Contemporary Islamic philosophy response to reality and thinking outside history

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to draw a map of the general features of epistemological and critical concerns in contemporary Islamic philosophy. This study will not be confined to the domain of academic philosophy or to those who are professionals in the field of philosophy.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper adopted the critical rational approach in dealing with contemporary Islamic philosophy in the Arab world. The scope will include scholars from different fields of epistemology who tried to present a "vision" of the attitude that should be adopted in facing the challenges of the age and the problems of the nation on the epistemological level or the political, economic and social levels.

Findings – There is a need for a philosophy of action and progress rather than a philosophy that is based on abstract ideas and theories and of words/rhetoric. The ethics required to accomplish this ought to identify the attributes of the citizen who can reach self-actualization through legitimate means based on a progress agenda with theoretical and philosophical foundations.

Research limitations/implications – Because a critical rational approach can be dealt with from different perspectives, this paper will adopt the classification of the principal intellectual trends: the reformist, secular and liberal.

Practical implications – This paper covers a long time span to determine whether the philosophical projects have been effective.

Originality/value – This paper, which criticizes the philosophic projects that are theoretically unsound and that do not address real social problems (like poverty), argues the need for a philosophy of progress and action. This will lead to devising an agenda that addresses the challenges the society is facing and to finding alternative and creative solutions resulting in development.

Keywords Egypt, Epistemology, Philosophy, Islamic philosophy, Religion, Reform, Secular, Secularization, Arab philosophy, Liberal

Paper type Research paper

It is risky, no doubt, to design a critical, epistemological map of contemporary Islamic philosophy. Although philosophy was initiated more than two thousand years, there are differences in specifying the definition of the term. The problem is compounded when one deals with contemporary Arab thought and/or Islamic philosophy. Is it thought pure and simple, or profound enough to count as philosophy? This assumes that intellectual activity is relegated to a lower level than that of philosophy and that philosophy is different from thought. Is creativity in philosophy confined to presenting integrated philosophical systems

in the Western sense? Or does philosophy cover theoretically based intellectual accounts even if the presenter does not belong to the formal discipline of philosophy? Is it imperative to have definitive answers to ontological, epistemological and axiological questions? Or does giving an in-depth answer to the problems and challenges of the time qualify the agent to enter the heavenly domain of philosophy? Should there be answers to issues such as colonialism, dependence, backwardness, despotism, the relation with the other (especially the west), attitude towards minorities, relation between state and religion, unity whether on the national or Islamic levels, the form of government, the relation between science and religion and attitude towards tradition. And finally, is the thought or philosophy that has been produced in this part of the world Arab or Islamic?

Some of these problematic issues are genuine while others are not, despite their domineering impact on some scholars in the field of philosophy. In order not to digress in tracing the theoretical foundation of these problematic issues, such is the wont of those scholars, so fond of reaching the foundations, and lose themselves among peripheral issues, let us focus on a procedure capable of showing the distinction required. Thus, it will be possible to draw a map of the general features of epistemological and critical concerns in contemporary Islamic philosophy. Such a term means every and each attempt made, real or not, presented as a response to the challenges of our age, and defined as having its origin in the so called "the shock of modernity" in the nineteenth century. In this paper, the study will not be confined, therefore, to the domain of academic philosophy, or to those who are professionals in the field of philosophy. The scope will be broad to include those from different fields of epistemology who managed to present a "vision" of the attitude that should be adopted in facing the challenges of the age and the problems of the nation on the epistemological level or the political, economic and social levels.

However, this procedural step reveals other problems facing all those who tried such an epistemological task: should this be accomplished by classifying intellectual trends? Or across generations or research schools? Or by adopting western methods of classification? Or should the discussion be confined to those who have intellectual projects?

As this issue can be dealt with from different perspectives, this paper will adopt the classification of the principal intellectual movements/trends: the reformist, secular and liberal. Others may suggest a different classification; and perhaps problems of interconnections and overlapping of different movements might emerge. Some might argue about which trend certain figures belong to, especially when some trends are difficult to classify. Solving this problem involves a procedure as well by resorting to the more general features or the most prevalent feature.

If the classification into trends (reformist, secular and liberal) does not fit some of those who have contributed to academic philosophical efforts, another angle of vision will inevitably impose itself. This will involve the exposure of generations of scholars of philosophy and then the proponents of the western schools.

Among all these, there are some who have been able to present a complete, or almost complete, philosophical vision; while some have been able to construct an "intellectual project", conforming to reform in real life. Hence, the next step will be contemplating the philosophical visions and intellectual projects of these thinkers. As this paper covers a long time span (more than two centuries), there are various points of view, but with the limited space of this paper, it is necessary to indicate that serious attempts have been made to reach a vision that is conclusive and comprehensive. There will also be a diagnosis and critical evaluation of the current state of affairs. Making use of this critical analysis, with an awareness of the history of ideas, there will be an attempt to find a way out of the current problems of this era.

The evolution of contemporary Islamic philosophy

Arab philosophy went into a state of hibernation for four centuries after Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). It is not true that this period started after Al-Ghazali's (1058-1111) attack against philosophers in his book *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Islamic philosophy continued to develop after this and reached its peak with Averroes (1126-1198) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). Al-Ghazali's attack was only directed against Greek theology and their Muslim followers such as Al-Farabi (870-950) and Avicenna (980-1037) among others. His attack was not against logic, physics and astronomy. He focused his attack on the attitudes of these particular philosophers, but not against philosophy itself as an intellectual activity.

Islamic philosophy remained in a dormant state until early in the nineteenth century and then reemerged with the shock of modernism instigated by the advent of Napoleon to Egypt in 1798. It was in Egypt that the call for resurrecting Islamic philosophy started, since it was the first country to enjoy political independence from the Ottoman Empire. This awaking took place under the influence of figures such as Head of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Hassan Al-Attar (1776-1835) and then his student Al-Tahtawi (1973, pp. 1801-1863) who went to France as a member of an Egyptian educational expedition (1826-1831). In addition, there were Mubarak (1979, pp. 1823-1893) and Jamal El-Deen Al-Afghani (1827-1897) who spent some time in Egypt from 1871 until 1879, and his student Sheikh Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905).

The points of interest that engaged contemporary Islamic philosophy started to shift away from those of the past: traces of time immemorial, the word of God, God's essence and attributes. The concerns shifted, and these were imposed by the shock of the modernity: the renaissance, relation between religion and the state, unity whether national or Islamic, the form of government, relation between religion and science, relation with the west, etc. The rise of fundamentalism, leading to dogmatism, resulted in the utter failure of contemporary Arab thought to give appropriate answers to these concerns.

A great deal of commotion stirred the modern era in the Muslim world. This age witnessed shaking the foundations of all the constants, principles and rules that used to govern the Arab-Islamic intellectual, political, social and economic life for a long time. The changes were brought about by the influence of the Western colonial invasion, the sharp divisiveness of the Arab nation, political reversals, the clash among cultural figures resulting in factions: a modern reformist group, a liberal party, a secular faction, a sectarian strife, the sharp tension between the new and the old, science and religion, Arab nationalism and the Islamic alliance, and all the rest of the feuding dichotomies which prevailed in the nineteenth century and are still holding the area in their grip until today. In this context Al-Afghani emerged in the nineteenth century as a genuine innovative thinker within the framework of modern Islamic history. He was a precursor of the new liberal spirit which endeavored to present theoretical and practical answers to the enormous challenges of the time. The greatest answer presented by Al-Afghani was "Islamic unity" to face colonialism. This unity was a form and synthesis of contradictions. Facing all the binary divisions of his time (progress/backwardness, science/religion, old/new, pan-Arabism/pan-Islamism), he used the same synthesis of contradictions which sought to overcome the antitheses to create a dialectical synthesis where the parts lose their identity in the whole. This was all meant to face the colonial challenge and to block the path of western orientalism in order not to reinforce these contradictions to serve its own divisive ideology. Al-Afghani set out to accomplish "two goals: first, to fuse all contradictions, and second, to test these contradictions in their historical context to see how far they are held in opposition to one another, and how far they can coexist without conflict in order to have peaceful development. This is truly a policy that welcomes dialogue and mutual recognition, and rejects denial, despotism and exclusion of the other" (Belqaziz, 1992, pp. 78-9).

