Chapter Three

Sayyid Qutb’s Views on Islamization of Knowledge
SAYYID QUTB’S VIEWS ON ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE:

Sayyid Qutb’s Views on Knowledge reveal a consistent tension between the western epistemology and the truths of Islamic revelation. This may not be surprising. Like many others in the colonized Muslim World, Qutb’s early life was marked by the tension between western influence and Islamic tradition: the growing influence of secular education, liberalism and nationalism in Egyptian life, and the increasing importance of maintaining an indigenous Islamic identity as a bulwark against cultural and political encroachment. Qutb’s early education in Musha, a village in Asyut, upper Egypt exposed him to both Sufi Mysticism and Qur’anic triangle at an early age; then Qutb had both memorized the Qur’an and adopted anti-British nationalist sympathies yet, he was later sent by his father to a ‘modern’ rather than a traditional religious school. After the nationalist revolution of 1919, Qutb studied at Dar-al-ulum, a non-religious teachers training institute.

To Qutb Knowledge is “....complete comprehension and interaction with this comprehension in the depths of soul and conscience which is then followed by action in harmony with them”. In other words, Qutb fetches out “three stages of knowledge. The first stage is the state of mind i.e. comprehension, the second stage is interaction i.e. acceptance by soul and conscience and third the spiritual state”. Qutb rejects all claims of man’s ability to arrive at truth either through the method of reasoning or by taking recourse to Philosophy. According to him reason in all its manifestations and functions i.e. logic, dialectics, and induction or deduction is not a reliable means for attaining certainty. For Qutb the only legitimate function of reason is to serve as a “great and valuable tool” in order to enable us to understand
and enact God's precepts and thus to fulfill the role of God's vicegerent on earth: "This development [of our mind] is connected to man's duty on earth as Allāh's vicegerent and [vicegerency] requires that the creation of man's mind is according to this design because it is the most suitable one for the performance of this role. Man will advance in grasping the laws of matter and exploiting them at the same time that he advances in the knowledge of various aspects of 'man's reality' moving beyond what he had known before. But the secrets of man's existence, the secret of life and death and of his soul, will remain hidden, beyond the scope of his reason because the knowledge of all these things is not necessary for the performance of his basic role". For Qutb reason is the faculty that enables us to think systematically and logically about the parts of the world we can apprehend, that is the realm of practical knowledge, it is also the faculty that enables us to recognize the limits of our own knowledge. In recognizing the limits of reason, we are prepared to acknowledge God's truths as self-evident, as beyond rational proof: "Indeed 'reason' isn't rejected, disregarded or banished from learning through revelation and understanding what it receives; it comprehends what is necessary as well as surrendering to what is beyond its scope. But it can not be the ultimate 'judge'. As long as there is an exact text, the explicit meaning of that text-without any speculation-is the ultimate judge of interpretation. The mind then derives its decisions from the meaning of this explicit text."

Given Qutb's insistence on the limits of human reason, philosophy thus appears both methodologically and epistemologically antagonistic not only to Islām but to the very truths of human existence. Nowhere is this opposition clearer than in modern western philosophy which is distinguished by explicit rather than implicit antagonism to religion. According to him, the result is tantamount to a deification of reason, i.e. the use of reason as a means of
simultaneously expanding and legitimizing the range of human knowledge, thereby discrediting the authority of religious truths: “The hostility of European thought to religion and to the religious approach lies not only in the subjects of study, philosophical systems and schools of thought that were established by European thought, but in the core of this thought, and in the methodology by which it acquires knowledge.” Reason in this way becomes a justification for the completeness of human knowledge. It not only determines how human beings come to know the world but also defines what is worth knowing as that which is knowable to human beings. As a result, Qutb maintains that what is now considered worthwhile knowledge is only the knowledge of worldly phenomena; we have ceased even to acknowledge the unseen world, the source of real truth. The result is a truncated concept of the world.

