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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَى سِدِّكَ يَا مُحَمَّدُ
وَكَلَّمَ. يَا لَهُ وَكَهَيْهِ يَا جَمْعِيَّةً وَسَلَامَ

Dedication

To Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi (1930-2021), the *Murabbī*,
the fosterer of others' growth par excellence, educator of men,
women, and children, many of whom have become in turn
educators.

The *Islam &...* Series

This series deals with our world situation in all its dimensions, not just the political and economic, and the need to make sense of it and survive it. The writers have emerged from lived community life, from learning communities, in which finding answers to the issues we face is urgent, rather than a purely theoretical or academic matter.

Thus the *Islam &...* Series brings together authors who examine our situation from Muslim and non-Muslim, classical, pre- and post-modern, scientific and humanist, academic and everyday experiential standpoints that converge in startling and productive ways. They draw on the Book and the Sunna, science, the arts, philosophy and metaphysics, and history to make sense, and they summon Imam Malik, Carl Schmitt, Aisha Bewley, Malcolm X, Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbi, D. H. Lawrence, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang von Goethe, Martin Heidegger, Antonio Damasio, Thomas Arnold, and pre-eminently Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi/Ian Dallas, as witnesses.

The range of topics in the series – education, the politics of power, technique and science, society through literature, and economics – help us to understand where we are, how we got here, where we would like to be, and how to get there, a far from abstract desire.

Root Islamic Re-education¹

Abdalhaqq Bewley

Say: *O you who disbelieve – who cover up the truth, I do not worship what you worship, and you do not worship what I worship; I am not a worshipper of what you worship and you do not worship what I worship. You have your deen and I have my deen.* (Sūra 109)

Almost all Muslims know these words from the Qur'an by heart, and many recite them once or more every day, yet not many really reflect on their meaning or realise the importance they hold for the people of this time. It is almost as though, in the repetition of the basic premise of the *sūra*, that two kinds of worship are being highlighted. The first kind – the gross idolatry of literally turning physical forms into objects of worship – is something that all Muslims are protected from doing as long as they hold to even the most basic elements of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ said in a well known *hadith*: “By Allah, I am not afraid that you will worship others besides Allah after me, but I am afraid that you will strive and struggle against each other over these treasures of the world.” To do that would be the unforgivable wrong action of open *shirk*.

However, as the Prophet ﷺ also made clear there is also such a thing as hidden *shirk*, the unconscious association of other things with Allah, and it is perhaps this that the second,

¹ A lecture delivered in Granada, December 2013.

repeated declaration refers to. In the *sūra* Allah commands His Messenger ﷺ to declare himself free of associating anything whatsoever with his Lord either outwardly or inwardly. But, while his community are protected from associating anything outwardly with Allah, from open *shirk*, the Muslims as a whole are certainly prone to inward association, to hidden *shirk*. Indeed Allah tells us in His Book near the end of *Sūra Yūsuf*: “*Most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others with Him,*” (12:106) and the Prophet ﷺ referred to it on several occasions.

The *sūra* ends: “*You have your deen and I have my deen*” making it clear that Allah’s *deen* is that *deen* in which He alone is worshipped, in which nothing is associated with Him, and that this is what differentiates it from the *deen* of the unbelievers. But what exactly is the unbelievers’ *deen*, what form does it take in today’s world? The *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ, “*kufr* is one *milla*, one system of belief,” has never been more demonstrably true than now. The dominant ethos of the world we live in is often referred to as the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, although it has in fact almost nothing to do with either Judaism or Christianity as religions, it can certainly be said to have grown out of the civilisation founded on these two religious traditions. It in fact finds its roots in the ancient world and, subverting seven centuries of enlightened input from the world of Islam while borrowing from it freely, it created a leviathan within the Judaeo-Christian world, the ongoing heir of the empire of ancient Rome, that has now overwhelmed the whole globe.

The most obvious outward manifestation of this domination is the dazzling technological superiority achieved through the scientific advances of the past few centuries that has been so crucial to the way that every aspect of human life is now

conducted and controlled. What is not so readily appreciated is that this technological dominance is the direct outcome of a lengthy and deeply searched philosophical tradition, which underpins everything that has happened in the modern world. Some landmark figures in this tradition are Plato, Aristotle, Erasmus, Descartes, Hobbes, and Kant but, of course, there were many other significant thinkers betwixt and between them.

The end result of these two millennia of thought has been a very particular understanding of the human creature, which can be very loosely generalised as the increasing subjectivisation of the individual human being and the increasing objectivisation of the surrounding world. A fundamental picture of the human being was definitively formulated, which posited a basic dualism of mind/matter, spirit/body, subject/object, inner perception/outer world, and between the two there was a hard and fast division. In this definition man has become a thinking mind, stuck in a material body, looking out on an alien world of separate things outside himself.