One of the features of Al-Afghani's synthetic project, in response to the divisive dualities and contradictions of the age, revolved around solving the duality of progress/backwardness and science/religion to repudiate the accusations against Islam. He realized then that the epistemological discourse of the western political dominance would inevitably lead to the cultural hegemony of the west over the Arabs and the Muslims unless this is faced with an epistemological containment and intellectual refutation of the theses of the western orientalist discourse.

Al-Afghani feared the orientalist invasion as much as he feared political dominance. Although Al-Afghani and Al-Tahtawi before him, focused on the apparent primary features of orientalism by means of refutation, modification and correction, he did not discredit it altogether (Al-Mussawi, 1933, p. 53). Because some Western orientalist philosophers, such as Ernest Renan, criticized and condemned Islam because of the state of Muslims, Muslim intellectuals, such as Al-Afghani, regarded distinguishing between Islam and Muslims as vital[1]. Muhammad Abdu followed the footsteps of Al-Afghani in writing a detailed response to Gabriel Hanotaux. In his debate with Lord Cromer, Muhammad Rashid Reda did likewise. While these responses implicitly acknowledged the importance of science and knowledge for a civilized nation and the necessity of freedom for life, they primarily provided proof that the original Islamic sources are just and applicable if assessed without reference to the actual condition of the Arab Islamic community.

Because the debates at the end of the nineteenth century were centered around justifications by Western politicians to civilize and modernize the colonies, such justifications were based on comparisons and underestimating the other, exemplified in the Arab Islamic culture. This is especially the case because the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of Aryan racist conflicts that were accompanied by interpretations of evolutionary ideas of the survival of the fittest. The reformists, therefore, had to go beyond mere correction of concepts to arguing against the opponents, using the grounds and methodology of these opponents. Some reformists, however, did not regard the orientalists as opponents. Al-Kawakbi (1975, pp. 1854-1902), for instance, with all his strong nationalist leanings, considered them as in search of the truth and as motivated to go on a journey to acquire knowledge because of their appreciation of the Arab Islamic thought. He cites Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) and other similar orientalists (308-311), ignoring political pro-imperialist orientalism.

The efforts of Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdu and Muhammad Rashid Reda, among other reformers, were not concerned with responding to orientalists except in so far as they touched upon issues related to Islam or politics. They implicitly separated political orientalism from scientific and religious orientalism. They, therefore, distinguished between Renan and Daniel Kimon and the politicians who followed them such as Hanotaux, Cromer and Balfour, on the one hand, and philosophers who oppose imperialist thought such as Gustave Le Bon, Herbert Spencer and Max Müller, on the other.

The reformist trend continued to develop after Rashid Reda and others, and diverged into various trends that were contradictory – dogmatic fundamentalism, moderate Islamism and open-minded Islamism. Some of the latter figures who adopted an intellectual attitude and had theoretical bases (without assessing them in this context and without discussing their divergent views) are Sayyed Qutb, Khalid Muhammad Khalid, Al-Ghazali, Al-Messeiri, Al-Qaradawi, Hweidi, Al-Bishri, Seif Abdel Fatah, Radwan Al-Sayyed and others.

Despite the ardent defense of Islam which the reformist trend adopted, they categorically refused to relinquish references to modernity. This attitude was embraced by different reformists in different degrees. At the lowest degree, there was at least acceptance of modernity in using technology, but intellectual modernity has always been a quandary.

Most of the writers who belong to the first group of reformists who represent this trend, did not have a coherent philosophical framework. And unfortunately the reformist trend was carried out by some mediocre writers who used flowery rhetoric and were merely writing in the defense position, responding to attackers. When one of these changed his position, he got engaged in offensive discourse, and was thus characterized as being feeble in adopting a theory (a trait that prevails in the discourse of most liberal and secular writers). They were specifically lacking an epistemological basis, and in general they did not have a thorough grounding in philosophy. In many cases, the religious reformist discourse even lacked the theoretical religious foundations.

At the opposite end of the reformist trend stood secularization which came to the fore in the east at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It basically came to Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and then to Tunisia followed by Iraq at the end of the century. The rest of the Arab World became familiar with secularization in the twentieth century.

Secularization was introduced to Egypt with the advent of Napoleon. In his *History*, Al-Jabarti referred to secularization in the section about the events of the French Expedition to Egypt. Although he did not use the term secularization, he used words that alluded to it. The term was first used in the Arab world by Ilias Buqtur in his *Arabic-French Dictionary* in 1827. Khedive Ismail who admired the west introduced the French legal system to Egypt in 1883. His desire was to turn Egypt into a part of Europe. At that time, and until 1791, laws in Muslim India were based on the Islamic legal code, the *sharia*. Gradually, the British planned to eradicate this legal and it was abolished in the mid-19th century. The laws based on Islamic sharia were abolished in Algeria following the French occupation in 1830. In Tunisia, the French legal code was introduced in 1913. Secularism was established in Turkey after Mustafa Kamal Atatürk ended the Islamic caliphate; and started to spread in different degrees in most governments of the Muslim world[2].

The most important figures of secularization are Shibli Shemmayel, Butrus Al-Bustani, Adeeb Ishaq, Yacub Sannoua, Khalil Saada, Antoun Saada, Ahmed Fares Al-Shedyaq, Farah Antoun, Ismail Mazhar, Kunstantin Zoreiq, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Abdel Aziz Fahmi, Ali Abdel Raziq, Michel Aflaq, Sukarno, Suharto, Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Murad Wahba, Abdallah Al-Arawi, Nasseef Nassar, George Tarabishi, among others. It is observable that secularism can at times coexist with socialism and nationalism as in the case of both Gamal Abdel Nasser and Michel Aflaq. It can also coexist with liberalism in the case of Taha Hussein; with a special way of understanding Islam as in the case of Ali Abdel Raziq; with nationalism as in the case of Al-Bustani (Hourani, 1997, p. 280), among others. Secularization can also have an affinity with atheism as in the case of Ismail Adham who wrote *Why I am an Atheist,* published in 1926; and Qabil Adam, who wrote *Mustafa Kamal Atatürk* and had leanings towards atheism and radical secularism. Another example is Kamal Al-Kelani who reverted back from atheism. As for Ismail Mazhar, who published a magazine entitled *Ages/Eras* in 1928, he wrote both about his atheism, and about reverting to Islam. In its early issues, his magazine promoted atheism, attacking religion, the Arabs, Arabism and accusing the Arab mentality of stagnation and degradation (Mazhar, 1926, p. 142 and Al-Helw, 2006). Some secularists in the Arab world, such as Ali Abdel Raziq, retracted their secularist positions either totally or partially.

Secularization has taken two forms in modern Arab thought. The first form adopted a radical firm stance in thinking about the universe, politics, society and economy, in a manner that recognizes only human reason, excluding religion and theology, i.e. a materialist position. Using philosophic terms, this first form adopted the "relative and rejected the absolute" – a trend that reached its theoretical peak with Wahba (1999, pp. 467-468) and its practical peak with Atatürk (1881-1938). Atatürk joined the Committee of Union and

Progress which forced Sultan Abdel Hamid to issue the Turkish constitution in 1908. He also played a role in the coup against the Ottoman Sultan in order to declare the Turkish Republic, and follow the secular footsteps of the modern European republics. Atatürk abolished both the Islamic Caliphate on 3rd March 1924 and the use of Islamic sharia in courts. Declaring Turkey a secular state, he secularized the government and education.

