



***MODERN IDEOLOGIES FROM
AN ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL
PERSPECTIVE***

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INTRODUCTION

- Purpose of this presentation:
- 1. Examine the philosophical foundations of modern ideologies or pseudo/quasi-religions:
 - i. Rationalism
 - ii. Empiricism
 - iii. Humanism
- 2. Analyze these philosophical foundations from an intellectual Islamic perspective to understand their practical implications.
- 3. Respond to these ideologies as Muslims:
 - i. Maintain Muslim identity: religious and intellectual
 - ii. Coexist with Western counterparts in sustainable and meaningful ways.

Terms and their Significance

- Definition of modern ideologies:
- “A comprehensive vision; a way of looking at things as in common sense and several philosophical tendencies, or a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society through a normative thought process.”
- “Any systematic and all-embracing political doctrine, which claims to give a complete and universally applicable theory of man and society, and to derive there from a programme of political action.”

- Meaning of Quasi-religions: Entities with unintended similarities to religions.
- One of the understandings of religion: It is a pervasive dimension in human life.
- Quasi-religion: Similar pervasiveness.
- In contrast to religion: No transcendent reality
- Its concerns are finite and conditioned; derived from social and political dimensions of human life.
- Religion=Quasi-religion=ideology

- Why Islamic intellectual perspective?
- Ideology: Philosophy=thought=intellectual
- Thus, need to answer modern ideologies from an Islamic intellectual perspective i.e., intellectually and not juridically.
- Modern Ideologies: derived from European philosophy from Renaissance and especially the 17th century onward i.e., the beginning of the modern age.
- **Modern period in the West**: philosophy replaced religion and the rise of the idea of *ideology* in the 19th century.

Modern Western Philosophy: Salient Features and Leading Figures

- Features of modern Western philosophy:
- 1. **Rationalism**
- Began with Rene Descartes (1596-1650), father of modern rationalism with his assertion, **“I think therefore I am (*cogito ergo sum*)”**.
- **The cognitive act of the individual ego and human reason independent of revelation as the ultimate criterion of the truth and foundation of existence.**
- His assertion of dualism: reality consists of two dimensions or two substances, 1. the world of extension or matter (materialists); and 2. the world of consciousness or thought (idealists). Consequently, European philosophy unable to understand the relation between the two.

- **2. Empiricism**

- Began with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) who is considered as father of modern British science.
- Reliance upon science and creation of ‘a new science’ which would give human beings mastery over nature and power over the environment and the philosophy that lies behind it.
- Established the ‘scientific method: accumulation of data, doing experiments and organized observation.

- **3. Humanism**

- Began in Italy and mostly in southern Italy and Sicily.
- Characteristic of the Renaissance and modern philosophy.
- **Definition:** “A cultural and intellectual viewpoint which affirms the dignity and worth of human beings, in respect of the power of human reason to know the truths of nature and the capacity of the human spirit to determine, express and achieve what is good for human beings.” (*human-centered and nature-centered*)
- Thus, humanism is **essentially secular** and signifies the independence of human beings from God and his freedom on earth outside the laws and dictates of God and revelation.

Islamic Intellectual Perspective

- The Arabic term ***fikr*** used as equivalent of the term thought as used in modern thought (which originated in philosophy) does not render the same meaning.
- ***Fikr*** is related to meditation and contemplation (*tafakkur*, *ta'aruf*).
- In Islamic sciences the locus and container of knowledge is not the human mind but ultimately the Divine Intellect which illuminates the human mind.
- **Thought** relates to purely human and therefore non-divine, mental activity.
- In modern sciences the criteria and instruments of knowledge are purely human i.e., human reason and the human senses.

Rationalism and Empiricism as Means of Knowledge

- **Modern philosophy and thought**: With Cartesian rationalism **individual human existence** was made the **criteria of reality and also the truth**. Individual awareness of his own limited self is placed as the criteria of existence.
- **Islamic intellectual perspective**: Its the **Being of God** which determines human existence and the various levels of reality.
- In Islam the means of knowledge available are: i) revelation ii) intellectual intuition or vision (*dhawq, kashf* or *shuhud*) and iii) reason.

- 1. Revelation is the primary source of knowledge.
- 2. Reason is also a source of knowledge but it is always attached to and derives sustenance from revelation as well as intellectual intuition.
- 3. Intellectual intuition or vision involves the purification of the self and opening of the ‘eye of the heart’ (*‘ayn al-qalb*) which enables human beings to gain ‘direct vision’ of the metaphysical realm (*‘ālam al-ghayb*).

