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From the Editor-in-Chief,

As I write this introduction (June 2025), Israeli bombs are dropping on Tehran and other cities in Iran; Israel is continuing its genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, and Putin's Russia is continuing its war of aggression on its neighbor, Ukraine. Donald Trump has regained the presidency in the United States, and while he attempts to transform the U.S. into his own authoritarian fiefdom, he has abdicated global leadership, thus causing a massive rearmaments campaign in Europe in order to bolster NATO and further deter aggression by Russia on Europe's eastern flank. Within Western countries, far-right extremists, including neo-Nazis groups, are on the rise with their anti-immigrant politics, threatening the already fragile state of the democracy. Additionally, the bloody battle for African resources between the West, Russia, and China has heated up; the Gulf states and other parts of the Muslim world cozy up to Trump while remaining idle in the face of Israel's genocide of Palestinians; China continues its rise as a global superpower as the Western dominance diminishes, making a Chinese invasion of Taiwan all the more likely; India and Pakistan, both nuclear powers, are having violent flareups over Kashmir, and Russia dreams of returning to a "Great Power" status in the emerging multipolar world, despite it having sustained an estimated 1 million casualties in its war on Ukraine. Talk of World War III has flooded both mainstream and social media. Above the poly-crisis condition, Global Climate Change looms, threatening to make our political-economic catastrophes into minor skirmishes. These and many other global problems, some new, some old, determine the lifeworld of billions of humans, forcing them to make impossible decisions about their lives and the lives of their children. Do we flee, and become refugees, or do we stay and risk the lives of our loved ones? Do we join the fight, or do we stand down and let it play out? Do we support our country despite its wrongdoing, or do we actively fight against our homelands and their governments? These questions, and many more, are the difficult questions that we find ourselves asking; it seems that nothing anymore can be taken for granted. If God died, as Nietzsche proclaimed, in the 19th century, is humanity next on the slaughter bench of history in the 21st? One thing is certain: We are in troubling times – times that call for critical engagement through critical thought.

In 2010, the Swedish-Iranian sociologist, Dr. Seyed Javad Miri founded the journal, *Islamic Perspective*, to engage in robust analyses regarding a myriad of social issues regarding the *dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam). This journal,

which published the works of numerous top scholars in the field of Islamic Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Philosophy, and Religious Studies, as well as up-and-coming scholars, lasted until 2022. In 2018, I had the honor of becoming its second Editor-in-Chief, subsequent to the tenure of Seyed Javad Miri. After the founding of the Institute for Critical Social Theory by Seyed Javad Miri and myself in 2021, we decided that we wanted to broaden the scope of the journal, making the subject matters it covered more expansive while maintaining inter-disciplinary methodology it was founded upon. The result of this change is what you have here: *Critical Perspectives: Journal of the Institute for Critical Social Theory*. With a release date set to coincide with ICST's inaugural conference, "Critical Theory in an Age of Social Disintegration," which was held at the University of Bristol in the UK in July 2025, the new journal represents a new constellation of thought, wherein Western thought comes into friendly – not adversarial – contact with the thought of the Global South, to formulate new and innovative ways of thinking about the global community and its challenges. This journal hopes to continue the legacy of *Islamic Perspective* and its inter-disciplinary approach to world affairs and social problems, while at the same time acting as a bridge between intellectuals in varying cultures and communities who seek a more comprehensive an ecumenical means of entering into a robust dialogue, discourse, and debate over vexing issues. Ultimately, the Institute for Critical Social Theory and its journal *Critical Perspectives* seeks to encourage collaboration between scholars throughout the world, from various intellectual traditions – including both secular and religious, as well as various disciplines. We aim to elevate often ignored or understudied theorists and bring them to a wider audience as well as set them in dialogue with the already established pantheon of thinkers. While being in a Western language, we hope to avoid the Eurocentric trap of only focusing on Western issues, while at the same time not neglecting those problems and those Western thinkers, as in many ways they affect much of the world.

In our first edition of *Critical Perspectives*, numerous members of ICST have contributed articles on a wide variety of topics. Dr. Joseph Alagha and his student Krikor Ankeshian will discuss the psychology of "Occidentosis," a term denoting "Westoxification," which was popularized by the 20th century Iranian theorist, Jalal Al-e Ahmad. The article of Dr. Rudolf J. Siebert discusses the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's "dialectics of being," while Dr. Michael Naughton's work will examine the political nature of state funded scholarship done in the UK. Dr. Syed Javad Miri's article attempts to decolonize our understanding of the Muslim philosopher, Abu Nasr al-Fārābī and his work, emancipating it from the orientalist lenses it is so often interpreted through. Last, my article argues for a dialectical understanding of

the West as a rejection of Oikophobia, or the psychopathology of “hatred of the home,” i.e., one’s own culture, history, society, civilization, etc. These articles and the varying disciplines and analyses they represent, set the polyphonic tone for future editions of *Critical Perspectives*.

We hope you will consider submitting your articles to the new ICST journal, *Critical Perspectives*.

Dustin J. Byrd, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief of *Critical Perspectives*

Founder and Co-Director of the Institute for Critical Social Theory
criticalsocialtheory.com

Terribilis Occidentalis: A Dialectical Critique of Oikophobia

Dustin J. Byrd¹

We live in an age of pathologies. Political pathologies, cultural pathologies, identity pathologies, all have become increasingly visible within the public sphere. In the West, one of the most pernicious of these pathologies is Oikophobia, or the “hatred of the home.” It is a way-of-seeing the West’s heritage, literary and intellectual resources, traditional cultures, history, moral norms, etc., in a reactionary and thus wholly condemnatory manner. Locked in pathological negativity, this way of evaluating the West is inherently myopic, dogmatic, and dangerously ignorant, for it is the abandonment of complex dialectical thought in favor of simplistic binaries. This pathology is especially prevalent among Leftist scholars, academics, and activists, whose worldviews have been so thoroughly saturated with anti-Western critiques, nothing in the West appears to them to be worth salvaging. Because of the historic sins of the West, everything connected to the West is inherently corrupt, and thus bad and/or with evil intent. Viewed from this one-dimensionality, that which is good, beneficent, and historically propulsive in the West is negated alongside the bad, deleterious, and regressive. There is no redemption for the West; it is wholly damned according to Oikophobic thought.

In this essay, I will discuss the history and nature of Oikophobia as the pathologization of critique, as well as the political, cultural, and civilization exports such a pathologization produces. With a few examples, I will show that Oikophobia – and the crystallization of the West as wholly evil – undermines the very emancipatory projects that critics of the West seek to

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engage in. Lastly, I will give an alternative to Oikophobia through what I call *Xenoaletheia*: a full disclosure of the West through a restoration of dialectical critique regarding the West and its cultural/historical inheritance.

Oikophobia as a Concept

Purely as a psychological pathology, the term Oikophobia denotes an irrational “fear of the home.” Specifically, it is a fear of one’s house (Domatophobia) and its contents, especially if such contents are potentially dangers, such as electrical equipment, appliances, or baths. It is often coupled with Syngenesophobia, or fear of relatives/family, as family life is closely associated with the home. While Domatophobia and Syngenesophobia may have rational origins (prior negative experiences, abuse, trauma, neglect, etc.), the fear that grips the individual in the end becomes wholly irrational, often leading to a stupefying paralysis.

As a socio-political concept, Oikophobia shares similar characteristics as its psychological conception, but diverges in meaningful ways. As a socio-political concept, the term was first introduced by the conservative British philosopher, Roger Scruton, his 2004 book, *England and the Need for Nations*, wherein he attempts to create a neologism for a growing phenomenon he has witnessed in the UK and the West in general. He defines Oikophobia as a form of willful “repudiation” of inheritance and home. Thus, in the Western context, the object of repudiation is Western identity, rooted in its varying national identities, histories, traditions, and cultural norms, i.e., the Western inheritance and its contemporary instantiations. Scruton writes,

This repudiation is the result of a peculiar frame of mind that has arisen throughout the Western world since the second world war, and which is particularly prevalent among the intellectuals and political elites. No adequate word exists for this attitude, though its symptoms are instantly recognized: namely, the disposition, in any conflict, to side with “them” against “us,” and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture, and institutions that are identifiably “ours.”²

From this quote, we can see that Scruton identifies two different ways in which Oikophobia manifests in “intellectuals and political elites.” The first is political: oikophobes’ default position in “any conflict” is to support “them” against “us,” to immediately view the other as the victim and “we” as the victimizer. In other words, without any evidence to the contrary, the

² Roger Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations* (London: Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2004), 36.

oikophobe immediately senses that the West (in whatever configuration) is somehow engaged in a devious plot against the innocent other, that ulterior motives animate the West in the conflict, and that the West is not only an actor in the conflict but has created the conditions that made the conflict inevitable.

This oikophobic political logic can be seen most clearly in the West's recent conflict with Russia regarding Ukraine and Putin's "special military operation" (SMO) in Ukraine.³ Within Leftist circles in the West, many believed the Putin was merely defending Russia's sphere of influence from Western/NATO encroachment when it invaded Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. The idea the Putin had his own ideological, religious, and geopolitical reasons for invading Ukraine (which he believes has no right to exist independently of Russia), could not be considered. The West, these oikophobes believed, led by the United States and its allies in NATO, created the conditions that made an otherwise benign Vladimir Putin brutally invade his neighbor. Often referred to as "Vatniks" for their uncritical acceptance of right-wing Russian propaganda, these Leftist individuals and groups – often motivated by Soviet nostalgia – fail to identify any legitimate reason as to why liberal democratic Ukraine would resist Russian aggression. All that could be offered were conspiracy theories about the U.S. State Department, the CIA, and other Western intelligence services "tricking" Ukraine into leaving the Russosphere via a "coup d'état" in 2014, i.e., the Maidan uprising against Russia and Viktor Yanukovich's puppet regime in Kyiv. From their oikophobic standpoint, since the U.S. and the West supported Ukraine, it must be Ukraine and the collective West's fault that Russia annexed the Crimea (2014) and invaded (2022). This myopic standpoint failed to recognize the overwhelming will of the Ukrainian people (including Russian speaking Ukrainians) to remain a sovereign country, not subject to the will of the Russian dictator, Vladimir Putin. Therefore, Ukrainian resistance to Russia's invasion was organic and inevitable; it was not the work of the collective West manipulating Ukraine from behind the scenes.

Oikophobia often invokes Western crimes of the past to justify the non-Western crimes of the present. With the war in Ukraine being understood as a continuation of "American imperialism," as evidenced by the U.S.'s many unjust wars and criminal interventions in the 20th century, the idea that the U.S. was taking a principled stance against Putin's war of aggression was not even considered. Oikophobia, as a pathologically one-sided orientation, does not allow the oikophobe to consider that the U.S. and the collective West can in some cases act criminally (Vietnam, Granada, Iraq, etc.), or facilitates criminal activity (genocide of Palestinians), and in other cases act out of good

³ While it has been made illegal within the Russian Federation to refer to Russia's war in Ukraine as a "war" (война), I do not abide by the Orwellian dictate here and will refer to Putin's war of aggression as a war.

will and right intentions (WWI, WWII, Bosnia, etc.). Because the West is situated as the “perpetual aggressor,” the assumed aggrieved “other,” regardless of their actual intent, must be innocent; they are merely reacting to Western aggression; their intentions are by default pure, benevolent, and without question. Thus, even if the U.S. and the collective West intervened to stop a genocide, as it did in the 1990s in Bosnia, a nefarious motivation must be attributed to their seemingly virtuous actions. It simply is not allowable for a positive motivation to be attributed to the West for the oikophobe. As such, siding with the “them” against the “we,” instead of siding with the good over the bad regardless of who is guilty and who is innocent, is the default position of the oikophobe.

Second, for Scruton, Oikophobia manifests its pathological critique of the West through its “need to denigrate the customs, culture, and institutions that are identifiably ‘ours,’” i.e., the totality of Western identity, as it is determined by its pre-political foundations: culture, language, history, religion, folk customs, etc.⁴ We see this manifested in the constant “cancellation” of all figures, movements, and phenomena that are incongruent with today’s political sentiments, i.e., the master morality that seeks to impose perfection on all or risk being erased from society. This not only includes individuals living, but also to the historical, wherein an individual, movement, country, or institution of the past, having not lived up to today’s master morality, will be stricken from history. While it is rational and necessary to critique the past and the misdeeds that animate the past, oikophobes viciously attack the misdeeds as a means of erasing the agent of those deeds from history. Psychologically, such irrational and emotive critiques appear as impotent attacks on that which can no longer be confronted in the present. While such actions provide a catharsis for the oikophobe, the irrationality of the attack does little to transform the present conditions. For example, striking Arthur Schopenhauer from the pantheon of Western philosophers because of his misogyny does nothing to diminish the prevalence of misogyny in the West today; it simply serves as a symbolic outlet for the aggrieved oikophobe. A rational, systematic, and academic critique of Schopenhauer’s misogyny can demonstrate how a thinker, no matter how brilliant, can succumb to forms of irrationality and bigotry, including misogyny. Yet, the oikophobe sees Schopenhauer merely as a symbolic representative of an inherently evil society, not as an individual reflecting the mores of his time. Therefore, Schopenhauer’s misogyny reenforces the oikophobes constitutional bias: all the West is condemned – Schopenhauer is just one chapter in that horror story.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

An Adolescent Frame of Mind devoid of Dialectical Critique: The Fanatic

For Scruton, oikophobia was transitory; it is a stage of the “adolescent mind,” who in the natural angst of youth, first learns to criticize that which is readily available: one’s own culture, country, politics, customs, etc.⁵ With proper education, socialization, and the development of critical, abstract, and complex ways of thinking, the individual eventually comes to accompany their emerging powers of critique with critique’s countervailing force: appreciative understanding. In contrast to Oikophobia, I define “appreciative understanding” as the “longing to preserve that which has proven itself worthy of preservation.” Alloyed, critique and appreciative understanding result in a more nuanced and honest relatedness to one’s own civilization and culture. A dialectical way of thinking emerges from the ability to both critique and preserve (based on appreciative understanding), for one develops the ability to discern the nuance that inhabits all societies, cultures, and civilizations. Without such discernment, one is apt to think in distortive binaries in a Manichaeistic fashion. In other words, that which is perceived to be bad is *wholly* bad; that which is perceived to be good is *entirely* good. The idea that an entity can contain within itself contradictory elements never is considered within such unnuanced binaries.

Being blind to the totality of the entity in front of them, the oikophobic individual often becomes *fanatical* in their critique; absolutely nothing redemptive or salvageable about the object of their aggression appears to them. According to André Haynal, Niklos Molnar, and Gérard de Puymège, the individual who falls into a fanatical “state of mind” and “mode of behavior” finds themselves entrenched “behind the barriers of his own symbolic Law: [the fanatic is] intolerant toward others, impervious to any idea but his own. He can thus be said to have an extremist, fixed, frenzied, even insane personality.”⁶ Such an individual is incapable of reaching beyond their own fixed orientation, as to do so risks the possibility that their closely held convictions may not stand up to rigorous scrutiny. If challenged effectively, the whole of their anti-West identity rooted in an oikophobic worldview – which frames both their interpretation of reality and orientation of action – is at risk of collapse. Thus, psychological defense mechanisms are instituted to protect their binary world view from the opposition nuance provides.

Scruton suggests that these fanatically oikophobic individuals failed to progress beyond the immaturity of adolescent critique. As he states, “[oikophobia] is a stage in which some people – intellectuals especially – tend

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ André Haynal, Miklos Molnar, and Gérard de Puymège, *Fanaticism: A Historical and Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Linda Butler Koseoglu (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 11-12.

to become arrested.”⁷ In other words, when the critical way-of-being of the individual progresses beyond the *dominant* way of relating to their civilization and culture and becomes the *sole* way of relatedness to the West, I argue, it has become both fanatical and “pathological.” We see this same logic in the work of the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, whose writings on social pathologies can give us an insight in how Scruton’s understands the adolescent nature of oikophobia. Fromm writes,

What is normal at a certain stage is pathological at another stage. Or, to put it differently: what is necessary at one stage is also normal or rational. What is unnecessary, seen from the standpoint of evolution, is irrational and pathological. The adult who “repeats” an infantile stage at the same time does not and cannot repeat it, precisely because he is no longer a child.⁸

With Fromm’s conception of the “pathological” in mind, I argue that Oikophobia is slightly different than what Scruton seems to suggest when he refers to Oikophobia simply as a “disposition.” A “disposition” is a person’s inherent quality of mind and/or character, which has generally been solidified through the process of formation through experiences, education, and socialization (*Bildung*), which can be rooted in or influenced by biological factors. Dispositions, often determined by psychological character types, tend to be inflexible, although some degree of malleability is generally possible. In other words, a disposition can be slightly altered over time in relation to social factors and experiences. Oikophobia as a *psychopathology* goes beyond a disposition; it is a “fixed worldview,” it is unbendable, allowing for next to no flexibility – it is the product of a fanatic mind. As a psychopathology, anti-Western Oikophobia forecloses on any avenue by which Western transcendentals, its Truth (*Verum*), its Goodness (*Bonum*), and its Beauty (*Pulchrum*), can penetrate the closed consciousness, and thus garner a positive evaluation. Oikophobia, in this sense, is *pathologically* myopic regarding all things “that are ours.” Once pathologized, critique of the West simply does not allow for any positive assessment of the West or any substantive aspect of the West. Rather, the West, and all things associated with it, is consigned to the realm of absolute evil (*Übel*), alongside actions like genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass rape. It is not evil at times and under certain circumstances; it is evil in its essence; it is inherently evil, and thus irredeemable. As such, for the oikophobe, “absolute evil” is the ontological condition of the West, not a description of any given action and/or policy. As stated before, even if the West acts in a truly altruistic, beneficent, and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 61.

sympathetic manner, the oikophobe sees nothing but camouflage meant to conceal the truly nefarious motives for the positive appearance. Thus, no matter what the West does, to the self-indicting Westerner, it is worthy of damnation. The result of the West being crystallized into a figure of absolute negativity is what I call “*Terribilis Occidentalis*” – a West that cannot be anything other than evil.

Scruton, however, believes that the West is no different than the rest of the World in that it often fails to realize its own transcendentals – its own stated moral codes, laws, and highest principles. For Scruton, Western oikophobia is nothing but “a catalogue of failings that are natural to the human condition,” which “will be encountered everywhen and everywhere.”⁹ In this sense, a “catalogue of failings” is not unique to the Western world; such a catalogue can be collected for every civilization at any point in time, albeit some more so than others. That is not to minimize the historical negativity and destructiveness of the Western world, for it did colonize much of the planet; it did engage in genocide of peoples; it did hold in slavery millions of souls, among other horrific crimes against humanity. The unique unboundedness of Western man, what Oswald Spengler called the “Faustian man,” has engaged in some of the most barbaric actions in the history of the human species. Even today, the West remains the sole world-historical force, especially the United States of America, capable of ending all life on the planet.¹⁰ Nevertheless, to identify the West’s “catalogue of failings” as being solely definitive of the West, creates a categorical exception: The criminality of the West is absolutized, but such absolutization is not done for all others. For Scruton, such an irrational anti-Occidental project seems intellectually indefensible. To absolutizing the West’s wrongdoings while exempting all other civilizations from such a process would already concede a point that oikophobes would surely reject: standards are higher for the West because it is in some way “superior” to the rest. If it is not superior, then it must be subject to the same standards as the rest of the world, which in most cases are international standards established by Western nations themselves. The

⁹ Scruton, *England the Need for Nations*, 33-34.

¹⁰ Some may argue that the Russian Federation is also a world-historical force alongside the United States. I reject this claim, as the Russian Federation under Putin’s direction has a fraction of the influence and power that the Soviet Union did, let alone the United States as a hegemon. The realization of this fact is one of the core reasons why Putin has attempted to project Russian power outside of Russia (Syria, Africa, etc.), and has invaded its neighbors. These are attempts to reconstitute the Russian Empire in the hope of gaining a “great power” status, thus becoming an opposition pole to the hegemony of the U.S. and its allies in the West. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that Russia does not have the ability to fully conquer a neighboring state, let alone be a meaningful oppositional force in a world dominated by the post-WWII neoliberal “rules-based order.” Nevertheless, this hegemonic reality will continue to be challenged in the 21st century.

absolutization of the West's "catalogue of failings" is but another irrational practice born of Oikophobia.

Scruton believes that oikophobia is "infectious," and he identifies two primary carriers of that malady: Western intellectuals and political elites. These two classes of Westerners hold an enormous amount of influence in Western societies and thus can establish political norms and values through various state and civil institutions that populations in Western societies are coerced to abide by, at least in public.¹¹ He writes, "what began as a *jeu d'esprit* among intellectuals very soon translated itself into political orthodoxy," especially among establishment liberals.¹² Being a conservative, Scruton predominantly assigns blame to liberal intellectuals and political elites, who forward positions that Scruton believes are detrimental to Western culture and societies. He argues:

In its attempt to persuade us to accept the current levels of immigration, our government appeals to *our* traditions of hospitality, asks us to accept the newcomers not as competitors for our territory but as refugees, to whom *we* owe charitable protection. In every major crisis, the government falls back on our historic identity and unaltered loyalty, in order to persuade us to accept even the changes that threaten those precious possessions.¹³

Cultural liberalism, which detaches the individual from historically defining cultural norms, beliefs, and practices, has led many to repudiate the "national idea," i.e., the guiding culture (*Leitkultur*), of their given Western nation, resulting in the production of "disinherited savages" incapable of seeing themselves as being members of the nation they repudiate, nor even being able to recognize the good of their nation.¹⁴ The "disinherited savage" that emerges from Oikophobia rejects his own historical-cultural inheritance, and in the process latches on to "otherness" as a means of grounding themselves in the virtues of global cultural ecumenicism. By repudiating their own, they send the message that they are a Westerner-untethered-to-the-West, an assumingly de-particularized and universally "authentic" individual who has emancipated themselves from their own infinitely corrupt society. As Scruton writes, "the oik [oikophobic individual] is, in his own eyes, a defender of enlightened universalism against local chauvinism."¹⁵ When married to oikophobia, this pathological fascination with the amorphous and highly romanticized "other," which we can describe as "xenophilia," creates a

¹¹ Ibid., 34.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37.

political and cultural class that is reactionary in nature. As such, individuals reactively ally themselves with the West's adversaries regardless of the nature, political orientation, and goals of the adversaries' actions. In other words, even when the non-Western others are engaged in criminal action (invasion, torture, genocide, etc.), the oikophobe finds some means of assigning culpability to the West, as opposed to those who are engaged in the crime, as we've already discussed in the case of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.¹⁶

As intellectual elites, Scruton places much of the blame for the oikophobic turn in the West on its intellectuals, especially the intellectual class that arose after 1968: the culmination of the Third Youth Movement that rebelled against the conservative world it had inherited from the World War II generation. The "May 68ers" as they're often called, demanded a new emancipatory politics: the emancipation of women; the emancipation of ethnic minorities; the emancipation of sexuality and the destruction of traditional gender roles and identities; they demanded equality born of socialist economics and the end of the "free market," etc. In other words, they wanted a new West that was more open to the world and thus unencumbered by its own cultural-historical inheritance, which they often condemned wholesale through the myopic lenses created by the horror and terror of colonialism, imperialism, and fascism.

In his book, *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left*, Scruton indicts Leftist intellectual "elites" for the degeneration of the West, the marginalization of tradition, the devaluation of all things Western, and the deprivation of national identity.¹⁷ According to Scruton, the dysgenic work of the intellectuals responsible for the spread of Oikophobia saturates the modern university systems in the West, and have thus trained generations of citizens to think in oikophobic ways. Particularly, regarding the United States of America, he writes:

¹⁶ Clearest evidence of such oikophobic logic can be found in the claim that Russia was "only reacting" to Western provocations when Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in 2024 and 2022. This oikophobic claim systematically infantilizes Russia, the Russian state, and its leader, Vladimir Putin, as it makes them only capable of reacting to outside stimuli, i.e., Western offensive moves. It suggests that if Russia had not been "provoked," it would be acting benignly or beneficently towards Ukraine, but since it was provoked, its brutal invasion is merely a "defensive" action against an aggressor, thus blaming the victim as opposed to the victimizer. By claiming that the Russian status quo towards Ukraine is benign or beneficent, and is now only reacting, the agency of the Russian state is stripped, as they do nothing born of their own reasons, or motivated out of their own political ideology. They're only capable of "reacting." Curiously, the continual "infantilization" of Russia is born both of oikophobia and blind centrism of Occidentalism, the latter seeing the "others" as perpetual victims while the West as perpetual victimizers.

¹⁷ Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

A chronic form of oikophobia has spread through the American universities, in the guise of political correctness, and loudly surfaced in the aftermath of September 11th, to pour scorn on the culture that allegedly provoked the attacks, and to side by implication with the terrorists.¹⁸

In this passage, Scruton once again assigns blame on Oikophobia for the reason why numerous academics, scholars, and pundits interrogated the causes of why the U.S. was targeted by al-Qa'ida. At this point in his essay, Scruton fails to recognize the fundamental difference between non-oikophobic critiques of the West's long and assorted entanglements in the Middle East and those born of oikophobic irrationality. On September 20, 2001, the American President George W. Bush famously said that "they [terrorists] hate us for our Freedoms."¹⁹ While this "Bushism" played well amidst a population coping with the trauma of the 9/11 terror attacks, it camouflaged from the American people the real reasons for the attacks: revenge – revenge for the destructive policies the U.S. and other Western countries maintained in the region, including the propping up of dictators, military interventions, the unequivocal support for the settler-colonial project of Israel, etc. These are all legitimate critiques of the U.S., its Western allies, and their policies, which is not necessary born of oikophobic tendencies. For such critiques to be oikophobic, Scruton would have had to demonstrate that they were born from oikophobic motivations, not reasonable analyses of the West and its history, but pathological disdain for the West and its history. Scruton is correct in saying that oikophobes would "side by implication with the terrorists," as oikophobic critiques would incline by default to justify the terror attacks, and therefore the murder of 2,977 people, since in their mind the West is wholly evil and unredeemable. However, non-oikophobic critiques would seek to explain, not justify, the terror attacks, and would not side with al-Qa'ida nor the Bush administration. Putting the blame on American academia for the failure of others, including Scruton, to identify the difference between justification and explanation is an unfair critique on Scruton's part. Nevertheless, critiques of the controversial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were often both oikophobic and non-oikophobic, to the point where the average person often could not distinguish between the two. With these statements on 9/11 and academia, one gets the impression that Scruton would rather have non-critical supporters of the West, who equal oikophobes in their pathological form of thinking, albeit in reverse: a pathological

¹⁸ Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations*, 37.

¹⁹ George W. Bush, "They hate us for our Freedoms," September 20, 2001, <https://www.c-span.org/clip/joint-session-of-congress/user-clip-they-hate-us-for-our-freedoms/4379586>

embrace of all things Western (Oikophilia). For the critical dialectician, the irrationality of Oikophilia must be rejected as strongly as the irrationality of Oikophobia, as both are distortions of reality that lead to ideological (false consciousness) claims.