Secularism, in its limited political economic form, is the "separation of state and religion." In such a case, it is not possible to think of the relative, changeable and temporary political affairs in relation to absolute religious doctrines. It leaves to religion the domain of morals and values and the practice of rituals which are matters confined to the relationship between man and his Creator. Among the most important figures who voiced these views in the Arab region was Farah Antoun (1874-1922), the Lebanese journalist who immigrated to Egypt in 1897. Influence by the ideas of the French philosopher Ernst Renan, he ardently defended secularism. He debated with Muhammad Abdu arguing that religion is confined to affairs of the hereafter, but the responsibility of the affairs of this world is borne by governments. He claimed that religion restricts the freedom of thought and action, using unchangeable rules which religion considers as revelation. On the other hand, civilized governments do not restrict any freedom, dealing with people on equal footing through revoking the barriers that stand between the different sects and factions. He argued that the good of people requires removing the ban jurisprudents impose on creativity and the acts of the human intelligence, which are the source of any refinement and development. Based on his erroneous premises, he concludes, "there is no real civilization, tolerance or justice without equality; there is no security, safety, freedom, science, philosophy or progress in the country without separating the civil power from the religious power" (Antoun, 2011, pp. 152-160).

Against a different frame of reference, Abdel Raziq. (1925, pp. 1881-1966) set forth a different form of secularism in his book *Islam and the Fundamentals of Government* in 1925. He created a commotion with his position on the Islamic Caliphate. Many wrote responses to refute his views, and Al-Azhar withdrew his PhD.

In a different context, secularism in the west is not merely a trend like the one in the Arab world; it is rather a characteristic of a western style of life and a feature in all the trends, such as Marxism and western capitalism, which separate politics and all other aspects of life from religion. It is also a characteristic of many philosophical schools, such as Hegelianism, empiricism, materialism, existentialism, pragmatism, positivism, deconstructionism, etc.[3] However, secularism definitely has numerous facets and dozens of guises with various synthetic combinations in practical application. Some of these combinations use religion in a political, pragmatic way in order to control the masses.

The secularisms of some Arab regimes today are actually eclectic synthetic secularisms, which try to contain the Islamic trends either through repression, political concession and conciliation or avoidance of initiatives that may be in conflict with these trends. This is apparent in the secularisms of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Algeria and Yemen. However, secularism in Tunisia is somehow radical despite the use of a few containment methods, oscillating between leniency and violence, with the Islamic trends. Lebanese secularism has clear features despite Lebanon's sectarian structure involving various religious and sectarian communities. The secularism of the successive governments is a mere political construction that aims at establishing stability and balance between different feuding factions. Apart from this political construction, secularism is also evident in non-Islamic trends, that is, with the Christian groups as well as the nationalist, Marxist and westernized trends. It is also conspicuously prevalent in art and the larger sector of the media.

As for the style of life of the people, secularism is present in different degrees in the Arab countries to match the degree of piety of the people who vacillate between superficial piety

and genuine religious commitment in belief and manners. The layperson sometimes displays a strange synthesis of secularism and strong religious inclinations. This reflects contradiction because of the desire to respond to the Islamic revival and westernization at the same time.

Secularists claim that secularism is equivalent to freedom, equality and justice, but this is not the case with religion. However, the history of secularism itself proves it is not true on both the theoretical and practical levels in both the west and the Islamic world. Hobbes's secularism is that of a country with a despotic ruler. This is similar to the secularism of Machiavelli because they both rejected the rule of the will of the people. John Locke's secularism is that of capitalism since its basic principles and aims serve the private property of the capitalist class at the expense of the other classes. When this type of secularism flourished, it led to the evolution of global imperialism—thus secularism and imperialism go hand in hand.

On the practical level, most governments of the Arab and Islamic world are despotic dictatorships which severely restrict all freedoms, especially freedoms of beliefs and political views. Examples are the secularisms of Atatürk in Turkey, Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Nasser in Egypt. In the west, the USA is the closest model of the country that Locke portrayed. Thus when it is run by the Republicans, it presents the worst inhumane example of world imperialism in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

The secularist intellectuals call for freedom, but they do not practice this freedom. They turn into despots once they take over the management of any cultural institution, by excluding all other intellectual trends. They even exclude fellow secularists when they differ with them in opinion.

Secularists also overlook, or ignore, that the state in Islam is a civil state where the ruler can be right or wrong. Abou-Bakr, who was chosen as a Caliph by a committee of the wise elders and the general approval of the Muslim public, said on that occasion, "I was made your ruler while I am not the best among you. If I do well, help me; if I do wrong, direct me to the right path (Al-Seyouti, 1952, p. 69)".

None of the first four Caliphs of Islam claimed he represented divine power. Islam does not support the theocratic state that bases its authority on the divine, which was the case in medieval Europe where the Church had both temporal and spiritual powers. In the long history of Europe, some kings claimed to rule by divine right, which is rejected by Islam. The government in Islam has civil authority limited by human rights and principles of freedom and justice. It was not a theocracy that is governed in the name of God. The son of one ruler was once brought to justice for transgressing the rights of an ordinary person. What Caliph Omar told Amr Ibn Al-As, the then ruler of Egypt, is memorable: "How could you treat people as slaves while they were created as free spirits" (Al-Misri *et al.*, 1996, p. 290). Civil rights, including freedom, are a foundation on which the civil society is built in Islam. Highlighting the principles of transparency and the right of mutual control of public affairs, without infringements on privacy and individual rights, are clearly established in the principle of "urging people to do right and prohibiting them from doing wrong." Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya approved the saying, "God assists a just state even if it is one of non-believers, and renounces the unjust state even if it has believers" (2019, p. 63).

It is clear that secularists flagrantly generalize when they pass general judgments on religions without discrimination. One of these is they make no distinction between Islam and Christianity. They ignore the fact that Islam does not have a special status for preachers or jurisprudents. Islam only recognizes religious scholars who are sources and references to those who would like to inquire about religious affairs. They only advise without any

imposition, or this is how it should be[4]. It is the ruling powers that created religious institutions to give their regimes legitimacy.

Secularists claim that there is a conflict between science and religion since religion contradicts science while secularism supports it. They thus project a European problem to the Islamic scene, and hence devise a European solution. The conflict between science and religion has a long history in the European context, but in the case of Islam, the conflict does not exist. The Qur'an itself regards the study of the universe and natural science as a religious duty, an imperative. As for the arguments concerning certain practices, these are exceptional cases that were never as serious as those of Catholic Christianity in the history of Europe. In Islam, the rise of the class of preachers does not constitute a religious authority comparable to that of the clerics in the Church. The anti-religious secular orientalist movement reveals the role played by secularism in accusing Islam of backwardness which stands in the way of scientific advancement without grounds or decisive proof. Their judgment is the result of using an inappropriate analogy which postulates that if Christianity impeded scientific progress in the west, Islam, similarly, impeded scientific progress in the east (Rodinson, 2007, p. 57)[5].

The third trend is liberalism which started with Al-Tahtawi. (2011, pp. 1801-1873). He praised liberalism in his book *The Extraction of Gold or an Overview of Paris* (1834) where he presented the Parisian life with its French culture, customs and values. Like Lewis Awad, (1987) some regard this book as the foundation of a trend in the Egyptian social and political thought in the nineteenth century (250-280). He also translated the French constitution issued in 1814, which he called *la Charte* after the French, and the Human Rights document among other documents which advocate liberal values and principles. Late in his life in 1869, Tahtawi published *The Methodology of Egyptian Minds with Regard to the Marvels of Modern Literature* (Shukri, 1983, p. 152). He definitely paved the way for the liberal trend in modern Egyptian thought (Hanafi, 1988, p. 51 and Barakat, 1984, p. 401); hence, he is the founder of Egyptian liberalism (Tahtawi 152).

Ali Mubarak (1979, pp. 1823-1893) continued Tahtawi's efforts in translation and education. He contributed to the emergence of the so-called modern civil education that went parallel to religious education run by Al-Azhar (Mubarak, 1979, pp. 105-186). He managed to introduce Egyptians to new aspects of life in France in his novel علم الدين *Alm El-Deen* [The Science of Religion] which he wrote around 1858.

It would not be accurate to insert Al-Afghani and Abdu in the context of Egyptian liberal thought despite the fact they had ideas focusing on freedom. Their ideas are more relevant to fit the Islamic context[6].

