the
seminal ideas of nineteenth-century Europe, and it is through
Al-Afghani above all that it reaches the Islamic world." [171] We
do not need to accept Hourani's ideational account on the
origins of the shift of focus in Al-Afghani's view of Islam from
one as religion to one as civilization to grasp that indeed a
new emphasis on action did occur with Al-Afghani. It was with
Al-Afghani that a new set of values began to be emphasized and
claimed for Islam: the necessity of promoting human reason and
scientific knowledge, the need to ensure and cultivate political
and military strength, and, underlying both of these values, the

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[167] Mawdudi (1971, pp. 43-8).
[168] Mawdudi (1986, p. 9).
[169] Esposito (1983, pp. 111-15).
[170] Badawi (1978, pp. 51-2).
[171] Hourani (1962, p.114).

urgency of pursuing an Islamically informed activism. Al-Afghani, unlike his more reticent pupil, 'Abduh, entertained a political understanding of "activism": "the political strengthening of the Islamic world and the ending of the Western incursions there were his primary goals, while the reform of Islam was secondary."[172] Unlike tradition, whether philosophical or orthodox, Al-Afghani shunned both speculation and theology, and instead stressed activity. Moreover, "[w]hen religious ideals conflicted with practical goals, it was the former that gave way."[173] According to Keddie, it was Al-Afghani who first invoked the Qur'anic passage — a staple of many Islamic reformers of all stripe -- "Verily, God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly."[174] In his address to an audience of "scholars and learned men of India," Al-Afghani energetically denounced the "idle philosophy" and the speculative bent of mind he attributed to "possessors of pure talents, holders of good and clean instincts and possessors of broad thoughts" among Muslim thinkers. "Why do you not raise your eyes from those defective books and why do you not cast your glance on this wide world?" Al-Afghani asks, and then goes on to note further that "you spend no thought on this question of great importance, incumbent on every intelligent man, which is: What is the cause of the poverty, indigence, helplessness, and distress of the Muslims, and is there a cure for this important phenomenon and great misfortune or not?" [175]

In Qutb we clearly have the sort of thinker/activist that Al-Afghani had in mind. Indeed, for Qutb of all types of human action, struggle is a particularly privileged kind of human effort. More specifically, Qutb argues that the essence of Islam itself is struggle against earthly injustice. Stipulating

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[172] Keddie (1983, p.39).

[173] ibid., p.41.

[174] ibid., p.83.

[175] ibid., p.120.

that the core of Muslim belief is exclusive submission to the One God, Qutb argues that any entity or agency that subjugates man to its power is by definition infringing on divine sovereignty. Therefore, any effort or action directing its energies to human emancipation from the bondage of an earthly power is by definition struggle in the way of Islam.   Islam, in fact, Qutb declares, is essentially a "revolution (*thawra*) against tyranny (*taaghuut*) and injustice (*dulm*), a revolution that has stripped all kings and emperors of their privilege and power, rendering to God all matters of legislation, and to the Muslim community (*ummah*) choice over who is to execute God's will."[d16] Moreover, not only is Islam itself a revolutionary creed, but also anyone who embraces it by necessity becomes himself a revolutionary: "as soon as man feels the power (*haraara*) of this creed, he will undertake with his whole being the task of fulfilling it through practical work, and will not rest until he has realized it."[d33] For those who believe in God are those who struggle in the way of God so that God's word prevails among men. And, again: "The word of God will not take hold on this earth until injustice and tyranny are lifted from this earth, and until all men are equal, with no one standing above another."[d33]

     Struggle in Qutb's discourse is the means by which two parallel, and related, efforts can be carried out. First is the task of cultivating and nurturing belief. As we have seen, belief for Qutb is not a static, abstract quality that man acquires, but rather a dynamic existential state carefully and patiently developed through willed and conscious action informed by an active reading of the word of God. But struggle also fulfills a second, more immediate, function: it is the means by which are removed obstacles that stand in the way of the fulfillment of the potential of human nature. In Milestones, Qutb is blunt in his language: the struggle is *physical*, to the extent that the obstacles faced are also physical. The anti-Islamic reality that faces man — *jaahiliyyah* — must be

confronted head on. Islam's "dynamic movement", taking into
account reality as it holds on the ground, "[treating] people as
they actually are," and "[using] resources which are in
accordance with practical conditions," "uses methods of
preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs," but
at the same time "uses physical power and *jihaad* for
abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *jaahilii*
system which prevent people from reforming their ideas and
beliefs, but forces them to obey their aberrant ways and makes
them serve human lords instead of the Almighty Lord."[t98-99]
Against such *jaahiliyyah* Islam's "movement does not confine
itself to mere preaching."[t99] Nor is " *jihaad*" meant merely in
a "defensive" sense, Qutb insists. Rather, Islam's movement
intrinsically seeks to take the initiative and is ready to
destroy obstacles wherever they stand.[t99] Those who,
believing that they are defending Islam's image when they insist
that Islam is "defensive" in its call for *jihaad*, Qutb
complains, are doing great harm to their religion:

> Islam is not a "defensive movement" in the narrow sense
> which today is technically called a "defensive war". This
> narrow meaning is ascribed to it by those who are under
> the pressure of circumstances and are defeated by the wily
> attacks of the orientalists, who distort the concept of
> Islamic *jihaad*. It is a movement to wipe out tyranny and
> to introduce true freedom to mankind, using resources
> according to the actual human situation.[t111]

As we saw in the previous section , it is essential for
Qutb's argument that man cultivate his belief, his *'aqiidah*,
freely and consciously; for Qutb, it is only on the foundation
of true belief that an Islamic order can be built. Islamic
struggle, therefore, is primarily a struggle to remove obstacles
that stand in the way of cultivating true belief; it is a
jihaad "to abolish all the Satanic forces and Satanic systems

of life; to end the lordship of one man over others."[t127]
Given that Qutb considers the prevailing societies *jaahilii* ,
Qutb is therefore calling for nothing less than the overhaul of
all of society as it stands today. And Qutb is well aware of
the magnitude of the task to which he exhorts Muslims: "[T]here
are many practical obstacles in establishing God's rule on
earth, such as the power of the state, the social system and
traditions and, in general, the whole human environment."[t131]
In Qutb's discourse, *jaahiliyyah*, though well-entrenched, is
always self-asserting and constraining. The mission of Islamic
struggle is to break through the *jaahilii* order that surrounds
the individual human conscience and to communicate directly with
that conscience.

> Islam uses force only to remove these obstacles so that
> there may not remain any wall between Islam and the
> individual human beings, and so that it may address their
> hearts and minds after releasing them from these material
> obstacles, and then leave them free to choose to accept or
> reject it.[t131]

This, of course, stands in perfect accordance with Qutb's
conception of human *fitrah*: man possesses an immutable nature
always present, at least in the form of potential, and always
ready to react to the primordial laws of nature as established
by God. Access to these laws, for Qutb, can be attained only
through true belief in the sovereignty of an almighty Creator,
and through a total and exclusive submission to His will.   The
individual human being, then, is the point of focus of any truly
Islamic reform within the Qutbian paradigm. But at the same
time, Qutb insists that man is also in a fundamental sense the
product of the social, political, and cultural system within
which he lives. As we will see in the next chapter, it is clear
that for Qutb, society is more than the sum total of its
individual members; it is a "life-paradigm", a "world-
conception", informed and driven by an essential ideal that

continuously feeds and animates the beliefs, feelings, ideas, and actions of individual members of society. That is why the *jaahilii* order must be confronted frontally, physically if necessary, in a struggle and a *jihaad* whose aim is to dismantle that order. Preaching to the individual while the individual lives, acts, feels and thinks within the *jaahilii* order is bound to yield no results. The *jaahilii* order stands as an immense obstacle, an impossible wall between the message of God and the immutable human *fitrah*. The monumental task then is reduced to dismantling the *jaahiliyyah*, and the central question becomes: how can the *jaahilii* order be brought down? How can the un-Islamic world-conception, encompassing as it does all aspects of society, and all dimensions of human life, be dismantled and replaced by the Islamic order? In the first section of the following chapter, we will examine Qutb's concept of *jaahiliyyah*; in the second section, we will examine Qutb's strategy for replacing *jaahiliyyah* by an Islamic system.

Chapter Three

The Islamic and the *Jaahilii*: the nature of society in Qutb's discourse

Introduction

The notion that the Islamic order is not only unique and fundamentally different from other "social orders", but is the only order that is in perfect harmony with the natural scheme of the universe, is a primary subtext that underlies the Qutbian discourse. Islam's singularity and perfection inform how Qutb views other systems: for all their diversity, non-Islamic societies are basically the same in their imperfections and weaknesses; they inform Qutb's explanations of Islam's early success and its subsequent decline: Islam's uniqueness explains the singular universal success it achieved in the short span of time it did, while its purity explains the sudden burst of energy and power from the civilizationally unsophisticated desert dwelling Arabs; they also inform the methodological prescriptions that Qutb proposes: Islam is pure and simple and shuns arcane and mystical interpretations; it favors non-specialized and "active" readings of its message and is unique in that it refuses to separate action from belief; therefore, in the quest for re-establishing the Islamic order, Qutb proposes an Islamic retreat from the impure, i.e., the non-Islamic, and at the same time urges Muslims to engage in a struggle against what stands in the way of a truly Islamic reconfiguration of nominally Muslim society. The subtext is present in Qutb's work from the very beginning of his Islamic writings, and not only remains in effect throughout his subsequent work, but ultimately takes over both the structure and the substance of his language and presentation.   Qutb's preoccupation in his early Islamic

works is with providing the framework for an Islamic order. In
Social justice (1948), for example, Qutb outlines what he
believes to be the social, political, and economic systems
called for by Islam; in The battle between Islam and Capitalism
(1951), Qutb is preoccupied with the immediate problems of
social justice and wealth distribution faced by Muslim society
and the solutions that Islam provides; while in Universal peace
and Islam (1951), Qutb turns his attention to illustrating how
Islam can secure the world true peace, internationally,
socially, and spiritually. In these three works — significantly
all of them written prior to the 1952 Nasser revolution —
Islam's purity and uniqueness inform the arguments and
propositions made by Qutb, and are at times explicitly
highlighted, but are seldom the direct object of systematic
analysis. In his insightful study on Social justice, William
Shepard compares the five editions of the work (published in
1949, 1953, 1954, 1958 and 1964) and draws the conclusion that
the modifications, deletions and additions introduced by Sayyid
Qutb to the successive editions of the work reveal a conscious
shift away from addressing the details of managing an Islamic
society and a reorientation towards the more immediate task of
toppling the prevailing status quo. [176] As Sivan also observes,
"Sayyid Qutb rejected what he considered the 'utopian fallacy,'
for there are no blueprints for the future. He does not deem
himself obligated to paint a detailed picture of an Islamic
society functioning and thriving in the last third of the
twentieth century, nor does he think he should provide a minute
scenario leading to its realization." [177] With The Islamic concept
and its characteristics (1962), the tone as well as the
substance of Qutb's work have almost completely rejected the
"utopian fallacy". In that book, Qutb's focus is no longer on
the mobilization of Islam to solve an array of problems that
Muslim society faced, but on *doctrinal* Islam. Qutb's
preoccupation is with the "Islamic conception" and the

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[176] Shepard (1996, pp. xxxvi, l).
[177] Sivan (1985, p. 66).

concomitant set of principles that together define the characteristics of the "Islamic concept": "comprehensiveness", "balance", "dynamism", and "realism". In this work, it is clear that Qutb's interest has shifted from spelling out the outlines of the future Muslim society to an analysis and an elaboration of the conceptual substructure, as Qutb sees it, of both the Islamic order and its antithesis, the *jaahilii* order. Not that Qutb introduces notions and themes that were altogether absent from his previous work. On the contrary, as we have already noted, a remarkable continuity is upheld across his body of work, in both the themes treated and the tone used. Abu-Rabii is correct in noting that "Qutb's phase of thought during the period 1952-1962 is an extension, and not a negation, of the previous phase." [178] At the same time, however, it is obvious that starting with The Islamic concept, Qutb is less interested in finding a place for Islam in the life that Muslims faced and more interested in defining the essence of a whole new order . In his work subsequent to The Islamic concept, Qutb's aim is to highlight the "essence" of Islam through a precise and systematic vocabulary, rather than to illustrate Islam through the expansive language of example and elaboration. While his chapters in Social justice bore titles such as "The methods of Social justice in Islam" and "Poltical theory in Islam", or even "The nature of Social justice in Islam", in The Islamic concept, one finds single-word title headings such "divinity" (*rabbaniyah*), "firmness" (*thabaat*), "comphresenviness (*shumuul*), "balance" (*tawaazun*), "positiveness" (*iijaabiyyah*), "realism" (*waaqi'iyyah*), and "oneness" (*tawhiid*).

The turn to the doctrinal, as signaled in The Islamic concept, mirrors another turn in Qutb's overall outlook and strategy. Qutb's pre-1952 works are marked not only by their preoccupation with outlining substantive solutions to social, economic, and political problems, but also by an optimism in the

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[178] Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 139).

possibility of changing society gradually. [179] On the other hand, Qutb's post-1952 works, especially his works after 1954, while focusing on the elaboration of a systematic doctrine, hold a decidedly pessimistic view of gradual reform. 1954 was the beginning of what was to turn out to be a bloody decade of confrontation between the Nasser regime and the Muslim Brotherhood — a confrontation in which the Brotherhood bore the heavier toll. [180] Sayyid Qutb spent most of the years between 1954 and his execution in 1966 in Nasser's prison camps, and it was in those camps that "[he] charted the renewal of Islamicist thought." [181] It would of course be erroneous to propose that Sayyid Qutb's outlook was exclusively dictated by the torturous experience he endured in prison; Sayyid Qutb had been a mature writer and critic long before he became familiar with Nasser's dungeons,[182] and echoes of his pre-Islamist past resonate even in his most radical Islamism. At the same time, it would be equally incorrect to suggest that the prison experience was incidental to the evolution of Sayyid Qutb's thoughts and outlook. Sivan is not altogether off the mark when he states that "Qutb's ideas matured during his nine years in prison." [183] Indeed, "[n]ot only did incarceration and brutal torture breed hatred, desire for revenge, and alienation, the experience forced [Qutb and his followers in prison] to face up to the

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[179] Binder (1988, p. 188).

[180] Kepel (1985, p. 12).

[181] Kepel (1985, p. 23).

[182] Musallam (1990b).

[183] Sivan (1985, p. 25). The word "mature" itself is of course problematic, since it suggests not only a progressive evolution from an incohate state to a more developed state, but also an evolution that takes us from the underdeveloped to its teleological realization. Such a proposition is untenable. First, Sayyid Qutb's writings before his prison experience, as we have argued, are oriented in a fundamentally different direction from those of his prison experience. Although one can hardly argue that Qutb altogether negates in whole what he defended prior to 1954, at the same time, it is clear that Qutb's focus dramatically shifted from a concern with the establishment of society to the immediate concern of revolution. One can hardly speak of "maturity" in an evolutionary sense in such a case, but rather of *reorientation*. Second, as we shall see later, the suggested teleology in Sivan's statement can be easily refuted by noting that while both Mawdudi and Qutb held the "same ideas" (and Sivan seems to accept this hyptheis), the directions the two thinkers took radically divereged from each other. Qutb's prison experience led him to unyielding confrontation, Mawdudi's less constraining context (although by no means did he have an open field), to creeping political cohabitation and compromise, not to say cooption by the state. See Nasr (1996) for an excellent discussion of the impact of political concerns on Mawdudi's positions.

realities of the new nationalist, military-controlled state: a
state characterized by sincere and combative anti-imperialism —
hence not to be impugned as 'collaborationist' as the old upper-
class rulers used to be."[184] Not only Qutb and his followers
were held in prison, but their very cause for social justice,
equality, and their hostility to the intrusive imperialist, were
taken hostage and appropriated by nationalist Nasserism.[185]
Nasserism, in Qutb's view, was in essence no different from the
ancien regime it replaced in 1952. However, Nasserism was a
much greater challenge to the Muslim Brotherhood than the old
tottering monarchy: like the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasserism's
leaders were "plebeian", the language those leaders used was
that of the people, while the ideals they championed closely
matched those of the Brotherhood.[186] A new strategy of
confrontation was in order, and a whole new language and
discourse needed to be forged to demarcate the lines between the
"true defenders of Islam" and the new *jaahiliyyah*.

In Milestones, the outlines of the new strategy and the
vocabulary of the language begin to take shape. The "vanguard"
of the Islamic mission must "retreat", the better to start on
firmer grounds. A whole new starting point is in order, with a
whole new vocabulary drawing the essence of its meaning from the
Qur'an and the Tradition, but at the same time applicable and
relevant to the task at hand. Two key concepts of the "new
vocabulary" will occupy us in this chapter: *jaahiliyyah* and
haakimiyyah. Like other concepts in Qutb's discourse, neither
jaahiliyyah nor *haakimiyyah* represents a sudden conceptual shift
that occurred at some particular point in Qutb's writings. Both
the notion that present-day society is, to some extent, un-
Islamic, and the assertion that God's sovereignty is absolute,
are present in some form or other all along in Qutb's arguments.
However, both *jaahiliyyah* and *haakimiyyah* acquire their fullest

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[184] Sivan (1985, p. 40).
[185] Abu-Rabii' (1996, p. 165).
[186] ibid.,, p. 164-5.

meaning and most explicit usage in <u>Milestones</u> , Qutb's major
work after <u>The Islamic concept</u>. In that work, Qutb is intent on
defining for us as clearly as possible what *jaahiliyyah* is
about, what is the essence of the *jaahilii* order, and how to
resist, combat and defeat that order. In his frequent mentions
of *jaahiliyyah*, Qutb time and again points to *haakimiyyah* as
the defining characteristic of what renders an order Islamic,
while another non-Islamic. Together, the two concepts serve to
lay the foundation for a radical call for action: a target enemy
— *jaahiliyyah* — is vividly drawn up; its defining characteristic
is identified — its violation of divine *haakimiyyah*; while a
specific strategic target of attack is identified: those who
usurp the functions and privileges of *haakimiyyah* — the
political elite and those who have the power to shape the nature
and character of society.

3.1 Jaahiliyyah

As we have already pointed out in the previous chapter,
Sayyid Qutb stands squarely outside orthodox Islam in his
categorical rejection of contemporary Muslim society as
essentially un-Islamic.   The reaction of Egypt's traditional
'ulema to Sayyid Qutb's proposition that prevailing Muslim
society was *jaahilii* was that of a scandalized establishment.
His book, <u>Milestones</u>, was decried as "blasphemous" by the Al-
Azhar divines; the defenders of orthodoxy and tradition
unambiguously rejected the notion that any period other than
that which preceded the time of Prophet could be characterized
as *jaahiliyyah*.[187] Qutb's characterization of prevailing Muslim
society as *jaahilii* seems to have initially been received
favorably within the Brotherhood: many agreed with Qutb's
outlook and saw <u>Milestones</u>' assessment of the prevailing order
as accurate and accepted its strategy of resistance. [188]   Three

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[187] Kepel (1985, p. 60).
[188] Kepel (1985, pp. 41-3); Al-Ghazali (1979).

years after Qutb's execution, in 1969, however, The Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood, Hasan Al-Hudhaybi, published what amounts to an about-face denunciation of Qutb's <u>Milestones</u>. Arguing that the mission of the Brotherhood is to preach rather than to judge (his tract was aptly titled *Du'aah laa qudah*, i.e., <u>Preachers, not judges</u>[189]), Hudhaybi dismissed as misguided and baseless Qutb's characterization of Muslim society as *jaahilii*.[190] Hudhaybi drew a distinction between *juhl* (ignorance) and *jaahiliyyah* and argued that many Muslims may be in a state of *juhl*, but as long as they have pronounced the *shahaada* (i.e., that they believe in the unity of Allah and the truth of Muhammad's prophecy), they are not living in a state of *jaahiliyyah.* Hudhaybi's substitution of the word " *juhl*" for the etymologically close but emotionally far more charged term "*jaahiliyyah*" (a term that traditionally evokes a vivid state of disorder and immorality) was meant to send a clear signal that the Brotherhood was parting ways with the Qutbian strategy and vision. Significantly, however, Hudhaybi's "rebuttal" of Qutb by and large missed Qutb's focus of attention. Hudhaybi complained that Qutb was stepping out of the bounds of what the Qur'an and tradition prescribed when he declared as non-Muslim those who did not subscribe to the active *'aqiidah* as depicted by Qutb. It is true that Qutb did brand as "partially" or "artificially" Muslim those who accepted to live in the non-Islamic order, but it is significant to note Qutb's focus was *society* and not the individual. It was *society* at large that Qutb insisted was *jaahilii*; whether a Muslim had sinned or not, or what the nature of his sins may have been or to what extent he had sinned, where moot questions for Qutb; and so was the traditional question: is there any sin which, upon committing it, a Muslim would become *kaafir*? By shifting the focus back to the individual and by reformulating Qutb's position in the vocabulary of the traditional debate over *takfiir*, Hudhaybi in

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[189] Hudhaybi (1977) *Du'aah laa qudaah.*
[190] Al-Hudhaybi (1977). Kepel (1985, p. 62).

effect sidestepped the thrust of Qutb's message while at the
same time drawing closer to the establishment positions.

   Qutb's "blasphemous" pronouncements on the *jaahilii* nature
of Muslim society was by no means new or original with
Milestones. As Albert Hourani notes, the question: "in what
sense could Muslim society still be said to be truly Muslim?"
had been a central concern for the Muslim thinkers since the
later Middle Ages.[191] Ibn Taymiyyah had raised that very
question vividly in the 13th century: were the Mongol rulers who
had conquered the lands of Islam east of Syria and who, in Ibn
Taymiyyah's eyes, were observing neither the letter of Islam nor
its spirit, and who at the same time professed to be Muslim,
genuine Muslims? Tradition insisted that upon the pronouncement
of the formula "There is no god but Allah and the Mohammed is
His prophet", the person pronouncing the formula is a Muslim and
only Allah may pass judgment upon the sincerity of such a
professed believer. Ibn Taymiyyah broke with the establishment
and insisted that a Muslim is no longer a Muslim "when he breaks
major injunctions concerning life and limb, property, jihad and
the status of non-Muslims, the sexual code of behavior,
alcoholic prohibition, gambling."[192] The question became ever
more urgent with the rapid onslaught of modernization and the
creeping secularization into the fabric of traditional society.
Muhammad 'Abduh, at the turn of the century was well aware of
the new threat. He accepted the new changes that the Egypt of
his time was undergoing as both inevitable and necessary, but
worried over the parting of ways that was taking place between
the shrinking sphere where Islamic morality exerted its
influence, and the growing sphere where the techniques, methods,
and values of modernized instrumentality and utility were
prevailing. He rejected the wholesale appropriation of systems
of law, declaring that transplantation of whole systems can only
make matters worse for the indigenous people.   But 'Abduh spent

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[191] Hourani (1962, p. 136).
[192] Sivan (1985, p. 97).

little of his energies debating whether or not the Egyptian society that surrounded him was Muslim. In his eyes, there was much to be gained by way of knowledge and technique from the powerful West, as long as a solicitous eyes was kept over the integrity of the "principle" of Islam. [193]

By sharp contrast, Mawdudi advanced a far more aggressive position that was close to that of Qutb and that placed at the center of the Muslim identity exclusive obedience to God. And by obedience, Mawdudi meant much more than mere observance of God's edicts: a Muslim's "Prayers, his Fasting and his pious appearance are nothing but deception" if this Muslim "refuses to obey [God and the Messenger]." [194] Mawdudi equated "obedience" to God with the rigorous establishment of an Islamic order, incarnated in a modern Islamic state. [195] Wherever and whenever such an order was not in place, *jaahiliyyah* prevailed, regardless of the piety of individual Muslims. Unlike the traditional '*ulema*, who by and large maintained a cumulative view of tradition, Mawdudi did not equate Islamic history with the history of "Islam", the religion-cum-comprehensive ideology that he had in mind. Islam's sojourn on earth was brief and lasted only during the short period of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided caliphs — i.e., Sayyid Qutb's "Original Community". The history of mankind since that fleeting interlude has been the history of *jaahiliyyah*, the product of generations upon generations of Muslims weak in their faith and only tenuously familiar with the true spirit of their religion. [196] Ironically — and not uncharacteristically of "radical" Islamists, as we shall also see with Qutb — Mawdudi's unorthodox insistence that the "Original Community" was the only period of non-*jaahiliyyah* in effect secularized the history of Muslims and placed man at the center of history making, in effect

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[193] See Hourani (1962, pp., 136-7).

[194] Mawdudi (1985, p. 104).

[195] Nasr (1996, pp. 57-8).

[196] Nasr (1996, p. 60).

downplaying God's role as the immediate creator of that history. The traditional view of history as the direct will of God allowed the '*ulema* to accept the de facto separation of divinely sanctioned authority from political authority: the Caliph and the King were rarely the same person since the time of the first Four Rightly Guided caliphs, the king usually retaining true power, while the caliph, formally the leader of the whole '*ummah*, served mainly to legitimate the moral authority of the earthly ruler.[197] It was precisely this separation that Mawdudi sought to eliminate.[198] Political action was religious action, and vice versa: no political act is devoid of religious meaning. If *jaahiliyyah* prevailed — and it did in Mawdudi's eyes — it was principally because Muslims had neglected to fulfill their duty as Muslims. They had been charged with the precious mission of installing the divine order, and they had, principally as a result of a weakening in their faith, failed their task. Having thus placed the blame of "historical failure" on human shoulders, Mawdudi by the same token places on those same human shoulders the responsibility of "resurrecting" the Islamic order: if the past and the present are the product of man, then so is the future. Of course, humanizing history and locating man at center-stage by no means fully determine by themselves the political character of Mawdudi's revivalist call. 'Abduh also humanized history, and similarly placed the burden of a successful future upon the shoulders of mankind; but, unlike Mawdudi and Qutb, 'Abduh viewed well-grounded education in "modern knowledge" and the acquisition of scientific and technological expertise and know-how as the key to the rehabilitation of Muslim society and the reinstallation of a more Islamic order. The full relationship between a humanist view of history and reform strategy cannot be delineated ideationally: strategy itself is historical and the actual course it undertook can be explained only by examining the options for action available to the protagonists.

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[197] See Hourani, Albert (1962, pp., 10-15).
[198] Nasr (1996, p. 60).

We have already discussed the fundamental differences between the context that 'Abudh faced and the one faced by Mawdudi and Qutb. 'Abudh had to make the best of a situation where his society — i.e., the Egypt of late 19th century early 20th century — faced a powerful intruder that threatened in vivid terms the survival of a weakened and relatively defenseless community of faithful. 'Abduh's teacher, Al-Afghani, was able to entertain the possibility of confronting the mighty Powers and ejecting them by force, bringing about thereby the unification of a powerful united Muslim entity. 'Abduh seems to have cast this option by the wayside. The struggle that Muslims were facing was a long term one, and the first step in that struggle was one of self-reformation. The society that prevailed was a weak Muslim society, but 'Abudh did not characterize it as *jaahilii*. Continuity and gradual, piecemeal reformation were the watchwords for 'Abudh. Mawdudi and Qutb, by contrast, facing a context of retreating colonialism and national identity building, needed a new vocabulary. The world had to be cast in sharp contrasts; the urgency of the situation demanded it: choices had to be made, power was at hand to be seized, and sides were to be taken in the upcoming momentous confrontations. Mawdudi's was that of India's Muslims; he was convinced that the Muslims of India needed an independent state of their own, and thus frustrated all attempts at reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims: whenever possible, he encouraged separation between the two communities the better to pitch his call for a formal division of India.[199] Qutb lived in an Egypt struggling, as always, with its many historical identities, but now also at the dawn of its newest identity as a modern, independent nation; with the coup of 1952, the feeling that a watershed moment was at hand intensified to a fever pitch. In Qutb's eyes, the choices were

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[199] Nasr (1996, pp. 32, 51).

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stark: Egyptians could either adopt an Islamic order, or they could opt to "import" a "foreign" ideology to order their lives.

It is crucial to note that from his earliest works, Qutb is consistent in his contention that no present-day society is truly Islamic. In Social justice, Qutb states that "Islamic society today is not Islamic in any true sense" and, already foreshadowing what will become the heart of his argument seventeen years later in Milestones, he justifies his assertion by quoting the following Qur'anic verse: "Whoever does not judge [*yahkumu*] by what Allah has revealed is an unbeliever."[s227] [200] However, the characterization that contemporary Muslim society is *jaahilii* in its essence must wait until The Islamic concept to begin taking explicit form, and until Milestones to attain its fullest Qutbian force. In Social justice, although historical and present-day Muslim societies are not deemed fully Islamic, they are nonetheless considered by Qutb as essentially Muslim. To the question: "Why did the spread of the Islamic spirit come to a halt a short space after the time of the Prophet?" Qutb answers by insisting first that "[the] halt was only partial, never complete." Stipulating a split between the political and the social order — a split that, as we will see, Qutb rejects in his later work — Qutb argues that Islam's spread suffered a halt only in the sphere of "politics". Islam's decline started when "[t]he tolerant caliphate became a tyrannical monarchy" and "when the public funds were made accessible to the monarch, his relatives, his courtiers, and his flatterers."[s228] The centrality of the political for Qutb — a centrality that will become more explicitly articulated later with his focus on *haakimiyyah* — is already clear since Social justice. However, In Social justice, Qutb still insists, very much in compliance with the Sunni tradition, that "the remainder

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[200] *Suurat al-maa'idah*, 5:47. Hardie's translation erroneously refers to verse 5:48, which does not use the term "*kaafiruun*" (unbelievers) but "*dhaalimuun*" (those who are unjust). The term "*yahkumu*", translated here "judge", is pivotal: for Qutb, it clearly has the meaning of "state rule" and the qualification "unbeliever" is now applied by Qutb not to individuals but to a regime, very much in the fashion of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathiir. See Cragg, K. (1985, pp. 58-9).

of the teachings of Islam remained in force; the charity and
benevolence, the mutual help and responsibility, the tolerance
and freedom of conscience and human equality, the payment of the
poor-tax and the alms... all these continued in force to a
greater or a lesser extent in many Muslim communities." [s229]
In Milestones , by contrast, Qutb's depiction of present-day
Muslim society is unwavering: "if we look at the sources and
foundations of modern ways of living, it becomes clear that the
whole world is steeped in *jaahiliyyah* ...."[t14] And by the
term "*jaahiliyyah* " Qutb wants to denote not only a state of
unfulfilled Islam but also the essence of the original
historical *jaahiliyyah*: the *jaahiliyyah* of today "is of the
same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps
a little deeper."[t-32]

     The *jaahiliyyah* that is the target of Qutb's sustained
attacks, however, is no remote reality. Qutb brings to the
historical and to the realm of immediate reality not only the
"Original Community", but also its antithesis: the "Original
jaahiliyyah." However, this *jaahiliyyah*, unlike the "Original
Community", has its present-day incarnations everywhere; it
lives and thrives in the communist, the idolatrous, the Jewish,
and the Christian societies.[t148-151] But more significantly
for Qutb, it is also alive in all present-day Muslim societies:

> Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits
> and art, rules and laws — is *jaahiliyyah* , even to the
> extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture,
> Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy [and] Islamic thought,
> are also constructs of *jaahiliyyah* .[t32]

     Time and again in Milestones, Qutb insists on the total
absence of the Islamic order and on the literal prevalence of
jaahiliyyah.   Qutb explicitly refuses to be impressed by what
he calls "the material gains of modern civilization." These
"gains", Qutb insists, should in no way detract from the fact

that present-day societies are *jaahilii*: "the whole world is
steeped in *jaahiliyyah* ... and all the marvelous material
comforts do not diminish this ignorance."[t14] In Qutb's view,
for all their essential and historical differences, all of
today's societies share one common characteristic: they all
submit to an authority other than God's.   Non-Muslim societies
are *jaahilii* not only because "their forms of worship, their
customs and manners are derived from false and distorted
beliefs," but principally because "their institutions and their
laws are not based on submission to God alone."[t151] Instead
of accepting "the rule of God", these societies, each in its own
way, have "established assemblies of men which have absolute
power to legislate laws, thus usurping the right which belongs
to God alone."[t151] By the same token, Muslim societies are
jaahilii "not because they believe in other deities besides God
or because they worship anyone other than God, but because their
way of life is not based on submission to God alone."[t152]
Belief that does not manifest its protest against the usurpation
of divine sovereignty — that is, belief that does not invest
itself in action (*harakah*) against injustice -- is false belief,
according to Qutb. Although present day Muslims "believe in the
Unity of God, still they have relegated the legislative
attribute of God to others and submit to this authority, and
from this authority they derive their systems, their traditions
and customs, their laws, their values and standards, and almost
every practice of life."[t153] The very same [17:106] cited in
Social justice is again invoked in Milestones: "Those who do not
judge according to what God has revealed are
unbelievers."[t153][201]

     The characterization as "unbelief" belief that does not
invest itself in Islamically guided *harakah* is of course related
to Qutb's equation of submission to law with worship. In both
cases, we see the manifestation of a theme crucial to Qutb's

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[201] In my copy of Milestones, verse 5:44 is erroneously cited instead of verse 5:47.

discourse: the centrality of the communal conception of religion — i.e., that religion is a paradigm for establishing society first, and only through that paradigm is the life of the individual ordered. The *harakah* that Qutb talks about is "social action": it is action that seeks to promote Islam by way of promoting the good of Muslim society. By the same token, worship for Qutb is not mere observance of a set of rituals and strictures, but is instead the submission to laws that regulate one's daily actions in society. The act of acquiescing to a system of law — whether divinely ordained or secular — is i Qutb's estimation an act of worship in and of itself. To support his point, Qutb cites the following Qur'anic verse:

> They have taken their rabbis and priests as lords other than God, and the Messiah, son of Mary; and they were commanded to worship none but One God. There is no deity but He, glory be to Him above what they associate with Him.[t152][202]

Qutb argues that it matters little that the people to which the *Qur'an* refers in this verse were not consciously granting divine qualities to their rabbis and priests, nor does it make a difference in the end that they did not "worship" them in the strict sense of the word "worship". These rabbis and priests held in their hands the power to "make laws" and the people "[obeyed] laws which were made by them [but] not permitted by God."[t152] If the *Qur'an* called the people that submitted to the rabbis and the priests "associators" — that is, those who believed that God had associates in his sovereignty — then also in the eyes of Islam, those that today submit to non-divine rule and who accept the legislation of mere men, are "associators".[t152] For *jaahiliyyah* is based on the usurpation ('*i'tidaa'*) of God's sovereignty, [making] some men lords over others."[t15]

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[202] *Suurat attawbah*, 4:31.