Whereas *Milestones* reveals Qutb’s outrage at the arrogance of human claims to knowledge and the usurpation of God’s rightful authority, in the ‘*Islamic concept and its characteristics*’ there is a sub-text of ‘pain’ in Qutb’s critique of philosophy. Here Qutb suggests that there is something besides transgression at stake; the ascendance of philosophy also represents a profound loss. For, although humans can not wholly grasp either God’s existence or His plan, the eclipse of religious meaning deprives humanity of the only spark of true knowledge available.

Unlike rationalist philosophy in which the development of nature and existence is reduced to scientific theories of causality, competition and chance, Qutb argues that religious truths (Islamic truths) contain the meanings for which human beings by nature yearn; it answers the important questions in life; Who is man? Where does he come from and why? And where does he go to after this life? Islam also answers all the questions that relate to the existence
and goals of mankind: “The Muslim realizes that his existence on earth is neither unplanned nor transitory; rather, it is foreordained and destined, his path planned, his existence designed with purpose. He has come into being in this world in order to act and work for his own sake and for the sake of others around him—-and he can not show his gratitude to God for the blessing of his existence and his true faith, nor can he hope for liberation from God’s appraisal and punishment, unless he fulfills his positive role as God’s vicegerent on earth”.8

The insistence on the inclusion of the intellectual, spiritual as well as material aspects of life in the definition of knowledge, on the part of Qutb is the result of his belief in the concept of the unity of universe. The universe, according to him, is a unity composed of the visible known and the invisible unknown. Life is a unity of material and spiritual energies whose separation results in imbalance and disturbance. Accordingly if this is what the universe is made of, true knowledge has to include all these aspects, whether spiritual or material. Any system of knowledge that advocates separation or compartmentalization of various aspects of life or emphasizes some aspects at the expense of others is rejected by Qutb. Thus for instance, “distorted Christianity which looks at him (man) only through his spiritual yearning and Communism which looks at him only through his material needs” are rejected by Qutb. He argues that Islām views man as a unity in which spiritual yearnings and material needs are inseparable. What marks the superiority of religion (Islām), according to Qutb is its totality.9

Unlike the distorted Christianity, Islām recognizes man’s material needs and takes it into account in its World-Conception. This theme is articulated by Qutb since writing Social Justice in Islām. In this work Qutb writes that “Islām’s aim is to unite heaven and earth in one world; to join the present
world and the world to come in one faith, to link spirit and body in a single humanity, to correlate worship and work in one life. The Christian rejection of material luxuries is only part of the divine message, and although Islām also teaches that “the needs of life are not permanent under all circumstances, nor do material necessities always outweigh man’s final destiny” nevertheless “at most time’s man must submit to their demands”. 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 nor did He create it for man to neglect it and to check its growth”.

To Qutb, science too is not reliable because of its changing orientations. What was considered to be certain a hundred years back is now rejected as unscientific.

In short, Qutb exudes immense faith in religion and more specifically in the Islāmic revelation as the only reliable source of true knowledge. He challenged those Islāmic thinkers who had sought to reconcile reason and revelation. Mawdudi had insisted that “instead of claiming that Islām is truly reasonable, one should hold that true reason is Islāmic”. Qutb follows Mawdudi’s lead in Milestones thus: “He who feels a need to defend, justify and apologize is not capable of presenting Islām to people. Indeed, he is one who lives in Jāhiliyah, a life that is hollow, full of contradictions, defects and flaws. This is one who in fact, wants to search for justifications for Jāhiliyah he is in. These are the people who attack Islām, forcing some of its adherents—who are ignorant of its true nature—to defend it, as if Islām somehow stood accused, in need of defending itself, like a prisoner on trial”.

