

Modernism And Postmodern Thought

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based on: Traditional Islam In The Modern World; Seyyed H Nasr

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1. Definition of Post/-Modernism Versus Tradition

This text discusses the typical mentality of our times: modernism and post-modernism, as seen from the traditional Islamic perspective, using the intellectual method of René Guénon and S H Nasr.

Unlike the predominant opinion in our (post)modern times, where words and concepts have often become depleted of their original meaning - acquiring new quite opposite meanings,^[46] we are of the conviction that concepts (abstract ideas) are receptacles of 'higher', more 'original' meanings in as much as we human beings are aware of and open-minded towards an objective, higher reality.

When meaning is lost and the modern 'diversification' of meaning is one aspect of it, then this world is about to succumb to meaninglessness.

René Guénon's method is to trace concepts back to their etymological roots and to redefine them according to their roots, whenever they have lost their deeper and original meanings. An example for this methodology is the concept of 'tradition' and 'traditional', which we understand differently from the mostly vague suggestions commonly used, which do not explain much in the context of the higher levels of reality.

1.1 Definition of Tradition

Therefore according to how we understand the concept of Tradition from its etymological root: tradere (deliver, transmit) - Tradition has nothing to do with peoples' usages or customs from old, but is understood as *revealed* tradition, that is truths and principles of divine order revealed or unveiled to mankind.^[1]

“Tradition is essentially of "super-human" origin, which is quite exactly also its correct definition and nothing traditional can be qualified as such without the presence of this vital and axial^[2] foundational element, which defines its own authentic character.” DRG

“Nothing which is purely human can be considered traditional, that is why it is wrong - as René Guénon rightly says - to talk about a "philosophic tradition" or a "scientific tradition"... because only the hereditary forms of an uninterrupted chain of transmission (silsilah) deserve the qualification "traditional" for they will guarantee the reality and permanence of the "vital element", ie. that of non-human origin, inside a particular tradition.” DRG

Or to put in another way: Tradition is the light with which the human kind has been endowed with from the beginning of times to the end of it;^[3] it is the light of meaning in an otherwise meaningless void, it is the light of spiritual guidance in a materialistic and hedonistic era, it is the light of the Logos shining upon the contingent entities. This Light is from God, the Light of the heavens and earth.^[4]

In the case of Islam, which is the most recent - and the last of traditions, the concept of tradition, the dīn, is seen as being twofold:

- in its general meaning the transmission of an element of the suprahuman level - the Qur'an,
- and in its specific sense the words and sayings reported from Prophet Muhammad MHMD may Allah bless him and grant him peace, which have

been recorded in the hadith collections together with the entire Islamic religion.

1.2 Definition of Modernism

Our definition of modern and modernism has nothing to do with what may be generally perceived as existing now-a-days (1*) as being very new or 'up-to-date', instead, what is here defined as modern, is that which is cut off from the Divine, the Transcendent, or the 'Supernatural', everything that does not refer to - and is isolated from - "the immutable principles which in reality govern all things and which are made known to man through revelation in its most universal sense. Modernism is thus contrasted with tradition (ad-dīn); the former [including] all that is merely human and now ever more increasingly subhuman, and all that is divorced and cut off from the Divine source. [Additionally] tradition has always accompanied and in fact characterized human existence, whereas modernism is a very recent phenomenon." S H Nasr, TIM98

And because those "principles (are) universal,... all the traditional doctrines are identical in essence". R Guénon, EW216

In other words modernism is:

"The enlightenment-humanist rejection (2*) of tradition and authority in favour of reason and natural science. This is founded upon the assumption of the autonomous individual as the sole source of meaning and truth--the Cartesian cogito."^[5]

1*: "If we are forced to re-define such terms as 'tradition' and 'modernism' ... it is because, [despite the considerable amount of research devoted to the subject by writers such as R. Guénon] there are still readers, including Muslim activists, for whom the distinction between tradition and modernism is not clear. They still identify tradition with customs and modernism with all that is contemporary.

Many Western students of Islam also identify 'modern' with 'advanced', 'developed' and the like, as if the march of time itself guarantees betterment."^[20]

2*: The enlightenment-humanist rejection: In the European process of modernisation God, the Absolute, was falsely relegated to a relative role as aloof from creation, so called Deism, which denies God's rule over His creation;^[6] instead the human being as such was to be celebrated and became the focus for all human motivation. This mostly Protestant mode of consciousness was of course a grave misunderstanding of the role of man and the role of God Himself.