Present-day *jaahiliyyah*, however, Qutb contends, has gone even beyond the original *jaahiliyyah* of the time of the Prophet. The original *jaahiliyyah* still took seriously the notion that a divinity, or, in the case of polytheism, a plurality of divinities, was sovereign over mere men. Present-day *jaahiliyyah*, on the other hand, "takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed."[t15] The most egregious manifestations of *jaahiliyyah* for Qutb are communism and capitalism as manifested in his contemporary societies: "Thus the humiliation of the common man under communist systems and the exploitation of individuals and nations due to the greed for wealth and imperialism under capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against God's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by God."[t15] The mark of present-day *jaahilii* society for Qutb is its subjugation of man by man — the direct consequence for Qutb of the usurpation of divine sovereignty; it is society where "some people become dominant and make laws for others, regardless of whether [or not] these laws are against God's injunctions and without caring for the use or misuse of their authority."[t243]

We will turn shortly to an analysis of the notion of *haakimiyyah* — sovereignty — in Qutb's discourse. As we have argued already, the usurpation of divine sovereignty is pinpointed by Qutb as the main cause for the existence of human bondage and misery at the hands of other humans. The ideological character of Qutb's conception of Islam is explicitly articulated in his assertion that in the Islamic order, where sovereignty belongs to God, the exploitation of man by man is simply not conceivable. It is not conceivable because, first, a society fashioned in accordance with the Islamic conception is a society of justice: it is an order in total harmony with the natural order; its members, truly

believing in God's sovereignty, will be infused with the spirit
of Islam, will act Islam in their daily lives, and will find
repugnant and contrary to the essence of their conception of
life relationships of human submission to another human; and
second, in truly Muslim society, the exploitation of man by man
cannot take hold since true belief in God's total and exclusive
sovereignty is belief always on the ready to invest itself in
action, and always ready to engage itself in the struggle
against injustice; the Muslim community would not, therefore,
tolerate the lordship of man without fighting it and struggling
against it.

As things stand, however, for Muslims living under a
jaahilii order, their primary goal in their larger mission
should be first to demolish this prevailing *jaahiliyyah*:

> Our aim is to change the *jaahilii* system at its very root
> — this system which is fundamentally at variance with
> Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression, is
> keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded
> by our Creator.[t34]

Qutb declares that Islam's "foremost duty in this world
is to eliminate *jaahiliyyah* from the leadership of man, and to
take the leadership into its own hands and enforce the
particular way of life which is its permanent feature."[t245]
Islam, Qutb insists, did not come to accommodate or cohabit with
the status quo. It did not come to "support people's desires,
which are expressed in their concepts, institutions, modes of
living, and habits and traditions."[t246] Rather, it came to
"abolish all such concepts, laws, customs, and
traditions."[t246] Moreover, in its struggle to demolish
jaahiliyyah, Islam should at no point compromise, even
momentarily, with the *jaahilii* order. The line between what is
jaahilii and what is Islamic is clearly drawn, so that co-
existence of *jaahilii* concepts and Islamic concepts cannot be

sustained or tolerated in an Islamic order. As we saw briefly
in Chapter 2, Qutb insists that the true Islamic method is not
strategic, but doctrinal. Just as the Prophet did not try to
consolidate support for his call by catering to the interests,
or by tapping into the insecurities and frustrations, of
potential allies, but insisted on an unyielding message of
monotheism, so also today's Muslims should confront *jaahiliyyah*
without devising strategies and tactics that in any way
compromise the integrity of the Islamic call. In early 1953,
Qutb still seems to entertain strategic thoughts and to value
Arab nationalism for its utility as a means towards installing
the Muslim order: "Some of us prefer to assemble around the
banner of Arabism," Qutb wrote.

> I do not object to this being a middle-range, transitional
> goal for unification, on the road to a unity of a wider
> scope. The whole land of the Arabs falls within the scope
> of the Abode of Islam. And whenever we liberate an Arab
> territory, we set free a patch of the Islamic homeland,
> and organic part of the Islamic body. [203]

But within the year, in <u>Islamic studies</u> (1953), Qutb's
aversion for strategic posturing becomes less ambiguous: even
in the cause of repelling the invading imperialist, Qutb now
asserts, Muslims should not compromise on their creed: "Those
who call upon us to join them in championing Arab nationalism
are only trying to accelerate the process of assimilation to one
or the other of the two blocs, the East and the West. But we,
the people, have another opinion on this matter. We the people
do no wish to be swallowed." [204] Qutb is clearly worried more
specifically about the looming possibility of Egypt's turn to
the Soviet bloc in its struggle to rid itself of the colonialist
West. However, even the "Asian-African" bloc, Qutb contends, is
not the cause that should rally the support of Egyptians. That

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[203] Quoted in Sivan, E. (1985, p. 30).
[204] Qutb, S. [1953] (1978) <u>Diraasaat islaamiyyah</u>, p. 100.

bloc is "unnatural"; Egyptians are attracted to it in reaction to the prevailing orders, i.e., the communist and the capitalist. The only "natural bloc" is that which is erected on the basis of the Muslim creed, and only to that bloc should Egyptians belong.[205] When confronting *jaahiliyyah* and struggling to bring about its demise, the active Muslim should not claim that the Islam he is promoting is an Islam that is in harmony with the order that prevails, even if such a claim is made tongue-in-cheek.

When it originally came, Qutb argues, Islam "never said to [the people] that it would not touch their way of living, their modes, their concepts and their values except perhaps slightly."[t251] Nor did it "propose similarities with their system or manners to please them, as some do today when they present Islam to the people under the names of 'Islamic democracy' or 'Islamic socialism'."[t251] Islam and *jaahiliyyah* are essentially different from each other," and if "[s]ometimes it appears that some parts of Islam resemble some aspects of the life of the people in *jaahiliyyah* ... [t]his resemblance in some minor aspects is a mere coincidence: the roots of the two trees are entirely different."[t247] The notion that Islam's similarities with the various *jaahilii* orders that prevail in this world is mere accident exists in Qutb's writings from the beginning of his Islamic work. In <u>Social justice</u>, where Qutb's preoccupation is with asserting Islam's superiority over the two prevailing world ideologies of his time — communism and capitalism — we can find Qutb complaining that those Muslims who "labor to trace connections and similarities between [the Islamic political system] and other systems known to the ancient and the modern world" are in fact motivated by "an inner conviction that the Islamic system is inferior to those of the Western world."[s87-88] Islam, Qutb insists, is "in itself a completely independent system which has no connection with these

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[205] Qutb, S. [1953] (1978) <u>*Diraasaat islaamiyyah*</u>, pp. 102-4.

others, either when they agree with it, or when they differ from it."[s88] Whatever divergence and similarity may be noted "is purely accidental and occurs in scattered points of detail."[s88] Moreover, "in such coincidence or in such divergence there can be no significance."[s88] What is essential is "the underlying theory, or the philosophy peculiar to the system."[s88] And Islam has its own theory and philosophy, and "it is from these that the details of the system take their rise."[s88]

Qutb's radical essentialism in his characterization of both Islam and *jaahiliyyah*, along with his ideological wholism — i.e., his insistence that all societies are systems informed by a coherent and all-encompassing world-conception — together fundamentally shape Qutb's perception of the *jaahiliyyah* that surrounds him and crucially inform his strategy of action for the establishment of the Islamic order. The *jaahiliyyah*, whatever form it may assume, takes the form "not of a 'theory' but of an active movement"[t82]:

> It is an organized society and there is a close cooperation and loyalty between its individuals, and it is always ready and alive to defend its existence consciously or unconsciously. It crushes all elements which seem to be dangerous to its personality.[t82]

It is crucial, according to Qutb, that the Muslim keep this in mind, since the *jaahiliyyah* he will labor to demolish will naturally react to his effort with resistance and hostility. In its mildest form of reaction, *jaahiliyyah* will try to frustrate the Islamic reformer by insisting that valid reform is always predicated on the definition of a fully detailed solution to all aspects of social life; this *jaahiliyyah*, in its attempt to come in the way of the true Muslim reformer, will ask such questions as:

What are the details to which you are calling? How much
research have you done? How many articles have you
prepared and how many subjects have you written about?
Have you constituted the jurisprudence on new principles?
— as if nothing was lacking for the enforcement of the
Islamic law except research in jurisprudence and its
details.... [t74-5]

Such questions, according to Qutb, are mere delaying
tactics for "diverting attention from real and earnest work, and
[are] a method through which the workers for Islam can be made
to waste their time in building castles in the air."[t76] It is
therefore the duty of Muslims to "expose these tactics and
reduce them to dust, [and] to reject this ridiculous proposal of
the 'reconstruction of the Islamic law'."[t76] But beyond mere
delaying tactics, *jaahiliyyah* will resist and fight whenever its
interests become threatened: "history tells us that the *jaahilii*
society chooses to fight and not to make peace, attacking the
vanguard of Islam at its very inception, whether it be a few
individuals or whether it be groups, and even after this
vanguard has become a well-established community."[t147] The
Islamic order, therefore, will not become a reality unless and
until it engages *jaahiliyyah* in a battle over supremacy.   To
this end, therefore, the Muslim reformer's attention should be
turned to "[attaining] sufficient power to confront the
existing *jaahilii* society."[t147] And by "power" Qutb has in
mind: "the power of belief and concept, the power of training
and moral character, the power to organize and sustain a
community, and such physical power as is necessary, if not to
dominate, at least to hold oneself against the onslaught of the
jaahilii society."[t147]

Those Muslims who undertake to set true Islamic reform in
motion form a "vanguard" (*talii'ah*) whose mission is to confront
the prevailing *jaahiliyyah* and to work towards bringing about
its annihilation. The members of this vanguard are the "true

believers", those who have thoroughly submitted to God exclusively and who will grant sovereignty over their lives only to God. This vanguard must, in its struggle against the *jaahiliyyah*, know how to interact with this *jaahiliyyah* that surrounds it and must establish a relationship with it that will best promote the vanguard's arduous mission.   Most importantly, the vanguard must understand that its mission "is not to compromise with the practices of *jaahilii* society," nor to "be loyal to it."[t34] Including himself among this vanguard, Qutb warns that "We and [*jaahiliyyah*] are on different roads, and if we take even one step in its company, we will lose our goal entirely and lose our way as well."[t34] In its struggle, the Muslim vanguard must spiritually cut itself off from *jaahilii* society and in general "keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing *jaahiliyyah* ."[t17] All loyalty to the leadership of this *jaahiliyyah* must be withdrawn, whether this leadership is "in the guise of priests, magicians or astrologers, or in the form of political, social or economic leadership."[t85]

Qutb does at times hedge on his otherwise uncompromising call for the total severing of all relations with *jaahiliyyah*. The Islamic vanguard should understand that ultimately, its aim is to demolish and do away with the *jaahilii* order, and, moreover, that in carying out its mission it should never compromise with this *jaahiliyyah*. At the same time, the Islamic vanguard "should also keep some ties with [*jaahiliyyah*]" and maintain at least a window of communication and interaction with it. The abolition of *jaahiliyyah* will not come about through compromise, but neither will it be fulfilled by "severing relations with it and removing ourselves to a separate corner."[t262] Rather:

> The correct procedure is to mix with discretion, give and take with dignity, speak the truth with love, and show the superiority of the Faith with humility.[t262-3]

3.2 Haakimiyyah

Mawdudi's influence on Sayyid Qutb's thought is perhaps most evident in Sayyid Qutb's appropriation of Mawdudi's *haakimiyyah*. While it is true, as Nasr and Akhavi point out, that Mawdudi's Urdu expression "*hukuumaat-ii ilaahiyyah*" (literally, divine government) means something different from Sayyid Qutb's Arabic "*haakimiyyah*", Mawdudi's theory of divine government crucially steered Qutb towards the formulation of his own conception of *haakimiyyah*.[206] It is important to note that, unlike Qutb, Mawdudi's central concern when he advanced "*hukuumaat-ii ilaahiyyah*" was to stress the unity of the divine and the earthly in all aspects of life, and especially in the sphere of the political. In his *Al-hukuuma al-islaamiyya* (Islamic government), Mawdudi writes:

> [T]he ever-lasting truth which the Qur'an expresses is that the kingship in the heavens and the earth [alike] is kingship of a single essence only. Sovereignty (*haakimiyyah*) is one component of that [singular] essence, and the order of this [worldly] existence is a perfectly centralized system, all of the powers of which are exercised by a single essence. Hence, as a consequence, whenever any individual or group claims for himself or for another full or partial sovereignty he is doubtlessly dazzled by falsehood, untruth, and absolute slander. [Consequently, humankind cannot but] believe in that essence as a single God to be worshipped in the religious sense, and also as a ruler and sultan in the political and social sense.[207]

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[206] Akhavi, Sharough (1997, p. 396).
[207] Mawdudi, A. A. (1980, pp. 100-1).

Legitimacy, in Mawdudi's view, can be attained by the ruler only if he rules in the name of Allah and if he undertakes to apply Islam in the society over which he rules — in short, a conception of government not altogether alien to conservative Sunni orthodoxy and a far cry from Qutb's revolutionary call. As Nasr convincingly demonstrates, Mawdudi's barely concealed political authoritarianism took explicit form once Mawdudi became a player in the field of Pakistani politics. [208] To begin with, *jihaad*, Mawdudi held, was the prerogative of government and not of individuals: only a government could legitimately declare *jihaad.* Mawdudi's position softened even further over the years: eventually, Mawdudi came to hold that *jihaad* could be declared only in time of actual war and when the enemy was non-Muslim.[209] In time of peace also it was the state that protected Islam. This protection came primarily in the form of inculcating the citizenship with the "true ethos of Islam", thereby gradually installing a "true Islamic order". It was a process that started from the top — from the ruling elite and the educated — and slowly infiltrated the lower strata through the process of *da'wah* (preaching).[210] Mawdudi's elitism is most explicit in his insistence that the criterion by which government was to be judged was "Islamicity" and not "democracy". Very much in the spirit of the *'ulema*, Mawdudi was preoccupied with the maintenance of stability and order. His answer was the traditional one: the firm grip of a strong executive.[211] Even *ijtihaad* (independent effort to creatively interpret the spirit of the *sharii'ah* on an open question), traditionally the preserve of the learned '*ulema*, Mawdudi stipulated could be practiced by the state. What emerges from Mawdudi's writings is a conception of government that neither Al-Mawardi (d. 1058) nor Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) — Islam's medieval founders of classical Islamic political philosophy — would have

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[208] Nasr (1996).

[209] ibid., p. 74.

[210] ibid., p. 77.

[211] ibid., p. 93.

found objectionable.[212] The individual citizen is subservient in Mawdudi's framework of the Islamic order to a strong state; divine sovereignty is interpreted by Mawdudi to the benefit of a powerful executive charged with the sacred mission of defending Islam and propagating its message. Individual freedom in this order is a secondary concern for Mawdudi: vicegerency to God is transferred from the individual to the state. [213]

Sayyid Qutb's point of departure for his political conception of the Islamic order is similar to that of Mawdudi, but the respective theories they eventually came to hold and defend radically diverged from each other on the question of human freedom within the Islamic order. Both Mawdudi and Qutb held as an axiom the exclusive sovereignty of God in matters of law. Mawdudi wrote that "[m]an's status in the universe having thus been determined, it follows logically that he has no right to lay down the law of his conduct and decide the right and wrong of it. This is a function which properly belongs to God."[214] Qutb, as we will see in Chapter 5, also insisted on the exclusive sovereignty of God over matters of morality and ethics and decried as the essence of *jaahiliiyyah* any human attempts to articulate a moral code of conduct. But whereas Mawdudi's conception of sovereignty led him to champion strong government, Qutb's argument from sovereignty ended, ironically, close to a view opposite that of Mawdudi's: sovereignty for Qutb was a shield against abusive government and a platform for promoting individual freedom. Sovereignty was the preserve of God and no entity, including — and *especially* — government, could assume it. Qutb never fully articulated — at least not to the extent that Mawdudi did — the relationship between government and the "Islamic mission". In his early Social justice (1948), Qutb does outline a framework for the role of government once the Islamic order has been established. But by and large, the

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[212] ibid., pp. 90, 93.
[213] Mawdudi (1955, pp. 81-2).
[214] Mawdudi (1953, p. 33).

notion of exclusive *haakimiyyah* in the sense that it came to acquire in his later writings is conspicuously absent from Social justice. The state outlined by Qutb in that work is a welfare state that enjoys rather wide powers, especially over matters pertaining to the redistribution of wealth. Qutb's preoccupation starting from 1954 — i.e., with the beginning of the prison years — clearly shifts away from exhorting the institution of a benevolent state and begins to revolve around the problem of checking the abuses of the authoritarian state. Sovereignty plays a central role in this paradigm, but its utility and place in Qutb's overall worldview cannot be fully grasped unless we keep in mind Qutb's conception of man and society.

In the previous chapter, we examined three concepts fundamental in Qutb's model of the individual. The human being is created with an immutable nature (*fitrah*), is capable of conscious belief (*'aqiidah*), and possesses the freedom to act and alter his condition (*harakah*). We saw in the first section of this chapter that for Qutb individuals by necessity live in a socio-cultural context and that their beliefs and actions are essentially informed by that context. Whether the context is Islamic or *jaahilii*, the individual draws his values and norms, his beliefs and convictions from the conception of life (*tasawwur*) that informs the society and the culture within which he dwells. The *jaahiliyyah* for Qutb is not merely a set of false beliefs that the individual may choose to adopt or reject, but a whole system of life that surrounds the individual, traps him within its constraining confines, and prevents him from breaking free from it should he decide to reject it as the system of life to follow. Although all social systems are comprehensive and inform society and culture in all of their complexities, there does, however, exist an important difference between the *jaahilii* order and the Islamic order. No matter what outward forms they may assume, all *jaahilii* orders have in common their violation of the exclusive sovereignty of God. In

the Islamic order, on the other hand, there exists only one sovereign: God.   All true religions, in Qutb's eyes, are Islamic in their essence, since they all call, without exception, for the submission to the One God:

> Throughout every period of human history the call toward God has had one nature. Its purpose is "Islam", which means to bring into submission to God.... [t80]

A point we have already raised previously concerns the preoccupation that Qutb exhibits — and with increasing intensity towards the end of his writings — for the conceptual reform of Muslim society and the establishment of the ideologically truly Islamic order. We have argued that it is a non-traditional conceptualization of Islam that Qutb deploys: Islam is turned into an ideology in the fully modern sense of the term "ideology", a world-conception that informs all aspects of society. The individual believer is not Qutb's primary occupation; when Qutb treats of the individual it is only to describe the agent who must carry out the mission of bringing about the Islamic order, not to spell out the way of the salvation of the soul. A parallel preoccupation runs through Qutb's arguments — and, again, this preoccupation becomes fully articulated with the <u>Islamic Concept</u> (1962). Qutb is never truly preoccupied with the nature of divinity — who is God and what is his essence — but with the mission of restoring to that divinity its absolute sovereignty on earth.   On this score, Qutb does not deviate from classical Sunni theology. The *Ash'ari* tradition was precisely a reaction to the perceived excesses of the *Mu'tazilah*, the rationalist school of 9 th century Islam that insisted that divinity itself could be scrutinized through rational discourse. In chapter 5, where we discuss Qutb's hostility to the social sciences, we will examine with greater detail Qutb's explicit rejection of all discourse that attempts to examine directly the nature of divinity. Such discourse, in Qutb's eyes, is an affront to God and can, and

does in Qutb's view, lead only to a loss of faith, with all the disastrous consequences to which such a loss always leads. Qutb, however, sharply deviates from historical tradition when he mobilizes the sovereign character of divinity to elaborate on the essence of what he calls the "Islamic conception." In Qutb's post-Islamic Concept discourse, the absolute sovereignty of God and the divine origin of the Islamic world-concept together define four important characteristics of the Islamic order. By virtue of God's total sovereignty, the Islamic world-concept must be "comprehensive" in the scope of problems it undertakes to solve and in the explanatory model of the world it presents for man. God's sovereignty also entails that the Islamic solution is "universal": God's dominion is the entire world, and His solution applies to all of humanity. Moreover, given the absolute unity of God, the Islamic concept stands distinct from any other worldview, regardless of any similarities that may be detected between Islam and that worldview. And finally, unlike any other system of life, whether ostensibly religious or man-created, Islam is pure in its divine origins and presents man with a simple, intuitive model of life.

3.2.1. Comprehensiveness

As we have already seen, Qutb insists that not only must the individual believe in God and perform the rituals of worship (*'ibaadaat*), but that he must also derive his laws exclusively from the Islamic conception. Deriving laws from other sources than God alone represents for Qutb an act of association (*shirk*): "anyone who derives laws from a source other than God... does not worship God alone."[t144] On this score, Qutb and Mawdudi seem to closely concur. In Let us be Muslims, Mawdudi writes:

Acknowledging that someone is your ruler to whom you must submit means that you have accepted his Din. He now becomes your sovereign and you become his subjects. Din, therefore, actually means that same thing as state and government; Sharii'ah is the law of that state and government' and 'Ibadah amounts to following and complying with that law. [215]

For Mawdudi, if the sovereign is Muslim, then those who obey him are following the ruler's *diin* — i.e., Islam. Qutb's view is less forgiving: the only legitimate law-giver, in Qutb's view, is God: "The entire universe is under the authority of God" and "[His] authority [must] be acknowledged as the law-giver for human life."[t81] The human being — ruler or subject — a creature living within the universe, and therefore subject to "those natural laws which come from God," can promote his happiness and interest only by adopting God's laws: "it is therefore desirable that he should also follow Islam in those aspects of his life in which he is given a choice and should make the Divine Law the arbiter in all matters of life so that there may be harmony between man and the rest of the universe."[t81] The theme that Islam must rule and legislate society's laws is present even in the earliest Islamic writings. In The battle between Islam and Capitalism (1951), Qutb insists that "Islam did not appear to isolate itself in mosques, or to dwell only in people's heart and conscience, but rather to rule and regulate life, and to infuse society with its life-conception, and accomplish this not merely through preaching and guidance (*al wi'dh wa al-'irshad*), but with legislation and organization (*al-tashrii' wa al-tandhiim*)."[m55] In concrete terms, "the state must rule Islamically" and its laws "must order how people relate to one another... [how] citizens interact with the state, and how the state is to deal with its constituency"; it must be the basis of "criminal and civil laws,

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[215] Mawdudi (1985, pp. 295-6).

the laws of commerce, and any regulations that together define the nature of the society and give it its particular character."[m60] Throughout his writings, Qutb remained consistent in his claim that Islam is a comprehensive, all-encompassing system of life. In Universal peace and Islam, Qutb writes that "Islam is comprehensive and covers all aspects of life just as capillaries and nerves direct themselves to all parts of the body;"[u3] In Islamic Studies (1953) he insists that "while all other creeds and ideologies focus on one particular area, Islam takes all aspects of life at once."[d36] In a later work, This Religion of Islam (1960), referring to the "Original Community", or what refers to there as the "ideal period of excellence", Qutb notes that the "principles, ideas, values and criteria" established by the new religion "embraced every sector of human life." They dealt with all aspects of man's existential anxieties and apprehensions, as well as his more mundane, earthly worries. On the one hand, "they embraced the human concept of God, and the relation of humanity to Him; the human concept of existence, of the purpose of existence, its general place and function in the universe." But at the same time, "[t]hey dealt too with political, social and economic rights and duties, systems, situations and relationships that connect together these rights and duties."[h40] In his more systematically doctrinaire work, The Islamic Concept (1962), Qutb devotes a whole chapter to the comprehensiveness (*shumuul*) of the Islamic conception of life. The Islamic concept informs "people about their Lord", about "His Person" and "His glorious attributes", and about "what pertains to him alone as distinct from what pertains to His creation."[ke91] It also informs "[them] concerning the nature of the universe in which they live, and its properties, and its connection with the Creator,"[ke95] and "tells [them] about life and the living, informing them concerning their respective sources."[ke98] And last, the Islamic concept addresses in detail the human condition and provides answers to man's deepest existential questions:

The Islamic concept also informs human beings about man, describing his origin and his source, his nature and his characteristics, his place in this existence, the purpose of his existence, his position of servitude to his Lord, and the requirements of this servitude.[ke100]

In the more radical <u>Milestones</u> (1964), Qutb outright equates *sharii'ah* with the *tasawwur* of <u>The Islamic Concept</u>. Not merely must all legal injunctions be derived from God, and all matters judged according to these injunctions; *sharii'ah* itself must "[include] the principles of administration, its system and its modes."[t200] *Sharii'ah*, in other words, becomes in Qutb's writings a dynamic system of law and a paradigm of life, rather than a static, frozen body of elaborated injunctions; the *sharii'ah* of Qutb is an "active" set of "principles", a "system" with "modes", capable of shaping reality in the fashion of a concrete, living Islamic order.

It is important to note at this juncture that, for all the ostensibly unyielding position that he adopts with respect to divine sovereignty, Qutb at times does carve out certain spheres of life from the purview of Islam. We will turn to this point with greater detail in Chapter 4, where we will examine Qutb's treatment of the "material" (i.e., natural) sciences. For now, let us merely point out that Qutb's hedge on his claim of the absolutely comprehensive nature of Islam is present both at the beginning of his Islamic writings as well as at the end. In <u>The battle between Islam and capitalism</u> (1951), rejecting the claim that Islam could lead to a dictatorship of the clergy, Qutb cites the example of the Prophet and "his habit" of consulting with the people and deferring to their advice on certain issues: "In worldly matters, the Prophet granted them freedom of opinion and action, since they are best familiar with their own affairs." And by "worldly matters" Qutb seems to mean anything

that has "no bearing on *sharii'ah* or society, but pertains to such fields as warfare, agriculture, the protection of fruits, and so forth, that is, what we may nowadays call the pure and the applied sciences."[m72] Or, again, "Islam does not insinuate itself at all in scientific matters, be they pure or applied, since such matters pertain to this world (*umuur al-dunyaa*)."[m81] Even over social questions and issues that touch on the manner of worship, or on anything that deals with the human soul and intellect, whatever has not been explicitly prohibited or permitted through Qur'anic text (*nass*) may be a topic of reasoned debate.[m81]

In <u>Milestones</u> (1964), Qutb again reasserts the notion that there exist areas of life that Islam does not inform. The *hadiith* "You know best the affairs of your business" is cited, as previously, to support this position. However, while in <u>The battle between Islam and capitalism</u> Qutb articulated the position within the larger argument that Islam is essentially non-dictatorial, in <u>Milestones</u>, the underlying subtext is the less defensive position that the new Islamic community should draw only from the true Islamic source. The effect is that while in <u>The battle between Islam and capitalism</u>, the exceptions to Islam's comprehensiveness further Qutb's argument that Islam is non-invasive and non-dictatorial, in the case of <u>Milestones</u>, the exceptions create dissonance with the absolutist tone of the work. In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb stipulates that one exception to Islam's absolute sovereignty over all aspects of life may be the acquisition of "worldly" knowledge: "A Muslim can go to a Muslim or to a non-Muslim to learn abstract sciences such as chemistry, physics, biology... technology, military arts and similar sciences and arts."[t203] Qutb does insist that such a state of affairs should be tolerated only until the time when the Muslim community is able to provide enough experts of its own, therefore eliminating the need to seek knowledge from non-Muslims. But all the same, Qutb's unyielding insistence that the Islamic vanguard never compromise with the surrounding

jahiliyyah, not only on the substance of the "Islamic conception" but even on questions of the strategy of fighting this *jaahiliyyah*, is clearly compromised. Matters of natural science are "not related to the principles of law, the rules and regulations which order the lives of individuals and groups, nor are they related to morals, manners, traditions... which give society its shape and form," there is therefore "no danger that a Muslim [learn] these sciences from a non-Muslim."[t204]

We shall treat of this important tension in Qutb's work in the next chapter. The exception that Qutb stipulates is not gratuitous. It goes to the heart of his argument that Islam is a universal religion and that humanity is united by an unvarying, primordial human nature.

3.2.2. Universality

The divine origin of the Islamic conception, in Qutb's view, bestows on that conception a second attribute besides its comprehensiveness. The Islamic conception lays claim not only to all aspects of life (the "sciences" excepted), but also to the totality of humanity. Islam is a religion for all humanity and for all times, and, as Qutb writes in <u>Social justice</u>, "reckons itself a Gospel for the whole world."[s16]   Qutb is not defying any established tradition when making such a proposal; on the contrary, he is reiterating the long standing traditional line that Islam's mission is to bring about the salvation of all mankind.[216] Among the modern reformers, the line was hardly controversial. Al-Afghani, as Hourani observes, impressed his fellow Muslims precisely because he insisted on the universal validity of Islam even in the face of the hegemonic power of Europe.[217] His pupil, 'Abduh, carried on Al-Afghani's position and asserted that "[t]he Islamic *Shari'ah* is

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[216] Smith (1957, pp. 10-11).
[217] Hourani (1962, p. 123).

universal and eternal. A corollary of this is that the *Shari'ah*
suits the interests of humanity at every time and in any place
whatever the nature of the civilization." [218]   Mawdudi, deploying
a more modern vocabulary insisted that he would "scientifically
prove that Islam is eventually to emerge as the World-Religion
to cure Man from all his maladies." [219]   In Universal peace and
Islam, Qutb focuses explicitly on the universal character and
validity of Islam. He advances the traditional line that Islam
is the only remaining true religion, and "the culmination of the
previously revealed faiths and includes the teachings of former
true Prophets."[u12] As the final religion, "Islam is the
guardian of humanity"[u12] and its mission is to "establish
justice in the world and to allow all peoples to enjoy this
justice... as members of the international community." [u72]
Islam is a "revolution" and came to "save humanity... from
prevailing injustices"[u72] regardless of race or nationality;
"[it] calls for action against injustice whether inflicted upon
Muslims or non-Muslims... allies or non-allies."[u73]   Islam
itself is the true incarnation of the one religion that God has
sent down to humanity throughout the ages: "every religion sent
by Allah was nothing but Islam."[ke183] Islam is "a uniting
faith" and stands for "the unity of all religions in the faith
of Allah, and also for the unity of all the prophets."[s24] Its
audience is the totality of humanity, for "all human beings are
descended from the same person created by God."[u46] Islam is
not "merely a declaration of the freedom of the Arabs," but
rather "addresses itself to the whole of mankind, and its sphere
of work is the whole earth. Allah is the Sustainer not merely
of the Arabs.... Allah is the Sustainer of the whole
world."[t107]   That is why Islam rejects nationalism: "Islam is
not nationalistic, because nationalism is contrary to its
principle of human unity."[u73] In the eyes of Islam, "[t]he
soil of the homeland has, in itself, no value or weight."[t130]
What value the homeland can acquire it acquires only to the

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[218] Quoted in Ridha, Rashid M. (1931, vol. 1, p. 614).
[219] Mawdudi (1963, p. iii).

extent that "God's authority is established and God's guidance is followed."[t130]

In fact, Qutb argues, it was Islam that introduced to humankind the very notion that humanity is one. When Islam was born "it taught the unity of the human race in origin and in history, in life and in death, in privileges and in responsibilities...."[s46] Given its essentially universal nature, "[t]here is no political or military institution in the world but owes something to Islam; and this has been true even in those ages when the Muslim world has been weak and divided...."[s240] Muslims may be unaware of the history of their religion, but Islam's contribution to world civilization is "immense".[m28-29] The "universal phenomenon" that Islam "did not leave unvisited a single aspect of human life"[h63]:

> Every single one of the great movements of history derived, directly or indirectly, from that momentous happening; or, to be more precise, from that vast universal phenomenon.[h63]

Qutb points specifically to "the movement of religious reform, undertaken by Luther and Calvin in Europe," the Renaissance, the collapse of the Feudal system and the virtual disappearance of the aristocracy, the "movement of equality and the rights of man which appeared in the Magna Carta," and the experimental method, "on which is based the scientific glory of Europe." But, again, Islam's greatest contribution is to instill in the conscience of mankind the notion that humanity is one — a concept that was, before the arrival of Islam, totally alien to human kind: "Humanity was unable to imagine any other kind of loyalty until Islam came and proclaimed to everyone that humanity is one."[h72] Moreover, Islam did not merely proclaim in words humanity's unity, but illustrated it in its treatment of people from all races. Islam's far-flung stretch "over a wide area of the globe... embraced most races and colors, and

melted them together in the order of Islam."[h72] One may argue
that the idea of a united humanity has not completely prevailed,
Qutb concedes, but nonetheless "[t]his concept, delineated by
Islam, is the root of all human thinking from a theoretical
standpoint, while petty loyalties are vanishing and diminishing,
being weak and baseless."[h73]

It is important to note that Qutb comes close to
contradicting his essentialist portrayal of the violent
rejectionism that, in Qutb's view, the Islamic vanguard are
bound to face from "modern day *jaahiliyyah* ." As we saw, Qutb
insists that present-day *jaahiliyyah* is more hostile than the
original, historical *jaahiliyyah* to Islam's mission of
restoring divine sovereignty.   The very notion of a god, Qutb
laments, is no longer taken seriously, whereas for the original
jaahiliyyah, the existence of the divine was taken as a matter
of fact. When praising the achievements of Islam and its
contributions to world civilization, Qutb argues that the world
today — *jaahilii* as it may be — is in a better state than it was
before the arrival of Islam. In This religion of Islam, Qutb
writes: "[h]umanity today is, in some respects, in a better
position than when this divinely ordained path was first
brought."[h41]   Thanks to "[t]he legacy of that brilliant
period," humanity today is "nearer to understanding the path of
Islam... than it [was]... when Islam first came."[h44]

Qutb never explicitly addresses, let alone resolves, the
tension that exists between these two propositions.   Both
assertions — that present day *jaahiliyyah* is steadfast in its
resistence and that Islam is the origin of what noble humanity
can be found in this essentially *jaahilii* world — are central
to his overall argument, so that their co-existence in the same
discourse is revealing of the multifaceted orientations of
Qutb's arguments. The first proposition is crucial to his
strategy of resistance: *jaahiliyyah* is consciously and
essentially hostile to the Islamic call and must therefore be

met on equal terms; whatever compromise one may forge with such *jaaliyyah* will serve only that *jaahiliyyah* in its relentless drive to detract from the true mission of destroying the *jaahili*. As we have seen, Qutb's central preoccupation in most of his works concerns resistance to the "internal threat": the intrusive and increasingly brutal state that aims at taking hold of all aspects of society. It is this *jaahiliyyah* that Qutb seems to have in mind when he insists that no compromise is possible between the Islamic and the *jaahili*, or when he asserts that *jaahiliyyah* today is even more hostile than the original *jaahiliyyah* to the mission of restoring divine sovereignty. But it is a different *jaahiliyyah* that Qutb appears to talk about when he asserts his second proposition: i.e., that humanity today is more receptive than ever to the Islamic message. The latter proposition is crucial to Qutb's argument since it furthers his assertion that Islam is not merely yet another ideological world-conception, but is rather *the* one world-conception for which humanity craves. Islam is at the source of humanity's nobility; all of the great ideas of mankind can be traced to Islam; the world, therefore, is receptive to Islam's call. The "external" *jaahiliyyah*, in other words, is ready to accept Islam, since it has become familiar with its basic concepts and has adopted some of its most important principles.