Ethnomasochism

Buried deep in Oikophobia can be found the perverse logic of ethnomasochism, a pathological form of self-contempt rooted in shame for one's origins. The rightwing French thinker, Guillaume Faye (1949-2019), defines ethnomasochism as such:

The masochistic tendency to blame and devalue one's ethnicity, one's own people. Ethnomasochism comes from shame and self-hatred. It's a collective psychopathology, provoked by a concerted propaganda campaign to make Europeans [Westerners] feel guilty about how they've treated other peoples and to make them see themselves as "oppressors." They are made, in this way, to repent and pay their alleged debt. A veritable historical imposture, their repentance, no less, is urged by the churches and the state... Ethnomasochism is the counterpart of xenophilia (the love and overestimation of the stranger, the "Other"). It's akin to ethno-suicide.²⁰

While one can recognize the political-social psychopathology that Guillaume Faye identifies here, i.e., Western self-contempt and its intellectual exports, his anti-oikophobia project was different than what I'm calling for here. Faye wanted Westerners to return reflexively to their roots, their traditional culture, history, and national identities. This process of re-Westernization restored Western identity, which could be utilized as a defense mechanism against the multicultural "non-identical" residing within the West, i.e., non-European immigrants, refugees, Muslims, Africans, etc. Without a strong Western identity, Faye believed, the West had no ability to resist being overwhelmed, and thus conquered, by non-Western cultures – what is often called "ethnic submersion." In the end, Western heritage is functionalized in Faye's ethnonationalist thought; it is a defensive weapon against the other, not an end-in-itself. Nevertheless, his identification of ethnomasochism is important, as it animates the underlying logic of Oikophobia.²¹

²⁰ Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance* (London: Arktos Media, 2011), 136.

²¹ This same logic can be found in R.R. Reno's controversial book, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and The Future of the West*, wherein he argues for a resurrection of the "strong gods," i.e., the "objects of men's love and devotion, the source of

For Faye, two important processes are at work within ethnomasochism: first, due to the long history of Western barbarism, oikophobes call for an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual divestment from the West's cultures and societies. This is pursued by the over-emphasis on the negativity of Western history and culture, thus inducing pathological forms of "shame and self-hatred" within the native populations of the West. Second, perverse atonement for such historical crimes must be pursued through cosmopolitanism, i.e., the deculturization of the West's native populations and the appropriation of a de-particularized global cultural ethos. Thus, ethnomasochistic atonement came through Westerners relinquishing their exclusive ownership of their societies, states, and cultures, and simultaneously adopting multiculturalism, in which "diversity" is elevated to a virtue. Echoing Faye, Scruton believed this dissolution of native culture alleviated the means by which the native population protected their "national identity."²² Post-World War II, Western countries that were once united by "pre-political foundations" (ethnicity, language, culture, shared history) became democratic, multicultural, multi-confessional *Willensgemeinschaften* (willed communities), wherein individual membership within that community is based on political ideals rooted in the Enlightenment, not pre-political foundations rooted in each nation's collective history.²³ In Scruton's words, the resulting conglomeration of cultures within one society leads to a "confusion of identity" that inherently endangers "national loyalty."²⁴ To state it in Hegelian terms, which are admittedly more metaphysical, the unity of the *Volksggeist* (spirit of a people) is fractured by multiculturalism and thus depletes the ethno-homogeneity needed to sustain itself, for it cannot integrate foreign *Geister* (spirits) and remain unified in-and-for-itself.²⁵ In other words, the diversity of peoples within one demos, what Faye calls "demographic submersion," leads to a diversity of spirits, with the inevitable consequence being the disunion of the Volk. This disunion, Faye believed, was the pretext

the passions and loyalties that unite societies" – the social, political, economic, and cultural objects that have been targeted by oikophobes in their various "anti-" ideologies. See R.R. Reno, *The Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2019), xii.

²² Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations*, 34-35.

²³ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 494-495.

²⁴ Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations*, 34. Scruton argues that a population does not evenly share in the results of oikophobia. He states, "the loss of national loyalty is a feature of ... political elites... it is not shared by ... the people. The "we" feeling is still there in our national culture." Ibid., 35.

²⁵ See Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 13-24.

for the identity collapse that occurred simultaneously with the conquest of Europe via “Islamization.”²⁶

For Faye, the ethnomasochist’s nefarious de-ethnosization of the *Volk* served as a means of alleviating the collective guilt inherited from the collective past.²⁷ To abandon one’s cultural inheritance and relinquish one’s country to foreigners, or “replacers” in the language of Renaud Camus, is a means of exculpating the West (especially Europe) of the inherited guilt it has accumulated over the course of its bloody history.²⁸ The result of the internalization of ethnomasochism plus cosmopolitanism led to a Western world unfamiliar with itself; an identity crisis that is facilitated and advanced by the continual oikophobic attacks on traditional Western identity (often by Leftists), and advanced by an abiding sense of *Überfremdung*: “over-foreignization” of the Western ethnosphere. The only way to overcome the historical crime of relinquishing one’s civilization to others, in Faye’s understanding, is a radical return to the past, i.e., a reactionary embrace of all things native, traditional, and culturally conservative, as a means of reversing the Enlightenment’s universalism and the great de-Westernization of the West, thus strengthening the West’s traditional cultural defenses against the “invading” anatopic others.²⁹ For Faye and others on the far-right, without such a palingenetic return to heritage and tradition, the West and its native inhabitants will be submerged beneath invading “others.”

Examples of Oikophobia

When Scruton originally wrote his essay on Oikophobia, the Left was predominately the carrier of this peculiar psychopathology. Now, in the era of authoritarian rightwing populism, Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen, the *Alternativ für Deutschland* party, etc., the Right has become oikophobic in their own peculiar way. Whereas the Left takes aim at the “traditional” and the “inherited” within the West, the Right takes aim at the Western “Enlightenment,” which is equally as Western as the West’s

²⁶ See Guillaume Faye, *The Colonization of Europe* (London: Arktos Media, 2016).

²⁷ Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight*.

²⁸ Renaud Camus, *You Will Not Replace Us* (Pleix, Chez l’auteur, 2018), 21.

²⁹ I define “anatopic others” as “those in the wrong place.” This form of bigotry is fundamentally different than traditional racism, as racists often claimed Westerners to be biologically superior to the non-Western others. “Anatopism” does not necessarily do so. Rather, it argues that the biologically/ethnically different others are simply in the “wrong place,” i.e., they don’t belong to – or in – the Western ethnosphere, and therefore they ought to “remigrate” back to their countries of origin, their historical ethnosphere, where they truly do belong. Nevertheless, despite their differences in motivation, racists and anatopists often have the same goal: the purification of their ethnosphere through the expulsion of the “other,” i.e., xenelasia.

traditions, cultures, ethnoses, etc., and is certainly an integral part of its overall inheritance. Oikophobia as a psychopathology is selective in what it targets: for the Left, the horrible crimes of the West's past and the cultural norms and institutions that legitimate that past are the objects of derision, whereas for the Right, the "universalism," the openness to "humanity," and the de-ethnicized formalism of the revolutionary slogan of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* are the main targets. Both seek to preserve some aspects of the West while negating others. In general, for the Left, that which is preservable begins *with* and *after* the Enlightenment; and likewise for the Right, that which is preservable begins *before* the Enlightenment.³⁰ Nevertheless, the issue of rightwing Oikophobia can be reserved for another day. This essay is meant to deal with the deleterious effects of left-wing Oikophobia. It is sufficient here to say that Oikophobia is not an exclusive condition of the Left, even if it has been historically more common within Leftist thought.

Looking at many intellectuals who we would generally characterize as being "on the Left," we find that even the Enlightenment in some cases ought to be negated, as many of the most prominent thinkers were admittedly tethered to culture-bound stereotypes, misconceptions, and assumptions about "others" – a sin so unforgivable that it warrants their permanent exile from philosophical study. For example, in the last decades, it has been fashionable to abstractly negate G.W.F. Hegel due to his alleged "racism." Without doubt, Hegel's work, especially his *Philosophy of History*, has been shown to harbor racist assumptions, especially those directed at Africa and Africans. According to Charles C. Verharen, Hegel's treatment of Africa is "shocking, abusive, and offensive," because it "denies the humanity of persons of African descent," especially when Hegel refers to Africa as "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night."³¹ Likewise, Daniel James and Franz Knappik point out numerous examples of Hegel's racial "essentialism" regarding the superiority of Europeans over Africans and Native Americans in their well-researched and convincingly argued article, "Exploring the Metaphysics of Hegel's Racism: The Teleology of the 'Concept' and Taxonomy of Races."³² James and Knappik's argue that Hegel's work "is appropriately classified as racist,

³⁰ This rightwing movement is often referred to as the "Dark Enlightenment," as it is an attempt to negate the liberal Enlightenment by restoring social inequality, racism, misogyny, monarchy, and authoritarianism – thus returning the West to its pre-Enlightenment "tradition" and identity.

³¹ Charles C. Verharen, "'The New World and the Dreams to which may give Rise': An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 4 (March 1997), 456, 458.

³² Daniel James and Franz Knappik, "Exploring the Metaphysics of Hegel's Racism: The Teleology of the 'Concept' and Taxonomy of Races," *Hegel Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (December 2022): 99-126.

that it postulates innate mental deficits of some races, and that it turns racism from an anthropological into a metaphysical doctrine,” which Hegel believed was the result of a “higher necessity” within history.³³ These critical academic assessments were elevated to an oikophobic-level by the Iranian-American, Hamid Dabashi, professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, who used such critical studies of Hegel to argue that Hegel was the “chief ideologue” behind European colonialism and thus partially responsible for today’s Western support of Israel, their settler-colonial project, and the genocide of Palestinians.³⁴ Dabashi stated:

Racism was definitive to the entire philosophical apparatus of Hegel and many other German and European philosophers. The whole system must be brought down, like those racist statues we have brought down in Europe and its settler colonies around the world.³⁵

Despite being a prominent aspect in a few analyses of Hegel, racism was not definitive of his overall philosophy, nor was it at the core for much of the European philosophical pantheon – especially for those philosophers who understood their work as being radical contributions to the further emancipation of humanity: Rousseau, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, Marcuse, etc., all of whom demonstrated a certain degree of Eurocentricity if not tacit racist assumptions. Indeed, radical emancipatory political thought, albeit within the Eurosphere, was much more determinative for Hegel from his days in Tübingen seminary to his mature works written in Jena and Berlin.³⁶ What Dabashi abandons is what James and Knappik attempt to do in their dialectical analysis: “save Hegelian philosophy from its racist baggage,”³⁷ or what Hegel himself calls *determinate negation* (*Aufheben*) as opposed to the oikophobic *abstract negation* of Dabashi’s “the whole system must be brought down” rhetoric.³⁸ Such a wholesale negation of Hegel due to

³³ Ibid., 100.

³⁴ Hamid Dabashi, “War on Gaza: How Hegel’s racist philosophy informs European Zionism,” *Middle East Eye*, March 15, 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/war-gaza-hegel-racist-philosophy-informs-european-zionism-how>

³⁵ Ibid. Dabashi is admittedly influence by Ranajit Guha’s critique of Hegel in his book, *History at the Limit of World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Also see Hamid Dabashi, *The Last Muslim Intellectual: The Life and Legacy of Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 134-135.

³⁶ See Klaus Vieweg, *Hegel: The Philosopher of Freedom*, trans. Sophia Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023).

³⁷ James and Knappik, “Exploring the Metaphysics of Hegel’s Racism,” 99, 118-121.

³⁸ Some may claim that Hamid Dabashi is Iranian and therefore cannot by definition be “oikophobic” since he does not hail from the West. I reject this claim. Dabashi is an American citizen, with the fullness of what that entails. From my perspective, when non-

his racism denies the propulsive element within Hegel's emancipatory thought, which even for revolutionaries like Franz Fanon was extremely important in their anti-racism and anti-colonial projects.³⁹

Another example of oikophobia is one that I experienced personally. While at a conference at the University of Oxford in 2023, I participated in a discussion concerning the "inherited guilt" that seems to be passed along from generation to generation in Germany regarding the Holocaust. I had objected to the idea that Germany's "struggle to overcome the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) should include the deliberate fostering inter-generational guilt, which I argued was a form of inter-generational tyranny: the forcing upon innocent generations the guilt of their forefathers. Rather, as Germany struggled with its Nazi past, it should ethically commit itself to making sure that Germany is never the aggressor, nor should it ever again find itself on the side of the aggressor, nor should it ever support the unjust aggression of one people against another, let alone support genocide. Rather, Germany should commit the state to always be on the side of the innocent victim. That is all they can do redemptively for the victims of their own anti-Semitic and genocidal past. Nevertheless, the guilt that is passed along in German society has become pathological in many ways, which has blocked the German state's ability to see clearly regarding the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and later the 2023-2025 genocide of Palestinians by Israel. Regarding Ukraine, Germany's guilt-complex led it to hesitate in supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression beyond mere symbolic solidarity. While the U.S. under President Joe Biden made defensive weapons available (albeit overly cautiously), the lethal means that Germany could have provided to Ukraine were late in arriving, as the German state feared the image of German tanks once again being on the soil of Eastern Europe fighting Russians. It was only in 2025 with the election of Chancellor Joachim-Friedrich Merz did Germany fully commit to defending Ukraine. Regarding Israel, Germany often justified its support for the genocide of Palestinians by cowardly hiding behind the narcissism of its own guilt for the Holocaust. Despite the obvious fact that innocent Palestinians, mainly women and children, were being deliberately targeted in their mosques, churches, schools, hospitals, "safe zones," and even U.N. facilities, Germany refused to condemn Israel's actions but rather made

Westerners become citizens of Western states, they too take on the "sins of the past" as well as the past's achievements. Citizenship in its wholeness, I argue, is not merely the appropriation of the benefits of being a citizen, but also an emersion into the Geist of the West, wars and all. While xenophobes deny the "new citizens" belonging in the Western ethnosphere and Geist, I seek to fully integrate it. "Our sins" are "their sins" because they are "us" by virtue of being a citizen.

³⁹ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 191-197; Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 68-70.

excuses for it by invoking the Holocaust. Citing Israel's state security as Germany's essential *Staatsräson* (reason of state), the German state elevated their own multi-generational guilt-complex over the lives of innocent Palestinians, who were the victims of an exterminationist head-of-state, Benjamin Netanyahu, just as the Jews of Europe were the victims of the exterminationist Adolf Hitler. Again, only after the election of Chancellor Merz was any meaningful condemnation of Israel's genocide condemned, and even then, it was done tepidly. In both cases, the echoes of World War II invoked the deeply masochistic tendencies in German society, instilled in the post-WWII generations through systematic Oikophobia regarding Germany's past. The concrete result: tens of thousands of innocent Ukrainians dead, and tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians dead. An honest commitment to the victims of the Holocaust should have caused the German Republic to immediately recognize the *Zeitenwende* (historic turning point) that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was and respond to the aggression of Vladimir Putin, as well as engage in a terse *correctio fraterna* (brotherly correction) of Israel and its aggression against Israel's own "life unworthy of life," i.e., Palestinians. But as we saw, deep-seated ethnomasochism blocked the German state's ability to act with courage, honesty, and integrity. As a result, Germany found itself facilitating genocide in two areas of the world, thus betraying the innocent victims of the Holocaust in whose name generations of innocent Germans have intellectually and morally flagellated themselves.

One does not "forget" or simply "move past" the historical guilt of crimes as heinous as the Holocaust, as Elon Musk told the *Alternativ für Deutschland* party in 2025, so that one can alleviate the burden of "working through the past."⁴⁰ Rather, one remembers, contemplates, and transcends the *shame* (not guilt) of the past, utilizing it to fuel today's commitment to never allow such barbarity to occur again to anyone. The ethnomasochistic *Staatsräson* and the oikophobic policies it has induced in German society do not serve the memory of the dead; such self-loathing only guarantees the wholly unavoidable deaths of more innocent victims by making German involvement in stopping such atrocities even more unrealizable. Ultimately, in the case of Germany, the self-loathing induced by Oikophobia facilitated more Holocausts, not less. Only a turn away from the pathology of Oikophobia, and a turn to understanding Germany as a dialectical entity, capable of much ill as well as much good, can rescue Germany from its own self-loathing and thus self-sabotage.

These are but a few examples of Oikophobia that have taken hold in contemporary Leftist politics and culture wars. We could have easily

⁴⁰ Rachel Treisman, "Elon Musk faces criticism for encouraging Germans to move beyond 'past guilt,'" *NPR*, January 27, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/27/nx-s1-5276084/elon-musk-german-far-right-afd-holocaust>

discussed the ongoing rejection of philosophers, writers, artists, religious figures, countries, and languages for their unforgiveable sins, such as Plato for his authoritarianism; Aristotle for his misogyny; Sigmund Freud for his “misogyny”; C.G. Jung for his racism; Karl Marx for his anti-Semitism; Friedrich Nietzsche for his stance on inequality and nihilism; Mahatma Gandhi for his racism and questionable sexual ethics; Ernesto “Che” Guevara for his violence; Pablo Picasso for his “toxic masculinity”; Andy Warhol for his exploitation of fellow artists; Charles Dickens for his misogyny; Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer for their contributions to the nuclear age; Mother Teresa for her “white savior complex”; Abraham Lincoln for his racism; Winston Churchill for his imperial racism; the whole of England for the sins of the British Empire; the whole of the United States for its genocide of Native Americans and enslavement of African Americans; the whole of Christendom for the Crusades, Inquisition, and support for colonization; the Latin language for being “elitist” and “imperial,” etc. It is not to say that these people and/or things have not engaged in horrible “sins”; they have, and critique is wholly justified. However, it is oikophobic to condemn the whole of the West through the lenses of these sins, rather than understand each one of the above individuals, groups, cultures as inherently dialectical phenomenon – divided within themselves: the internal conflict and contradiction. To myopically cancel them due to their moral failings is to deprive the West and the world from the benefits derived therefrom. Additionally, it makes us all into hypocrites, for especially we in the West, whether we realize it or not, have in many ways benefited from much of the work the above have done. We do not have to worship these individuals and things, we do have to memorialize them with statues that whitewash their crimes, nor should we forget their misdeeds altogether, as some would argue. Deification of historical entities is philosophical idolatry and attempts to erase them from history is a thought crime; history has already been made, and their place in it is secure, for the good and the bad.

Learning from Oikophobic Iran: Gharbzadegi

During the reign of the Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), Iranian society took a sharp turn Westward, as it attempted to break away from its “regressive” Islamic roots to take its place among the “civilized” and “progressive” nations of the West. Driven by political, cultural, and intellectual elites, often with Western educations, the urban centers in Iran began to mimic Western trends, especially in fashion, language, music, and other cultural norms, while holding onto monarchal absolutism.⁴¹ This

⁴¹ Accompanying this Westward gaze, came the Shah’s “White Revolution” (1963), which promised modernizing reforms that were to benefit the whole of Iranian society. These

cultural mimesis of the West was termed in Persian as *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification). First coined by the Iranian professor of philosophy, Ahmad Fardid,⁴² in relation to the dominance of Greek thought in Iranian philosophy, it was later popularized by the Iranian theorist, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who argued in his book, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, that Western cultural norms (and their political exports) had engaged in a “colonization” (*Isti’mar*) of the Iranian ethnosphere to the benefit of the West and the diminishment of Iran.⁴³ To utilize the language of Scruton, Al-e Ahmad understood *Gharbzadegi* as a psychopathological form of *xenophilia* that is predicated on pervasive alienation from the “oikos,” in this case “home” being the culture, history, and traditions of Iran. Being influenced by Karl Marx and other anti-colonial thinkers, Al-e Ahmad understood that *Gharbzadegi* undermined the foundations of the Iranian identity that gave it the capacity and resources to resist Western imperialism, which went far beyond cultural norms, but rather into the exploitation of Iran’s resources, both by the Shah and by Western countries and their corporations. Separating Iranians from their culture, history, and traditions prepared Iranian society for the separation of Iranians from the wealth of their country, their national sovereignty, and their autonomy as an independent nation and culture. Through the adoption of another civilization’s cultural standards, they diminished their own standards, their own arts, their own identity, thus making Iran merely a consumer of the cultural good of another society.⁴⁴ Although appropriated *en masse*, the social norms of the “Xenos” (The West) were often completely at odds with the cultural norms of Iran, thereby causing social friction between the urban elites and the more rural populations and proletariat who were increasingly making

reforms led to rapid urbanization, redistribution of wealth, and land comprehensive land reform. Not all Iranian society benefited from these reforms. In reality, much of the benefits went to the Shah, those who had direct ties to the Shah, and Western companies and Western countries, especially the United States, which had taken the place of the British Empire as the chief Western influencer in Iran.

⁴² Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Review of Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 4 (2000): 566, 565-571.

⁴³ Occidentosis has also been translated in numerous ways, including: “West-struckness,” “Occidentosis (Western plague),” “Occidentalization,” “Xenomania,” “Westomania,” “Euromania,” etc.

⁴⁴ The Shah himself engaged in a form of oikophobia but in a clever *oikophilic* way: he often promoted Persian identity over Iranian identity, the former being the identity closely associated with ancient Persia before Persia Islamized. By elevating the ancient civilization of Persia over modern Iran, he knew it antagonized a large percent of Iranian society who saw his moves as a devious way to undermine the religious authorities whom the Shah saw as primarily responsible for the “backwardness” of contemporary Iran. Knowing those religious authorities and the Muslim faithful cared little for Iran’s pre-Islamic culture, the promotion of Persia by the Shah was a way of appearing “other” than Iranian but also authentically – even primordially – Iranian, and thus not appearing to be captive to the West.

their way into urban spaces during Iran's industrialization. Gharbzadegi was not an evolution within Iranian culture, but rather a break from the linear tradition; it was an abrupt rupture that suited the powerful at the expense of the powerless. Thus, Iranian Oikophobia served as the negative principle residing at the heart of Gharbzadegi; it was the abandonment of the Iranian "oikos" for the Occidental "Xenos" that contributed to the course correction, or over-correction, that materialized in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, wherein Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini led (from afar) his country in the overthrow of the Shah and the influence Western countries, especially the United States, had within Iran. What followed the fall of the Shah was not a *determinate negation* (*Aufheben*) of the West, but rather an attempt to eradicate Gharbzadegi from Iran through reactionary nativism, which included the implementation of the *Velayat-e Faqih*, or "Rule of the Jurist," instituted by a new Iranian Constitution that was saturated with Shi'i Islam. Through Khomeini's rule, Iranian society was "re-Islamized" to the degree that Gharbzadegi was no longer possible in the public sphere for a long time. A conservative yet revolutionary anti-Xenos pathology emerged because of the oikophobic ethos of Gharbzadegi. In other words, the oikophobic pathology was replaced by an incestuous oikophilic pathology, as the pendulum swung just as fanatically in the opposite direction.

A Dialectical Approach to Western Cultural Inheritance: Oikoaletheia

The lesson to be learned from Iran's experience with Oikophobic thought and praxis is that a society that forsakes its own roots, its own cultural and historical foundations, opens itself up to the opposite: a fundamentalist re-emergence and systematic distortion of those foundation; a form of palingenetic "return to the past" that is wholly reactionary, defensive, and authoritarian, lacking the dynamism that propels cultures forward. When critique of the home become pathological, what appears to be "progressive," "open to the other," and "universal," the resulting changes in culture engender an aggressive backlash from those still anchored within those roots and foundations. The dissolution of those foundations alienates substantial portions of society, who experience Oikophobia as an attack on their identity and their existence, thus causing a state of fear and panic among those who seek not to dissolve into collective otherness. Furthermore, just as Oikophobia ruptures the natural evolution of culture by abandoning it in favor of an idealized other, so too does the called for a "palingenetic return" of reactionaries rupture the natural flow of culture, as it artificially attempts to reverse the dialectical process of history, making history, tradition, and native identity a defensive fortress against the so-called "corrupting" influence of

the Xenos.⁴⁵ As a result, such a defensive “reversal of time” cuts off the actual benefits derived from the inter-penetration of cultures, societies, and civilizations. In order not to fall into the trap of Oikophobia and Gharbzadegi on the one hand, and palingenetic defensiveness on the other, one needs a dialectical approach to the inheritance and heritage of one’s society, not an abstract negation or a wholesale embrace. Both extremes lead to fractured societies that cannot grow, develop, and exist dynamically in any meaningful way.

We should also recognize that Oikophobia is an effective weapon of those outside of the West who seek to cause internal decay within the West, not so that non-Western states and actors can create a society that finally realizes the “universal” promises of the Western Enlightenment (freedom, justice, equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, etc.), but rather so such entities can destroy the very possibility that Western values can ever be fully realized. For example, Alexander Dugin, the Russian fascist philosopher, is known to encourage Oikophobia (in both the Left and Right) in the United States and Europe, as Westerners undermining the West from within is most advantageous for Putin’s neo-medievalist and neo-imperialist Russia and the “multi-polarity” project Dugin and Putin champion.⁴⁶ It is well known that Dugin and Putin seek to return to an age behind the Enlightenment, behind democracy, i.e., a new Age of Empires, wherein powerful states dominate those around them and serve as poles of power and influence, i.e., the end of the Westphalian system. By critiquing the West in an oikophobic manner, Western oikophobes contribute to the undermining of the very values they seek to substantiate in the world. In essence, their critiques undermine the ability of the West to resist its own collapse into the hellscape of empires, the dream of anti-democrats like Dugin and Putin.

Oikoaletheia

The Western political and cultural Left is in a precarious position: on the one hand, it takes as its charge to be open and honest about the criminal nature of the Western history, its colonialism, imperialism, practice of slavery, racism, misogyny, genocide, and other crimes against humanity. It has rightly dedicated itself and its projects to the critique of the harm the West has done to the world. Nevertheless, when such a critique becomes myopic – limiting

⁴⁵ I have described the process of “reversing time” as “peripeteic dialectics,” or the attempt to de-negate that which has already been negated through the historical process. See Dustin J. Byrd, “Palingenetic Ultra-Nationalist Christianity: History, Identity, and the Falsity of Peripeteic-Dialectics,” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 4, no. 42 (2021): 39-62.

⁴⁶ Dina Khapaeva, *Putin’s Dark Ages: Political Neomedievalism and Re-Stalinization in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2024), 17-35; Alexander Dugin, *The Theory of a Multipolar World* (London: Arktos Media Ltd, 2021).

its scope of understanding of the West to its “crimes” and therefore making those crimes the sole identifier of all things Western – the Left falls into the psychopathology of Oikophobia, with the resulting conception of the West being the wholly evil *Terribilis Occidentalis*. Paradoxically, when the Left does this, it abandons the very foundations of the West that supply such a critique with the resources it requires to engage in meaningful critique – the proverbial shooting oneself in the foot. Not only does the Left’s oikophobic anti-foundationalism undermine the ability to critique itself, but it also perversely delivers the Western inheritance, its religious, philosophical, sociological, and historical storehouse of knowledge, to those who would use such resources against the “non-identical” in the West: the immigrant, the refugee, the new citizen. By abandoning the West wholesale, the oikophobic Left abandons its own cause, for it is only with Western resources that the West can uphold and realize its highest most values.

It is clear to me that what is needed in the Occidental world in order to avoid a rightwing palingenetic return to the past, which forsakes the progress made since the Enlightenment, is to contest the heritage, legacy, and inheritance of the West – to determinately negate it, and thus preserve, elevate, and realize that which is beneficial to all whilst leaving in the dustbin of history that which has plagued, defiled, and diminished humanity. What must be avoided is equally Oikophobia and Oikophilia. In its place, we must cultivate *Oikoaletheia*, which I define as a “a dialectical disclosure of the truth about the home (Occident), which seeks to cultivate both critique and appreciative understanding of the West’s failings and achievements.”⁴⁷ If we fail to transform our oikophobic and xenophilic critiques towards a more balanced and intellectually honest *Oikoaletheia*, we will ultimately dissolve the foundations of the West entirely and thus deliver what is left of our cultural resources over to those who will utilize such against the non-identical and the oikophobic alike.⁴⁸ Therefore, Christianity (and religion in general) must be contested, not just abandoned to the far-right; patriotism must be contested, not just abandoned to the far-right; cultural traditions must be contested, not just abandoned to the far-right; language must be contested, not

⁴⁷ “*Oikoaletheia*” is a neologism of the Greek words “*oikos*” (οἶκος - home) and “*Aletheia*” (ἀλήθεια - truth/disclosure). When brought together, they indicate a comprehensive disclosure of the truth regarding the home civilization, culture, etc., to avoid the myopic extremes of Oikophobia on the one hand, and its mirror opposite pathology, Oikophilia.