Science:

As far as the pure or abstract sciences such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, and physics-----are concerned, one can discern dichotomous views
of Qutb regarding their nature in *Social Justice in Islām* and the *Milestones*. In *Social Justice in Islām*, 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 the culture and elevated above the realm of history. In *Social Justice in Islām*, modern science is perceived by Qutb as primarily the fruit of modern Europe. However, in the *Islāmic Concept and its Characteristic*, in the *Milestones*, in *This Religion of Islām* and, in *Islām the Religion of Future* Qutb insists on the Islāmic origins of science. In *This Religion of Islām* he expresses a strong belief that the impact of the birth of Islām and its subsequent propagation on history of humanity is unparalleled. “This Universal Phenomenon which manifested itself on the planet earth, namely the religion of Islām did not leave unvisited a single aspect of human life, and although its influence may differ in degree of intensity”; it remains a “reality---------not to be doubted that every 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”.\(^5\) The renaissance also owes its existence to the world of Islām, as do “the destruction of the feudal system-----the movement of equality and rights of man which appeared in the *Magna Carta* in England and the French revolution”. But most significantly European civilization owes to Islām the very foundation “on which is based the scientific glory of Europe”, the “experimental method”. Qutb notes, it was through the Universities of Andalusia (Spain) that Europe imported experimental science, a science fundamentally different from the Greek science with which it was familiar.\(^6\) In *Islām the Religion of Future* Qutb writes: “In fact it was Islām, by virtue of its realistic system that initiated the inductive or experimental school which was

\(^{5}\) English great chapter, the charter of English liberties granted by King John in 1215 AD under threat of civil war and reissued with alterations in 1216, 1217 and 1225 AD.
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. The Islamic origin of science is also another old argument that Qutb inherited from the reformist debate. Rashid Rida* (AD 1865-1935) proudly insisted on the Islamic origins of European civilization. “Some fair minded European scholars and intellectuals,” he wrote in his *Al-Manar*, “had admitted that the beginning of modern European civilization had been a consequence of what the Europeans acquired from Islám in Spain at the hands of Ibn-Sina (AD 980-1037)** and his disciples, and during their wars against the Muslims”.18 Earlier Jamal-ad-Din al-Afgani*** (AD 1839-1897) also explicitly articulated within the modern context, the centrality of the Islamic contribution to modern science as Europe and the world had come to know of it.19 To Qutb, Islám was both the historical and essential inspiration of the scientific spirit. Not only does he state that much of the western science originated in Islamic Universities prior to European ascendance but he also regards the pursuit of material progress as a divine command, since such prosperity is a prerequisite for social justice and a condition of human vicegerency. The practical sense in which humans are vicegerents of God is their control over the earth and all its resources or what Qutb also refers to as “managing the affairs of earth”. He argues that the pursuit of such knowledge does not entail a challenge to the fundamental concepts of Islamic belief. Moreover, he argues that indeed all physical sciences lead towards Allah, provided they remain within the bounds of natural experiments and do not attempt philosophical speculations that render human

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* Most prominent disciple of Muhammad Abduhu and one of the most influential scholars and jurists of his generation, best known for his al-Manar, a journal comprising Quranic commentary and opinions on pressing legal, political and social issues of the day
** Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn `Abdul`lah ibn Sina, Persian physician, and the most influential philosopher-scientist among the Muslims
*** One of the most influential reformers of the 19th century commonly viewed as the chief ideologue of Pan Islamism
history and the Universe devoid of divinity. Qutb thus embraces science and technology, provided they are confined to the study and mastery of material world.\textsuperscript{20}

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. 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 \textit{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. Islam also eschews the miraculous and prefers the fostering of belief through mundane exhortation and everyday action. The example of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the “first generation of Muslims” 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”.\textsuperscript{21} 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 itself and its facts”.\textsuperscript{22} For Qutb, it appears crucial to argue for the achievement of the “unique first generation of Muslims”-though unique in the history of mankind, it 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. Qutb’s emphasis on the non-miraculous nature of Islām was motivated by his ultimate argument for an “active Islāmic conception.” It is the very nature of the Islāmic concept, Qutb holds, to encourage and urge the human being to do something positive and productive, because according to the Islāmic concept man is an active agent and not a passive recipient of this earth”. 23 Man is the vicegerent of God on earth and is obligated to discharge the duty with which God has charged him. Commensurate with this position, God the Merciful has given him the power to comprehend the world and manipulate matter and discover the laws of nature he laid down. Further Qutb argues that the realization of Islāmic order rests on the shoulders of the Muslim believer. “Islām is a divinely ordained faith but its 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”. 24 Engaging in the material exploration of the earth is not only necessary for survival, but is a religious obligation that man owes to his Creator. Man’s vicegerency of 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. 25 Qutb reiterates a position already articulated in its essence by Rashid Rida. Rida argued that the acquisition of technical knowledge was a “religious duty”.

