Views and Comments

Paradigms in Political Science Revisited

We are at a crossroads where the time is ripe for the emerging Muslim thought to once again set the standard for universal participation and debate. My continual argument with Mona Abul-Fadl's concept of *kairos* in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (September 1989 supplement) is whether the openness of the discourse realm is a result of what Gai Eaton describes as the process of decomposition releasing explosive gases,[1] where the "ripeness" is putridity, or a beneficial progress of ideas. Does postmodern deconstruction, decentralization, and destruction create a foothold for the remembering of Islam? Or will the Islamic discourse enter the scene to be trivialized and relativized in the encounter? From my perspective, I tie the movements of the paradigms to the political encounter with the other, where the self-described American establishment was forced to recognize the non-white, the non-male, the non-consumer.[2] More sensitive to complexities, calmer in her approach, and without any reductionism or oversimplification, Mona Abul-Fadl recognizes the "mundane" links of ideas, but treats them with respect nevertheless. It is her insight to see in the *tanzil*, in the physical and already interpreted descent of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the one rope on which we may spin, *in sha'a Allah*, the Islamic discourse for it to achieve grounding and affirmation in a world of chaos and alienation.

We are in a time when a metacritique may now become possible,[3] where the crisis in Western thought coincides with a dawning epistemic consciousness among Muslims. "We are living," she notes, "at the threshold of a critical era which is steadily being acknowledged as such. The designation 'post-modernity' indicates the direction of the transition away from the established canon of values and beliefs identified with the European Enlightenment."[4]

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[1]Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 20.

[2]See my "Paradigms and Postmodern Politics from an Islamic Perspective" presented at the same conference, December 15-17, 1989, Association of Muslim Social Scientistis and the International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia.

[3]We must continually be wary of playing with the metacritique the way the investment banker plays with take overs, for the metacritique is after all the top of the pyramid of knowledge, the top of the accumulated heap of knowledge. Selling a giant parent corporation, which is done far above the input and desires of its "children," its workers, its middle managers, may correspond to metacritique, where we wield the pen that will disinvest the field workers' efforts of meaning. See Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1985).

[4]Mona Abul-Fadl, "Paradigms in Political Science Revisited" *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (September, 1989), supplement, p. 31.

Our challenge is to develop an original intellectual stance which contributes to the world of ideas without being submerged. Our best strategy for both contributing to and avoiding submersion seems to be to work along two levels, the epistemic[5] and the socio-historical. The epistemic level is the paradigmatic reading, the reading of the discourse, while the socio-historical level is that of the legacy.

Our opportunity is even more retinant because the Islamicate traditionally has set the standards and grounds of discourse and let the debate open up from there. This meant that non-Arabs and non-Muslims, Greek ideas and Indian ideas, could all flourish within the larger Islamic episteme. The fertile soil of the Andalus, the mystic explorations in India, and the phenomenon of *Arabic* science practiced by extremely diverse groups and people having in common only language and methodology contributed to Islamic civilization. Thus the efforts of Muslims cannot for a moment be seen to be somehow parochial or strictly Muslim. They must instead be understood as being by Muslims for humankind, from the Ummah for humankind. Far from being a dominating and squelching approach, however, this kind of universality carries with it the concepts of diversity in form and unity in essence, *shūrā* and participation (never commands *ex cathedra*), and the resonance of previous revelations and al din al fitrah, that primordial recognition of the divine found everywhere in everyone who believes. As Mona Abul-Fadl points out elsewhere, the *tawḥīdī* episteme is universal without being totalizing, and therein lies the difference.

To overcome the limitations and rigidities of a pervasive rationalist mode that was once so popular with the behavioralists, and remains so for the neo-positivists, we see a counter research program which attempts to accommodate intersubjectivity and human agency to rationality, as Mona Abul-Fadl puts it. Although this research program carries the debate beyond conventional remedies, it offers intriguing points of collusion for the Muslim thinker. She finds two contrasting perspectives invoked as a counter program. One takes up the rationality end of the spectrum which becomes redefined in terms of Habermas' communications model, the ideal speech situation. Habermas attempted to build a rational model of society on the ruins of ontology, as he put it. Having accepted that the light of Being no longer shone through the transparent medium of language, as Edward Said characterizes the modern age, Habermas nevertheless held out the hope that language could once again become clear and its opacity found to be just a bad dream. Whereas

[5]Mona Abul-Fadl's description is as follows. "'Episteme' is used here to refer to foundational values and beliefs about knowledge and being which usually permeate the matrix of any specialized area of inquiry without necessarily being consciously articulated as such. The nearest we come to such an articulation is the paradigm debate which raises fundamental questions relating to identity and meaning." [p. 9].

Wittgenstein and others accepted the language game and attempted to develop workable semantics, Habermas sought to disinvest interests from language in society. He devised a model society where interests could not distort language, where past distortions could be removed and previous suppressed language un-suppressed.[6] But Habermas' attempts to plug the holes of modernity find often scornful criticism in Lyotard, Foucault, and Baudrillard.

