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# Decolonizing the Muslim mind: A philosophical critique

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**Abstract**

The crises of the Islamic world revolve around "epistemic colonialism." So, in order to decolonize the Muslim mind, we must be able to deconstruct the Western episteme, and this involves dissociating ourselves from the Eurocentric knowledge system that gradually became ascendent since the Renaissance through such ideas as progress and modernity. However, this does not mean we need to discontinue dialog with Western thought. Rather it means retrieving and reviving our own intellectual heritage and being able to *think* with the categories and concepts derived from that heritage. But in light of the postcolonial situation where the intellectual and linguistic connection with one's own tradition is severed, this is a tremendous challenge. What is more, many Muslim intellectuals simply think that Islamic heritage has little relevance to address contemporary challenges. Yet unless Muslims are able to ground their self-identity in their own intellectual tradition, they will be held captive to the web of epistemic colonialism. They might be comfortable offering their prayers as Muslims, but their mental ambience will be permeated by devastating, Eurocentric ideas. They will hardly be able to overcome their fragmented self-image.

# 1 | I

Imagine living in an old Riad in Fez, a Haveli in Lahore, or another traditional house, and then being forced into ugly high-rise apartments. These modern buildings might offer amenities like swimming pools, fitness centers, and private outdoor spaces, but their all-glass structures lack the traditional windows that connect people to the natural world of heat, light, and sound. Moreover, the sealed and glazed facades increase heating and cooling loads and create issues with glare and thermal comfort. Although people may still possess beautiful artifacts from their old homes, such as window panes, oil lamps, and plant pots, they no longer understand their language and meaning in a new context. In a word, the new setting radically alters the rhythms of life, work, and thought. And this is analogous to what has happened to the Muslim mind; its very architecture has been fundamentally transformed. Sadly, the current generation, with its fragmented self-image, often does not care to explore their historical identity and the importance of this knowledge in constructing a present self-identity.

That is to say, in order to establish a new foundation, the existing structure must be dismantled, which I would call "epistemic colonialism." Unlike "political colonization," epistemic colonialism refers to the ongoing influence of colonialism even after the formal end of settler colonialism. It signifies the persistence of colonial structures and paradigms in areas such as education and culture beyond the end of colonial rule.[1] Let me provide an example to further explain what I mean by epistemic colonialism. Consider the case of "education" in our postcolonial era. The majority of formal education systems globally adhere to Western curricula, even when the medium of instruction is other than English. In this context, Western civilization is frequently viewed as the standard, making other civilizations appear unsuccessful and in need of adopting Western frameworks. Similarly, Western academic, scientific, and educational frameworks are typically labeled as the "academy," "science," and "education," while intellectual traditions from other parts of the world are often relegated to the categories of "religious training" or "informal education."[2] More importantly, modern education or modern science generally pays no attention to the relationship between knowledge and ethics, even though the power of knowledge, for example, knowing what forces govern the working of an atom, is too obvious to ignore. All this is to say that even though modern (Western) education is governed by its own particular ideology and provincial history, it is presented as neutral and universal, as if no other paradigm is possible within which one can think about education or science. For instance, education in the Islamic tradition has a deep moral and ethical dimension and is related to the ideas of self-cultivation and human flourishing, all of which seems more and more irrelevant today as universities are eager to pursue skills and excellence at the expense of ethical formation (i.e., to form a complete human being through moral and intellectual training).[3]

The above example goes some way toward explaining how epistemic colonialism colors our vision and prevents us from seeing the world as it is. Whereas political colonization deprives people from political self-determination, epistemic colonialism colonizes and cripples the mind through knowledge systems. The idea of epistemic colonialism is deeply related to Eurocentrism,

[1]This definition, in this sense, resembles, though not exactly similar, what scholars call "coloniality" in general, see (Grosfoguel, 2002, p. 205).

[2]For a wide-ranging critique of modern, post-colonial education, see Ogunnaike (2018).

[3]Some of the goals of Islamic education are perfection of the soul; refinement of culture, language, and character; training and skills; contemplating the cosmos; and cultivating wisdom. See Nasr (2010, pp. 129–160).

and we cannot talk about decolonizing the Muslim mind if we fail to offer a diagnosis of this disturbing doctrine. To see how Eurocentrism is built into our recent history, let me begin with the famous quote by the British historian and politician T. B. Macaulay, who sought to establish the need to impart English education to the people of the Indian subcontinent:

> I have never found one among them who could deny that *a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia*.[4] The intrinsic superiority of Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.[5]

Thus spoke Macaulay as far as his verdict on the worth of the entire Indian intellectual tradition in Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic was concerned. For Macaulay and his allies, the literatures and traditions of the Hindus and Muslims were worthless and outdated superstitions that delayed the advent of modernity in the subcontinent. Lest one think this is coming from some obscure colonial administrator whose words have little relevance today (note, however, that Macaulay and his colleagues did succeed in changing the educational system in India by replacing Persian with English), let us analyze a claim from the well-known English cultural critic Roger Scruton:

> The roots of Western civilization lie in the religion of Israel, the culture of Greece, and the law of Rome, and the resulting synthesis has flourished and decayed in a thousand ways during the two millennia that have followed the death of Christ. Whether expanding into new territories or retreating into cities, Western civilization has continually experimented with new institutions, new laws, new forms of political order, new scientific beliefs, and new practices in the arts. And this tradition of experiment led, in time, to the Enlightenment, to democracy, and to forms of social order in which free opinion and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the state (Reilly, 2010, "Foreward").

"Why did not something similar happen in the Islamic world?" asks Scruton. How is it that a civilization that emerged with tremendous vitality in the seventh century, extending its influence across North Africa and the Middle East to establish cities, universities, libraries, and a flourishing courtly culture, now appears in many places to be silent, violent, and resentful? Scruton ponders. Moreover, Scruton inquires why Islam today not only appears to tolerate the violence of its most ardent supporters but also seems to endorse and preach it. Scruton also goes on to question why Muslim minorities in Europe, who migrate and seek the benefits of a secular legal system, advocate for a different kind of law altogether, despite a lack of consensus among them on what that law entails or who has the authority to interpret it (Scruton, "Foreword," in Reilly, 2010).

[4]Emphasis mine.

[5]Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education*, February 2, 1835, http://oldsite.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/rraley/research/english/macaulay.html. (accessed on December 23, 2023).

Scruton then sets out to provide a response. He wishfully speculates that Islamic civilization underwent a profound intellectual crisis in the eleventh century when it turned its back on philosophy and took refuge in dogma, and it never really recovered from that (Scruton, "Foreword," in Reilly, 2010). Scruton, who is not a specialist in Islamic intellectual history, is not, however, alone in claiming that Islamic civilization lapsed into a period of long stagnation after the theologian al-Ghazālī's famous attack on philosophy and reason. There is a venerable list of both Western and Muslim historians, including T. J. de Boer, Ibrahim Madkour, and Montgomery Watt, who have supported the thesis that the Islamic world preserved and interpreted Greek philosophical heritage during Europe's "Dark Ages" and later passed it on to the Latin West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, at this point, the narrative stopped recognizing the contributions of the Islamic world, and subsequent Islamic thought received limited scholarly attention. Scholars argue that this is because orthodox theologians disapproved of it, claiming that the intellectual tradition in the Islamic world had died out by the twelfth century. According to this viewpoint, the Latin West fortuitously took over the Greek philosophical heritage just in time, averting the rejection of this heritage by the Islamic world, which purportedly descended into a state of fideist obscurity. Consequently, critics argue, this situation has resulted in "intellectual suicide," a "dysfunctional culture rooted in distorted theology," and the "moral infantilization of many Muslims" (more on this later) [see Reilly, 2010, Ch. 9].