90
Preoccupied as he was with the colonial condition of most Muslims in his time, Rida bemoaned the weakness of the 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—that is, waging a *jihad* in the way of Allāh. Rida 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 Islām, and therefore, a means to enable them to carry out their *Jihad* duty. Qutb also perceived the acquisition of science as a means to acquire power; but while Rida’s invocation of the sciences seems to have been motivated 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*.

**Humanities and Social Sciences:**

Qutb is quite explicit in highlighting the non Islāmic or what he considers to be the *Jāhilī* character of the social sciences and humanities. He goes on to list the number of subjects among the social sciences, which are heavily loaded with *Jāhilī* influences in his *Milestones* According to him, “philosophy, the interpretation of history, psychology (except for those observations and experimental results which are not part of anyone’s opinion), ethics, theology and comparative religion, sociology (excluding statistics and observations)—all these sciences have a direction which in the past or present has been influenced by *Jāhilī* beliefs and traditions. That is why all these sciences come into conflict, explicitly or implicitly with the fundamentals of any religion, and especially with Islām.27

It is important to note that Qutb deems unobjectionable statistically based analysis of society. In fact, Qutb himself in many instances in his writings does refer to statistical result of social studies.
Chapter Three

Qutb, writing in a time when “western” curriculum, that included the new disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, had made inroads into mid-century Egyptian universities, expressed a deep concern over the un-Islamic character of these disciplines. Such concern was only vaguely expressed by his predecessors, Jamal-ad-din al-Afgani, Muhammad Abduh* (AD 1849-1905) and Rashid Rida.28 To Qutb, the humanities and social sciences do not recognize the privileged status of man in the world (as the vicegerent of God) but reduce man to 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 if not an outright absurdity; and through the ideas and systems they propose and conceptualize, they undermine the Islamic conception and work to promote Jāhilīyah and quell any attempt at establishing the Islamic order. Qutb asserts that Muslims should reject them as source of Knowledge for the simple reason that they have failed to deliver on their epistemological promises. As mentioned in the discussion on the natural sciences, Qutb argues that man’s mission 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 “aqeedah” 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

* Religious scholar, jurist and liberal reformer, who led the late 19th century movement in Egypt and other Muslim countries to revitalize Islamic teachings and institutions in the modern world.
time address his eternal existential questions about the world, his position within it and his relationship with his past, his future and what surrounds him. Surely Allāh the 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 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. 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, i.e. the connection between Willing and originating. The ‘Hows’ are beyond human comprehension. The Islāmic conception suggests that we leave such matters to the one with absolute knowledge and absolute power of planning—It would be a 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”. 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 human knowledge and studied other due to personal interest. Then he turned to the fountainhead of his faith. He came to know that what ever he had read so far was as nothing in comparison to what he found here”.