S H Nasr described another characteristic of modernism as follows:

"A second trait of modernism closely related to anthropomorphism is the lack of principles in the metaphysical sense. Human nature is too unstable and turbulent to be able to serve as metaphysical principle for anything. That is why a mode of thinking that is not able to transcend the human level and that remains anthropomorphic cannot but be devoid of principles understood metaphysically..."^[19]

"Only mathematics among the modern sciences may be said to process certain principles in the metaphysical sense: the reason is that mathematics remains despite everything a Platonic science, and its laws discovered by

the human mind continue to reflect metaphysical principles as reason itself cannot but display the fact that it is a reflection even if a dim one, when it seeks to turn upon itself, of the Intellect."^[19]

Additionally we need to add an important observation, recently brought up again, that nationalism is the most important marker of modernity. Defining regions and countries within the narrow limits of ethnicity and religious belonging etc. has become modern normality. However this is a completely new development in the history of mankind and it has had (and still has) very bloody consequences for the people being victimised for it.^[47]

1.3 Definition of Postmodernism

We further understand postmodernism as the recalcitrant, unruly child of modernism. It is a kind modernism driven to its extremes, by its usurping or 'deconstructing' modernism itself and by its arrogant denial of tradition or anything absolute and permanent, which gives it the same bad smell as its parent concept, because it is overtly more rebellious and hateful of anything holy, divine, or absolute.

Postmodernism is the name for the general quality of our time. As it holds that all world views are constructed by historical processes, by culture and religion, postmodernism sees those world views ('tall stories') as a function of power rather than truth.^[7] Truth does not matter.

In other words postmodernism is:

"A rejection of the sovereign autonomous individual (3*) with an emphasis upon anarchic collective, anonymous experience. Collage, diversity, the mystically unrepresentable, Dionysian passion are the foci of attention. Most importantly we see the dissolution of distinctions, the merging of subject and object, self and other. (4*) This is a sarcastic playful parody of western modernity and the 'John Wayne' individual and a radical, anarchist rejection of all attempts to define, reify or re-present the human subject."^[5]

3: Also a rejection of reason as a universal concept.

4: Even the merging of true and false, as there is no more objective reference to Truth.

This emphasis upon "anarchic collective, anonymous experience" has been immensely reinforced by the anonymity and virtuality (i.e. non-reality) of the internet innovation starting at the end of the 20th century.

2. Characteristics of Modernism And Postmodernism

2.1 Modernism & Postmodernism

In modernism it was believed that materiality or the existence of phenomena were everything there is and that knowledge of either is superior to anything else. This philosophy of science is called positivism. Thus positivism is a rejection of metaphysics, as it holds that the "goal of knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena that we experience," which we can observe and measure and "knowledge of anything beyond that, a positivist would hold, is impossible."^[8]

Now-a-days there is also the post-positivist critical realist who "recognises that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable (and who is therefore) critical of our ability to know reality with certainty."^[8]

In some quarters there is still an underlying, dormant longing for the construction or discovery of the Grand Design (4*), meaning a new unity of being, of what reality really is, but a unity which has to do without religion and metaphysics. (2.3ff)

4: Probing the "Grand Design, in posing the greatest questions: How vast is the Universe, the entirety of existence? Was there a beginning? Will there be an end? What is the origin and fate of the Universe?"

However, as Charles Upton has shown^[9] it is always held in postmodernism (as a conviction or belief ?!) that:

- (1) there is no Grand Design,
- (2) truth is plural and ultimately subjective,
- (3) reality is only as it is configured,
- (4) there is nothing out there but chaotic potential.

So much for the quest for truth!

Furthermore, with today's "celebration of diversity", normal logical thinking seems to have evaporated from many a contemporary mind, as modernism and postmodernism even can work together, or so it seems, in the mind of a single individual, confounding it and neutralising any attempt toward a traditional or metaphysical view of reality!^[7] So we can find many absurd examples today where opposing opinions or convictions are held in parallel - at the same time by the same individual!

2.2 Postmodernism In A Nutshell:

- (1) There is no objective truth or reality
therefore => (2)
- (2) reality is constructed
therefore => (3)
- (3) all comprehensible worldviews are oppressive
therefore => (4)
- (4) such worldviews should be deconstructed
therefore => (5)
- (5) Deconstructionism is the progressive pulverization of reality
therefore => (1)

(1) !!

SAC-34

2.3 Higher Levels of Reality Became Eliminated

So the higher levels of reality were eliminated from intellectual research and attention. This happened because reason and rationality were bit by bit isolated from their transcendent and immutable principles. This was a process over several centuries and this tendency became ever more prevalent since the French revolution of 1789 in Western, European thought and imagination.