If one pays close attention to the above, it does not take too long to notice the triumphalist, teleological tone in it. For instance, Scruton boastfully says: "And this tradition of experiment led, in time, to the Enlightenment, to democracy, and to forms of social order in which free opinion and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the state" (Scruton, "Foreword," in Reilly, 2010). As I alluded to earlier through the example of "modern education," one wonders how one gets around one's present historical situatedness, which is shaped by the ideologies of the Enlightenment and Eurocentrism that seem to thoroughly distort our understanding of the past? According to Oludamini Ogunnaike, it is no coincidence that this perception of Western civilization emerged alongside the imperial project, where thousands of young people were taught to believe in the civilizing mission of the newly established West. They were instilled with a sense of duty to liberate the darker peoples of the world from barbarism and ignorance, introducing them to Western civilization—regardless of their own self-determination—and justifying even the most forceful and unpleasant methods to achieve this goal. This harsh imperialism is simply the flip side of the modern West's liberalism: "if you and your societies are not rational, liberal, and free in the same way that ours are—so the logic goes—then you are backwards and we will take away your freedom through illiberal means in order to "develop" you and remake you in our own liberal image" (Ogunnaike, 2018). After showing how the term "the West" is a recent innovation going back a few centuries, the cosmopolitan thinker Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that there is no such thing as Western civilization. In Appiah's view, the term "Western culture" generates much confusion as it is a controversial idea. During the Cold War, "the West" referred to one side of the Iron Curtain, with "the East" as its opposite and enemy, neglecting much of the world. More recently, "the West" often means the North Atlantic region: Europe and its former colonies in North America. Here, the opposite is the non-Western world in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—now termed "the global south"—though many in Latin America also claim a western heritage. This perspective acknowledges the entire world but oversimplifies diverse societies, while selectively carving around Australians, New Zealanders, and white South Africans, making "Western" appear as a euphemism for white (Appiah, 2016).

At any rate, like Scruton, the Princeton historian Jonathan Israel offers his reasons for the supremacy of what he calls the Radical Enlightenment (i.e., the Enlightenment of Spinoza, Bayle,

and Diderot as opposed to the moderate Enlightenment of Locke, Hume, and Newton). In his *Enlightenment Contested* Israel declares:

> For anyone who believes human societies are best ruled by reason as defined by the Radical Enlightenment, ordering modern societies on the basis of individual liberty, democracy, equality... clearly constitutes a package of rationally validated values which not only were, but remain today, inherently superior morally, politically, and intellectually not only to Postmodernist claims but to *all actual or possible alternatives*, no matter how different, national, and Postcolonial and no matter how illiberal, non-western, and traditional. The social values of the Radical Enlightenment, in short, have an *absolute quality* in terms of reason which places them above any possible alternative... (Israel, 2006, p. 869).

In other places, Israel conceives of the Radical Enlightenment as a package that includes, *inter alia*, (1) adoption of philosophical (i.e., mathematical-historical) reason as the only and exclusive criterion of what is true; and (2) rejection of all supernatural agency, magic, disembodied spirits, and divine providence (Israel, 2006).

This is an extraordinary claim, especially in light of the grand failures of modernity, namely slavery, colonial genocides in Africa and India, the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, racism, fundamentalism, and the environmental crisis (see e.g., Hallaq, 2018; Zwicky, 2023). Yet scholars such as Israel do not hesitate to invoke the framework that takes the Enlightenment ideas of reason, history, and society *as the norm or the universal against which the history of all other particular cultures should be studied and assessed*.

The Enlightenment movement of the 18th century was marked by an egalitarian impulse to fuel an intellectual and social revolt against the Christian dogmas of the Middle Ages. Ogunnaike and others have studied the complex genealogy by which the decline of religion and the secularization of knowledge in the West during the Renaissance and Enlightenment led to a profound transformation of the cosmic order traditionally represented by the great Chain of Being (the hierarchical structure of the cosmos in Platonic and medieval thought) (see e.g., Ogunnaike, 2016, p. 802). As the *intellectus*/*nous* and the realms perceivable only by it (such as the Divine, angelic realms, or Platonic forms) disappeared, Western humanity found itself in a curious position atop the Chain of Being. While God and heaven still lingered in the background or somewhere in the clouds, in terms of the visible and comprehensible universe explored by philosophers and scientists, it was Western humanity which occupied the summit. In contrast to the Middle Ages, Ogunnaike argues, where humanity was assessed by its connection to a transcendent, divine ideal, the secularization process of the Enlightenment led to humanity being evaluated based on proximity to the immanent ideal of rational, enlightened European subject (Ogunnaike, 2017, p. 189).

In the nineteenth century, Hegel articulated this Enlightenment ideal by proclaiming Western Europe as the land where the particular is raised to the universal. The specific mode of reasoning characteristic of Enlightenment thought was elevated to the status of "universal reason," seen as the defining attribute of humanity itself. This enabled Enlightenment thinkers and their successors to assert authority as speaking from a universal standpoint. As Hegel says:

> In Africa proper, man has not progressed beyond a merely sensuous existence, and has found it absolutely impossible to develop any further. Physically, he exhibits great muscular strength, which enables him to perform arduous labours; and his

> temperament is characterized by good-naturedness, which is coupled, however, with completely unfeeling cruelty. Asia is the land of antithesis, division, and expansion, just as Africa is the land of concentration. One pole of the antithesis is that of ethical life, the universal rational essence which remains solid and substantial; the other is the exact spiritual opposite, that of egotism, infinite desires, and boundless expansion of freedom. Europe is the land of spiritual unity, of retreat from this boundless freedom into the particular, of control of the immoderate and elevation of the particular to the universal, and of the descent of the spirit into itself (Hegel, 1980, pp. 172–173).

In Ogunnaike's view, these ideas have historically justified Western imperialism and colonization and continue to influence development work, Marxist coups, and white supremacist ideology. In Hegel's modified, temporalized Chain of Being, the modern subject is at the top, while other segments of humanity are positioned further down the chain, often relegated to the past or deemed outside of history altogether. Hegel implies that non-Europeans are subhuman due to their lack of Enlightenment, and his incorporation of racial essentialism suggests they might be irredeemably so (Ogunnaike, 2016, p. 802).

Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* examines the constructed notion of Europe as the presumed origin of modernity in non-Western societies. Over the past two centuries, European philosophers and thinkers have formulated theories that claim universality while largely ignoring the majority of the world's population residing in non-Western lands. Ironically, scholars from non-Western regions frequently adopt these supposedly "universal" theories to study their own cultures, while failing to acknowledge their "particular" historical situatedness. That is, we may wish to reject Eurocentrism, while simultaneously adopting its analytical sociopolitical frameworks. Chakrabarty argues that "provincializing" Europe involves scrutinizing how these supposedly universal theories are rooted in specific intellectual and historical traditions that lack true universal validity (Chakrabarty, 2008, pp. 26–27). Yet, European thinkers continue to dominate contemporary scholarship, with Europe itself serving as an unspoken reference point when it comes to knowledge production. Historians from non-Western regions often feel compelled to engage with European history, whereas European scholars studying Europe do not necessarily reciprocate this courtesy.