93
PERCEPTION OF ISLĀMIZATION:

In Social Justice in Islām, Qutb proposes that the twin Pillars upon which a lasting "renaissance of Islāmic life can be effected" are the establishment of Islāmic "Law and Statute" and the fostering of a social system that draws its life-conception from "Islāmic philosophy". He goes on to write that "the natural method of establishing that philosophy is by education". But a dilemma at once emerges. The prevailing "educational methods and modes of thought are essentially western and inimical to the Islāmic philosophy itself"; so that the very attempt to establish Islāmic world view in practice frustrates the project of Islāmic purification. It may be pointed out here that to Qutb true Islāmic philosophy is to be found in the holy Qurʾān rather than in the writings of Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd etc. Qutb argues that "western educational methods" owing to their materialistic basis are contrary to Islāmic theory of life. Secondly being the products of Jāhilī system, these methods by their very nature are opposed to the Islāmic concept "no matter whether such opposition is manifest or concealed in various forms". The challenge, therefore, is to "choose the ways of native Islāmic thought, in order to ensure pure results, without adopting a position of isolationism in regard to thought, education and science." Qutb's answer to his own dilemma is ambiguous and somewhat self-contradictory. On the one hand he 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". 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." 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 favour, 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 new philosophy which must be influenced by these developments in the course of life".  

Qutb’s Islamicization programme appears more specific in the Milestones. The basic leitmotif throughout the Milestones is precisely that everything must be fundamentally altered to conform to the Islamic ideal. In this work, the line between the Jahili and the Islamic is sharp and well defined, and the possibility of mingling the Jahili and Islamic World conceptions is outright eliminated.

“The function of this divine system which is given to us—the callers to Islam—is to provide a certain style of thinking, purified from all those Jahili styles of thinking which are current in the World and which have poisoned our culture by depriving us from our own mind.”

Islamicization of pure Sciences:

As mentioned earlier, Qutb expresses somewhat contrasting views about the origin of modern science in his works Social Justice in Islam on the one hand and Milestones, Islamic concept and its Characteristics, This Religion of Islam, and Islam the Religion of Future on the other. In Social Justice in Islam, modern science is perceived by Qutb as primarily the fruit of modern Europe. However, in the Islamic Concept and its Characteristics and in Milestones
Qutb insists on the Islamic origins of science. It was the Islamic Concept (Tasawwur) that crucially reoriented scientific investigation from its Greek obsession with abstract theory to its present day focus on experimental investigation. In Social Justice in Islām, Qutb views modern science primarily as the achievement of the western civilization and the product, in the form that it has come to assume, of western culture. Having granted the culturally tainted character and at the same time having insisted that the acquisition of science is not only desirable but also crucial for the very survival of the Muslims, Qutb has no choice but to accept compromise: “what must be must be” is his conclusion since “there is no possibility of living in isolation from science and its products, though the harm it does may be greater than the good.” In contrast to this, the position adopted by Qutb in the “Milestones” is bolder. Here he argues that 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 Jāhili and the Islamic life conceptions. “Islām considers that there are two kinds of culture; the Islāmic culture and the Jāhili culture” Qutb writes, “excluding the abstract sciences and their practical applications.” This is a remarkable concession given Qutb’s incessant insistence that Jāhiliyyah and Islām can have nothing in common. Equally noteworthy is his belief that science is essentially good and necessary for the wellbeing of humanity. As already mentioned, Qutb also argues that scientific activity or learning of science is a part of man’s duty on earth. Islām does not look with contempt at the material progress and material inventions; in fact, it considers them when used under the divine system of life as God’s gifts and also Islām recognizes Muslims as “vicegerents of God on earth and makes them responsible for
learning all sciences and developing various capabilities to fulfill this high position which God has granted them”. Further, these “abstract sciences” according to Qutb are not related to the basic concept of a Muslim about life, universe, and man, the purpose of his creation, his responsibilities and his relationship with the physical world and with the Creator. In other words, they do not transgress into “metaphysical questions that touch on the life conception”. It is interesting to note that Qutb’s acceptance of the “neutrality” of the “abstract sciences” is close to that of Mawdudi. As Seyed Vali Reza Nasr notes “to debate effectively with modernity Mawdudi had to accept many modernist assumptions especially those involving scientific truths, which he saw as value neutral”. Not that he believed that science in the 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”. An important practical consequence for Qutb of the metaphysical neutrality of the sciences is that Muslims may learn those sciences from non-Muslims, should there be no Muslims available to 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”. Qutb quite clearly does at times hedge on the extent of the life-conceptual neutrality of the sciences. When pure and unmingled with Jāhilī conception, “all these sciences lead man towards God, unless they are perverted by personal opinions and speculations, and presented devoid of the concept of God”. 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 speculative philosophy or technical
or abstract sciences having nothing to do with religion". Consequently, "the western ways of thought," he goes on, "and the sciences started on the foundation of these poisonous influences with an enmity towards all religions, and in particular with greater hostility towards Islām". Therefore, while 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 Islām. A slight influence from them can pollute the clear spring of Islām".