From now on man himself became the centre point of existence and the "modern" idea claimed that there was nothing higher than human reason and no object of science more dignified to receive scientific attention than what was possible to perceive empirically through the human senses. Typical for this was 'positivism'.

It meant that from now on man was "not able to go further than outward appearances".^[10] Seeing that every science centered around man, however, made his research and therefore his civilization restricted to only one level of being, the materialistic viewpoint.

In postmodernism human rationality and what was left of human intelligence became relativized, relying on the sub-human and the irrational. In this restricted scientific field sense-experience became the only source of knowledge. But man thinks according to what he is; or as Aristotle certainly knew, 'knowledge depends upon the mode of the knower.'"

"A study of the modern concept of man as being 'free' of Heaven, complete master of his own destiny, earth-bound but also master of the earth, oblivious to all eschatological realities, which he has replaced with some future state of perfection in profane historical time [utopia], indifferent if not totally opposed to the world of the Spirit and its demands, and lacking the sense of the sacred, will reveal how futile have been and are the efforts"

...

... to modernise an integrated tradition such as Islam, or even 'harmonizing' Islam and modernism."^[11]

However, in the traditional sciences everything is related to and dependent on the higher levels of reality,^[12] and in consequence there is always a vast field of scientific investigation above those practical applications which are the result of what modern man usually depicts as science.^[13]

This was shown for example by Imam Al-Ghazali raDiy-Allahu-anhu.gif, who in his Ihya 900 years ago, described the "only intellectually rigorous escape from the trap of postmodernity."

He and his school taught that "no universal statements about the world or the human condition can be reached by purely ratiocinative or inductive methods, because these cannot transcend the material context of the world in which they are framed."^[14]

2.4 The Lack of Principles

Secondly has the lack of principles led human civilization into a very unsteady - to say the least - or volatile situation of ever new trends and ideas in all realms of life, not only in natural science, but also in politics,

economics, sociology and of course in the emergence of new or not so new religious trends such as the many forms of "New Age".

These are the manifestations of the great confusion of our time, which are not dealt here, but which everyone can see with his own eyes.

Instead of presenting the means for calming man's egotism (nafs) and evil desires this modern superficiality and confusion is leading modern societies into ever greater divisions and to "creating ever greater artificial needs," which cannot be even satisfied in a life of 1000 years.^[15]

2.4.1 The Reduction of Human Nature

When the modern perception of reality had thus been reduced to the material and profane level, it also reduced human nature to its physical and psychological aspects.

However the human soul is not only a psychic entity, but first of all a spiritual one, which is its principal aspect. This is according to the traditional teaching of all world religions and metaphysical doctrines:

Thus man has (not two but) *three* levels of being:

the physical, the psychic or psychological and the spiritual.

The "seat or organ of spirituality" is mentioned in the words of German theologian Meister Eckehart (d.1327):

"There is something in the soul, which is not created and not possible to create (increatedum et increabile); if the whole soul were such, it would be not created and not possible to create; and this is the Intellect (intellectus)."

The disadvantageous modernist 'development' therefore stripped man of his divine, sacred potential. This led to a concept of human nature which is "too unstable, changing and turbulent to be able to serve as the principle for something" or anything at all, because it is grounded on the emotional and often irrational levels of being.

The tendency to reduce human nature can even be observed in some overtly exoteric religious circles - influenced by modernism itself, where there may be lipservice to the Divine, but in practice great focus on moral, behavioural or political issues, neglecting the essential demands of the Divine Law, in respect to inner transformation and spiritual striving.^[16]

2.4.2 Principles Necessary To Transcend Human Level

However, doctrines and principles are necessary to gain meaning from empirical sense-data and to gain meaning is proof of perfection and permanency, while giving up on the quest for meaning leads to ignorance and despair. As one of the ancient savants, Aristotle, declared:

"The things which are most knowable are first principles and causes; for it is through these and from these that other things come to be known, and not these through the particulars which fall under them." AM I.ii.6

Man has therefore to prepare himself for a way of life with a special concern, which is a spiritual way of thinking about and engaging in this world, transcending the materialistic, and (only) psychological levels of understanding, while keeping his highest endeavour in this life the Ultimate Concern, this is God - this is Allah.^[17]

2.4.3 The Validity of the Modern Sciences

Transcending the materialistic and psychologic levels of understanding is neither intended nor envisaged by modern science. It is quite obvious that neither empiricism, nor validification through induction, nor "reliance upon the data of the senses as confirmed by reason, (can) serve as principle in the metaphysical sense."^[18] These scientific methods are valid on their own restricted levels leading to results and applications of the sciences which created them, but they are neither able to answer our existential questions nor improve our normal human condition. ("Normal" - meaning: how man was meant to be, normality as sanity^[1])

What is worse, modern science has with all its inventions brought about a serious disequilibrium in this world - despite its partial benefits - , precisely because of it being divorced from - and its inability of taking account of - the higher principles, even if this may not always have been the intention of the individual scientist.^[21]

2.5 The Theory of Evolution

2.5.1 As Weapons Against Religious Thought

The theory of evolution, being a very pervasive modern theory, has been one of the strongest weapons against religious thought in the West, at first against the Christian faith, later against traditional thought and religious belief in general.