- Modern Western thought rejected both revelation and intellectual intuition as a means of knowledge and declared the independence of reason from both revelation and intellectual intuition.
- In the domain of the sciences neither empiricism nor reliance upon the data of the senses as confirmed by reason can serve as principles in the metaphysical sense.
- Contrary to the Islamic sciences: In the absence of revelation and intellectual intuition the modern sciences are not attached to metaphysical principles and not integrated into a higher form of knowledge

Humanism

- The Islamic conception of human being (*insān*) differs profoundly from the Modern.
- The Islamic conception of human being (*insān*): 1. Servant of God (*al-‘abd*) and, 2. Vicegerent on earth (*khalīfat Allāh fī al-‘ard*).
- ****The human being is created to actualize his purpose or seek perfection (ṭalib al-kamāl) and attain eternal happiness through intellectual and spiritual growth.***
- The role of human being is not the glorification of himself (as in Western Humanism), but of his Lord.
- The guidance is the Revelation to which the human being is tied not only in its aspect of law as embodied in the *Sharī‘ah* but also in its aspect of truth and knowledge (*Ḥaqīqah*).

Islamic vs Modern Conception of Man

Islamic

- **Ontological/Cosmological:**
- He possesses a soul and spirit created by God.
- Contains in himself plant and animal natures as the crown of creation (*ashraf al-makhluqat*).
- Not evolved from the lower forms of life. Man has always been man.

Modern

- **Ontological/Cosmological**
- Rejection of permanence.
- The greater 'evolves' from the 'lesser'.
- 'Cut off' God from His creation. Reject any principle above the human, which then results in the human being falling to the level of the subhuman.

Islamic

- **Epistemological:**
- Faculties: senses, reason, intellectual intuition/spiritual illumination
- Possibility of knowledge of self (inward) and God (direct).

Modern

- **Epistemological:**
- Thought pattern is not connected to anything sacred.
- Replaces the Divine Order by one purely of human origin and inspiration.

Islamic

- **Eschatological:**
- Consciousness comes from God and goes beyond death
- Creature of this world (temporary) and afterlife/original home (permanent).

Modern

- **Eschatological:** (absence of eschatological realities)
- Purely an earthly creature, master of nature, responsible to only himself.
- Transcendent Principle is forgotten,
- Subscribes to Utopianism which seeks to establish a perfect social order through purely human means.
- It disregards the presence of evil in the world theologically and aims at doing good without God.

- From the Islamic perspective, by **modern** it does not mean contemporary or up-to-date. It also does not signify something that is successful in the conquest and domination of the natural world.
- **Modern** means that which is cut off from the Transcendent, from the immutable principles which in reality govern all things and which are made known to man through Revelation.
- Modernism implies all that is human and now even subhuman, and all that is cut off from the Divine source.
- **Modernism** is thus contrasted with Islam as a religion and complete way of life (*al-dīn*).