3.2.3. Uniqueness

We have already seen briefly that Qutb rejects as purely coincidental any similarities that may be detected between *jaahiliyyah* and the Islamic conception: "the roots of the two trees are entirely different"[t247], Qutb writes in <u>Milestones</u>. The Islamic conception, by virtue of its divine origin, in addition to being comprehensive, is also unique and essentially different from any man-established system of life. In <u>Social justice</u>, Qutb speaks of the "independence" enjoyed by Islam's political system from other systems: "the world has known a

number of political systems, but the Islamic system is not one of these."[s89] The Islamic system derives neither its theory nor its method from them. Taking exception with the use of the "secularist" Egyptian writer, Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956),[220] of the term "the Islamic empire" to describe "the Islamic world", when the latter existed as a political entity, Qutb accuses Haykal of reducing Islam to a mere colonial power and of holding an opinion antithetical to "a true understanding of the spirit of Islam."[s89] Whereas the imperial powers of today treat their colonies exploitatively and inequitably, "Islam holds that there is an equality of Muslims in all parts of the world [and] forbids any racial or local loyalty," but instead "encourages religious loyalty in many places."[s89] Therefore, unlike the modern imperial powers, Islam never treats its provinces as "mere colonies or storehouses" from which "supplies may be poured into the capital," but instead treats "[e]ach province as a member of the body of the Islamic world."[s89-90]

An important difference separates Qutb from Al-Afghani on the question of Islam's uniqueness. Al-Afghani held an evolutionary view of Islam that, while it did not deny the unique character of Islam, at the same time did not lead to an understanding of that uniqueness in the same sense that Qutb held. Islam was indeed unique for Al-Afghani, but it was *essentially* unique: Islam and Christianity differed from each other in the same sense that a less developed entity differs from a more evolved one. As Keddie notes, Al-Afghani held that Islam is superior for the following reasons: "[f]irst, its insistence on the unity of the Creator, which excludes incarnation or any sharing of divine powers; second, its lack of inherent race or class distinctions; and third, its rejection of beliefs that do not rest on proofs." [221] At least on the third score, i.e., the necessity of rational proof, Al-Afghani argued,

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[220] For an excellent presentation on Muhammad Husayn Haykal's ideas and context, see: Smith (1983).
[221] Keddie (1983, p. 81).

Islam was superior than Christianity; a mature humanity is addressed by the Qur'an, rather than the immature one that Christianity did and whose soul it could save only by impressing them with the emotional proof of miracles. Qutb rejected Al-Afghani's line and held instead that all religions are initially of the same essence as Islam; what made Islam unique is the "fact" that it has retained intact the essence of its original purity.

Qutb's belief in the essential uniqueness of Islam is perhaps best illustrated through his repeated invocation of the "ideal period of excellence", the period of "Original Community". This "ideal" period, as we have mentioned already, refers to the time of the Prophet and the Four Rightly Guided caliphs. This "first group of Muslims molded their lives according to [Islam's] concept... led mankind in a manner unparalleled in history, either before or after... [and] established such an exemplary system for mankind that it has not been repeated or even approached in the subsequent history of the world."[ke2] The success of the Original Community can be directly attributed to its faithful adherence to the "true", "dynamic" Islamic method, and should any community of Muslims again undertake to apply Islam as the original adherents did, then once more the true Islamic order will prevail.[k108] [k156] A singular historical event, the "Original Community" represents "a period of excellence in the history of [the divinely ordained] path—and indeed in the history of mankind — which is still the sublime summit towards which necks are craned and gazes directed, still there in its exalted state."[h36] The members of the original period "represented a higher humanity, unique models in their sublimity, by comparison with whom the figures in later centuries, appear to be but dwarfs and deficient human beings...."[h38] And in Milestones, a whole chapter is devoted to "The unique Qur'anic generation" — a generation "without comparison in the history of Islam, even in the entire history of man."[t21]

3.2.4. Purity

However, although unique, the "Qur'anic generation" did not possess abilities or talents that surpassed human capacities. Always with an eye towards inspiring action, Qutb is careful to qualify his glorification of the "unique generation" by pointing out that, the achievements they were able to accomplish in such a short span of time notwithstanding, the members of the "[unique generation] were... human beings, who had not left the bounds of their nature or essential disposition, nor surpassed any of the constructive capacities."[h38] As we have pointed out in our discussion on action (*harakah*), the mundane character of the Original Community is central to Qutb's argument. The Original Community is to serve not merely as a model to emulate, but as an example that vividly illustrates the feasibility of the Islamic project and the possibility that mere human effort can achieve the ideal. For Qutb, the uniqueness of the Original Community does not lie in the character of that community, but rather in its method of self-reformation. The secret to the success of the Original Community resides, first, in its action-oriented reading and adaptation of the Qur'anic message, and second, in its puritan and exclusive devotion to the *Qu'ran* and the *hadiith* as the sole sources for moral and social guidance. Islam is the "final, most perfect way of life"[f30] and to it alone everyone must turn for solutions; it "is like a delicate and perfect piece of machinery which may be completely ruined by the presence of a foreign body."[s91] All divine religions, "from *Nuh* (Noah) to *'Isa* (Jesus)" were pure in their message, and all attempted to communicate the "correct knowledge of their Creator."[ke18] However, in every case, except Islam, those religions suffered "deviations from their teachings, due to political circumstances and lusts and passions... and led mankind astray from the straight path."[ke18]   Such "false

ideas" accumulated upon humanity's conception of life that "it would not have been possible to remove the rubbish from the minds of people except through a new messenger, a messenger who would cut through the rubbish... by proclaiming the truths of the Islamic concept in its purest form...."[ke18] Undaunted, Islam insists on facing the "rubbish" of *jaahiliyyah* with a simple message: "[b]eing an essentially simple and natural religion void of contradiction or confusion, Islam exists in harmony with human logic."[u16] Islam aims to address *fitrah* in a simple language and to convince the human through his understanding: "[i]ts convictions are so simple and clear that they appeal to human understanding."[u18] Islam is a creed with no ambiguities and no complications (*'aqiidah basiitah waadhiha laa ta'qiid fiihaa wa laa ghumuudh*).[m64]

Islam's profound simplicity can be best grasped when one compares the Islamic creed with other belief systems, be they called "religion" or otherwise. In the Islamic concept, Qutb states that "the beauty of this faith... and the simple but profound truth embodied in it is [sic] manifest only after studying the rubbish heap of *jaahiliyyah*."[ke35] Islam's "purity" and "simplicity" are important for Qutb's argument because it is to these two characteristics of the Islamic conception that Qutb points when he attempts to impress upon his reader the illegitimacy of all religions other than Islam and when he dismisses the possibility that philosophy and the social sciences can serve as the basis for a life-conception. Christianity in particular is targeted by Qutb for the state of "impurity" to which historical events have brought it.   In Islam: the religion of the future (1960), Qutb explains that the nature of present-day Christianity can be understood by examining the series of conflicts into which the Christian religion became entangled and the excesses to which it was driven in its attempts to survive in this world. Facing on the one hand a hostile Judaism that rejected off-hand the Christian message of "gentleness, peace, spiritual purification and

renouncement of ritual formalities," and on the other the persecution of "the pagan Romans", the "Disciples (the students of Jesus) and their followers" were driven to an unnatural life of secrecy.   The most significant consequence of this persecution, Qutb argues, consists in the inability of the Disciples to freely communicate with each other and to verify their respective accounts of what Jesus had said and done: "they altered the text of their Scriptures, transmitting the history of Jesus and the events in his life in a haphazard fashion."[h41] Most notably, the Gospels were written at the earliest "a full generation after Christ" and historians differ about so basic a fact as "the language it was written in."[f41] Later, Paul, "who was considered the principal propagator of the Christian faith" fashioned a "conception of Christianity... adulterated by the residues of Roman mythology and Greek philosophy."[f42] Such adulteration represented a "catastrophe which inflicted Christianity since its early days in Europe." [f42] Further blows were to be delivered to the Christian faith "when the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced the new religion and enabled the Christians to become the ruling party in 355 AD."[f43][222] Though now in possession of greater political power, the Christians had to pay dearly for that power with the purity and simplicity of their religion: "Christianity's principles became muddled and transmuted as a result of its struggles and conflicts, leading to the formation of a new synthetic religion...."[f44] The new Emperor, "a slave to his lust" and in possession of "no genuine religious convictions... deemed it in his interest and in the interest of the two competing ideologies (idolatry and Christianity) to have unity and reconciliation."[f44] To this the Christians acquiesced, perhaps believing that Christianity "would eventually rid itself of the absurdity of idolatry."[f44-45] But the historical record, as Qutb reads it, tells us that the opposite took place and that Christianity "continued its course polluted with

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[222] It is not clear here why 355 AD was chosen by Qutb. Qutb may perhaps have meant 325 AD for the Council of Nicea.

heathen myths and conceptions."[f45] Debilitating "political
and racial differences" plagued the early Christians and
compelled the young religion to "alter and modify its basic
principles in accordance with its political aims."[f45] An
example of such tampering with Christianity's basic message is
the "Council of Chalcedon" in 451 AD, where [it was] "declared
that Christ should be recognized in both divine and human
natures.... Thus, they viewed Christ as 'true God' and 'true
Man', though united in one entity and on one body, not two
divisible or separate bodies — but consolidated in one entity
which is Son, God, and Word."[f47] Paralyzed by "such grafting"
and "burdened with elements of so-called 'mysteries' quite alien
to its nature as Divine religion," this synthetic Christianity
eventually found itself "unable to give authoritative Divine
interpretation to the nature of existence...." [f48]

     When not guilty of collaborating with earthly powers, this
"synthetic Christianity" adopted the other extreme position of
total rejection of the earthly world and absolute devotion to
the spiritual realm. Such asceticism in Qutb's view has little
to do with the original Christian creed and is as much a
byproduct of "unfortunate" historical events as is
Christianity's appropriation of idolatrous ideas and rituals.
As we saw in our discussion on *fitrah*, Qutb rejects the
asceticism advanced by Christianity as "unnatural" as it
inhibits "those natural potentialities which are necessary for
human survival and civilization, on the one hand, and for the
performance of man's functions as vicegerent of God on the
other."[f51] Such reactionary extremism on the part of those
who felt revolted by the materialism that had infiltrated their
religion in the course of time proved to be counter-productive
since, first, it "gave vent to struggle between two extreme
parties"[f51] and, second, it incited "feelings of revolt
against this system [sic] alien to human nature."[f52]   The
revulsion of the common man was further incited when it was
"discovered that the private lives of the clergymen were

saturated with luxurious enjoyment and full of the most
perverted debauchery."[f52] The Church, again solicitous to
retain its power, reacted by issuing "dispensation
certificates," thereby assuming for itself the "authority to
change, add or omit whatever they wanted of the Christian
creed."[f53] Most flagrantly, "[t]he Twelfth Ecumenical Council
resolved unanimously that, since Jesus Christ had conferred upon
his Church the authority to grant forgiveness of sins... the
Church would reserve to itself the practice of this procedure
for the salvation of the Christian peoples."[f53] This
inevitably transformed the Church into a tyrannical, capricious
and self-serving institution that manipulated disputes between
kings and emperors to better wield its control over the people,
"[exploiting them] in the worst ways by imposing exorbitant
taxes which it collected directly."[f55]

The subsequent revolts that followed — namely, the
Protestantism of "Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich
Zwingli"[f56] — came too late to set Christianity back to its
true course or to restore to the Christian religion its original
purity. The "hideous schizophrenia", Qutb insists, had already
infected "the European psyche": the world of the divine was
permanently severed from the earthly world, effecting a
separation of "the religious ideal from the social order" and
"[putting] an end to any working relationship between religion
and practical life in Europe."[f55] Moreover, "the crime
committed by the Western Church" was not merely against itself,
but "against the Christian religion and against all religions of
the world up to this time."[f55] Religion became equated with
the particular European experience of Christianity, and the
historical accidents that led to a perversion of the Christian
message, and the ultimate reaction to the tyranny of the Church,
were taken to represent the essential manifestation of all
religious conceptions. But, Qutb notes, "[a]ll these
circumstances are (thanks to God) purely European and not

universal. They are related to a particular sort of religious
dogma, but not to the essence of religious Faith."[f64]

     For Qutb, then, it is the deviation from the origin al
"Islamic" conception — i.e., the core message of God's total
sovereignty — brought about by a "murderous" onslaught of
"unfortunate" historical accidents and compounded by the
accomodationist strategy adopted by the early Christians that
together combined to create an order where God is confined to a
limited space of life and rendered irrelevant to the task of
ordering the social affairs of humans. Qutb stresses
"deviation" as the original sin and attributes the misfortune
that was to fall upon Muslims to the adulteration of the
"Islamic" conception with non-divinely inspired worldviews and
ideas. Muhammad 'Abduh, by contrast, shifted the blame away
from Qutb's putative "deviation" from the pure, and to the
mismanagement of diversity in opinion. It is true, as Badawi
observes, that "['Abduh's] proposal for unity was to go back to
Islam as it was before the disputes." [223] But it is equally clear
that 'Abduh did not entertain Qutb's proposal for the wholesale
emotional and conceptual overhaul of Muslim society and
consciousness. He viewed the diversity of opinion in matters of
religion and theology as unfortunate and sought to "reconcile
the various sects through theological manipulation" [224] rather
than through a categorical dismissal of tradition and the
establishment, as Qutb unapologetically did. 'Abduh does write
in his later, less revolutionary, years that "[o]ur belief is
that Islam is a religion of unity in conviction and not
diversity in principles. Reason is amongst its strongest
supporters and revelation is one of its strongest bases. Beyond
this are delusions from Satan and whims of rulers. The Qur'an
is a witness on everyone's actions and is the judge of its
correctness and error." [225] But it was the "diversity in

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[223] Badawi (1978, p. 95).

[224] ibid., p. 51.

[225] 'Abduh, Muhammad (1935, p. 23).

principles" that 'Abduh wished to preclude, not a diversity in opinion. Very much in line with tradition, 'Abduh held that as long as the basic tenets of Islam were held, no interpretation may be deemed grounds for keeping one who held it to be considered as a Muslim.[226]

'Abduh's concerns when he articulated his inclusive strategy of diversity management pertained to the diversity between theologians and philosophers — i.e., the elite learned who may dabble in questions and matters dangerous to the faith of the uninitiated masses. The purity of the original Islam, then, served as the rallying point of departure to bring about the unity of the upper strata of theologians and philosophers.[227] For Qutb, Islam's purity and its simplicity are important characteristics for a different reason: they highlight what he insists are "fundamental" differences between Islam and all other religions in the form they have come to assume. By its hypocrisy, the Christian Church outraged the sense of truth innate in all human beings; by its tyrannical practice it incited fear and hatred towards itself; and by its mystification it strained the credulity of the believers and aroused their cynicism. By contrast, Qutb argues, Islam, notwithstanding its present state of weakness, has retained its purity and, throughout its history, never rose to the tyrannical heights attained by the Christian Church. Islam's purity guaranteed that the fatal split between the divine and the earthly never took place for Islam in the definitive form it came to assume in the Christian context.

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[226] Badawi (1978, p. 60-1).
[227] ibid., p. 61.

Chapter Four

Man and the "abstract sciences"

Introduction

In chapter 2, we examined Qutb's theory of the individual and highlighted three concepts in particular that together shed some light on the Qutbian model of the human being: basic, immutable human nature (*fitrah*), belief (*'aqiidah*), and action (*harakah*). The individual is always in possession of a core nature that is historically and culturally unvarying; he is a creature of belief who needs to face the unknowns of life by asserting convictions; and he is a creature of action for whom meaning can acquire substance only through immediate and self-invested interaction with the world. In chapter 3, we focused on two concepts — *jaahiliyyah* and *haakimiyyah* — that together gave us some insight into Qutb's model of human society. In Qutb's vocabulary, *jaahiliyyah* refers to the essentially un-Islamic social order. It is an order based on a world-conception totally antithetical to the Islamic world-conception and fundamentally at odds with human *fitrah*. This *jaahiliyyah*, whatever outward form it may assume, is the order where divine sovereignty has been usurped by some earthly power. By contrast, the Islamic order is that society where the only recognized and obeyed absolute sovereign is God; it is the order where *haakimiyyah* is exclusively reserved for the Creator. Taken together, Qutb's model of the individual and his conception of society are striking in their essentialism: both individual and society are defined by a set of core characteristics that transcend historical and cultural variations. Not that Qutb purges history altogether from his account of man and society. As we have seen, it is important for Qutb's argument that man act in his world and that he react

to the particular, historical context within which he finds himself. We saw that Qutb went so far as to explicitly state that the content of the *Qur'an* itself was answer to the particular concerns of the historical community surrounding the Prophet. But it is equally clear that for Qutb, the actor is not the pure making of history, but a creature with both an essence and a will. If Qutb did not have qualms stating that the *Qur'an* came to answer the particular concerns of the Prophet's community, it was only because he had already forcefully asserted that humanity is one and that the concerns of the "Original Community" are essentially the concerns of present-day communities, and for that matter, of all communities that history has ever produced. Man in Qutb's discourse is historically located, but not historically determined. The same holds for Qutb's conception of society. Only two types of social orders exist in Qutb's world: the *jaahilii* and the Islamic. History enters in the determination of the surface manifestations of a society, but what makes that society *jaahilii* are not any of its particular customs and traditions, but its usurpation of divine *haakimiyyah*. By the same token, a society is not Islamic by virtue of its historically Islamic lineage or merely because that society refers to itself as Muslim; a society is Islamic if it orders itself in accordance with the Islamic world-conception — i.e., if it respects divine *haakimiyyah*.

Having thus stipulated, on the one hand, an historically invariant core human essence, and on the other, a historically abstracted definition of the *jaahili* and the Islamic, Qutb proposes a program of social reform that is at the same time individualist in its strategy of action and universalist in the scope of its ambitions. The individual believer is the agent of change and the instigator of revolution; no matter how much history may have mutilated his outward makeup, the essence of his humanity cannot be altered, and therefore the potential for confronting history and changing it is always within his power;

it is the individual — or rather, the *fitrah* within the
individual — that Qutb addresses and attempts to stir. At the
same time, having defined the nature of *jaahiliyyah* in abstract,
ahistorical terms, and the essence of the Islamic in an equally
axiomatic vocabulary, Qutb argues that the Islamic program of
reform does not target merely the nominal world of Islam — i.e.,
those who call themselves Muslim — but all of humanity. It is
the same, one *fitrah* that all humans share, and it is the same,
unique order that completely fulfills the demands of that
fitrah. Islam's, then, is a universal mission to change
prevailing conditions to the "natural" order, not a defensive
reaction to conserve or merely protect what is called "Muslim".
The task that Islam wants to fulfill is world-civilizational; it
targets the whole of humanity and aims to reform it. But in its
quest to establish a universal order, Islam today confronts
another mission with equally universalist ambitions: what Qutb
calls "modern material civilization".   This "modern material
civilization," Qutb notes, also claims for itself universal
validity and attempts, as Islam does, to subtract the
historically contingent element out of its identity. But does
this "modern material civilization" have legitimate claim over
humanity? Qutb's answer is an emphatic "no".   To begin with,
Qutb argues, "modern civilization" is a historically contingent
product; it is the outcome of the Christian European context and
its worldview is particular to the circumstances and conditions
of its existence. Most crucially, the separation between the
worldly and the divine, stipulated as the bedrock of the "modern
material civilization", is particular to the history of
Christianity in Europe; it is not an inevitable stage that all
civilizations must go through on the road to progress. In
particular, the conflict between science and religion is the
consequence of the "unfortunate" historical developments that
Christianity endured, from its very start, and is not the result
of an essential incompatibility between science and religion in
the abstract. On the contrary, Qutb goes on, the case of Islam
clearly shows that science is inspired by the true divine world-

conception. Science as we know it today, Qutb insists, owes its existence to Islam, both historically and essentially. The historical record is clear, in Qutb's eyes, that the flourishing of science in Europe was directly inspired by the principles of Islam through the work of Muslims. Moreover, an essential message of Islam is the promotion of the acquisition of knowledge about this world: God granted man the privileged role of *khaliifah*, vicegerent to God, to do good in this world and to help improve the "material" welfare of fellow human beings. Islam, then, is the true essential source of modern science. Consequently, Islam accepts the universalist claims of modern science: since Islam is a universal call and since it is the inspiration of science, then science is also universally valid. By the same token, since science is inspired by Islam, it must also be essentially good. The prevailing "disastrous" human condition should not therefore be blamed on science; instead, it should be blamed on the usurpation of the most basic principle of the natural order: the submission of man to no authority other than God.

4.1   The Christian context of the science-religion conflict

Like a good essentialist, Qutb turns frequently to history to explain the anomalous. To the question: why did the spirit of the "Original Community" not endure longer than the short span of time it actually did? Qutb offers, as we saw, a strikingly contingent explanation. The contingency of history on this score is important for Qutb because it enables him to propose that renewal is always within reach, if only Muslims would engage in willed action informed by pure '*aqidah*. Similarly, as we also saw in our discussion on *jaahiliyyah*, Christianity's deviation from the divinely ordained path is also explained by Qutb in radically contingent terms. It was an "ill stroke of luck" that the early Christians collaborated with the Romans and tolerated the mingling of pagan ideas with the

original pure divine message. The adoption of Christianity by
the Roman Emperor Constantine is pointed out by Qutb as an
especially "catastrophic" turn in the history of the Christian
faith. The new political alliance between the Romans and the
Christians set Christianity in earnest upon "[a] course polluted
with heathen myths and conceptions."[f44-45]   Subsequent
historical events compounded each other and further led
Christianity astray, turning the original, pure, simple and
intuitive divine message into a polluted, elaborate doctrinal
system that offends human intuition and strains the credulity of
reason. The religious wars, the spirit of intolerance, and
ultimately the notion that Church and State must be separated
and religion confined to the realm of the personal, are all the
consequence of the pollution suffered by the pure message.

Historical contingency allows Qutb to make another point
important for his larger argument: religion and science are not
essentially hostile to each other. What has come to be
perceived as an essential clash between the scientific spirit
and the spirit of religion can be traced back in history to the
particular Euro-Christian context. "There came a time in
European history," Qutb writes in Milestones, "when very painful
and hateful differences arose between scientists and the
oppressive Church; consequently the entire scientific movement
in Europe started with Godlessness."[t216] Such antagonism with
science, Qutb notes, rarely took place in the history of Islam.
Qutb's position on this score changes little from his earlier
writing to Milestones. In Social justice (1948), Qutb writes
that "Islamic history has never known those strange, organized
persecutions of thinking men or learned men, such as were known
in the lands of the Inquisition."[s12] Again turning to the
contingent to explain "anomalies", Qutb argues that those
instances in Islam where learned men were persecuted "may be
accounted as anomalous in Muslim history." [s12] These
anomalous "occurrences were the outcome of political
necessity... and on the whole were not a normal feature of

Islamic life."[s12] Moreover such anomalies were the
consequence of "weak belief": "they arose among peoples who were
converts to Islam, and who therefore could not be expected to
understand it fully."[s12] By contrast, the Christian Church,
facing the new emerging science with its novel theories and
explanations of the physical world, reacted with bitter
hostility and undertook to consistently suppress whatever it
deemed heretical to its dogma. As we noted in our discussion on
fitrah, Qutb's criticism of European Christianity is the old
line of 19th century European liberalism. It was 'Abduh who
truly introduced that line into Islamic reformism discourse. As
Hourani observes, "'Abduh accepted in general the view of
Christianity which he learnt from Renan and Spencer or heard
from Blunt: that Christian doctrine as traditionally formulated
cannot stand up to the discoveries of modern science and the
modern concepts of the laws of nature and of evolution." [228] Of
course, European liberalism and 'Abduh parted ways as soon as
the former formulated their conception of deity in materialist
or pantheistic terms. But the corruption of historical
Christianity was a well established maxim in Muslim orthodoxy,
so that 'Abduh encountered no difficulty appropriating the
modernist arguments against the established church without
accepting the unorthodox conclusions drawn by the European
liberals. Qutb, probably not fully aware of the European
origins of his argument, was no less comfortable with liberal
argument.

    Qutb goes on to note that, ironically, the very strategy
of accommodation that motivated the early Christians to tolerate
the mingling of heathen ideas with the truly divine conception
of life subsequently resulted in a politically powerful system
of belief so infected with falsehoods and myths that any theory
from the new science was bound to be perceived as a
transgression against Church catechism:

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[228] Hourani (1962, p. 143).

As a result of these compromises, the Church adopted many distorted concepts and a great deal of information concerning the universe that was incorrect and faulty, since error is part of all human research, study, and experiment. When the astronomers and physicists started to correct the errors contained in these "facts", the origin of which was human rather than divine, the Church took a very harsh stand against them. Not content with mere verbal attacks, the Church fathers employed their temporal power to torture people for their heresies, whether religious or scientific.[ke9]

The monopoly claimed by the all-powerful Church over "the right of understanding and interpreting the Bible" and the prohibition against "any thinker from outside its clannish cadre from trying to understand and interpret it," along with the political might that the Church wielded and the power it exercised over the civil order fostered among the Christian clergy a mindset of intolerance to new ideas and a regressive retreat back to what was already accepted that eventually degenerated into outright mystification. The consequence is "the introduction of abstract dogmas that were absolutely incomprehensible, inconceivable and incredible."[f56] The most "striking" of these ecclesiastical mystifications, Qutb notes, is the "dogma about the Eucharist" . A "novelty without foundation in the Holy Book, early Christian history or the ecumenical councils," the theory of "transubstantiation" was "imposed [by the Church] upon its followers" and "rational discussion" over it was forbidden "on pain of excommunication."[f57] Moreover, the Church "gave intellectual sanctions to certain geographical, historical and [physical] views and postulates which prevailed at that time and which were full of mistakes and fabulous imagination, declaring them exempt from discussion, correction, refutation or even replacement."[f57] Failing to realize that human knowledge is

fallible and incomplete, the Church, by proposing that knowledge attained by human beings is final committed an act of transgression against the sovereignty of God — a transgression for which humanity is still paying the price. Qutb often invokes the verse: "You have been given only little of the (true) knowledge" to make his point. In The Islamic concept, he writes:

> Man by nature is a creature, bound within the limits of his divinely given capacities, and he is mortal. He is neither absolute nor all-knowing, nor is he from pre-eternity. Hence his perception is necessarily limited by the limits of his created nature.[ke45]

The denial of an essential hostility between science and religion was already an old argument by the time Qutb adopted it and made it an integral part of his general discourse. One of the most forceful voices in Islamic reformism who argued that the strife-ridden history between religion and science in the Christian European context should not be adopted as a paradigm for measuring compatibility between science and religion in general was Rashid Ridha.[229] Ridha rejected the proposition that Muslims should emulate the separation between the spiritual and the temporal that Europe had effected in its drive to topple the obstacles to progress that the regressive religious authority of the Church was erecting in the road to progress.[230] Ridha held that "the principles and the courses of the development of each religion were completely different. Islam encouraged reason, progress, and the natural sciences. Medieval Christianity had never called for any of these."[231] In Islam, the religion of the future, Qutb extensively quotes the Pakistani Ali al-Nadawi,

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[229] Shahin (1992, p.62).
[230] Ridha (1923, p. 55).
[231] Shahin (1992, pp. 62-3).

Mawdudi's principal propagator, [232] to stress the point that the notion that religion and science are mutually antagonistic is historically circumscribed to the particular course of Euro-Christian history. Al-Nadawi writes:

> One of the gravest mistakes committed by the European clergymen, and even it might be one of the biggest crimes committed against religion... was what they have foisted in their Holy Books from some human knowledge and contemporary information about human history, geography, and natural sciences.[f58]

Qutb's quote of al-Nadawi goes on to argue that "the acme of knowledge at a certain time" is never final, "as human knowledge is ever increasing and developing."[f58] By "grafting" imperfect scientific theories to their religion, the Christian clergymen "initiated the untoward struggle between science, reason and Religion," a struggle in "which Religion was eventually badly defeated."[f58] Unwilling to rid itself of the false accretions it accumulated since the initial pure message, the Church on the contrary persecuted those scientists who propounded theories that refuted the scientific claims the Church had adopted. "At this stage," al-Nadawi writes, "the educated and the renovators became impatient and declared their revolt against the Church, its clericals and all conservatives," and in this way "contracted the enmity of the Christian religion to start with, then all religions without exception.... The revolutionaries came to the conclusion that science and Religion are two irreconcilable opposites and cannot survive together." [f62] Religion, whether Christianity or some other creed, came as a result to be looked upon as a dark enterprise, promoted and championed by "pale, stern faces, frowning foreheads, fierce looks, impatient indigence and daft, stupid mentalities."[f62] Religion stirred within the "revolutionaries" a feeling of

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[232] See, Sivan (1985, pp. 22-4).

disgust and hatred and a disposition to reject anything closely
or remotely touching on the religious. "As is usually the case
with most revolutionaries everywhere," [f63] those who rose
against the abuses of the Church and fought against it to assert
their right to think freely, rashly equated the agents of the
Church with the essence of religion: "they failed to distinguish
between the obligations and responsibilities enjoined by
religion and [the] inflexibility, despotism and
misrepresentation assumed by the ecclesiastics." [233] [f62]
Instead they turned against not only the authority of the
Church, not only Christianity, but all religions.

The very same argument is present in Qutb's earlier Social
justice (1948), a clear indication that, at least on this
important score, the ideas of Mawdudi came only to reaffirm
Qutb's already formed narrative. "Hence has arisen the
bitterness between religion and science," Qutb writes, "between
the Church and the intellectual world in the life of
Europe."[s6] Qutb then goes on to elaborate on the main subtext
of Social justice: why should Muslims turn to Islam and reject
other systems of life (mainly, in Qutb's eyes, Communism and
Capitalism)? To answer this question, he asks the following
rhetorical question: "what of ourselves; what has all this to do
with us?" His answer:

> The conditions of our history, and the nature and
> circumstances of Islam have nothing in common with any of
> these things. Islam grew up in an independent country
> owing allegiance to no empire and to no king.... So Islam
> chose to unite earth and Heaven in one spiritual
> organization, and one which recognizes no difference
> between worldly zeal and religious coercion. Essentially,
> Islam never infringes that unity even when its outward
> forms and customs change. [s7-8]

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[233] Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) The future belongs to this religion; p. 62.

Having argued that the alleged conflict between science and religion is historically confined to European Christianity, Qutb goes on to make the more ambitious case that Islam, the "true religion", is essentially favorably disposed towards the sciences, while historically it has proven to be a catalyst for their growth and evolution. Muhammad 'Abduh, half a century eralier, had also insisted that "religion is a stimulus towards research into the secrets of the world, calling for the respect of the established facts." [234] But while 'Abduh made this assertion in the larger argument of promoting educational reform as he rejected the practice of imitation (*taqliid*), which he blamed for the intellectual stagnation he perceived as prevailing among learned Muslims, Sayyid Qutb articulated his argument within a less defensive and more ambitious discourse framework that insisted on the universal and comprehensive character of the Islamic mission. First, Qutb argues that the modern sciences as we have come to know them today owe their origin and character to Islam; second, that Islam fully recognizes the achievements of modern science and considers them the fruit of all of humanity; and third, that, the realistic and interactive religion that it is, Islam not only fully recognizes the material context of man and his earthly nature, but in fact requires of him to engage in the fruitful exploration of the world and the cultivation of the riches granted him by God.

4.2   The Islamic origins of science

For Qutb, the impact of the "Islamic revolution" — i.e., the birth of Islam and its subsequent propagation — on the history of humanity is unparalleled. Islam is a "universal phenomenon" and since the beginning "did not leave unvisited a single aspect of human life."[h63] Muslims may have lost power, and their erstwhile influence may have waned, but it remains a

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[234] Quoted in Ridha, Rashid M. (1931, vol. 1, p. 11).

"reality... not to be doubted" that "[e]very single one of the great movements of history derived, directly or indirectly, from that momentous happening; or, to be more precise, from that universal phenomenon."[h63] The Protestant movement in Christianity could not have taken place had not the Crusaders come into contact with the world of Islam and brought back with them the idea that Scriptures needed no mediation and religion no institutional authority. [235] The Renaissance also owes its existence to the world of Islam, as do "the destruction of the Feudal system... the movement of equality and the rights of man which appeared in the Magna Carta in England and the French Revolution." [h64] But most significantly, European civilization owes Islam the very foundation "on which is based the scientific glory of Europe": the "experimental method". [h64] By way of the universities of Spanish Andalusia, Europe imported experimental science (*al-'ilm al-tajriibii*), a science fundamentally different, Qutb notes, from the Greek science with which Europe was familiar.   In The future belongs to this religion (1960), Qutb writes:

> In fact, it was Islam, by virtue of its realistic system,
> that initiated the inductive or experimental school which
> was started in Andalusia. The experimental or
> "scientific" method was then transferred to Europe where
> Roger and Francis Bacon, falsely alleged to be the fathers
> of this school, established this doctrine.[f119]

The Islamic origin of science is also another old argument that Sayyid Qutb inherited from the reformist debate. Rashid Ridha, whose *salafii*, anti-imperialist outlook in his later years foreshadowed the Qutbian brand of Islamism, proudly insisted on the Islamic origins of European civilization: "some fair minded European scholars and intellectuals," he wrote in his Al-manaar, "had admitted that the beginning of modern

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[235] Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) This religion of Islam; p. 65; Qutb, S. [1962] (1991) The Islamic concept and its characteristics; p. 56.