⁴⁸ Since they reject the norms of their own culture, oikophobes have the difficult task of defending themselves against the accusation that they are *uneigentlich* (to use Heidegger’s word for “inauthentic”). They often appear to “appropriate” the culture of others as a means of escaping their own. It is understood that if oikophobes do not anchor themselves within their own culture, they have no right to critique their culture, and therefore their attempts to criticize the West from outside of Western culture resources has no bearing, for only norms standards generating from the West can govern the West.

just abandoned to the far-right; the traditional family must be contested, not just abandoned to the far-right; the classical arts and the Classics of literature must be contested, not just abandoned to the far-right, etc. All those aspects of the Western inheritance that can be contested *ought* to be contested, not abandoned.

Abandoning the dialectic approach to the West is to retreat into fiction over reality. Fiction is simple, clean, and enjoyable; it can be made as one-sided as necessary. Reality is complex, dirty, and often painful. It is a tortuous process of coming face to face with the truth about history, society, and self. Fiction is by its nature exclusionary (it is the world of its creator); all that is troubling can be subject to mental apartheid or buried and forgotten, while reality has a way of confronting everyone, especially those who seek to avoid such confrontation. Many within the West (and outside of it) would prefer the fiction of the *Terribilis Occidentalis* – the *all-evil West*, while others would like to hide in the myth of the all-beneficent West – the apex of humanity and human achievement. Few will wrestle with the mixed legacy of the Occidental world and dare to know it within its fractious wholeness. The overwhelming temptation to escape the trauma of full awareness of the Western legacy is palpable, especially when such nuanced awareness demands entertaining the possibility of modifying firmly held worldviews. To understand the dialectical nature of the West is to appreciate the Occidental world's goods amidst its evils, and to honestly critique its evils amidst its goods, no matter how much it indicts that which we care about.

If the Oikophobes are correct, and the West is irredeemable, then there is nothing to fight for. Its demise should come swiftly. However, if there is something yet to save, then we ought to turn our attention to saving it, elevating it, and actualizing it. From my perspective, as a political philosopher with one foot in the Western tradition and one in the non-Western world, I think the West and its legacy is infinitely redeemable, and therefore the Western inheritance must be contested, not abandoned. Sir Roger Scruton was correct to criticize the pathological tendencies of the Oikophobic Left for their reactionary stance towards all things Western. However, handing the Western inheritance over to the Right is not the only other option on the table. Through Oikoaletheia, the Occidental world can be contested, determinately negated, and appreciated in its fullness, if only we have the courage to do so.

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Towards a Decolonial Understanding of al-Fārābī's Ideas

Seyed Javad Miri¹

Introduction

This article focuses on the ideas of Abū Naṣr Muhammad al-Fārābī (870-951 CE) and his philosophical legacy, analyzing these concepts through the lens of social theory. The primary objective is to highlight the overlooked dimensions of al-Fārābī's thought that can serve as an intellectual resource in addressing contemporary social issues. Rather than engaging in a purely philosophical examination, this study seeks to explore the social and practical applications of al-Fārābī's ideas within the framework of alternative theories. Such an approach is particularly significant given al-Fārābī's relatively underexplored position within the discourse of social theorists. By connecting his thought to modern social theories, this article aims to provide a novel perspective on the potential relevance of his intellectual contributions in today's world.

The central question guiding this research is how al-Fārābī's ideas can be reinterpreted in the modern era. Additionally, it considers whether revisiting al-Fārābī's thought, centuries after his time, remains theoretically or practically relevant. Initially, the article evaluates two predominant approaches to the study of philosophical heritage. The first, the archaeological approach, views al-Fārābī as a historical intermediary who transmitted Greek philosophy to the modern Western tradition. The second, the historical approach, treats al-Fārābī as merely one link in a broader chain of philosophical thought that has since lost its utility. While both perspectives

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acknowledge al-Fārābī's historical significance, they fail to address the contemporary theoretical and social implications of his ideas. This article critiques these views and introduces an alternative approach, one that recontextualizes al-Fārābī's thought within the framework of modern social theories.

Subsequently, the article examines anti-colonial traditions and their historical evolution to establish a foundation for reinterpreting al-Fārābī's legacy. These traditions, rooted in the framework of decoloniality, strive to move beyond Western-centric perspectives and propose alternative intellectual paradigms to address present-day social challenges. Within this context, core concepts from al-Fārābī's thought, such as "cooperation" and "collective happiness," are reconsidered and redefined for contemporary applications. By critically integrating these concepts into modern social contexts, the article demonstrates how al-Fārābī's ideas can still produce new perspectives and solutions. Ultimately, the research addresses its primary question by asserting that al-Fārābī's intellectual legacy remains a valuable resource for developing alternative social theories and exploring new horizons in the study of philosophical and social thought.

Eurocentric Approaches to the Islamic Philosophical Tradition

The Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly in the study of the works of great thinkers like al-Fārābī, has been examined through various perspectives. These diverse approaches reflect the complex interplay between Islamic civilization and other philosophical traditions, particularly those of the West. From strictly archaeological or historical readings to attempts at offering alternative and counter-narrative interpretations, each perspective seeks to elucidate the significance of these philosophers and their ideas within the broader context of intellectual history and their relevance to contemporary debates. These approaches not only highlight differing views on the history of philosophy but also underscore the philosophical and cultural challenges associated with decolonization processes and the redefinition of intellectual identity in the modern world.

The Archaeological Approach

The Archaeological Approach and the study of the Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly the works of al-Fārābī, are based on the idea that the significance of these philosophers is confined to a specific historical period. In this period, Islamic civilization acted as a vessel for preserving and transmitting Hellenistic rationality. In other words, Islamic civilization merely safeguarded and transferred Greek philosophical ideas to the modern

West without making substantial alterations. According to this view, Islamic civilization is not recognized as a creator of new ideas but rather as a mediator in preserving and transferring the philosophical heritage of Greece. Thus, al-Fārābī's role is understood solely within this historical framework as an intermediary, not as a philosopher in-and-of-himself.

This perspective presents al-Fārābī in the modern world as merely a historical and museum figure. For example, this approach compares al-Fārābī's relevance today to the significance of a cart in the modern world: a tool that was once functional but now holds no practical importance. A cart is preserved in museums not for its current utility but as a testament to human progress in transportation. Similarly, studying al-Fārābī's ideas holds value only as an example of intellectual history, not as a source of inspiration or solutions for contemporary issues. This perspective asserts that revisiting al-Fārābī's ideas to redefine modern collective life is futile, and thus irrelevant. Consequently, al-Fārābī is primarily viewed as a historical symbol with no practical value in the modern era.

In addition to al-Fārābī, this approach evaluates other great Islamic thinkers, such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, c. 980-1037 CE), al-Ghazālī (c. 1058-1111 CE), and Mullā Ṣadrā (c. 1571-c.1635 CE), in the same way. These philosophers are also regarded merely as historical figures whose contribution to human civilization lies in their role as intermediaries for transmitting Greek ideas. This perspective limits their achievements to preserving and transferring earlier thoughts rather than recognizing them as innovative or transformative. Even the study of their ideas, within this framework, is considered solely historical and cannot address contemporary challenges facing the Islamic world or modernity. This marginalization effectively disregards the practical and applied importance of their works in the modern world.

A noteworthy aspect of this approach is its linear view of the history of philosophy, which portrays philosophy as a continuous and uniform flow from ancient Greece to the modern West. In this linear narrative, the history of philosophy begins in Greece and progresses steadily, with no significant deviations, toward Western Europe and ultimately the United States. This linear trajectory regards Islamic civilization merely as an intermediary phase in this process. Any deviations or innovations that might have occurred throughout history are deemed insignificant or negligible by this perspective. The history of philosophy is thus imagined as a direct and uninterrupted path from its origins to its current state.

This interpretation applies not only to Islamic philosophers but also to prominent philosophical figures from other civilizations, such as Nagarjuna, Confucius, and Lao Tzu. From this viewpoint, the importance of these individuals is also confined to their historical and museum-like roles.

Studying the works and ideas of these figures is justified solely as symbols of humanity's past and bygone intellectual development. In other words, rather than serving as sources of inspiration for contemporary humanity, these thinkers are recognized only as historical examples of the evolution of human thought. This perspective reduces all these figures to mere historical artifacts and entirely dismisses the possibility of utilizing their ideas to enhance the intellectual and social conditions of the modern world.

The Historical Approach

The historical approach represents a significant perspective in the study of the Islamic philosophical tradition, including the works of al-Fārābī. This approach emphasizes al-Fārābī's importance as a philosopher within the context of intellectual history but confines his relevance to a specific historical period. In this view, al-Fārābī's contributions are recognized for their pivotal role in shaping the evolution of thought and philosophy in the past. For instance, Charles E. Butterworth, a prominent American scholar, underscores al-Fārābī's intellectual value from a historical standpoint. According to Butterworth, al-Fārābī is an influential thinker whose importance lies predominantly in the realm of the history of science.² Thus, the study of al-Fārābī's ideas is deemed beneficial for understanding historical developments in philosophy but not for addressing contemporary intellectual challenges.

The historical reading situates al-Fārābī's intellectual contributions within a broader narrative of past scientific and philosophical progress, much like the role of Ptolemaic astronomy in the history of science. Ptolemaic astronomy, which was foundational in its time, drove significant advancements in understanding the cosmos. However, with the advent of quantum mechanics and modern astrophysics, its practical relevance has diminished. Similarly, the ideas of al-Fārābī are considered invaluable for their historical significance but lack direct applicability to contemporary philosophical and social questions. This perspective suggests that while al-Fārābī played a key role in the intellectual traditions of his era, his ideas are not well-suited for addressing the complexities of the modern world. Consequently, the historical approach largely focuses on his place in the intellectual trajectory of the past rather than his potential influence on present-day thought.

From this perspective, al-Fārābī's ideas are seen as inadequate for responding to the demands of contemporary issues and are valued primarily for their historical merit. For example, his conceptualizations of the "virtuous

² Charles E. Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings. "Selected Aphorisms" and Other Texts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

society” and “collective happiness,” which were groundbreaking in his time, are perceived as outdated and inapplicable to the social and political realities of the modern era. The historical approach argues that al-Fārābī's intellectual framework was deeply rooted in the specific cultural, social, and political conditions of his time, which differ fundamentally from those of today. As a result, any attempt to apply his ideas to modern challenges is deemed ineffective and futile. Again, this limitation positions al-Fārābī as a historically significant figure whose contributions enrich our understanding of intellectual history but do not offer practical solutions for contemporary dilemmas.

Ultimately, the historical approach excludes al-Fārābī from serving as a model for contemporary intellectual inquiry and reduces his role to that of a historical reference point. Just as scientific advancements have rendered older paradigms obsolete, al-Fārābī's philosophical contributions are seen as having limited relevance in addressing modern philosophical or social challenges. While acknowledging his foundational role in shaping intellectual traditions, the historical approach denies the possibility of leveraging his ideas to improve or innovate current philosophical or social frameworks. In essence, these positions situate al-Fārābī as a central figure in the history of ideas but not as a source of inspiration for contemporary discourse, thereby reinforcing the divide between historical significance and present-day applicability.

An Alternative Reading

An alternative reading of the Islamic philosophical tradition offers a fresh perspective that transcends the limitations of historical or archaeological approaches, focusing instead on the dynamic and contemporary relevance of thinkers like al-Fārābī. This approach is closely tied to the traditions of decolonization, which seeks to critique and dismantle the Eurocentric frameworks that have historically dominated the philosophy of history. Alternative readings aim to reframe figures like al-Fārābī not merely as historical or museum-like intermediaries of Hellenistic thought but as active sources of intellectual innovation capable of addressing modern challenges. From this perspective, al-Fārābī's ideas on society, happiness, and rationality can be reinterpreted and applied within contemporary social and philosophical contexts. This approach challenges linear and reductive narratives of intellectual history, advocating for a redefinition of the Islamic philosophical tradition as an integral and active part of the global intellectual heritage with enduring relevance. In doing so, the alternative reading seeks to reinvigorate the legacy of Islamic philosophy, positioning it as a vibrant

resource for confronting the complexities of the modern world rather than relegating it to a static and bygone past.

Decolonization Traditions

Non-Western civilizations, cultures, and intellectual traditions have undergone various transformations on their journey to the present era. These changes have resulted from complex interactions with colonial powers, internal dynamics, and global influences, shaping their contemporary identities and frameworks. To better understand these processes, we can structure and analyze them through three distinct stages, each highlighting a specific aspect of the decolonization trajectory. These stages offer a comprehensive framework for examining how non-Western traditions have navigated the challenges of colonialism and post-colonial modernity, providing a deeper understanding of their intellectual and cultural evolution.

The first phase of the evolution of non-Western traditions is characterized by their subjugation under the dominance of Western European colonial powers. During this period, non-Western societies and territories were directly subjected to the military and political authority of colonial rulers. Intellectuals, thinkers, and socio-cultural activists of the time widely believed that colonialism was primarily a military and political force imposed through external domination. Accordingly, they held that if the foreign military powers could be defeated and expelled from their lands, colonialism would come to an end, paving the way for the establishment of free and independent societies. This phase is historically marked by efforts to oust colonial forces and the emergence of independent nation-states, serving as a foundational step in the broader struggle for liberation.

In contemporary intellectual discourse, this phase is often framed under the concept of the “Anti-colonial Movement.” Political and intellectual leaders of these movements predominantly perceived Western colonialism as a political and military phenomenon and believed that dismantling this dominance would lead to liberation and national independence. They operated under the assumption that the termination of colonial political and military control would naturally facilitate the creation of autonomous and sovereign societies. However, this perspective largely focused on the overt aspects of colonialism, paying less attention to its deeper structural dimensions. As a result, the initial phase of anti-colonial struggles prioritized the expulsion of colonial rulers and the restoration of political sovereignty, often overlooking the complex cultural, intellectual, and economic entanglements of colonialism.

The second phase of post-independence transformations refers to the period when many non-Western countries successfully liberated themselves

from Western colonial military and political domination. For example, countries like Zimbabwe expelled their white colonial rulers, while movements such as the nationalization of the oil industry in Iran marked significant milestones in the Middle East. Similar efforts in Egypt and Latin America achieved successful military and political independence. However, despite achieving formal sovereignty, the people in these regions often felt that true freedom eluded them. They realized that colonialism was not merely a military or political phenomenon but encompassed other dimensions that continued to subjugate them. This awareness highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of colonialism, extending beyond conventional understandings of political and military control.

During this phase, thinkers like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Syed Hussein Alatas, Sayyid Muhammad Naquīb Al-‘Attās, and in Iran, Alī Shari‘ati and Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad, concluded that colonialism was not limited to political, military, or even economic domains. Instead, colonialism was deeply intertwined with the production of knowledge, shaping a specific way of thinking and living that entrapped the non-Western individual.³ These intellectuals argued that colonialism operated as an “epistemic hegemony,” creating a worldview that perpetuated Western dominance. According to this perspective, achieving true decolonization required creating an entirely new way of thinking. Without this intellectual transformation, societies would remain trapped under the hegemonic structures of Western colonialism.

Interestingly, during the same period, Europe witnessed the emergence of post-structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in France, as a response to structuralism. This intellectual movement, influential in linguistics, philosophy, social theory, and sociology, emphasized decentering the West and rejecting its intellectual centrality. Thinkers like Edward Said advocated for a similar decentering within the post-colonial context, arguing that liberation from colonial dominance required intellectual and conceptual decentering of the West. This approach directly tied into the post-colonial tradition, emphasizing the need to redefine thought frameworks and escape the epistemic confines of Western hegemony. Said proposed that to transcend the West, one must refrain from relying on Western conceptual tools and frameworks.⁴

While this strategy appears compelling and emancipatory, it also faces philosophical and metaphysical limitations. For instance, one cannot overcome the intellectual dominance of Western colonialism using concepts such as Kantian subjectivity or Cartesian rationality, which are foundational to the modern Western worldview. These frameworks themselves form part

³ Seyed Javad Miri and Shabnam Faraji, “Critical Social Theory in the ‘Originality of Nature’ School,” *Sociological Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2023): 71-95.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

of the epistemic structure created by colonialism. Thus, overcoming nihilism or the pervasive effect of colonial modernity requires alternative intellectual tools. If modern humanity is ensnared in nihilism, it cannot escape through Kantian or neo-Kantian phenomenological perspectives or Weberian rationality. Therefore, developing new intellectual horizons and alternative philosophical paradigms becomes essential to achieving genuine liberation from colonial structures and their enduring influences.

The third phase in the evolution of global thought, emerging in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, is characterized by the development of “decoloniality” or Decolonial Theory. This intellectual movement centers on the necessity of decentering the West and moving beyond subjectivism. However, it argues that this transition cannot be achieved by merely referencing Western concepts and categories, as doing so would perpetuate the same modes of knowledge production established by Western epistemologies. From a philosophical perspective, the roots of this movement can be traced back to the Aristotelian shift from the pre-Socratic and Platonic focus on being to a focus on entities. This ontic turn, dominant in post-Aristotelian philosophy, led to an emphasis on what is rather than what exists as being. Consequently, decoloniality emerges as a critique of this longstanding ontic focus, advocating a return to ontological inquiry that seeks to transcend the limitations of Western philosophical traditions.

A key tenet of Decolonial Theory is that to transition from an ontic perspective to an ontological one, it is imperative to engage with traditions, thoughts, and intellectual practices from diverse civilizations. This approach rejects the exclusive focus on Western intellectual and philosophical frameworks, advocating instead for a cross-cultural tradition. Such an approach emphasizes the richness of multiple traditions and their potential to contribute to a more inclusive and holistic understanding of existence. For instance, Aditya Nigam, a prominent Indian thinker, argues that transcending Western dominance requires disengagement from Western philosophical currents.⁵ Nigam’s perspective underscores the necessity of seeking alternative pathways to thought that do not replicate the intellectual structures of the West, thus enabling a more genuine break from colonial frameworks.

Another influential figure in this movement is Aníbal Quijano, a Peruvian philosopher and sociologist, who introduced the concept of the “coloniality of power.” According to Quijano, colonialism has not only shaped political, military, and economic structures, but has also imposed a historical condition in which individuals and societies remain entrapped. This “coloniality of power” extends beyond tangible systems of control to encompass an entrenched historical state that continues to shape modern

⁵ Aditya Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking Across Traditions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

realities. Quijano's theory highlights the importance of understanding colonialism not merely as a historical event but as an ongoing historical structure. Escaping this condition, he argues, requires the creation of strategies that directly address and counter this historical framework, rather than relying on Western ontological categories, which are themselves products of the colonial system.

Advocates of decoloniality, including Nigam and Quijano, emphasize the need for innovative strategies that align with the specific historical condition of coloniality.⁶ These strategies must move beyond the confines of Western ontological and epistemological paradigms, as thinking within these frameworks only reinforces the colonial structures they seek to dismantle. For instance, Nigam's focus on disengaging from Western philosophical currents and Quijano's analysis of the colonial condition both underscore the necessity of alternative frameworks that draw from non-Western intellectual traditions. This shift toward a cross-cultural and ontological approach offers a pathway for rethinking and reshaping intellectual and cultural practices, enabling societies to transcend the entrenched legacies of colonialism.

An Alternative Reading of al-Fārābī's Philosophy

Building on the discussions presented, we revisit the question of whether reinterpreting al-Fārābī's philosophy is relevant and necessary in the contemporary era and, if so, how it should be approached. An alternative decolonial reading of al-Fārābī's works suggests that his philosophy, rather than being confined to its historical context, offers valuable insights for addressing modern intellectual and social challenges. By critically engaging with his concepts of society, happiness, and rationality through a decolonial lens, his ideas can be reframed as part of a living tradition that transcends Eurocentric paradigms. This approach not only highlights the global significance of al-Fārābī's thought but also positions it as a tool for challenging colonial epistemologies and fostering innovative frameworks for understanding collective life and knowledge in diverse cultural contexts. Thus, revisiting al-Fārābī's works through this perspective is both necessary and impactful in advancing contemporary philosophical discourse.

In Iran and across the Islamic world, few scholars have examined al-Fārābī's philosophy from alternative perspectives. For instance, Muhsin Mahdi adopts a specific lens influenced predominantly by Leo Strauss.⁷

⁶ Seyed Javad Miri and Shabnam Faraji, "Edward Said and Post-Colonial Theories: The Possibility of Transcending the 'Center' based on the Concept of 'Ontological Rebellion,'" *Sociological Cultural Studies* 15, no. 4 (August 2025), 18. doi: 10.30465/scs.2025.9403.

⁷ Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Mahdi's interpretation of al-Fārābī's texts is shaped by Strauss's analytical framework, which prioritizes a particular philosophical methodology. This raises the question: Is it possible to approach al-Fārābī's texts through a different lens, distinct from Strauss and similar influences? Such an endeavor would require rethinking the key concepts within al-Fārābī's philosophy and exploring their relevance from alternative philosophical and theoretical viewpoints. One such concept central to al-Fārābī's framework is *tashrih al-masa'i* (cooperation), a foundational idea in his vision of the virtuous city (*madīna al-fāḍila*).

According to al-Fārābī, the virtuous city is defined by the cooperative efforts of its members to achieve the true purpose of human existence: happiness. Cooperation, for al-Fārābī, is the bedrock of a society capable of fostering individual and collective well-being. In his *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, al-Fārābī states, "The virtuous city is one in which the true purpose of association is to cooperate on matters that bring about human happiness."⁸ This principle of cooperation can be examined alongside the ideas of thinkers such as Peter Kropotkin, the Russian philosopher and anarchist theorist. Kropotkin, in his critique of capitalist systems, argues that the natural and social order is founded not on competition, as proposed by social Darwinism, but on mutual aid. For Kropotkin, cooperation is the underlying principle governing organisms, from the microcosm of the human body to the macrocosm of the natural world.

Kropotkin's analysis directly contrasts with the capitalist emphasis on competition and the elimination of the weakest, a perspective reinforced by Social Darwinism's portrayal of nature as a battleground for survival. Kropotkin, however, emphasizes that mutual aid, rather than hostile competition, is the true foundation of natural and social systems. Similarly, al-Fārābī underscores the indispensability of cooperation (*tashrih al-masa'i*) as the essence of the virtuous city, arguing that without it, no society can come into existence. By comparing al-Fārābī's concept of cooperation with Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, we can explore new ways of understanding al-Fārābī's philosophy through interdisciplinary and cross-cultural frameworks. Such an approach could open new dimensions for interpreting al-Fārābī's ideas, moving beyond the traditional methodologies that have dominated scholarship of his work.

Reflecting on al-Fārābī's works through the lens of Kropotkin raises critical questions about how al-Fārābī's philosophy can be reinterpreted beyond its historical and antiquarian dimensions. Can we engage with al-Fārābī's ideas not as relics of a bygone era but as a living tradition relevant to our present circumstances? Drawing on al-Fārābī's concept of *tashrih al-*

⁸ Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī, *The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1986), 118.

masa'i (cooperation), we may ask why contemporary Islamic and global societies struggle to achieve collective well-being. What factors prevent humans from cooperating harmoniously? Why is there a disconnect between the economy and politics, or between politics and society? Why do societies distrust both markets and power structures? Moreover, what inhibits the integration of these three elements – market, power, and society – into a harmonious whole? A Kropotkinian reading of al-Fārābī suggests that the neglect of “happiness” as a central societal value is a fundamental obstacle to such harmony.

According to al-Fārābī, the interplay of markets, power, and society must be guided by a unifying principle: the pursuit of happiness, or collective well-being. This idea, analogous to the modern concept of “public good,” emphasizes that society should be a space where all members benefit rather than one dominated by the interests of a particular class or group. However, contemporary systems often overlook culture as a critical fourth element that can mediate and integrate the others. Al-Fārābī's philosophy underscores that human communities are formed not merely for survival or utility but for the higher purpose of achieving collective happiness. Without this shared goal, society becomes fragmented, and the potential for cooperation dissolves. Al-Fārābī's emphasis on “public good” aligns closely with Kropotkin's advocacy for mutual aid, offering a framework for rethinking societal organization in ways that prioritize inclusivity and collective benefit.

Furthermore, a decolonial reading of al-Fārābī's philosophy opens the door to diverse possibilities for engaging with his ideas in contemporary contexts. This perspective not only revitalizes al-Fārābī's concepts but also creates a dialogue with other significant figures in Islamic thought, such as Ibn Sīnā, Mullā Ṣadrā, Suhrawardī, Allama Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Allama Ja'fari. Each of these thinkers has contributed foundational concepts that remain relevant for addressing today's intellectual and societal challenges. Revisiting these contributions through a decolonial lens allows for a critical reassessment of their potential to offer alternatives to Western paradigms. By engaging with these key figures, we can construct new intellectual frameworks that help societies move beyond the limitations of Western-centric thought and towards more inclusive, culturally grounded, and philosophically enriched approaches to collective well-being and cooperation.

In conclusion, colonialism is not limited to military and political domination; it also encompasses intellectual and cultural dimensions. For non-Western individuals and societies to truly break free from Western colonialism, they must reclaim their intellectual and conceptual independence. Prevailing interpretations within Western intellectual traditions often prevent the development of fresh and meaningful readings of the Islamic philosophical heritage, a restriction that itself constitutes a form

of non-military colonialism. The anti-colonial approach in non-Western civilizations has now reached a stage where it seeks to liberate itself from the conceptual and epistemic domination of the West by challenging and decentering Western frameworks. This intellectual rebellion aims to construct new ways of understanding that are rooted in the cultural and philosophical traditions of non-Western societies.

Instead of viewing al-Fārābī and other Islamic and non-Western thinkers as mere intermediaries for transferring Hellenistic rationality to Western civilization or preserving their ideas as outdated relics in the museum of the history of science, an alternative and innovative approach is required. This involves revisiting their most critical concepts with an eye toward their relevance in contemporary contexts. Al-Fārābī's works, rather than being confined to their historical moment, can be actively reinterpreted to address the intellectual and social challenges of today. This requires moving beyond Eurocentric readings and exploring how his concepts can contribute to reimagining societal structures and philosophical inquiries in the present.

In this context, this article emphasized two of al-Fārābī's key concepts: *tashrih al-masa'i* (cooperation) and *sa'ada* (happiness). These ideas demonstrate al-Fārābī's relevance to contemporary discussions about the nature of society and the pursuit of collective well-being. Cooperation, as a foundational principle for the virtuous city, and happiness, as the ultimate goal of human association, offer frameworks for addressing issues of societal fragmentation, distrust, and inequality. By engaging with these concepts, we not only decenter the West as the sole intellectual authority but also uncover the enduring potential of al-Fārābī's thought to contribute to the formation of inclusive, harmonious, and equitable societies in our time.

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**He Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune:
A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Governmental Funding on the
Construction and Deployment of Forms of Sociological Knowledge and
Expertise**

Michael Naughton¹

Introduction

When I was an undergraduate sociology student in the mid-1990s those who utilized the research methods and tools of the social sciences outside of academia for population survey, commercial marketing, accountancy or management consultancy companies, for instance, which put financial profit above the quest to make society a better, fairer, more just place were frowned upon.² Such sociologists were routinely referred to in terms of “enemies” of sociology by my research methods professor. At best, they were seen as misusing their talents and skills. At worst, they had actively “sold out” on the basis that their endeavors served to support the capitalist system and the ills that stem from it. Such researchers were seen from a broadly Marxist perspective, which was the dominant theoretical perspective of the professors on my undergraduate degree program, as a major part of the problem in the sense that they contributed to the existing imbalances of power within capitalist societies, rather than striving to highlight and alleviate the forms of domination, exploitation, injustice, and general misery caused by the existing power structures to the general populace.