The profound limitations of such Eurocentric thinking dating back to Hegel should be further evident in the course of our analysis, but let us also briefly mention the Harvard historian Khaled El-Rouayheb concerning this point, who in his recent book on seventeenth century Ottoman intellectual history rightly questions the hidden teleological assumption at work in the Enlightenment models, according to which human scientific and philosophical development could only develop or progress in one direction, namely the direction that certain parts of Europe actually embraced since the Scientific Revolution. So, any intellectual development that does not conform to the European model is ultimately written off as a form of obscurantism and religious fanaticism (El-Rouayheb, 2015, p. 357). Unsurprisingly, then, Israel, like Scruton, ends up reiterating the decline thesis when he comments on Islam in the book.

## 2 | II

The fallacy of the Enlightenment should be evident to students of the Islamic and Indian intellectual traditions. Yet the sad truth is that most of our intelligentsia have lost interest in our own intellectual tradition of science, literature, and philosophy, presumably because a random colonialist like Macaulay with no knowledge of Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic dictated to us that

"a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." The blind acceptance of European theories by our intellectuals across science and the humanities needs no mention. Controversial doctrines such as "modernity," "progress," "development," and "scientific empiricism" are a staple of our intellectual thinking beyond any critical interrogation. In fact, we have become so accustomed to European ways of thinking that even our "literary theory and criticism" in the humanities derive from the work of such Western critics as Foucault, Derrida, or Bakhtin. This is in spite of such a rich history of literary traditions in both India and the Islamic world. As Sheldon Pollock notes:

> It's not as if we do not have the materials to make some serious sense of culture and power in early modern India (understood here as the period from about 1500 to 1800, after which British colonial power consolidated itself in the subcontinent and changed the rules of the knowledge game). In the sphere of imagination and its written expression, South Asia boasts a literary record far denser, in terms of sheer number of texts and centuries of unbroken multilingual literacy, than all of Greek and Latin and medieval European culture combined (Pollock, 2011, p. 4).

One also recalls here the observation of Chakrabarty, who laments the fact that few if any Indian social scientists or philosophers are capable of seriously arguing with the thirteenth-century Nyaya thinker Gaṅgeśa or with the grammarian and linguistic philosopher Bhartṛhari (fifth to sixth centuries), or with the tenth- and eleventh-century Shaivite philosopher Abhinavagupta, as they set out to study social practices in modern India. "Sad though it is," Chakrabarty notes, "one result of European colonial rule in South Asia is that the intellectual traditions once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic are now only matters of historical research for most—perhaps all—modern social scientists in the region. They treat these traditions as truly dead, as history" (Chakrabarty, 2008, pp. 5–6). In other words, the interlocutors that our social scientists look up to are a Hegel, or a Marx, or a Weber rather than the aforementioned figures.[6] As scholars have noted, colonization denies those who are epistemically colonized access to their own history. By imposing colonial modes of thought and language, it limits the ability of local languages to authentically reflect reality. The colonial project asserts that the languages of the colonized lack technical or scientific rigor. Consequently, epistemic colonialism erases archives, reduces history to a blank slate, and obscures identities and symbols. It undermines the colonized people's capacity to represent their own traditions using categories other than those imposed upon them by European colonizers (Asif, 2020, p. 4).

Although I am not as pessimistic as Chakrabarty, let us acknowledge that in light of such a deeply entrenched epistemic colonialism, the call for a decolonization of the Muslim mind cannot be more urgent.[7] The word "decolonization" is closely related to the term "decoloniality," which goes back to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Sylvia Wynter, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and others in the postwar (i.e., WW II) period.[8] As Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018, pp. 105–110) explain, decolonial thinking aims to dissociate

[6]This, however, is not completely true. See the recent works of Ganeri (2012, 2017) and Faruque (2021a), among others, which thoroughly engage the Sanskrit and Arabic traditions as they deal with modern issues.

[7]Of course, what I have to say on this topic concerns, *mutatis mutandis*, other traditions such as Hinduism or Buddhism as well.

[8]For more information, see Fanon (1994, 2021); Césaire (2000); Wynter (2003); Sousa Santos (2018); Connell (2007); Quijano and Ennis (2000); Quijano (2007); Mignolo and Walsh (2018). For a critique of some of these approaches see Táíwò (2022) and Ogunnaike (2022).

the rest of us from the epistemic suppositions common to all the areas of knowledge initiated in the Western world since the European Renaissance and consolidated through the Enlightenment. It is to distance ourselves from the dubious belief that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnicity should be considered representative of a universal rationality, even when that ethnicity is Western Europe, as this stance essentially attempts to impose a provincial perspective as universalism (as Ogunnaike, Chakrabarty, and others have argued). Moreover, decolonial thinking involves attaining what Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls "epistemic freedom." As Ndlovu-Gatsheni says, "epistemic freedom is fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop indigenous methodologies," and write from one's historical situatedness while unencumbered by Eurocentrism (Ndlovu-Gatscheni, 2018, p. 3).

So, decolonizing is about liberating the "colonized mind" from its Eurocentric, epistemic shackles. In a way, decolonial thinking had begun much earlier. For example, one may think of Muhammad Iqbal from the subcontinent and his critique of Western epistemology and the need to rethink Islam. But in my view, Iqbal concedes too much ground when he says that the teachings of Islam must be understood and interpreted "in light of modern knowledge" (see Faruque, 2021b). Briefly, he tells us that modern humanity faces a crisis because of progress in modern science, which challenges the conventional understanding and interpretation of religion. The solution, for Iqbal, does not consist in a complete break with the past. Rather, the modern Muslim must confront the challenge of modern science and must endeavor to rethink the entire tradition of Islam while refraining from rejecting it *in toto*. And as I have shown in a recent article, Iqbal provides numerous instances of what such a reconstruction or reinterpretation should look like in practice. Thus, for Iqbal, interpreting Islam in light of modern knowledge means reading and explaining the poet-philosopher Bedil in light of Bergson, the Sufi philosopher 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī in light of Hegel, ideas such as selfhood and consciousness in light of Einstein's theory of relativity, and Sufism (the doctrine of the perfect human for example) in conversation with Nietzsche (Faruque, 2021b).