Qasim Amin is one the main landmarks in the long journey of the development of liberal thought because of his ideas on *The Emancipation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1900) (Al-Zarkali, 1992, p. 184). Another landmark is Ahmed Lutfi Al-Sayyed (1872-1963) whose intellectual project excluded Islam as a source of legislation and a frame of reference. His interest in Islam was merely concerned with the moral and ethical side and as a phase in the development of the Egyptian character (Al-Zarkali, 1992, p. 200; Hanafi, 1988, p. 148; Shurkri 238-237). He showed fervent admiration for Greek philosophy and translated some of the works of Aristotle whom he lovingly termed "our master Aristotle may God bless him" (Al-Naggar, 1975, p. 208). Al-Sayyed was described by the liberals of his time as "the Teacher of our Generation" – the generation which studied under him in the newspaper *Al-Gareeda* and at the Egyptian University (Al-Naggar, 1988, p. 208).

Another prominent figure in the realm of liberal thought was Fahmi (1973, pp. 1886-1958). He studied in Paris where he obtained a PhD in 1913 with a dissertation entitled *La Condition de la Femme dans la Tradition de L'Islamisme*, [The Status of a Woman in the

Islamic Traditions] under the supervision of Lucien Lévy-Brühl (1857-1939). The dissertation included sharp criticism of the conditions of women in the Islamic society, and more importantly, the stance of Islam in relation to women. He adopted the historical critical approach, free from commitment to the sacredness of revelation, using the methodology of the orientalists in interpreting the texts of the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions. However, Fahmi later reviewed a great deal of his older convictions and showed an understanding of facts about Islam after freeing himself from the influence of the orientalists. He started to express this new position in his writings in the late twenties of the twentieth century in newspaper articles and in his various intellectual activities (Fahmi, 1973, pp. 20-21; Al-Ansari, 1999, p. 21; Al-Haj, 2000, pp. 507-508).

A staunch liberal, Heikal (1951, pp. 1888-1956), is also an ardent defender of Islam. He found no contradiction in supporting the two trends. He was a supporter of this conciliatory attitude in the thirties of the past century. Provoked by a missionary attack at the time, Heikal firmly stood against it. His articles on Islam appeared on the pages of the liberal newspaper, Al-Sayassa (Politics), together with the articles of Moheb El-Deen Al-Khateeb and Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltout. Heikal, a prolific writer, published *The Life of Muhammad* (1932-1935) and *In the Home of Revelation* (1936). He openly expressed deep disappointment in the western civilization and policies and in the possibility of the success of Western culture in the Arab and Egyptian environment (Heikal 272-3, Al-Nagar 9-43 and 353 and Al-Moa'asassa, 1980, pp. 97-106).

Hussein (1987, pp. 1889-1973) is the most prominent advocate of liberalism during that period. He can also be classified in the secularist context because of his strong ties with Ahmed Lutfi Al-Sayyed and the Liberal Constitutional Party, as well as his shift to the politics of the Wafd Party in the early 30s. Hussein devoted all his intellectual, literary, academic and political efforts to serve the Western liberal thought which he espoused. He spent all his life advocating liberal concepts and values and was engaged for a long time in the battle between the old and the new, especially in his book فى الشعر الجاهلى *On Pre-Islamic Poetry*. He published *The Prophet's Life* in 1933 at the time Heikal published his study of the Prophet's biography, but he did not revert from his liberal thought as Heikal did. Taha Hussein said that this book was a literary study among others which presented a picture of the old Arabic literature to the young as food for weary souls. He added:

> I would like them to know that reason is not everything and people have other faculties which need nourishment and satisfaction too. These accounts and events may not appeal to the mind and may not be accepted by logic and do not follow the scientific method, but they appeal to people's hearts, feelings, emotions, imagination and inclination to be gullible. This is because people need a place to rest in order to be secluded from the hardships of life. What makes people enjoy such accounts is the element of entertainment when life is hard. But there is a big difference between using these accounts to address the mind, claiming that these are facts supported by scientific proof according to research methodology, and using them to address the heart and feelings as a means to stir desirable feelings and suppress bad motives, to help people to pass their time and bear the burdens of life and cost of living. (Hussein, 1987)

In 1937, Hussein published *The Future of Culture in Egypt* which was the clearest expression of his intellectual project based on westernization and pure secularization. His book *From Afar* presented a secular view of the relation between the triad of religion, science and politics where he stressed the secularity of the Egyptian state[7].

Both a liberalist and secularist like Taha Hussein, Ismail Mazhar (1891-1962) brought up the idea of forming a "Peasant Party" in 1929. This Party was based on a liberal program with vague socialist undertones, aiming at solving the problems of the Egyptian peasants.

He presented the idea to the Leader of the Nation, Nahas Pasha, Head of the Wafd Party, who ignored the idea (The Program of the Peasant Party, 1965, pp. 146-152).

As for Abbas Mahmoud Al-Aqqad (1889-1964), he was a prominent liberal Islamist, who expressed the intellectual political ideas of the Wafd Party. He was an advocate of the liberal democratic movement, defending freedom while standing staunchly against the communist and socialist trends of his time. Although he was an unswerving advocate of the liberal thought of the Wafd Party, he later differed with the views of the Party and abandoned it. He accused it of making compromises in its liberal democratic ideas. Al-Aqqad was never an advocate of blind westernization[8].

For Aqqad, liberalism meant the application of the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights. This did not conflict with his idea of Islam. He used a rational approach to deal with Islamic issues. He adopted a rational methodology that depended on proof and applied a rigorous solid style. He, thus, became one of the staunchest defenders of Islam, its systems and political figures in the twentieth century.

This is not strange because some analysts described liberalism as "an ideology that is prone to different interpretations; it has a thousand facets" (Ezzat, 2004). It sometimes allies its forces with secularism to the point of assimilation, and sometimes it reconciles itself with some Islamic trends in the form of the so-called liberal Islam.

Liberalism maintained its presence in the area until it suffered from retreat in the 1950s and 1960s under the pressure of the domineering impact of socialism and Marxism on the intellectual life in the Arab region at the time of Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Once again, however, liberalism reemerged in the late 1970s with the appearance of the New Wafd Party and the new liberal guises that the old socialists and Marxists took. They adopted the same tactics and demeanor of the new class, namely the self-described "intellectual class" – an illusive concept which allows free mental manipulation in different circumstance. Many names emerged at this point on the liberal scene. For instance, Saad El-Deen Ibrahim called for a liberal civil society and a liberal state, sometimes mimicking the American model and sometimes following the British example, based on a constitutional monarchy.

A strong liberal Islamic movement was also quite visible among an emerging generation which adhered to an Islamic frame of reference with a liberal interpretation. This new generation believed in democratic plurality, partisan competition, representative government, human rights, dialogue between civilizations and market economy, without giving up the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. At the same time, it did not give up the civil constitutional democratic state.

Islamic philosophy in the academic domain

The first appearance of modern academic philosophical studies in the Muslim world occurred with the establishment of the Egyptian University (now Cairo University). Professor of Islamic philosophy at this university, Sheikh Mustafa Abdel-Raziq, later became Head of Al-Azhar. His book *Preface to the History of Islamic Philosophy* played a crucial role in clarifying the fact that Islamic philosophy is an eminent creative endeavor, which is not simply a traditional domain confined to the philosophy of Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Tufayel, Ibn Baja and Ibn Rushd (Averroës), who fell under the influence of Greek philosophy. Islamic philosophy, as he sees it, includes Islamic jurisprudence (أصول الفقه). He is absolutely justified since jurisprudence is the field of knowledge that focuses on the philosophy of law with all the exemplary criteria of philosophy. Muslims were genuine thinkers in this field more than they were in the other traditional fields of philosophy. Indeed, their creative contribution in jurisprudence cannot be compared to their contributions in any other philosophical domain. Those who do not

regard *jurisprudence* as a philosophic area of study did not simply read enough in this field of knowledge and shamefully confuse it with the study of *fiqh*, religious rules.