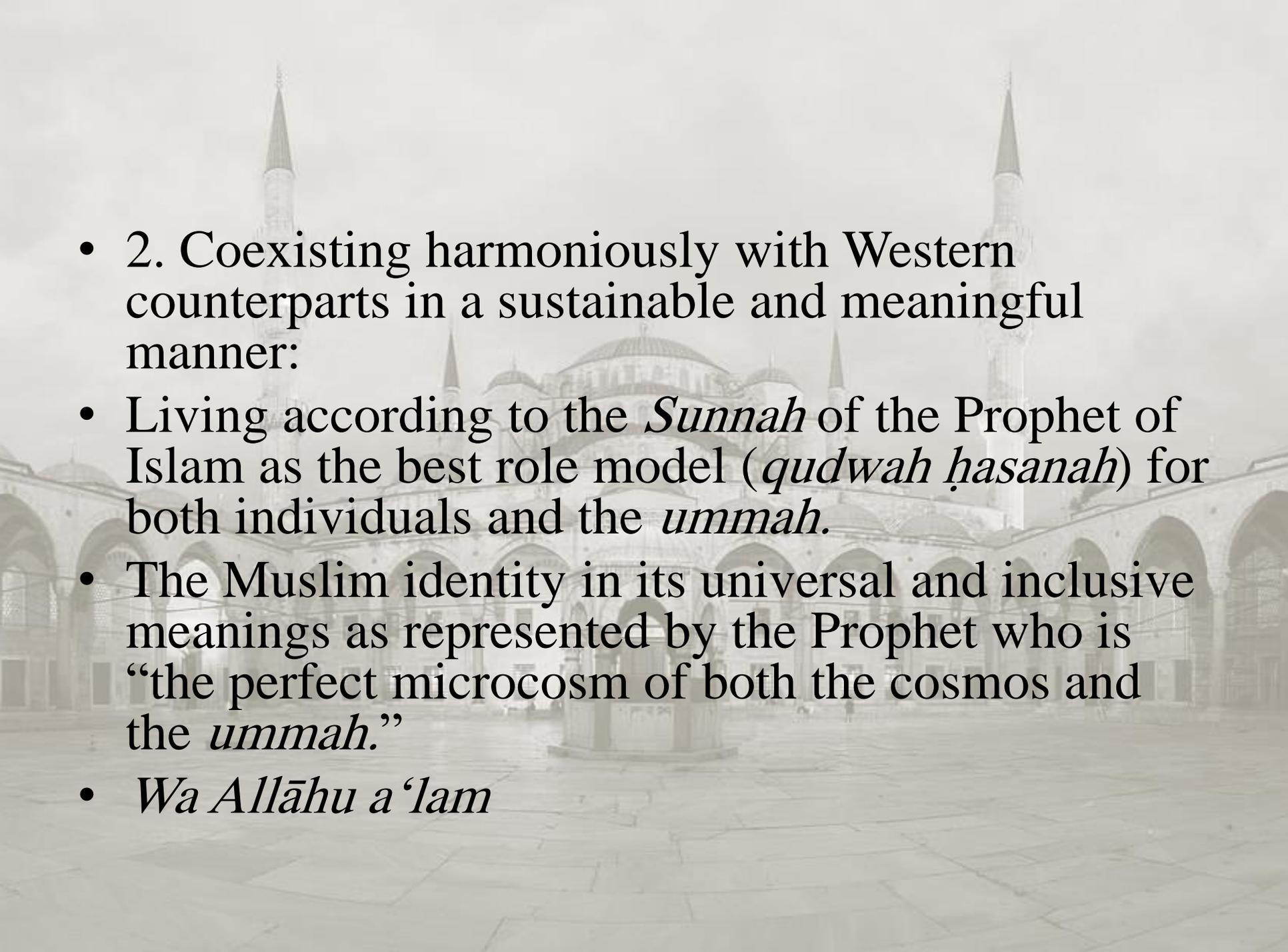
Muslim Response

- With the understanding of the significance of philosophy in Western civilization and consequently modernism, the meaning of modern phenomena in all fields for example in science, politics, economics, education, and social realities is more easily understood.
- The challenges of modernism on Muslims are experienced not only in the West but also within the Islamic world.
- The response by Muslims to this worldview permeated by modern ideologies are:
 - 1. Alienation from Islam (represented by for example, modernists or liberals).
 - 2. Anger (intense emotion or even violence) of the West (represented by for example, 'fundamentalists' or extremists).
- The essence of an Islamic response to the modern world consists of the religious, spiritual and intellectual aspects of human life.

Intellectual Response

- 1. Maintain Muslim Identity: Founded on principles of Divine Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) and divine Law (*Sharī‘ah*) as perfectly exemplified by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh).
- The Muslim *ummah* which shapes Islamic civilization as a knowledge-community with a distinctive knowledge culture.
- Main feature of knowledge-community: **Islamic Intellectual tradition.**
- Challenge from the West is in the area of knowledge and therefore intellectual.
- Thus responses include:
- Learning from and preserving the intellectual tradition.

- Drawing from its responses to modern ideologies such as atheism, agnosticism, secularism, materialism, scientism etc. and other scientific theories.
- i. Actualizing the Islamic response i.e., applying the knowledge to concrete situations individually and socially.
- ii. Defending Islam from distorted interpretations by relying on what is central and authentic to Islam.
- iii. Avoiding sectarian opposition which drains spiritual energies of the Muslim *ummah*.

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- 2. Coexisting harmoniously with Western counterparts in a sustainable and meaningful manner:
 - Living according to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam as the best role model (*qudwah ḥasanah*) for both individuals and the *ummah*.
 - The Muslim identity in its universal and inclusive meanings as represented by the Prophet who is “the perfect microcosm of both the cosmos and the *ummah*.”
 - *Wa Allāhu a‘lam*