As this is related to UK government research funding bodies, the general feeling in the mid- to late-1990s seemed to be that academics should be

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² In this article, I use sociology and social scientific interchangeably, with sociology defined as the social scientific “study of how society is organized and how we experience life.” See British Sociological Association (BSA), “What is Sociology.”

free to research whatever they wanted to and not be dictated to, or hindered by, the agendas or parameters placed on research by the government or agencies that distribute governmental funding to facilitate research that supports its ideological ends, and which can also have no publishing clauses, unless the funder of the research gives permission.

A good example of the general consensus of this discourse at the time was a department meeting where the issue of the university wanting colleagues to make applications to government run funding bodies was raised as a possible way of adding to the department coffers. There were smiles and nods of agreement and approval all round when a colleague said, and I quote: “I am a Marxist sociologist trying to bring capitalist society down, not prop the university up!”

In the intervening years, it has become increasingly apparent to me that sociologists in universities in the UK have experienced something of a paradigm shift in terms of attitudes towards government funding for prospective research projects, which has been driven, precisely, by sociology departments or schools wanting to add to the department, school, or university purse. Indeed, the type of discourse expressed at the department meeting two decades ago is not only no longer in vogue in UK universities today. Rather, the attitude towards government grants for academic social scientific research projects can be conceptualized as being turned almost entirely on its head. Applying for governmental grants is also increasingly becoming a condition to secure employment, tied to career progression and promotion³ or even to retain an academic position.⁴

This became even more evident to me about ten years later when I attended a seminar aimed at supporting academic social scientists to obtain government funding for their proposed research projects. It was organized by a leading academic society and run by two prominent professors who have a very successful track record in obtaining government funding for their social science research projects. At the beginning of the seminar, one of the professors asked: “Why do you apply for government funding for your research?”

After what felt like a long silence, and because no one else seemed to want to engage with the question or try to answer it, I said: “You apply for funding to do research because you want to find out things that you do not know or cannot find out about without doing some research.”

One of the professors running the seminar quickly shot this idea down

³ I know, personally, of cases where an academic has been promoted after obtaining a large research grant from a government funding body. Such cases for promotion are strengthened as grant holders can switch universities and take their funding with them, which can see bidding wars between universities for the grant holder who can choose the best offer.

⁴ Indeed, a friend contacted me recently to let me know that he had managed to secure his first lectureship at another university in its sociology department where the requirement is that he submits at least one application for funding a year if he wants to keep his post.

by saying: “No. Wrong. You apply for funding to bring money into your department, make your head of department happy, and increase your chances of promotion.” I was literally stunned by what they said. It immediately ripped from my eyes any rose-tinted glasses that I may have been wearing as to the purpose of conducting academic social scientific research. It also made me see the professors running the seminar in an altogether different light, too. I now saw them clearly as careerists lacking in authenticity who were engaged in a form of grooming of the next generation of academic sociologists to be just like themselves.

Despite the foregoing anecdotes, the story that sociologists project about the purpose of the discipline and the role that they play has remained consistent, that sociology and sociologists challenge societal inequalities and social injustices, and they struggle for changes to make society more equitable, fair, and just. It is as though the shift to an environment that is rich with government funded research, the new forms of governmental assessment of university research, and the accompanying requirements to work within governmental agendas has had no effect at all on the forms of knowledge constructed by sociologists. Nor is there evidence that there has been much reflection, or, more precisely, any reflexivity, on the ways that forms of sociological knowledge that march to the drum of government dictates relate to the power relations in society and how they can work against the programmatic goals claimed by the dominant discourses on sociology and sociologists and can create the very social problematics that sociologists espousing the dominant discourse claim to stand against.

It is against this background that the remainder of this article offers a contribution to the sociology of sociological knowledge by conducting a critical sociological analysis of the potential impact of increasing government funding on the construction and deployment of forms of sociological knowledge and expertise. In so doing, it traverses the intersection between the time when doing sociological research funded by government grants was seen, generally, as anathema by the dominant discourse on the discipline of sociology and the work that sociologists are supposed to do and the current environment within UK sociology departments where there is not only a general desire for social scientists to apply for government research grants, it can also be a requirement for obtaining or retaining a university position or achieving a promotion. This highlights that the story that sociologists tell of the discipline and of the role that they play in exposing and challenging abuses of power in society needs amendment.

It will be argued that not only is the dominant discourse told in the story of sociology and the work of sociologists an inaccurate account of the discipline and the role of sociologists, but the reverse is a more accurate account of the role and function of sociology and sociologists when sociologists act as outsourced

forms of governmental labor. Indeed, rather than serving to expose and confront abuses of power in society, government funded sociological research projects can play a crucial role in the construction and deployment of the very discourses that position subjects of power as objects to be acted upon, for power to be exercised over.

To this end, the remainder of this article will be structured into four broad parts. First, I will show the rise in government funding for sociological research over the last two decades. This will provide the context for the second part of the article, which will consider the story that sociologists project regarding the nature and scope of the discipline of sociology and the role that they play in identifying and challenging abuses of power in society. In two sections, this part will begin with an analysis of a range of utterances from a number of prominent sociologists reflecting on the discipline and the work that they do as sociologists in what might be termed the pre-government grant research era. It will, then, consider an authoritative source of contemporary discourse that cites leading sociologists, also reflecting on the discipline and their work, in the existing environment where sociologists willing to work under the terms of government funded research grants battle one another for the government grants on offer, which are seen as being prestigious. The aim of this first part of the article is to show the congruence in the accounts despite the shift from a research culture that was largely devoid of government grants to one in which they are replete. Third, I will explicate Michel Foucault's theories on the emergence of the modern state, power and knowledge and bio-power to highlight how power is exercised in modern societies and to show that at the heart of exercises of power in contemporary Western societies are discourses, bodies of knowledge that inform those who exercise power about those aspects of the population to be known about; to be managed or controlled; to have power exercised upon or over. Finally, I will locate the work that sociologists do when conducting research funded by government grants within the foregoing Foucauldian framework of power and knowledge, which not only undermines the dominant story that sociologists have of sociology as a critical, radical, and trouble-making discipline and the work that they do, it implicates forms of sociological knowledge so produced at the heart of modern exercises of governmental power. It is concluded that a more appropriate understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge in modern societies – between discourse and exercises of modern forms of bio-power – can assist sociology and sociologists in the better realization of the programmatic goals that they claim that they desire in the story of sociology that they project to society and tell themselves.

The Rise in Government Funding for Sociological Research

The government funding body that provides funding for sociological research is the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which is the UK's largest funder of economic, social, behavioral, and human data science.⁵ In terms of numbers, the amount of funding provided for social science research in 2001 by the ESRC was 46 million pounds sterling.⁶ Accounting for UK inflation, this figure rises to 86.5 million pounds to September 2023. Against this, the ESRC budget for sociological research for the three-year period 2022-25 was 362 million, or 120.7 million per annum. This represents a real term increase in government funding for sociology of almost 30% over the 20-year period. However, the increase in government funding for sociological and social scientific research will likely be far in excess of 30% over the last two decades in elite universities. This is because ESRC funding is not shared equally between all UK sociology or social science schools or departments but rather is heavily concentrated in the leading research-intensive Russell Group universities, of which the university that I work at is a member.⁷

Indeed, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system set up by government to assess the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.⁸ Introduced in 2014, it is a joint undertaking by the four UK higher education funding bodies: Research England, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE). Research is assessed every 6 or 7 years. In the last REF, conducted in 2021, 94% of the University of Bristol's research was assessed as either "world-leading" (4 Star) or "internationally excellent" (3 Star).⁹ As a comparison, the University of Oxford achieved 91% 4- and 3-Star ratings in the 2021 REF, and the University of Cambridge had 93% of its overall submissions to REF 2021 rated as world-leading (4 Star) or internationally excellent (3 Star).¹⁰

In terms of the amount of Quality Research (QR) funding allocated by REF 2021, the REF outcomes were used to inform the allocation of around £2

⁵ Economic and Social Research Council, "About ESRC," (2023).

⁶ The Guardian. "The Economic and Social Research Council." 24 April 2001.

⁷ Russell Group universities are the group of leading research-intensive universities in the UK. There are 24 universities in the Russell Group. Together they produce more than two-thirds of the research rated as "world-leading" produced in UK universities and support more than 260,000 jobs across the country. The Russell Group universities also inject nearly £87 billion into the national economy every year. In 2018-19, 446,450 undergraduates and 155,655 postgraduates were studying at a Russell Group university. See Russell Group, 2023.

⁸ Research Excellence Framework. "REF 2021: Research Excellence Framework."

⁹ University of Bristol. "Research Excellence Framework."

¹⁰ University of Oxford. "REF 2021 results."; University of Cambridge. "Our world-leading research."

billion per year of public funding for universities' research.¹¹ In terms of English universities, the University of Oxford was allocated the biggest share at nearly £164.2 million for 2022-23, up from £144.7m in 2021-22. The University of Cambridge was awarded around £141.5m, up from £126.7m in 2021-22. The top 10, all of which were allocated more than £50m, included Imperial College London, University of Manchester, King's College London, University of Bristol, University of Nottingham, University of Birmingham and University of Leeds, all of which are Russell Group members.¹²

There is a well-known adage that declares that "money goes to money," which refers to the advantage that the wealthy have and how wealth begets wealth. This might also be applied to the issue of government funding for research, wherein government funding for research begets government funding for research, with the elite, wealthy, Russell Group universities that have the best track record for high quality research (as assessed by the governmental REF) being given the largest share of the pot of government funding available for research.

In terms of the aim or purpose of the funds provided by government for social scientific research, the ERSC proudly asserts: "Our work helps raise productivity, address climate change, improve public services and generate a prosperous, inclusive, healthy, and secure society."¹³

The obvious problem with such a statement is that it fails to acknowledge that all of the research areas or specific issues referred to are contentious and subject to much political debate and ideological disagreement. That is to say, there are competing and conflicting perspectives on what would constitute appropriate productivity, climate, public services, a prosperous and inclusive society, and so on, which will also be impacted by the ideological stance of the particular government in power at the time that funding is allocated, too.

More specifically, and just as problematically, potential research projects, if they are to stand any real chance of being funded by the ESRC must also be in line with the five "Thematic Priorities" laid down by the ESRC as determined by its governing body UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the umbrella government funding body for research that the ESRC sits beneath. These thematic priorities also vary over time depending on the dominant governmental ideology at the time, which determines the funds are decided or released. This is transmitted to potential applicants for government research funds by school, department, or faculty research directors and teams of other research development personnel within universities that have emerged in the last

¹¹ UK Research and Innovation, "Research Excellence Framework," (2023)

¹² Research Professional News. "The English Universities getting the most Research Funds Next Year."

¹³ Economic and Social Research Council, "Who ESRC is." (2023),

couple of decades to assist applicants on how to best shape their proposals or applications if they are to stand any chance of being funded. This represents a further pressure on potential applicants for government funding who are driven by career goals to craft their applications narrowly within the terms of the governmental funder, especially since the expected organizational success rate in the ESRC research grant scheme is around 15% to 20%.¹⁴

Overall, UKRI's stated aim is: "to harness the full power of the UK's research and innovation system to tackle large-scale, complex challenges."¹⁵ The reference to "harness the full power" here is insightful and will be discussed extensively below. It represents an explicit understanding that power and knowledge are intrinsically related in the exercise of power in contemporary modern societies, which is why, I would argue, UKRI/ESRC rewards those prepared to bid for, and work under the terms of, government funding for proposed research so handsomely. The reference to "large scale" is equally insightful for my analysis here, as I am particularly concerned with applications for government funding for proposed sociological research projects that offer to conduct quantitative research, which is highly prized by the government funding organizations. This is how UKRI describe the importance of quantitative research:

Quantitative research can measure and describe whole societies, or institutions, organizations or groups of individuals that are part of them. The strength of quantitative methods is that they can provide vital information about a society or community, through surveys, examinations, records or censuses, that no individual could obtain by observation.¹⁶

As will be shown below, the reference to how "vital" the information produced by large scale quantitative research is in informing governmental forms of power about specific communities or society as a whole represents a further acknowledgment of the desire by government to fund forms of social science research that can assist with the management or control of society.

This seems to me to be particularly problematic given that it has long been established within the sociology of knowledge that the kinds of questions asked, and, indeed, the way in which they are asked, determines the kinds of knowledge produced. As Karl Mannheim, one of the founders of the sociology of knowledge noted: "Knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain

¹⁴ UK Research and Innovation, "Analysis of ESRC funding data," (2023).

¹⁵ UK Research and Innovation. "UKRI Strategic themes," (2023).

¹⁶ UK Research and Innovation, "What is Social Science," (2023).

position.”¹⁷

It would be a mistake, however, to see the ESRC as some kind of epistemological gatekeeper, not least because such a view is as sociological. It abstracts the construction of forms of knowledge, presupposing that there exists knowledge to be guarded by the ESRC, for example, which is known in advance of its construction. Rather, in the analysis that follows, the ESRC, specifically, and UKRI, generally, will be shown to be *epistemological gate-openers*, a new concept that I constructed for this article, controlling the construction of forms of knowledge, nonetheless. Through their criteria and thematic priorities, governmental funding bodies such as the ESRC indeed determine the kinds of questions that are allowed to be asked, the way in which they are asked, and thus the forms of knowledge that are allowed to be produced through forms of governmental support. And, while it is not possible to know the utility of a body of knowledge until it has been produced, one thing is for certain, forms of knowledge that are thought would be of no utility whatsoever or a threat to the perceived governmental agenda will not be funded, hence probably not ever produced.¹⁸

The Story that Sociologists Tell Themselves and Society about Sociology and the Work that they do

In outlining the story that sociologists tell themselves and society about sociology and the work that they do, this part of the article will be in two sections. The first will consider what prominent sociologists of the pre-1990s era thought was the role of sociology and sociologists, which I term *the traditional view of sociology as told by sociologists*. The second section will evaluate a contemporary expression of sociology and the role of sociologists as told by the British Sociological Association (BSA), the national subject association for sociologists in Britain, which fails to take any account whatsoever of the increasing number of academic sociologists working under government grants, nor any potential impact on the construction and deployment of forms of sociological knowledge produced that this might have.

¹⁷ Mannheim as quoted in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Penguin, 1966), 22.

¹⁸ For example, see the analysis by Reece Walters (2003) where he shows the ways that regulatory and governing authorities set research agendas, manipulate the processes and production of forms of criminological knowledge and silence or suppress critical voices through various techniques of neutralization. Reece Walters, *Deviant Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2003).

The Traditional View of Sociology as told by Sociologists

The following assertions derive from a number of eminent sociologists. They were not chosen randomly but were purposely selected as representative of a dominant discourse within sociology about the role and function of sociology in society. They present a particular role for sociology as a discipline and for the role of individual sociologists to reveal and challenge existing power structures in society that are seen as working against the interests of the general population. From them derives a view of sociology as a radical, potentially insurgent, and trouble-making enterprise; a societal illuminator revealing how the world really is, able to describe what is really happening and saying how things really should be.

In the face of sociology nothing is “sacrilegious,” nothing has “the right to stand above criticism.”¹⁹

I work as a sociologist... I explore and write about present day society so that others may understand it better... I aim to derive practical recommendations for policy from sociological evidence.²⁰

sociology is a subject whose insights should be available to the great mass of the people in order that they should be able to use it to liberate themselves from the mystification of social reality which is continuously provided for them by those in our society who exercise power and influence.²¹

The “practice” of Sociology “necessarily has a subversive character” whose “task” is “*the critique of existing forms of society*.”²²

Sociology is society’s understanding of itself.²³

The foregoing assertions were made by some of the most significant Western sociologists of the last 50 years. They are united in presenting a particular “brand” of sociological rationality, truth, and understanding. Moreover, contained in this vision is a concept of power that conceptualizes sociology and

¹⁹ C. Wright Mills as cited in Irving Louis Horowitz (ed), *Sociological Self-Images: A Collective Portrait* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1969), 56.

²⁰ Peter Townsend, *The Minority Report* (London: Allen Land, 1973), 9; Bob Mullan, *Sociologists on Sociology* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 208.

²¹ John Rex, *Sociology and the Demystification of the Modern World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), ix.

²² Anthony Giddens, *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 2-22. Emphasis in the original.

²³ Mullan, *Sociologists on Sociology*, 293.

sociologists as serving in the interests of the general populace to monitor and control abuses by those who “hold” and exercise power in Western liberal democratic societies. Indeed, for Giddens “the fomenting of rebellion, a stimulus to revolt” is precisely the “association” he would advocate for sociology.²⁴

Moving to a more specific critique of the assertions in the quotations, the question arises in C Wright Mills’ assertion as to which kind of sociological rationality he is referring? There are many differing and competing sociological perspectives, which offer their own particular form of “rationality.” Sociology is far from a consensual discipline. Similarly with Townsend, he presumes that sociological “evidence” is unproblematically collected and interpreted. He neglects the fact that different sociologists informed by different perspectives will interpret the same raw “sociological evidence” in different ways; that the explanation of “data” is determined by the theoretical perspective of its interpreter; that this interpretation is, in the contemporary context, far from being neutral and unbiased, but rather is intrinsically and inextricably a political utility, a legitimating device for the exercise of power (discussed further below).

We also need to ask which “others” does Townsend intend to understand society “better” through? Sociology is a particularly esoteric discipline that does not speak to the majority of the populace, however much individual sociologists might think it does or would like it to. And what would count as “better” anyway? Compliance with his own subjective recommendations?

Likewise with Rex, his belief that sociological “insights” would somehow inevitably “liberate” is simply to say that “sociologists know best,” or that his version of sociology knows best. This notion inflates the ability of sociologists by presupposing that there is only one real truth, which can only be revealed by one variant of sociologists, and which should then be unquestionably followed. But, as will be shown below, the “truths,” rather than Truth, that determine social reality in modern societies are sociologically constructed and are constitutive of forms of governmental power. And what would count as “liberation” for Rex? Again, different sociologists would describe and prescribe such social problematics differently.

With regard to Giddens, why should the “task” of sociology be “the critique of existing forms of society”? Why should sociology be “necessarily” “subversive”? Is this the valorization of polemic for polemics’ sake? Or are existing forms of society forever and hopelessly in error? Or will a time come when sociology can give up this endless critique and a perfect state will be reached? What purpose does this critique fulfil? In whose interests does it ultimately serve? And what does Mullan mean by “society’s understanding of itself”? This is not only vague and abstract about the relationship between “sociology” and “society,” it also presupposes that sociology speaks on behalf

²⁴ Giddens, *Sociology*, 1-2.

of, and in the interests of, all citizens, which fails to recognize or account for competing social, political and religious ideologies, for instance, about how the social world is and how it should be.

In addition to these specific problems, all of the above statements are also highly problematic in another crucial aspect that undermines their patently good intentions and acts as a barrier to the realization of the sentiments expressed. Each propagates a mis-conceptualized, and rather conspiratorial notion of modern power as “owned” by those most privileged, which is then abusively applied to, or over, those most disadvantaged or vulnerable within society. The result, a kind of hierarchical continuum of power from top down, which provides a simplistic and particularly nihilistic understanding of modern power: the only way to “escape” power is to overthrow power and to take possession of power, which, as we have seen in the experience of the former Communist Eastern bloc, for instance, really changes nothing at all but merely supplants one dominating minority group with another equally dominant one, with the *relations* of power remaining essentially the same.

The Contemporary View of Sociology as told by Sociologists

So much for the traditional view of sociology and the role of sociologists in an era when sociologists generally had more freedom and independence to research what they thought important and were not restricted by governmental requirements or dictates that may accompany government research grants. But what does the more contemporary dominant discourse say about the discipline of sociology and the work that sociologists do?

The *Speak up for Sociology* pamphlet published by the British Sociological Association (BSA) is a useful source for gaining an insight into the contemporary view of sociology as told by sociologists.²⁵ Specifically aimed at encouraging prospective students to elect to study sociology, *Speak up for Sociology* claims that it will “help students celebrate and defend their choice of subject.”²⁶ In so doing, however, it merely echoes the traditional view of sociology as told by sociologists that was critiqued above without any consideration at all of the possible impact that government funded sociological research may have on the forms of knowledge produced or the part that such forms of knowledge might play in exercises of governmental forms of power.

Quoting Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, the pamphlet asserts that sociology is “to reveal what is hidden,” which, as I said above and will show further below, misrepresents and misunderstands the reality that knowledge does not exist prior to its construction. To be sure, knowledge is not something that is “hidden” by those in power who would rather we, whoever “we” are, did not

²⁵ British Sociological Association, “Speaking up for Sociology.” (2023)

²⁶ Ibid.

have access to it, but rather is a product of the questions asked, and the methods utilized that produce forms of sociological or social scientific knowledge.

It is in this sense that the contemporary view of sociology as told by sociologists disappoints, both because it merely reproduces the traditional view of sociology and sociologists that was analyzed above and for doing so in an altogether uncritical and unreflexive fashion. Indeed, another sweeping claim in the BSA pamphlet, without any attempt to explain what it means or to provide a context to try to make sense of it, is the statement that: “Sociology examines the workings of our everyday world and attempts to make a difference.”²⁷

Thus, along similar lines to the traditional view of sociology by sociologists, the contemporary view of sociology by sociologists also posits the task of sociology and sociologists as attempting to make a difference in the world; yet it fails to provide any examples of what kind of difference it is referring to. Nor does it indicate quite why sociology attempts to make a difference in the world or to whose benefit the differences in the world that are being attempted will work.

The BSA pamphlet continues in this mode throughout, making a series of further vague statements that mirror the traditional view of sociology as told by sociologists.²⁸ Another example is: “Sociology isn’t always comfortable, and it shows us things we’d perhaps like to hide from.”

So, in one breath the BSA pamphlet is saying that sociology and sociologists “reveal what is hidden” and in the next it says that it shows “us,” whoever that refers to, “things we’d perhaps like to hide from,” again without any critical reflection and without giving any examples at all of what is being referred to.

There is nothing much to be added or gained to this analysis by simply quoting further from the contemporary dominant discourse by the BSA on the discipline of sociology and the role of sociologists. Yet, two further quotations from the pamphlet leave no doubt that there has been no adjustment whatsoever for the increase in the number of sociologists who work under the dictates of government funding. The first is by Zygmunt Bauman and the second is by Laurie Taylor, both of whom could quite easily have been included in the traditional view of sociology and sociologists:

“The purpose of sociology is ‘to come to the help of the individual.’”²⁹
[Sociology] ‘disturbs conventional ways of thinking, breaks up solid categories and throws doubt on accepted truths.’³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

As we can see, the traditional and contemporary discourses on sociology and the role of sociologists are identical in presenting sociology as somehow emancipatory for individuals in society and the role of sociologists to question, rather than produce, problematic truths that might act against the interests of the general public or aspects of the population.

Before any closer analysis of the ways in which sociologists might support and reproduce, rather than challenge, existing forms of power can take place, however, a more appropriate understanding of how modern forms of power and knowledge are intimately related is first necessary, for which the critical social theory of Michel Foucault is a particularly insightful source.

Foucault, Modern Forms of Power and Resistance

Foucault's research on the emergence of the modern state and the distinguishing features of modern power and knowledge in Western societies made two important interrelated contributions directly applicable to this critical analysis: that power in modern Western societies is intrinsically and inextricably related to forms of scientific knowledge, relating to both the natural and the social sciences. In particular, he showed how scientific expertise, and the techniques by which "power-knowledge" produces discourses (bodies of knowledge), determine the "truths" peculiar to modern societies, the "truths" "we live by." In consequence, the foregoing conceptualizations of modern forms of power contained in the stories that sociologists tell themselves about sociology and the work they do, whether traditional or contemporary, are both found wanting. Neither discourse problematizes the construction and/or deployment of forms of sociological or social scientific forms of knowledge. Nor do they reflect on the part that sociologists can play in exercises of modern forms of power and the construction of the "truths" that shape how individuals think, feel, and act in modern societies, particularly when they are engaged in the production of social scientific forms of knowledge and expertise under the remits of government grants and in the overall interests of prevailing forms of governmental power.

Foucault's history of exercises of power in a modern state highlighted that from the middle of the 16th Century a series of treatises began to appear that not only concerned the traditional questions of the nature of the state, nor even with the problems of how the prince could best guard his power. Their scope was much wider concerning the "art of government," in almost every area of social life such as the "governing of a household, souls, children, a province, a convent, a religious order, or a family."³¹ Political reflection was, thus, broadened to include "almost all forms of human activity, from the smallest

³¹ Paul Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (London: Penguin, 1984), 15.

stirrings of the soul to the largest military maneuvers of the army.”³²

Foucault’s history of government also emphasized the centrality of forms of sociological knowledge and statistical forms of social scientific analysis in the modes of government that distinguish the modern world and how they bear on the management or control of the population:

the population is the object that government must take into account in all its observations and “savoir,” in order to be able to govern in a rational and conscious manner. The formation of a “savoir” of government is absolutely bound up with the knowledge of all the processes related to the population.³³

Foucault’s analysis further showed that from about the 18th Century onwards, the “arts of government,” which replaced Sovereign authority, emerged as a consequence to the problem of population and “consist(ed) essentially of the knowledge of the state, in all the different elements, dimensions and factors of its power, termed precisely ‘statistics,’ meaning the ‘science of the state.’”³⁴ Statistical forms of sociological knowledge, argued Foucault, gradually revealed that the population had its own lawlike regularities such as its own rate of death, suicide, disease, and its own cycles of scarcity, etc. He observed that under modern forms of power the population is the subject of needs and aspirations but is at the same time also the object in the hands of the government, aware vis-a-vis the government of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it. He asserted that under the art of government, population management became the ultimate interest of government, with the aim of embracing the welfare of the population to improve its conditions, increase its wealth, longevity, and health, etc. Hence, individual interest and that of the population as a whole becomes both the target and the instrument of government.³⁵ For Foucault,³⁶

statistics... make it possible to quantify the phenomena specific to population, such that the art of government and empirical knowledge of the state’s resources and condition – its statistics – together formed the major components of a new political rationality.³⁷

This highlights how forms of governmentality or rationalities of government in modern Western societies are, from a Foucauldian perspective, entirely

³² Ibid.

³³ Michael Foucault, “Governmentality,” *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (Autumn 1979), 18.

³⁴ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 14-16

³⁵ Ibid., 18

³⁶ Ibid., 17.

³⁷ Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 16. Giddens asserted that “as good a single index as any of the movement from the absolutist to the (modern) nation state is the initiation of the systematic collection of ‘official’ statistics.” See Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 179.

dependent upon forms of social scientific and statistical forms of knowledge on all aspects of the domain to be governed or managed. Such forms of knowledge inform governmental regimes about the population or aspects of the population to be managed or controlled. It was these new forms of rationality that emerged alongside the replacement of “sovereignty” by “governmentality” that are intrinsically connected to the production and deployment of forms of social scientific statistical knowledge, calculation, categorization, and expertise for governmental ends.³⁸

These developments – the emergence of governmental rationality and what might be termed statistical forms of sociological rationality and reason – ushered in a new regime of power for Foucault, namely “bio-power.” The notion of bio-power as a political rationality is essential to Foucault’s thoughts on governmentality and was crucial to his analysis of power within modern societies. It is also crucial to the application below of Foucault’s thesis on the intrinsic relationship between power and sociological forms of knowledge that are constructed in the interests of forms of governmentality and the exercise of forms of bio-power.