Foucault, especially, shows how thought (discourses) lives within its own system and how understanding a text from another age requires not simply reading it and implicitly subsuming it on our own, but requires an archaeology, a stratum by stratum uncovering and stratum by stratum contextualization to give the text whatever meaning it is going to have. Such approaches, as Mona Abul-Fadl points out, are hardly typical of the mainline discipline, which participates in the post-Enlightenment fantasy of a strictly dichotomous power and knowledge, such that it is possible—and required—to treat the discipline of political science, for instance, as a knowledge pursuit unrelated to the vulgarities of power.

However, she does put together a response to the power-knowledge proposition. Merely accepting that power structures the discourse universe which makes knowledge possible is not enough; "to leave matters there faults the argument," she explains, "for it restricts it to a vicious circularity."[7] Instead, "only by realizing that the dialectic of power and knowledge is ultimately integrated at a point beyond the temporal plane can this circle be broken and the dichotomous logic be superseded."[8] This location beyond the temporal plane then opens up intriguing consequences of universality, but a universality which does not become totalizing. This entails a *tawḥīdī* episteme, which she describes as the only framework which can sustain a universalistic and stabilizing momentum without threatening the autonomy and integrity of its subject. This is due, she explains, to its unique point of departure which is transcendental and at the same time world-encompassing.With this we transcend the bane of Marxist analysis—reification—and the complete imposition of the dominant on the other culture. But this is accomplished not by the anarchic and paralogical strategies characteristic of postmodernism, but instead is carried out at a transcendent level. One strategy of postmodernism is the surrealistic strain in the discipline, where politics itself is reconceptualized

[6]See Eric A. Winkel "Remembering Islam: A Critique of Juergen Habermas and Michael Foucault" *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (September, 1989).

[7]Baudrillard complains that when Foucault denounces power, he also invokes it, "because the reminder of fascism (as the reminder of power), even under the form of microanalysis, is still a nostalgic reminder of the political, of a truth of politics, at the same time as it allows us to save the hypothesis of desire so that we can still say that power and fascism are nothing but paranoid accidents" [Jean Baudrillard (1977) *oublier foucault*, (Paris: Gallimad)].

[8]Draft manuscript, 1989.

as "play," to expose its ideological bearings, which implicitly obstructs the possibilities of a consensus emerging.[9] But Mona Abul-Fadl notes that Voegelin, in giving ammunition to anyone who would like to see positivism fail, could not have foreseen that the critique of modernity would give way to a radical and nihilistic cult substituting survival for progress and abandoning a rational morality for politicized aesthetics.[10] Clearly the predilection for method masks the channels of power in modernism, but the unmasking and uncovering brought about by postmodernism could not—nor did it want to—move beyond reaction to ontology. What she develops here and elsewhere is the *tawḥīdī* framework, an approach which avoids the pitfalls of both modernism and postmodernism.

Thus, the postmodern turn and the currents which have spawned the postmodernist trend, she notes, are perhaps not equipped to do more than question and, perhaps, to effectively undermine the dominant paradigm, without, however, replacing it.[11] So much of the reaction against postmodernism has merely been a retrenchment of the Great White History or Great Books variety, with its vociferous critics like Bloom, Hirsch, and others. When Spivak, in a recent Harper's magazine debate, called out for giving the other some voice, the neo-conservatives cried out for the classics which informed the "American" experience, obviously an experience unknown to the voices of the others.

And here we have the central problem with the radical or anarchic traditions in the West. As Muslim thinkers we certainly find much help from those quarters in our iconoclasmic pre-architectonic phase, but our involvement with these "strange bed fellows" has its consequences as well. Said's metaphor is apt here for us. As with Rorty's image of the philosopher's salon and Habermas' ideal speech situation, the other is allowed to enter the house only after a vigorous scrubbing and sanitation procedure. Like the rebellious daughter bringing us to see the parents, our presence is more to shock than to contribute. Mona explains that "while it may be true that the West is increasingly aware of the possibility that its experience might not constitute the archetype of all possible histories, and while it is increasingly aware that there might be something it could learn from other cultures and other histories, the perspective which conditions this openness to the other remains itself subject to its own confines."[12]

Whereas the postmodern turn is a wholesale rejection of ontology, a complete shift from depth epistemology to surface hermeneutics, the *tawḥīdī*

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[9]Mona Abul-Fadl "Paradigms in Political Science Revisited" *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (September, 1989), supplement, p. 31.

[10]Ibid., 1989, 38.

[11]Ibid., 1989, 39.