European civilization had been a consequence of what the Europeans acquired from Islam in Spain at the hands of Averroes and his disciples, and during their wars against the Muslims." [236] But it was Al-Afghani who was perhaps among the first to explicitly articulate within the modern context the centrality of the Islamic contribution to modern science as Europe and the world had come to know it. In his famous answer to Renan's article, L'islamism et la science, in which the French philosopher of religion had proposed that there existed an inherent tension, even conflict, between the scientific spirit and the Arabo-Muslim "character", Al-Afghani countered by stating that this very character belonged to a "race that has marked its passage in the world, not only by fire and blood, but by brilliant and fruitful achievements that prove its taste for science, for all the sciences, including philosophy." [237] Al-Afghani's answer to Renan is famously ambiguous: while Al-Afghani does insist on the contribution of Muslims to the progress of scientific knowledge and civilization, in his answer to Renan at least, Al-Afghani concedes to his French counterpart that "the Muslim religion is an obstacle to the development of sciences." [238] Al-Afghani goes on to state that "all religions are intolerant, each one in its own way," and the religion of Islam is no exception. European society, having cast off the yoke of religion, was now "free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, while Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion." [239] Even more forcefully, Al-Afghani writes:

> In truth, the Muslim religion has tried to stifle science and stop its progress. It has thus succeeded in halting the philosophical or intellectual movement and in turning minds from the search for scientific truth. [240]

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[236] Shahin (1992, p. 43).
[237] Keddie (1983, p. 184).
[238] ibid., p. 183.
[239] ibid.
[240] ibid.

Al-Afghani seems to recognize that the "true believer" faces a difficult dilemma: "[c]onvinced that his religion contains in itself all morality and all sciences, he attaches himself resolutely to it and makes no effort to go beyond. What would be the benefit of seeking truth when he believes he possesses it all? Will he be happier on the day when he has lost his faith, the day when he has stopped believing that all perfections are in the religion he practices and not in another? Wherefore he despises science."[241] Al-Afghani acknowledges the dilemma faced by the "true believer", but all he can muster by way of addressing this dilemma is to point to the historical role that Muslims have played in the development of the sciences. The *religion* of Islam, by the fact of being a religion, may be hostile to science, but historical Islam — i.e., Muslim *civilization* — was not hostile, but on the contrary promoted scientific investigation. It must be stressed, however, that Al-Afghani's ambiguity on the relationship between scientific progress and Islam is not easily resolved by drawing a neat distinction between Islam the "religion" and Islam the "civilization". Not infrequently, Al-Afghani flatly asserts the compatibility between Islam the "religion" and the spirit of science. In his "Lecture on Teaching and learning" (1882), an address to an audience of Indian scholars and students, Al-Afghani maintained that "if the spirit of philosophy were found in a community, even if that community did not have one of those sciences whose subject is particular, undoubtedly their philosophic spirit would call for the acquisition of all the sciences."[242] And then he goes on to state that "[t]he first Muslims had no science, but, *thanks to the Islamic religion*, a philosophic spirit arose among them, and owing to that philosophic spirit, they began to discuss the general affairs of the world and human necessities."[243] (emphasis added) The "true

[241] ibid., pp. 183-4.
[242] ibid., p. 105.
[243] ibid.

believer's dilemma", which Al-Afghani left unresolved in his address to the European challenger, Renan, Al-Afghani settles by declaring in clear terms the compatibility between Islam and science: "those who forbid science and knowledge in their belief that they are safeguarding the Islamic religion are really the enemies of that religion. The Islamic religion is the closest of religions to science and knowledge, and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith." [244]

Al-Afghani's "lecture on Teaching and learning" (1882), i.e., his address to the Indian audience in which he insisted on the compatibility between Islam and science, was delivered one year before his rebuttal to Renan. One may be tempted to argue that Al-Afghani's contact with European ideas may have drawn him away from his position of the year before to a more ambiguous one. But as Keddie rightly notes, it was a year *after* that address to Renan, in August 28, 1884, that Al-Afghani published in *Al-'urwa al-wuthqaa* (the bi-weekly which he issued with 'Abduh from their exile in Paris), "The materialists in India", a vitriolic attack on the Indian Ahmad Khan and his followers. [245] In his attack, Al-Afghani accused Khan of having "called openly for the abandonment of all religions (but he addressed only Muslims), and cried, 'Nature, Nature,' in order to convince people that Europe only progressed in civilization, advanced in science and industry, and excelled in power and strength by rejecting religions and returning to the goal aimed at by all religions (according to his claim), which is the explanation of the ways of nature. ('He invented a lie against God'). [246] Keddie goes on to explain the puzzling discrepancy between Al-Afghani's two conflicting positions by arguing, first, that Al-Afghani belonged to the established elitist tradition of Muslim philosophy that differentiated between the learned elite and the

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[244] ibid., p. 107.

[245] ibid., p. 84.

[246] ibid., p. 177; the quote "He invented a lie against God" is a Qur'anic quote, Qur'an, 6:21.

uninitiated masses, and, second, that in his addresses, Al-Afghani tailored his language, ideas and arguments to suit the level of intellectual sophistication of the audience he faced. In his address to the Indian Muslim audience, Al-Afghani therefore drew Islam in positive lights and attributed the stagnation of Muslims not on Islam the religion, but on the "imitative" and "static" habits of learning to which Muslims had grown accustomed. By the same token, Al-Afghani was less inhibited and freely spoke his philosophic mind when facing the French Renan. Implicit in Keddie's argument is that Al-Afghani's true stance on the relationship between Islam and science is closer to the position stated in his answer to Renan than the one articulated much more frequently to Muslim audiences, and that therefore it was for this reason that Al-Afghani, assuming that his answer was not going to be seen by Muslim eyes, expressed it. While Keddie may be right that Al-Afghani's "true" position is articulated in his answer to Renan, it is important to stress also that central to Al-Afghani's concerns is not whether Islam and science are compatible — important as that issue is to Al-Afghani — but rather the urgency of promoting an Islamic response to the imperialist threat that loomed large over the heads of Muslims. In his response to Renan, the racism underlying the latter's argument seems to have stirred Al-Afghani to a defensive position: his main concern was to prove the Frenchman wrong in his proposition that something inherent in the Arab "character" — the inhabitants of most of the Muslim land West of Persia — explained the weak position of Muslims. Al-Afghani probably saw in this argument an attempt by the Frenchman to provide a rationale explaining, if not justifying, Western intrusion in Muslim lands. By the same token, Al-Afghani's invectives against Ahmad Khan were probably motivated, at least in part, by his perception that the Indian thinker and his "Materialist" school of thought were an ideological and moral Trojan Horse for a British infiltration of Indian society that went beyond material domination but sought the destruction of the indigenous

Muslim identity and spirit: "[t]hese materialists became an army for the English government in India. The English saw that this was the most likely means to attain their goal: the weakness of Islam and the Muslims." [247]

Qutb exhibited little of Al-Afghani's ambiguities. For Qutb, Islam was both the historical and the essential inspiration of the scientific spirit. Unlike the dogmatic tradition of the Christian Church, where certain scientific doctrines were decreed unchangeable and beyond the scrutiny of reason, Qutb notes that Islam gives full freedom to the human mind "to research and gather information, to observe and construct laws, to develop instruments and tools for use in the world of everyday life," all along allowing it to "[make] mistakes and [err] without punishment or persecution." [i178] The very idea of attaining knowledge by experimenting, Qutb writes in <u>Milestones</u> (1964), "was an offshoot of the Islamic concept and its explanations of the world, its phenomena, its forces and its secrets."[t208]

The Europeans, however, when appropriating the scientific experimental method, did not acquire along with that method the underlying philosophical structure that informed it and gave shape to it. In <u>Islam and the problems of civilization</u> (1962), Qutb notes that "when [experimental science] was acquired by Europe, it was not acquired with its underlying philosophical roots, but was rather transferred as technique, practical science, and method (*'ulum wa turuq fanniyyah wa manaahij tajriibiyyah*)." [i111] Islam's "realistic humanism" (*ruuH al islaam al-waaqi'iyyah al-insaaniyyah*) enjoined the exploitation of the earth's bounty by man, and it was within this conception that placed man at the center of earthly material exploitation that the scientific method evolved. By contrast, the Europeans confined themselves to merely learning the methods and the

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[247] Keddie (1983, p. 179).

techniques of the sciences and neglected to understand the fundamental principle that originally inspired them: that these methods are tools, that they are the fruit of human exertion and that they exist to serve man and to better his lot on this earth. As a result, they disfigured the original humanistically oriented science and developed a new science that began to "stifle [man's] core characteristics that make him a special, privileged creature." [i111-112]

Islam, on the other hand, places man at the center of any earthly enterprise, including knowledge acquisition and production, and bestows upon him a privileged position above the rest of creation. It recognizes his material, earthly needs and exhorts him to fulfill them. Islam also presents itself to man in simple, comprehensible terms and eschews the mystification characteristic of the deformed Christianity. Man is encouraged to think and to explore, to question and to understand.   Man, in fact, according to Qutb, is the vicegerent of God (*khaliifah*) and his mission is that of caretaker over the riches with which God has surrounded him. Scientific exploration, in the form of exploration of the material world, is therefore not only compatible with the Islamic-conception, but is essential to the fulfillment of those tasks upon which man is called to discharge in his capacity as *khaliifah*.

4.3 *Science and* khilaafah

The demise of Christianity as a true religion and its subsequent degeneration into an arbitrary and unjust religion of mere men is all too apparent, for Qutb, in the excesses that its clergy not only tolerated, but cultivated and even encouraged. As we saw, the asceticism that Christianity equates with piety is dismissed by Qutb as a violation of the true spirit of divine religion. The true divinely ordained world-conception is in

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total harmony with human *fitrah* and seeks to establish a balance between all of the impulses and desires of that *fitrah*. Excessive self-deprivation, even in the name of worshipping the True God, is not sanctioned by God's true religion. Islam, unlike the disfigured Christianity, recognizes man's material reality and takes it into account in its world-conception. This theme is articulated by Qutb since <u>Social justice</u>, where he writes that Islam's aim "[is] to unite earth and Heaven in one world; to join the present world and the world to come in one faith; to link spirit and body in one humanity; to correlate worship and work in one life." [s22] The Christian rejection of material luxuries is only part of the divine message, and although Islam also teaches that "[t]he needs of life are not paramount under all circumstances, nor do material necessities always outweigh man's final destiny," nevertheless "at most times man must submit to their demands." [s31] For it is God who created life, all of life, its spirituality as well as its material dimension, and "He did not create it for no purpose." [s31] Islam "does not depreciate the value of wealth or of family," [s38] recognizing that "the empty belly cannot appreciate high-sounding phrases." [s43] Asking for charity, in particular, Qutb argues, is humiliating to the believer in need and results in the total loss of self-esteem. [s43] For this reason, *zakaat*, the dispensation of the poor tax, in Islam is a religious *obligation*, one of the five pillars of the faith, not merely an act of voluntary charity. The poor, in other words, Qutb explains, are fully entitled to the *zakaat* due them, and therefore need to be thankful for what they receive only to God: "[*zakaat*] is not a charity that is collected from the rich. The state imposes this levy, collects it, and decides its public expenditure on the basis of the *Qur'an*. It is fallacious to describe *zakaat* as a donation given by the rich to the poor who must be grateful for it."[u66] More specifically, "[t]he poor-tax is a right which the community claims from the individual, either to guarantee a competence to some of its members, or to provide some little enjoyment over and above a

bare livelihood."[s133-4] Poverty is looked upon in Islam with
disapproval since it forces those who suffer from it to live a
life consumed by the worries of bare survival and deprives them
of "the leisure for better things, for things which are more
suitable to human nature, and to that special nobility with
which Allah has endowed the sons of man."[s134] For God has
created men and "has given them a nobility through their minds
and their emotions, and through their intellectual yearnings for
what is higher than mere physical needs." A life reduced to
eking out bare subsistence is not only below the level meant for
man, but below even the level of animals: "[s]ome birds can
sing, and can rear a brood into life, since they have a
sufficiency of food and drink. But the case with man... is that
the material needs of food and drink keep him too busy to rise
even to this level which the birds and animals
achieve...."[s134] In short, seeking a life above mere
survival, then, is an *obligation* that the good Muslim should
fulfill in his own life and should help others around him
fulfill as well.

     In addition to exhorting him to enjoy his life on earth
and to fulfill his material needs and necessities, Islam is
careful to address man in a language he can grasp without
difficulty, a language that is clear and simple to understand
and free from complicated and improbable mystifications. As we
saw in chapter 3, for Qutb, two of the most distinguishing
characteristics of Islam when compared to other religions are
its purity and its simplicity. Divinely ordained, Islam is
pure in its sources and draws its guidance only from the
Creator. Targeting human *fitrah* and recognizing the limited
nature of man's capacities, Islam addresses the human in a
simple language and seeks to engage his intellectual abilities
and his capacity to understand: "Islam's convictions are so
simple and so clear that they appeal to human
understanding."[u18] We also saw that Islam eschews the
miraculous and prefers the fostering of belief through mundane

exhortation and everyday action. The example of the Prophet and
the "Original Community" is repeatedly invoked by Qutb to
underscore the importance in Islam of instilling belief through
the active and conscious involvement of man. The Prophet, for
instance, "did not dazzle them with any claim to mysterious
power, to superhuman privileges of unseen origin."[h46] He
presented humankind with a "religion which did not depend for
its proof on wonders and miracles, which did not rely on strange
events for the very heart of its message, but which relied
rather on the examination and scrutiny of the evidence of life
and its facts."[s12] We saw that for Qutb, it is crucial to
argue that the achievement of the "Original Community", though
unique in the history of mankind, was not the result of a
miraculous, divine intervention, but the fruit of human effort.
This point is important for Qutb, since it is the first step in
his larger argument that it is, and has always been, within the
power of the Muslim community to alter its present state for the
better, and that the secret to bringing about change lies in the
active involvement of lay Muslims in the amelioration of their
prevailing conditions.

Muhammad 'Abduh also stressed the non-miraculous nature of
Islam; but while Qutb' emphasis on the mundane rather than the
miraculous was motivated by his ultimate argument for an "active
Islamic conception", 'Abduh's rejection of the miraculous was
meant to highlight human *reason* in contrast to imitative
taqliid. Islam, the last true religion, was addressing a
"mature" humanity that had evolved from the infantile state in
which it received Judaism and Christianity. At that time,
'Abduh writes,

> It was not wise to address [humanity] with high sentiments
> or reasonable evidence but it would be a sign of mercy to
> deal with [it] as a father deals with his young son. He
> approaches him only through his senses. The early
> religions used powerful commandments and frightening

deterrents and demanded complete obedience even in matters
beyond their comprehension. [248]

Islam, on the other hand, preferred to address humanity
through its reason. With Judaism, opposition the religious
message was subdued through emotional manipulation: through
miracles that frightened and inspired; Christianity took a step
away from the divine sensationalism of Judaism by emphasizing
love and compassion; but humanity had to wait for Islam before
the appeal of the divine message was made to human reason. [249]

Recognizing on the one hand the material necessities to
which man is subject, and celebrating on the other his capacity
to think and reason, Islam, moreover, does more than merely
tolerate the human exploration of the material world: "[i]t is
the very nature of the Islamic concept to encourage and urge the
human being to do something positive and productive, because
according to the Islamic concept man is an active agent and not
a passive recipient of this earth."[ke158] A privileged
creature above all other creations, man is entrusted with the
mission of "[actualizing] the way prescribed by Allah, which is
to initiate, to build, to change, and to make developments in
the land in reliance on the natural forces that Allah created to
be of use to human beings in their work."[ke158] Man is the
vicegerent of God on earth (*khallihatu allaahi fi al ard*) and is
obligated to discharge the duty with which God has charged
him.[250] [i109] In His wisdom and mercy, God created a world that
man can comprehend and granted man the power to manipulate
matter and to discover the laws of nature He laid down. [251] As we
saw in our discussion on *harakah*, Qutb argues that the
realization of the Islamic order rests on the shoulders of the
Muslim believer. Islam is a divinely ordained faith, but "[i]ts

[248] Badawi (1978, p. 59).
[249] Badawi (1978, pp. 60-1).
[250] Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*; p. 109.
[251] Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*; p. 29.

realization in the life of mankind depends on the exertions of men themselves, within the limits of their human capacities and the material realities of human existence in a given environment."[h2] Engaging in the material exploration of the earth, therefore, is not only necessary for survival, but is a religious obligation that man owes his Creator. Man's vicegerency to God is a "permanent reality" and its manifestation takes on a variety of forms, from the most mundane to the most technologically advanced:

> It is expressed when man tills the land to produce food, and it is expressed when man smashes the atom or sends satellites into space to investigate the earth's atmosphere or other planets. All such activities from one end of the spectrum to the other, as well as whatever may come in the future, are various expressions of man's vicegerency on this earth.[ke70]

Qutb reiterates a position already articulated in its essence by Rashid Ridha. Ridha argued that the acquisition of technical knowledge was a "religious duty". Preoccupied as he was with the colonial condition of most Muslims in his time, Ridha bemoaned the weakness of Muslims and their utter inability to resist the heathen invading West; they stood powerless in the face of aggression and unable to carry out the religious duty of defending their faith — i.e., waging a *jihaad* in the way of Allah. Ridha saw in the acquisition of scientific and technological skills a way to develop the strength that would allow Muslims to confront the invader and chase him out of the House of Islam, and therefore a means to enable them to carry out their *jihaad* duty.[252] Qutb also perceived in the acquisition of science a means to acquire power; but while Ridha's invocation of the sciences seems to have been motivated

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[252] Shahin (1992, p. 51).

primarily from a utilitarian impulse, Qutb's argument is more deeply grounded in a comprehensive theory that seeks more than just the rehabilitation of a weak Muslim *ummah*.

4.4   Islam and "universal" science

In <u>Social justice</u>, Qutb proposes that the twin pillars upon which a lasting "renaissance of Islamic life can be effected" are the establishment of Islamic "law and statute" and the fostering of a social system that draws its life-conception from "Islamic philosophy." [s249] Qutb goes on to write that "the natural method of establishing that philosophy is by education." [s250] But a dilemma at once emerges: the prevailing "educational methods and modes of thought are essentially Western and essentially inimical to the Islamic philosophy itself," so that the very attempt to establish the Islamic worldview in practice frustrates the project of Islamic purification. First, Western educational methods "stand on a materialistic basis which is contrary to the Islamic theory of life," and second, because, *jaahilii* as they must be, these methods are by their very nature opposed to the Islamic concept, "no matter whether such opposition is manifest or concealed in various forms."[s250] The challenge, therefore, is to "choose the ways of native Islamic thought, in order to ensure pure results, rather than a mongrel" without adopting "a position of isolationism in regard to thought, education and science."[s250] In <u>Social justice</u>, Qutb's answer to his own dilemma is ambiguous and somewhat self-contradictory. On the one hand, Qutb asserts that "thought, education, and science... are a common heritage of all the peoples of the world, in which we among the foremost have a fundamental part."[s250] He goes on to assert even more forcefully:

> In the case of the pure sciences and their applied results of all kinds, we must not hesitate to utilize all things

in the sphere of material life; our use of them should be
unhampered and unconditional, unhesitating and
unimpeded.[s251]

And yet, a few lines later, Qutb admits that

The experimental method rests on the basis of a definite
philosophy which is neither intellectual nor spiritual; if
this had never established itself in favor, science would
never have followed the course which latterly it has
taken. In the same way science can never remain in
isolation from philosophy, nor can it be content to be
influenced by philosophy without in turn influencing it.
For philosophy benefits by the experimental results of
science, and is influenced by it in aim and method. Thus
a study of pure science involves a study of philosophy,
which is influenced by that science, and which in turn
exerts an influence on it. All this is over and above the
fact that the applied results of science must influence
all material life, methods of gaining a living, and the
division of wealth. All this will in due time produce new
forms of society based on a new philosophy which must be
influenced by these developments in the course of
life.[s252]

Having yet not explicitly articulate a position he came to
adopt in his later works, starting with This religion of Islam
and The future belongs to this religion (both published in
1960), that the origin of modern science is essentially Islamic,
Qutb faces the following problem: how to ensure the purity of
the "Islamic theory" knowing that the prevailing world-
conception fundamentally shapes the knowledge produced within
that conception. Qutb's answer is strikingly pragmatic and
certainly a far cry from the later dogmatic position he adopts
in Milestones. The world as is must be confronted as it exists:

"[W]hat must be must be," Qutb states flatly. He goes on to explain that

> There is no possibility of living in isolation from
> science and its products, though the harm it does may be
> greater than the good. There is no such thing in life as
> an unmixed blessing or an unalloyed evil. Thus Islam does
> not oppose science, or the utilization of science.[s252]

In Milestones, by sharp contrast, where his reformist program takes a turn for the radically rejectionist, Qutb can no longer retain his "what must be must be" position: the basic leitmotif throughout Milestones is precisely that what obtains in the here and now must be fundamentally altered to conform with the Islamic ideal.   In Milestones, the line between the *jaahilii* and the Islamic is sharp and well defined, and the possibility of mingling the *jaahilii* and the Islamic world-conceptions is outright eliminated:

> The function of this Divine system which is given us — we,
> who are the callers to Islam — is to provide a certain
> style of thinking, purified from all those *jaahilii* styles
> of thinking which are current in the world and which have
> poisoned our culture by depriving us from our own mind.
> [t72]

However, what is striking is that even in his most radically rejectionist work, Qutb never goes all the way to reject the "impure" sources of knowledge: rather than maintain that all knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is the product of the *jaahilii* life-conception, Qutb drives a sharp wedge between two types of knowledge: one that is culturally and philosophically informed and another that is independent of the host life-conception. In Milestones, Qutb also argues that the learning of science is part of man's duty on earth:

Islam does not look with contempt at material progress and material inventions; in fact, it considers them, when used under the Divine system of life, as God's gifts. [t189]

And also,

Islam appointed [Muslims] vicegerents of God and made them responsible for learning all the sciences and developing various capabilities to fulfill this high position which God has granted them. [t210]

However, unlike his argument of <u>Social justice</u>, where science was to be accepted because "there is no possibility of living in isolation," in <u>Milestones</u> Qutb asserts that science is to be accepted primarily because scientific knowledge transcends the cultural and the historical dimensions of life:

The statement that "Culture is the human heritage" and that it has no country, nationality or religion is correct only in relation to science and technology. [t206-7]

The "abstract sciences" such as "chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, medicine, industry, agriculture, administration.... are not related to the basic concepts of a Muslim about life, the universe, man, the purpose of his creation, his responsibilities, his relationship with the physical world and with the Creator." [t204] These sciences, in other words, do not transgress into "metaphysical" questions that touch on the life-conception (*tasawwur*). Qutb's acceptance of the "neutrality" of the "abstract sciences" was close to that of Mawdudi. As Nasr notes, "[t]o debate effectively with 'modernity,' Mawdudi had to accept many modernists assumptions, especially those involving scientific truths, which he saw as value neutral."[253] Not that he believed that science in the

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[253] Nasr (1996, p. 50).

Islamic order would remain value-neutral. Mawdudi seems to have held the equivocal view that science, although value neutral upon its acquisition, could be infused with the Islamic spirit once acquired by Muslims: "even a bulldozer or computer would be 'Islamic' if used in the path of God." [254]   Clearly, Mawdudi articulated his position on the neutrality of science from a defensive position: he could not reject the acquisition of science, but at the same time, he could not concede that the sciences were laden with the values and conception of un-Islamic West, and so, he asserted its value neutrality; of course, his statement that science could be infused with the spirit of Islam once acquired belies this assertion. Al-Afghani, by contrast, articulated a less ambiguous position on the neutrality of science.   In his "Lecture on teaching and learning," (1882), Al-Afghani said:

> The strangest thing of all is that our 'ulema these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim, and one European science. Because of this, they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation, and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science. Men must be related to science, not science to men. [255]

But again, it is important to stress the different contexts from which Mawdudi and Al-Afghani articulated their positions. Al-Afghani's concern was directed at the reform of what he denounced as "an imitative tradition"; by stressing the neutrality of science, Al-Afghani hoped to allay the fears of the establishment and to facilitate the introduction of scientific learning among Muslims. In Al-Afghani's days, the

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[254] Quoted in Nasr (1996, p. 52).
[255] Keddie (1983, p. 107).

'ulema still maintained the upper hand in the balance of power within Muslim society, and so a forceful statement asserting the neutrality of foreign knowledge was necessary. By the time of Mawdudi, in the 30's and beyond, the necessity of acquiring science is no longer an issue. Rashid Ridha had already stated that "Islamic reform could take place in the East, but it depends in the first place on convincing traditional scholars of the indispensability of natural sciences, on which the possession of power and wealth rests."[256] Mawdudi's equivocation expresses this new balance of power: the neutrality of science position is now articulated within a paradigm that seeks to Islamicize the whole of society; the neutrality of science is still upheld by Mawdudi, but it is clear that Mawdudi's assertion is not categorical, but strategic: as soon as the Islamic order is installed, the "neutral" science will undergo an Islamization, *suis generis*.

An important practical consequence for Qutb of the metaphysical neutrality of the sciences is that Muslims may learn these sciences from non-Muslims, should there be no Muslims available to teach them: "No doubt Islam permits a Muslim to learn chemistry, physics, astronomy, medicine... and similar technical sciences from a non-Muslim or from a Muslim who is not pious."[t209] Qutb quite clearly does at times hedge on the extent of the life-conceptual neutrality of the sciences. When pure and unmingled with the *jaahilii* conception "these sciences lead man toward God, unless they are perverted by personal opinions and speculations, and presented devoid of the concept of God."[t216] But in the case of Europe's "regrettable situation" — that is, its "unfortunate" history of strife and animosity between an encroaching and tyrannical church and the civil order — "all sciences turned against religion, whether they were metaphysical philosophy or technical or abstract sciences having nothing to do with religion."[t216-17].

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[256] Shahin (1992, p. 46).

Consequently, "[t]he Western ways of thought," he goes on, "and all the sciences started on the foundation of these poisonous influences with an enmity toward all religion, and in particular with greater enmity toward Islam." [t217]   Knowing this, when learning their sciences, Muslims must "remain on guard and keep these sciences away from philosophical speculations, as these philosophical speculations are generally against religion and in particular against Islam. A slight influence from them can pollute the clear spring of Islam."[t217]

Qutb's favorite example of a science transgressing its legitimate boundaries is Darwinism: "Darwinist biology goes beyond the scope of its observations, without any rhyme or reason, and only for the sake of expressing an opinion, in making the assumption that to explain the beginning of life and its evolution, there is no need to assume a power outside the physical world."[t206]   Darwinism is "scientific *jaahiliyyah*" and the unforgivable sin it commits is that of infringing on God's *haakimiyyah*. Qutb does not seem to be offended so much by the actual content of the theory — of which he treats only tangentially — but rather by the proposition underling the theory: i.e., that a man, Darwin, took it upon himself to explain the origins of man's existence. Only the word of God may explain man's existential questions: "the secret of his existence and the secret of the universe surrounding him."[t39] A second sin seems to deeply offend Qutb: Darwinism's demotion of man from his status of privileged being, reducing him "to be nothing more than an animal, or even than inorganic matter!"[t87] Instead of God's caretaker, man is reduced to the lowest level of existence: mere matter.

By the writing of <u>This religion of Islam</u> (1960), Qutb has integrated in his argument the proposition that the philosophical foundation upon which science is built owes its existence to the Islamic conception.[i178] As we saw, Qutb argues that Europe acquired the experimental method, and

therefore what Qutb considers to be the foundation of the modern sciences, from the Islamic world through Muslim Andalusia. It was Islam's redirection of inquiry towards "experimental realism" and away from "Greek idealism" that launched the European scientific revolution. What Islam rejects, therefore, cannot be the sciences, since these sciences are built on an Islamic foundation. Islam rejects the materialist school (*al madhab al maaddii*) that reduces the whole of existence to mere substance, and nothing but substance.[257] Muslims should reject such a conception not only because it violates the divine balance struck in Islam — and therefore, violates the divine *tasawwur* — but also because this conception, which claims for itself a scientific status, has been proven to be scientifically deficient and false. The "scientific *jaahiliyyah*" of Darwinism, Qutb insists for instance, has not been able to withstand true scientific scrutiny: "in spite of the characteristics which man shares with animals and inorganic matter, man possesses certain other characteristics which distinguish him and make him a unique creation. Even the exponents of 'scientific ignorance' were forced to admit this, the evidence of observational facts choking them...."[t87] In addition to Darwin, Marx and Freud are singled out for particular censure on this score:

> The fatal blow was delivered in the hands of Freud and Marx, the first reducing all human impulses to sexual desires and depicting man drowning in a sea of sexual fantasy, and the second reducing all historical developments to economic factors, depicting man as a weak, passive creature, completely at the mercy of the God of Economy, or rather, the God of Matter![i57-8]

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[257] Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*; p. 179.

As we shall see in the next chapter, what these thinkers —
and all those who draw their thinking from the *jaahilii*
mentality — have in common is their elimination of man as a
privileged agent, a creature essentially different from the rest
of creation. The scientific spirit has nothing to do with such
anti-humanist life-conception, Qutb argues, and therefore the
fruits of these sciences, i.e., the "industrial" and "material"
achievements of modern civilization, owe their existence not to
the materialism of modern science but to the deeper roots of the
true divine conception. For this reason, Qutb concludes, "there
is nothing good that material civilization produces that we
cannot legally enjoy."[i181]

4.5   *Science, the condition of humanity and the Islamic mission*

An unmistakable shift from the dialectical to the
dichotomous can be detected in Qutb's writings between his
depiction of science in Social justice and the one he offers in
Milestones. In Social justice, science and culture are tightly
coupled, so that each influences the other and fundamentally
shapes its essence and character. In Milestones, on the other
hand, science is divorced from culture and elevated above the
realm of history. In Social justice, modern science is perceived
by Qutb as primarily the fruit of modern Europe. By the time of
The Islamic concept and Milestones, Qutb is insistent on the
Islamic origins of science. It was the Islamic *tasawwur* that
crucially re-oriented scientific investigation from its Greek
obsession with abstract theory to its present-day focus on
experimental investigation. In Social justice, Qutb views
modern science primarily as the achievement of Western
civilization and the product, in the form that it has come to
assume, of Western culture. Having granted the culturally
tainted character of science and at the same time having
insisted that the acquisition of science is not only desirable,
but crucial for the survival of Muslims, Qutb has no choice but

to accept compromise: "what must be must be," is his conclusion, since "[t]here is no possibility of living in isolation from science and its products, though the harm it does may be greater than the good."[s252] The position Qutb adopts in Milestones, by contrast, is bolder. True science is culturally neutral, while the benefits of that science are an unmixed blessing, if they are learned within the divine conception of life. Ironically, Qutb's bolder position is acquired at the cost of hedging on one of the most fundamental points of Milestones: the essential incompatibility of the *jaahilii* and the Islamic life conceptions. "Islam considers that... there are two kinds of culture; the Islamic culture... and the *jaahilii* culture," Qutb writes, "excepting the abstract sciences and their practical applications."[t207] This is a remarkable concession, given Qutb's incessant insistence that *jaahiliyyah* and Islam can have nothing in common.

Equally noteworthy is Qutb's belief that science is essentially good and necessary for the well being of humanity. We have already seen how Qutb argues that scientific activity is a way of fulfilling the mission of *khilaafah* of God. As we also saw, Rashid Ridha called for the pursuit of science on grounds that the acquisition of science would enable Muslims to fulfill the important religious duty of *jihaad*, and that therefore such an acquisition was itself a religious duty. [258] In his "Lecture on teaching and learning" (1882), Al-Afghani pointed to the sciences as the secret behind the daunting power of the invaders. He said:

> The Europeans have now put their hands on every part of
> the world. The English have reached Afghanistan; the
> French have seized Tunisia. In reality this usurpation,
> aggression, and conquest has [sic] not come from the
> French or the English. Rather, it is science that

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[258] Shahin (1992, p. 51).

everywhere manifests its greatness and power. Ignorance had no alternative to prostrating itself humbly before science and acknowledging its submission. [259]

In Al-Afghani's view, the benefits of science are boundless: "There is no end or limit to science," he said in that same lecture, then he added: "[i]f someone looks deeply into the question, he will see that science rules the world. There was, is, and will be no ruler in the world but science. If we look at the Chaldean conquerors, like Semiramis, who reached the borders of Tatary and India, the true conquerors were not the Chaldeans but science and knowledge." [260] 'Abduh articulated a similar position and closely tied the acquisition of the sciences to the rehabilitation of Muslim power. He decried the hostility that the the traditional Al-Azhar university displayed to the new sciences and as far back as 1877 called for the introduction of "the new and useful sciences" into Al-Azhar's curriculum. [261] Bemoaning the sectarian intolerance he viewed as prevailing among Muslims even to traditional knowledge, 'Abduh wondered "what will be our position in relation to the new and useful sciences which are essential to our life in this age and which is our defense against aggression ad humiliation and which is further the basis of our happiness, wealth and strength. These sciences we must acquire and we must strive towards their mastery." [262] Without them, the Muslim state cannot carry out its primary mission of custodian of the faith. 'Abduh hardly deviates from the traditional line which insists that "[t]here is no religion without a state." [263] A powerful state, then, is crucial for the preservation of religion. Arguing along traditional lines that strengthening the state is an emergent consequence of a prosperous citizenry, since "[t]he state does not possess trade

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[259] Keddie (1983, pp. 102-3).
[260] ibid., p. 102.
[261] Badawi (1978, p. 64).
[262] Quoted in Ridha (1931, vol. II, p. 40).
[263] ibid., p. 43.

or industry, 'Abduh goes on to note that "[the state's] wealth is the wealth of the people and the people's wealth is not possible without the spread of these sciences amongst them so that they may know the ways for acquiring wealth." [264] The protection of the faith, then, can be assured only when the prosperity of the people in modern times is promoted. And only with the acquisition of "the new and useful sciences" is such prosperity promoted.