For Foucault, a society’s “threshold of modernity” has been crossed when power, a particular kind of power – bio-power – is primarily a matter of the “administration of life” and “life-processes.”³⁹ He asserted:

bio-power brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life... Modern man is an animal whose politics place his existence as a living being in question.⁴⁰

It is bio-power that makes the management or governmentality of post-sovereign societies possible: In order to manage or govern a population/the governed, administrative knowledge of “life” and “life-processes” is a necessary prerequisite. In order to manage a population well (noting that how “well” is defined will depend of the political or ideological perspective of the prevailing powerful forces in play at the time), governmental rationality requires detailed knowledge about the population or the domain to which it is directed. Bio-power made possible the fostering “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit statistical calculations and made knowledge-power an agent for the transformation of human life.”⁴¹

Moreover, for Foucault, bio-power/population management is

³⁸ See, for example, Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham, *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), 27.

³⁹ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 143.

⁴⁰ Foucault cited in Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

achieved, not through the exercise or threat of physical or economic power, but rather, through “disciplinary techniques.” Discipline referred to the instruments and techniques utilized in the operations of “disciplinary power,” which can be taken over and used by any social institution: prisons, certainly, but also schools, hospitals, the military, factories, universities, and so on. Discipline requires surveillance knowledge, by which those to be “known” and acted upon are made “visible” and knowable.⁴² This is provided through a whole array of governmental devices and techniques such as school, factory, health and/or prison inspectorates, royal commissions, departmental committees of inquiry, social surveys, journalistic reportage.⁴³ It can also include forms of academic sociological knowledge produced under the terms of government funded research grants, which are utilized to visualize and statistically represent populations and societal domains for the purpose of governmental exercises of power.

Sociologizing Government Funded Sociological Forms of Sociological Knowledge and Expertise

If sociology as a disciple is evaluated from the standpoint of the sociology of sociological knowledge and the foregoing Foucauldian perspective on power, knowledge and discourse, then, the story of sociology that sociologists project is rendered problematic. Indeed, certain forms of sociological knowledge are implicated, firmly, in the interplay of modern forms of bio-power, particularly when they are the product of government funded research agendas that curtail any potential resistance to existing forms of governmental power. Moreover, when sociologists work under the terms of government funded research requirements a consequence of what they do – their discursive product, the forms of knowledge and statistics that they produce – contributes to ensuring, reproducing, and potentially extending, the prevailing social order by informing those who exercise power about those to be known and acted upon. Indeed, social scientific forms of knowledge and statistical analyses are not just about “an independently given universe of social objects and events, *they are in part constitutive of it.*”⁴⁴

Sociological research that serves governmental agendas actually help to create and sustain the dominant power relations within society, which the dominant discourses on sociology and sociologists, both historically and

⁴² Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Penguin, 1977).

⁴³ Thomas Osborne, “Security and Vitality: Drains, Liberalism and Power in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, edited by Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996), 114.

⁴⁴ Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 180. My emphasis.

contemporary, claims to be programmatically against; they provide forms of social scientific expert “truthful” categorial statistical knowledge required for calculation and deployment by bio-power, indeed making known the modern citizenry of which Foucault spoke. It is through the systematic application of all the kinds of sociological knowledge derived at by social scientific methods and procedures; through sociological research projects, social population surveys and opinion polls that sociologists working on government funded research projects are participants in the most fundamental tool or technique of modern exercises of power. Without them modern forms of power simply cannot function. Modern political rationalities and governmental technologies are intrinsically linked to developments in sociological forms of knowledge, statistical analyses, and to the power of forms of sociological expertise.

Space does not allow for an extensive empirical analysis of ESRC funded sociological research projects in all Russell Group universities, but three examples from the University of Manchester are representative of the kind of research undertaken by academic sociologists and social scientists to inform governmentality of aspects of the population that it wants to know more about as a precursor to exercise governmental bio-power. This includes the British Election Survey (BES), awarded 1.25 million pounds by the ESRC, which was described by those running the project in 2015 as “designed to help our understanding of long-term political change, and the role of national and sub-national variations in the political and social context in shaping citizens’ attitudes and behavior.”⁴⁵ It includes the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), a four-year interdisciplinary program of research concerned with understanding changing ethnic inequalities and identities. The CoDE was awarded 2.83 million pounds by the ESRC to utilize a range of research techniques and tools:

to ensure that the potential economic and social benefits of our research are realized. Our focus is on the changes within ethnic groups (their internal structures and formulations of identities) and their external relationships and position in British society.⁴⁶

A final example is the English longitudinal study of ageing (ELSA), which was awarded 2 million pounds by the ESRC. The aim of the study is to create a genome-wide association study dataset to develop a new area of research in the UK. More specifically, academics from a number of disciplines and institutions will seek to demonstrate the utility of the resource through two demonstration projects: (1) To examine whether genome wide data explains variability in measures that have economic and social science interest; and (2) To use genetic

⁴⁵ British Election Survey, “British Election Survey 2015.”

⁴⁶ Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, “Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE).”

markers associated with obesity and well-being to examine their bi-directional associations.⁴⁷

Such academic research and survey devices are utilized to survey and surveil societal populations and contribute sociological forms of knowledge, statistical analyses and expertise to inform governmental rationalities about such aspects of society so that forms of bio-power in modern societies are enabled to be exercised.

However, it is not only academic sociologists working to construct governmental forms of knowledge and expertise within universities that provide this necessary social scientific statistical knowledge to those who exercise modern forms of power. Non-academic forms of social scientific expertise are also utilized to construct forms of statistical knowledge under governmental funding outside of universities, which must also be included for a more comprehensive analysis. This includes the surveys conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) such as the Household Assets Survey, the Labour Force Survey, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (formerly the British Crime Survey), and the Living Costs and Food Survey.⁴⁸ Surveys from such things as the Consumer Research Bureau and the Centre for Consumer Interests, The National Shopper's Survey, and all manner of markets, resident and localized community surveys should also be included. Together, such forms of knowledge are also utilized by all manner of health and social welfare experts in housing, education, crime and justice, employment, health care, social security officials, and all kinds of governmental departments who decide and deploy the criteria that affect us all; who decide the "truths" that society lives under; who decide the needs of the population or the section of society under the governmental gaze and control the resources for those needs.

It is in this sense that the forms of knowledge, the products, that are constructed by sociological or social scientific research, both inside and outside of universities, that work under the terms of governmental research grants or directly under governmental control are potentially far-reaching. Such forms of knowledge neither present the kind of challenge to existing forms of power that cause or contribute to forms of abuse, injustice, and exploitation in society that is presented in either of the stories that sociologists project about the discipline and the work that they do. On the contrary, such forms of knowledge actively serve to produce forms of knowledge that can, and do, create and underpin the forms of injustice, abuse, or exploitation that the dominant discourses on

⁴⁷ English Longitudinal Study of Aging. "English longitudinal study of ageing (ELSA): a genome-wide association study (GWAS)." Available at: <https://www.cmi.manchester.ac.uk/research/projects/past-projects/elsa-gwas/>. Last accessed: 14 December 2023.

⁴⁸ Office for National Statistics. "Find your study." Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys> Last accessed: 14 December 2023

sociology and sociologists claim to exist to challenge. This is because modern forms of bio-power are not about domination and control in the conventional sense, it is not so much a matter of imposing constraints or limitations upon citizens, upon a population, but more a matter of statistically “making up” citizens capable of bearing “a kind of regulated freedom.”⁴⁹ Thus, social scientific forms of knowledge and statistical analyses that are constructed in the interests of forms of governmentality and modern exercises of governmental bio-power are not simply ways of collecting information about a state, but are in fact about “normalization”; about normalizing the population; about producing individuals and entire populations in line with ideological governmental norms and values. In defining those outside the norm, such as the unemployed, the homeless, criminals, prostitutes, the mentally ill, the diseased, and so on, sociological statistical forms of knowledge in fact determine the norm. And, because “few of us fancy being pathological, most of us try to make ourselves normal, which in turn affects what is normal.” Indeed, we desire to be normal. (Hacking, 1990: 2). Accordingly, sociologists influenced by Foucauldian insights have shown that even:

our personalities, subjectivities, and relationships are not private matters... On the contrary, they are intensively governed...Thoughts, feelings and actions may appear as the very fabric and constitution of the intimate self, but they are socially organized and managed in minute particulars.⁵⁰

This is because in modern societies it is not power but rather freedom that is imposed, not through force, but through the “shaping,” “channeling” and “enhancement” of subjectivity in all the operations of modern government. And the “government of subjectivity,” which characterizes modern political power, is explicitly connected with social scientific statistical knowledge, a technique of the management of a modern population concerned with producing industrious, able, obedient, and disciplined subjects. Indeed, the aim and purpose of modern government and forms of bio-power is to “know,” to “prescribe,” and to “monitor” the lives of those for whom one is responsible.⁵¹ It is sociological forms of knowledge that are enabled by governmental funding that provide the raw material or ammunition for such governmental forms of bio-power to be exercised over the section of the population that it renders visible.

⁴⁹ Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (June 1992), 174.

⁵⁰ Nikolas Rose, *Governing The Soul: The Shaping Of The Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 221-213.

Conclusion

This article sought to highlight the disconnect between the dominant discourses on the stated role of the discipline of sociology and of sociologists as revealing and challenging abuses of power and forms of inequality, injustice, and exploitation in society and the reality that governmental forms of sociological knowledge, statistical social scientific analyses and forms of sociological expertise can play a vital role in exercises of bio-power in modern Western societies. Both the traditional and contemporary stories of sociology and the role of sociologists that were constructed and outlined fail to acknowledge that within their ranks there will be sociologists who might be described as mere governmental employees whose desks are based in universities. Although, to be fair to the traditional view of sociology and sociologists, this is certainly a more prominent social phenomenon nowadays, particularly in elite Russell Group universities who receive the lion's share of governmental research funding, than it was in the past when there were smaller numbers of sociologists working under the terms of government grants, when there was generally more freedom and independence for sociologists to conduct so called "blue skies" research.

This is not to damn sociology as an out-and-out tool for power, but rather to raise an alarm that the increasing number of government-funded research over the last couple of decades can act contra to the stated programmatic goals as expressed by the dominant discourses on the role of sociology and sociologists in society. Indeed, as a sociologist myself, my overall aim with this critical analysis is to look reflexively or "self questioningly"⁵² at the impact of the outputs or products of those fellow sociologists working under governmental agendas and remits in the interests of trying to provide a more appropriate understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge in modern societies; between discourse and exercises of modern forms of bio-power; and how this conflicts with the stories that sociologists tell of sociology and the role that they/we play. The hope is that sociology and sociologists so informed will be better placed to be able to work towards the realization of the programmatic goals that they claim that they so desire in the story that they project to society about the discipline and the mission that they are embarked upon, which I am also fully committed to – to make the world a better, fairer, more just and equitable place for all individuals whatever their economic status, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, culture, sexuality, and so on.

All of this being said, I do recognize that it will be easier said than done in a contemporary academic research culture that is wedded to forms of governmental funding in the form of research grants and the ways in which

⁵² Malcolm Ashmore, *The Reflexive Thesis: Wrihting Sociology of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50.

further government funding is allocated to those academic outputs rated highly in the governments quality assessment system – the Research Excellence Framework (REF). That academic sociologists are also greatly rewarded, personally, for obtaining what are seen as much prized research grants and for scoring highly in the REF, in the form of obtaining or retaining their jobs or being promoted, also presents a major challenge. Yet, unless something is done to reinstate the kind of research independence that sociologists once enjoyed, the story that sociologists project regarding their discipline and their role in challenging abuses and misuses of power will remain, at best, only partially true, and thus diminished as a producer of forms of counter discourse.

Foucault's work has been invaluable in making my theoretical case in this article, but his thoughts on how power might be resisted are just as useful in framing this critical analysis as a form of counter discourse to prevailing power relations, as they relate to the construction and deployment of sociological forms of knowledge in the exercise of forms of governmental bio-power. Indeed, Foucault conceived that forms of resistance to power are not simply a reaction to a pre-existing power. This, he argued, "would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relations."⁵³ Rather, it is more likely the reverse: states of power are continually engendered or incited by virtue of the potential counter-powers that co-exist with them. In Foucault's terms: "Where there is power there is resistance."⁵⁴ Power, then, presupposes resistance of some form in the tussle between dominant discourses and their counter discursive oppositional forces. As Foucault asserted:

Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relationships), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibria which occur in the latter, and conversely they are internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into effect.⁵⁵

Moreover, as Burchell et al observed:

The sense and object of governmental acts do not fall from the sky or emerge ready formed from social practice. They are things which have had to be – and which have been – invented. Foucault observed that there is a parcel of thought in even the crassest and most obtuse

⁵³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 94.

parts of social reality, which is why criticism can be a real power for change, depriving some practices of their self-evidence, extending the bounds of the thinkable to permit the invention of others.⁵⁶

Accordingly, from a Foucault inspired perspective, both domination by power and resistance to it involve the invention of “tactics” and the co-ordination of these various tactics into coherent strategies. Accordingly, a strategic maneuver must be countered by an opposing maneuver; a set of “tactics” must be consciously “invented” in opposition to the setting in place of another; a different “art” of the human body is what will oppose an historically given one. “One is always ‘inside’ power, there is no ‘escaping’ it.”⁵⁷ It is in this sense, that the analysis invented here is offered as a tactical form of counter discourse to the existing power relations between governmental forms of power and what can be described as outsourced forms of academic labor that toils to create the forms of knowledge required in the exercise of such forms of power, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

In closing, an encounter with a colleague as I was writing this article who has significant training and a wealth of experience in government research funding seems relevant and indicates that the analysis offered here is both timely and has much work to do. When I told them about the thrust of the article and how I was trying to shine a light on how the increasing number of colleagues working on government grants actually produces forms of knowledge required for exercises of forms of governmental power that many of us are critical of, rather than trying to understand what I was saying they got defensive and argumentative and did not want to accept it. In what became an uncharacteristically heated exchange, they cited a large-scale project that they know much about that is government funded to the tune of many millions of pounds and said that the professor who is running it certainly does not think that they are not acting independently and nor did they. In response, I said that it doesn’t matter what they or the professor running the large governmental research project personally think about what they are doing, that from a critical sociological perspective they are, nonetheless, working in the interests of the prevailing ideological forms of governmental power, but they still did not want to try to understand or accept what I was saying.

In simple terms, power is where A makes B do what A wants B to do. This can take the form of physical coercion, for example, where a gun is placed to the head of B by A to make B do what A wants B to do. It can also take the form of economic persuasion, for example, where A pays B a sum of money to make B do what A wants B to do. Steven Lukes also famously constructed a three-fold typology of the dimensions of power, with the third dimension

⁵⁶ Burchell et al, *The Foucault Effect*, x.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

relating to a particularly effective forms of power where B does what A wants B to do but B thinks or believes that B is doing it because it is what B wants to do.⁵⁸ This dovetails nicely with the Foucauldian approach to how forms of knowledge are translated into discourses that shape how members of a population think, feel, and act in ways that the individuals concerned would believe to be their own thoughts and actions.

To apply this line of thinking to the dialogue with my colleague mentioned above, it matters not if my colleague or the professor leading the large-scale research project that is resourced and enabled by governmental funding believes that they are acting independently. The fact that they are working within parameters decided by a form of governmental power in the overall interests of sustaining or extending such governmental power undermines such a claim or belief of independence. Whatever they may believe or want to believe, they are shackled to, and harnessed by, governmental power in ways that they may not realize or, indeed, may not want to realize. If we think about this problem in terms of a continuum of critical consciousness or reflexive self-awareness, such social actors would be placed somewhere between two extremes: either unwittingly acquiesce to governmental power, at one end of the continuum, or willing compliance with governmental power for the personal rewards and status that they obtain for doing so, at the other, which would correlate with a variant of Luke's third dimension of power and economic persuasion power.

Moreover, if we consider how those social scientists working for multi-million-pound governmental contracts sit or fit within either the traditional or contemporary story of sociology and the role of sociologists constructed above, they are unlikely to be seen as troublemakers unearthing problematic truths or challenging existing power relation by governmental forces precisely because they work in the interests of those governmental forms of power. By comparison, those sociologists who try to act in ways that accord with the traditional or contemporary story of sociology and the role of sociologists in terms of striving to highlight or challenge abuses of power, injustice, and unfairness that are not in line with governmental ideological ways of dealing with such issues in society, which might well have been caused by prevailing forms of governmental power, will likely be seen very much as troublemakers that those stories speak of. And, it is unlikely, too, that they would be supported or promoted in their careers or celebrated in ways that their colleagues who create outsourced forms of governmental discourse are, as they please both governmental forms of power and their university research directors and finance officers with the government grants that they obtain for themselves and for the universities.

⁵⁸ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

The main title of this article is: *He who pays the piper calls the tune*. It reflects an idiom that is said to emphasize that the person who is paying someone to do something can decide how it should be done. It seems apt to finish on this point. Whether it be UKRI, ESRC, or any other governmental funding body that determines the agenda for government funded research, then, it is they who are paying the researcher, even if indirectly through outsourced payments to universities or private research companies, and it is they who decide which forms of sociological knowledge are funded and therefore produced. To be sure, he who pays the piper most certainly calls the tune as this relates to government funding for sociological research. It is, after all, he who owns the pipe.

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Erich Fromm's Dialectics of Religion: From Critical Theory to the City of Being

Rudolf J. Siebert¹

Introduction: Contrast of Reality and Idea

According to Max Horkheimer, the founder of the critical theory of society of the Frankfurt School, and the former collaborator and friend of Erich Fromm, the relationship of German idealism from Kant to Hegel to the thinking of the emancipated Jews, was sealed through great Jewish disciples and successors of the idealist philosophers: from Marx to Bloch, Horkheimer, Fromm, Adorno, Marcuse and Löwenthal.² The relationship proved itself in individual teachings of idealism, as well as in its universal dialectical structure. This logical structure united the sense for reality with the imperturbable holding on to the Idea, be it in religious or philosophical form, the very contrast to reality. Among the identical traits in particular was one essential one: namely the impossibility to call the Divine by its name, or to make an image of it.³ There was a similarity between German idealism and the Talmud, which was more than accidental. From birth what counted for them was the truth, which one could not express affirmatively, but which was, nevertheless. This contradiction lay in the Jewish tradition as well as in dialectical philosophy and theology, in which it had become explicit through thought that aimed at the truth. That the Jews through the long centuries of persecution preserved their teaching, in which neither the reward of individual bliss nor the eternal

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² Max Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft. Aus den Vorträgen und Aufzeichnungen seit Kriegsende* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967), 302-316.

³ Ibid; Exodus 20.

punishment of the individual was decisive, that it remained loyal to a law after the Jewish state had disappeared for two thousand years, which could have enforced it, only on the basis of the hope, which was valid for the just people in all nations in the future, that precisely was the contradiction that connected it with the great philosophy in Germany, with all what ironically was called “idealism” in everyday discourse.

Here we concentrate on Erich Fromm and his teaching on the revolutionary (or democratic) and authoritarian personality, as well as on the being and having character, in the religious as well as the secular sphere. In our concentration on Fromm’s dialectical theory of religion, we assume with Georg W. F. Hegel, the greatest idealist, that the character and the social morality of a nation, on one hand, and its constitution and laws, on the other; are in interaction with each other, and thus cause each other.⁴ If we consider e.g., the customs and morals of the ancient Spartan nation as the effect of its constitution and so vice versa this constitution as the effect of its social morality, then this consideration may after all be correct. However, this conception does not grant satisfaction, because, through it neither the constitution nor the social morality of the Spartan people were comprehended. That could only happen in the constitution and morality, which the life and the history of the Spartan nation showed, were recognized as moments of a third and of something higher, namely the notion as the unity of the universal, the particular, and the singular, and as being grounded in this dialectical notion: the notion of the state as the unity of family and civil society. To this highest point of idealism, Fromm and the other critical theorists no longer pursued. They were no longer systematic philosophers. They put systematization under ideology suspicion: ideology understood as “false consciousness,” as the cover up of particular economic motivations, shortly as the “untruth.” Critical theory of society is essentially *ideology critique*, and precisely as such it is materialistic. During the axial time, both Socrates and Jesus held on to the Idea, in its philosophical and religious form; for such, they were both executed unjustly, one by the Athenian state and the other by the Jewish state, as states were in decline.

Attitude and Theory

Erich Fromm’s dialectical attitude toward religion and critical theory of character, society, and religion, reached its climax not in his encounter with Judaism, the *Religion of Sublimity*, or with Christianity, the *Religion of Becoming, Freedom, and Full Manifestation*, or with Buddhism, the *Religion of Inwardness*, but rather in his encounter with the great High-Medieval,

⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I. Werke 8* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 300-302.

panentheistic philosopher and theologian, Meister Eckhart (AD 1260-c.1327), whose influence has reached into modernity, into historical idealism, as well as into historical materialism.⁵ The panentheistic way of being and of acting was a dialectical one, filled with wonder and beauty. It was wonderful to be dialectical in both ways: in being outside and inside, in seizing and in being seized, in seeing and at the same time being seen, in holding and being held. That precisely was the dialectical goal of panentheism, where the spirit remained at rest, united with Eternity. As Meister Eckhart showed Georg W. F. Hegel the dialectic of enlightenment a century before Max Horkheimer, the founder of the critical theory of society, and his friend Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, and bring him back to religion, to Christianity, so he helped Fromm to revise the Marxian and the Freudian enlightenment, and to rediscover religion again: Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Meister Eckhart's panentheism helped Fromm to mediate between the pantheism of the oriental religions, e.g., Daoism, the already trinitarian Chinese *Religion of Measure*, and Hinduism, the likewise trinitarian Indian *Religion of Imagination*, on one hand, and the theism of the occidental religions, e.g., trinitarian Christianity and the unitarian deism, invented by Voltaire and Rousseau in preparation of the Bourgeois Enlightenment and revolution, on the other. What alienated Fromm, as well as his former friends Horkheimer, Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, from the Jewish religion of his youth, was the aggression, the destruction, and the wars of annihilation, willed, commanded, and ordered by an authoritarian God. In Judaism, the Israelites, once liberated by Yahweh and through Moses from Egyptian slavery, had slaves again and engaged in wars of colonization, and were severely punished for it. Having received the Decalogue from Yahweh through Moses, the Israelites returned with the help of Aaron to the Golden Calf, to idolatry, and were severely punished for it. There was a revolutionary and liberating *being* God, and his prophets and men, and there was an authoritarian and aggressive *having* God, and his men. In the name of this authoritarian God, Joshua subdued the whole land of Canaan: the highlands, the Negeb, the lowlands, the hill sides, and all the kings in them.⁶ He left no man alive and delivered every single soul over to the ban, as Yahweh, the authoritarian God of Israel, had commanded. Joshua conquered them from Kadesh; Joshua's slaughtered the thirty-one kings west of the Jordan, starting out with the king of Jericho, the oldest city of the area, and the king of Ai near Bethel, and others east of the Jordan, with all their people. In Jericho, only a prostitute and her family were allowed to survive,

⁵ Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*. Übersetzt aus dem Mittelhochdeutschen von Josef Quint (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1963); Raymond B. Blakney (trans.), *Meister Eckhart* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941).

⁶ Joshua 5-14; Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

because she had helped to rescue two spies sent by Joshua before the campaign. After the Anakim had been wiped out by the Israelites, *the country had rest from war*.⁷

Such genocidal military action in an historical authoritarian structure stood, despite of the following peace, in contrast to the Idea and to the Law, the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount: You should not steal; you should not kill; you should not lie; you should keep the Golden Rule. The Israelites, who were liberated by Moses and his God from Egyptian slavery, were identical with those who rebelled against Moses and his God, but also radically different from each other. The Israelites who were to receive the Decalogue from Moses and his God on Mount Sinai, were identical with those who made the Golden Calf and fell into idolatry, but also radically different from each other. The first group of Israelites elevated themselves to the Idea. The second group conformed to reality. There could be no greater contrast than that between idealists and realists.

Authoritarian Structure

In the midst of the authoritarian structure of the commanding God and the obeying humans, there is present already the seed of revolution, liberation, being, and peace.⁸ According to Fromm, one of the main themes of the Hebrew Bible was the dialectic of the authoritarian and the revolutionary character.⁹ Another theme was the dialectic of the having and the being character: leave what you have. Free yourself from all fetters. Be! The history of Hebrew tribes began with the command to the first Hebrew patriarch, Abraham, to give up his country in Ur of the Chaldees, and his clan, and to go to the unknown.¹⁰ Yet Abraham's descendants settled on a new soil, and new clannishness developed. This dialectical process led to more severe bondage. Precisely because the Hebrews became rich and powerful in Egypt, they became slaves. They lost the vision of the One God of their nomadic ancestors. They worshipped idols. The gods of the rich turned later into their masters. The second Hebrew patriarch was Moses. He was transformed by God to liberate his people. He was to lead them out of Egypt, which had become their home, even though eventually a home for slaves. The people were to go into the desert in order to celebrate. Reluctantly and with great misgiving, the Hebrews followed their leader Moses into the desert, the mystical key symbol in this liberation. Later the Hebrews conquered new

⁷ Joshua 11:21-23.

⁸ Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*.

⁹ Erich Fromm. *To Have or to Be* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 48-65.

¹⁰ Genesis 12:1

lands. They exterminated their enemies. They settled on their enemies' soil. They incorporated and worshipped their enemies' gods and idols. They transformed their democratic tribal life into that of despotism and authoritarianism. They had slaves. They colonized.

In his critical theory of society and religion, Fromm held on to the double dialectic first of revolutionary and authoritarian tendencies, and then of being and having tendencies. For Fromm, in the midst of the fascist temptation, there was present already the democratic resistance.¹¹ Horkheimer, Fromm, Marcuse, and Adorno concretely superseded revolutionary and *being*-oriented Judaism and Christianity into their critical theory of society and religion; they negated the authoritarian and having element in them and preserved the revolutionary and liberating lament in them. For example, Horkheimer did not believe that Adolf Eichmann's illegal capture by Israel, and his trial and execution in Jerusalem, would diminish Antisemitism, nor did Fromm, Marcuse or Adorno.¹² Fromm hoped that the Israelites' prophetic Messianic message of freedom and being could finally conquer Antisemitism, and all other dualisms.¹³ The critical theorists may not have known what could stop authoritarian Antisemitism, but they knew that authoritarian police or military actions could not do it. Otherwise, World War II, the massive military victory over fascism by communist Russia and liberal America should have finished authoritarian Antisemitism forever, but it didn't.

Law and Sabbath

When Erich Fromm produced his book, *The Jewish Law: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Diaspora-Judaism*, in 1922, and *The Sabbath* in 1927, he had left behind the authoritarian Judaism of his youth, the Jewish diaspora in Frankfurt, and was touched not only by the bourgeois, but also by the Marxian and Freudian democratic enlightenment and revolution.¹⁴ He was still concerned with revolutionary and liberating Judaism and religious contents, but not in theological, but rather in psychological and sociological forms; in vocabulary produced by Marx and Freud, not on the phenomenological level of speculative reason, but rather on the phenomenological level of analytical understanding. The dialectic of the sacred and the profane, the religious and

¹¹ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1994).

¹² Horkheimer. *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*.

¹³ Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*.

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *Das Jüdische Gesetz. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Diaspora-Judentums. Dissertation von 1922* (Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1922); Erich Fromm, "Der Sabbath," in *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Natur und Geisteswissenschaften* 13, International Psychoanalytischer Verlag (1927): 223-234; Fromm, *To Have Or To Be*, Chapter III.

the secular, had fully opened up for Fromm, and thereby also the need for their reconciliation. Fromm had entered the Freud Institute at the Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe Universität. The Freud Institute had joined Max Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research. Fromm and Horkheimer worked together in the Institute combining, like the non-believing Jewish psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, Marx and Freud, sociology and psychology, and became friends with each other on the basis of their Jewish background and the development of their critical theory of society.¹⁵ They were both trying to hide their Judaism as well as their Marxism in pre-fascist Germany and later in liberal America. Along with Adorno, Marcuse, and Ernst Bloch, they both emigrated from fascist Germany only to be met with a pre-fascist wave in America, with followers of the fascists and Antisemites Henry Ford and Jesuit Father Charles Coughlin, and Protestant ministers, and members of the *Amerikadeutscher Bund* (German American Bund). Originally, *critical theory* may very well have been a cover name for historical materialism.