For all these reasons, I find Iqbal's perspective highly problematic. It essentially asks us to subject the entire Islamic intellectual tradition to the "litmus test" of Western modernity, which asserts that modern Western episteme is somehow superior to traditional Islamic and Indo-Islamic episteme. And this is to fall back on Macaulay's colonialist and Eurocentric narrative mentioned earlier. Also, I must summarily distinguish my own position from that of the contemporary decolonial theorists before moving on to discuss how we can fruitfully decolonize the Muslim mind. Although I agree with decolonial theorists that we must disengage from the corrosive effects of the Eurocentric episteme, we need not go too far in rejecting anything Western, for example, the contributions of Greek philosophy. From my vantage point, the Greek tradition is part and parcel of the broader Islamic tradition, and in fact, there is every reason to think that the Greek world also belongs to Muslims given their preoccupation with Greek thought for more than a thousand years. Moreover, sometimes decolonial thinkers generalize their reading of Western colonial history and tend to blame Christian theology for all the ills that the Europeans brought to the Americas (see e.g., Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It is true that there were murders in the name of Christianity, especially in the Americas, but there were also Las Casases from the same religion (see Clayton, 2010). Furthermore, when decolonial theorists explore genealogies of crucial terms such as "human" or "nature," they simplify the discourse and portray the Western tradition as an absolute anomaly in human history which I find problematic.

Also, proponents of "decolonial theory" often rely on the Euro-American theories and paradigms to critique themselves and "translate" non-Western traditions into the terms of these same

theories. Some scholars have criticized this approach by arguing how studying non-Western traditions on their own terms can help Western scholars rediscover and appreciate the premodern history of traditions they consider their own, like the Bible and the Greeks. These traditions have been severely distorted by the colonial project of modernity. So, colonization not only distorts the past and identity of the colonized, but also damages the consciousness and history of the colonizers. Therefore, decolonization is not solely a project for the colonized but may be even more crucial for the colonizers, who have been led to believe they belong to an intellectual tradition and "civilization" without viable alternatives or equals (for more information, see Dagli, 2024; Lumbard, 2022; Ogunnaike, 2022).

## 3 | III

Be that as it may, let me still acknowledge that my own thinking on this issue parallels the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism, but I propose a model of "pluralism" as a way forward (not the one which completely alienates anything Western):

> Cultural and epistemic pluralism is the recognition that fundamental questions of philosophy, science, and spirituality have been addressed by major cultures, and that there are multiple valid epistemological frameworks to address the questions of truth, knowledge, and being (Faruque, 2021a, p. 10).

Now, the above framework would only make sense if we were able to overcome Eurocentrism and dissociate ourselves from the hegemonic discourses of the Enlightenment and modernity, which encompass such purportedly "universal" ideas as progress, individualism, equality, empiricism, instrumental rationality, scientism, development, human rights, etc. In other words, we cannot take the *Weltanschauung* of modernity for granted, which is based on the Enlightenment, the mechanistic paradigm of modern science, and the Renaissance aggrandizement of human nature. To forestall a misunderstanding at this point, let me underscore that critiquing modernity and the so-called Enlightenment (which many in our parts of the world simply accept on "blind faith") does not mean we have to go back to the times of horses and buggies and stop utilizing technology and other facets of modern life. Rather it is a question of "provincializing" Europe and its modern ideas that are passed off as universal and timeless while originating from very particular intellectual and historical contexts (Chakrabarty, 2008). Given the space limit, I will not be able to elaborate on all the crucial aspects of the genealogy of modernity, although one cannot think of decolonizing the Muslim mind without going into the very roots of modernity, whose ubiquitous presence affects all our present thinking on important social, economic, political, religious, and spiritual matters. If we are really serious about "delinking" our present and past from the all-encompassing nature of the Western episteme and think about facing the challenges of modernity, we have no choice but to ask the following question about Europe posed by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age*: "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in [...] Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?" (Taylor, 2007, p. 25). That is to say, we have to begin with late medieval thought and the debate between the realists and nominalists on the nature of the universal. We should then proceed to analyze the proliferation of eclectic thinking during the Renaissance. In particular, we should pay attention to the Renaissance's aggrandizement

of human nature, its birthing the idea of the "individual" by way of Petrarch, and its mantra of power and domination over nature. The list can be exhaustive, but one has to understand the contexts of the seminal events of the Protestant Reformation, the Copernican Revolution, the sectarian wars, and the Scientific Revolution—all of which paved the way to the European Enlightenment. To the extent possible, one has to familiarize oneself with the influential writings of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Galileo, Hobbes, Descartes, Boyle, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and many others.

There have been numerous critiques of modernity from multiple standpoints, so we can pass over some of the details and simply note that it would be hard to find any serious intellectual (though there are some as shown earlier) who still believes in the Hegelian myth of the modern age as the creation of great human beings, of extraordinary scientists, writers, philosophers, and pioneers who vanquished the religious superstitions of their time and established a new world based on reason, progress, and freedom. As mentioned earlier, the recent memory of colonialism, slavery, racism, wars, genocides, and climate disasters is sufficient reason to think that modernity is not so great, although there are still those, like the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who see it as an "unfinished project" (Habermas, 1990). Regardless, there are different ways one can interpret the rise and crisis of modernity. While some see it as the result of the secularization of Christian ideals, for example, the doctrine of progress as the secularization of Christian millenarianism, others think of it in the more Nietzschean way of identifying it with self-assertion and self-creation. Others hailing from the decolonial tradition link the rise of modernity to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the subjugation of nature, and European colonialism. Still others argue that the fault lines of modernity lie in the great theological struggles that marked the end of the medieval world and that transformed Europe in the last few centuries separating the medieval and the modern worlds (for some seminal accounts, see Blumenberg, 1985; Giddens, 1990; Gillespie, 2008; Jameson, 2002; Latour, 1993; Nasr, 1989; Taylor, 2007; Weber, 1946, 1992).[9]

Be that as it may, for our purposes in this essay, we need to critically evaluate the notion of progress, which is often seen as essential to the modern self-understanding and the place of science, which is the backbone of modern culture. The notion of progress has come to dominate nearly every facet of modern life, from the division of nations into "developed" and "developing," to economies based on growth and expansion, to government policies and scientific theories measured in terms of empirical success. As alluded to earlier, the concept of progress can be traced to Christian millenarianism and certain strands within Calvinism that emphasize releasing human energy to transform society and the face of the earth (see e.g., Nisbet, 1994). Or it may be understood in a spiritual sense as in John Bunyan's 1678 Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In addition to their theological roots, the writings on progress during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment drew inspiration from the scientific achievements of the 16th and 17th centuries, especially the Copernican Revolution and the Newtonian synthesis. The rapid advances in empirical science—for example, Newton's law of universal gravitation—encouraged an optimistic view of human beings' capability to understand, control, and shape their world. French intellectuals such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and Marquis de Condorcet sought to capitalize on new scientific discoveries, which they incorporated into their writings on progress. In his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the*

[9]Also, in the wake of the French Enlightenment, the word "modern" came to characterize a belief in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the gradual amelioration of social and moral betterment with the passage of time. See Habermas (1981, p. 9).

*Progress of the Human Mind* for instance, Condorcet provides numerous examples of recent scientific discoveries that build on earlier forms of knowledge (Condorcet, 1955). In general, the popularizers of progress argue that European science, culture, and institutions are the most superior in the world, setting the standards for the rest of the world to eventually be part of the civilized order. Some take things in new directions by arguing for the biological superiority of the European race, as one sees in the writings of such Enlightenment thinkers as Hume and Kant (see e.g., Kant's *Physical Geography* [Kant, 2012]). Others such as Auguste Comte draw simplistic conclusions about the ascendency of "scientific progress" by appealing to the idea that history advances through three successive stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific (Comte, 2009).