Sayyid Qutb's argument reaches fundamentally the same conclusion as that of 'Abduh: the promotion of the sciences is necessary for the welfare of the people. The two thinkers, however, traverse radically different paths in their arguments to reach the same valuation of the sciences. Two aspects of these differences will be of interest to us here: the first is epistemological, while the second is political. Epistemologically, 'Abudh equated the sciences with human reason: the promotion of reason meant for 'Abduh the promotion of the sciences. Like his teacher, Al-Afghani, 'Abduh "perceived philosophy essentially in terms of science." [265] The rejection of the notion that Islam clashed with reason was meant also to express the compatibility between Islam and science. Qutb, on the other hand, displays greater sophistication and seems to be aware that scientific knowledge is not reducible to reason. Islam's greatest contribution to the sciences, in Qutb's eyes, was the methodological innovation it introduced in the quest for knowledge acquisition: the experimental method pirated by the British Roger and Francis Bacon. As we shall see in the next chapter, Qutb articulates a sophisticated rejection of the notion that reason is neutral. The proposal that all knowledge can be attained through human reason conflicts with one of Qutb's fundamental tenets in his paradigm: the primacy of revelation in addressing the human condition and the circumscribed nature of man's *khilaafah* mission on earth.

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[264] ibid.

[265] Moussalli, Ahmad S. (1992, p. 130).

Unlike Al-Afghani, and 'Abduh especially, Qutb was averse to attempts that sought to read the latest scientific theories in the Qur'anic text. Having neatly drawn out the legitimate borders of human understanding and action, Qutb could not easily accept a back-door intrusion into the sovereign territory of divinity: "The Qur'an is thematically complete, and final in terms of its revelationary facts. The conclusions of science, on the other hand are not final or absolute, mainly because science is tied down to man's reason and tools which cannot naturally give a final and absolute fact." [266] Clearly, then, if Qutb accepts the sciences, he does so not by equating them to reason and stipulating their value neutrality by virtue of their identification with neutral reason, but rather by, first, epistemologically detaching them from Western culture, and second by linking them to historical Islam and grounding them conceptually to the Islamic *tasawwur*.

The political contexts of 'Abudh and Qutb also partially explain the arguments deployed in their respective promotion of the sciences in Muslim society. While 'Abduh argued along classical lines that identified a strong state with a strong religion, Qutb's anti-statism precluded the possibility of such an identification. By the time of Qutb's writing, the statement "the state does not possess trade or industry" was patently false: the nationalist state *did* possess — and in a concrete sense through the nationalization of many sectors of the economy[267] — wealth and industry. A strong state in Qutb's eyes was primarily an abusive state; it was a state that usurped divine sovereignty and that therefore belonged to the camp of *jaahiliyyah*. The exact opposite of 'Abduh's equation of state strength with the health of religion is proposed by Qutb: the stronger the state, the weaker the religion.

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[266] Qutb, S. (1974, p. 182).
[267] See Botman (1991); Gordon (1992); Ginat (1997).

Qutb's post-colonial context and his turn to the "internal challenge" explain, at least in part, the differences between 'Abduh and Qutb in their respective views on the role of science in the rehabilitation of the Muslim faith. 'Abduh still dealt with the traditional state: an autocratic regime but not one that deemed part of its authority the domination of all aspects of society. Qutb faced a fundamentally different political authority: the intrusive modern state. As Kepel writes, "the state built by the Free Officers after 1952 was... very different from the monarchy that preceded it." [268] Qutb's call for the promotion of the sciences, then, could not be articulated on grounds that such a promotion would lead to a stronger state. When Qutb calls for the promotion of the sciences, he does so in general terms that, first, do not link such an acquisition with strengthening the state, and that, second, make it clear that Qutb deems the promotion of such sciences primary only in a context where an Islamic order has been installed. But perhaps most crucial is the rhetorical role these "abstract sciences" serve in Qutb's argument. When Qutb points to the "abstract sciences", he usually does so in a context where the "neutrality" of these sciences serves as a foil to the less benign -- at least in his view -- "humanities and social sciences". Most indicative of the rhetorical role of the "abstract sciences" is the exoneration Qutb grants these sciences from any responsibility for the present condition of humanity. On humanity's present condition, Qutb has gloomy words to offer: "Mankind is wretched;"[h89] "humanity is heading for the deep, awful precipice of destruction;"[f11] "the current path is turning man into half-machine, half-animal;"[i5] "man is almost on the verge of losing his ability to choose;"[i6] and most famously in <u>Milestones</u>: "Mankind today is on the brink of the precipice."[t7] But at the same time, it is not science or technology that Qutb accuses, *per se*, nor even the "material gains" made possible by them: "Man will be miserable,

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[268] Kepel (1994, p. 26).

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bewildered, anxious, living like present-day man in acute torment, *despite* all the triumphs of modern science and all the conveniences of material civilization."[h23] (emphasis added) It is "despite" and not "because" of the "triumphs of modern science" that humanity is suffering "acute torment". Qutb echoes, but less strongly, Al-Afghani's denunciation of the misuse of the sciences. Al-Afghani wrote: "All the scientific gains and whatever good these [Western] nations' civilization , if weighed against the wars and sufferings they cause, these scientific gains would undoubtedly prove to be too little and the wars and sufferings too great. Such a progress, civilization and science in this fashion and with these results are undiluted ignorance, sheer barbarism and total savagery. Man in this respect is lower than animal." [269] Qutb does write in a similar vein that "this emptiness and confusion increase in proportion to material prosperity and convenience," but it is not "prosperity and convenience," as such, that Qutb fingers as the causes of human misery. "Humanity has scored great triumphs, thanks to science, in the field of medicine and the cure of physical disease.... In the sphere of industrial production too almost miraculous results have been achieved.... Similar achievements in the exploration of space, in the construction of artificial satellites and stations, have been made, and more may be expected."[h24] Then Qutb asks, "what is the effect of all this on human life? On the spiritual life of humanity? Has it found security? Has it found peace?" His answer is of course negative: "By no means! It has found misery, anxiety, and fear." But it is not *because* of the material gains that misery has resulted, but rather because "[n]o progress has been made in the formulation of the aims of human life and the purpose of human existence."[h24] What Qutb accuses is the "Western philosophy of materialism" that informs the life-conception of all modern societies: "the philosophy of materialistic Western civilization is a danger to the continued

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[269] Al-Makhzumi (1931, p. 349).

existence of man," Qutb writes in <u>Social justice</u>, " in spite of all the triumphs of science which could have tended to human happiness and peace and content, had it not been that the bases of the Western philosophy of life were purely materialistic and hence unsuitable to guide men along the path of perfection."[s250-1] In <u>Islam, the religion of the future</u>, science is at worst accused of not being able to remedy "the failure of this civilization or save it from its approaching doom."[f78]   And even more telling is the following quote from Alexis Carrel (for Qutb, the archetypal scientist), which Qutb reproduces twice in <u>Islam and the problems of civilization</u>:

> science and technology are not responsible for our present condition; we are. We are the ones who did not discriminate between the permitted and the forbidden, violating thus the laws of nature and in this way committing our greatest mistake. [270]

The plight of humanity, therefore, is not the result of scientific or technological progress, but the consequence of adopting a life-conception grounded in "the Western philosophy of materialism." In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb does not hesitate to congratulate "the West" for its scientific achievements and readily admits that "Europe's genius created its marvelous works in science, culture, law and material production, due to which mankind has progressed to great heights of creativity and material comfort."[t12] But if Qutb displays no hesitation congratulating this Western civilization for its "achievements," it is only because, now the relationship between culture and science has been vitiated to the point where science can no longer be claimed to be the product of Western culture, *per se*. Science has emerged in its present form from Europe is a matter of pure historical accident, and not a testament that Western culture in its essence is superior to Islamic culture.   But

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[270] Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*; pp. 117, 128.

more than that, this very science over which Europeans now claim exclusive preserve Qutb traces its origin to the Islamic heritage: both Bacons, Roger and Francis, drew heavily from Islamic sources, and through them science took its first steps.[271] In the final analysis, given the contingent character of history on the one hand, and the universal and primordial character of Islam on the other, science is a historical product whose development and ownership are universal and not cultural. The spirit of science is essentially Islamic to the extent that it reflects the manifestation of universal *fitrah* and is informed by the Islamic *tasawwur* (conception), and it is universal to the extent that it fulfills the unvarying needs of humankind. Moreover, if since its adoption of science the West has achieved such universal success along the material sphere, it is only because scientists have concerned themselves with fulfilling the basic material needs shared by all mankind, needs that are dictated by human *fitrah* and that therefore do not change from one culture to the next. At the same time, in trying to solve these material problems, scientists have had as their unfailing guide the laws of nature. These laws have been laid down by God and are unvarying from one context to another, or from one generation to the next: "[t]he entire universe is under the authority of God, and man, being a small part of it, necessarily obeys the physical laws governing the universe."[t81] Moreover, God has supplied man with all the wit and reason he needs to uncover the mysteries of nature so that he may fulfill his task of God's caretaker: "God has granted man the possibility to acquire knowledge (*imkaan al 'ilm bi shu'uunihaa*) as a gift."[i26] God also laid down fixed rules so that man may benefit "from the constancy of the natural laws, which can be discovered through scientific experimentation and practical experience in his interaction with the universe."[ke116]   Therefore, anyone who applies himself to the

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[271] See Qutb, S. [1960] (1974) <u>The future belongs to this religion</u>; p. 119.

task should be able to contribute to humanity's stock of scientific knowledge.

In matters of science, "Europe's creative mind is far ahead," Qutb concedes in <u>Milestones</u>, "and at least for a few centuries to come [Muslims] cannot expect to compete with Europe and attain supremacy over it in these fields."[t13] In their present condition, "[Muslims] are not in a position to offer mankind great scientific discoveries or dazzling cultural achievements, so that the people of the world would flock to them because of their superiority in science and culture."[ke201] However, Qutb takes it as an equally given axiom that the West has miserably failed to establish a successful universal *moral* order. This failure he explains as having resulted precisely because Western thinkers, especially its philosophers and social scientists, mistakenly believed that what the natural scientists were able to accomplish along the material sphere, they could also accomplish along the moral and spiritual realm. They believed that mere human ingenuity, intelligence, and imagination could solve man's existential, moral, and social problems, just as they were able to unravel the mysteries of nature and discover the laws that explain its regularities. Qutb picks up where Al-Afghani left off and builds a theory of man and existence that coherently explains "the moral failure" of the West. Al-Afghani the elitist philosopher begrudgingly accepted the fact of the human condition. In the concluding remarks to his answer to Renan, Al-Afghani wrote: "science, however beautiful it is, does not completely satisfy humanity, which thirsts for the ideal and which likes to exist in dark and distant regions that the philosophers and scholars can neither perceive nor explore." [272] Rashid Ridha, articulating a position closer to that of Qutb, also recognized the limits of "scientific progress" and held that, morally, Muslim society was superior to the scientifically

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[272] Keddie (1983, p. 187).

far more advanced than Western society. [273] But what is notable
is that Qutb's rejection of the sciences as the solution to all
human problems is firmly grounded on a comprehensive theory of
man, society, and knowledge. Man, in Qutb's view, is unique
among God's creations and his place in this world is privileged.
The methods applied to discover and understand the world of
matter, animate (i.e., the world of animals) or inanimate, do
not apply to him so that man can never understand himself on his
own without the help of his Maker.   In the case of the material
world, the laws of God were given the form of the laws of
nature, and man's instinctive intelligence and imagination led
him to a successful unraveling of those laws. Such could not be
the case with moral laws. In Islam, the religion of the future
(1960), Qutb writes:

>   We soon became really conceited when we beheld what man
>   could invent in the material world and what miraculous
>   achievement he could realize. We went on to acquire the
>   illusion that the mind which is capable of finding methods
>   to invent the airplane and the missile, smash the atom and
>   manufacture the hydrogen bomb, to probe the laws of
>   physics and harness them for human creativity — we
>   imagined that his mind is worthy of being entrusted with
>   setting up a master plan for human living, rules of
>   conception and belief, and codes of morality and behavior.
>   We forgot that this mind can work only upon material
>   things, because it is fitted to understand the laws of
>   matter and its comprehension penetrates through only
>   matter. When we apply the mind to the "world of man" it
>   comes to be at a loss, acting in an immense wilderness,
>   because it is not intrinsically adapted to comprehend the
>   tremendousness of human reality.[f116]

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[273] Shahin (1992, p. 76).

The following chapter examines Qutb's views on the extent to which man has failed in his attempt to establish, on his own, laws for regulating his life as a moral, spiritual and social being.

Chapter Five

The "humanities" and the "social sciences"

Introduction

Sayyid Qutb's particular context and the fundamental differences that existed between his epistemological concerns and those of early Islamic reformers such as Al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and even Rashid Ridha, are most explicit in his preoccupation with the non-Islamic character of the humanities and the social sciences. By what we will call here the "humanities and social sciences", we are referring to philosophy (*"falsafah"*), historiography and historical interpretation (" *tafsiir al-taariikh al-insaanii*"), psychology (" *'ilm al-nafs*"), ethics ("*al-'akhlaaq*"), theology and comparative religion (" *al adyaan al-muqaaranah*"), and sociology (" *al-tafsiiraat was al-madhaahib al mubaasharah*).[274] Crucially, Qutb excepts from this list of *jaahilii* orientations in thought (" *al ittijaahaat fii al fikr al-jaahilii*") knowledge attained through empirical and statistical methods. Qutb finds acceptable observations that do not lead to "general explanations."[275]   However, it is important to note that Qutb's identification of the humanities and social sciences as *disciplines* that threaten the integrity of the

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[274] Qutb, S. [1964] (1978) <u>Milestones</u>; pp. 205-6.

[275] Qutb, S. [1964] (1978) <u>Milestones</u>; p. 205. It is important to note that Qutb deems unobjectionable statistically based analyses of society. In fact, Qutb himself in many instances in his writings does refer to statistical results of social studies; in <u>Social justice</u> (1948), he writes: "Tests carried out in the last war among children in nurseries proved that the child whose upbringing is in the hands of a succession of nurses lacks personality, and has no self-control"[s59]; in <u>Islam and universal peace</u> (1951), arguing against the integration of the sexes, Qutb writes: "As for integrating the sexes to refine human feelings and sublimate suppressed desires, it is enough to consult the statistics regarding the number of pregnant girls in U.S. secondary schools. The number of pregnant girls accounted for as much as 48 percent of the girls attending a high school in Denver" [u32]. We find Qutb refering to social studies even as late as <u>Islam and the problems of civilizations</u> (1962); there, to support his arguments and propositions that sexual laxity leads to a more sexually deviant society than sexual chastity, Qutb cites statistics on Sweden that, according to Qutb, show that "Sweden is on the path of negative growth".[i162]

Islamic conception, and therefore present obstacles to the
installation of the Islamic order, is a theme seldom articulated
by the classical modernists in the same explicit terms deployed
by Qutb.

Muhammad 'Abduh, the champion of reason that he was,
nevertheless still expressed his reservations about these
disciplines; but his equivocation consisted in a hedge on the
power of "human reason", rather than an explicit rejection of
objectionable *disciplines*. Just as 'Abduh reduced the sciences
to "reason", he also reduced non-revealed sources knowledge
about man to that same "human reason". In matters of religion
and theology, 'Abduh seemed most anxious to assert the primacy
of revelation and to avoid intellectual excursions, such as
pursuing the topic of the "nature of divinity", that threatened
to weaken faith. Such "are philosophical ideas which if they
did not lead the best of them astray have never guided any into
conviction. We therefore must be limited to what our reason can
handle and to ask God's forgiveness for those who believed in
God and in what His Messengers brought and who nevertheless
indulged in discussing these problems."[276]   Al-Afghani, on his
part, worried mainly about "materialism", deeming it both
epistemologically bankrupt and spiritually pernicious. In "The
Truth about the Neicheri (materialist) sect", Al-Afghani wrote:
"the modern materialists, despite all their inventions, have
remained baffled by some questions. They cannot apply any one
of their false bases or principles, whether it be nature or
absolute intelligence."[277] He ridiculed Darwinism in particular,
noting that "[o]nly imperfect resemblance between man and monkey
has cast this unfortunate man [Darwin] into the desert of
fantasies, and in order to control his heart, he has clung to a
few vain fancies."[278] But more crucially for Al-Afghani, what is
important to expose is "the corruption that has come into the

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[276] 'Abduh, Muhammad (1935, p. 75).   See also Heyworth-Dunne (1939).
[277] Keddie (1983, p. 138).
[278] ibid., p. 136.

sphere of civilization from the materialist or *neicheri* sect, and the harm that has resulted in the social order from their teachings." In doing this, Al-Afghani hoped to "explain and elucidate the virtues, advantages, and benefits of religions, especially the Islamic religion." [279] Rashid Ridha also generally spoke in broad terms. Ridha's immediate concern was the acquisition of knowledge and technical know-how that would enable Muslims to break free from their dependence on Europe, but that at the same time would preclude the adoption of the mores of Western culture: "[w]e must compete with the Europeans in an effort to discover the sources of benefit to us. We must explore their signs and causes, and refrain from confining ourselves to the importation of the products of their industries. Imitating the West will make us dependent on the Europeans forever and eliminate all our hopes to approach and emulate them." [280] By "emulating" the West, Ridha meant the appropriation of scientific knowledge and expertise that would enable Muslims to modernize their society without its Westernization. [281]

By contrast, Sayyid Qutb, writing in a time where a "Western" curriculum that included the new disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities had made inroads into mid-century Egyptian universities, expressed a deeper anxiety only vaguely felt by his predecessors. [282] By the writing of <u>Milestones</u>, the contrast between Sayyid Qutb's disposition towards the natural sciences, on the one hand, and the humanities and the social sciences, on the other, is sharp and explicitly pronounced. The natural sciences, when not transgressing into the forbidden territories of metaphysical speculation on the human condition, treat of problems that legitimately belong to the realm of man's vicegerency. As we

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[279] ibid.
[280] Ridha (1898-1935, pp. 551-2).
[281] Shahin (1992, pp. 50-1).
[282] Cochran (1986).

saw, Qutb argues that man is not only *permitted* to investigate the natural world and exploit its riches, but is *obligated*, by virtue of his privileged stature, to do so. The natural sciences, as the world has come to know them today, owe their very existence to the Islamic conception, and more specifically, to its view of the world as a harmonious whole, its valuation of contemplation over God's creation, and its insistence on direct action upon immediate reality. By contrast, the humanities and the social sciences aspire to treat of questions that do not legitimately fall under man's mission of vicegerency to God. By definition, they transgress into the world of metaphysics and take upon themselves the task of answering questions that only God, the all-knowing and all-powerful creator, may address and answer.

Unlike the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences do not owe their existence to the Islamic conception; on the contrary, they violate two of its most fundamental givens: the elevated status of humanity and the sacredness of divinity. While Islam places man above the rest of creation and assigns him the privileged role of God's vicegerent, the humanities and the social sciences reduce man to nothing more than yet another creature, among others on earth, when not reducing him to mere matter. At the same time, Qutb argues, the humanities and the social sciences have historically, and ironically, in the name of humanism, carried out a sustained assault on divinity. The God of the philosophers is not an active, purposeful and conscious god, but a passive, detached, pointless and abstract entity. Moreover, when not attacked through undermining an ontological conception of God, divinity is assaulted by asserting the primacy of reason above revelation. Qutb argues that thus the very human reason that is reduced to mere matter is at the same time incoherently, if not hypocritically, elevated above divinity to answer questions it cannot even begin to fathom. Consequently, a social system that draws its principles, ideas, strategies and structures from the

humanities and the social sciences is bound to do violence to
both man and his Creator. Such a system, then, if adopted by
Muslims, will not tolerate the Islamic conception, but instead
will undermine its foundations and attempt to do away with it
altogether. Therefore, the humanities and the social sciences
must be viewed, more than anything else, as instruments that
the anti-Islamic order, the *jaahiliyyah* mobilizes in its ever-
continuing struggle against the true Islamic conception. On
these grounds alone, Qutb argues, the humanities and social
sciences must be approached with great caution: the Muslim may
dabble in these disciplines, but only as long as he does so with
the aim of learning, through them, the essence of *jaahiliyyah*,
the better to fight and resist it, rather than with the spirit
of using them as serious sources of knowledge about man and
society. But Muslims should oppose taking the humanities and
the social sciences seriously — i.e., as sources of knowledge
rather than as phenomena to be understood and studied in an
attempt to better know the nature of *jaahiliyyah* — for another,
more immediate reason: the humanities and the social sciences
cannot deliver on their promises. Rather than solve man's
problems, reliance on human knowledge to erect social and moral
systems has brought the human condition to the brink of moral as
well as physical disaster. Man still remains a mystery and the
eternal questions he has always faced remain unanswered, while
his moral character is now, more than ever before, in a
threadbare condition. The social, political and ethical systems
that man has erected all suffer from a lack of realism, an
absence of balance, and the preponderance of abstract theory.
Such systems, unlike the ones erected on the basis of the
Islamic conception, are unprincipled, *ad hoc*, and always under
the sway of immediate pressures of reality. Unlike a system
founded upon the divine, and therefore perfectly balanced,
conception, a society receiving its conception from human beings
will violate its own principles and therefore, when able to
survive its contradictions, will live hypocritically, with the

gap ever widening between the ideal it pretends to respect and the real it is forced to accept.

This chapter examines in some detail Sayyid Qutb's disposition towards the humanities and the social sciences. Qutb's doctrinal objection against adopting the humanities and the social sciences as sources of knowledge about man and society is examined in the first two sections. In the first section, we examine Qutb's argument that these disciplines represent an assault on man's humanity, while in section 2 we discuss his argument that the humanities and social sciences represent an attack on divinity. Section 3 examines arguments articulated by Qutb that focus on the Islamic conception as such: the non-authenticity of these disciplines, the incompatibility between these disciplines and the Islamic conception, and the dangers that such disciplines pose to the Islamic conception. In section 4, we examine Qutb's argument that the humanities and social sciences must not be taken seriously as sources of knowledge because they have proven unable to deliver on their original epistemological promises. Rather than bring greater understanding about man, these disciplines, Qutb argues, have created more confusion and bewilderment. In the last section, we examine Qutb's argument that the humanities and the social sciences lead to social systems that are overly abstract and theoretical, that suffer from both a dimension of unreality and the weight of the immediate and the contingent, and that exhibit an imbalance that guarantees the moral and psychological suffering of all those who live under the weight of such a system.

5.1 The assault on man

As we saw in chapter 2, agency, will and the capacity to inform action (*haraka*) with belief ('*aqiidah*) represent for Qutb the essential characteristics that distinguish man from the rest

of God's creation.   As we also saw in chapter 4, these capacities that man enjoys, according to Qutb, have been granted by God so that man may fulfill his mission as God's vicegerent. The humanities and the social sciences, regardless the differences that may internally differentiate schools and philosophies, represent for Qutb a gravely misguided and arrogant attempt to fundamentally redefine man. In these attempts at redefinition, man is no longer an agent in possession of a will and capable of acting and believing, but mere matter, outside the process of making history and completely subservient to its allegedly irresistible forces and patterns. Mistakenly applying the methods of the natural sciences on man, and therefore treating him as a passive datum, the humanities and social sciences cannot resist in the final analysis to collapse man to inanimate matter.   As a result, any social system that bases its conception of life on ideas derived from the humanities and the social sciences will deal a deadly blow to human dignity and at the same time discard human agency from participating in the process of conceptualizing and building society. The most manifest consequences of such a redefinition of man, in Qutb's view, is the inhumanity perpetrated against man in the name of some man-made ideology or another, and the rise of an unprecedented breed of totalitarianism.

Qutb's recurrent exemplar of a man-made system that does great violence to human dignity and at the same time subtracts man from the process of history is communism. Communism violates the integrity of man, first, by stipulating that society is structured around classes. The proletariat class is elevated to the role of history maker and is pitted against the other putatively retrogressive classes. The effect of this conception of society and of the relationship that obtains between its members is to breed within the proletariat the "emotion of... hatred and envy of other classes" so that "[s]uch a selfish and vengeful society cannot but excite base emotions

in its individuals."[t90-91] But much more devastating to human
dignity than the cultivation of base emotions is the total
reduction of man to mere matter. In The Islamic concept, Qutb
writes:

> In the formulation of Marx, the material world, in the
> form of economic activity, became the creator of morals,
> manners, minds, religions, and philosophies. In
> comparison with these gods of material order and economic
> force, an individual human being is worth very little,
> because he is a passive recipient and his mental activity
> is merely a secondary by-product of matter![ke141]

Reduced to matter, man is no longer a shaper of history
but a product of mysterious and yet, ironically, mundane forces
that elude his control. Far from occupying his divinely
ordained elevated status, "man's scope" is confined "within the
mouse-hole of 'the factors of production.'" Qutb's reaction is
to "shudder in disgust at the narrow mentality of Karl Marx and
Engels in their distorted perception of the life of mankind."
He goes on to write:

> Think of all the great forces of the physical universe and
> their miraculous harmony in producing the exact conditions
> suitable for human life and human endeavors, and think of
> the special place that human beings occupy in the scheme
> of existence, and then think of how Marx and Engels turned
> their backs upon all this greatness and beauty to hide
> their heads within the narrow confines of economics and
> factors of production. One can only throw up one's hands
> in utter contempt and disgust at the pettiness of their
> mentality.[ke-64]

In The Future of this religion of Islam (1960), Qutb
derisively refers to such historical materialism "that inanity

which ravages the structure of Western culture."[f75] But far
from being harmless, it is "an inanity whereby the soul is
suffocated and humanistic values and privileges are
degenerated...."[f76] In the later <u>Islam and the problems of
civilization</u> (1962) Qutb writes:

> Marxism and, in general, materialistic philosophies, take
> man out of their reckoning of events and developments.
> Marxism in particular stipulates the economic as the sole
> god that determines the fate of man, and completely sets
> by the wayside man's will, his nature, and his potential
> and capacity. As a result, a conception of man is
> presented whereby his fate is always at the mercy of
> economic factors, or of forces resulting from such
> factors.[i93]

A derivative conception that Qutb considers equally
devastating to the welfare of humanity is the notion of
"perpetual progress". Qutb as always turns to the "religious" —
as he has defined it — to explain his position. Muslims should
be aware, Qutb warns, that the modern notion of "progress" is
the product of the historical circumstances of the Christian-
European context. The divine conception, initially pure and
perfect, suffered irreparable distortion in the early moments of
Christianity. The Christian world, since then, has been living
with, and reacting to, this distorted belief. In the context
of Islam, by contrast, the Islamic message and conception have
remained intact, although the actual compliance to, and
application of, Islam's message and conception have not been
perfectly sustained. But more importantly, the Christian of
Europe has had to face the yoke of a tyrannical Church, while
the Muslim has not. It is therefore understandable that "the
European thought, in its flight from the Church and in its
intense desire to be rid of this yoke, went to an extreme in its
denial of 'absolutes' and in its affirmation of 'change' by
denying the very concept of religious faith and revealed

law."[ke73] But at the same time, Muslims must not blindly embrace "the notion of perpetual change and continual progress in a universe devoid of anything absolutely true or permanently valid. This position is not scientifically valid, but is rather a violent reaction to the tyranny of the Church."[ke73]

Whether by reducing man to mere matter or by superseding human conscious agency by supra-human forces, the models of man, reality and change presented by the social sciences and the humanities all suffer from one important flaw: they all demote man from the privileged status divinely assigned to him. Darwin, Freud and Marx are time and again singled out by Qutb as the original sinners on this score: "their ideas and directives are all founded on the impulse to belittle man in various ways: by reducing him to an animal, as Darwin did, by arguing that all his actions are motivated by crude sexual energy, as Freud argued, or by asserting his passivity in the face of economic and material factors, as Karl Marx proposed."[i78] Such propositions, Qutb insists, fundamentally negate a central thesis in the Islamic conception: the unique and privileged position that God has granted man. Man is no mere animal, Qutb writes:

> Man is a unique creation in this universe, created for a purpose and with an aim. He enjoys a particular nature that stands above the nature of animals and that enables him to fulfill functions no animal may fulfill. As a result, he enjoys a noble status equaling the nobility of his mission. Thus he was when he was originally created, thus he is now, and thus he shall remain tomorrow. And those who have contradicted this reality now find themselves compelled to accept it.[i176]

But more than challenge the nobility of man as a unique and privileged creature, non-divinely inspired social systems

negate also the uniqueness of the individual: "every member of
humanity is a unique individual, unlike any other individual in
existence,"[i52] Qutb writes in <u>Islam and the problems of
civilization</u>. Later on, he adds:

> For he is *man* and not a member of a herd; he has his own
> characteristics that distinguish him for all other human
> beings and that set him apart as truly unique. All human
> beings share the same attribute of humanity, but each
> enjoys his own particular identity.[i176]

Taking these two "realities" about man as a given — that
man is a unique creature, unlike any other, and that each human
being is unique and different from any other human being — Qutb
argues that any social system that aspires to guarantee the
happiness of the members of its society must devise institutions
that ensure the nobility of man and respect his individuality.
Qutb sees no conflict between ensuring, on the one hand, the
humanity and individuality of workers and, on the other,
promoting the productivity of work. On the contrary, once the
humanity and individuality of the worker are respected, Qutb
contends, "engineers and managers will not find it difficult to
devise a labor system that fosters these two desiderata while at
the same time, thanks to technology, guarantees great
productivity."[i177] He goes on to write in <u>Islam and the
problems of civilization</u> (1962):

> A society's economic, social and political systems, and
> the conditions of labor that prevail within its factories
> and elsewhere, should keep in mind, first, the
> *characteristics of humanity*, and, second, the
> *characteristics of individuality.* Workers should not be
> treated as a herd of sheep, nor should any individual
> worker be regarded as a mere machine.[i177]

The negation of individuality represents for Qutb an "outrageous catastrophe" caused by systems of life erected by man. Individuality, Qutb writes, is a "fundamental characteristic in the biological constitution of man, and therefore in his intellectual and psychological make up. A system that cultivates this individuality to its maximum potential, with an eye towards promoting the greater good, is a system that is compatible with human *fitrah*."[i107] Qutb's preoccupation with the totalitarian central state is obvious when he writes that a system which "suppresses and kills [individuality] in various ways and manners... is a system that is working towards the total destruction of the human organism."[i107] Qutb points in particular to social systems that adopt an economic structure "where everything is in the hands of the state, and where — in addition to political and judicial monopoly — all resources and means of production are under its control."[i107-8] In such social systems, Qutb writes, the state is "the sole entrepreneur that sells to, and buys from, individuals. It is the only thinker, for it neither tolerates dissent nor allows debate over the principles, the ideas and the means of the state." [i108]

Within his argument against what he perceives to be the onslaught by modern civilization against the humanity and individuality of man, Qutb articulates a particular concern on the issue of gender differences. It is the animalistic/materialistic reductionism of modern civilization that leads to a blurring of the divinely ordained differences between the male and the female. While the male and the female do share in the same humanity, and therefore stand on the same footing in their respective rights as human beings, they are nonetheless divinely charged with different duties and obligations. In the Islamic conception, Qutb argues, a woman

should not be expected to beget children and raise them, and at the same time work outside of the home, while the man shares nothing of her many burdens as a mother. Having argued that human beings live according to the exigencies of life-encompassing world conceptions, and having argued that all *jaahilii* world-conceptions are constraining and inimical to true emancipation, Qutb dismisses off hand the proposition that woman is brought to equal footing when offered the choice to stay at home or work outside. The *jaahilii* society for Qutb, in the name of showing woman respect as an equal, is in fact burdening the woman with a double duty of making a home and working outside of the home. Moreover, a woman's ordained duties as a mother are far more important to society than whatever contribution she may make outside of the home. Qutb arrives at this conclusion by equating "work outside of the home" with "making things" and "working in the home" with "making human beings".   That "making things" is more valued in modern, materialistic, society than "making human beings" is no surprise, Qutb notes. In the Islamic conception, on the other hand, the human being is the noblest of creatures, and therefore the step immediately follows that the duty of fostering and caring for the human being is more important than any activity that produces mere objects.[i177] To insist otherwise is to negate an essential character of the female and therefore to negate a key component in the make up of the individual woman.

5.2 - Assault on divinity

The conception of man proposed by the humanities and the social sciences, Qutb argues, notwithstanding the differences that may internally exist between one school or another, does great violence to the fundamental characteristics that define man in the Islamic conception. Man possesses an immutable *fitrah* that elevates him above all other creatures and things; man is an active agent, capable of *harakah*, who makes history

and who has a say in shaping his own destiny; he is also a
conscious agent, capable of belief (' *aqiidah*) and self-
reflection. To challenge this conception is to challenge God's
definition of the role of man on earth. Given the unity of
creation, such a challenge cannot be confined to merely the
divine conception of man: to challenge the divine conception of
man is to challenge the divine conception of all creation, and
therefore to challenge God Himself.   But the humanities and the
social sciences go one step beyond an implicit challenge against
God. God as the ontologically real entity of the Islamic
conception is, for instance, reduced by philosophy to an
abstraction, a mere idea. The active, conscious god of the
Islamic conception is summarily deposed in favor of the god of
the philosophers: an entity stripped of consciousness, will, and
agency, a god who can neither know nor act — hence who can
hardly be either merciful or compassionate, let alone omniscient
and omnipotent.