Frankfurt East Side

Fromm had grown up, like Adorno, on the middle-bourgeois eastside of Frankfurt, he in a fully Jewish family, and Adorno in a mixed Jewish-Catholic family, close to the globally known Jesuit center, St. Georgen. Adorno was baptized a Catholic, educated a Protestant, finally to become a Marxist, Freudian, and Hegelian, concluding his life with a clear *Non-Credo*, as confessed already to his Catholic friends Eugen Kogon and Walter Dirks during a public discourse at the University of Münster in 1958. During Adorno's funeral in Frankfurt's Main Cemetery, no religious symbolism of any kind appeared.¹⁶ Adorno's *Non-Credo* happened despite of Hegel, who had been helped by the panentheist Meister Eckhart to return in Switzerland from the enlightenment to religion, to Christianity, to Lutheran Christianity, and from whom Adorno and Horkheimer had learned a century later about the dialectic of enlightenment.¹⁷ Adorno waited for a better, less contradictory revelation than offered in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, or in any other positive religion. Not so with Fromm. He received a full Jewish education in a fully Jewish family, like his former friend, Horkheimer. The first part of verse one of Psalm 91 was written on Horkheimer's parents' gravestone in the Jewish cemetery of Zürich, Switzerland, and the second part on his own

¹⁵ Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1994), 9-126.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters*, ed. and trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 361.

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a. Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969).

and his wife Maidon's gravestone, a late convert from Anglican Christianity to Judaism: *In you, Eternal One, alone I trust!*

Horkheimer's mother had prayed Psalm 91 for protection throughout the fascist time and was finally rescued by a Catholic taxi driver who drove her and her husband to neutral Switzerland. Fromm and Horkheimer remained Jewish believers. Their Jewish faith bound them together. When Fromm finally left the Institute of Social Research while it was at Columbia University in New York, out of philosophical reasons, Horkheimer saw in his departure the greatest loss of all the losses for his Institute. Both the believing Fromm and the non-believing Adorno encountered Antisemitism in the highly developed school system of the very commercial, very liberal, and very Jewish city of Frankfurt. When a generation later I studied in the same school system, in the humanistic Lessing Gymnasium, Lessing having been a German enlightener, Antisemitism came to its climax. Jewish students, believing or not, disappeared quietly from the classrooms. When in the afternoon before the Kristallnacht on November 10-11th, 1938, I came as a 11-year-old student out of the central Frankfurt swimming pool, I saw the nearby famous synagogue in flames. I was amazed that the firemen did not try to extinguish the fire in the synagogue, but that they rather only tried to protect the surrounding buildings from the flames. Famous Jewish philosophers and theologians, like Martin Buber, had visited that synagogue. The Fromm Family as well as the Adorno family were familiar with the synagogue. When I came to the Zeil, the main street of Frankfurt, I saw all kinds of objects flying out of the Jewish stores, including Chrystal lamps, which gave the night its name. Only when I came home in the evening, I heard through the *Volksempfänger*, that a young Jew had assassinated a German diplomat in Paris, and that therefore thousands of Jews had been imprisoned in the Reich. I lived on the working class westside of Frankfurt, only ten minutes' walk away from the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Universität and from Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research on its campus, in which also Fromm worked. To those living in the area, the "Frankfurt School" was known as "Cafe Marx." The Institute was known to the people for its Marxism more than for its Judaism. In 1933, the Institute was closed by the National Socialist Cultural Minister in Berlin for both its Judaism and its Marxism, as well as for its Freudianism. My Grandfather, Martin Bopp, was a conductor on the streetcar driving between the University and the Opera House, which was dedicated to the *Beautiful, the Good, and the True*, located in the center of Frankfurt. He met daily the scholars from the Institute, including Fromm, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, etc., as they travelled in his streetcar from the University to the center of the city and back again. He took their money. He did not know who and what they were, critical theorists. They did not know who he was, a former owner of a farm and a bakery in Münzenberg, in

Oberhessen, and now a streetcar conductor, a Lutheran, a social democrat, a member of the proletariat, which they as Jews, Marxists, and Freudians wanted to liberate. Instead, fascism grew daily in Frankfurt, and Germany, and Europe, and America. A fascist academic colleague of Adorno, Fromm, and Horkheimer, at the University wanted to put Adorno against the wall and shoot him. All members of the Institute, Horkheimer, Fromm, Marcuse, and Adorno, Benjamin, Löwenthal, etc. were in the same danger, being believers or not.

Christ Dogma

When Fromm wrote his essay *Psychoanalysis and Soziology*, in 1928 and 1929, and his book *On the Development of the Christ Dogma: A Psychological Study of the Social Psychological Function of Religion* in 1930, and on the *State as Educator to the Psychology of Penal Justice* in the same year, and on the *Psychology of the Criminal and of the Punishing Society*, one year later, and on the *Method and Task of an Analytical Sociopsychology*, in 1932, and on the *Psychoanalytical Characterology and its Significance for the Sociopsychology* in the same year, he had concretely, dialectically superseded religion, mainly Judaism and Christianity, into the Freudian and Marxian enlightenment movements, into the critical theory of society, which summed up these movements. While Fromm negated the clannishness, bondage, slavery, and the idolatry of the gods of the rich, he preserved in his teaching and struggle whatever he found good still in religion: in Judaism the memory of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham and Moses, and in Christianity, the revolutionary Jesus of Nazareth. Fromm did those writings only a few years before Adolf Hitler and national socialist authoritarianism came into power and broke the democratic resistance.

Workers

Fromm worked on a social-psychological inquiry, examining blue and white color workers on the eve of the Third Reich, around 1930.¹⁸ The research dealt with the dialectic of the revolutionary personality and the authoritarian character. Eight thousand workers were interviewed for this study. Religion appeared, if at all, more on the counter-revolutionary authoritarian side than on the revolutionary side. The authoritarian character is romantic, religious, nationalistic, capitalistic, sadomasochistic, and most often racist. The revolutionary character was future-oriented, secular, cosmopolitan, socialistic, sublimated in terms of aggression and libido, and generally open

¹⁸ Erich Fromm, *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches. Eine Sozialpsychologische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1980).

toward diversity. 12% of the authoritarian personalities, and a passive majority of workers, made Hitler's victory possible and predictable. The bourgeois Catholic Center Party gave Hitler the emergency laws, and thus made him legitimately a dictator, and then dissolved itself with the Reichskonkordat agreement between the Nazi state and the Vatican. Adorno took Fromm's labor study as a model for his authority studies. He emphasized the authoritarian character in many of his works. One of Adorno's Californian studies on authoritarianism found a majority of authoritarian personalities in the labor unions, so much so that it could not be published, and is still part of Leo Löwenthal's unpublished estate in California.¹⁹ A broader study on authoritarianism, which emphasized religious aspects of the authoritarian personality, and entitled the *Authoritarian Personality*, could be published.²⁰ It took the religious side of the authoritarian character seriously. Adorno made special studies of fascist Protestant ministers. They would today be called Christian nationalists.²¹ In the beginning of the 1960s, Adorno predicted a new rise of the authoritarian personality for the future. His prediction was verified by history in the 2020s. When Fromm emigrated to the very conservative, liberal America, to Chicago, he changed the Marxist "revolutionary character" of his labor study into the "democratic character" in order not to offend his friends. After he had left the Institute for Social Research and started his work as a psychoanalyst in New York, he superseded the dialectic of revolutionary character and authoritarian personality in his labor study into the dialectic of the being-personality and the having-character.²² Now he found support for his being-character in religion, in Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity.

Authoritarian Family

Around 1936, shortly before Fromm left the Institute for Social Research at Columbia University, he worked with Horkheimer and Marcuse on a *Study on Authority and Family*.²³ The project concentrated not only on the authoritarian character of Catholicism, but also of the Reformers, and the way how they dealt with the family. The Institute was interested not only in the

¹⁹ Leo Löwenthal, *An Unmastered Past* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1987).

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1950), 727-743.

²¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Psychological Techniques of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²² Fromm, *To Have or To Be*.

²³ Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse, *Studien über Autorität und Familie. Schriften des Instituts für Sozialforschung* (Paris: Dietrich zu Klampen Verlag, 1936).

authoritarianism in family and state, but also in religion. As Adorno continued his study in terms of the dialectic of democratic character and authoritarian personality, Fromm continued his study in terms of the dialectic of being personality and having character. Without coming in conflict with each other.

Nontheistic Mysticism

In his book *You shall be as Gods A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition*, Erich Fromm defined his religious and theological position approximately as nontheistic mysticism, another name for Meister Eckhart's panentheism, situated between pantheism and theism.²⁴ Fromm took the title of his book from Genesis 3. According to Genesis, it had been the serpent in paradise who promised Eve that if she and Adam would eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would not die, as threatened by God, but that their eyes would rather be opened, and they *shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*.²⁵

Separated from the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Fromm continued, nevertheless, to share still in Horkheimer and Adorno's emphasis on the Exodus prohibition against making images of God, or even naming him:

You shall not make yourself a carved image of any likeness of anything of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons, and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not utter the name of Yahweh your God to misuse it, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it.²⁶

The critical theorists radicalized both prohibitions of image and of name.²⁷ Sometimes in the history of Judaism, God's name had not been allowed to be expressed at all. There was never any hostility between Fromm and the Institute; in their emphasis on the prohibition of image and name, they

²⁴ Fromm, *You Shall Be As Gods*.

²⁵ Ibid, Genesis 3.

²⁶ Exodus 20: 4-9.

²⁷ Dustin J. Byrd, *The Frankfurt School and the Dialectics of Religion: Translating Critical Faith into Critical Theory* (Kalamazoo, MI: Ekpyrosis Press, 2020); Sebastian Truskolaski, *Adorno and the Ban on Images* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

remained most deeply united. In his *You shall be as gods*, Fromm tried to show the development of the concept of God and man within the Hebrew Bible and the post-biblical Jewish tradition in early Christianity from authoritarianism to revolution and liberation. The development began with an authoritarian God and an obedient man. But even in this authoritarian structure the seeds of freedom and independence could already be found: the dialect of authoritarian and revolutionary character. From the very beginning of the development God was to be obeyed precisely in order to prevent men from obeying idols, authoritarian idolatry.²⁸ The worship of the one God was the negation of the negation of the worship of men and things. The true worship of God as Spirit in the spirit and in the truth had not yet been announced by the non-authoritarian Jesus of Nazareth to the woman in Samaria, in what is today the Westbank:

Believe me, woman, the hour is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain (Gerizim) nor in Jerusalem.
You worship what you do not know;
we worship what we do know;
for salvation comes from the Jews.
But the hour will come – in fact it is here already –
when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit
and truth:
that is the kind of worshipper
the Father wants.
God is spirit,
and those who worship
must worship in spirit and truth.²⁹

According to Fromm, the development of biblical and post-biblical ideas represented the growth of the seed of revolution, freedom and independence; God the authoritarian ruler became God the constitutional monarch who was himself bound by the principles he had announced.³⁰ The anthropomorphically described God became a nameless and imageless God, and eventually a God of whom no essential attribute could be predicated. Man, the obedient servant, became the free man, who made his own history, for better or for worse, free from God's interference, and guided only by the prophetic message that he could either accept or reject. In Fromm's view, as far as the God-concept is concerned, what he called the "X-concept," we must

²⁸ Fromm, *You Shall Be As Gods*, 223-229.

²⁹ John 4:21-24.

³⁰ Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 223-229.

ask whether we should continue to use a concept that could be understood only in terms of its social-cultural roots: the Middle Eastern cultures with their authoritarian tribal chiefs, slaveholders, and omnipotent kings, and later authoritarian medieval feudal lords and absolute monarchies. In the West, the renaissance of an anti-authoritarian, revolutionary, democratic humanism was occurring in the end of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, among adherents of Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, as well as among Marxist and Freudian socialists, including Frommians. It is a reaction to the three-fold threat that humankind faces today: that of the environmental disaster, that of the nuclear extinction, and that of the authoritarian transformation of men into appendices of machines, the rise of the totally administered world. If the spirit and the hopes of the Prophets are to prevail, it will depend on the strength of this new revolutionary, democratic, being-oriented humanism.

Despair and Hope

Fromm disagreed with many Christian theologians in that he let the non-authoritarian Jesus of Nazareth not die in despair, by pointing out the Jewish custom to quote the whole Psalm 22 to its very end by quoting its first verse.³¹ When Jesus quoted the desperate first verse of Psalm 22 on the cross, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*, he intended to say the whole of Psalm 22, including the hopeful, prophetic, Messianic ending:

The whole earth, from end to end, will remember and come back to
Yahweh;
all the families of the nations will bow down before him.
For Yahweh reigns, the ruler of nations!
Before him all the prosperous of the earth will bow down,
before him will bow all who go down to the dust.
And my soul will live for him, my children will serve him;
men will proclaim the Lord to generations still to come,
his righteousness to a people yet unborn. All this he has done.³²

Jesus was hopeful, prophetic, and Messianic up to the very end of his life. His death on the cross came through a heart attack, which in any case did not leave much time for the very long Psalm 22. Its end gave the hope that the authoritarian, having structure of the totally administered world will not have the final word, neither will the environmental or atomic catastrophe. The prophetic Jesus of Nazareth was full of messianic hope until he drew his last breath. His death gave hope to the multitudes that the authoritarian having-

³¹ Ibid., 231-236.

³² Psalm 22.

structure of the totally administered world will ultimately not have the final word, nor the environmental, or atomic catastrophe. Franz von Baader, the Catholic friend of Hegel, and Erich Fromm, a religious psychologist of psychology, and a religious sociologist of sociology, echoed the spirit of Meister Eckhart.³³(32) As such, Eckhart, Baader, and Fromm were able to differentiate the true prophets of revolution, freedom, being, and democracy, from the false, deceitful, prophets of authoritarianism and fascism, truth from propaganda, in what Hegel has called the spirit of times.

Double Difference

Fromm understood that Meister Eckhart had analyzed the difference not only between the authoritarian and the revolutionary or democratic character, but also the difference between the having and the being modes of existence, with a clarity not surpassed by any teacher in Antiquity, Middle Ages, or Modernity.³⁴ Eckhart was a scholarly theologian like his contemporaries Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus. And the greatest representative of German mysticism, who even influences in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century thinkers like Karl Marx, and critical theorists like Fromm, who are seeking authentic guidance from a non-theistic, panentheistic, rational, yet religious philosophy of life. Even Marx may not have been an atheist, but a pantheist following Spinoza like other young Jewish revolutionaries.³⁵ According to Marx's greater teacher Hegel, Spinoza was according to his origin a Jew. It was in general the oriental perception, according to which everything finite appeared merely as something transitory and disappearing. It had in Spinoza's philosophy found its thoughtful expression. This oriental expression of the substantial unity constituted now admittedly the foundation of all truthful further development. But one could not remain standing at this point. What was still missing in this position was the occidental principle of individuality. This revolutionary principle of free subjectivity or subjective freedom, or being, stepped forth in philosophical form contemporaneously with the Spinozism first of all in the monadology of Leibniz. Spinoza was not an atheist. Spinoza did not only not deny God, but he rather recognized him as alone truly being. His atheism was the very opposite: acosmism. Fromm's main sources for Eckhart, Joseph L. Quint and Raymond B. Blackney, have

³³ Fromm, *To Have or To Be*, 59-65; Leo Löwenthal, "Franz von Baader: Ein religiöser Soziologe der Soziologie I," *Internationales Jahrbuch für Religionssoziologie*, 1 (1965).

³⁴ Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*.

³⁵ Tracie Matysik, *When Spinoza met Marx: Experiments in Nonhumanist Activity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

in the meantime been superseded by the once Catholic and now Anglican, Matthew Fox.³⁶

Internal Poverty

For Meister Eckhart, internal spiritual poverty lead to divine Abyss, to the quiet desert of the imageless and nameless Divinity.³⁷ It may have been after his departure from the Institute of Social Research, during his praxis as psychoanalyst in New York, that Fromm superseded his original concept of authoritarian or fascist character into the “having personality” and his original Marxist as well Freudian notion of revolutionary, or democratic character, into “being personality,” for which he then found proof in Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as historical materialism and psychoanalysis.³⁸ Fromm’s opus reached its climax with the mediation of the notion of internal spiritual poverty, as absence of having, and presence of being in Meister Eckhart’s panentheistic theology, and religious psychology and sociology.³⁹ Fromm’s paradigm change from the revolutionary and authoritarian character to the being and having personality in his psychoanalytical praxis in New York, and even in his own political party during the 1960s, was a response to the challenge of global capitalism. In New York, students at a Jesuit high school did not chose Jesuit Georgetown University in Washington D.C for their graduate school, but rather Harvard University, in order to make as much money as possible in their lives. The having personality developed into a pathology. Against the tide, Fromm tried to transform having personalities into being personalities with the help of Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism. According to Fromm, the classical source for Meister Eckhart’s views on the mode of having and being was not Plato, or the Neo-Platonists, or Proclus, but rather Christianity, Jesus’s revolutionary Sermon on the Mount: “How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁰ Fromm came to his definition of having dialectically, through its opposite, through poverty, as presented through the Sermon on the Mount, summed up in the Golden Rule. From Eckhart’s panentheistic theology and the New Testament, Fromm learned that there were two types of poverty: an external poverty of things and an inner poverty, referred to in the Gospel verse, rendered by Eckhart as: “He is a poor man who wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing.”⁴¹

³⁶ Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart’s Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1980).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Fromm, *To Have or To Be*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Matthew 5-7.

⁴¹ Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*.

For Eckhart, a person who wants nothing was not one who had chosen an ascetic life in the Church. Eckhart scolded those pious people, who understood not wanting anything as an exercise of repentance in confession and external religious praxis, thereby anticipating the reformer Martin Luther and the Lutheran philosopher and theologian Hegel. According to Fromm, Eckhart saw the subscribers to that concept as people who held on to their selfish egos: ego seen by Fromm, with Freud, as center between Id, including aggression and libido, and superego and environment.⁴² For Eckhart, these people had the name of being saintly on the basis of the external appearances, but inside they were asses, because they did not grasp the true meaning of divine truth. For the comparative religiologist Fromm, Eckhart was concerned with the kind of wanting that was also fundamental in Buddhist thought: greed, the craving for things and for one's own ego.⁴³ The Buddha considered this wanting to be the cause of human suffering, not enjoyment. When according to Fromm, Meister Eckhart spoke of having no will, he did not mean that one should be weak. The will Eckhart spoke of was identical with craving, an arbitrary will that one was driven by that was in a true sense not will at all. Eckhart even postulated that one should not even want to do God's will, because this also was a form of craving. The person who wanted nothing was the person who was not greedy for anything. This was, according to Fromm, the essence of Eckhart's panentheistic concept of non-attachment: of letting go, of letting be. Fromm approached the problem of having, and not poverty. On another level, he discussed the relationship between possession and freedom; human freedom was restricted to the extent to which we are bound to possessions and our own egos, understood in the Eckhartian and Freudian sense.⁴⁴

By being bound to our egos, our ego-boundness, or egomania, we stood in our own way, and were blocked from bearing fruit, from being creative, from realizing ourselves fully. Fromm identified completely with Dietmar Mieth's 1969 book, *The Unity of Vita Activa and Vita contemplative*.⁴⁵ Mieth maintained that freedom as the condition of true creativity and productivity was nothing but giving up one's ego, as love in the sense of Apostle Paul was free from all ego-boundness.⁴⁶ Freedom is being unfettered, free from the craving for holding onto things and one's ego; this is the precondition for love and becoming a productive and creative human

⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Das Ich und das Es. Metapsychologische Schriften* (Frankfurt a. Main: Fischer Verlag, 1992).

⁴³ Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard De Martino. *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

⁴⁴ Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*; Fromm, *To Have or To Be*.

⁴⁵ Mieth Diemar, *Die Einheit von Vita Activa und Vita Contemplativa* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Puster, 1969).

⁴⁶ Ibid; 2 Corinthians 15:3-7.

being. According to Paul, Eckhart, and Fromm, one had to get rid of the fetters of ego-boundness and egocentricity, the having mode of existence, in order to arrive at full beingness. Fromm had not found any author whose thoughts who thoughts on the having orientation matched his own like Eckhart's and later Mieth. Mieth spoke of the reconstruction of man, the property structure of people, in the same way as Fromm spoke of the having mode, or the having structure of existence under global capitalism. Mieth referred to the Marxian concept of "expropriation" when he spoke of the breakthrough of one's own inner property structure, adding that it was the most radical form of expropriation.⁴⁷ According to Fromm, Eckhart's second more universal and fundamental meaning of being was life, activity, birth, renewal, breakthrough, outpouring, flowing out, creativity, productivity.⁴⁸ In this broader sense, being was the dialectical opposite of having, of ego-boundness, and egocentrism; it was revolution and democracy, the opposite of authoritarianism. For Eckhart, being meant to be active in the classical sense of the creative expression of one's own human powers, not in the contemporary sense of keeping busy under all circumstances. According to Fromm, by activity, Eckhart meant dialectically to go out of oneself, while at the same time staying in oneself: acting and being as boiling, giving birth, flowing in itself and beyond itself. Sometimes Eckhart used the symbol of running in order to indicate the active character of being running into peace! The man who was in the state of running into peace was a noble and heavenly man. This man continually ran and was seeking peace through his running. The active and wholly alive man was like a vessel, that grew as it was filled and would never be full. In Fromm's perspective, breaking through the mode of having was the precondition for all genuine activity and being. In Meister Eckhart's ethical system, being rooted in his panentheistic metaphysical and theological system, the supreme virtue was the state of productive and creative inner-activity and being, for which the premise was the overcoming, the negation of all forms of ego-boundness, craving, and having. Being was the negation of negation. The virtue of being was the foundation of democracy, without which it could not prosper.

New Synthesis

According to Fromm, for those people who were not authentically rooted in theistic religions, e.g., the three Abrahamic religions, the principal question was that of conversion to a humanistic religiosity without religion, without dogmas, and without ecclesiastical institutions.⁴⁹ Such religiosity had long

⁴⁷ Mieth, *Die Einheit von Vita Activa und Vita Contemplativa*

⁴⁸ Fromm, *To Have or To Be*.

⁴⁹ Ibid; Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*.

been prepared by the movement of nontheistic, non-pantheistic, panentheistic religiosity, from Buddha through Meister Eckhart to Marx and Freud. People of the 20th and also still of the 21st century, were not confronted with the choice between selfish bourgeois materialism and the acceptance of the theistic or pantheistic concept of God. There was the panentheistic option. In this option social life itself – in all its aspects in family, civil society, state, history, culture, including art, philosophy, and science, in work, in leisure, in personal relations – would be the expression of the religious spirit or consciousness. A separate positive religion would no longer be necessary. Fromm did not intend his demand for a new nontheistic, noninstitutionalized, panentheistic religiosity to be an attack on the existing positive religions.

Conclusion

Fromm's demand for a new nontheistic religiosity did however demand that the Roman Catholic Church, beginning with the Roman bureaucracy, had to convert itself to the spirit of the Gospel. I have been a lifelong member of the Roman Catholic Church, first in fascist Germany and then in the liberal democratic America. During World War II, I was a leader in the antifascist Catholic Youth Movement in Nazi Germany. After the Second Vatican Council, I was together with my friends Hans Küng, Johann Baptist Metz, and Gregory Baum, part of the progressive reform wing of the Church, working for its conversion to the spirit of the Gospels, for true evangelization. Fromm's demand did not mean that the socialist countries had to be de-socialized, but that their fake socialism had to be replaced by a genuine, humanistic socialism.⁵⁰ Fromm summed up his critical theory of society and religion by remembering that the late Medieval culture flourished because people followed the vision of the City of God.⁵¹ Modern society flourished because people were energized by the vision of the growth of the Earthly City of Progress. It ended with the sinking of the Titanic and World War I. In the 20th century, this vision of Progress deteriorated to countless wars, genocides, mass administration of societies, i.e., human hubris, avarice, envy, pride, arrogance, ambition, egocentrism, what St. Augustine called the "Tower of Babel."⁵² It was in the 20th century when it began to collapse, and so we may add, it is now continuing to disintegrate with much confusion. Fromm predicted that the collapsing City of Progress as Tower of Babel would ultimately bury everybody in its ruins. If, so Fromm argued dialectically in

⁵⁰ Erich Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966).

⁵¹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014).

⁵² *Ibid.*

Hegelian and Fichtean terms, the City of God and the Earthly City of Progress were thesis and antithesis, a *new synthesis* was the only alternative to chaos: the synthesis between the spiritual core of the late Medieval World, most adequately expressed not only in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Albertus Magnus, but also in Meister Eckhart's panentheistic theology, psychology and sociology, and the development of rational thought and science since the Renaissance. For Fromm, this new synthesis was the City of Being. Not only Fromm's critical theory of religion, but even his whole lifework was devoted to this goal. Likewise, a renaissance of Fromm's work would serve and promote this new synthesis.

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Formation of the “Colonized” Archetype in a Postcolonial World: A Psychological Analysis of Occidentosis

Joseph Alagha and Krikor Ankeshian¹

Introduction

Prolific intellectuals like Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Frantz Fanon, and Edward Said, have initiated a decolonial wave of thought by describing the injustices of colonialism. On the one hand, their methods, approaches, and solutions vis-à-vis colonialism are different: Al-e Ahmad seems to call for a return to a form of core authenticity and Islamic nationalism, in contrast to Fanon’s almost complete break from the past and focus on liberation, rather than on authenticity and truth. On the other hand, the parallels they draw seem similar. With their respective books, *Occidentosis*, *Black Skin White Masks*, and *Orientalism*, the aforementioned three authors demonstrate the remnants of the colonial condition, even in a postcolonial context. They describe an almost identical underlying psychological phenomenon, namely, the contrasting dichotomy of superiority and inferiority. Al-e Ahmad’s *Occidentosis* evokes admiration and plagues his people; Fanon’s “zone of nonbeing” confronts racial minorities with a world that does not recognize their equal humanity; and Said’s *Orientalism* dehumanizes the Orient. In these three cases, the colonizer projects and presupposes a fictitious image of their own superiority, juxtaposing this with the inferiority of the colonized. This leads the colonized to naively internalize this supposed inferiority, and perpetuated inequality. This in turn begs the question: what are the processes through which an occidentotic archetype or personality arises? As Al-e Ahmad suggests throughout his book, the issue is multifaceted and can be approached from various angles, including politico-economic, psycho-social, cultural,

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historical, educational, etc. He also assigns the task of elaborating analyses to the reader after he himself paved the road.² Thus, we accept Al-e Ahmad's call to understand the problem and offer some suggestions to further embellish the brilliant sketch he provides. Afterall, understanding the psychological impacts of colonialism and its remnants in the postcolonial context are crucial for decolonization efforts. As argued by Al-e Ahmad, the psychological aspect (which contains parts of identity and groups relations) is one variable of the whole equation, which ought to be construed and examined with all its components. In this chapter, Al-e Ahmad's book is analyzed in its entirety. We pinpoint his understanding of colonialism, alongside his normative approach favoring postcolonialism. In addition, we deploy a social-psychological approach to uncover the underlying psychological meanings and implications of Al-e Ahmad's works as well as to understand the psychology of the colonized on the individual and group levels. These theories include: The "Social Comparison Theory," the "Social Identity Approach" (includes both Social Identity Theory and self-categorization theory), the "System Justification theory" (SJT), and the "Identity Shift Effect." The aforementioned theories respectively shed light on some psychological aspects of Al-e Ahmad's *Occidentosis*. First, the self-perpetuation and persistence of social hierarchies of inequality between the colonizer and the colonized. Second, the social categorization, comparison, and identification of the colonized vis-à-vis the colonizer (outgroup) and the ingroup. Third, outgroup favoritism, i.e., the attitudes that result in the colonized that hold favorable opinions of the colonizer, thus maintaining the status quo. Last, the internal and external conflicts between the drives for ego and group justification versus system justification, which results in ambivalent attitudes and shifts in the identity of the colonized. It can also result in a motivation to resemble the perceived higher status colonizer and thus create the occidentotic. The examination of Al-e Ahmad's *Occidentosis* through a social-psychological lens has, to our knowledge, not been adequately articulated before. What is crucial to decolonial efforts in a postcolonial context is situating the defining role of colonialism in creating outgroup favoritism. This strand of thought results in an identity shift as well as the creation of the occidentotic.

² Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, trans. R. Campbell (Berkely, CA: Mizan Press, 1984), 14, 27.

Al-e Ahmad on Colonialism: Occidentosis

Throughout his seminal book, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, Jalal Al-e Ahmad deftly navigates the constructs constituting the tripartite chain.³ He presents a unique understanding of colonialism, decolonialism, and postcolonialism. Before clarifying his distinct position, we would like to discuss how colonialism is situated in the literature, and how generally it is understood. Colonialism could be understood as powerful nations exercising their power over less fortunate nations, in pursuit of political and economic control. It often results in exploitation, the destruction of culture and traditions, and leads to psycho-social instability. This phenomenon is not new, as it could be traced back to the third millennium B.C.⁴ Nevertheless, the modern understanding of colonialism is often associated with the European conquest and the settlement of the Americas, beginning in the late fifteenth century. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the technological developments associated with it, as well as the dominant “ideology” of capitalism in the 16th century, mass transportation of people across oceans became possible, which gave way for the emergence of modern European colonialism and imperialism. In addition to the aforementioned reading of colonialism, there is also the Marxist understanding of colonialism as simultaneously a cause–effect of capitalism, describing colonialism as a historical stage in relation to capitalism. Thus, colonialism is often associated with modernity and capitalism.⁵

The term “Gharbzadegi” (Occidentosis/Westoxification), which was originally coined by the Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid, was chosen by Al-e Ahmad to describe colonialism.⁶ Al-e Ahmad argues that Westoxification does not apply exclusively to Iran, but he rather predominantly uses it in reference to a contradiction within the Iranian society, viz. as a spell of sorts, whereby Iran was plagued with the disease of the West, while simultaneously being “infatuated” with it.⁷ For Al-e Ahmad, this dependence upon the West and intoxication blinded the Iranians to the

³ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*.

⁴ Branislav Andelkovic, “Hegemony for Beginners: Egyptian Activity in the Southern Levant during Second Half of the Fourth Millennium BC,” *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (2012): 789-808.

⁵ Mary Gilmartin, “Colonialism/Imperialism,” in *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, ed. Carolyn Gallaher, Carl T. Dahlman, Mary Gilmartin, Alison Mountz, Peter Shirlow (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 115-123; Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 15-25, 101-113.

⁶ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Review of Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 4, (Nov. 2000): 565-571.

⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 15; Oxford Reference, “Westoxification.” In Oxfordreference.com dictionary (2024).

dangers that are often associated with the advent of Western influence. These include secularism and the devaluation of religion; capitalist materialism; as well as Weberian “disenchantment”⁸ and Durkheimian “anomie.”⁹ This subsequently resulted in weakened ties with the indigenous-authentic Islamic tradition, culture, and history in Iran.¹⁰ In his account of Western colonialism, Al-e Ahmad emphasizes one factor, situating it at the center of discussion.¹¹ For him, “the machine,” or rather the inability of Iran to produce the machine, instead of having to rely upon Western imports, suffices to demonstrate the problem at hand:

If we define Occidentosis as the aggregate of events in the life, culture, civilization, and mode of thought of a people having no supporting tradition, no historical continuity, no gradient of transformation, but having only what the machine brings them, it is clear that we are such a people.¹²

In line with his Marxist tendencies, Al-e Ahmad associates Occidentosis with an epoch characterized by economic and political subordination to Europe and America. In this epoch, Iran stagnated due to the lack of understanding of sciences and technology, which rendered Iranian society as a mere consumer of “the machine.”¹³ In turn, the conditions of the country impacted the “lifeworld” of the Iranian commoner.¹⁴ The human being – a creature of experience and neuroplasticity – is deeply impacted by conditions of his lifeworld.¹⁵ The danger of colonialism, and in this case its iteration of Occidentosis, is particularly dangerous with its capability to directly and indirectly effect the daily lives and experiences of the people in the host

⁸ Disenchantment can be understood as the lack of meaning and loss of personal connection with oneself in everyday life, resulting from the overly rationalized modern society.

⁹ Anomie occurs during times of crises and normlessness, when individuals feel disconnected from society and the external world.

¹⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 58-59, 72.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 64-68.

¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29-34, 45.

¹⁴ Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is “the non-theoretical world, i.e., all what seems to be normal, usual, and daily.” Thus, we may describe the lifeworld “as direct experience of one’s own world (*Unmittelbarkeit der Lebenserfahrung*) and ‘theoretical world’ (based upon a priori categories of experiencing) as the rational objective perception of the world. Both should be “reduced” within the process of “experience” (*Erkenntnis*) in order to reach the pure consciousness of being.” See Joseph Alagha, “Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Modernity,” *Global Journal of Human-Social Sciences: A Arts & Humanities* 17, no. 6 (2017): 33-53, 33.

¹⁵ In simple terms, neuroplasticity is the brain’s capability to grow and evolve in response to life experiences.

country. Hence, it propagates through all strata of the Iranian society, making occidentotics out of “peasants,” officials, clergy, and intellectuals alike.¹⁶

The usefulness of the term “Occidentosis” is immense. In addition to describing the “colonial disease” in Iran, it also aids Al-e Ahmad in setting the scope for his book, i.e., Western colonialism exclusively. The term was also later adopted by Ali Shariati.¹⁷ Here, it is important to note that the meaning of the term, popularized by Al-e Ahmad, differs from the original intent of in Greek philosophy.

In this context, it is important to reframe and redefine colonialism in what could be considered a non-disciplinary approach. According to our understanding, it is somehow problematic to exactly situate colonialism exclusively to an epoch characterized by capitalism. On the other hand, it is also problematic to consider it as trans-historical, not in the sense of eternality, but rather as not being restricted to only a specific historical epoch. This is to say that colonialism does not stand only as a category, but is also a subset, an iteration. Based on the aforementioned, one questions what differentiates colonialism from expansionism and imperialism, and how to account for colonialism in a rigorous manner? Although the terms imperialism and colonialism are often used interchangeably,¹⁸ the concept of colonialism is often ascribed to any form of dependence on a foreign hegemonic nation, regardless of the colony or settlement elements.¹⁹ As for colonialism and expansionism, it seems that although the quality or phenomenon are similar, the rate, scale, and methods differ. Thus, colonialism can be considered as a form or subset of expansionism. In other words, the seeming confusion regarding whether precapitalist forms of expansion fit a definition of colonialism could be considered in essence the same as modern-day colonialism is a contested issue of consideration. Different authors have different assessments of what takes precedence: scale, rate, or means.²⁰ To refrain from any further theoretical discussion, we propose a fluid and flexible definition of colonialism, which incorporates all three phenomena: expansionism, imperialism, and colonialism. It also encapsulates instances of colonial domination, both pre- and post-capitalism. Also, Al-e Ahmad seems

¹⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 13-14, 59, 90. We use the term “peasant” in accordance with how Al-e Ahmad treats the ordinary person in his writing.

¹⁷ Ali Shariati (1933-1977) was one of the most prominent ideologues of the Iranian Revolution.

¹⁸ The distinction between imperialism and colonialism has been extensively discussed in literature. Nevertheless, many authors, including Al-e Ahmad, seldom define the terms and clarify these distinctions.

¹⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*.

²⁰ It is worth mentioning that, in order to circumvent this issue, some authors have made a distinction using the term “modern colonialism” in reference to colonialism in the late 15th century onwards. This seems sound, as it maintains that the nature or essence (underlying concept) of colonialism remains the same regardless of the era.

to rely on an all-encompassing flexible definition, while simultaneously emphasizing a specific epoch of European colonialism.

Normative Approach: Decolonial and Postcolonial

In his descriptive work, Jalal Al-e Ahmad mostly relies on an historical approach. As for his normative work, he seems to alternate between decolonial and postcolonial suggestions, with the postcolonial eventually taking precedence. A decolonial approach involves the rejection and undermining of an established hegemonic political rule by any foreign occupation that entails the subservience of the indigenous people.²¹ A postcolonial approach encompasses an interdisciplinary method that considers the material and epistemological realities of postcoloniality,²² seeking to combat the hegemonic dominance of colonialist and imperialist systems, while simultaneously acknowledging the transformations and realities of the nation and people emerging from the colonial context.²³ Both approaches are oriented towards the sovereignty and autonomy of the nation, emphasizing critique and intervention from the stance of the victim, but not the perpetrators. Thus, decolonialism is the effort to reverse the impact and legacies of colonialism and its forces, while postcolonialism is the reconciliation of the indigenous with the “modern,” while maintaining a balance between authenticity and development.²⁴ In both efforts, understanding and analyzing the product left behind by colonialism is a crucial first step.

Al-e Ahmad’s “occidentosis” seems similar to Edward Said’s “orientalism” and Fanon’s “zone of non-being.” While Al-e Ahmad narrows the scope of occidentosis to predominantly Iran, Said broadens the mandate to the Orient as a whole. For Said, orientalism was a three-headed dragon: simultaneously an academic tradition, a worldview, and a political tool for subjugation. The essence of this triad centered around the presumption of inherent Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.²⁵ This bears a striking resemblance to Fanon’s analysis of racial inequalities. Fanon’s “zone of non-being” confronts the person of color with a world that rejects them. It is an

²¹ Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1-2.

²² Viz. the material, politico-economic, and cultural conditions that determine the reality of the context in which the post-colonial nations have to operate. See Young, *Postcolonialism*, 57.

²³ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 57-58.

²⁴ Joseph Alagha, “Ali Shariati: Liberation Theology, Social Justice, & Humanism,” *Islamic Perspective: Journal of the Islamic Studies and Humanities*. Institute for Critical Social Theory 28 (2022): 51-72, 55.

²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

existential condition whereby the inferiority of the black person is presumed, and it is characterized by a sense of alienation, disconnection, invisibility, oppression, and marginalization.²⁶ To further compare Fanon, Al-e Ahmad, and Said, the parallelism in their thought seems conspicuous. In their theoretical approach, colonialism is understood as a total project leaving nothing unchanged, with Marxist undertones to each of their approaches. Fanon and Said gave special consideration to language and its role in epistemology, ranging from its use of representation and misrepresentation of the Orient, colonialism, and participating in the culture and world of the colonizer, and even resistance. On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad does not emphasize language; rather, he mentions it only en passant.²⁷

Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad highlights the practice of adopting aspects of colonial culture in conformity. In Fanon’s account, the black man learns perfect French diction in the hope of some sort of liberation, i.e., he attempts to wear a “white mask” to sideline the insecurity of his own blackness, informed by the white gaze.²⁸ Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad describe a process of association via the formation of intimate relationships. Al-e Ahmad describes Iranians from underprivileged backgrounds, endeavoring to study in Europe and marry Europeans to sever their indigenous ties, in a desire to achieve upward socio-economic mobility.²⁹ Fanon explicates interracial sexual desire, motivated by the envy of whiteness and an attempt to come into proximity with it, with undertones of perceived purity and wealth.³⁰ Nevertheless, in both cases, the colonized do not anticipate the reality of their inherent inferiority in the eyes of the colonizer. In an attempt to sidestep the uphill battle, they fall into the abyss condemning themselves to being a “special phenomenon,” rejected by the Westerner and alienated from one’s own kind and self. This seems consistent with the orientalist interest in taking from the East, viewing it and its people as mere exoticism to be enjoyed and/or studied.

This aforementioned problem – internalized inferiority and the determination to compensate for such an “inherent” inferiority – is a central theme in Al-e Ahmad’s normative prescription. By conforming and appealing

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau noire, masques blancs*), trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Pluto Press, 1952), 10.

²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 21, 130; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17-40; Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (*L’an V de la révolution algérienne*), trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Books, 1959), 10, 15, 36, 112, 69-98; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre*), trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 188-189, 221-225.

²⁸ In this regard, Fanon was inspired by the French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre.

²⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 120.

³⁰ The white man is perceived as the Segway to material wealth by the white woman, and the white woman is perceived as a symbol of purity by the black man. See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, chapters 2 & 3.

to the sensitivities of the colonizer, the colonized is attempting to reclaim his humanity in a convoluted manner. In Fanonian or Hegelian terms, this could be rendered as “starving for recognition.”³¹ Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad vehemently oppose the prerogative of the colonizer to monopolize humanity. Thus, both subsequently reject the idea of a need for recognition of the colonized person’s humanity. Al-e Ahmad’s presentation of the occidentotic, the derivative of Occidentosis, ought to be understood in light of this overcompensation for the occidentotic’s inborn complex. In his reading, Al-e Ahmad seems to have a semblance of the Nietzschean inspiration of the occidentotic, whereby S/he is both creature and creator.³² Al-e Ahmad seems to alternate between the considerations of deterministic conditions and the free will to combat them. The former can be inferred through parts of his work where he seems to sympathize with the ordinary Iranian, acknowledging that S/he is not to blame.³³ This, along with the structure, which is dominated by the colonial powers, overpowers the agency of the individual. On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad’s pessimism underlies a tone of optimism, namely, that the spell of occidentosis can possibly be alleviated. This can be inferred from his writing, especially his coaxing the Iranian nation to combat colonialism, rather than submit to it.³⁴ Thus, he calls for a “transvaluation” of hegemonic Western standards and values that are enforced and reinforced by colonialism.³⁵ This is likely to run against the spirit of Nietzsche’s thinking, as he advocated for a complete overhaul and break with the past.

Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad emphasizes revolution and liberational ideas. Each one has his own reading and approach, emphasizing some elements, while ignoring others. For Fanon, postcolonialism is an embrace of the new; revolution should be radical and absolute. It is a break with the past rather than being construed as a return to a different iteration of the past.³⁶ In this respect, there is a slight contradiction in Fanon’s thoughts. In his analyses, he considers a return to “olden” African ways of living as a mirage and an illusion: a path with little or no merit. However, in his analysis of Algeria, he views it closer to Al-e Ahmad’s reading, whereby he does not reject the Islamic tradition, fearing its social practice going into a seclusion, thus becoming regressive and rejecting modernity as a whole. Rather, he construes

³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 58-59, 63. Fanon is likely to have been inspired by G.W.F. Hegel in emphasizing recognition as the black person’s self-undermining desire.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: The Modern Library, 1883); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: The Modern Library, 1886).

³³ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 64, 92-93.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, 131.

³⁵ “Transvaluation” is a heuristic reference to Nietzsche’s re-evaluation and reversal of existing moral values. Both refer to Western values, although in completely different senses.

³⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

its revolutionary utility for resistance and liberation, recognizing its potential for compatibility within a postcolonial setting.³⁷ On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad proposes a postcolonial approach that involves a return to the authentic roots. For him, revolution involved the compatibility of traditional values with nativist and/or local tradition, as well as harmonizing authenticity with modernity and technological advancement. As a fulcrum, he holds Islamism and nationalism as important values not to be dispensed with, as he views these as essential tools to combat Western orientalist aspirations and colonial ambitions. However, this return to the past ought not to be misunderstood as a simple return to Islam. Rather, it is a meticulous arrangement of the lifeworld that prevents self-alienation and subservience to foreign forces. Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad questions identity formation and understands that a complete rejection of modernity is detrimental, both on the practical and theoretical levels. Unlike Fanon’s call for embracing one’s blackness rather than seeking recognition, in line with his historical approach, Al-e Ahmad seems to place more emphasis on certain external factors. In this respect, Al-e Ahmad places the machine at the center of this process. For him, it is an important benchmark for Iran to move towards being a producer of the machine, rather than being an exclusive consumer. According to him, this is a symbolic and pragmatic signal for transformation within Iran, without which there is no progress. In this respect, Al-e Ahmad writes,

For two hundred years we have resembled the crow mimicking the partridge (always supposing that the west is a partridge, and we are a crow). So long as we remain consumers, so long as we have not built the machine, we remain occidentotic.³⁸

Al-e Ahmad’s insight on the psychology of the decolonial approach vis-à-vis the machine is important. He aptly identifies an element of fear, whereby the decolonial fears Western influence in their indigenous domain, thus considering any trace of it potentially destructive. This fear of “mechanosis” is in line with anticipation of cultural destruction via the machine.³⁹ Al-e Ahmad emphasizes the importance of considering the machine. The fear of potential mechanosis should not result in willful stagnation. Indigeneity without progress is regression; progress without respect for indigeneity and authenticity amounts to colonialism. And so, the call for the importance of a postcolonial approach – rather than a complete break from the West – can be repeatedly seen through his work.

³⁷ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*.

³⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 31.

³⁹ “Mechanosis” is similar to occidentosis, but with machines invading common Iranian society and ravaging the lifeworld in the process.

This is the crux of Al-e Ahmad's argument, and it is central to understanding his approach. The machine is the culmination of various factors – including socio-politico-economic factors – that must align for the process of machine production to succeed. Al-e Ahmad is not naïve, as he understands that the process is reliant on stringent external factors. According to him, a balance of authenticity and modernization is crucial for Iran to prosper. Thus, his postcolonial normative approach is a combination of analyzing extrinsic ideal necessities, while, at the same time, emphasizing intrinsic potential possibilities.

A Social Psychological Approach

Assessment Methodology: To fully understand occidentosis and work towards a prescription, it is necessary to understand its psychological consequences. In our assessment, it is important to systematically analyze the archetype, or personality formation of “the colonized” or “the occidentotic.” In Jungian psychology, the “archetype” refers to the contents of the collective unconscious.⁴⁰ We use the term “archetype” denotatively, as the term “personality” has different connotative meanings. Likewise, Al-e Ahmad's account of occidentosis seems to lack a significant number of indicators and information. To further emphasize, it is important to consider the question, how can one analyze personality formation and development? First, personality is seldomly studied on the group or population level, as it is difficult to specifically pinpoint certain traits. Thus, there is a necessity to overgeneralize and sacrifice precision at the expense of expression. As Jan Smedslund explains, there is an unbridgeable gap in psychology between odds at the group level, on the one hand, and odds for specific individuals, on the other.⁴¹ Thus, when analyzing the occidentotic, we place emphasis on the individual level. In this respect, the difficulty lies in the multiplicity of occidentotic identities. This is true both on the general level and specific level: On the general level, in the sense that all individuals are unique,⁴² and any form of generalization or projection from one individual to another would compromise much relevant content and reality in translation; and on the specific level, in the sense that Al-e Ahmad provides accounts of different

⁴⁰ Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-4. Collective unconscious is a deeper layer of the unconscious, which is universal and has modes and contents of behavior generally the same everywhere and in all individuals.

⁴¹ Jan Smedslund, “Why Psychology Cannot be an Empirical Science,” *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science* 50, no. 2 (2016): 185-195, 194.

⁴² This is due to the diversity in genetics, socio-politico-economic circumstances, geography, environment, etc.

occidentotic groups, from commoners, to intellectuals, and even leaders.⁴³ Second, personality development involves a multidimensional approach that accounts for as many aspects of life as possible. It usually analyzes the development of characteristics over long periods of time, distinguishing them from temporary fluctuations.⁴⁴ Personality development can be of different magnitudes and is a continuous process. This is to say that personality formation starts from childhood and continues throughout the lifespan of the individual, with temperament being significant. Here, there is an emphasis on subjectivity, with contextual factors and experiences being central.⁴⁵ Thus, family and childhood experiences are accounted for in personality development analysis, including attachment styles, parenting styles, and family dynamics, as well as cultural and socio-economic background.⁴⁶ Indeed, the most popular model of personality is considered to be the big five personality model, which is part of the trait theory of personality.⁴⁷ It is worth noting that there are other theories of personality, including the psychoanalytic model, evolutionary, socio-cognitive, and so on.

To some extent, Fanon anticipated Al-e Ahmad’s call for clarification on the psychological front with a partly psychoanalytic approach. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon challenges from multiple angles the problems of colonialism, racism, and internalized racism. Fanon draws upon the

⁴³ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 13-14, 59, 90.

⁴⁴ Cornelia Wrzus, “Processes of Personality Development: An update of the TESSERA framework,” in *The Handbook of Personality Dynamics and Processes*, ed. John F. Raaijmakers (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2021): 101-123.

⁴⁵ Avshalom Caspi, Brent W. Roberts, “Personality Development across the Life Course: The Argument for Change and Continuity,” *Psychological Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2001): 49-66; Brent W. Roberts et al., “The Development of Personality Traits in Adulthood,” in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, ed. Oliver P. John, Richard W. Robins (New York: Guilford Press, 2010): 579-595; Vlada Bilohur, “Formation and Development of Personality established by Change and Growth Theory,” *Humanities Bulletin of Zaporizhzhie State Engineering Academy* (April 2019): 77-89; Yuzhan Hang, Christopher Soto, Billy Lee, Lydia Gabriela Speyer, Aja Louise Murray, René Möttus, “Social Expectations and Abilities to meet them as Possible Mechanisms of Youth Personality Development,” *Journal of Personality* 91, no. 3 (2023): 601-612.

⁴⁶ Thomas J. Schofield et al., “Parent Personality and Positive Parenting as Predictors of Positive Adolescent Personality Development over Time,” *Merrill Palmer Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2013): 255-283; Thomas Deckers, Armine Falk, Fabian Kosse, and Hannah Schildberg-Hörisch, “How does Socio-Economic Status Shape a Child’s Personality,” *IZA Discussion Paper No. 8977*; Yanshu Sun, Jeffrey S. Wilkinson, “Parenting Style, Personality Traits, and Interpersonal Relationships: A Model of Prediction of Internal Addiction,” *International Journal of Communication* 14, (2020): 2163-2185; Jürgen Fuchshuber, Michaela Hiebler-Ragger, Adelheid Kresse, Hans-Peter Kapfhammer, Human Friedrich Unterrainer, “The Influence of Attachment Styles and Personality Organization on Emotional Functioning after Childhood Trauma,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10 (September 2019).

⁴⁷ The five-factor model of personality, or the big five, includes a group of personality traits: conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and extraversion.

phenomenological experiences of the black man – ranging from existential reflection, to language, sexuality, power, and oppression – in order to challenge and understand certain notions about the processes of colonial oppression, thus subsequently construing personality development. This can be seen through his critique of Octave Mannoni.⁴⁸ Mannoni's descriptions and attributions are worth considering, as he seems to describe a specific subset of issues and experiences relating to both the colonizer and the colonized. He discusses these psychological factors on the individual level, while clarifying the importance of non-psychological factors. On the one hand, according to Mannoni, the colonizer suffers from a sort of inferiority complex. By consequence, they desire to be respected and dominate the colonized – which is by default the inferior one in this paradigm. On the other hand, the colonized suffers from a dependency issue, whereby they harbors internalized contempt for the colonizer.⁴⁹ Fanon takes issue with Mannoni by contending that Mannoni missed the crux of the problem. For Fanon, Mannoni fundamentally misunderstood colonialism, attributing it to a dual misinterpretation from the stance of both the colonizer and the colonized. This takes colonization out of the equation for understanding the resulting psychology. In this equation, the inferiority is the antecedent of colonialism. Fanon rejects this proposal. This is in line with Al-e Ahmad's reading, whereby colonialism is the root of perceived subservice, and is not its derivative. There is another issue at stake with Mannoni's metaphor of Prospero and Caliban being a parallel to the colonizer and the colonized. Prospero is regarded as a patriarchal figure endeavoring to civilize the primitive Caliban. This is problematic as it validates the treachery of the colonizer. The more coherent interpretation is pointed out by Said and Al-e Ahmad, whereby the colonizer dehumanizes the colonized to exact "brutality." Thus, both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad view this as a complete misrepresentation that betrays the essence of the topic.

In our analysis, we refrain from drawing too heavily upon the psychoanalytic method. In our assessment, an analysis of the colonized or occidentotic personality should ideally utilize a neo-socioanalytic model.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 83-108. Octave Mannoni is a French Psychoanalyst who is renowned for *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, which deals with the psychology of the colonizer and the colonized.

⁴⁹ Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ Brent W. Roberts and Lauren B. Nickel, "Personality Development across the Life Course: A Neo-Socioanalytic Perspective," in *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, ed. Oliver P. John & Richard W. Robins (New York: Guilford Press, 2021), 259-283.

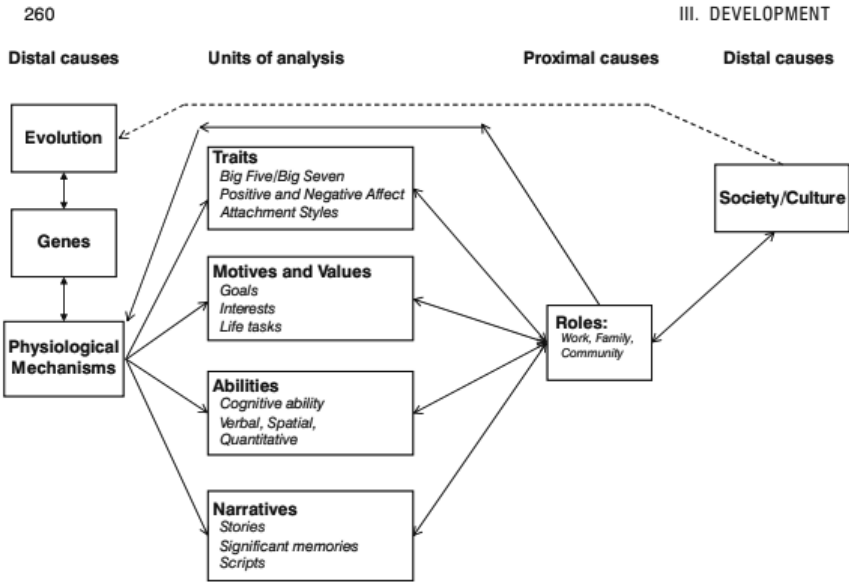


FIGURE 11.1. The revised neo-socioanalytic model of personality.

For the purposes of our analysis, we contextually modify this model, as there is a void of quantifiable data on the subject of study. Nevertheless, through Al-e Ahmad’s extensive portrayals of Iranian society, many aforementioned factors relating to occidentosis seem challenging to infer. In this respect, we propose some suggestive theoretical lines of reasoning that emphasize a social-psychological approach. As this analysis is from a direct inference of material provided by Al-e Ahmad, it predominantly applies to the Iranian context of his time.