As the Columbia professor Wael Hallaq notes in a recent interview, modernization theory continues unabated in almost every academic field. And foundational to every modernization project is what Hallaq calls a "theology of progress." This theology is grounded in the belief in a linear, teleological framework of time, viewing progress as inevitable. According to this perspective, early historical stages were merely preparations for subsequent phases, culminating in the zenith of human progress—Western modernity. Implicit in this viewpoint is the notion that no culture or civilization predating modern Europe possesses comparable validity, competence, or moral and scientific advancement. Everything these civilizations achieved culturally or otherwise is perceived as being directed toward a higher objective beyond their own existence.[10] The telos was Western modernity, which had to be imposed on the rest of the world by colonialism, coercion, and hegemony. I will comment more on the dangerous implications of the modern doctrine of progress, but for now let us focus on the metaphysical foundation of modernity, which comes from the mechanistic worldview of modern science. Few today would deny the global popularity and influence of modern science, so much so that even our ethical aspirations tend to be guided by scientific findings. Take the case of "selfhood" for example. Since the Enlightenment, there has been a tendency to characterize human identity based on the values of modern science, as if it alone possesses the ability to define our essence. Following the developments in post-Darwinian biology, we are satisfied with quantifying and situating human nature within the cell nucleus. So for instance, IQ is no longer a measure of one's skills but is perceived as an indicator of one's intrinsic value as an individual—an assessment of inherent worth (Comfort, 2019). However, in light of colonialism, slavery, and ecological crises, the belief that Western science and technology alone provide reliable foundations for selfhood and self-understanding is no longer sustainable. Moreover, many concepts of selfhood and identity from the Age of Reason, along with prevalent science-fiction depictions of post-human futures, have largely been shaped by university-educated men from affluent middle and upper classes in wealthy nations of the global North. These ideas not only reflect scientific discoveries but also embody the values of those who have historically wielded authority in the scientific domain—emphasizing positivism, reductionism, and the desire to control nature (Comfort, 2019). So, it is not difficult to see how defining the self only in scientific terms tends to obscure other forms of identity, such as one's labor, social role, or moral and spiritual values.

[10]Interview on "Restating Orientalism," conducted by Fatima Taskomur (Hallaq, 2019):

https://www.fletcherforum.org/home/2019/2/12/an-interview-with-professor-wael-hallaq#:~:text=This%20theory%2C%20foundational%20to%20writing,phases%20of%20history%20were%20preparatory (accessed on December 23, 2023). One can also mention Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Abdurrahman Taha, Osman Bakar, Naquib al-Attas, and Gholamreza Aavani for comparable critiques.

Moreover, with modern science Eurocentrism comes full circle. Truth be told, the topic of modern science, about which a lot can be said, is complicated, and I have a forthcoming book that deals with the philosophy of science as it relates to the nature of reality. Nonetheless, since what I am trying to do here is to deconstruct Eurocentrism so that we can begin to rejuvenate the Islamic intellectual tradition, I will offer some cursory remarks. Science (i.e., Western science) has a very complicated history (see Daston & Galison, 2007; Feyerabend, 1975; Fleck, 1979; Kuhn, 1996; Shapin, 1996; Shapin & Schaffer, 1985). What many students of science have forgotten today is that the word "science" is fairly new (William Whewell coined the term "scientist" in 1834), and it meant something very different for Newton and Boyle and, of course, for Plato and Aristotle, since the term that was current in Newton's time was "natural philosophy" while it was "*epistēmē*" in Aristotle's time (Ross, 1962). Moreover, science often presupposes a worldview, for example, reductive materialism/physicalism or methodological naturalism, as in the case of modern science. In contrast to the Eurocentric narrative, one may assert that other cultures also have (or had) "science," and Western science happens to be one among many others with its particular assumptions. That is to say, science does not take place in a vacuum, as it is colored by a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions. Following Galileo, Descartes, and Locke, scientific thought proceeds on the very problematic assumptions of the primary and secondary qualities distinction and the Cartesian bifurcation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Descartes, 1985; Galileo, 2008; Locke, 1997). Moreover, in the wake of the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution, a mechanistic understanding of the world came to be dominant, which sees the universe as a self-subsisting machine or a pre-ordained clock. Over time the scientific worldview also came to deny vertical causality, teleology, and transcendence (Smith, 2020). And in its extreme form, many claim that science is the only reliable form of knowledge (or that science can explain everything)—a doctrine known as scientism. But at the most basic level, scientific thought presupposes a "subject-object" dichotomy about the world (i.e., realism about the world) that obscures a more basic form of consciousness called "non-reflective consciousness" (see Faruque, 2021a). One can also mention Husserl and Heidegger in this regard, among many others, who have brought into the open many of the fundamental epistemological and ontological assumptions clouding modern science (see Heidegger, 1977; Husserl, 1970).

Heidegger famously declared more than half a century ago that "science does not think" (Heidegger, 1968). In his well-known Memorial Address, he claims that "man today is in flight from thinking" (Heidegger, 1966, p. 45). But he qualifies his statement immediately by saying that people will flatly deny that they do not think anymore. They will point to the massive amount of scientific research and argue that never in human history has there existed such "research" on countless inquiries (Heidegger, 1966, p. 45). Heidegger anticipates such arguments and explains that the word "research" or more properly science itself has replaced *real thinking* because "science does not think." He characterizes scientific thinking as "calculative thinking" whose "peculiarity consists in the fact that whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes" (Heidegger, 1966, p. 46). In other words, we aim for specific, empirical results. For Heidegger, calculative thinking remains calculation even if it neither involves numbers nor uses a computer, since its essence remains computational (Heidegger, 1966, p. 46).

Hearing these arguments in 2023, one cannot help but agree with Heidegger. The title of a recent book on thinking by a major analytic philosopher proves Heidegger's point. The book is entitled *The Border Between Seeing and Thinking*, and yet the reader would be disappointed if they expect some kind of discourse on "thinking" (Block, 2023). Instead, Ned Block tells us from

the beginning that he is going to refrain from deploying philosophical arguments, which for him involve merely intuitive thinking without any scientific, empirical basis. So, he marshals a large quantity of empirical research from various disciplines such as cognitive science, psychology, and neuroscience to explain what distinguishes *perception*, including not just seeing, but also hearing, touching, and so on, from *cognition*, which includes thinking, reasoning, and decision-making. Assuming cognition to be synonymous with "thinking" (which it is not), there is surprisingly little in his book on what constitutes "thinking." Taking empirical research on perception to be the ultimate judge of the issue, Block does shed some light on the border between seeing and cognition, through such arguments that perception is nonconceptual, adaptive, and iconic while cognition is conceptual, propositional, and discursive (see McDowell, 1994; Wittgenstein, 1953 for a contrasting view). But the overall analysis is tinged with irony, since thinking involves "universals" and concepts, while Block wants to settle this very issue through empirical research, which by definition is particular and inductive, no matter their "quantity."