Qutb's rejection of the humanities and the social
sciences, and especially "Western philosophy", on grounds that
these disciplines violate the Islamic conception of divinity, is
most explicitly articulated in The Islamic concept and its
characteristics (1962). The god depicted by the philosophers,
Qutb explains, is an absurd and pathetic entity, and a telling
example of the worst that idle intellectualism is capable of
concocting.   A "vast difference [separates] the Islamic concept
of Allah and the concept of God presented by such philosophers
as Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus," Qutb writes. He goes on:

> They describe an "abstract" god which is a creation of
> their intellect and a product of their logic. It is a god
> without will power and without any action, and this is
> because of its assumed "perfection".[ke166]

The god of Aristotle, Qutb complains ironically, is such a
perfect entity that he is not even aware of creation but merely
contemplates himself: having posited the perfection of god,
Aristotle infers that since a perfect being may not contemplate
anything below perfection, therefore god is capable of beholding
nothing else but himself.[283] Such a god, by virtue of his
perfection, is also capable of neither action nor will, for
action implies desire, and god is beyond desire, while will
implies making a choice between two courses, while by definition
god is himself the perfect good.[284] Aristotle pursues his notion
of god even further, Qutb laments, to arrive at the conclusion
that this perfect god was not the creator of the universe:

> Aristotle made a distinction between the "Necessary Being"
> and the "possible being". God is the Necessary Being but
> He is devoid of will and action, and He did not create the
> universe, nor is He concerned with it. The universe, and
> whatever and whoever is in it, was a "possible being".
> Its desire to be like the Necessary Being brought it into
> "existence" from "non-existence".[ke187]

Atrophied as the god of Aristotle may have been, the
deadliest blow to any concept of a living god was dealt,
according to Qutb, by Plotinus. The god of Aristotle was indeed
unaware of creation, incapable of action, and stripped of will.
But he was aware of at least his own existence. Not so with
Plotinus. The god of Plotinus was "beyond things, beyond
attributes, and beyond knowledge!"   The perfection of god
meant for Plotinus that it was not possible for god to think of
anything, to know anything, including himself. And so, "in [his]
view, the only role of the One was to create Intelligence.
After that there was nothing for Him to do!"[ke144-5]

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[283] Qutb, S. [1962] (1991) <u>The Islamic concept and its characteristics</u>; p. 133.
[284] ibid., pp. 143-4; 168.

Hence the god of the philosophers, in Qutb's view, is an absurd entity, whittled away beyond understanding by the excesses of idle intellectual speculation. Theirs is a "God about whom nothing can be said and who has nothing to do with the real world! Obviously, a purely intellectual approach, without reference to the created universe and without the benefit of Revelation, can succeed only in constructing such a pallid and abstracted God that it can have neither existence nor reality."[ke168]

In addition to an assault on the ontological status of God, philosophy has also undermined divinity through its more recent conceptions of reality. Reiterating his argument that the present state of spiritual and moral degradation in Western society is the result of a reactionary rejection of an erstwhile tyrannical church — a church that grew tyrannical precisely as "a direct result of tampering with the revealed religious concept and introducing human distortions into it" — Qutb singles out modern European Idealism as an example of a philosophy that aims at undermining the god of the Islamic conception. Fichte's and Hegel's brand of idealism, and, of course, Marx's dialectical materialism, are given special attention. On Fichte's idealism Qutb writes:

> Fichte argued that the mind has an existence completely independent of other-than-itself. Its existence is its own existence, and not of other-than-itself. There cannot be unknowable things-in-themselves. Knowledge was possible because the mind itself produced the forms of knowledge through its various categories. Thus, every object, including things, is the product of mind. To say otherwise is to admit the existence of the Not-Self which would contradict the Self, that is to say, the existence of the mind itself.[ke61-2]

But, Qutb wonders sarcastically, "why should the existence of the Not-Self contradict the existence of the Self? Why cannot there be things and objects as well as minds?"

Qutb goes on to note that while Fichte reached, through his idealism, the conclusion that the mind is supreme, "Hegel employed it to establish the reality of the Absolute."[ke62] In Hegel's idealism, Qutb explains, "the Idea in its wholeness, the Absolute Idea, is eternal and was self-existing before the realm of Nature or finite minds came into being. This Absolute Idea is what religions refer to as God." But even as a metaphor, this Absolute idea is not a "Being separate from the world of nature. As [Hegel] puts it, Nature represents the Idea 'outside itself.' That is to say, Nature is the rationality of the Idea in external form."[ke62]

 But such abstract idealism, Qutb adds, was not able to take a foothold even within the European context within which it was articulated and developed. European thinkers "quickly abandoned [Idealism] in favor of 'Positivism'."[ke62]   The rejection of Hegelian Idealism, Qutb notes, was indeed the right thing to do. But, unfortunately, "the leaders of Positivism, in their revolt against the God of the Church and the godhead of 'Absolute Idea,' did not move toward anything better. They ended by making the phenomenal world, or Nature, their god."[ke62] And again, their god suffered from the same shortcomings and contradictions that afflicted the god of the "Absolute Idea". First, this god was only vaguely and incoherently defined: "Is this some well-defined being? Is it the universe as a whole? Or is it the various 'things' and their shapes and movements?"[ke62-3]   Second, Qutb wonders, what is the relationship between this god of "Nature" and the human being: "Does it have an existence independent of the human concepts concerning it? Or is it what our senses tell us it is?"[ke63] And if the latter does hold, then what kind of

Creator depends on his creation to exist? [285] Third, why has this nature singled out the human being, out of all other animals, to bestow intellect and reason upon him? Why are all other animals without intellect, except man? [286] Fourth, what *is* this nature? If it is "matter", then what is "matter"?   If it is posited as something permanent, then how can it also be held at the same time that matter transforms into energy, and energy back to matter? And "[i]n which of the two states, mass or energy, does it create the human mind... and at which stage does it impart life and consciousness?" And, fifth, "if Nature imprints reality on the human mind, does it imprint the correct reality?" Obviously not, Qutb concludes, since was it not the case that "this reality and this mind decided that the earth was the center of the universe, and then again that the earth is but a small planet, moving around the sun"? But "[w]hich of these contradictory intellectual judgments are the realities imprinted on the human mind by Nature? Does one observe that it makes mistakes in its imprints? Or is it the human mind that makes mistakes."

A few observations are in order. First, as we noted before, Qutb's discourse, at least by the time of <u>Milestones</u>' writing, becomes heavily theocentric and the vocabulary it mobilizes is consciously adopted by Qutb to carry out his analysis and put forward his proposals in the vocabulary of the "Islamic conception". [287] Qutb takes seriously the proposition that language is a reflection — like all human activities and beliefs — of the surrounding world-conception. To adopt the vocabulary of another world-conception is to assist in the promotion of that very conception. It is mainly for this reason — i.e., refusing to adopt the non-religious vocabulary of philosophy — that Qutb insists on injecting "god" in his

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[285] ibid., p. 63.

[286] ibid.

[287] See Shepard (1996, pp. xxiv-xxxiv); for a discussion on the increasingly theocentric vocabulary of Sayyid Qutb as revealed in the five editions of <u>Social justice in Islam</u> from 1949 to 1964.

analysis of the various schools of philosophical thought. Qutb
insists that all philosophies are in essence "religions", since
they all propose their own particular paradigms of life, and
central to Qutb's notion of religion is the presence of a "god".
Hence, all treatment of the question of the origin of man and
reality is in essence an excursion into theology, and whatever
explanation is given on existence in the final analysis posits
its own conception of a "god".

Second, it is quite clear from his analysis of Idealism
and Positivism that Qutb's criticism is driven and is heavily
informed by premises that from the start directly contradict
some of the most important concepts that Qutb wishes to refute.
First, "God", in Qutb's discourse, is immutable and absolutely
independent of any other force outside of Himself; and second,
the "reality" that this God brings forth is stable and orderly;
change does take place, Qutb many times argues in The Islamic
concept and its characteristics, but only within a "fixed
paradigm" of reality. With these two premises in mind, Qutb
then goes on to "refute" the philosophers' conception of God by
showing that: (1) the God they offer is neither immutable nor
absolutely independent: the god of Nature changes states from
matter to energy, while the god of the "Abstract Idea" needs the
human mind to assert its existence; and (2) the "reality"
depicted by the philosophers is neither stable nor orderly: what
is real depends on the mind — and the mind errs, as the history
of science has shown us.[288] Consequently, Qutb's conclusion that
such a conception of God by the philosophers cannot truly hold
is patently a self-asserting "argument" and nothing more than a
converse version of the old ontological argument: God is
immutable; since the god posited by the philosophers is not
immutable, therefore the depiction they present cannot be a true
depiction!

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[288] Qutb, S. [1962] (1991) The Islamic concept and its characteristics; pp. 57-65.

Third, it is significant to note that the very techniques of detraction that Qutb accuses *jaahiliyyah* of employing against the Islamic conception are heavily used by Qutb himself in his assault on philosophy. In <u>Milestones</u>, Qutb writes, mimicking the *jaahilii* resistance to the Islamic call: "what are the details of the system to which you are calling? How much research have you done? How many articles have you prepared and how many subjects have you written about?" But such questions, Qutb concludes, are not asked seriously or earnestly; they are asked only "to find an excuse to reject the Divine system and to perpetuate the slavery of one man to another."[t75] It is clearly in the very same spirit of rejection rather than serious engagement that Qutb wonders about the relationship between the god of "Nature" and the human being. Showing a rather sophisticated bent towards philosophical speculation, Qutb asks, obviously in a sarcastic and rhetorical mode: "Does it have an existence independent of the human concepts concerning it? Or is it what our senses tell us it is?"[ke63] And if the latter does hold, then what kind of Creator depends on his creation to exist? [289]

    In addition to an attack on the ontological status of God and the articulation of a conception of reality that substitutes idea and matter for a conscious, living divine agency, a more subtle assault is carried out against God in what Qutb considers to be the immoderate celebration of reason and the relentless devaluation of revelation.   Qutb points to the Enlightenment as the historical starting point for such a worldview.   By entrusting the mind to solve *all* of man's problems, the leaders of the Enlightenment were in effect asserting the supremacy of "reason" over all other sources of knowledge, and most importantly over revelation:

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[289] ibid., p. 63.

The mind was propped up as a god during the Age of
Enlightenment at the middle of the 18th century, and the
external world was considered to be the creation and the
making of this mind. The mind took control over all
aspects of life, unchallenged in the opinions it put
forward, while man gained an absolute freedom to do as he
pleased, constrained only by human strictures. And thus
ended the relevance of religion in human life.[i57]

We have already examined Qutb's objections to the notion
that the world is the creation of the mind. Fichte's and
Hegel's idealism, for instance, strike Qutb as nonsensical both
in the premises they take as their staring point, in their
reasoning, and in the conclusions they reach. For Qutb, the
claim that the world is the offspring of an idea can be
entertained only through an intellectualism that relinquishes
any link with reality. But even on its very own terms, idealism
cannot sustain its arguments and its worldview. In answer to
Fichte's argument that "every object, including things, is the
product of mind" and that "[t]o say otherwise is to admit the
existence of the Not-Self which would contradict the
Self,"[ke61-2] Qutb simply wonders: "why should the existence
of the Not-Self contradict the existence of the Self? Why
cannot there be things and objects as well as minds?"[ke62]

The notion that reason is supreme presents another, more
subtle, challenge to the Islamic conception of divinity. To
stipulate the supremacy of reason, Qutb argues, is to stipulate
the existence of *one*, immutable reason. But, Qutb notes,
"'reason' as an abstract 'ideal', free of the influences of
cultural biases and personal opinions, does not exist in the
actual world of human beings." A few lines later, he repeats:
"[t]here is of course nothing which may be called 'reason' in
the abstract, free from the influence of personal desires,
passions, biases, errors, and ignorance...."[ke14] It is this
very notion that stipulates that reason is abstract and

untainted by the human context that lies beneath the effort by
those Islamic scholars and intellectuals who have attempted, and
continue in their attempt, to place reason and revelation at the
same footing. Revelation, Qutb counters, by virtue of its
divine origin, is by definition not subject to the whims of life
and man; reason, on the other hand, is a reflection of the human
context. In The Islamic concept and its characteristics ,, Qutb
singles out Muhammad 'Abduh for particular criticism. Qutb
quotes 'Abduh's The Oneness of Allah writing:

> Divine revelation through messengers is an act of God,
> while human reason is also an act of God in this world,
> and acts of God are necessarily in harmony with each
> other, never at variance with each other.[ke14]

Qutb expresses his agreement that both revelation and
reason are of divine origin, but insists that "divine revelation
and human reason are not at the same level, the former being
greater and more all-embracing than the latter." On the
contrary, he writes:

> Divine revelation came down to be a source to which human
> reason must refer, and to be the criterion to which human
> reason must refer in judging norms, standards, and
> concepts....[ke14]

It is at the other end of the spectrum that Muhammad
'Abduh stands on this question. 'Abudh believed in the ability
of human reason to attain moral and ethical knowledge. The
acquisition of scientific or technological expertise by itself
does not suffice, in 'Abduh's eyes, to rehabilitate the Muslim
condition. He wrote: "[t]he science which we feel in need of is
thought by some people to be technology and other means of
mastering agriculture and trade. This is false, for if we look
at what we complain of, we find something deeper than the mere

lack of technology and similar disciplines. We complain of lack
of ambition, laziness, disunity, disregard of obvious interest.
Technology cannot offer us remedies to such complaints. What we
need to learn, therefore, is something beyond such a discipline
which touches upon the soul and this is the science of human
life."[290]   It is true that 'Abduh does go on to state that "what
we lack is extensive knowledge of the ethics of religion and
what we need in accordance with our feelings is to have a true
understanding of religion."[291] But it is also clear that by an
"understanding of religion", 'Abduh meant the application of
human reason in the discovery of the moral laws articulated in
scripture.   As Badawi notes, "['Abduh] believes that man would
arrive through the use of his reason to whether an action is
moral or immoral [and that] an ethical system based on reason
alone is possible."[292] And "understanding of religion" may be
arrived at in more than one way. Following Al-Afghani and the
rationalist *Mu'tazilah*, 'Abduh did not trust the common man to
arrive on his own to such an ethical system: they needed to
accept religion, both its initial premises of divine existence
and authentic prophecy, and the injunctions it stipulates; but
the learned and the initiated, on the other hand, may dabble
into the philosophical question for the rational basis of
morality and ethics.[293]   In short, 'Abduh accepts, at least in
principle, the possibility of rationally discovering the basis
of morality and ethics.

    Two of 'Abduh's most notable pupils, Rashid Ridha and
Sheikh Al-Maghribi, are also singled out for criticism.
Straining to bring the *Qur'an* in conformity with reason, both
Ridha and Al-Maghribi, very much in the same vein as their
teacher, produced "far-fetched interpretations of the Qur'anic
text."[ke14] Their sin, however, Qutb argues, did not consist

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[290] Ridha (1931, pp. 352-3).
[291] ibid.
[292] Badawi (1978, p. 63).
[293] ibid., pp. 63-4.

in the celebration of reason. As we saw in the previous chapter, Qutb not only himself frequently celebrates the virtues of reason (in Qutb's vocabulary, man's innate capacities to explore the material world), but stipulates that the application of reason is part of man's *khilaafah* mission: "To say that Divine Revelation is the fundamental source of knowledge does not imply the cancellation of man's faculties of perception and reasoning...."[ke140] The sin committed by 'Abduh, Ridha and Al-Maghribi, in Qutb's eyes, seems to be their defensive reactionism. Qutb sees in the "defensive reactionism" of such Muslim reformers the same dangers that plagued the initial reactionism of the "Christian church" against the new sciences, and the reactionism of the new sciences against the church in particular and religion in general. In the context of contemporary Islam, Qutb gives the example of the defensive position adopted by many Muslim thinkers towards the Islamic concept of *jihaad*. Reacting to the accusations thrown in the way of Islam by "Christian missionaries and some Zionist authors" that "Islam [is] a religion of the sword... some defenders of Islam from among us immediately rose up to remove this 'blemish' from Islam. In their zeal to 'defend' Islam against these vicious attacks, they downgraded the place of *jihaad* in Islam by narrowing its sphere of application and by apologetically stating that *jihaad* is permitted only for 'defensive' purposes, in the narrow current technical sense of the word."[ke12] The same holds with many Muslims' reaction to accusations that Islam is resistant to change and progress, and is antithetical to reason. In reaction to these accusations, Qutb contends, writers such as 'Abduh and his pupils engaged their detractors in a rearguard battle instead of proactively putting forward the Islamic conception on its own merits and independently of the accusations that are lodged against it. In the case of 'Abduh, "caught between the two extremes of intellectual inertia in the Muslim world and the deification of reason in Europe, he propounded the theory that human reason and divine revelation are of equal importance for the guidance of

man, and that it is impossible that knowledge acquired through rational thought should come in conflict with divinely-revealed truths."[ke13] But rather than merely assert that human reason "can comprehend what is within its grasp," 'Abduh, in Qutb's view, extended the reach of reason to include questions and problems that only revelation can help man address: "divine revelation (*wahy*) may deal with absolute realities such as the reality of God and the relationship of the will of God to created events," while "[r]eason has no choice but to accept these absolute principles which are beyond its grasp."[ke13]

5.3 Attack on Islam

So far, we have examined Qutb's two main doctrinal objections against seriously appropriating the social sciences and the humanities as sources of knowledge about man and society. The social sciences and the humanities, Qutb charges, are disciplines that violate two of the most fundamental principles of the Islamic conception: the special status of man and the integrity of a conscious, willing, and active god. On these grounds alone, in Qutb's view, these disciplines should be rejected by the Muslim as serious sources of knowledge about man, society and reality. To reduce man to an animal or to mere matter is at once to negate his immutable *fitrah*, to reject his capacity to believe, and to preclude the possibility of an active human agency. By the same token, to replace the conscious and active god of the Islamic conception with an ironic or metaphorical god, whether in the form of an "idea" or in the form of "nature", is to negate the existence of this god altogether, in effect stripping him of his *haakimiyyah* and thereby plunging into a *jaahilii* world-conception. However, these two doctrinal violations are not the only grounds on which the social sciences and the humanities should be rejected. First, unlike the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences are not authentically Islamic. As we have seen

in chapter 3, a central theme in Qutb's writings is the essential incompatibility between Islam and *jaahiliyyah*. The social sciences and the humanities, Qutb argues, are characterized by a penchant for abstraction and inaction, and invariably lead to theories that strain credulity and common sense; in a word, they are patently un-Islamic in essence and spirit. But second, and more importantly, to adopt the humanities and the social sciences as sources of knowledge is to place the Islamic conception in a state of real danger. The Islamic order and *jaahiliyyah*, Qutb insists, cannot coexist within the same social context nor will they tolerate one another; instead, they are engaged in a continual struggle for supremacy. To accept any knowledge from the humanities and the social sciences is to side with *jaahiliyyah* in the momentous struggle between good and evil, the Islamic and the *jaahilii*.

A central premise in Qutb's argument on the supremacy of the Islamic conception and its relevance to not only present-day Muslims but to all of humanity, is the integrity of the Islamic spirit. Unlike Judaism and Christianity, Qutb argues, Islam never suffered a corruption that compromised the fundamental principles of the Islamic conception. Historically, Qutb admits, Muslims have deviated and have accepted social orders other than Islam. In Social justice, as we have seen, Qutb argues that after the time of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Companions, Muslims by and large lived under governments that were patently un-Islamic. In Milestones, Qutb broadens the accusation to include society itself: having accepted the rule of the un-Islamic, the *jaahilii*, the self-proclaimed Muslim society itself became *jaahilii*. But in either case, whether in Social justice's limited denunciation of government or in Milestones' broad brush against Muslim society, Qutb maintains that the "Islamic conception" — as a set of principles — remained untouched,[294] and therefore always at the disposal of a

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[294] Qutb, S. [1962] (1991) The Islamic concept and its characteristics; p. 41.

new generation of Muslims ready to answer the call of their
fitrah, ready to believe, and, most importantly, ready to act
and transform for the better their world and that of their
fellow human beings. The humanities and the social sciences
represent a great danger precisely because, in Qutb's view, they
aim to undermine the very principles of the Islamic conception —
principles that have so far survived and withstood the onslaught
of a relentless *jaahiliyyah*.

In The Islamic concept, Qutb repeatedly makes the point
that the Islamic conception is essentially different from
notions derived from philosophy: "[The Islamic concept] is...
entirely different from philosophical concepts, which originate
in human minds, about the reality of God, the reality of
existence, the reality of man, and the connections among these
realities."[ke41] Islam itself "had come originally to rescue
mankind from... [the] deviations" introduced in the life of man
by philosophical speculation, the very same speculation "that
had plagued Christianity earlier."[ke6] Alas, after Islam's
initial success, "[t]he early days of struggle for the
propagation of the Faith and of *jihaad* [gave] way to a period
of ease and comfort."[ke6] Then followed a period of political
strife between 'Ali and Mu'aawiyyah, which later evolved into
doctrinal and philosophical feuding between various sects and
factions, "such as *khaarijiyyah*, *shii'ah*, *mu'tazilah*,
qadariyyah, and *jaabiriyyah*."[ke6] This fragmentation and
dissolution of a powerful union was primarily the result of an
adulteration of the pure Islamic concept with "foreign" ideas.

For Qutb, then, philosophical speculation presented an
alien methodology of knowledge acquisition that clashed
profoundly with the Islamic *tasawwur*; Islam, the "pure" and
"simple" religion of *fitrah*, frowned on the abstract
complexities of philosophy.   Islam's decline began precisely
when Islam's "pure spirit" was mingled with *jaahili*, man-made
conceptions, imported from other world-conceptions.   The

contrast between Qutb's view on the relationship between the decline of Muslims and the development of philosophy in the Muslim world and the view of Al-Afghani is striking. Al-Afghani seems to have held the exact opposite view. For Al-Afghani, the glory of the Muslim world began to fade precisely when the philosophical tradition began to be neglected. In his "Lecture on teaching and learning," Al-Afghani wrote: "[t]he first defect appearing in any nation that is headed toward decline is in the philosophic spirit. After that, deficiencies spread into the other sciences, arts, and associations." [295] For Al-Afgani, "[p]hilosophy is the science that deals with the state of external beings, and their causes, reasons, needs, and requisites." Al-Afghani likens Islam's learned, the ' *ulema*, to "a very narrow wick on top of which is a very small flame that neither lights its surroundings nor gives light to others." [296] Far is the Islam of his day from the religion that will shed light on all of humanity.

We see Qutb's argument that philosophy is foreign, and therefore harmful, to the Islamic conception as early as Social justice. In that work, Qutb has yet to adopt the vocabulary he was later to use in The Islamic concept and its charecteristics — most notably, he refers to "Muslim philosophy" rather than "Islamic conception" — but his misgivings about philosophy are nonetheless explicitly articulated:

> [T]he true Muslim philosophy is not to be sought in Ibn
> Sina or Ibn-Rushd, or such men as these who alone are
> known as the Muslim philosophers; for the philosophy which
> they teach is no more than a shadow of the Greek
> philosophy, and has no relation to the true Islamic
> philosophy.[s17]

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[295] Keddie (1983, p. 105).
[296] ibid., p. 107.

In the later The Islamic concept and its characteristics ,
Qutb frequently returns to the theme that a fundamental
difference exists between philosophy and the Islamic conception:
"there exists a genuine disharmony between the methodology of
philosophy and the methodology of belief, between the style of
philosophy and the style of belief."[ke7] The Islamic
conception produces "great and sublime truths," while philosophy
engenders "petty, artificial, and confused efforts."[ke7]
Dabbling in philosophy is to practice "intellectual gymnastics
[that] merely produced confusion in people's minds and polluted
the purity of the Islamic concept, narrowing its scope and
rendering it superficial, dry, complicated, and
incomprehensible."[ke7] That is why, Qutb insists, the aim of
Muslims should not be to develop their own "genuine"
philosophy, since the flaw with philosophy is not merely a
question of content, but one of method:

> We have no desire to add still another book to the shelves
> of Islamic libraries under the heading of "Islamic
> Philosophy". Never! Indeed, our purpose is not mere cold
> "knowledge" which deals only with intellectual issues and
> adds to the stock of "culture".... Rather, we want to
> bring about that "movement" which is beyond
> "knowledge".[ke5]

In his earlier works, Qutb's rejection of philosophy w as
articulated on less doctrinal grounds. In The battle between
Islam and capitalism (1951), Qutb articulates an argument from
cultural authenticity: he proposes that Muslims should not adopt
philosophy as a source for answering their social and
existential problems because they already possess in hand a
complete system with which they are deeply and intimately
familiar — Islam. Islam is the essence of Muslims' culture:

Islam is our friend, and has been our friend for one
thousand and three hundred years.... It stirs our
emotions and excites our memories; it has an echo in our
conscience and is no stranger to our souls, our feelings,
our habits and traditions, as communism is such a
stranger.[m32]

Social and philosophical theories emanate from a source
other than Islam — i.e., are the product of man rather than the
product of revelation — have no roots in Muslim society, and
therefore cannot be expected to take hold among Muslims.   In
The Islamic concept and its characteristics (1962), the argument
from cultural authenticity can still be detected, but at the
same time an important change in emphasis has shifted the
orientation of this argument. Qutb's positive call for the
adoption of Islam in The Islamic concept is pursued doctrinally,
while the rejection of competing life-conceptions still has
traces of the argument from cultural authenticity: "[i]t is not
possible," Qutb writes, "to find a basis for Islamic thought in
the modes and products of European thought, nor to reconstruct
Islamic thought by borrowing from Western modes of thought or
its products."[ke9] Marxism, for instance, Qutb points out, is
irrelevant to the Muslim context, since, in developing his
theories, "[Marx] traces the history of a single group, the
Europeans, in an extremely simplified fashion by emphasizing
only a few aspects of it." He then goes on to ask:

How could this one man, living for a limited span of time
in a particular place and society, comprehend the
infinitely many causes and influences operating on
millions of people over several centuries?[ke76]

Little wonder, then, that Marxism, or any other
transplanted social, economic, or political theory, has neither
grown roots in Muslim societies, nor has it improved the
condition of Muslims living in those societies. On the

contrary, the laws and systems that have been erected out of these social theories have met with resistance from Muslims, who cannot see the relevance of such laws to their lives, nor identify such systems with the traditional structures that play a central role in their daily existence.   A feeling of "estrangement between the spirit of the law and the spirit of society to which it applies" then begins to take hold of the alienated Muslim.   It is a feeling that results from "the conviction that the law meets neither the society's moral nor its material needs.   In other words, when the law is incompatible with the society's conditions and requirements, people do not feel that the law is pertinent to either individual or social circumstances."[u68] [297]   The lack of relevance of non-Islamic theories of society and man to a Muslim's life, however, is not the primary reason for opposing the adoption of such theories or those disciplines that engender them.   An essential point in Qutb's discourse is the intimate relationship that exists between content and method, between text and context.   Knowledge and the tools used to learn such knowledge inform and influence each other, so that neither can be adopted without the other.   The social sciences and the humanities, in Qutb's view, are the particular product of the *jaahilii* system, whatever outward form this system may assume. They collectively represent human hubris and the transgression of mere man into territories that are the exclusive preserve of God.   To embrace them or to take them seriously as sources of knowledge is to embrace, or at least to tolerate, *jaahiliyyah.* But since the Islamic *tasawwur* and the *jaahilii* conception cannot coexist, to embrace or to tolerate *jaahiliyyah* is to side with it against Islam.   In particular, the methodology of philosophy fundamentally clashes with that of the Islamic conception.   For this reason,

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[297] The notion that laws imported wholesale cannot be transplanted into Muslim culture had already been articulated by 'Abduh. As Hourani observes, "'Abduh had a lively admiration for the achievements of modern Europe, for the serious tone of its society. But he did not believe it possible to transplant its laws and institutions to Egypt. Laws planted in another soil do not work in the same way, they may make things worse." Hourani (1962, p. 137).

> [w]e must avoid the style of philosophy in presenting the
> Islamic concept, because there is a close relationship
> between subject and style of presentation. The style of
> philosophy can only change and distort the Islamic
> concept, because its nature and historical development are
> foreign and discordant, even inimical, to the nature of
> the Islamic concept.[ke10]

The contrast is sharp between Qutb's rejection of philosophy on grounds of methodological incompatibility with the "Islamic *tasawwur*" and Al-Afghani's positive disposition towards philosophy. In Al-Afghani's view, the true spirit of philosophy (*falsafah*) is essentially Islamic. "The first Muslims," he notes in his "Lecture on teaching and learning," " had no science, but thanks to the Islamic religion, a philosophic spirit arose among them, and owing to that philosophic spirit they began to discuss the general affairs of the world and human necessities." [298] In "The benefits of philosophy," Al-Afghani goes even further and locates the origin of philosophy for Muslims in the Qur'an itself: "it becomes clear that the Precious Book was the first teacher of philosophy to the Muslims." [299]   Al-Afghani's argument on the Islamic origin of philosophy begins along the same lines as that of Qutb on the Islamic origin of the "abstract sciences". As we saw in the previous chapter, Qutb invokes the *khilaafah* (vicegerency) mission to define man's mission on earth and to legitimize the exploration of his physical surrounding. Al-Afghani uses similar language to legitimize philosophy: "[God] said to man: That which is on earth was created for you; therefore, do not become monks, but take according to your just share of its pleasures and do not deprive yourselves of beauty, which is a divine gift. He promised those perfect in mind and soul, who constituted the virtuous, the rule over the whole

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[298] Keddie (1983, p. 105).
[299] ibid., p. 114.

earth. In sum, in that Precious Book, with solid verses, He planted the roots of philosophical sciences into purified souls, and opened the road for man to become man." [300]

It is crucial to note the last words of the quote from Al-Afghani: "opened the road for man to become man." For Qutb, man *is* man by virtue of his *fitrah*; for Al-Afghani, man *becomes* truly human only through education and learning. The divine mission of *khilaafah*, then, represents for Al-Afghani a journey where both the external world and the self are explored and discovered. For Qutb, the line between the external world and the self is clearly drawn. The divinely ordained *khilaafah* mission is well circumscribed to the world beyond the self; only the Creator may inform the self, through the Qur'an, of matters of existence, ethics and morality.

The notion that method and substance are intimately related is present in Qutb's writings since at least Social justice.   As we have already seen, Qutb faces a practical dilemma in Social justice: how should we proceed with the project of "[inducing] Islamic theory by education," when it is clear that "educational methods and modes of thought are essentially Western and essentially inimical to the Islamic philosophy itself"?   Western thought, Qutb argues, not only stands on a "materialistic basis that is contrary to the Islamic theory of life," but is essentially inimical and oppositional to Islam, "no matter whether such opposition is manifest or concealed in various forms."[s250] In Social justice still, Qutb highlights the example of Pragmatism to show how a philosophy is intimately related to its historical and socio-economic context, and how it engenders educational methods in line with its own underlying assumptions:

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[300] ibid., p. 113-4.

It has been the rise of [Pragmatism]... which has produced
the educational techniques of America. It has been
responsible for a teaching curriculum and a system which
will encourage the mind to take this view of things and to
rationalize life along this line. More; it is this which
has directed it towards technical production, and which
has to a large extent diverted it from academic and
theoretical education.

Accordingly we must reckon with this general philosophy of
life; if we borrow educational techniques, teaching
systems, and curricula, this philosophy underlies all of
them. This philosophy shapes and forms them, assisted by
the results of pure psychology. Such an influence is
inevitable, though this same science in its methods and in
its results is itself influenced by that very
philosophy.[s254]

In the case of Pragmatism, the objection that Qutb raises
against the conception it promotes does not pertain to its
"excessive intellectualism" — Qutb's favorite qualm against the
humanities and the social sciences — but rather to its
"instrumental materialism". With Pragmatism, Qutb writes,
"material profit becomes the sole criterion, not only of the
acceptance or the rejection of things, but also of existence or
non-existence. This implies a state of affairs in which man
loses all nobility, where he is neither more nor less than an
instrument."[s256] By way of illustrating his assertion on the
relationship between an underlying conception and outward
action, Qutb proposes that the best explanation for the
"puzzling policies" of "the United States on the Palestine
question and its stand in the United Nations on the question of
Egypt were merely the results of its intellectual background of
pragmatism — in conjunction, of course, with other factors. The
idea of right and justice has little effective place in

materialistic American life; and hence it has little chance of permanent acknowledgment in international policies."[s256-7]

Qutb's disposition towards the humanities and the social sciences clearly shifted from one of caution, as displayed in Social justice, to one of pronounced aversion and hostility, as fully articulated in The Islamic concept and in Milestones. In Social justice, the possibility of drawing knowledge from these disciplines could still be entertained by Qutb. Although they may undermine the Islamic conception in doing so, Muslims may, as long as they are "careful", "derive the fullest profit from... philosophy, which is the intellectual treatment of the universe and life; from literature, which is the emotional treatment of these things...."[s258] In Milestones, by contrast, the Muslim is no longer exhorted to "derive the fullest profit" from these disciplines, but rather, to study them — and only from a "God-fearing and pious Muslim" — for the purpose of knowing the deviations adopted by *jaahiliyyah*, so that the he may know how to correct these man-made deviations in the light of the true Islamic belief."[t205] In other words, whatever epistemological value the humanities and social sciences may have been granted by Qutb in Social justice are completely denied by the time Milestones is written, and the study of these disciplines are subsumed under a strategy of resistance and struggle.

5.4 The epistemological failure of the humanities and the social sciences

In the first three sections of this chapter, we have argued that Qutb rejects the humanities and the social sciences on three grounds: their degradation of man, their assault on divinity, and their threat to, and incompatibility with, the Islamic conception. The humanities and social sciences do not recognize the privileged status of man in the world, but instead reduce man to an animal, or worse, to mere matter; they do not

acknowledge the existence of a conscious, active god: the god offered by the humanities and social sciences is an abstraction at best, when not an outright absurdity; and, through the ideas and systems they propose and conceptualize, they undermine the Islamic conception and work to promote *jaahiliyyah* and quell any attempt at establishing the Islamic order. A fourth reason is advanced by Qutb in opposition to the humanities and social sciences: Muslims should reject them as sources of knowledge for the simple reason that these disciplines have failed to deliver on their epistemological promises.