Abdel-Raziq was able to establish the first research school (الفقه) which was a turning point in the history of Islamic scholarship in the Muslim world. With this school, philosophy became a formal academic field of knowledge. The most famous prominent figures were Mustafa Helmi, Abu Al-Ela Afifi, Ahmed Fuad Al-Ahwani, Osman Amin, Ibrahim Bayoumi Madkour, Ali Sami Al-Nashar, Muhammad Abdel Hadi Abu Reida, Muhammad Ali Abu Rayyan, Tawfik Al-Taweel, Naguib Mahfouz (who abandoned philosophy to literary creativity) and Abdel Rahman Badawi. They may all, except for Mahfouz and Badawi, be classified as reformists who are the disciples of Mustafa Abdel-Raziq, himself a disciple of Muhammad Abdu, a disciple of Al-Afghani. This reveals that there is a bond between the evolution of philosophical scholarship in the Muslim world and the Islamic reformation. These figures contributed to various studies in the field of Islamic philosophy, spiritual life, Sufism, Islamic scholastic theology, methodology of Islamic thinkers, Islamic criticism of the Aristotelian logic and all the history of philosophy since the Greek era until modern times.

This first school of pioneers at Cairo University was followed by the Azhar school which was established by Muhammad Al-Bahayy (former Head of Al-Azhar), Abdel Haleem Mahmoud and Muhammad Abdel Rahman Bissar (former Head of Al-Azhar). Then there is the Dar Al-Oloum school formed by Mahmoud Qassim.

A third generation followed and comprised Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Yahya Hweidi, Murad Wahab, Sami Al-Dorubi, Badie Al-Kassem and Adel Al-Awwa – who belong mostly to Cairo University.

A fourth generation of thinkers followed. These were influenced by various disciplines but they all contributed to philosophy: Zakariya Ibrahim, Abu Al-Wafa Al-Taftazani, Hassan Hanafi, Fuad Zakariya, Sadeq Jalal Al-Azm, Muhammad Aziz Lahbabi, Al-Jabri, Al-Arawi, Rushdi Fakkar, Arkoun, Tizini, Muruwa, Samir Amin, Anwar Abdel Malek, Muhammad Ahmed Khalaf Allah, Imam Abdel Fattah, George Tarabishi, Nadeem Al-Bitar, Borhan Ghalioun, Haleem Barakat, Muta Safdi, Radwan Al-Sayyed, Hesham Djaït, Muhammad Al-Talebi, Hesham Sharabi, Edward Said, Hadi Al-Alawi, Ali Al-Wardi, Nasseef Nassar, Ali Harb, Abdel Amir Al-Assaam, Ahmed Sobhi, among others. Beside this group, there is also another which only teaches philosophy.

A generation or more of professors of philosophy in the Arab world followed. They were mostly immersed in professional academic scholarship, presenting robust or frail research. Some present work that comprises research and creative theorizing and some have the status of thinkers with intellectual projects, but as most of their work is still in the formative state, this reference will suffice.

Some figures from among those – and others from outside the Arab world, Iran, for example – went beyond the academic domain and presented a philosophy, an integrated vision or an intellectual project. Some attempted to accomplish intellectual independence, while others were merely an extension of Western trends.

Extensions of Western trends in the Islamic world

As a result of the deteriorating conditions which the Islamic nation suffered from, there was a wave during which the Arabs were under the influence of any trend that came from the west. Thus, pragmatism, Marxism, existentialism, logical positivism, structuralism, deconstruction and contemporary hermeneutics entered the Islamic world. Many books about these trends were translated in addition to all the research papers conducted on them. They also have had a tremendous effect on the philosophical visions and stances of a number of thinkers.

The followers of pragmatism were Ahmed Fuad Al-Ahwani and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud in the second stage of his development and Muhammad Abid Al-Jabri. They extended its influence in different degrees; Al-Ahwani sympathized with it and reconciled it with Islam. In his study of pragmatism, he used a method of "presentation and accurate delineation" (Al-Ahwani, 1987, p. 14). For emotional reasons, he abstained from criticism. In his book *John Dewey*, Al-Ahwani states that "during his centenary it is not appropriate to direct arrows of criticism at him, especially when this book is not long enough to include both a review and criticism. Whoever wishes to read a criticism of his school can read Crosser's book *The Nihilism* of *John Dewey*" (Al-Ahwani, 1987, p. 10). With this, Al-Ahwani thinks he said something new; and adds, "In writing about him, we adopted a new approach [. . .]. It is preferable to make the man the center of his philosophy. First, the focus is on his life and biography, and then various aspects. He is portrayed as an educator, a philosopher, a revolutionary against traditional philosophy, a moralist and a sociologist" (Al-Ahwani, 1987, p. 11). For Al-Ahwani, this is innovative. He adds, "I use Dewey's own expressions in most cases as he himself used to complain because of those who convey his doctrines inaccurately. I hope I have succeeded in presenting his work with precision" (14).

The influence of Dewey reached its peak when Al-Ahwani attempted to reconcile his ideas with Islam. Al-Ahwani said that Dewey's ideas "are not new to us in the east as Islam is the religion of humanity; it is the religion of science which opens the way for development and growth and calls for theoretical thinking and contemplation" (141).

Thus, Al-Ahwani provides two examples of what many beginners and advanced researcher do in the Muslim world. Writing involves accurate presentation and honest reporting, and for some Islamists, it turns into the reconciliation of a western school or thinker and Islam.

Zaki Naguib Mahmoud followed a similar route despite his prominent position in scholarly work in the field of philosophy. Clearly he belonged to the school of logical positivism as his book *Positivist Logic* showed. This is reiterated in A *Position Regarding Metaphysics*, which was previously titled *The Myth of Metaphysics*. This book gives a clear presentation of the ideas of logical positivism, but because Mahmoud was subjected to serious criticism, he changed the title to alleviate the effect[9]. During the first phase of his intellectual development, Mahmoud introduced and established logical positivism in the Muslim world as a flagrant extension of western logical positivism. This doctrine aimed at benefitting from scientific achievements and incorporated views and additions to the old positivism, e.g. logical analysis of language and the use of mathematical logic (Simon, 1963). Mahmoud said, "Since the condition of things in the world of reality is the field of scientific research, the scientific approach is described as positivist" (60). "So if a current situation engages the interest of the researcher, these are in fact the phrases or words of a language. In this case, the term "position" here is logical, which means that logical positivism is a linguistic expression of a tangible material reality chosen according to the laws of empirical science" (Mahmoud, 1974, p. 60).

This is the image of logical positivism with which Mahmoud started the first phase of his intellectual life. However, more than once I heard Professor Mahmoud confirm that he gave up this positivism. He was even enraged in his later years when he was described as a logical positivist, especially when, in the second half of his career, he broadened his horizon of knowledge through studying the Islamic and Arab heritage. He realized that positivism confines the mission of philosophy and science to a narrow view – that of linguistic analysis.

Mahmoud was also deeply influenced by the analytic philosophy which is evident in his book *Towards a Scientific Philosophy* – an influence which stayed with him for a long time. Sometimes, he sided with pragmatism and his partiality towards this school was obvious in

his translation of the book *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, and in his book *The Life of Thought in the New World* (1956).

If Mahmoud gave up logical positivism, he did not give up pragmatism even when his interest in Arab thought started. In his book *Renewal of Arabic Thought* (1974), he changed his approach of dealing with the tradition from the position of the logical positivist to that of the pragmatist. His pragmatist approach only valued "action and application, and the criterion is what we live by, what can be fused in people's life as they live it. If I find in the life of the ancestors what can be of use to me today in the form of a method of building houses, paving roads, running the economic life with its agriculture, industry or trade, words or phrases to verbalize what people want to express today, I revive this type of tradition. The rest has to stay in its grave for the historians who wish to study that" (Mahmoud, 1958, p. 18).