"Our belief in evolution and our worship of progress ... are modernist dogmas which have [in the Western and in the modern world] specifically replaced (among others) Christian charity and hope in Divine Providence." SAC403

Once Darwin "with his half-baked theory of evolution"^[22] had refuted the doctrine of creation; faith in God itself, the Almighty, was shattered and the truth of the Bible ridiculed. The argument of man descending from a (shadowy) ape was later applied against the truth of every Divine Revelation. (see 2.5.3)

2.5.2 As If A Proven Scientific Fact

Not only in the West of the 18th century but globally in the world today the theory of Evolution "is paraded around as if it were a proven scientific fact," and instead of bothering to seek for proofs for this quasi-theory, and after generations of indoctrination - especially by passing years through the educational system - most people have become convinced by and have accepted 'evolution' as an irrefutable truth. But would one dig deeper into the theory of macroevolution^[23], one would swiftly discover those many inconsistencies and assumptions it makes, because the theory is unscientific and because there are no proofs.^[24]

Many contemporary scientists have acknowledged the defects of this theory, but their criticism is not much publicised, and if it is publicised, it has rarely come to the attention of the general public. What remains today as 'contemporary popularized science' is not always what has been refuted by many sincere scientists years ago.^[25]

2.5.3 The Pervasiveness of The Theory of Evolution

The theory of evolution has become pervasive in such a way that its proponents are referring to evolution as a blueprint for human development in general and by transferring the idea of evolution to completely different areas of human thought, such as sociology, history, politics and even the arts.^[26]

So for example in psychology we now have something called 'evolutionary psychology', or 'sociobiology', the latter intending for psychology to "be put on a biological and cultural basis."^[27]

Or the insidious trend - when some personal suffering comes to the open - of getting rid of compassion, thinking that it may "signal to your social-Darwinian competitors, that you are probably not fitted to survive because insufficiently 'evolved.'"^[28]

But psychology is really the knowledge of the soul - of all its levels and functions. Evolutionists are only concerned with its coarse and lowest levels. However, studying monkeys individually or in flock^[29] will not increase our knowledge of the essential qualities of man, much less of any higher states of being by which the human species has been honoured over the rest of creation.^[30]

Thus the theory of evolution has become a pseudo-religion, explaining this and that and almost everything, even the otherwise unexplainable! For its logical absurdity and a survey of the main scientific facts see for example L. Bournoure and D. Dewar.^[31]

2.5.4 Its Most Important Features

Its most important features and 'shortcomings' are that it "refuses to see permanence anywhere, and that (for this theory) the greater somehow 'evolves' from the lesser and (that it) is totally blind to the higher states of being. This in itself is but a result of that loss of principles alluded above."^[32]

Thus is the state of the modern world in which we are living, that in the words of S H Nasr:

"Evolutionism is but a desperate attempt to fill the vacuum created by modern man's 'cutting off' of the 'Hands of God' from His creation and negating any principle above the merely human, which then falls of necessity to the level of the subhuman.

Once the [Transcendent] Principle is forgotten, the world becomes a circle without centre and this experience of the loss of the centre remains an existential reality for anyone who accepts the theses of modernism, whether he be [a Jew], a Christian or a Muslim."^[32]

see also:

Modernized Muslims And Architecture, by S H Nasr

Effects Of Westernization Upon Muslims, by S H Nasr

2.5.5 Man Did Not 'Evolve'

As long as man has lived on this earth he has had a traditional outlook or perspective on life, which is proven by the heritage of mankind, especially by the various holy scriptures. In those times past he put his trust on the Higher Being, God, Allah and lived under His protection and guidance. In normal circumstances, man was neither just an individual with a mind but

without a heart, nor just a heap of molecules in a DNA-string: thank God the human mind is indefinitely more than electrical signals running through nerve-threads.

According to the Islamic tradition, man - as God's viceregent -has a potential for knowing God and to choose what is better and more beautiful in any given situation.