Contributing Causes for Occidentosis

Throughout his book, Al-e Ahmad provides certain causes for occidentosis. The intelligentsia and Iranian leadership play a central role here, including the clergy. For Al-e Ahmad, the intellectual class is central to the spread of occidentosis.⁵¹ This process occurs either through foreign education, pursuit of personal interests, or apathy. Similarly, there is a distrust of the government by the people, as according to Al-e Ahmad the leadership is incompetent at best, and more realistically hungry for power.⁵² There is also the problem of

⁵¹ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 90.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71, 74.

the media and local publications, which are plagued by occidentosis and subsequently propagate it.⁵³ This seems similar to Fanon's descriptions of the media in the second chapter of *A Dying Colonialism*. Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad describe the media being used for colonial purposes and thus advocate for transforming the media into an agent of resistance. Al-e Ahmad proposes this to be a potential function of the Iranian clergy.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, in his account, the clergy are rather regressive and stagnant, instead of being proactive and initiative. Al-e Ahmad does not shy away from discussing external factors and their subsequent consequences. He discusses urbanization via the machine, emphasizing the relative deprivation created in rural areas. Thus, the villager is driven out of his locality into the city by the trickling effect of Western industrialization and colonial forces. Two notable quality of life reasons include unemployment created by the machine, and lack of safety due to villages not being properly protected.⁵⁵ Finally, he describes the problems in the Persian educational system. Al-e Ahmad points out to the emphasis on Western-centric education. He finds the lack of Persian literature and humanities, and an overemphasis on theoretical sciences to be problematic. He again points out to the corrupt Orientalist and occidentotic tendencies among the educators and professors.⁵⁶

Theoretical framework

In order to understand the underlying psychological processes contributing to the formation of the occidentotic personality, it is important to consider Festinger's "Social Comparison Theory." The theory posits that individuals use comparison as a mirror to the self, striving to self-evaluate and define. This can also be understood in Turner's terms as an attempt at self-categorization.⁵⁷ Comparison can be both upward and downward, and can be inferred without direct contact with others, i.e., through different media. For Festinger, there is a tendency for upwards comparison for the sake of improvement and self-enhancement. There is also a tendency for uniformity vis-à-vis a particular group on the level of specific opinions or ability considered important. Thus, in this cause, there is pressure to conform to the

⁵³ Ibid., 46, 57.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 56-60.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 80-81, 112.

⁵⁷ Leon Festinger, *The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University Press, 1957); John C. Turner and Penelope Oakes, "The Significance of the Social Identity Concept for Social Psychology with Reference to Individualism, Interactionism, and Social Influence," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 25, no. 3 (June 2011): 237-252; Kevin P. McIntyre and Donna Eisenstadt, "Social Comparison as a Self-Regulatory Measuring Stick," *Self and Identity* 10, no. 2 (2011): 137-151.

desired values or opinions of the specific group. Here, one of the major motivations for social comparison aligns with Tajfel and Turner’s “Social Identity Theory” (SIT), whereby the individual seeks positive self-distinctiveness – an internal drive to have positive self-esteem and self-conception.⁵⁸ On the interpersonal-intergroup⁵⁹ continuum proposed by SIT, there is further discussion of positive distinctiveness strategies. The one most relevant to this analysis is individual mobility, whereby individuals pursue mobility emphasizing their personal benefit over group benefit.⁶⁰ On the other hand, “System Justification Theory” (SJT) also makes use of distinctiveness principles similar to SIT. SJT posits that in addition to ego-justification, there is also desire for positive ingroup distinctiveness, group justification and system justification, namely, positive outlook vis-à-vis the social structures they exist under.⁶¹ This can often lead to passivity rather than stride for change; or alternatively it can also lead to outgroup favoritism,⁶² which is more prevalent in disadvantaged group members.⁶³ This can also be traced to Festinger’s cognitive dissonance, whereby the individual is naturally inclined to have cognitive consistency for there to be positive self-distinctiveness.⁶⁴ Here, the external pressures alongside with the internal pressures can result in Treynor’s “identity shift effect.” The intrinsic and extrinsic conflicts disrupt the state of harmony and homeostasis. Thus, the process of conflict and

⁵⁸ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin & Stephen (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1979): 33-47; Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner J. C., “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1986): 7-24.

⁵⁹ A spectrum of behavior from full interpersonal to full intergroup. On the complete interpersonal end, behavior is a result of individual traits and personal relationships, while on the complete intergroup end, behavior results from membership in social group or category.

⁶⁰ S. Alexander Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach* (London: Sage, 2001), 38.

⁶¹ “Group justification” means positive self-distinctiveness and positive ingroup distinctiveness respectively.

⁶² “Outgroup favoritism” is a phenomenon where the individual views membership of his or her ingroup as a signal of lower class, while perceiving membership of another group as a symbol of higher status.

⁶³ John T. Jost and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “The Role of Stereotyping in System Justification and the Production of False Consciousness,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 33 (1994): 1-27; John T. Jost, “Outgroup Favoritism and the Theory of System Justification: A Paradigm for Investigating the Effects of Socioeconomic Success on Stereotype Content,” in *Cognitive Social Psychology: The Princeton Symposium on the Legacy and Future of Social Cognition*, ed. Gordon B. Moskowitz (London: Psychology Press, 2001): 89-102; John T. Jost and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo,” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (December 2004): 881-919.

⁶⁴ Leon Festinger, “A Theory of Social Comparison Processes,” *Human Relations* 7, no. 2 (1954): 117-140.

subsequent resolution, result in the emergence of a new identity or framework.⁶⁵ This can manifest itself in different forms, including conformity – and in the case of the occidentotic – Fanonian cultural cringe and outgroup favoritism.⁶⁶

Application and Formation of the “Colonized” Archetype: Occidentosis in the City

With the theoretical framework laid out, it is necessary to apply it to Al-e Ahmad’s accounts and descriptions of the occidentotic. The first thing to consider is the average young Persian commoner of the time. According to Al-e Ahmad, the environment in which they lived was one characterized by stagnancy. In international relations, a key concept to understand is international anarchy, whereby there is no *de jure* ruling force on the international level. Subsequently, the hegemonic forces rule and control by default. The problem with stagnancy and lack of competitiveness is that it leads to being prone to the control of hegemonic powers. This is on the back of economic and political domination, which allows for exploitation of weaker nations on every level. The impacts are undeniable on the lifeworld of the individual, in this case in the Iranian milieu. Some of the problems that followed were urbanization, unemployment, and subsequently, decrease in the quality of life. Here, there are at least considerable probabilities for discontent and dissatisfaction on the part of the Iranian commoner, culminating in a spectrum of questions. Two prominent questions to consider would be: “how can I survive?” and “how can I live a decent life and work towards a better future.” It is important here to mention that the context discussed is the mid-twentieth century in Iran, whereby technologies like the internet were not available to allow for a wide range of inquiry for advice. The way to decide which course of action to take is determined by consulting the people around oneself – viz. family and immediate surrounding individuals – or by observing and trying to understand the path taken by people whom individuals want to emulate. Thus, in this context, we propose that their natural tendency for comparison plays a significant role. This is likely to be, as stated previously, an upwards comparison. The question shifts to who or what is the object of this comparison? One idea to consider would be the bourgeois of higher status in the Iranian milieu. The problem with this comparison is the inheritance of wealth, an outlet unavailable for the average proletariat. On the other hand, there is a far more interesting attainable object

⁶⁵ Wendy F.C. Treynor, *Towards a General Theory of Social Psychology: Understanding Human Cruelty, Human Misery, and Perhaps, a Remedy* (Seattle, WA: Euphoria Press, 2009).

⁶⁶ This concept was coined by A. A. Phillips. Fanon describes a process of colonialism whereby the colonized devalues his or her own culture in favor of the culture of the colonizer.

of admiration, namely the educated. In this respect, the object of comparison could be intellectuals, government officials, and professional syndicates, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. This is not to disregard alternative options of business and commerce, as the possibilities there are more diverse. Nevertheless, on the whole, these result in similar lines of thought and outcomes. Regardless, by Al-e Ahmad’s account, medicine is one of the few fields where being educated in Iran gives the student a certain edge.⁶⁷ However, as stated by Al-e Ahmad, for academic and official positions (with the exception of religious officials), the road involves foreign education and the support of occidentotic powers.⁶⁸ In pursuit of education and/or a better quality of life, the first step is to head to the city.⁶⁹ After getting to the city and securing at least the bare minimum of nutrition, the concerns continue. By demands of social identity, one needs to think of ways to fit in and accustom oneself as a part of the environment. One way to do this is appearance, whereby there is a need for grooming and dressing well.⁷⁰ Another element to consider, which Al-e Ahmad does not mention, but is present in the work of Fanon, is language. There is a tendency to conform to the way of life surrounding oneself, in this case to the inhabitants of the city. This is further true especially in light of their relatively better living standards and perceived higher status in line with social comparison theory. Thus, often the villager tries to adopt the suburban “posh” manner of expression. Also, the process often entails shifts in thought and identity, more in line with the thought of the perceived salient ingroup. Here, by Al-e Ahmad’s account, the occidentosis seems more prevalent in the city. Therefore, the occidentotic attitude can be considered more prevalent as well. This can potentially lead to disdain or apathy towards what one considered previously important, i.e., traditions, nationalistic or nativistic concepts, etc... This can also result in contempt for their previous identity, person, and ingroup by association. The logic being that when one held dear certain customs and was a certain person with a certain social and personal identity, they were living in poor conditions. Thus, there can be an association between poverty/lack of control of one’s destiny and the identity/customs of a certain group. Similarly, the opposite is also salient, whereby there would be an association between the occidentotic, individualistic, “modern” life/thought of the city, and better living conditions. This can be problematic, as these associations are often short sighted and dominated by the moment. In addition, it is important to consider the next step after securing a basic living standard and getting acclimated to the city. The point of discussion here is leisure. Although the city provides certain benefits,

⁶⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57, 66.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

it is also disenchanting; it is a place where life moves fast and everyone strives for success, chasing a dream of wealth and status. Notwithstanding the “rat race,”⁷¹ apart from certain exceptions, the main benefactors are the wealthy elites, as dictated by the capitalist system. However, in the process, most hopeful individuals lose meaning and values once considered significant. Similar to a casino where the odds favor the house, the way to compensate for the long-term misleading promises being sold is by providing short term gratification, such as gambling, prostitution, and substance abuse.⁷² By replacing religious institutions with institutions of leisure (which do not need to be mutually exclusive), there is a radical shift induced into the life of the common Iranian, whereby they lose a crutch relied upon since childhood.⁷³ This again often leads to dissatisfaction, desperation, and a range of mental health problems, subsequently creating a need for unhealthy or “self-destructive” coping mechanisms. Thus, in our assessment, isolation from family/community, loss of meaning and purpose, in addition to fictitious dreams of glory and wealth, is the three-headed dragon of prevailing occidentosis in the city.

In addition to comparison and categorization vis-à-vis higher status individuals in their environment, there is also images produced by the media. Whether it is through radio, books, or cinema, the common Iranian has much to contend with on the level of depictions. This can be further inferred through Al-e Ahmad’s account of foreign celebrities and media being prominent in Iran, sometimes overshadowing Iranian accomplishments.⁷⁴ Western media has particularly been vicious when depicting foreign nations of the East, using various tactics, from straw-manning and “othering,” to primitivizing. Hollywood is a prominent example, especially regarding its depictions of the Arabs. With a sample size close to 1,000 films throughout a century, Jack G. Shaheen presents an undeniable pattern of vilifying Arabs and Muslims. Whether it is painting the Easterner as a greedy, primitive terroristic man, or a serpentine, lustful, and tempting woman, there is a tendency to mis-portray and degrade the Easterner. Similar tendencies also apply vis-à-vis Islam, as Islam is essentialized as a “Eastern religion,” rather than being portrayed as a global religion, and Muslims are often depicted as religious fanatics.⁷⁵ To keep it short, this has undeniable subconscious impact on comparison, categorization, and self-esteem. This is reenforced by the depiction of the Westerner as the protagonist who always defeats the inferior or threatening

⁷¹ The “rat race” is a phrase associated with modern society, whereby individuals compete for money and power (in most part to no avail).

⁷² Ibid., 67.

⁷³ Ibid., 67-68.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁵ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (Ithaca, NY: Olive Branch Press, 2014).

Easterner.⁷⁶ Thus, there is another entity playing the role of a mirror to the self, viz. the perceived Westerner. As a result of comparison, one notable possibility is the categorization of the self and the ingroup as second rate vis-à-vis the perceived higher status outgroup. This internalized and perceived inferiority is another line that evokes questions, while subsequently answering these. This is in line with the positive distinctiveness hypothesis of SIT, which motivates the following question: how does one attain a higher status and improve both quality of life and self-esteem? A likely answer is to resemble the Westerner. This is in essence outgroup favoritism. In addition, the negative association, and subsequent perception of the ingroup, can potentially lead the emphasis shift far left in the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. In this context, there is a likelihood for a tendency to rely upon individual mobility tactics. This underlies a perception of possible mobility and group permeability, which can manifest itself in different ways. One consequence could be the abandonment of cultural and traditional values in an attempt to cut associations with the perceived lower status ingroup. Another consequence could be, as Al-e Ahmad points out, marrying foreigners, primarily motivated by individual social mobility. This is also in line with Ego and Group Justification. If the Western milieu is painted consistently as significantly better than the Eastern milieu, there will be a temptation for the Easterner to resemble the Westerner. The depiction of the occidentotic milieu thriving on the back of exploitation – coupled with the indigenous milieu being ravaged on every level by the occidentotic power – could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. In other words, the colonial forces warp the perception of the colonized, while simultaneously destroying their lifeworld, and presenting a “better” alternative. Thus, the incentives are often too strong for the Iranian to favor the outgroup and justify the system, as the alternatives are apathy, rejection, and stagnancy, or rejection and an overwhelmingly uphill endeavor.

Another issue is the derivatives of occidentosis vis-à-vis the Iranian individual, and their upbringing. In the aforementioned, the underlying commonality is a rejection of the indigenous ingroup, traditions, and culture, in favor of the Western ones. The problem here is the contradiction between this newly found or induced attitude and the subsequent actions, in relation to the upbringing of the common Iranian, whose life is built upon the pillars of family, community, indigenous traditions, cultural values, religion, and nationalism. This can be added to – and is in line with – Al-e Ahmad’s contradictions within the logic of machine consumption, especially in creating certain psychological consequences while demanding other ones.⁷⁷ The transition from embracing the above, to rejecting many of its elements, is

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 66-76.

likely to cause some form of disruption within the psyche of the Iranian, resulting in cognitive dissonance. In Freudian terms, the simultaneous demands of the id and the superego are difficult to harmonize. Perhaps, a more tangible example would be the substantial difficulty of maintaining a healthy psyche while simultaneously conducting prayers at a religious institution in the morning and inhaling coke in a “place of leisure” at night. In addition to the guilt of betraying one’s religious values, there is also the guilt of self-service vis-à-vis nationalism. Here, in our estimation, there is a likelihood for a radical shift within the psyche and thought of the individual as a result of disrupted homeostasis. The internal psychological inconsistency (internal conflict), in addition to the pressure to pursue a certain path in order to secure the material conditions necessary to survive and thrive in the city (external conflict), can result in an identity shift. This can be, to some degree, considered a defense mechanism, as it is an attempt to discard the possibility of both self-rejection and social rejection. In our assessment, this culminates in the emergence of the occidentotic archetype or personality. The machine, and by extension occidentosis, seem to demand this conformity.⁷⁸ Here, it is also notable to mention that there are potential alternatives to our lines of reasoning, although as inferred from Al-e Ahmad’s accounts, these are less likely. An example can be the rejection of the colonial power’s classification in favor of a self-definition against the multi-level colonial suggestions. In this respect, one thing to consider would be the utilization of rhetorical resistance on part of the oppressed commoner.⁷⁹

On Education

There are also other contributing factors necessary to mention in order to present a fuller picture. One that is regularly highlighted by Al-e Ahmad is education. This can be considered a mischaracterization in Al-e Ahmad’s work, whereby he seems to consider education with any foreign influences to be occidentotic, and subsequently untrustworthy.⁸⁰ This attitude seems surprising, especially considering his postcolonial approach vis-à-vis the machine. Here, Al-e Ahmad captures the notion that education cannot be value-free or completely neutral, but rather is almost always value-laden. His suspicion of Western education passively inducing colonial ideas, in line with colonial benefits, is not far off the mark. This leads to “justifiable cynicism” on the part of Al-e Ahmad, who aptly points out the watering-down of Iranian culture and literature being taught in the Western dominated educational

⁷⁸ Ibid., 124-126.

⁷⁹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 112-121.

system.⁸¹ The problem here is that he overgeneralizes and vilifies any foreign influence in education. This is also likely why Al-e Ahmad, in his accounts of the missionaries, does not mention their positive contributions to education in Africa. One example can be of the first higher education center in Sierra Leone, in 1827, which contributed to the creation of nationalist leadership, and was founded before the establishment of the colonial government’s schools.⁸²

Another notable point and parallel between Al-e Ahmad and Fanon is the understanding of declared goals vis-à-vis actual goals. This can be inferred through their accounts of women’s liberation hurled by the West as a declared goal. Both fail to mention the pragmatic benefits of this liberation. However, their analysis is on the mark as pertaining to the actual goal of colonization. Fanon further explicates the issue in his chapter entitled; “Algeria Unveiled,” as he points out to the significance of women’s role in subjugation and resistance. A common Western tactic used to ravage the Algerian culture and milieu was the unveiling of Algerian women, the pillars of Algerian society.⁸³ In the same breath, education entailed a similar declared goal of “civilizing” the “primitive” Persian. In line with the previous case, part of the actual goal was a malevolent attempt at furthering occidentosis. However, the condemnation of Western-influenced higher education without further scrutiny and consideration is similarly questionable. It is part of the educational institution’s role to propagate and teach the culture of the land and its people. This includes traditions of all epochs of the country’s history – including its literature and the classics produced by the people of the land – as well as the processes through which these have contributed in creating the present. It is also important to establish a link between educational institutions and the family, with the educational institutions imparting and disseminate some of the values and ethics of the people of the land. In other words, the educational institution also has a normative function in addition to its descriptive one. However, this does not prohibit the questioning of any of the aforementioned traditions, values, and norms. This is where the “problems” often arise. It is important to understand that education and knowledge do not appear in a vacuum or from thin air. Rather, they are the result of processes of compiled labor and thought, accumulated over decades and centuries. This is to say that students’ thoughts will inevitably be impacted by education, which may include changes in religious attitudes and moral values. This is natural in successful education, which does not occur only in educational institutions, but is also a function of the family and environment. In our

⁸¹ Ibid., 113.

⁸² Dana L. Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (April 2000): 50-58, 51.

⁸³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

assessment, the rejection of this proposition seems mutually exclusive with foregoing education and all the benefits that successful education provides. The crux of the argument is the problematic nature of deliberate attempts of educational institutions to enforce certain ways of thinking to the exception of others. This stands regardless of the attitude being enforced and any form of ideology it falls under. The student has the right to an education that provokes thought, encourages exploration, and broadens horizons. The educator and the educational system are devised in such a way as to challenge the student and aid the processes of development and growth, rather than forcing ideas upon the student. The core tenant of education is the freedom of thought. In other words, Al-e Ahmad's seemingly "absolutist" claim seems to be untenable. Higher education that has Western influence is not fundamentally occidentotic. Rather, it can possibly be used for colonial purposes. This does not justify the notion, seemingly stemming from frustration, that any educational institution influenced by an opposing group is inherently colonial. Not all educational systems devised by the outgroup are necessarily an attempt at "brainwashing" the youth. This is questionable as Al-e Ahmad states that traditional educators – in some of these educational institutions – have neither been effective nor have they kept up with the times. He adds that the graduates of some Iranian institutions have been outperformed by Iranian graduates from foreign countries. Again, Al-e Ahmad regards this to be an indirect influence of colonialism, which leads to problems in infrastructure and funding, which culminates in stagnation.⁸⁴

On the Intellectual and the Commoner

In light of the processes described through social psychology, one potential outcome is the emergence of the occidentotic intellectual or official. This returnee from the West is usually educated in a specialty and is characterized by material success and status. However, by Al-e Ahmad's account, the occidentotic intellectual does little to benefit his community, but rather contributes to its demise by spreading occidentosis.⁸⁵ This assessment is reasonable. However, Al-e Ahmad seems to sideline an important factor of continuity, which brings into question his consistency. The issue at hand is the question of structure and agency. In some parts of his work, Al-e Ahmad seems to emphasize human agency, particularly in treating the intellectual and holding him accountable. This seems inconsistent with his previously mentioned depiction of the common Iranian, whereby he emphasizes structure at the expanse of agency.⁸⁶ He seems to overlook the possibility that the

⁸⁴ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 112-117.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 92.

common Iranian from the village could be the younger version of the returnee occidentotic intellectual or specialist. To further understand, one needs to consider Al-e Ahmad’s outlook, and subsequently his idealism in writing his book:

If one can maintain a role for our educational system, it is to disclose outstanding personalities who, in the midst of this social disorder (arising from the crisis of occidentosis), can lead this caravan somewhere. The aim of our educational system, such as it is, must not and cannot be to conventionalize, to uniformize, to homogenize people so they will all put up with the existing situation and come to terms with it. Especially for us, who live in this age of transformation and crisis and are undergoing this period of social transition, it is only with the help of self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled people (who in the usage of pop psychology are termed antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced) that the weight of this transformation and crisis may be borne and that the social disorder described in this work may be remedied.⁸⁷

By all means, this seems to be written with a noble intent, which is seminal in Iranian culture. The problem is in its seemingly unrealistic idealism, which demands too much of the Iranian student. In this respect, some important questions arise: why should a bright young mind sacrifice time and resources for a more difficult path as opposed to the path of least resistance? This question is further amplified in light of Iranian stagnation, and the Western malevolent entity being effective in contributing to this stagnation, while simultaneously presenting substantially better and more tempting alternatives. In Al-e Ahmad’s paradigm, it is the tradition, indigenous values, and nationalist unity that would be the decisive factor. This can also be inferred as the crux of Al-e Ahmad’s disfavor of Western influence in Iranian education. Regardless, the problem is the material needs of the individual superseding Al-e Ahmad’s seemingly idealistic expectations. This, in line with our social psychological theoretical analysis, make it more likely that the Iranian commoner is the future occidentotic intellectual. Subsequently, Al-e Ahmad’s judgement of the potential future self of the common Iranian crumbles when he de-emphasizes the agency of the common Iranian. Alternatives give rise to other problematic questions relating to power. Idealistic notions aside, what is the difference between the common Iranian and his future self? A simple answer is socio-economic status, and subsequently, more control of his or her life. Regardless of how individuals

⁸⁷ Ibid., 131.

turn out, they are products of their environment, with their agency at play to navigate the external. The problem is Al-e Ahmad's emphasis of agency when analyzing an individual of higher socio-economic status and control, and his deemphasis of agency when analyzing the same person with lower socio-economic status and power. This almost seems as if Al-e Ahmad is advocating for Nietzschean slave morality. The assessment that the same individual is not to be blamed when they are helpless and oppressed – but becomes part of the problem when they take control and make something of their life – seems to be dubious. This is to say that in the context of nationalism, Al-e Ahmad's concerns are perfectly well placed. However, in a humancentric worldview, this reading of the Iranian intellectual, viz. the future of what can be considered the common Iranian, seems to be harsh. It is important to emphasize that the core culprits are the colonial forces. Thus, by this assessment, it is important to reframe this inconsistency in Al-e Ahmad's line of argumentation. The Iranian commoner cannot be expected to remain in a state where they have no control over their life. In other words, as far as our assessment is concerned, no one, including Al-e Ahmad, has the grounds to lay blame on the Persian who pursues the path of least resistance for their and their family's wellbeing. This is again not an attempt at justifying occidentosis of any kind, but rather an attempt to understand the psyche of the Iranian navigating the uncertainties of the time. It is a call to acknowledge that the individual, which is a temporary entity supplied with limited time, is stuck between a rock and a hard place. The vicious cycle is certainly difficult to break, with the colonial power inducing a pandemic, while simultaneously providing a seemingly affective vaccine. In our assessment, understanding the psyche of the individual, and what they most likely perceive to be what is best for them, is crucial in a rigorous analysis of occidentosis. In addition, assessing the seemingly uncomfortable and incompatible contradiction – between the needs of the individual and the nation vis-à-vis occidentosis – is crucial for reclaiming indigeneity and authenticity, as opposed to the so-called “decolonization efforts.” It seems that normative suggestions that stand a chance of making contributions to a solution are the ones that are pragmatic and realistic, as opposed to idealistic prayers. In this pursuit, the prevailing realities of internalized inferiority – with subsequent openness and tendency to outgroup favoritism and individualistic orientation – are central parts of the multivariant equation.

Conclusion

With the invasion of occidentosis in Iran, erudite intellectuals like Al-e Ahmad provided challenges to colonialism, describing the “ravaged” lifeworld of the Iranian milieu. Like Fanon and Said, Al-e Ahmad presents

nuanced readings of colonialism, decolonialism, and postcolonialism. Colonialism has been around as long as time, with its modern interpretation associated with 15th century modernity and capitalism. It is an iteration of expansionism, with a flexible interpretation of it seeming appropriate, with the divide between the pre-capitalist and post-capitalist eras. Al-e Ahmad’s historical approach underlies his normative approach, as he considers both the decolonial and postcolonial, favoring the latter. Decolonialism cuts ties with the West, while postcolonialism maintains them, emphasizing indigenous authenticity. Al-e Ahmad’s “occidentosis” runs parallel to Said’s “orientalism” and Fanon’s “zone of nonbeing.” The colonized is deemed inferior and subsequently is dehumanized and oppressed. Unlike Fanon and Said, Al-e Ahmad only briefly mentions language, but similar to Fanon, he highlights conformity to colonial culture. He also discusses severing tactics from one’s indigenous culture through attachment to a foreigner by marriage, for example. Thus, emphasis is put on internalized inferiority and the need for compensation and recognition. This culminates in a call for revolution and an endeavor for liberation, with Islam and nationalism as central pillars, as opposed to Fanon’s complete break from the past.

In line with Al-e Ahmad’s call for a psychological approach to the analysis of occidentosis, we employ social psychological theories to understand the formation of the “occidentotic” archetype. Unlike Fanon’s psychoanalytic approach in response to Mannoni’s mischaracterizations, we rely on lines of reasoning inferred through the work of Al-e Ahmad. We put an emphasis on the individual, with an attempt to draw a general picture, resulting in potential alternatives. As disciplinary approaches are difficult to apply due to gaps in the data, this analysis can be considered non-disciplinary. Al-e Ahmad identifies the stagnation of the intellectuals, officials, clergy, and argues that they and the media are prominent proliferators of occidentosis. Urbanization follows, resulting in unemployment and poor living standards. Because he compares and self-categorizes, the commoner heads to the city for education and social mobility. After securing bread and butter, grooming and wealth become the prerequisite for individual mobility. Added to the equation, conformity to the distorted image of self and group, echoed by the colonial media, outgroup favoritism and system justification arise. The resulting failure in the pursuit of glory and material well-being leads to meaninglessness and unhealthy coping mechanisms, which oppose the values they have been brought up upon. The resulting cognitive dissonance creates the internal conflict, which when paired with external material pressures, bring upon an identity shift. In other words, this can be described as the emergence of the occidentotic personality. It is worth noting that these lines of reasoning are not exclusive, as subjectivity is in play, which allows potential alternatives.

Additionally, Al-e Ahmad has many bones of contention against the educational system in Iran, which he finds ridden by the bad influences of Western modernity, resulting in the relative failure of some local educational institutions. Al-e Ahmad mischaracterizes the Iranian intellectual and official; he categorizes them as completely different from the common Iranian, and lays blame upon them for being occidentotic. Simultaneously, he understands the commoner as blameless. This is problematic as it paves the way for Nietzschean slave morality, sidelining the possibility that the commoner of yesterday becomes the occidentotic of today, who is in pursuit of a better life. This misunderstanding is excusable under the pressure of the conditions of the time. It is an overambitious endeavor to propose a theory that slices through the multilayered scheme of colonial forces that aims at undermining indigenous life and promoting Western-centric ideals about the good life. And so, construing the psychological process of Occidentosis realistically – with its subjectivity and material conditions – remains crucial for any further prescription.

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