What proves that Zaki Naguib Mahmoud adopted the pragmatic approach, although he does not explicitly acknowledge this, is his development of the renewal approach through:

> Taking from the tradition of the ancestors what we can practically and scientifically apply today in a manner that represents an addition to our modern methods. Every system devised by the ancestors which was followed by a more successful one, was inevitably cast away and became the domain of historians. In other words, the culture of our ancestors or our contemporaries is simply ways of living. If the ancients had a system that is useful for us in our current living conditions, we can put it to good use and, thus, revive it as part of our legacy. What has no practical value is what we discard with no regrets. We take the same position towards the culture of our contemporaries in Europe and America. (Mahmoud, 1958, 18)

The most important problem for Mahmoud is how to convert from the culture or words to the culture of science, technology and industry. He believes that this will not happen by reverting to old traditions but through directing attention to "Europe and America to absorb from their sources what they can give and what we can accept and assimilate" (Mahmoud, 1974, p. 82).

Pragmatism had advocates in the later generations of thinkers with intellectual projects. Muhammad Abid Al-Jabri had several varied methodologies derived from the Western philosophical doctrines of Kant, Freud, Bachelard, Althusser or Foucault, in addition to some ideas by Marxism (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 12). Many dealt with how he made use of structuralism specifically, but they did not notice that in his book *Contemporary Arab Discourse*, he also used the pragmatic methodology with a number of other methods in his own way through merging and synthesizing. His pragmatism is evident in the fact that he did not regard these concepts as molds, but as "working tools" in a way that rendered them "productive" concepts. He said, "They are work tools which should be used in each subject in a way that makes them productive, otherwise they should be given up. What is the value of any concept if it is going to be mentioned as mere decoration?" (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 12). This is really and truly the pragmatic doctrine. In "practical application what is useful is what ought to be functional" (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 11). However, Al-Jabri denies his pragmatic tendency, and asks "Do we adopt a certain pragmatic or procedural tendency?" And the answer is, "No" (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 12).

In the forefront of the thinkers who are under the influence of Marxism are Mahmoud Amin Al-Alim, Sadeq Jalal Al-Azm, Hussein Muruwa and Al-Tayyed Tizini. The last two presented complete projects based on their Marxist views, while the first contributed a few scattered criticisms and partial positions on this issue or that; one time in philosophy and another in literature or politics.

Existentialism found its greatest representatives in the Arab world in the figure of Abdel Rahman Badawi (1917-12002) with his special understanding of this doctrine and his

exceptional originality as an Arab existentialist philosopher. His existentialism developed with his M.A. thesis on the *Problem of Death in Existentialism* which he wrote under the supervision of Lalande and then Moiré in 1941 and in his PhD dissertation *Existentialist Time* under the supervision of Taha Hussein in 1943. Existentialism was in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s among some intellectuals and even among some young people who only understood it superficially. They admired the ideal of freedom to lead a life of pleasure, love and promiscuity, and ignored the fact that existentialist freedom entails responsibility and commitment.

Osman Amin's philosophy, which he called internalism, can be traced back to the influence of the Cartesian philosophy and some Western intuitionist trends, in addition to socialism. His internalism is founded on a spiritual principle based on the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions, which gives his work its distinctive feature. His work seeks the internal and goes beyond the external, through a combination of mind and heart, knowledge and mystic experience. He sees his internalism as a philosophy which resorts to the past to review it and moves towards the future to prepare for it. As for Western rationality, it extended its influence through thinkers like Badie Al-Kasm. His doctrine is based on the philosophy of proof which he developed in his PhD dissertation *The Idea of Proof in Metaphysics* (Geneva University).

Structuralism had a great influence not only on Arab philosophy but also on literature. Among the first two to write about it was Abdel Wahhab Gaafar in his book *Structuralism between Science and Philosophy* and Zakariya Ibrahim's *The Problem of Structure*. The Moroccan writers were especially interested in it, and this is evident in Al-Jabri's book *The Structure of the Arab Mind* as well as in others.

Although the European enlightenment started early in the eighteenth century, it resounded in the twentieth century in the Muslim world[10]. This does not pose a problem except that there is no awareness of the historicity of concepts and their contextual specificity in addition to the nature of the cultural differences and the dissimilar natures of the relevant challenges and opponents. The enlightenment is a European philosophical movement which confirms the natural law and the principle of natural rights, human rights, using reason as the ultimate criterion and rejecting the authority of the feudal system and the Church because they fight science. It uses reason and empirical methods, depending on Newton's scientific methodology (Blackburn, 1996, p. 120). Politically, the enlightenment movement sought to liberate the traditions of political practices to enable participation in public life. Socially, it sought to establish values, laws and rules without reference to religious beliefs (Al-Tereiki, 2003, p. 214). The judiciary was restructured without the influence of the ecclesiastic system, to primarily base the political system on the principle of citizenship (Oliver and Hater, 1994, p. 12 ff.). The justification for establishing the state is self-contained and is not imposed from above; they are derived from and articulated by the masses, i.e. the citizen.

The aspects of this extended definition can be observed in varying degrees and with many differences in the works produced during the enlightenment by Arab secularists, be they positivists, Marxists, socialists or existentialists. They are also apparent in the ideas of some politicians such as Atatürk, Bourguiba and secularist partisan politicians.

The enlightenment tendency also exists but with different denotations in the ideas of some Islamists who claim that the real Islam has the best methodology of the enlightenment. Islam aims at liberating people from submission to any other power but God. This is what is meant by to lead people out of the darkness to the light. Islamic enlightenment thus confirms principles of freedom, human rights, equality and justice with an Islamic frame of reference.

This is clear in Al-Ghazali, Fahmi Hweidi, Abdel Wahhab Al-Messeri, Seif Abdel Fattah and Tariq Al-Beshri.

This movement is not related to the group of "revisionists" who raise the slogan of enlightenment to justify their erroneous and arbitrary interpretations of the Qur'an and traditions (Sunna). These do not follow the objective rules of text exegesis, especially with the texts that contradict their views in issues related to government, politics, economics and women. Sometimes, they dismiss the traditions and justify their views with groundless reasons that have nothing to do with historical criticism or the methodology of text analysis.

The position of such thinkers is explained by a defeatist approach in facing the west: first surrendering to European enlightenment, and now to contemporary hermeneutics. Contemporary hermeneutics found advocates in the Arab world in three forms:

First, there is a trend which simply translates and conducts casual research of a hagiographic nature.

Second, another trend tries to apply the new hermeneutics, in one of its western forms, to Arabic texts.

Third, a trend sought to analyse the text of the Qur'an according to its understanding of Western hermeneutics, mimicking what was done to the Bible, committing a methodological error, using analogy as the main device. Western hermeneutics has its own nature which it acquired through its conflict with the heritage of ecclesiastical exegesis. This heritage has developed in its relation to the Bible in a manner that is different from the heritage of the Arab interpretation of the Qur'an. Furthermore, the Qur'an has its own special nature which is different from that of the Bible. Therefore, the Arab hermeneutic thinkers slipped into the error of using the device of analogy with all its risks, thus creating an undisciplined revisionist position. This revisionist hermeneutics showed in different guises and degrees in Ahmed Subhi Mansour, Gamal Al-Banna, Muhammad Said Al-Ashmawi, Muhammad Shahrur among others.

Several other Western trends were applied in the Muslim world, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to cover all of them. An example is phenomenology, which has influenced some figures, such as Hassan Hanafi who has his special way of applying it. He added to phenomenology other trends from the west and Arab sources, which will be dealt with later.

Another group of thinkers, who are difficult to classify, merged their study of Western philosophical thought with their concern with current issues, people's interests and participating in on-going events.