The traditional outlook on life is opposed to the modern or postmodern way of seeing reality, in fact the two are irreconcilable. Man has always been man, he did not have to evolve from some lower being, from an ape or a fish... The idea of bringing out the higher from the lesser is a modern myth, it is both illogical and unscientific!^[33] In the words of Charles Upton:

”The projection of this false myth of progress on biology results in the ideology known as 'evolutionism', the doctrine that the less is the causal origin of the greater, that the higher and more complex life forms, including man, have developed incrementally from simpler forms. The Traditionalists, on the other hand, teach that the advent of new life forms, which the fossil record shows to be more discontinuous than continuous - thus calling Darwin's 'natural selection of random mutations' into serious question - actually represents the descent of matter-organising spiritual archetypes from the higher planes of Being, in response to God's creative word. These 'Platonic Ideas' of species then draw themselves the matter they need in order to construct physical vehicles for their life in space and time.”^[34]

2.6 The Idea of An Earthly Utopia

Nowadays in the age of unhindered individualism and postmodern deconstruction of 'tall stories' and all-encompassing ideas and 'worldviews' and due to the recent disappointments in socio-political engineering (facshism, communism) the ideas of progress and utopia have lost much of their attraction. But while these ideas had to 'retreat' somewhat from the level of political discourse, they still form the imagination of average, individual man and woman. They are still forming their mentality including their ideas of personal accomplishment, seeing that everyone seems to be his own forlorn master in the ungodly endeavour of an earthly paradise.

It can be shown that the idea of continuous human progress (nowadays individual progress) towards some kind of earthly (individualistic) utopia is related to and sustained by the allround theory of evolution.

As in the latter, so for example in technological or today in biogenetic development, it is generally maintained and taken for granted, that man's situation will but improve, that 'things will turn out alright' and 'everything will be fine'. But what if this solely technological progress is combined with social and moral regression and creeping corruption, which is obviously the case?

What if the broken promises by political leaders and technocrats lead to a growing climate of disappointment and despair, when average man has nowhere to turn - not even to consumerism?

What if utopianism is just another vain dream amidst the bleak prospects for man's godless future?

Anti-traditional ideas of an utopia and progress have even penetrated quite a few fundamentalist minds inside the world-religions. This shift of

emphasis toward the materialistic ("das Grobstoffliche") is one of the symptoms of the decadence of time as foretold by the Prophet of Islam .

So it is not surprising, that the greater the loss of true spirituality in a community, the stronger will be the imagination of some kind of earthly paradise.

When analysing recent history in the West it is not difficult to realize the dire consequences which this modernist idea of human progress has had during "the era of democracy and progress" of the 20th century:

This modernist idea has wrought wars and chaos upon the world on an unprecedented scale, and it will regrettably continue doing so.

The price which people have to pay - for turning their back to Tradition - has been very high, and in the case of some recent muslim political experience has "led and still leads to deep social and political upheavals whose goals and methods (are) completely alien to the ethos and aims of traditional Islam."^[35]

2.7 The Loss of The Sense of The Sacred

Finally one more characteristic of modern thought is the loss of the sense of the sacred, which - among all of the symptoms of modern and postmodern thought - is its most devastating consequence. The reduction of intellect to reason and in postmodernism, the abolishment of any universal acceptable concept of reason(!) has made sacred knowledge "inaccessible and to some even meaningless."^[36]

This state of affairs has to be taken into account in any analysis of modern mentality, because without this sense of the sacred, tradition will never be correctly understood.

On top of this has Islam itself been affected - in the minds of some of our contemporaries - by 'the wheel of time', in this case by the modernist concept of "rationality". This has as a consequence tended in some quarters to reduce this wonderful religion (dîn) to only one of its dimensions, namely to outer dimensions of the Sharî'ah and to "divest it of those intellectual weapons which alone can ward off the assaults of modern thought upon its citadel."^[20]

But as Islam is a living tradition lasting to the end of time, it will also avert those modernist attacks. This we know from the authority of our religion.

However, there is no doubt that the intellectual challenges posed by modernism in the form of evolutionism, rationalism, existentialism, agnosticism, individualism, nihilism and the like and by postmodernism with its deconstructionism, can only be answered intellectually, those challenges can neither be confronted juridically nor militarily.

See also: Concerning The Nature of Sacred Knowledge

3. What Prevented Modernism In Islamic Thought

Yes, there is the Divine imperative of using reason, but Islam has never forgotten the restrictions on human reason and has always deeply venerated the principles which transcend human thought. So reason - roughly corresponding to `aql - was always open to higher levels of knowledge, i.e. sacred knowledge and Islamic metaphysics (al-`ilm ilâhiyyah).

In Islam there is no modernism, because there can nothing be more modern, ie new and shining in its light of truth than the Islamic message, because it transcends time.