Be that as it may, the trend away from "thinking" even in the discipline of philosophy is symptomatic of a larger cultural paradigm which has to do with the ascendency of science since the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding its particular merits, scientific thinking does not leave room for metaphysics, even though it inevitably presupposes one, namely naturalism (i.e., the causal closure of the physical world) or materialism (i.e., matter is the ultimate ground of reality). As Bas Van Fraasen says:

> I propose the following diagnosis of materialism: it is not identifiable with a theory about what there is but only with an attitude or cluster of attitudes. These attitudes include strong deference to the current content of science in matters of opinion about what there is. They include also an inclination (and perhaps a commitment, at least an intention) to accept (approximative) completeness claims for science as actually constituted at any given time (van Fraasen, 2008, p. 59).

Philosophy itself, thanks to the efforts of analytic philosophers, now takes on the role of the handmaiden of science, as we saw in the case of Block's recent book. This is because only scientists are allowed to say what is actually real, while philosophers must limit themselves to what questions one can ask and how to think clearly within a scientific paradigm. Thus, while writing about ontological issues such as the nature of being, Stephen Hawking admits that traditionally these questions belonged to philosophy. "But philosophy is dead," Hawking declares, "Philosophy has not kept up with modem developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge" (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, p. 5).

However, it is not at all clear that there is a consensus among scientists or more properly physicists when it comes to settling the ultimate questions. This is demonstrated by a widely discussed paper entitled "On Math, Matter, and Mind" by three well-known physicists (Hut et al., 2006). The paper begins by observing that although physicists agree on the formalism of their theories and the methodology of their experiments, they often disagree about the question of how to interpret their results as they pertain to ontology. It then proceeds to categorize different camps in terms of the following:

a. The Fundamentalist View
b. The Secular View
c. The Mystic View

The fundamentalist view represented by the physicist Max Tegmark argues that a straightforward application and further exploration of the current framework of physics will eventually cover and explain all of reality. Assuming materialism to be true, it further holds that the physical world, at bottom, is nothing other than the mathematical world. The secularist (Mark Alford) and the mystic disagree. The secularist responds by arguing that science deals with a limited domain of reality. As such, its results hold true only for that limited domain. Hence, the urge to derive a metaphysical framework from scientific theory is akin to putting the cart before the horse. The mystic (Piet Hut) in their turn recognizes a flaw in materialist reductionism and argues that physics has left out the subject pole of experience. So, it must address the problem of consciousness. Nevertheless, the mystic claims that science may change in shape and form, but it steadily advances closer to ultimate truths. Although I find much to both agree and disagree with these views and would like to point out that they misinterpret Platonism by way of Roger Penrose, the more important issue is to realize that science does not resolve the metaphysical questions, as many seem to claim it does. In fact, it is apropos here to quote the great physicist Erwin Schrödinger on the limitations of scientific materialism:

> This is the reason why I believe it to be true that I actually do cut out my mind when I construct the real world around me. And I am not aware of this cutting out. And then I am very astonished that the scientific picture of the real world around me is very deficient. It gives a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but it is ghastly silent about all and sundry that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us. It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet, physical pain and physical delight; it knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity. Science sometimes pretends to answer questions in these domains, but the answers are very often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously. So, in brief, we do not belong to this material world that science constructs for us. We are not in it, we are outside. We are only spectators. The reason why we believe that we are in it, that we belong to the picture, is that our bodies are in the picture. Our bodies belong to it... (Schrödinger, 2014, p. 95).

Schrödinger also points to the lack of philosophical reflection among science-educated people, which might shock us:

> It is certainly not in general the case that by acquiring a good all-round scientific education you so completely satisfy the innate longing for a religious or philosophical stabilization, in face of the vicissitudes of everyday life, as to feel quite happy without anything more. What does happen often is that science suffices to jeopardize popular religious convictions, but not to replace them by anything else. This produces the grotesque phenomenon of scientifically trained, highly competent minds with an unbelievably childlike—undeveloped or atrophied—philosophical outlook (Schrödinger, 2014, p. 12).

Since many people bring up the "success factor" of modern science, it is necessary to shed some light on this. For many observers, modern science is great and ubiquitous because it enables us to connect with each other instantaneously across thousands of miles as in Zoom and Skype, to perform complicated heart surgeries, and to almost mimic human intelligence

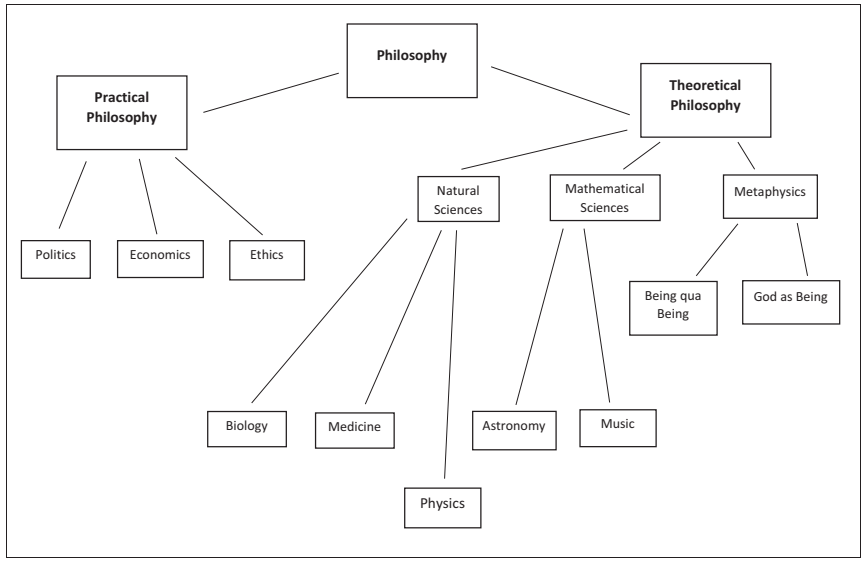


**FIGURE 1** Classification of the sciences in Islam.

through AI as with ChatGPT. But this is an outmoded, triumphalist view of science that first of all confuses "science" with the technological successes of science, and secondly, neglects to consider some of the disastrous consequences of scientific technology in such domains as climate and nuclear weapons. In fact, one observes a growing dissatisfaction among an increasing number of intellectuals concerning scientific totalitarianism (McGilchrist, 2021; Merchant, 2020; Nasr, 2008; Smith, 2012, 2020; Zwicky, 2023).

## 4 | IV

One can go on to show many similar pronouncements on the current paradigm of science, but the above analyses should be sufficient to dismantle the triumphalist vision of modern science. Still, one must be careful here to distinguish between science itself and the scientific worldview, for the latter involves the philosophical ideas of materialism, reductionism, scientism, etc., which are beyond the purview of science per se. In any event, the purpose of the above analysis was to show the epistemological tyrannies of Western science, not to reject science in general. This is because scientific activities in Islam were conducted under a different set of metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. As explained by Islamic philosophers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic science exemplifies the unity, hierarchy, and interrelatedness of all that exists in both the natural world and beyond (see Figure 1).[11] Islamic science is grounded in the worldview of *tawḥīd* or the oneness of reality into which various perspectives from foreign civilizations, for example, Greek and Indian, were historically integrated (Nasr, 1968, 1976). The scientific impulse is driven by the search for truth, as al-Kindī says:

[11]This is a general diagram showing the interrelationship of the sciences. But this classification scheme went through many developments in the course of history. So, for instance, the relationship between ethics, politics, and economics is more complicated than what is presented here. For more information, see Bakar (1998).