[12]Ibid., 1989, 40.

perspective reaches far beyond both the depth of modernity, by engaging a transcendental which is not merely the apotheosis of limited truths, and the surface of postmodernity in its ability to shock, erase and dismantle. In fact, Mona points out that the *shahadah* is the perfect demonstration of total "deconstruction," total destruction and dismantling (*la ilaha*, there are no absolutes, no gods, no idols, no values . . .) followed by the ultimate absolute of Being (*ila Allah*, except Allah and all that entails). As Muslim thinkers, then, we encourage the total wiping of the slate clean, even when it joins with strange postmodern bedfellows, and our affirmation of the remainder—His face—becomes our position beyond modernity or postmodernity. Our affirmation (the *shahadah*), then, is the remembrance of the first covenant with Allah (SWT), where we affirmed, "Yes, You are our Lord." The affirmation's methodology, as it were, was developed by Muhammad (ṢAAS) for the early Ummah, and it is the recovery of this strategy which is our goal.

Our strategy is clear, but our tactics are not yet clear. Where to contribute? Where to look for resonances which we can engage and to which we can contribute? The history of Islamic thought has been one of setting the ground for the *tawḥīdī* episteme, so that all matters arising may be fruitfully discussed and debated. And the element of power is completely integral to this engagement of our intellect and imagination. A central concept in the description in the Qur'an of Dhu'l Qarnain is *tamakkun*, empowerment as a means for justice to thrive. With this concept of *tamakkun* we begin to see the inadequacies of contemporary discourse, we see that we must build our *tawḥīdī* perspective from Islamic terminologies, we must build the semantics of Islam. Consonant with *tamakkun* is the conceptof *dafa'*, the pushing away of evil from the earth, where in some kind of dialectic one Ummah will push another out, so that the places wherein Allah's name is oft praised will remain. The matrix of inquiry in contemporary social theory is rooted in dualistic and polarized concepts, with dichotomies such as fact/value, ideal/real, sacred/profane, material/ideal, theory/practice, philosophy/science, and reason/revelation. Clearly any such conceptualizations run counter to the *tawḥīdī* perspective, and part of our iconoclasm must be their destruction in our own analyses.

Our task is to contribute to human thought, to remember Islam for ourselves so that we participate universally in an Islamic discourse which must never be confined to Muslims. By addressing political science and politics at the paradigmatic level, we recognize that in the crisis and crumbling of the Western paradigm we stand to contribute. We have the opportunity to offer our own reading, a reading which will draw on and engage Western strands of thought while at the same time clearing the way for the *tawḥīdī* episteme. The question is what do we as Muslims know about the *tawḥīdī* episteme that can render a competent and intriguing reading of the West?

If we are ready, our readings of the Islamic episteme and the social–and cultural–historical legacy may combine with our readings of the Western tradition in ways which prepare the ground for the *tawḥīdī* episteme to once again be the medium and tradition within which human thought will flourish, *in sha'a Allah*.

Eric A. Winkel (Sikander)
International Islamic University
Selangor, Malaysia

الرمز	اسم الكتاب	اسم المؤلف	سنة النشر	عدد الصفحات	نوع الغلاف	السعر
A-1	إسلامية المعرفة: المبادىء العامة وخطة العمل	المعهد العالمي للفكر الاسلامي	(١٤٠٦هـ / ١٩٨٦م)	٢٢٨ صفحة (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي	٥ دولارات
A-2 A-2-A	دليل مكتبة الأسرة المسلمة	خطة وإشراف الدكتور عبد الحميد أبو سليمان	(١٤٠٥هـ / ١٩٨٥م)	٦٦٤ صفحة (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي مجلد	١٠ دولارات ١٥ دولار
A-3 A-3-A	حُجية السُّنة	د. عبد الغني عبد الخالق	(١٤٠٧هـ / ١٩٨٦م)	٥٩٨ صفحة (٩٫٥×٦٫٥) بوصة	عادي مجلد	١٠ دولارات ١٩ دولار
A-4	الصحوة الاسلامية بين الجحود والتطرف	الدكتور يوسف القرضاي	(١٤٠٤هـ / ١٩٨٤م)	٢٣٢ صفحة (٨×٥٫٥) بوصة	عادي	٤ دولارات
A-5 A-5-A	نحو نظام نقدي عادل	الدكتور محمد عمر شابرا	(١٤٠٨هـ / ١٩٨٧م)	٤٠٤ صفحات (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي مجلد	١٠ دولارات ١٩ دولار
A-6	أدب الاختلاف في الإسلام	الدكتور طه جابر العلواني	(١٤٠٧هـ / ١٩٨٧م)	١٦٨ صفحة (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي	٥ دولارات
A-7	الوجيز في إسلامية المعرفة	المعهد العالمي للفكر الإسلامي	(١٤٠٨هـ / ١٩٨٧م)	١٣٢ صفحة (٦٠٤٫٥) بوصة	عادي	٣ دولارات
A-8	أصول الفقه الإسلامي	الدكتور طه جابر العلواني	(١٤٠٨هـ / ١٩٨٨م)	٤٤ صفحة (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي	٣ دولارات
A-11	الأزمة الفكرية المعاصرة	الدكتور طه جابر العلواني	(١٤١٠هـ / ١٩٨٩م)	٦٤ صفحة (٩٠٦) بوصة	عادي	٣ دولارات