A utopia, meaning the place which is not anywhere on this earth, or a perfect society in this world of fitna or tribulation is not an Islamic concept, as it disregards the dichotomy and conditions of the two worlds: the perfect state is only to be found with God and in the Here-After. So, what is reminiscent to the idea of a utopia is really the Divine Presence in the dunya (in this life) and in the akhira, the Here-After.^[39]

In the secularised, de-Christianized West however, utopianism sought "to establish a perfect social order by purely human means." Lately (~1990ies) this search for an utopia has found new expressions in feminism, or environmental issues, which can have valid arguments. But this utopianism "disregards the presence of evil in this world in the theological sense and aims at doing without God, as if it were possible to create an order based on goodness but removed from the source of all goodness."^[37]

1st. First of all and in contrast to the profane models of development and ordering of society, Islamic development is always dependant on the Divine, the Master of Creation, Allah (may His Majesty be exalted).

2nd. Secondly, there is no societal or other development of any kind unless there is 'inner development', ie. purification and growth (tazkiyyah) at a personal, spiritual level.^[38]

3rd. Thirdly, the Islamic description of a perfect society is primarily identified with the prophetic period of al-Madina. This is a time in human history, when the Messenger of Allah guided the Muslims to become a growing and self-purifying community (ummah) of faithful (al-muminûn), a community which was centered around the divine message and the living exemplification of it, i.e. the Messenger of Allah .

As there cannot be a better leader and spiritual teacher than the Holy Prophet , there cannot be a better society either, and every future society has to measure up to this pattern.

Or, otherwise, the perfect society in Islam is beyond this earthly plane, it is more a point of reference than a locus for political maneuvering.

So, what prevented - until quite recently - the growth of utopianism in the Islamic sphere is:

- a.) Islamic realism, that on earth imperfection cannot be eliminated,
- b.) The awareness inspired by the Quran and the hadith that there is a deterioration (decadence) in time, i.e. "the gradual loss of perfection in the Islamic community as it moves away from the origin of revelation".

Compare with the authentic hadith: The holy Prophet Muhammad said:

"The best people are those living in my generation, then those coming after them, and then those coming after" (the second generation) and that

c.) Any improvement in society (if not a perfection of it) can only come about with the help of God.^[31]

4. True Science Is Based On The Intellect

In modernism reason is conceived as a purely human activity, cut off from the Transcendant and in postmodernism one is set to deconstruct reason by taking hold of and referring to the irrational levels of the human psyche, whereas in traditional sciences the human mind is understood as being a mirror of the Divine Mind. The picture produced on the mirror is the product of the Picture-maker reflecting Itself on it.

Hence tradition has always held that the organ "and container of knowledge is not the human mind but ultimately the Divine Intellect." Therefore "true science is not based on purely human reason but on the Intellect which belongs to the supra-human level of reality, yet illuminates the human mind."^[40]

"When Descartes uttered, 'I think, therefore I am (cogito ergo sum), he placed his individual awareness of his own limited self as the criterion of existence, for certainly the 'I' in Descartes' assertion was not the Divine 'I' who, through Hallâj, exclaimed, 'I am the Truth' (ana'l Haqq): The Divine 'I' which alone, according to traditional sources has the right to say 'I'. Until Descartes, it was Pure Being, the Being of God, which determined human existence and the various levels of reality. But with Cartesian rationalism, individual human existence became the criterion of reality and also the truth."^[40]

And what could be of more success to earthly man than to link up his intellect to the higher Intellect, which is not of his own and which is unrestricted and independent of place and time.^[41]

See: S H Nasr: < Islam and Modern Science >

5. A More Worthy Source of Knowledge Than Reason

To gain immediate and direct knowledge the man of (Islamic) Tradition transcends human reason and rationality. This can be achieved by applying his intellectual intuition, always in the context of the sacred texts of revelation (nuzûl) and the prophetic guidance (hidâyah).

This intellectual intuition has nothing to do with simple imagination or the kind of "intuition" as it is generally understood, instead it is divinely granted to those worthy of it, "it is immutable and infallible in itself and the only starting point for all development in conformity with the traditional norms"^[42], i.e. it is the indispensable (spiritual) agent to comprehend the truth of the divine principles.