> We ought not be ashamed of appreciating the truth and of acquiring it whatever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. For the seeker of truth nothing takes precedence over the truth, and there is no disparagement of the truth, nor belittling either of him who speaks it or of whom who conveys it (al-Kindī, 1974, p. 58).

One can contrast the Kindian spirit reflected in the above quote with the Eurocentric mindset of the Macaulays and their likes, who would fail to see anything scientifically substantial in cultures other than their own. It is thus no surprise that Islamic philosophers and scientists enthusiastically embraced all forms of scientific and philosophical knowledge from Late Antiquity, forming a necessary link between Graeco-Roman culture and Latin, Western Christendom. The following quote by Alvarus of Cordoba (9th century) summarizes how Christians admired Muslim science and culture during the Middle Ages:

> [T]he Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books; they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their own language. For everyone who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are a thousand who can express themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write better poems in this language than the Arabs themselves (*Indiculus Luminosus*, PL. CXXI, 555; cited in Menocal, 2002, p. 66).

While Western thinkers such as Scruton (mentioned earlier) recognize this fact, they wonder why Islam "failed" to keep the momentum of scientific inquiry alive after al-Ghazālī's supposed attack on science and philosophy in the eleventh century (I say "supposed" because al-Ghazālī was not against science) [al-Ghazālī, 2000]. Now nothing could be further from the truth, although it is unfortunate that most Muslim intellectuals have fallen prey to this false narrative! Still now we hear Muslim intellectuals making the facile claim that Islam had a so-called Golden Age somewhere back in the Middle Ages. But even if we assume for the sake of argument that the Islamic intellectual tradition declined after the twelfth century, the Golden Age of Islam is of passing historical interest to contemporary Muslim thinkers, as they fail to see its contemporary significance. Whereas ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle still figure in Western curricula in, say, political science, such is not the case with Muslims when they study political science. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that we end up learning almost entirely about Western political thought through Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Schmitt, Agamben, etc., rather than about Islamic political thought when we study political science (the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of other disciplines).

Be that as it may, many Muslims still believe that the Golden Age of Islamic civilization had come to an end in the 12th or 13th century, giving way to a "dark age" of intellectual decline—an age of imitation and compilation—that lasted until modern times. Yet recent scholarship has shown that while different disciplines enjoyed varying careers at different times, on the whole, a serious and prolific rationalist enterprise in the Islamic world thrived well into the 16th and 17th centuries, and in some cases well into the 19th and 20th centuries. This is a topic for another study, but I can at least refer the reader to the works of George Saliba, David King, Jamil

Ragep, William Chittick, Ahmad Dallal, Robert Morrison, Emilie-Savage Smith, Nahyan Fancy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Henry Corbin, Mohammed Rustom, Khaled El-Rouayheb, Asad Ahmed, Robert Wisnovsky, and others, who have made available mountains of evidence demonstrating this claim.

One can now see the problems of affirming the decline narrative, alongside assuming the Enlightenment adoption of mathematical-historical reason as the sole criterion of *what counts as intellectual progress*, as with Scruton and Israel. This narrative reduces the complexity of the multifaceted relationship between "religion and reason" in Islam to a series of simple assertions, for example, that there existed an eternal feud between theology and philosophical reason, or that Islamic philosophers would always hide their true beliefs for fear of persecution by religious scholars, and so on. More importantly, the decline narrative naively assumes that most of the issues associated with Islam today such as Islamism, extremism, and violence can be traced back to the simple fact that Muslim theologians in the past had succeeded in banishing "reason" from the sphere of religion, thereby paving the way to blind faith, bigotry, fanaticism, and intolerance.

And more often than not, such self-serving narratives provide the critic with all kinds of justifications to ultimately prescribe Western-style reform and enlightenment to Muslims, which may be seen as a form of cultural imperialism. It is thus no surprise that prominent Western intellectuals such as Richard Rorty and Scruton have called for an Enlightenment in relation to Islam to overcome its present social and political ills. Needless to say, such simplistic readings of history only exacerbate the current problems with which these critics are concerned. This is because such explanations divert our attention from the real causes of many of these contemporary problems by substituting them with fictitious narratives that are based on a rather skewed, Eurocentric reading of historical data.

At any rate, if the analyses in the preceding pages hold any weight, we should realize that we cannot hope to decolonize the Muslim mind if we fail to liberate ourselves from the grip of the all-encompassing Western episteme, which has managed to separate us from our own history, literature, science, and philosophy. We must be especially mindful of Eurocentric modernity and its ideas of progress and materialistic science. It is interesting to note that many recent Western thinkers themselves were able to see the dark side of the idea of progress. One thinks of Walter Benjamin, who went on to associate "progress" with "catastrophe" because it is the modern vision of progress that turns the past into ruins and that, in its incessant striving for the new, degrades what is new no longer. In his *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin argues how a faith in progress seems no less to belong to the mythic mode of thought than does Nietzsche's idea of the "eternal return" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 19). Moreover, the quantitative notion of progress is in direct conflict with the idea of sustainability, which must ground any approach to dealing with the finite resources of the natural world. In his recent *Restating Orientalism*, Hallaq calls for a total rejection of the entire knowledge system of the post-Enlightenment West. Hallaq forcefully argues that Western episteme with its value-free economic and political rationalities has brought the world on the brink of destruction through rapacious capitalism and genocidal colonialism on the one hand and through climate disasters on the other (Hallaq, 2018).

Notwithstanding such critiques of the Western episteme, it might be argued that it is difficult to think of modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise without invoking categories and concepts that have their origin in recent European history. For some, modern civil life would be unthinkable without ideas such as citizenship, the state, civil society, the public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on—all of which bear the burden of their European footprint

(Chakrabarty, 2008). While there may be some truth to this argument, recent increases in racial violence, Islamophobia, and the mistreatment of minorities in Western countries should provide sufficient ground for thinking that Western liberal modernity is far from being ideal, or even the best option we have (see e.g., Massad, 2016; Uddin, 2019). But as I said earlier, my approach to decolonization upholds a healthy pluralism that ultimately does allow one to incorporate positive elements from Western thought (but not its Eurocentrism!) into one's own worldview—political, scientific, or otherwise. What is deplorable, however, is the attitude of blindly following the West.

But why does one think that non-European traditions have no equivalents (or even better options) for the various categories of political modernity mentioned above? Is it not possible to revive the idea of "*sulḥ-i kull*" (peace with all), which was a key feature of Mughal pluralism? The well-known policy of *sulḥ-i kull* was a core element of the Mughal statecraft, one that made it arguably the most tolerant and inclusive state in the entire early modern world. As historians have documented, the idea was used to express the ethos of civility, universal reason, and inclusiveness that the emperor Akbar wanted to promote (Kinra, 2020). Yet *sulḥ-i kull* is one of many such ideas of pluralism. If we study our heritage (including the Hindu and Buddhist heritages) in the Indian subcontinent, we will find numerous treatises expressing ideas of pluralism, tolerance, and justice. The perception of India as a pluralistic society is well-attested in various sources (that does not mean it was perfect), as can be seen in the following poem by Amīr Khusrow—the famous thirteenth-century poet and musician:

> If a Khurasānī, Greek or Arab comes here,
>
> he will not face any problems,
>
> for the people will treat him kindly, as their own,
>
> making him feel happy and at ease.
>
> And if they jest with him,
>
> they do so with blooming smiles (*Nuh sipihr*; cited in Losensky & Sharma, 2012).