The inevitable consequence of this was the abandonment of a traditional view of existence based on Divine Revelation, which had held sway until that time and which saw all existence as a unified whole. It was replaced by a perspective in which the mathematical science of the world and its phenomena took precedence over everything else. Descartes, who was as much a scientist as he was a philosopher, put it thus: "I perceived it to be possible to arrive at a knowledge highly useful in life ... to discover a practical, by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us ... we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature." And

Francis Bacon, another 17th Century philosopher/scientist, who is best known for his dictum that God works in Nature only by secondary causes, encapsulated this position by saying, “Those therefore, who determine not to conjecture and guess, but to find out and know – not to invent fables and romances of worlds, but to look into and dissect the nature of this real world – must consult only things themselves.”

This led inexorably step by step to *Principia Mathematica*, the magnum opus of Isaac Newton, in which he formulated the laws of mechanics and gravity and which proved to be the fundamental work for the whole of modern science. In it Newton formulated what he called the law of universal gravitation and the three fundamental laws of mechanics, to the incalculable advancement of scientific knowledge, even if to the eventual detriment of the natural and human environments. There are few people who have so changed other people’s perception of the universe they live in. After Newton mystery disappeared from the universe. Everything was now self-explanatory in terms of mutually dependent, internally self-consistent, interactive forces needing no extra-universal stimulus. Professor E.A. Burtt writing about what had happened says:

“It was of the greatest consequence for succeeding thought that now the great Newton’s authority was squarely behind that view of the cosmos, which saw in man a puny irrelevant spectator (insofar as a being wholly imprisoned in a dark room can be called such) of the vast mathematical system whose regular motions according to mechanical principles constituted the world of nature...”

The world that people had thought themselves living in – a world rich with colour and sound, a world of purposive harmony

and creative ideals – no longer existed except in imagination. The real world outside was a hard, cold, colourless, silent and dead world – a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity. In Newton, the Cartesian metaphysics found its perfect expression and finally became the predominant worldview of modern times.

The age of scientific materialism had been born.

It might be asked what all this has to do with the subject of this talk – the need for Muslim re-education – but the fact is that the worldview propagated by this philosophical tradition, culminating as we have seen in the work of Descartes and Newton, rapidly disseminated itself and soon became part and parcel of the way more and more people saw themselves and the world they lived in. It became embedded in the education systems of every part of the world and it is true to say that almost everyone is now indoctrinated in its precepts from the moment of their birth, so that there are now very few human beings indeed, Muslims included, who do not view the world in its light. The problem for Muslims is that there are unresolvable contradictions between the understanding of existence inherent in this worldview and the basic teachings of Islam. To start with there is the rigid dualism referred to earlier, the unequivocal separation of subject and object, of mind and matter, of inner perception and outer world. When this is taken to its logical conclusion it leads to a situation where a true understanding of *tawhid*, of the essential unity of existence, the absolute foundation of all Islamic teaching, becomes, intellectually speaking, virtually impossible to achieve.

Another way that an authentic understanding of *tawhid* is undermined by the scientific worldview is its rigorous reliance on causality in its methodology. Bacon started the ball rolling

by definitively removing the Divine from any involvement in the physical universe with his dictum: “God works in nature only by secondary causes.” This was driven home by Newton’s third law of motion: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” This removed the Divine from any involvement whatsoever in the natural world and has been the basis of virtually all scientific experiment and discovery ever since. The problem for Muslims is that this is absolutely at odds with the Qur’anic view of the way things happen. It is made abundantly clear in many *ayats* of Allah’s Book that there is direct Divine participation in everything that occurs in the natural world and, as Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib reiterated time and time again in his discourses, to attribute effects to their causes is hidden *shirk* – in other words an unconscious denial of *tawhid* – because in every instance there is no actor but Allah. The effect accompanies the cause; it is not brought about by it. Both are equally created by Allah at the moment of their occurrence.

However, as I said, scientific materialism has now intruded into every aspect of life and every corner of the earth and our education merely serves to reinforce it and articulate it. The Muslims have been subjected to this indoctrination process along with everyone else and it might be said that we are, in a way, in a worse position than non-Muslims because we think that, because we have the formulae of *tawhid* on our tongues, we are somehow immune from the insidious effects of the scientific worldview. But, in my experience, Muslims are just as susceptible to its deceptions as non-Muslims and often more so. I have talked over the last forty years to a great many Muslims about this matter and what I have found is that almost all of them have a completely Baconian approach to the subject. For

them science and religion occupy separate spheres, different spaces in their consciousness.