As we have already seen in our discussion on the natural sciences, Qutb argues that man's mission in life is well defined by God: man is to act as God's caretaker on earth. God has created man with an immutable *fitrah* and has charged him with a clear mission; to act in violation of that *fitrah* or to transgress beyond the bounds of that mission is to invite misery and disaster. Man can never hope to unravel the nature of his own *fitrah* for the simple reason that it is part of his *fitrah* that he remain ignorant of its nature. Unlike other creatures, man needs to believe in what transcends him and in what he can never fully understand: he needs a creed, '*aqiidah*, just as he needs to eat and drink. God has provided man with the tools to explore and understand the world, and has laid out a blueprint that both outlines for him a framework within which to organize his life, and at the same time addresses his eternal existential questions about the world, his position within it, and his relationship with his past, his future and what surrounds him. Only God has insight into such questions:

> Surely, Allah Most High, the fashioner of the human being, knows the nature and extent of human faculties. He knows what capability man has been given to understand the laws of the physical universe and to control the forces of nature in order to carry out the tasks of his vicegerency on the earth, just as He also knows what is concealed from

man on the secrets of "life"; i.e., what are his body and brain, how they came about, and how they function, and the secret of his mind or soul or of his spirit. Even the connection between his intellectual and spiritual functions and his bodily functions is to a large extent still unknown to him.[ke49]

Only God has access to the "hows" of creation, for "'How' is the connection between what He wills and the way it comes into being, that is, the connection between Willing and Originating. The 'hows' are beyond human comprehension. The Islamic conception suggests that we leave such matters to the One with absolute knowledge and absolute power of planning...."[ke119] It would be folly, Qutb argues, for man to attempt to undertake the task of unraveling such mysteries. Would man dare manipulate matter, Qutb asks rhetorically, if he were in total ignorance of what he had in his hands? If he did, the result would be an assured "self-destruction".[i40] The "exact same situation" now holds with spiritual and moral questions. Man is daring to delve into these questions, when his ignorance is nearly total of the subject matter he wishes to investigate. Citing his own experience, Qutb writes:

The person who is writing these lines has spent forty years of his life reading books and in research in almost all aspects of human knowledge. He specialized in some branches of knowledge and studied others due to personal interest. Then he turned to the fountainhead of his faith. He came to feel that whatever he had read so far was as nothing in comparison to what he found there.[t210-11]

To make the same point, Qutb often quotes, and at great length, the French scientist Alexis Carrel. Although Qutb disagrees with Carrel's final conclusions (we will turn shortly

to Qutb's objections), he expresses total agreement with
Carrel's assertion that, in spite of the great scientific
progress than man has achieved through the centuries, man
remains essentially ignorant of his own nature. Qutb inserts a
lengthy quote from Carrel's Man the Unknown in his Islam and the
problems of civilization (1960).[301] The quote runs more than
twelve pages and excerpts from it are repeatedly quoted
throughout the work.   Carrel's main points are captured in the
following excerpt:

> There exists an extraordinary gap between the sciences of
> dead matter and the sciences of living things.... For
> astronomy, the mechanical and the natural science are
> erected on observations and findings that can be clearly
> and simply articulated in a quantitative language. These
> sciences have together conceptualized a harmonious
> universe... They have woven around this world a beautiful
> tapestry of facts and theories. By contrast, the live
> sciences find themselves in a totally different situation:
> it is as if those who study life are now lost in a thick
> forest.... They have undertaken many studies and have
> accumulated many findings, and yet, they remain incapable
> of deriving any exact conclusions from their research....
> They remain still at the descriptive phase, for man is a
> complete whole, incredibly complex, who cannot be grasped
> in simple terms, nor understood partially....[i13-14]

According to Carrel, Qutb explains, the main reason behind
the failure of the humanities and the social sciences lies in
the structure of the human mind and in the inherent complexity
of man. In The Islamic concept, Qutb quotes Carrel writing that
"[o]ur mind is so constructed as to delight in contemplating
simple facts. We feel a kind of repugnance in attacking such a
complex problem as that of the constitution of living beings and

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[301] Qutb, S. [1962] (1993) *Al-islaam wa mushkilaat al-hadhara*; p. 13-25.

of man."[ke51]   The mind, Carrel goes on, "love[s] to discover in the cosmos the geometrical forms that exist in the depths of our consciousness."[ke51]   Qutb fully concurs. Three "truths about man" are identified by Qutb: the uniqueness of man, the individuality of each person, and the complexity of human nature.   A successful social and moral system, therefore, must take all of these three "truths" into full account.   But man has not been granted the wherewithal to coordinate between these three truths; instead, God, in His mercy, "has spared this weak and ignorant creature from struggling in vain in this matter, rescuing him from trying to originate this concept [of life] on his own and thus scattering his energy in a domain for which Allah has not given him any resource or tool."[ke54]   God did not forsake man to his own fate:

> He did not leave man alone in his deep ignorance... to construct a belief-concept on his own. Rather, He gave him a comprehensive concept, governing not merely the reality of man, but also the much greater realities of the Creator Himself.[ke53]

That is why the very attempt to "devise a comprehensive explanation of the existence of life and of man and to... design ways of life and systems for human beings together with rules of conduct" would be "sheer ignorance".[ke54]   It is this very ignorance, Qutb concludes, that has brought man to the tragic condition within which he finds himself today.[i34]   Turning to his favorite foil, Marxism, Qutb writes that man's most "scientific" attempt to devise a social and moral system has resulted in pure dogma that negates the very spirit of science:

> Marxism — the scientific school — relieves itself from the true scientific investigation of History and human impulses, for it sets its scrutiny on one particular dimension of life — the economic dimension — and declares

it, as we have said, a god whose will cannot be resisted, whose rule cannot be challenged, and against whom man has no recourse.[i94]

But their own proclamations to having attained truth notwithstanding, Qutb insists, supporters of Marxist theory are contradicted not only by the common sense reality that surrounds them, but, significantly for Qutb, by "true scientists" who do specialize in the study of man: "the scientific specialists of the 20th century confess to their absolute ignorance of man."[i93-4] Qutb, again, has in mind Carrel and the latter's assertion that very little knowledge has been gained on the nature of life and the essence of man.

However, Qutb observes, while he and Carrel may agree that humanity is in a state of ignorance about the nature of man and life, a fundamental difference separates the two thinkers and leads them to prescribe a philosophy and a plan of action that are in direct conflict with each other.   To Qutb's "astonishment", Carrel's conclusion in the light of the prevailing ignorance of the human condition, is to exhort the pursuit of more knowledge about man:

> The only solution to this overwhelming ill is to gain more knowledge of ourselves.... Such knowledge will enable us to understand the underlying forces that influence our present-day lives.... And in this way we will be able to adapt ourselves to the conditions that surround us, and to change them....[i169]

This seems to stagger Qutb and leads him to exclaim: hasn't Carrel argued that the mind is inherently structured to always seek simplification and reduction, and by the same token to feel repugnance towards the complex and the disorderly?   And was it not, Qutb further wonders, also part of Carrel's argument that man is an infinitely complex creature, and that the mind is

ill-equipped to fathom his nature and essence? Moreover, had
Carrel not also asserted "that there exists a fundamental
difference between the science of matter and the science of
man"? Puzzled by what he perceives to be Carrel's outright
"self-contradiction", Qutb concludes that "this learned man,
whose sensitivities run deep... this enlightened thinker and
revolutionary... is after all a Westerner, who grew up in a
Western culture, and who is therefore informed by its long
history and its prevailing present, a present heavily dominated
by the notions of modern science..... He is a prisoner of this
culture, its conceptions, its history, and the patterns of its
life."[i171] Once again, the constraining *jaahiliyyah* is
invoked by Qutb to explain what Qutb perceives to be the limits
imposed by a life-conception inimical to the basic emancipatory
principles of the Islamic conception. The orientation of
Carrel's program (which by proxy represents in the eyes of
Sayyid Qutb the commitments of the humanities and the social
sciences to the scientific investigation of man) is a world
apart from Qutb's unyielding assertions that the ignorance by
man of his nature is a fixed and divinely ordained fact of human
existence, that the sphere of what the mind may comprehend is
well defined and is limited to the *khilaafah* mission with which
man has been charged, and that, humanity's plight, therefore, is
the result of the transgression of man into a forbidden realm,
while its salvation can be attained only with a retreat away
from that realm.

    Finally, perhaps the best way to capture the essential
difference that separates Qutb from his predecessors in the
Islamic reform movement is by contrasting Qutb's position on the
role of man in the development of a socio-moral order and that
of Al-Afghani. In "The benefits of philosophy," Al-Afghani
wrote: "[m]an, after achieving some comfort in his life, turns
his attention toward his soul. He realizes that perfection of
his livelihood and the sources of his bodily comfort, when
accompanied by the corruption of manners and evil internal

habits, is pure deficiency. Therefore, it was through philosophy that virtuous characteristics were distinguished from vicious habits, so that spiritual perfection might be achieved through man's refinement and purification. *Man invented the art of the rectification of morals (tahdiib al-akhlaaq) in order to control his soul and safeguard the holy virtues in it. Once reason had arranged for the welfare of the body and its livelihood, and for the rectification and straightening of manners, reason directed its thoughts toward itself, seeking its own anticipated perfection, true life, eternal happiness, and intellectual pleasures.*"[302] (my emphasis) It is this "reason" which "sought the causes of laws and the reasons for legislation. Making the universe the object of its thought and consideration, it reflected on and penetrated, in both a general and particular fashion, the universe's origin, source, and material, its accidents and incidents, and its causes and effects."[303] Ironically, Qutb employs similar words, but instead of "reason", Qutb points to the Qur'an: "the Qur'an explained to man the secret of his existence and the secret of the universe surrounding him. It told him who he is, where he has come from, for what purpose and where he will go in the end."[t-39] On may be tempted to argue that perhaps Al-Afghani's focus lay on the physical explanation of the world rather than moral or spiritual understanding. But this thesis can be quickly dismissed if we note the following from Al-Afghani's "Lecture on teaching and learning": "It is philosophy," Al-Afghani wrote in "Lecture on teaching and learning," "that makes man understandable to man, explains human nobility, and shows man the proper road."[304] Even more explicitly, he says later that "[t]he science of principles consists of the philosophy of the *sharii'ah*, or *philosophy of law*. In it are explained the truth regarding right and wrong, benefit and loss, and the causes for the promulgation of laws. Certainly, a person who studies this science should be capable

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[302] Keddie (1983, p. 111).
[303] ibid., p. 112.
[304] ibid., p. 105.

of establishing laws and enforcing civilization." [305]   We are indeed a world away from Qutb's unyielding hostility for *jaahilii* knowledge and methodology that in his view infringe upon divine *haakimiyyah*.

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[305] ibid., pp. 106-7.

Chapter Six

Critical remarks and conclusions

Our aim so far has been to present Qutb's writings in the most coherent light. We have purposely imposed on top of Qutb's discourse an explanatory paradigm that casts Qutb's arguments in sharp relief. Our narrative has been guided by the proposition that Qutb's ontological conceptions, his theory of knowledge, and his political positions and strategies are intimately related to one another and interdependent and together form a cogent proposal for an "Islamic solution". In the first two chapters we examined some fundamental concepts in Qutb's ontology: his views on man and divinity while in chapters three and four we focused on Qutb's theory of knowledge: we examined first his conception of "human knowledge" -- i.e., knowledge that, in Qutb's view, fell within the purview of human *khilaafaah* mission -- and then his conception of "divine knowledge" — i.e., knowledge that, Qutb insists, may not be attained by man but only by God. We have throughout our presentation pointed to the political subtext informing Qutb's ontology and epistemology, stressing the important theme in Qutb's discourse of always directing abstract theory and ideas towards politically involved action. We have also purposely avoided taking Qutb to task on his assumptions and definitions. Instead, our task so far has been to shed light on those assumptions and to delineate the relationships between the various fundamental defining concepts that Qutb mobilizes in his presentation.

In this chapter, our goal is to critically highlight some important tensions in argument that run through Sayyid Qutb's Islamist discourse. As we said in our introductory chapter, in doing this our aim is not to simply point to "failures in thought" in Sayyid Qutb's discourse. We take as another starting point in

our analysis that seeming "failures in thought" are in reality highly informative sources of insight into the complexity of an author's intellectual and material contexts of writing.   In keeping with our strategy of "making the author's arguments even more cogent" (to paraphrase Gadamer), we shall attempt, wherever possible, to propose plausible Qutbian rebuttals to formulated criticism in the light of tensions and contradictions we might have detected in Qutb's propositions.   By "plausible Qutbian rebuttals", we simply mean bringing to bear in our examination of a seeming tension or contradiction a constructive interpretation of the structure of Qutb's discourse and the main arguments we have examined so far.   This we do since we take seriously the proposition from Habermas that "[t]he interpreter cannot understand the semantic content of a text if he is not in a position to present to himself the reasons that the author might have been able to adduce in defense of his utterances under suitable conditions." [306] It is also in this spirit that we examine criticism of Qutb by other authors.   Wherever possible, we will also subject such criticism to an imaginative "Qutbian rebuttal".   Of course, we shall throughout maintain a critical distance from such rebuttals. It is not in the spirit of apology that we shall try to counter criticism of Qutb, but in the spirit of pushing as far as possible our understanding of his highly complex worldview.

A central theme in Sayyid Qutb's Islamist discourse is the proposition that life conceptions are comprehensive worldviews that touch on all aspects of reality. Whether Islamic or *jaahilii*, life conceptions, in Qutb's view, inform the structure of society, its culture, its ethics, its political philosophy, its economy and the distribution of wealth within it, and the nature of knowledge it generates.   The Islamic conception (*tasawwur*) -- the only divinely sanctioned conception, and therefore the only one in absolute harmony with creation -- fundamentally rests on the premise that final sovereignty (*haakimiyyah*) belongs to Allah.

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[306] Habermas (1981, p. 132).

Once the premise of divine *haakimiyyah* is accepted as a given and observed in action, Qutb argues, an egalitarian society will naturally emerge, where the power of rulers is kept in check and where man never presumes to transgress into the well-circumscribed realm of divinity. Qutb's comprehensive view of life conceptions together with his premise of divine *haakimiyyah* give shape to three important dimensions in his discourse: (1) the Islamic, by virtue of the uniqueness of Allah, is also unique, (2) as a result of Islam's uniqueness, the Islamic and the *jaahilii* are mutually exclusive and cannot be mingled with one another, and (3) by virtue of the sharp distinction between the human and the divine, the transition from *jaahiliyyah* to the Islamic order can be successfully carried out neither gradually nor through persuasion, but only through an abrupt confrontation with the prevailing *jaahilii* order.

The centrality of the comprehensive character of Islam dates since Qutb's early Islamic works. In The battle between Islam and capitalism (1951), Qutb states that "Islam did not appear to isolate itself in mosques, or to dwell only in people's heart and conscience, but rather to rule and regulate life, and to infuse society with its life-conception, and accomplish this not merely through preaching and guidance (*al wi'dh wa al-'irshad*), but with legislation and organization (*al-tashrii' wa al-tandhiim*)."[m55] In that same work, Qutb also writes that "the state must rule Islamically [and its laws] must order how people relate to one another... [how] citizens interact with the state, and how the state is to deal with its constituency"; it must be the basis of "criminal and civil laws, the laws of commerce, and any regulations that together define the nature of the society and give it its particular character."[m60] In Universal peace and Islam (1951), Qutb writes that "Islam is comprehensive and covers all aspects of life just as capillaries and nerves direct themselves to all parts of the body"[u3]; in a later work, This Religion of Islam (1960), Qutb writes that the "principles, ideas, values and criteria" established by the new religion "embraced every sector of human

life." On the one hand, "they embraced the human concept of God, and the relation of humanity to Him; the human concept of existence, of the purpose of existence, its general place and function in the universe," but at the same time, "[t]hey dealt too with political, social and economic rights and duties, systems, situations and relationships that connect together these rights and duties."[h40] In the more self-consciously theoretical work, <u>The Islamic Concept</u> (1962), Qutb devotes a whole chapter to the "comprehensiveness" (*shumuul*) of the Islamic conception of life. The Islamic concept informs "people about their Lord", Qutb writes, about "His Person" and "His glorious attributes", and about "what pertains to him alone as distinct from what pertains to His creation."[ke91] It also informs "[them] concerning the nature of the universe in which they live, and its properties, and its connection with the Creator,"[ke95] and "tells [them] about life and the living, informing them concerning their respective sources."[ke98] In the later, more radical <u>Milestones</u> (1964), Qutb uses the traditional term "*sharii'ah*" in the sense of his more innovative "*tasawwur*". *Sharii'ah*, Qutb writes, must "[include] the principles of administration, its system and its modes."[t200] *Sharii'ah* becomes in Qutb's writings a dynamic system of law and a paradigm of life, rather than a static, frozen body of elaborated injunctions; the *sharii'ah* that Qutb has in mind by the writing of <u>Milestones</u> is an "active" set of "principles", a "system" with "modes", capable of shaping reality in the fashion of a concrete, living Islamic order.

As we have already noted, for all his adamant insistence on the absolute "comprehensiveness" of the Islamic conception, Qutb does however many times hedge on the supposed absolute "comprehensiveness" of the Islamic conception. In <u>The battle between Islam and capitalism</u> (1951), by way of refuting the claim that Islam could lead to a worldly dictatorship by the clergy, Qutb cites the example of the Prophet and "his habit" of consulting with the people and deferring to their advice on certain issues: "In worldly matters, the Prophet granted them freedom of opinion

and action, since they are best familiar with their own affairs."
And by "worldly matters" Qutb appears to refer to whatever has "no
bearing on *sharii'ah* or society, but pertains to such fields as
warfare, agriculture, the protection of fruits, and so forth, that
is, what we may nowadays call the pure and the applied
sciences."[m72] In the early The battle between Islam and
capitalism (1951), Qutb's hedge extends even to social questions
and issues that touch on the manner of worship, or on anything that
deals with the human soul and intellect, as long as such questions
have not been explicitly prohibited or permitted through Qur'anic
text (*nass*). [m81] By the time of Milestones, Qutb has given up
his relatively liberal view of The battle that there do exist
social questions that may be tackled without divine guidance.
Nevertheless, Qutb does not altogether abandon the proposition that
there exist areas of life that Islam does not inform. The *hadiith*
"You know best the affairs of your business" is cited by Qutb, as
previously, to support this position.

     In Milestones, Qutb stipulates that one exception to Islam's
absolute sovereignty over all aspects of life may be the
acquisition of "worldly" knowledge: "A Muslim can go to a Muslim
or to a non-Muslim to learn abstract sciences such as chemistry,
physics, biology... technology, military arts and similar sciences
and arts."[t203] Qutb's otherwise unyielding insistence that the
Islamic "vanguard" never compromise with the surrounding
jahiliyyah, not only on the substance of the "Islamic conception"
but even on questions of the strategy of fighting this *jaahiliyyah*,
is clearly weakened. Matters of natural science are "not related
to the principles of law, the rules and regulations which order the
lives of individuals and groups, nor are they related to morals,
manners, traditions... which give society its shape and form,"
there is therefore "no danger that a Muslim [learn] these sciences
from a non-Muslim."[t204]

     Qutb's hedge on the absolute comprehensiveness of Islam
manifests itself along many other important dimensions.   One of

Qutb's most basic propositions -- a proposition with great consequence to his political strategy -- is the notion that Islam's downfall resulted from the mingling of "foreign" notions with the "pure" Islamic conception. Given that conceptions are comprehensive worldviews, it follows that by importing "foreign" notions, the Islamic conception as a whole is compromised, while the "foreign" world-conception as a whole is in effect being appropriated. Qutb is consistent throughout his work in asserting that by borrowing discrete ideas from other world-conceptions, Muslims are unwittingly appropriating whole systems, and thereby dismantling their own indigenous Islamic conception.   However, it is important to point out that Qutb himself -- at least before Milestones -- clearly does not seem to view "foreign" ideas and conceptions as potentially contaminating to *his* project of articulating the essence of the Islamic conception. For example, the author Qutb quotes most extensively is the French Alexis Carrel, with whose ideas and observations Qutb seems to have been greatly impressed. Qutb of course always concludes his long quotes of Carrel -- which at times span several uninterrupted pages -- by stating that although he shares his observations, he (Qutb) rejects Carrel's conclusions: Qutb agrees with Carrel that man is a complex creature and that the science of man has revealed very little, but rejects Carrel's proposition that the solution tp modern man's problems lies in the quest of more knowledge. But it is nevertheless striking to read Qutb on the one hand categorically denouncing any mingling of "foreign" notions with the pure Islamic conception, and at the same time show little hesitation in invoking the works of non-Muslims in a clear attempt to give greater weight to his own propositions.

    Qutb also fails to maintain his all-or-nothing principle when the converse scenario of *jaahiliyyah* borrowing form the Islamic conception is examined: did Europeans borrow from the Islamic conception? And if so, why did they not unwittingly borrow the Islamic conception as a whole and in the process dismantle their own indigenous conceptions? In Islam and the problems of

<u>civilization</u> (1962), Qutb notes that "when [experimental science] was acquired by Europe, it was not acquired with its underlying philosophical roots, but was rather transferred as technique, practical science, and method (*ʻulum wa turuq fanniyyah wa manaahij tajriibiyyah*)." [i111] Islam's "realistic humanism" (*ruuh al islaam al-waaqiʻiyyah al-insaaniyyah*) enjoined the exploitation of the earth's bounty by man, and it was within this conception that placed man at the center of earthly material exploration that the scientific method evolved. By contrast, the Europeans confined themselves to merely learning the methods and the techniques of the sciences and neglected to understand the fundamental principle that originally inspired them: that these methods are tools, that they are the fruit of human exertion and that they exist to serve man and to better his lot on this earth. As a result, they disfigured the original humanistically oriented science and developed a new science that began to "stifle [man's] core characteristics that make him a special, privileged creature." [i111-112] In other words, Europeans were able to borrow the fruits of the Islamic conception: technique and knowledge about the material world, without borrowing the underlying Islamic conception.

The latter proposition, although in conflict with Qutb's pronouncements on the comprehensive nature of world-conceptions, is however well in line with another set of important pronouncements articulated by Qutb: the world of man and the world of God are fundamentally different. By the time of <u>Milestones</u>, as we saw earlier, Qutb adopts the position that Muslims can indeed borrow from non-Muslims what pertains exclusively to the world of man without necessarily risking the wholesale appropriation of the underlying host world-conception. The tension between a comprehensive outlook of world-conceptions and a slowly creeping dualism gradually intensifies throughout Qutb's works to reach its climax with <u>Milestones</u>. In <u>Social justice</u>, society is viewed as a system, and Qutb goes to great lengths treating its many interrelated dimensions within a comprehensive framework: its economy, its politics, its educational institutions and its

culture. By the writing of <u>Milestones</u>, society is reduced to a
collection of believing individuals united and informed by a world-
conception.   Each member of the believing community -- i.e., the
"truly" Islamic society -- is a discrete unit, a fully conscious
being with an immutable nature, a will and the freedom to believe
and to act according to the adopted beliefs. We saw that it is
important for Qutb to stipulate a discrete conception of the
individual: the whole of his strategy of reform rests on the
reality of a human consciousness that can be reached and touched by
the Word. But by the same token, it is equally clear that Qutb
insists that the acquisition of belief cannot be achieved
discretely: to acquire true belief the individual believer must
live in a *community* of believers. Belief is not an abstract idea
but an existential outlook that develops through a dialectical
interaction of the divine word with everyday *social* life.

One way to reduce the tension between Qutb's discrete view of
man and his organic conception of society is to note that the two
mutually conflicting conceptions play different roles within Qutb's
discourse. When Qutb is articulating his vision of an Islamic
revolution, Qutb talks about man the discrete being: radical change
of an existing system will take place only when *individual* members
of that system reject the creed in which they believe and adopt
another creed. In the post- *jaahilii* system, on the other hand,
when the revolution has been successfully carried out, society is
viewed principally as an organic entity: society is not merely a
collection of individual believers, but a living world-conception.
Leonard Binder is correct in noting that "Qutb does not deny the
importance of Islamic government and law, but he puts far less
emphasis on the organization of the Islamic state than he does on
opposition to the un-Islamic state." [307] Indeed, Qutb hardly goes
into any detail on the nature of Islamic governance beyond pointing
to the exemplary conduct of Sunni Islam's heroes (e.g., Abu-Bakr,
'Umar) . However, it would not be necessarily correct to draw from

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[307] Binder (1988, p. 177).

Qutb's silence on the details of the post- *jaahilii* political order the conclusion that Qutb holds that such an order is self-sustaining and does not need structured governance. Issa Boullata is only partially correct when he states that "it is clear that [Sayyid Qutb's] thought is highly idealistic. It does not recognize that although an individual knows his duty, he may not necessarily perform it -- even if he is continuously exhorted." [308] Qutb does spend little time outlining a mechanism of enforcement and instead places his focus on the narrower task of fighting jaahiliyyah as a first step towards installing the Islamic order. But Boullata misses the point when he writes that "although an individual knows his duty, he may not necessarily perform it". It is not on "knowing" that Qutb rests his philosophy of the virtuous society, but on "believing" — i.e., on the visceral internalization of a conception that gives life to a structural material context and an existential worldview that together compel man to act in the "right way": that is why Qutb dwells on the "Islamic conception". Man is not a discrete "knower", but a discrete "*believer*" deeply shaped by the conception within which he has been raised.

Binder notes that in Qutb's discourse, "there is an element of individualism, which, when linked to Qutb's theory of human freedom as based on divine sovereignty, tends towards an anarchy of true believers. In a community of true believers there is no need of earthly laws, regulations, and devices of enforcement." [309] However, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Qutb does talk about a society governed by "Islamic law". Even in <u>Milestones</u>, where Qutb's focus is on toppling the *jaahilii* order, we find Qutb stating that "[t]he *Sharii'ah* includes the principles of administration, its system and its modes."[t200] Sharough Akhavi, explaining the position of the Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Guide, Hudhaybi, a few years after Qutb's execution, writes: "[s]aying he has not found the term *haakimiyyah* in either the Qur'an or the sunna, Hudhaybi stresses

[308] Boullata (1990, p. 61).
[309] Binder (1988, p. 177).

that he has no trouble with the idea that to Allah accrues all
power in the universe -- all Muslims must avow this. But he
objects to the idea of Qutb and his followers that this principle
of Allah's absolute power means that human beings cannot make any
laws for the regulation of society. Allah has given human beings
the ability to write and implement laws: 'truly, Almighty Allah has
left us enormous leeway in the affairs of the world.'" [310] To be
sure, Qutb indeed does stress the paramount centrality of divine
haakimiyyah. But as we have argued already, and will argue again
shortly, the meaning of "divine *haakimiyyah*" should be understood
in Qutb's discourse within his larger program of human
emancipation. Indeed, the *sharii'ah* that Qutb has in mind is a
dynamic system of law and a paradigm of life, rather than a static,
frozen body of elaborated injunctions; the *sharii'ah* that Qutb
writes about in Milestones is an "active" set of "principles", a
"system" with "modes", capable of shaping reality in the fashion of
a concrete, living Islamic order. Qutb does not necessarily seem
to hold that the Islamic virtuous community is an "anarchy of true
believers" or a community of believers bereft of the power to
legislate by virtue of divinity's monopoly over sovereignty.

By the same token, it is also clear that Qutb does not view
non-Islamic societies as merely a collection of misguided non-
believers. Qutb makes it clear that he views *jaahilii* society also
as an organic entity. *Jaahiliyyah* will fight and resist change,
Qutb asserts in Milestones: "History tells us that the *jaahilii*
society chooses to fight and not to make peace, attacking the
vanguard of Islam at its very inception, whether it be a few
individuals or whether it be groups, and even after this vanguard
has become a well-established community."[t147] *Jaahiliyyah* is a
living entity that must be confronted, and not merely a state of
unbelief, and in the struggle to abolish it, Muslims should strive
to "attain sufficient power to confront the existing *jaahilii*
society. This power must be at all levels; that is to say, the

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[310] Akhavi (1997, p. 399, note 47).

power of belief and concept, the power of training and moral
character, the power to organize and sustain a community, and such
physical power as is necessary, if not to dominate, at least to
hold oneself against the onslaught of the *jaahilii* society."[t147]
The last sentence captures well the tensions between Qutb's
conceptions of the individual and his conceptions of the community.
The "power of belief and concept" and "the power of training and
moral character" pertain the individual, while "such physical power
as is necessary, if not to dominate, at least to hold oneself
against the onslaught of the *jaahilii* society" concern society.

The following question then arises: how does Qutb mutually
reconcile: (1) a conception of man as a discrete, believing entity,
(2) a conception of the *jaahilii*, i.e., the pre-Islamic, society as
an organic entity, and (3) a conception of the Islamic, i.e., the
post-*jaahilii*, society as an organic entity? The short answer is
that Qutb never satisfactorily effects such a reconciliation. The
individual member of society is at the same time a discrete, extra-
social entity, and an integral part, if not the product, of the
society within which he or she lives. Qutb's way out is to
stipulate the existence of primordial *fitrah*, i.e., human nature.
Qutb reverts to the discrete, extra-social human entity when he is
arguing that the basic needs of *fitrah* have been violated. The
individual will revolt -- or at least will become predisposed to
revolt -- against his or her social context when primordial *fitrah*
is neglected and its needs frustrated. *Jaahilii* society, like the
"truly" Islamic community, is an organic entity; but while the
Islamic order respects human *fitrah*, *jaahiliyyah* violates it, thus
driving members of the *jaahilii* society to revolt against it.

Fitrah, however, can play its salutary role in Qutb's
discourse only if the stipulation is maintained that the nature of
fitrah is a pure divine creation -- i.e., man and history have
nothing to contribute to its making. First, by virtue of its
divine origin, *fitrah* is absolutely good: man is essentially and
naturally virtuous. Kenneth Cragg writes that "Qutb gives

indications in many places of his keen awareness of how perverse humankind can be. His sense of sinfulness in the world leads him back to a reinforced determination about the political agency when it ought to have caused him to suspect and distrust it." [311] Cragg is on the mark if by "awareness of how perverse humankind can be" he means the realization on Qutb's part that *fitrah* can be overwhelmed and suppressed. Such is the case, Qutb seems to believe, as soon as divine *haakimiyyah* is challenged and compromised. But Cragg's puzzlement over Qutb's "reinforced determination about the political agency when it ought to have caused him to suspect and distrust it" indicates that Cragg imputes to Qutb the belief that humankind's perversion is essential -- or at least, manifestly unavoidable. But if we take as given that Qutb views humankind as essentially good, and that the "sinfulness in the world" is a result of transgression by man into the realm of *haakimiyyah*, we find little that is surprising in Qutb' turn to political agency: action, guided by pure *fitrah*, is in fact, in Qutb's eyes, the only way to salvation on earth. [312]

Secondly, by virtue of its divine origin, *fitrah* cannot be subject to the whims of contingency. It is crucial for the coherence of Qutb's argument that human *fitrah* not vary from one social context to the next, otherwise, human *fitrah* itself becomes open to the influences of *jaahiliyyah*, hence inverting the dependency relation upon which Qutb builds his arguments. Qutb needs to preclude the possibility of *jaahiliyyah* influencing human

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[311] Cragg (1985, p. 62).

[312] Olivier Roy, in the same vein, writes that "It is in the most extremist Egyptian group, *Takfiir w al-hijrah*, which takes the Islamists ideas of Sayyid Qutb to their full extension, that the abandonment of politics can be seen in the idea of the hegira, retreat from the world, *hijra* (even though the group didn't give itself this name)", Roy (1994, p. 79). Roy fails to note that, first, the "retreat" that Qutb preached was essentially a "spiritual" and "conceptual" retreat, i.e., as Qutb clearly indicates many times in Milestones, the retreat of the "vanguard" was to be from the *jaahilii tasawwur*, translated in real life from an avoidance of the "practices" of *jaahilii* society, and not from the *jaahilii* society itself. So, it is not clear what Roy means by "[taking] the ideas of Sayyid Qutb to their full extent." Second, Roy fails to mention that the *hijra*, whether in the sense used by *Takfiir wa al-hijrah* or by Sayyid Qutb, is not a once-and-for-all communal *abandonment* of the old society by those who refuse to live within what they deem to be *jaahiliyyah*, but a "strategic" retreat; the episode of the Prophet's *hijra* is undeniably the exemplar to which all those who undertake a hijrah, and the Prophet's flight from Mecca was indeed strategic — or, more accurately and more importantly, it has come to be viewed so within Muslim traditions.

fitrah so that the door is left open to the potential of *fitrah* revolting against *jaahiliyyah*. Ahmad Moussalli misses the point when he views Qutb's assertion that there does exist a universal, unvarying human nature as a failure on Qutb's part to recognize the complexity of the human condition. "The term 'natural'", Moussalli writes, "is not so obvious as Qutb assumes. For the term 'natural' may mean that man feels or thinks he feels as natural. In fact, it can be said that one person's 'needs' are another's 'luxuries'." [313] While Moussalli is indeed justified in questioning Qutb's proposition that there is a universal and unvarying distinction that always holds between what is "natural" and what is not, he fails to fully capture the axiomatic role that *fitrah* plays in Qutb's discourse and the chain of dependency that *fitrah* and other fundamental concepts in Qutb's discourse together form. *Fitrah* for Qutb is a purely divine creation; it is a static, ahistorical dimension of human existence; it reacts to historical contingencies, but is never itself altered by anything historical; the realm of the divine and the human are sharply distinct from each other: man exerts himself within the realm of *khilaafah*, while all that which lies outside *khilaafah* is the prerogative of God. Clearly, to open the door for a varying *fitrah* would lead to a collapse of Qutb's edifice: on what grounds is *jaahiliyyah* going to be judged and dismissed as harmful if the proposition is weakened that a *jaahilii* system is a system that violates a primordial, unvarying human nature? Given Qutb's other important axiom -- that all societies are held together by a comprehensive world-conception -- how is revolution possible if a society's individual members are determined by the *jaahilii* world-conception within which they live -- i.e., if what is "natural" is taught to them by the *jaahilii* world-conception?