Intellectual projects involving tradition and renewal

Some modern Arab thinkers presented a philosophy or an intellectual vision instead of simply conducting academic research, such as Osman Amin, Abdel Rahman Badawi, Youssef Karam, Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Murad Wahba, Rene Habashi, Badie Al-Kasm, Yahya Hweidi, among others. There are also those, living or recently deceased, who had intellectual projects such as Adonis, Tizini, Mahdi Aamel, Hassan Hanafi, Al-Jabri, Arkoun, Muruwa, George Tarabishi, Muta Safdi, Hesham Djaït, Hesham Sharabi, Al-Messeri, Muhammad Hussein Fadl- Allah, among others. There are thinkers who belong to the eastern part of the Muslim world in Malaysia, India, Pakistan and Iran. Without reference to their disciplines, there is, for instance, Muhammad Iqbal, Ahmed Khan, Ameer Ali, Muhader Muhammad. Waheed Khan, Al-Sayyed Muhammad Baqer Al-Sadr, Abdel Karim Seroush, Muhammad Mojtahid Shebstri, Mohssen Kedever, Mustafa Malikan, Hashem Aghagri, Heidar Muhammad Kamel Hob-Allah, Jawadi Amely, Sadiq Larijani, Mosbah Al-Yazdi, Muhammad Taqqi Jaafari, Muhammad Al-Sayyed Tabtaba'ei, Ammed Wa'ezi, Sadr Ed-

Deen Taheri, Al-Sayyed Mahmoud Al-Hashemi, Baqer Al-Irawani, Muhammad Ali Al-Taskheeri, Nasser Makarem Al-Sherazi, Al-Hakimi, Mahdi Al-Mahrizi, Ahad Qaramalki among others. Since the subject and context of the paper cannot allow for dealing with them all and as the efforts of some were viewed previously, some examples of those who have what is known as intellectual projects will be referred to.

The project Adonis focused on was to reread the tradition, which is one of the first attempts to do this. In the early 1970s, he published his PhD dissertation entitled *The Fixed and the Changeable: Research in the Arabs as Followers and Innovators*, in which he dealt with the matrix of the Arab culture as a construct of the foundational structure of the Arab society. He analyzed the sources; established their theoretical origins; dealt with the shock of modernity in relation to the power of the religious heritage; then addressed the shock of modernity in relation to the power of the poetic heritage. He attributed the foundation of the movement of modern Arabic poetry in the relation between the genuinely native and the foreign elements as the regulator of the duality of the fixed and the changeable or following and innovation. He said that in the heritage, there are "cultural products which are varied to the point of contradiction. So it is not proper to view the tradition as the origin or the essence of the whole, but one should study a particular cultural product" (Adonis, 1973, p. 228). This cultural product is under the influence of the dualities: following and inventing, the fixed and the changeable, the positive and the negative. A positive example is both Umro' Al-Qays and Amr Ibn Abi Rabi'a. Their poetry established the erotic or permissive propensity in Arabic literature. Their poetry acquired a special status because it dealt with taboo-breaking ideas (Adonis, 1973, p. 215). They also wrote about rejecting those in positions of power and calling for change. In the same manner, he deals with the ideological trends where he includes those who are among the negative group, i.e. the fixed position, Ibn Hanbal, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya. In the positive category, i.e. those who call for change, rejecting the fixed positions, he mentions the historical Islamic trends: Al-Murji'a, Al-Jahmiyya, Shia and Sufism. Adonis seems to have forgotten that the genuinely native and the foreign are both essential to progress. If there is no dialectic interaction between them, no change is possible. He also seems to forget that invention from scratch is not possible since no one can be inventive in all aspects of one's thought. Invention is not absolute, but involves an element of following/tradition depending on the individual. Both fixedness and changeability are two positions that coexist. If it were not for the tension between them, progress would not be possible. For him, some of those who represent fixedness are Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyya. But in my point of view, they at times represent changeability. Al-Ghazali's inventiveness appears in his work in the field of philosophy with critical tendencies: he focuses on proof rather than on gnosis before he turned to Sufism. Even then he had an innovative tendency as shown in his book *The Revival of Religious Sciences*. When he started to become a Sufi, his inventiveness showed in his methodological doubt which was a landmark in the history of this method. Ibn Taymiyya displayed inventiveness in his personal creative contributions to jurisprudence and politics. This inventiveness is obvious by philosophical criteria in his criticism of Aristotelian logic on an empirical basis.

In the context of contemporary intellectual projects, Hassan Hanafi's project attempted to solve the dilemma of the contemporary and the traditional. In 1980, he published *Tradition and Innovation* – his most important book which establishes his philosophical project based on a criticism of the orientalist methodology. He replaced the methodology of the orientalists by others and put forth his vision of how these methodologies should be, linking them with national objectives, such as linguistic innovation, content analysis and the change of the cultural environment. Therefore, Hanafi's works have three directions. First, there is his

position on the old tradition with the following books: *From Dogma to Revolution, From Following to Inventiveness, From Text to Reality*, and *From Annihilation to Survival*, among other works. Second, there is his position on the western tradition including the books: *Introduction to Occidentalism*, and *Current Issues*, to which his PhD. dissertation can be added (written in the 1960s). Third, there is his position on reality or the theory of interpretation – a front on which his efforts were scattered in various books and articles. Hanafi's project, as he likes to classify it himself, is within the framework of the Islamic left. He issued a magazine under this title as well – *Islamic Left* (Only the first issue saw the light of day). Hanafi explained the features of this trend in his paper "What does the Islamic Left Mean?[11]"

However, the classification of Hanafi as part of the Islamic left is not accurate because his project dialectically synthesizes different trends: Marxism, liberalism, rationalism, gnosticism, fundamentalism, secularism and modernism. As for the methodology he adopts, he shifts between Husserlian phenomenology, historical dialectics, structuralism, deconstruction, pragmatism and analytical philosophy. This is on the intellectual level, but on the purely academic level, Hassan Hanafi is undeniably an authority on the history of philosophy.

If Hanafi represents a dialectic synthesis of several doctrines and methodologies on the one hand, Al-Tayyeb Tizini on the other hand represents one trend, namely historical materialism. He sought to reinterpret the Islamic tradition in "an attempt to create a new vision of Arab thought since its inception up to the current period." The objective is to move from "tradition to revolution" passing by the "Qur'anic text" and what he called "the early Muhammadan Islam," theology and medieval Arab philosophy. In his interpretation, he adopted the method of historical materialism which is based on a purely materialistic view of society and history – a Marxist-Leninist view which sees the social historical process in terms of material factors. Thus, it seeks to reveal the materialistic basis of social life and discover the laws that govern its development. It, thus, studies the general laws of social development and how they appear in the historical behavior of the people. It further considers the relation between the economy and production – the determining factors behind all social and historical development (Hanafi, 1967, pp. 17-18). They indeed affect all forms of human consciousness and thinking, together with the features of civilization, religious, scientific and cultural activities (Marx, 1987, pp. 30-31).

In the same context, there is Hussein Muruwa's intellectual project which searched for materialist tendencies in the Islamic and Arab philosophical tradition. He meant to prove that "the revolutionary powers in the Arab liberation movement have a distinguished present laden with the future which is different from the past-laden present of the backward powers [. . .]. They have their own tradition which is distinct from that of the other powers" (Muruwa, 1981, p. 24).

The reading of the tradition by Tizini and Muruwa is simply an eclectic reading which is based on Marxizing the Arab history, i.e. adding a Marxist flavor to the tradition. They project materialistic concepts on Arab history in an arbitrary interpretation by using concepts derived from the context and development of the European history. They apply these concepts to Arab history and its development, interpreting history according to Marx's analysis of what he called the "Asiatic mode of production." This proves that Tizini and Muruwa fell in the trap of Eurocentrism even when they claim to attack it.