A recent study by Manan Asif entitled *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* argues how a European understanding of India as "Hindu" has replaced an earlier, native understanding of India as "Hindustan," a home for all religions. Asif investigates the most complete idea of Hindustan, elaborated by the early seventeenth-century Deccan historian Firishta. His monumental work, *Tārikh-i Firishta*, became a major source for European philosophers and historians, such as Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, and Gibbon during the ensuing centuries. Yet colonialist historians managed to supplant the idea of Hindustan and install "India" in its place. We are thus content with the convention that while say Bangladesh came into being in 1971, "India" is something that stretches back to an "ancient" period with thousands of years of history. That is to say, "Early Pakistan" or "Early Bangladesh" seems anachronistic, while "Early India" is a seemingly unproblematic periodization.

Be that as it may, Firishta's history is the first history of Hindustan as an idea and a place that contains multitudes of religions and polities. Unlike other grand history books written by his fellow Muslims that trace the beginning of history to Muslim prophets, Firishta seeks to

provide a unified history of Hindustan, stretching back through Noah and Adam to the Indra. That is, in writing his *Tārikh-i Firishta*, Firishta was also consulting various works including the *Mahābhārata* (translated as the *Razmnāma* during the Mughal period) so that he could account for the intersection of time in both Hindu and Islamic sources. Since the *Mahābhārata* talks about a cycle of four very long world ages (*kritayug*, *tretayug*, etc.), it seemed difficult to reconcile its conception of time with the Islamic account, but Firishta narrates an incident in which a man asked Ali (the fourth caliph), "Who was there thirty thousand years before Adam?" and Ali responded by saying "Adam." The man kept on asking the same question to which Ali responded by saying "Adam" every time. By making use of this metaphysical account of origin, Firishta suggests that one can conceive of the creation of the Earth as having an unknowable beginning as far as dating is concerned. Adam is always the first regardless of the schema that is at play, and, for this reason, "the sayings of the people of Hind do not appear to be without merit" for Muslims. He then harmonizes the two temporalities by placing the lives of Adam and Noah within *dvaparayug*. One can thus see a brilliant effort to integrate one's Muslim identity into the Indian context (Asif, 2020, pp. 92–95). One can get an even better sense of such a pluralistic attitude in Akbar's vizier Abū al-Fazl's introduction to the *Razmnāma* (i.e., the *Mahābhārata*). Abu al-Fazl frames the rendering of the *Mahābhārata* and many such works as motivated by Akbar's direct orders. He relates how Akbar sought harmony between the "nation of Muhammad, Jews, and Hindus" by making available their "authentic books" in clear and easy-to-understand translations. In Abu al-Fazl's view, the *Mahābhārata* is a "work of wise sages," which covers many principles, including the smaller issues and beliefs, of the Brahmins of Hind. Abu al-Fazl cautions those who display hostility toward other religions and deliberately use texts of religion that are inaccessible due to different languages (Asif, 2020, pp. 90–91). Thus, it was decided to translate the *Mahābhārata* so that those who display hostility to religion may refrain from doing so and may seek after the truth. In light of the widespread recent sectarian violence in India, these examples cannot be more relevant. One could go on to produce many such examples from the annals of Islamic cultural history that showcase powerful analogs to modern notions of human rights, pluralism, sovereignty, social justice, and so on. If we dig deeper into Islam's variegated history, I suspect there will be much in art, architecture, literature, politics, and philosophy from which one can draw inspiration. And Islam did produce its Avicennas, Ghazālīs, Rāzīs, Ibn ʿArabīs, Rumis, al-Ṭurṭūshīs, Ibn Khaldūns, Mullā Ṣadrās, and Shāh Walī Allāhs.

Once we are past Eurocentrism and the Enlightenment, it is necessary to retrieve and revive the Islamic heritage. But one unfortunate challenge in all this is the "language barrier" (few Muslim intellectuals are conversant in Arabic, Persian, or Ottoman Turkish today), along with the cynical mentality that somehow one's own intellectual heritage cannot deal with the challenges of modernity (one can see this in the writings of Abdallah Laroui, early Hassan Hanafi, Orhan Pamuk, Pervez Hoodbhoy, and others). But today there exists a plethora of books and articles in English or other European languages, which should be enough to familiarize oneself with the categories and thought processes of our predecessors, and then initiate a new mode of thinking that is distinctly ours. What one needs here is an indomitable will to overcome epistemic colonialism. But one is also in need of a grand "translation movement" in order to retrieve the unparalleled resources stored in millions of manuscripts in various Islamic languages. Contemporary Muslim intellectuals hardly have any clue as to the value of these manuscripts. With respect to our present situation, one cannot help but draw parallel to the humanists of the Renaissance when they were trying to revive the classical traditions in Greek and Latin. While we do not need to embrace the metaphysics of humanism, we can acknowledge the parallelism in our respective situations. Fortunately, one can mention

initiatives such as the Library of Arabic Literature translation project in this context, which makes available English translations (and Arabic editions) of significant works of Arabic literature, encompasses a wide range of genres, including poetry, poetics, fiction, religion, science, travel writing, philosophy, law, history, and historiography.[12] But one needs more such projects with respect to other Islamic languages. In addition, there should be more institutes of advanced studies across the Islamic world, so that Muslim scholars can collaborate more and make themselves aware of their collective thinking. Furthermore, there is a need for more institutes or departments in the Islamic world dedicated to studying the West, particularly the history of Western science, from the perspective of Islamic civilization. Of course, many of these proposed initiatives are tied to specific sociopolitical circumstances in a given place which are complex and which I cannot address in the present article. Nevertheless, Muslim thinkers should overcome their inferiority complex and stop looking up to the West every time they think of investigating an intellectual problem.

Let us come back to the metaphor I mentioned at the beginning of this article. In order to decolonize the Muslim mind, one must be able to deconstruct the Western episteme (read: the existing structure in the metaphor), and this involves dissociating ourselves from the Eurocentric knowledge system that gradually became ascendent since the Renaissance through such ideas as progress and modernity. However, this does not mean we need to discontinue dialog with Western thought, as explained earlier. Rather it means retrieving and reviving one's own intellectual heritage and being able to *think* with the categories and concepts derived from that heritage. Now in light of the postcolonial situation where the intellectual and linguistic connection with our own tradition is severed, this is a tremendous challenge. What is more, many Muslim intellectuals simply think the Islamic heritage that I mentioned has little relevance to address contemporary challenges. Yet unless one is able to ground one's self-identity in one's own intellectual tradition, one will be held captive to the web of epistemic colonialism. One might be comfortable offering one's prayers as a Muslim, but one's mental ambience will be permeated by devastating, Eurocentric ideas. One would hardly be able to overcome one's fragmented self-image. For all these reasons, the decolonial project cannot simply be a matter of armchair thinking. It must also be a spiritual practice leading to a state of intellectual emancipation.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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