A dynamic, historical *fitrah* would seriously threaten another important dimension in Qutb's discourse: the sharp distinction between the human realm and the realm of divinity. If human nature

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[313] Moussalli (1992, p. 91).

is a product of history and society, then the humanities and the social sciences become legitimate epistemological activities in the quest of human salvation and happiness. But, as we saw, Qutb is adamant that man can never attain knowledge of his own condition and his own nature, and that only God has access to such knowledge. To propose otherwise it to challenge God's sovereignty: His *haakimiyyah*. In his insightful study of the successive changes that Sayyid Qutb's Social justice underwent through its five editions between 1949 and 1964, William Shepard detects a substantial shift in Sayyid Qutb's discourse to an increasingly theocentric vocabulary. "[T]he earlier editions [of Social justice]," Shepard writes, "presume [divine guidance] more than they proclaim it, while the later editions and particularly the last, have a number of changes and additions designed to assert and emphasize this point." [314] However, while Shepard is indeed correct to note that Qutb adopts an increasingly God-centered language, one must also observe that Qutb's theocentrism takes shape in conjunction with the increasing predominance of another central theme in Qutb's discourse: the centrality of the human being. Qutb truly inverts the role theocentrism has played in traditional mainstream Sunni Islam: it is not at the expense of human freedom that God occupies center stage, but precisely to emphasize it. At least this is the conscious line that Qutb promotes. There is little room in Qutb's conception of the individual for the traditional notion of *qadar* -- predestination. As we saw in Chapter 2, Qutb crucially insists that man is a free entity, conscious and in possession of a will, active and capable of manipulating his surroundings. Having willed, *ex nihilo*, a fixed, comprehensible natural order, and having also ordained man's freedom, God retires, as it were, from the realm of *khilaafah*, leaving the stage open for human action. By the writing of Milestones, it becomes clear that the theocentrism that Qutb mobilizes is meant to justify action *against* an unjust *status quo* rather than to justify that *status quo*, as the traditional notion

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[314] Shepard (1996, p. xxiv).

of *qdar* often did.   In a word, Qutb's theocentrism is anti-statist
and not anti-humanist.

Qutb's crucial effort to draw a sharp wedge between the realm
of divinity and the realm of humanity is at first glance startling.
"Islamism" -- i.e., the reassertion of Islam as a central source of
guidance in the conduct of life in all of its complex dimensions --
is by definition based on the premise that the sacred and the
mundane are inseparable and that religion is an integral part of
the continuum of life. To draw a clear distinction between the
divine and the mundane, it may seem, could only run counter the
very essence of the "Islamist project".   In the case of Qutb, our
thesis has been that the separation of God and man is aimed
specifically for the purpose of denying the state any claim to
absolute sovereignty over its citizenry. The anti-statist drive
behind Qutb's conception of *jaahiliyyah* and *haakimiyyah* cannot be
overestimated. But we must also stress that Qutb is worlds apart
from the conventional secularist proposition that religion is a
"private" matter between the individual and his Maker. The very
opposite is in fact Qutb's opinion. Religion -- "*diin*" -- as we
have seen, is re-defined by Qutb to mean something akin to
"paradigm".   By the time Qutb writes the <u>Islamic conception</u>, Islam
is presented as a *tasawwur*, a life-conception that informs "all"
aspects of life. The wedge driven between God and man, therefore,
is meant for the purpose of denying the state its absolute
sovereignty over the life the Muslim community, thereby removing
the greatest obstacle that Muslims face -- at least in Qutb's eyes
-- in their effort to fulfill the Islamic order.

Qutb's theocentrism, in short, should be understood
strategically. As Shepard rightly notes, Qutb's "focus is more on
the divinely ordained nature of Islam than on God Himself." [315]
Placing all *haakimiyyah* in the exclusive hands of God and sharply
separating God from man is the two-pronged strategy that Qutb

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[315] ibid., p. xxxii.

mobilizes for the purposes of political emancipation. But it is important to understand that Qutb pursues this strategy with the larger aim of establishing a community invested with the "truly" Islamic conception. Such a virtuous community, however, will take root only gradually, through time and through a dialectic interaction with the surrounding, earthly reality, and ideally with no interference from the state. Guided by an innate *fitrah* -- a divinely ordained *fitrah* crucially inscrutable to man -- the community of believers will gradually evolve into a society informed by the Islamic conception. In this slow evolution, the sacred text -- i.e., the Qur'an -- plays a central role. It is the medium through which man's existential and social concerns can be articulated: the language of the Qur'an and its discourse, Qutb asserts, address *fitrah* as no other man-created science can.   In this quest of the Islamic order, human interference is the cardinal sin. History, as Qutb reads it, is replete with examples of human failure when the divine order was challenged and human ingenuity was mistakenly applied to matters for which it was neither equipped nor prepared. The one exception to humanity's failures is the example of the Original Community of the Prophet: in that brief period of time, humanity was able to witness the glory it was capable of achieving if only it accepted to receive, with true belief, the Word of God and allow that Word to bring back to life the suppressed energies of a primordial *fitrah* always ready to be resuscitated

        What emerges from Qutb, then, is a discourse sustaining a tension between two important dimensions in his argument. The impulse to belief (*'aqiidah*) as we saw in Chapter 2, is stipulated by Qutb as an important characteristic of human nature. Man needs the unknown and the mysterious in his life, as much as he needs to understand and comprehend. In this view, man is a passive receiver of the Word: he contemplates and accepts, but does not challenge. The impulse to action (*harakah*), on the other hand, drives man to act, to challenge, to struggle and to invest his belief in material life.   The question then is: how would Qutb reconcile, on the one

hand, his stipulation for passive belief, and on the other his insistence on an active believer?

One possible answer is to note that in Milestones, *harakah* denotes for Qutb the specialized meaning of a militant *jihaad* against a *jaahiliyyah* that has taken the offensive against any attempts at restoring the Islamic order. Qutb's main focus in Milestones is the pre-Islamic, revolutionary period, where the central aim is the removal of *jaahilii* obstacles. Activity, struggle, and sacrifice are the important virtues of a Muslim during this period. On the other hand, once the revolution has succeeded and the divine, natural conception is allowed to freely take root within the believing community, the believer is expected to accept the Word of God without challenge. As it stands, however, this answer is not satisfactory. Qutb clearly stipulates an active believer even beyond the revolutionary phase. For Qutb, *harakah* is not merely a means for acquiring power, but a *method* for developing and maintaining belief. Belief is sustained and further consolidated by continuously engaging everyday life and the Word into a continuous dialog. Akhavi is right to note that "[a]ction is Qutb's watchword," but he misses the mark when he adds that "the agent that acts is 'Islam'." [316] It is crucial that, at least in the pre-Islamic order phase, the *individual human being* be the agent. Akhavi is also mistaken when he states that "Qutb held that the sacred texts were self-evident, that they are a priori truths that simply need to be invoked and implemented to solve the problems of the Muslims." [317] Indeed, Qutb did hold "that the sacred texts were self-evident", but "self-evidence" for Qutb meant something more complex than merely an immediate and unmediated access to meaning. For Qutb, the meaning of the sacred text should not -- nor could it -- be sought through the specialized techniques of traditional hermeneutics: i.e., the traditional techniques of Qur'anic and *hadiith* exegesis. But by rejecting the mediation of the specialized scholar, Qutb is not asserting the converse proposition

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[316] Akhavi, Sharough (1997, p. 400, note 62).
[317] ibid., p. 378.

that the meaning of the Qur'an is immediately transparent. On the
contrary, Qutb proposes that man can never fully comprehend the
true meaning of the Qur'an -- nor is he meant to fully comprehend
it. What is essential for Qutb is the *activity of engaged
interpretation within daily life*.   Man has no access to "a priori
truths that simply need to be invoked", and it is not to such
discrete set of "truths" that Qutb turns "to solve the problems of
the Muslims". It is indeed startling to read Akhavi assert that
"Qutb is willing to consider the changing nature of Islamic
prescriptions only within the confines of 'abrogation of one text
by another'."[318] The assertion runs counter the very essence of
Qutb's program: Qutb's aim is to promote the establishment of an
"Islamic" social order informed by a comprehensive Islamic
conception that dialectically engages mundane life; it is within
such an Islamic order that Muslims will be able to gradually
formulate solutions to their problems, not through the simple
application of "a priori truths" or through the traditional
exegetical technique of "abrogation of one text by another".

Leonard Binder observes that "although *sharii'ah kawniyyah* is
understood as dynamic, Qutb does fall into the contrary view that
divine creation has the form of fixed laws (*nawaamiis*) of creation,
of which man is part, and to which man must conform by means of the
knowledge gained of such laws from revelation."[319] The tension
between "dynamic *sharii'ah kawniyyah*" and "fixed laws", Binder
further writes, "can be mitigated, if not resolved, by recalling
that Qutb's Islamic phenomenology is based on divine revelation and
creation, and not upon experience in the world. Qutb's praxis
involved reconciling direct (rather than discursive) experience
with the Islamic phenomenology. Hence, movement (*harakah*) involves
the dynamic reconciliation of divine phenomenology and experience
in (what Husserl called) the life-world, through activity which has
meaning in the Islamic sense. The ambiguity that remains turns on
whether Qutb conceived of the *nawaamiis* (norms) of nature as

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[318] ibid., p. 398, n. 42.
[319] Binder (1988, p. 197).

principles of movement or as fixed and unchanging order, and I do not think that the text gives us a decisive answer." [320]

A few aspects of Binder's position need to be carefully examined. First, although we agree with Binder that in Qutb's discourse "divine creation has the form of fixed laws (*nawaamiis*) of creation, of which man is part, and to which man must conform," we cannot fully accept his further assertion that it is "by means of the knowledge gained of such laws from revelation" that man effects his compliance to the fixed divine laws. In matters of divine revelation, Qutb stresses as axiomatic *'aqiidah*, belief, and not "knowledge". For Qutb, man does not *learn* the laws of Islam, or the "fixed laws of creation": he *becomes* a Muslim, i.e., he becomes an active agent that has internalized the Islamic *tasawwur*. Secondly, Binder states that "Qutb's Islamic phenomenology is based on divine revelation and creation, and not upon experience in the world." This clearly flies the face of one the most important assertions in Qutb's discourse: for Qutb, Islamic phenomenology -- in our reading of Qutb, the experience of the phenomenal world through the Islamic conception -- emerges through the dialectical interaction between the Word and the world. If by "based on divine revelation" Binder means that Islamic phenomenology cannot be attained outside of "divine revelation", then he is correct. But it is clear that Binder relegates to a secondary role "experience in the world", when it is obvious that such experience is also, in Qutb's view, a sine qua non for "Islamic phenomenology". Therefore, if we view "Islamic phenomenology" as the synthesis of "divine revelation" and "experience in the world", Binder's statement that "movement (*harakah*) involves the dynamic reconciliation of divine phenomenology and experience in the life-world, through activity which has meaning in the Islamic sense" becomes problematic. "Divine phenomenology" is always implicated within the context of mundane interpretation; *harakah*, in other words, is not concerned with reconciliation -- since reconciliation

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[320] Ibid.

presumes a confrontation between two mutually opposing extreme ideals -- but with the *generation* of meaning, without an a priori grasping of either the Word or the meaning of "experience in the world" outside the Islamic conception. And third, Binder writes that "[t]he ambiguity that remains turns on whether Qutb conceived of the *nawaamiis* (norms) of nature as principles of movement or as fixed and unchanging order, and I do not think that the text gives us a decisive answer." In our view, Qutb does provide an answer -- though not necessarily a satisfactory one. Qutb is not principally concerned with the character of the "*nawaamiis* of nature". When he wishes to stress stability, durability, he turns to human *fitrah*. *Fitrah*, it is true, is defined in conjunction with the larger natural order: *fitrah* and the larger natural order are in perfect harmony with one another. But it is also clear that *fitrah* is more central for Qutb's overall argument: it is of paramount importance that it be fixed and unchanging. By the same token, Qutb is not principally concerned with whether or not the laws of nature are dynamic or static; his main concern is to insist on the active, dynamic *method* of establishing and promoting the Islamic *tasawwur.*

Our criticism of Binder also applies to the following statement from Akhavi: "[a] disjuncture exists between Qutb's insistence on fixed truths and his advocacy that Muslims put at the service of their society the gains in material civilization that have taken place in *jaahilii* society. It is not clear how technological innovation can be made to conform with the fixed truths of the 7th century."[321] Moreover, Akhavi fails to recognize that the important dichotomy for Qutb is not between "fixed" and non-"fixed" truths, but between the realm of God and the realm of man. Qutb may stipulate "fixed truths" in the context of divinity -- although, as we have argued, for Qutb the development of the Islamic conception is dynamic -- but he clearly leaves the epistemological field wide open to "*khilaafah* knowledge" -- i.e.,

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[321] Akhavi (1997, p. 397, n. 31).

knowledge that, in Qutb's view, pertains to the realm legitimately
prescribed to man's vicegerency.

In short, three important axes of tension have been identified
in Qutb's discourse: the tension between the image of man as a
discrete being, with a nature, the capacity and impulse to believe,
and the drive to act, and the image of man as an integral element
in a society held together by a world-conception; the tension
between the stipulation that the gap is wide between the world of
God and the world of man, and the proposition that the divinely
inspired Islamic conception must be injected in mundane living; and
the tension between the assertion that man possesses a fixed *fitrah*
and lives in a universe whose laws are well defined and stable, and
the assertion that the method of bringing the Islamic conception to
life is dynamic.   Our argument has been that although these three
sets of tensions are never satisfactorily resolved by Qutb, their
presence serves as an important source of insight into the nature
of Qutb's discourse: they highlight the complex character of the
issues that Qutb grappled with in his attempt to articulate his
own, highly original interpretation of the "Islamic solution".

Appendix 1: Glossary of Arabic terms

a -

'aalim (pl. *'ulemaa*): scholar, especially in religious matters.

'aqqidah: belief, creed.

'aayah (pl. *'aayaat*): Qur'anic verse.

b -

bay'ah: cereminy of investiture where fealty is pledged to the new leader.

f -

fatwah: an opinion articulated by a 'aalim on Islamic law.

fay': lands acquired by Muslims from non-Muslims without fighting.

faqiih (pl. *fuqahaa'*): Muslim jurist.

fiqh: Muslim jurisprudence.

fitrah: innate nature.

h -

haakimiyyah: sovereignty; a recent neologism, used extensively first by Sayyid Qutb.

hadith: a saying from, or anecdotes about, the prophet Mohammed.

harakah: action, movement.

hijrah: flight of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina on September 24, 622.

hukm: in the Qur'an, usually has the meaning of "judge"; has acquired the meaning of "rule" in the eyes of modern Islamists.

i -

'ibaadaat: acts of worship tha trelate humans directly to God, in contrast to *mu'aamalaat* (see below).

ijmaa': "consensus" of the 'ulema; *'ijmaam'* is generally recognized as one of the bases of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

'ilm: learning, knowledge, science.

imaam: leader in *salaat* prayers; in *shii'ah* Islam, the divinely ordained leader of the whole Muslim *ummah*.

insaan: human being.

insaaniyyah: humanism.

iraadah: will.

isnaad: chain of authority through which the authenticity of a *haddith* is validated.

istihsaan: use of discretionary opinion in cases where strict use of analogy (*qiyaas*) leads to undesirable results.

j -

jaabiriyyah: extreme predestination.

jaahilii: that which is related or pertains to *jaahiliyyah*.

jaahiliyyah: period before the advent of Islam; used by Mawdudi and then Qutb and other Islamists to denote a state of non-Islamic rule.

jihaad: striving to overcome challenges and obstacles; the terms has come to be equated with warfare against unbelievers.

k -

karamaat: miracles.

khaliifah: vicegerent, custodian, deputy; the term is also used to describe successor to Muhammad's leadership of the Muslim *ummah*.

khilaafah: technically "succession", but Qutb uses it with the meaning of vicegerency;

khutbah: sermon given by the *imaam* in the Friday prayer (*salaat*).

kaafir: unbeliever; pl. *kuffaar*.

m -

manhaj: method, program.

maslaha: interest, welfare.

mu'aamalaat: social relations, actions that engage human beings only; see in contrast *'ibaadat*, which refer to relations between man and God.

muftii:religious scholar who has the authority to issue *fatwaa*.

musnad: corpus of *hadiith* compiled by Ahmad Ibn-Hanbal (780-855).

mustadh'af: weakened, poor, oppressed.

n -

naamuus: laws divinely ordained.

nass: explicit Qur'anic text.

nizaam: order, system.

q -

qaanuun: law.

qiyaas: analogy; analogical thinking.

r -

rabbaaniyyah: divinely ordained.

s -

sahiih: well supported in the chain of *isnaad*;

salaat: prayer.

shahaadah: testimony, especially that "There is no God but Allah and the prophet Muhammad is his messenger."

shar', or *sharii'ah*: the divinely ordained law that God has devised for human life.

shii'ah: the second major sect in Islam; the other being the majoritarian *sunni* sect.

shirk: association to the single sovereignty of God, i.e., considering or treating entity other than God as a divinity.

shuurah: consultation between the ruler and his community.

siirah: the Prophet's model of conduct.

sunnah: the example of the Prophet.

sunni: the major sect in Islam; the other major sect being the *shii'ah*.

s -

taaghuut: the oppressor, the usurper of God's sovereignty.

t -

tafssir: the interpretation and explication of Qur'anic text.

takfiir: declaring someone as unbeliever.

talfiiq: the invocation of opinions from various schools in Islamic orthodoxy, rather than the traditional exclusive acceptance of opinions from one school.

taqliid: imitation.

tasawwur: conception; Qutb often uses the term to mean "paradigm" or "world-view".

tawhiid: the assertion of God's unity.

ta'wiil: the esoteric interpretation of Qur'anic text.

thawra: revolution.

tulaqaa': Meccans who did not join the ranks of the Prophet until after the surrender of Mecca.

u -

’ubuudiyyah: submission in servitude to God.

’ulemaa (sing. *’aalim*): official scholars in *fiqh* and *tafsiir*.

ummah: the enture Muslim community.

uluuhiyyah: the quality of being divine.

ustaadh: professor.

w -

waaqi’iyyah: realism.

wijdaan: existence.

z -

zakaat: the compulsory proportion of wealth a Muslim must pay the poor.

Appendix 2: Time Line

The following timeline provides the major events in modern Egyptian political history, modern Islamic reformism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and in the life of Sayyid Qutb.[322]

1517:
> Egypt was Ottoman sovereignty, with local rule de facto exercised until 1803-1805 by Mamluk governors.

1798:
> Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt begins.

1801:
> Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt ends.

1803-05:
> Dynasty of rule by governors (waalii, pasha) begin in Egypt.

1805:
> Muhammad 'Ali rule of Egypt begins.

1830:
> Occupation of Algeria by France.

1838:
> Jamal Al-Diin Al-Afghani born.

1848:
> Muhammad 'Ali pasha, deposed; succeeded by his son, Ibraahiim; succeeded by Abbaas Hilmi.

1849:
> Muhammad 'Abduh born.

1854:
> Sa'iid succeds 'Abbaas as viceroy of Egypt.

1865:
> Muhammad Rasid Ridha born in a village near Tripoli, Lebanon.

1863:
> Isma'iil succeeds Sa'iid.

1866:

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[322] References: Hourani, Albert (1991) <u>Islam in European Thought</u>; Hourani, Albert (1993) <u>A history of the Arab peoples</u>; Kepel, Gilles (1985) <u>Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharao</u>; Keddie, Nikki R. (1983) <u>An Islamic response to imperialism: political and religious writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani</u>; Keddie, Nikki R. (1972) <u>Sayyid Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani: a political biography</u>; Shahin, Emad Eldin (1992) <u>Through Muslim eyes: M. Rashid and the West</u>; Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza (1996) <u>Mawdudi and the making of Islamic revivalism</u>; Badawi, Zaki M. A. (1978) <u>The reformers of Egypt</u>; Fisher, Sydney Nettleton (1969) <u>The Middle East: a history</u>.

Afghani comes to Afghanistan for the first time. He enters into close relations with the military ruler, A'zam Khan, who was to later become Amir.

1867:

Egypt's governor adopts title of *khedive*.

1868:

In Afghanistan, A'zam Khan deposed by his half-brother Shiir 'Ali Khan.

December -- Afghani expelled from Afghanistan.

1869:

Afghani travels to Istanbul.

1870:

Afghani appointed to the reformist official Council on Education.

Afghani gives controversial lecture, equating prophecy with philosophy; Al-Afghani is expelled from Istanbul as a result.

1871:

Afghani travels to Cairo upon the invitation of the politician Riyaad Pasha; 'Abduh becomes a devout student of Al-Afghani.

1875:

The "Eastern crisis". Penetration of European power in the heart of the Ottoman Empire.

1876:

The Anglo-French supervision of Egypt's debt.

1877:

'Abduh finishes his studies and obtains degree of *'aalim*.

1878:

European ministers take office in the government of Nubar Pasha.

Al-Afghani begins to agitate against the British and calls for Egyptian independence.

1879:

Khedive Islmaa'iil deposed by Anglo-French intervention and replaced by his son Tewfiq.

August — Al-Afghani expelled from Egypt; 'Abduh ordered to retire to his village;

Al-Afghani travels to Muslim ruled Hyderbad, in India, where he befriends followers of Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

1880:

'Abduh back to Cairo, appointed by Prime Minister Riaz Pasha to be an editor of the official gazette *waqaa'i' misriyyah*

1881:

Occupation of Tunis by France.

1882:

The *'Urabi* revolt: semi-coup led by col. *'Urabi*. Britain invades Egypt.

'Abduh sentenced to three years in exile; 'Abduh leaves for Beirut.

Egypt under "temporary" British occupation. Pro forma recognition of Ottoman sovereignty recognized.

Al-Afghani leaves India for London.

1883:

Al-Afghani leaves London for Paris.

'Abudh joins Al-Afghani in Paris.

Al-Afghani enters into a journalistic exchange with Ernest Renan.

1884:

Al-Afghani and 'Abduh begin publishing their newpaper, *al-'urwa al-wuthqaa*

'Abudh visits London and enters in contact with Hartington to discuss the situations in Egypt and the Sudan.

1884-5:

Al-Afghani enters into contact with the British Wilfrid Blunt in an attempt to negotiate a resolution of the Egyptian situation.

'Abduh visits Tripoli, Lebanon; Rashid Ridha meets with 'Abudh.

1885:

Fall out between Al-Afghani and Blunt. Al-Afghani travels to Boushehr, in Soutern Persia.

Al-Afghani travels to Tehran, upon the invitation of the Iranian minster of press, on behalf of the Shah.

1887:

Al-Afghani's anti-British feelings alarm the Shah; Al-Afghani is quietly asked to leave Persia; Al-Afghani leaves for Moscow; in Russia Al-Afghani tries to convince the Russians to start a war against the British.

1888:

'Abudh allowed to return to Egypt.

1888-9:

British obtain bank and mining concessions from the Shah. Russians angered by British inflitration into Persia.

1889:

Shah of Persia invites Al-Afghani back to Iran; Al-Afghani travels to Tehran.

1891:

January — Al-Afghani expelled by the Shah for anti-governmental activities.

Mass protests against Tobacco concessions granted by the Shah to the British.

1892:

'Abbaas Hilmii II succeeds Tawfiiq as *khedive*.

Al-Afghani arrives in London.

Sultan Abd Al-Hamid invites Al-Afghani to Istanbul.

Rashid Ridha obtains degree of "Scholar".

'Abduh visits Tripoli, Lebanon; Ridha meets with 'Abudh.

1895:

Al-Afghani secretly meets with the *khedive* of Egypt on a visit of the latter to the Ottoman sultan.

Al-Afghani meets with Mirzaa Rizaa.

1896:

Mirzaa Rizaa assasinates Persian Shah, Naasir A-Diin Shaah. Persian government demands that Al-Afghani be extradited; but the Sultan does not comply.

1897:

Al-Afghani dies of cancer of the chin.

1899:

'Abudh becomes Mufti of Egypt.

1903:

September 25 -- Abu Al-'A'laa Mawdudi is born in Awrangabad, Deccan.

Rashid Ridha visits Tunisia and Algeria.

1905:

Muhammad 'Abduh dies.

Japan defeats Russia.

1906:

The Dinwashi incident.

Hasan Al-Banna born.

September 10 -- Sayyid Qutb is born in the village of *Mushaa*.

1907:

The "Nationalist Party" is formed, led by Mustafa Kamil (1874-1908).

The 'Nation Party' - formed, by Ahmad Lutfu al-Sayyid (1872-1963) and Sa'd Zaghluul.

1908:

Mustafa Kamil, leader of the "Nationalist Party", dies.

1912:

Rashi Ridha founds *daar al-da'wah wa al-irshaad*

Italy conquers Libya.

1914:

December -- Turkey joins Germany and Austria in WWI

Egypt placed under a British protectorate. *Khedive* 'Abbaas Hilmii II deposed; Husayn Kaamil succeds his father as "sultan".

1917:

Sultan Husayn Kaamil dies; Ahmad Fu'aad succeds his brother.

1918:

Mawdudi moves to Binjur with his brother to pursue a career in journalism.

Sa'd Zaghluul petitions the Paris Peace Conference for Egyptian independence.

1920:

1922: Qutb leaves *Mushaa* for Egypt to continue his studies.

Britain unilaterally proclaimed Egypt's independence.

February 28 -- Sultan Ahmad Fu'aad assumes title of "King" Ahmad Fu'aad I.

Rashid Ridha participates in the formation of the *jamaa'at al-raabitah al-sharqiyyah.*

1923:

Constitution of a conservative monarchy is adopted.

1924:

Abolition of the Caliphate by Kamel Ataturk.

1926:

Mawdudi receives certificate to teach religious sciences and becomes a Deobandi *ʾaalim.*

Rashid Ridha attends the Islamic conference in Mecca.

1928: The Muslim Brotherhood is formed by Hasan al-Banna.

1929:

Qutb enters university (*Daar Al-'Uluum*).

1930:

Egypt's constitution is abrogated and a much more conservative constitution is enacted.

1926:

Rashid Ridha attends the Islamic conference in Jerusalem.

1933:

First congress of the Muslim Brotherhood held in Cairo.

Qutb graduates from university (*Daar Al-'uluum*).

1935:

Rashid Ridha dies.

1936:

King Fu'aad Ahmad dies; succeded by his son Faaruuq.

An Anglo-Egyptian treaty affirms Egypt's independence.

1936-39:
The Muslim Brotherhood collects funds for the Arabs of Palestine.

1937-39:
Rapprochement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palace against the Wafd Party.

1939:
Split of the "Youth of Our Lord Muhammad" group, which denounces Al-Banna for his "compromises with" the regime.

WWII starts.

1940:
First contact between Al-Banna and Sadat to free Egypt from British domination.

1941:
Al-Banna banished to Upper E. on British orders.

August — the jamaa'aat-I Islaami is created.

1942:

February -- Wafdist cabinet imposed on the King by British tanks. Sadat arrested for having contacts with Germans.

1943(?):

Formation of the "secret aparatus" of the Muslim Brotherhood.

1944:

End of the Wafdist cabinet.

1945:

February, Egypt declares war against Germany and Japan, thus qualifying to become founding member of the UN.

1946-47:

The government encourages the Muslim Brotherhood in a struggle against the Wafd and the communists.

Violent atmosphere. Many clashes between rival political factions. Anglo-Egyptian negotiations to free Egypt from the terms of the 1936 treaty.

1947:

Internal dissent within the Muslim Brotherhood and the ascent of the "secret Apparatus".

UN votes to partition Palestine.

1948:

January: discovery of arms caches belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Palestine War.

Contacts between Muslim Brotherhood volunteers and officers of the Nasser group.

Qutb publishes Social Justice in Islam.

March: assassination of a judge by the "Secret Apparatus".

April: Muslim Brotherhood volunteers to fight in Palestine against the Zionists.

June-September: Anti-Jewish and anti-Western violence in Cairo.

August — Qutb sent to the US on an "official mission".

November: Evidence of existence of "Secret Apparatus" comes to light.

December: the Muslim Brotherhood banned by premier Nuqrashi on charges of "attempts to overthrow the existing order, terrorism and murder"; steps are taken to suppress it.

December: Riots against Arab-Israeli armistice talks.

1949:

January: Nuqrashi assassinated.

Febrary: Al-Banna assassinated. Salih 'Ashmawi takes over leadership of the dissolved Muslim Brotherhood.

1950:

June: Wafd government in power.

1951:

May: legal reconstitution of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt's government encourages attempts to force the British out by popular resistance.

October: Egypt unilaterally abrogates the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. Clashes with British forces stationed in Egypt.

December: Judge Hasan al-Hudaybi becomes Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, formally replacing al-Banna.

1952:

January: Egypt and British forces clash in *islaa'iliyyah*.

January: Egyptian barrack attacked by British army.

January 16: Cairo ravaged by anti-Western rioting.

January 26: Serious riots break out in Cairo against foreigners ('Black Saturday').

January: Hudaybi condemns riots; contradictions between rank and file and the Supreme Guide.

July 23: Free Officer's coup, led by general Muhhamad Nagib and col. Gamal Abdul-Nasser; King Fu'aad Faaruuq I deposed; King Fu'aad Faaruuq II succeeds his father as nominal King; enthusiastic support for coup by rank and file of the Muslim Brotherhood.

September: Hudaybi rejects offer by Free Officers to bring Muslim Brotherhood into government.

December: 1923 constitution abrogated.

1953:

"Secret Apparatus" escapes the control of the Supreme Guide.

January 16: all political parties abrogated; creation of one-party state; Muslim Brotherhood exempted from dissolution.

June — King Fu'aad Faaruuq Ii deposed; the monarchy is abolished; Egypt becomes the Arab Republic of Egypt.

November: Sanadi, head of "Secret Apparatus", expelled from Muslim Brotherhood.

December: Salih 'Ashmawi and Muhammad al-Ghazali (favorable to Nasser) expelled from Muslim Brotherhood.

1954:

January, Muslim Brotherhood inspired student demonstrations led to clashes; the Muslim Brotherhood is outlawed and its leaders are imprisoned.

February: Nasser-Neguib conflict; Neguib, supported by ex-Brothers, Wafdists, and Communists, is last obstacle to absolute power of Nasser.

Nasser carries out purges of the armed forces, regional and municipal councils, the press, and among politicians.

March: Muslim Brotherhood legally authorized again.

August: violent press campaign against Muslim Brotherhood. Hudhaybi disappears from public eye and goes underground.

Octber 26 -- attempt to assassinate Nasser is reported. Muslim Brotherhood vigorously suppressed.

Six Muslim Brotherhood defendents sentenced to death, among them 'Abd al-Qadir 'Awda; hundreds of militants imprisoned in camps.

December 9 — the six Muslim Brotherhood defendants are hanged.

1955:

Bandung conference held.

The establishment of the Baghdad Pact.

Egypt concludes an arms deal with the Soviet Bloc.

July 13 -- Qutb sentenced to 15 years in jail.

1956:

June: new constitution endorsed by referendum.

US and Britain withdrew their offer of aid and compel the World Bank to do likewise; Egypt reacts by nationalizing the Suez Canal; Britain and France take military action, bombing and invading Egypt's canal zone; Israel simultaneously invades E's Sinai, halting just short of the Suez Canal.

Nov. 1: Egypt severs relations with Britain and France.

1957:

May: 21 Muslim Brotherhood slaughtered in Tura prison.

May: Zaynab al-Ghazali and 'Abd al-Fattah Isma'il meet in Mecca to "relaunch the Muslim Brotherhood ".

1958:

Egypt is called "The United Arab Republic" (until 1971).

1959:

Relations restored to ambassadorial level in 1961.????

1962:

September -- Egypt intervenes militarily in the Yemenese civil war.

Unification of various Islamicist groups around the nucleaus of the reconstructed Muslim Brotherhood. Reading of SQ's <u>Milestones</u>.

1964:

Egypt's army sent to Yemen.

May: Sayyid Qutb and other Muslim Brotherhood members released from prison.

1965:

August 30: Nasser, in Moscow, denounces a "new conspiracy by the Muslim Brotherhood."

August-September -- Repression against Muslim Brotherhood. Sweeping arrests.

Diplomatic relations with West Germany severed in protest against German recognition of, and aid to, Israel.

1966:

Egypt establishes full official relations with a separately independent Syria.

August 29 — Sayyid Qutb hanged with two other of his companions.

1967:

Jun.: 6-day war. Arab countries defeated by Isreal.

June -- Egypt severs diplomatic relations with USA.

1968:

February -- Student demonstrations against those "responsible for the defeat".

November -- Fresh demonstrations. Muslim Brotherhood in Mansura participtate in demonstrations.

1969:

July -- Egypt recognizes East Germany.

1970:

September 28 -- Nasser dies.

1971:

Egypt changes title to: "The Arab Republic of Egypt".

1972:

Relations with Gremany restored.

1973-4:

Relations with US restored.

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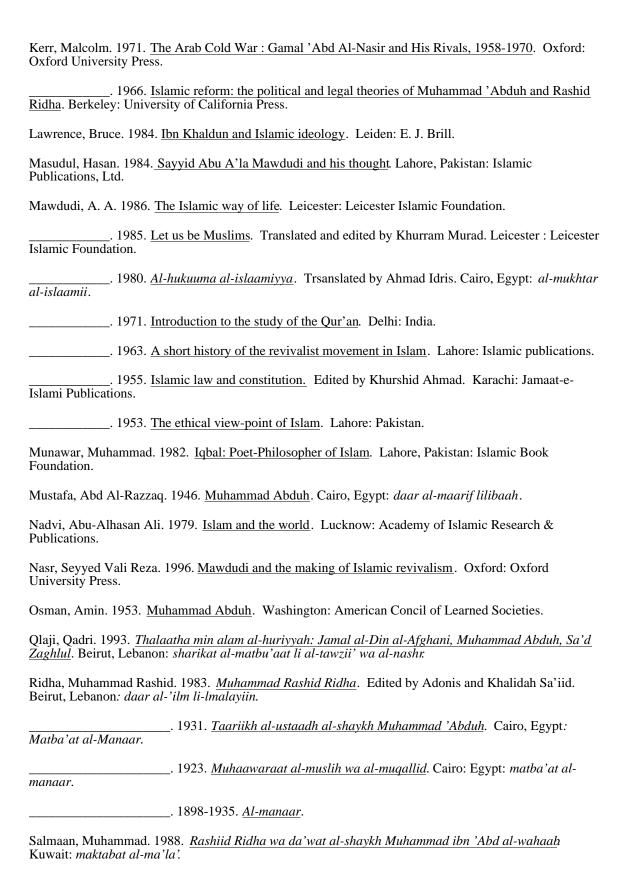
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