They in fact posit the truth of science as being somehow distinct from the truth of religion. In the mosque and the Islamic students' society they use one language and in the laboratory and classroom quite another. The scientific worldview is necessarily based on Bacon's dictum that God only works in the universe through secondary causes. But the God the Muslim worships in the mosque is by definition the only Actor without intermediary in every phenomenon. These Muslims are leading double lives, often without realising it. No, there is no doubt that the Muslims' understanding of *tawhid* has been weakened and corrupted by the dominant worldview. Like almost everybody else, the modern Muslim has in fact divorced the Divine from direct involvement in natural processes, seeing them only in terms of secondary causation, and is therefore precluded from seeing things as they really are. He too views existence through a Galilean telescope and sees a Newtonian mechanistic universe with a mind permeated by Cartesian dualism.

And we should not be surprised at this since the Prophet ﷺ told us it would happen. As I said earlier the scientific worldview we have been looking at is the inevitable endgame of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The Prophet ﷺ once said, "You will surely follow the ways of those who came before you, span by span and yard by yard, so that even if they enter into a lizard's hole you will enter it." The Companions asked, "Do you mean the Jews and Christians?" He replied, "Who else!?" And it is absolutely the case that the view of existence finally formulated by Descartes and Newton is a dark tunnel with a dead end and no exit.

However, although the Cartesian/Newtonian model seemed to be a complete description of existence and was immensely effective, in that it endowed human beings with the ability to manipulate nature to their own advantage and gave great power and profit to those with the most understanding of it – even if to the eventual extreme detriment of the planet on which they live – it has turned out to be, in fact, a very incomplete picture of even the very things it purported to be the definitive explanation of. That very matter, the solid substance upon which the whole edifice rested and of which it was supposedly built, was suddenly discovered to be quite other than had been supposed. Rather than being the lifeless substance posited by Newton, mechanistically determined by being acted on by outside forces, it turned out, at its very heart, to be composed of energy itself. Rather than being inert and predictable it was now seen to be, in reality, highly dynamic and extremely unpredictable.

In the year 1927 two things happened that were to demonstrate once and for all that the model that had held sway for three centuries, that was the bedrock on which the modern world was based, that had become the very basis of human cognition of the world, was actually a completely inadequate, even false, description of the natural world. These two things were the publication of Heisenberg's paper on his "Uncertainty Principle" and the publication of Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*.

Einstein had already cast doubt on many of Newton's absolute certainties and, building on the work of his predecessors in researching the sub-atomic world, Planck and Rutherford, Werner Heisenberg, in close collaboration with his great friend and teacher, Niels Bohr, developed his "uncertainty principle". In one stroke the Newtonian description of existence was

torn to shreds. This is not the time, nor am I even minimally qualified, to go into the details of the science involved, but the end result of Heisenberg's work in quantum mechanics was to show definitively that the rigid separation between the human observer and the outside world he was observing, on which all scientific experimentation was based, did not in reality exist. Fritjof Capra, himself a contemporary atomic physicist of considerable standing, expressed in a particularly lucid and eloquent way the implications of Heisenberg's research when he wrote:

“When quantum mechanics – the theoretical foundation of atomic physics – was worked out in the 1920's, it became clear that even the sub-atomic particles were nothing like the solid objects of classical physics... At the sub-atomic level the solid material of classical physics dissolves into wave-like patterns of probabilities... A careful analysis of the process of observation in atomic physics has shown that the sub-atomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities but can only be understood as correlations between the preparation of an experiment and the subsequent measurement. This implies, however, that the Cartesian division between the I and the world cannot be made while dealing with atomic matter. Quantum mechanics thus reveals a basic oneness of the Universe. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated basic building blocks, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole and these relations always include the observer in an essential way.”

The rigid dualism of the Newtonian model has thus been shown to be a scientific fallacy and the existence of an

underlying unity, at both the macrocosmic and microcosmic level, has been scientifically demonstrated to be the true description of the universe we inhabit. This has once more opened the way to a truly authentic understanding of *tawhid*, something acknowledged by Heisenberg himself. He was asked if he believed in a personal God and replied, “May I rephrase your question? If you are asking can you, or anyone else, reach the central order of things or events, whose existence seems beyond doubt... I would say yes.” And he further said on the same occasion, “...let’s hope the central realm will light our way again, perhaps in quite unsuspected ways.”

What was sealed by Heisenberg in the world of the physical sciences was accomplished by Heidegger in the philosophical realm. The powerful Western philosophical tradition we earlier traced from Plato to Kant continued to remain strong throughout the 19th century but the 20th century saw it lose relevance as it petered out in a mire of abstruse and arcane linguistic abstractions. A major exception to this trend was the work of Martin Heidegger and with his publication of *Being and Time* he cut through two thousand years of philosophy to reopen, as he said, “the question of being”. In doing this he redefined the understanding of what it is to be a human being. As his greatest student and fellow philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer said: “Martin Heidegger changed the philosophical consciousness of the time with one stroke... the brilliant scheme of *Being and Time* really meant a total transformation of the intellectual climate, a transformation that had lasting effects on almost all the sciences. His thinking has penetrated everywhere and works in the depths often unrecognised – but nothing today is thinkable without it.”