"The Muslim intellectual saw revelation as the primary source of knowledge, not only as the means to learn the laws of morality concerned with the active life. He was also aware of the possibility of man purifying himself until the 'eye of the heart' (ʿayn al-qalb), residing at the centre of his being, would open and enable him to gain direct vision of the supernatural realities. Finally he accepted the power of reason to know, but this reason was always attached to and derived sustenance from revelation on the one hand, and intellectual intuition on the other."^[43]

Other descriptions of the intellectual intuition are: vision, unveiling and wisdom (shuhûd, kashf or dhauq and Hikmah) – which are all the way firmly rooted in the traditional, religious universe of Islamic thought; they are given as a grant from God - Allah, may His Majesty be exalted and it is He Who gives to whom He pleases.

See: Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi, On True Knowledge

6. The Islamic Concept of Man

By following the Quranic revelation and the prophetic pattern of conduct^[44], a Muslim is not only capable of rendering his life in its religious, social, political and economical aspects in harmony with the intention of his Creator, seeking His pleasure, - but he may also gain direct insight into the higher realities.^[45]

This following (of the two above) includes to tread the path of purification of - and introspection into - his soul all the time being led by the Grace of God, as it was shown for man of all ages by the Perfect Man on earth, Prophet Muhammad .

To succeed in both worlds man has to be good and to do good and the source of all goodness is God. At the time of the covenant of the 'alast', before the creation, the souls were aware of and knew God, this is the pristine creation - al-fitrah.

In this life (dunya) man is created to serve and to worship no other than Allah, may His Majesty be exalted, who is his Lord and Sustainer, because it is to Him he will ultimately return.

His worship includes and hinges on his endeavour to purify^[44] his inner self (soul) - by the grace of God - so that it may become a mirror of the Divine Qualities, such as Ar-Rahmân (The All-Compassionate). The fundamentals of the dîn - tradition (or 'religion') are the channels through which he can redress his animal soul - ego (nafs) and finally become the vice-regent of Allah (khalîfah) in this world - this is the true fulfilment of being human.

In the next world (al-âkhirah) man will be created in a state which corresponds to his intentions and actions in the life of the world (dunya), and the judgement is Allah's alone.

This teaching of the Real was valid in the old days of the 'Golden Ages' and this teaching is valid today, be it modernism or post-modernism we live in, until the end of time.

How to live as a believer and as a Muslim in the (post-)modern world, treading the path of pure religion (Islam), upright, seeking Allah Almighty's Good Pleasure only (rid.wân), has to be the main issue - also today.^[45] This spiritual quest includes first of all re-turning to Allah, that is sincere taubah and studying the principles of the dîn in order to implement them in our lives from this day onwards.

See also: S H Nasr The Islamic Conception of Man

7. Living In (Post-) Modernity

To live in this age of (post-) modernity means as above mentioned, to walk the path of pure religion, upright, seeking Allah Almighty's pleasure only. Neither does not mean to be involved in hatred or seeking to reduce Allah's mercy (raHma) towards other human beings, nor to be occupied with minor, marginal issues, but to focus on the fundamentals of the religion; Islam = 5.

Concerning the validity of some 'modern appearances', Nasser Gazi commented on this and said:

This is a difficult question and "one which would be hard to generalise on. It is clear that we cannot go back to the Middle Ages or to convert the world (both East and West) into some traditionally oriented society. What can be done is to try and trace the traditional doctrines back to their metaphysical roots, and thence try and apply them anew. Each aspect of modernism would have to be examined individually in the light of this.

Moreover, it is not the 'modern appearances' which are in question, but that what underlies the appearances that matter. Not everything that is modern is anti-traditional."

What man has lost is immensely much, and what he has gained through the process of modernisation is flimsy in comparison, but to mention a few areas:

- a certain amount of freedom (!) - mostly diverting towards negative individualism and consumerism for the 'fortunate few' in this world;
- the rule of law - even when those man-made laws often discriminate against the poor and downtrodden, and seem to be more a charade than real;
- human rights - f. ex. publicly denouncing inhumane treatment of prisoners, but always ignoring the human responsibilities especially towards the Master of Creation.
- a certain level of freedom of speech - when inside the given frames of what is 'politically correct'; so for example very little criticism of Zionism,
- a certain standard of health care, but which is eroding in the West.

Those Muslims living in the West do well to improve life in society, steering away from nihilism, egotism, materialism and sectarianism - in such a way as shown by the exemplary person in human history - the Prophet of Islam MHMD - who is a mercy for the whole universe for all time.

8. References

Quranreferences:

QR 5-3

Quran: Sura al-Mâidah (5), verse 3:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.

QR 8-53

Quran: Sura al-Anfâl (8), verse 53:

This is because Allah has never changed a favor which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition; and because Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

QR 24-19

Quran: Sura an-Nur (24), verse 19:

Allah knows, while you do not know. UP

QR 34-22

Quran: Sura al-Mulk (34), verse 22:

Say: Call upon those whom you assert besides Allah; they do not control the weight of an atom in the heavens or in the earth nor have they any partnership in either, nor has He among them any one to back (Him) up.