**Islamization of Social sciences and Humanities**

Qutb exhibits an extremely cautious attitude towards the western humanities and social sciences. He asserts that these disciplines must not be taken seriously as a source of knowledge on the grounds of their failure to deliver on their original epistemological promises. According to him, rather than leading to a greater understanding about man, these disciplines have created more confusion and bewilderment. Consequently, the social systems which are erected on the basis of these disciplines are unbalanced, more abstract and theoretical than realistic, triggering moral and psychological inconveniences in their own members. Qutb's doctrinal antipathy towards the western humanities and social sciences can be better understood in the light of his contention that western humanities and social sciences: (A) challenge the humanity of man; (B) negate the divinity of Allāh; and (C) undermine the Islāmic conception.

**Humanity of man is challenged:**

What distinguishes man from the rest of the creation according to Qutb, is that he is an agent in possession of a will and has the capacity to inform his action with belief. These capacities that man enjoys, according to Qutb have been granted to him by God so that he 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 this attempt 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 an 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 example 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 “such a selfish and vengeful society cannot but excite base emotions in its individuals”. But much more devastating to human dignity than the cultivation of base emotions is the total reduction of man to mere matter. In *Islāmic Concept and its Characteristics*, Qutb writes: In the formulation of Karl Marx (AD 1818-1883), 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 secondary by-product of matter. Reduced to matter, man is no longer a shaper of history but a product of mysteries 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 factories of production.”

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 (AD 1809-1882), Freud (AD 1856-1939) 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, by asserting his passivity in the face of economic and material factors, as Karl Marx proposed”. 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

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* Austrian Neurologist, founder of Psychoanalysis.
contradicted this reality now find themselves compelled to accept it. But more
than challenging 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”, for 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.51

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. Once the
humanity and individuality of the worker are respected, Qutb claims that
“engineers and managers will not find it difficult to devise a labour system that
fosters these two desiderata which at the same time, thanks to technology,
guarantees great productivity”. According to him, “a society’s economic, social
and political systems, and the conditions of labour that prevail within its
factories and elsewhere, should keep in mind, first, the characteristic of
humanity, and second, the characteristic of individuality. Workers should not
be treated as a herd of sheep, nor should any individual worker be regarded as a
mere machine.52 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". Quṭb’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”. Quṭb 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...” In such social systems, Quṭb 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”. 

Divinity of Allāh is negated:

For Quṭb, the social sciences and humanities project a negative notion of God as against the only true and positive notion projected by the Islāmic conception. As against the Active, Conscious, Omniscient, Omnipotent ....God of the Islāmic conception, the god described in social sciences and humanities corresponds to mere material (according to Marx), or to sex (according Freud) or to absolute idea (according to Hegel*') and so on.

Quṭb’s rejection of the humanities and the social sciences, and especially “western philosophy” on grounds that these disciplines violate the Islāmic conception of divinity, is most explicitly articulated in the Islāmic concept and its characteristics. The god depicted by the philosophers, Quṭb explains, is an absurd and pathetic entity, and a telling example of the worst that idle intellectualism is capable of thinking up. “A vast difference separates the Islāmic concept of Allāh and the concept of god presented by such

* G W F Hegel (AD 1770-1831), German idealist philosopher who developed a dialectical scheme that emphasized the progress of history and ideas from thesis to antithesis and thence to higher synthesis.
philosophers as Plato (BC 427-347), Aristotle (BC 384-322), and Plotinus* (AD 205-270). 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”.