QR 102-7

Quran: Sura at-Takâthur (102), verse 7:

Then you shall most certainly see it with the eye of certainty;

Literature references:

CMW: Crisis of The Modern World; René Guénon / 'Abd al-Wâhid Yahya; some quotes

EW: East and West; René Guénon; some quotes

KS: Knowledge And The Sacred; Seyyed Hossein Nasr; State University of New York Press 1989

SAC: The System of Antichrist; Truth And Falsehood In Postmodernism & New Age; Charles Upton; Sophia Perennis, NY 2001

To order it: www.seriousseekers.com

TIM: Traditional Islam In The Modern World; Seyyed Hossein Nasr;

DRG: Dictionnaire de René Guénon, Jean-Marc Vivenza; Éditions Le Mercure Dauphinois, Grenoble 2005

IPOP: Islamic philosophy from its origin to the present, Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Footnotes:

- 1: An example: What Is Normal And What Normality? Hasan Le Gai Eaton
- 2: axial: i.e. related to the vertical axis, to the heavenly dimensions.
- 3: Tradition is the light for human kind, and in the case of Islam, the Prophet MHMD was named a Light.
- 4: The Verse of the Throne, Ayat al Kursi آية الكرسي Surah al-Baqarah 2: 255
- 5: from The Electronic Labyrinth
- 6: God's creation: We describe Allah in the way that He has described Himself.
- 7: Charles Upton, SAC
- 8: Positivism & Post-Positivism
- 8: From Cosmology: A Cosmic Perspective", no link 20130824
- 9: Charles Upton, SAC33
- 10: EW216
- 11: TIM103
- 12: EW
- 13: Islam and Modern Science, Lecture by S H Nasr
"The historians and philosophers of science in the last twenty [or] thirty years have shown beyond the scepter of doubt that modern science has its own world view. It is not at all value free; nor is it a purely objective science of reality irrespective of the subject you study. It is based upon the imposition of certain categories upon the study of nature, with a remarkable success in the study of certain things, and also a remarkable lack of success [in others], depending on what you are looking at."
- 14: A H Murad
- 15: Instead of curbing those desires, reducing unnecessary needs and leading man towards conditions which would allow for a more contemplative and pious way of life. - The above quote is from CMW92
- 16: see for example:
Modernized Muslims And Architecture, by S H Nasr
Effects Of Westernization Upon Muslims, by S H Nasr
- 17: see also: Is Belief In God Enough?
- 18: TIM
- 20: TIM109
- 21: See for example: Review (of) The Quantum Enigma, by S H Nasr Among other topics on "the false premise of Cartesian dualism and bifurcation according to which reality is divided radically into res cogitans, the knowing subject, and res extensa or the objective world."
- 22: Imran Khan, not traced.
- 23: However the definition of macroevolution vs. microevolution has been changing over time in evolutionary theory: "In evolutionary biology today, macroevolution is used to refer to any evolutionary change at or above the level of species. It means at least the splitting of a species into two or the change of a species over time into another ... but the term is not restricted to those higher levels."
- 24: TIM105
- 25: See also Evolution Deceit, by H Yahya
- 26: The idea of evolution, of Darwinism and the dominance of the stronger were part and parcel of the one of the most pernicious ideologies of the 20th century, Fascism.
- 27: evoyage.com - assumptions
- 28: SAC283
- 29: The Evolution of Prejudice; Scientists see the beginnings of racism in monkeys /// the results support an evolutionary basis for prejudice...
- 30: Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:
{ Surely We have honoured the children of Adam, and carried them on land and sea... }
Sura 17-70; honoured all of mankind.
- 31: quoted in TIM or Evolution Deceit
- 32: TIM106
- 33: Imagine a piece of computer evolving - by accident - from its integrated IC-circuits, from its bits and zeros into the machine which it is - without the mind to design it and

programme it! How much less is this conceivable in the - much more complex - biological domain of life itself!

34: SAC105

35: TIM107 and see also: New Kharijism; Sh. M. Hisham Kabbani or Superficial demonisation of Islam; GFH

36: KS4

37: TIM107

40: TIM100

42: CMW

43: TIM102

44: For following the prophetic pattern of conduct; see: The Principles of Tasawwuf

45: Other texts on this site are meant to provide some waypoints.

46: See also: On Tradition, and Texts On Tradition And "Traditionalism"

47: more: YT: J Stearns & Joshua Landis on Ethnicity and ISIS in Syria

www.alhassanain.org/english