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. 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 god. 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”.

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 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 god was to create intelligence. After

* Ancient Roman philosopher, regarded by modern scholars as the founder of Neoplatonic School of philosophy.
that there was nothing for him to do!” 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, bereft of revelation, can succeed only in constructing such a pallid and abstracted God that it can have neither existence nor reality”. 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 (AD 1762-1814) 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, its own existence, and not of other-than-itself. There can not 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”. But, Qutb wonders sarcastically, “Why would 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 the mind is supreme,
Chapter Three

“Hegel employed it to establish the reality of the Absolute”. In Hegel’s idealism, Qutb explains, “the idea in its wholeness, the Absolute idea, is eternal and self-existed 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”. 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”. 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”. 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?” 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?” And if the latter does hold, then what kind of creator depends on his creation to exist? 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? 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 matter transforms into energy, and energy back to matter? And “in 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 “which of these contradictory intellectual judgments are the realities imprinted on the human mind by Nature? Does one observe that makes mistakes in its imprints? Or is it the human mind that makes mistakes”.

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.64

Islamic conception is undermined:

As already mentioned a central theme in Qutb’s writings is the essential incompatibility between Islamic and Jahiliyyah. 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 Jahiliyyah, Qutb insists, cannot co-exist 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 \textit{Jāhiliyyah}. In the momentous struggle between good and evil, the Islāmic conception and its relevance to not only present-day Muslims but to all of humanity is the integrity of the Islāmic spirit. Unlike Judaism and Christianity, Qutb argues, Islām never suffered a corruption that compromised the fundamental principles of the Islāmic conception. Historically, Qutb admits Muslims have deviated and have accepted social orders other than Islām. In \textit{Social justice in Islām}, Qutb argues that after the time of the Prophet and the pious caliphs, Muslims by and large lived under governments that were patently un-Islāmic. In \textit{Milestones}, Qutb broadens the accusation to include society itself: having accepted the rule of the un-Islāmic, (the \textit{Jāhilī}), the self proclaimed Muslim society itself became \textit{Jāhilī}. But in either case, whether in \textit{Social justice's} limited denunciation of government or in \textit{Milestones'} broad brush against Muslim society, Qutb maintains that the "Islāmic conception"- as a set of principles- remained untouched, and therefore, always at the disposal of a new generation of Muslims ready to answer the call of their \textit{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 Islāmic conception - principles that have so far survived and withstanded the onslaught of a relentless \textit{Jāhiliyyah}.65

Qutb's discourse on Islāmization of knowledge basically revolves around three themes –i) the comprehensiveness of Islāmic concept ii) the non authenticity of humanities and social sciences and iii) the essential incompatibility between these disciplines and Islām. Qutb asserts the
comprehensiveness of Islāmic conception in many of his works. In *Social Justice in Islām*, for instance, Qutb writes that “the principles, ideas, values and criteria” established by Islām “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. On the other hand they deal with political, social and economic rights and duties”. In *Islāmic Concept and its Characteristics*, Qutb devotes a whole chapter to the comprehensiveness (*Shumūl*) of the Islāmic conception of life.

The incompatibility between these disciplines and the Islāmic conception is explained by Qutb through highlighting the dangers that these disciplines pose to the Islāmic conception. These disciplines, according to him disparage the humanity of man by reducing him from his elevated status of the vicegerent of God to a mere creature; they negate the Divinity of God by creating His substitutes in the form of ‘matter’, ‘absolute idea’ or by giving precedence to reason over revelation. Qutb, however, does not view pure or abstract sciences to be incompatible with the Islāmic conception. On the contrary, he believes in the Islāmic origins of science and concedes that it facilitates man in accomplishing his goals as the vicegerent of God.

The sharp distinction between human and divine that exists in Qutb’s discourse would imply that the transition from non-Islāmic to Islāmic could not be gradual. This entails an evaluation of another, yet more important dimension of Qutb’s discourse namely how to establish an Islāmic society in the world.
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Chapter Three

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