In his intellectual project, Muhammad Abid Al-Jabri made it a point to criticize the Arab mind to reveal its structure and development. He used several methodologies derived from the modern humanities and the Western schools, especially the French. He followed Kant, but on a different level, because he believed it is a necessity to criticize reason to establish

the modern Arab renaissance. He said, "The basic and dangerous point of weakness in the project of the modern Arab renaissance is that Arabs did not known or were not aware that the weapon of criticism should be preceded and accompanied by the criticism of weapon. They have ignored the criticism of reason." He claimed that his methodology in reading the tradition is based on "scientific research of a mind that created a certain culture, the Arab Islamic culture, and which was also formed by it" (Al-Jabri. *The Structure of the Arab Mind*. 14). Therefore, Al-Jabri emphasized that "the special nature of the cultural and social environment is responsible for the establishment of a specific thought" (Al-Jabri. The Structure of the Arab Mind. 12). He argued that one of the essential methodological pivotal elements is "formal overlapping of thought as a tool and thought as content" (Al-Jabri. The Structure of the Arab Mind. 12). Nevertheless, he used tools borrowed from outside his cultural realm. Al-Jabri uses Lalande's historical method to understand reason and to distinguish between a "forming" reason and a "formed" one (Al-Jabri. The Structure of the Arab Mind. 15). Moreover, he used the concept of the epistemological unconscious which is derived from the ideas of Jean Piaget (Al-Jabri. The Structure of the Arab Mind. 40 ff.). He also used structuralism and the old pragmatic method, which sees concepts not as final molds, but merely as "work tools that should be used in different contexts in the manner that renders them productive" (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 12). He also used some of the ideas of Kant, Freud, Bachelard, Althusser and Foucault, and nothing stopped him from using some Marxist ideas, or borrowing the method of deconstruction (Al-Jabri, 1988, p. 11). Muhammad Abid Al-Jabri had numerous and varied methodologies derived from Western philosophies, that is to say, from outside the "cultural realm of the Arabs," although he claimed otherwise. One of the most important results he has achieved is distinguishing three epistemological systems in the Arab culture: expression, gnosis and proof, with the aim to prove that the Moroccan mind excelled over the east Arabian mind in depending on proof rather than gnosis.

Thus, Al-Jabri's methodology is an eclectic one, which led to partiality, separating Morocco from the east in the Arab World. Al-Jabri seems to have forgotten that not all Moroccan thinkers base their work on proof, and not all eastern Arabs are immersed in gnosis. On each side there are representatives of his three systems. In addition, there are single thinkers on either side, who combine in their intellectual makeup all three forms: expression, gnosis and proof, such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun. Do we consider Ibn Arabi and Ibn Sabeen, with their gnostic philosophy, as eastern? Was Abu Al-Barakat Al-Boghdadi, with his rational philosophy, a Moroccan? Cannot we see that Al-Suhrawardi, the most prominent mystic, does not oppose the validity of rationalist method of proof?

As for Muhammad Arkoun, his project attempted to apply the western reading of the Bible to the Qur'an, ignoring the different contexts and the nature of each book. He meant to prove "the historicity of Islamic Arab thought," and to criticize the traditional readings of texts so that one can begin to think of that which is beyond human thought, i.e. religious phenomenon (Arkoun 18 ff.), to break the dogmatic mindset (Arkoun, 1992, p. 12 ff.). The old way of thinking will be replaced by "the imposition of an active worldly culture capable of being assimilated and used by living powers that are active in the society" (Arkoun, 1995, p. 15). He used modern hermeneutics and linguistics together with most modern methodologies in the humanities, especially depending on concepts derived from Foucault and Levy Straus's structuralism and Derrida's deconstruction, among other concepts (Arkoun, 1995, p. 63).

Arkoun believed that anthropology is the only science that provides the necessary and suitable clues to discover different cultures and doctrines. He also argued that exegetes,

scholars and the early Islamic theologians refrained from dealing with the vast horizons that the Qur'an opens. If we read the Qur'an according to the methodology of the history of religions, which he claims we have not done yet, we will have broader horizons. He rightly emphasizes the fact that there is a difference between the Qur'an and efforts of Islamic scholars in writing the books we read now. From these books, we derive images of Islam based on their own interpretation – an interpretation that changes with the change in the historical, cultural and political conditions. Thus, there should be a distinction between the Qur'an as an independent entity and the interpretation of Islam as a historical phenomenon. We have to understand the Qur'an that opens horizons for contemplation, thinking, in-depth erudition and the use of reason. Here, he strongly urges that we should turn towards the western social sciences which will give us the mental tools and the research methodologies and problematics that should improve our ways of thinking. Therefore, he calls for the adoption of modern systems of thought rather than restrict ourselves to the material aspects of modernity which further deepens out backwardness[12].

Towards the future

This is an age with divergent routes for the contemporary Arab thought which exhausted its energy in searching for a theoretical philosophy. It is torn between tradition and modernity, and while it could not retrieve its tradition, it is not coping with the modern age. It actually failed in facing contemporary challenges. The most obvious proof is the condition of the Arab nation now and the deplorable condition of the Muslim world. This may also be evident in the fact that all the efforts exerted by the contemporary Arab and Muslim thinkers do not have any impact on reality, which means that they float in a space of abstract intellectual structures detached from historical reality, lacking the philosophy of action.

Therefore, there is a need for a philosophy of action and work, not of words and contemplation. There is a need for a philosophy of progress, and hence a philosophy of ethics, but not the moral principles of abstract philosophical theories. There should be morals that can be applied—an ethics of progress.

The philosophical doctrines of the modern Islamic and Arab thinkers have not yet put forth an explanation of the means and practical mechanisms that can lead to a real awakening. They were immersed in theoretical polemics without setting an ethics of progress. The ethics of progress is not simply the scientific values and moral principles, such as objectivity, honesty, avoidance of personal and psychological predispositions, verification and deferring judgment until a definite proof has been established, accuracy, etc. The required ethics ought to show how man can realize such attributes in himself, how to act spontaneously in his practical life, and how to reach self-actualization through legitimate means that acquire their legitimacy from a progress agenda with theoretical and philosophical basis, acknowledged by public consciousness.

The contemporary philosophical reality is in a crisis exacerbated by the fact that religion, despite its extreme importance, has acquired a confusing position as a result of the modern cultural and intellectual variables. Contemporary man is torn between two extremist trends which dominate the current debate in different contexts: the extreme secularists and the extreme religionists. In this dilemma, the contemporary person is confused as to what to choose. It is a dilemma because there is no third choice. This third solution is not possible without setting deep the principles of critical thinking and the dominance of moderate rationality. Hence, there is a necessity for adjusting the position of contemporary Arab thinking towards rationality, and consequently towards philosophy. Philosophy teaches rational thinking, productive contemplation, accurate interpretation and constructive

criticism. It allows us to formulate questions and deal with the problems of our nation from different perspectives. Why not? Philosophy is the mirror of the age. It is, nevertheless, not a mere understanding of the world; it is additionally a continuous effort to change it to the better. Thus, there is a change from contemplation to action where philosophy turns from a discipline of interpretation into one of change of the self, society, laws, economy and politics. This can be achieved through the appropriate methodology that enables us to criticize our history, ourselves and our time. Consequently, there will be a shift towards the future on the basis of principles and values which conform to our historical aspirations for the realization of the national project of democratization. This will result in establishing the values of originality and progress at the same time, and widening the scope of participation and human rights. It will be possible to build the self in a modern way through establishing a third path that is neither secularist nor "salafi" (pertaining to the ancients) by means of a new reading of the sources that involves a synthesis of rationality and spirituality. This is what the new philosophy of religion that we have been trying to launch since the 1980s of the twentieth century will try to accomplish. It started to develop with the first two Arabic books on the philosophy of religion written objectively and methodologically published at the beginning of the 1990s in the twentieth century, namely, *The Reasonable and the Unreasonable in Religions* and *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*.

Notes

1. See an extended analysis of the dialogue between Renan and Al-Afghani on the relation between Islam and science in Mohamed Othman Elkhosht's *Islam, Positivism and Orientalism*, Cairo, Nahdat Misr Pub., 2007.

2. See the second edition of *Contemporary Encyclopedia of Religions and Sects*.

3. Al-Messeiri distinguishes between partial secularism and comprehensive secularism. The partial one gives a partial view of reality as it does not deal with the comprehensive and epistemological dimensions. It is not comprehensive, so it argues for a separation of religion and just politics, and perhaps economics as well. This is expressed as "separation of religion and state." This partial view ignores the other dimensions of life, and does not deny the existence of absolutes, the moral absolute imperatives, or metaphysics. It can be described as "moralistic secularism" or "humanistic secularism." As for comprehensive secularism, it is a comprehensive view of reality that tries quite vigorously to neutralize religion, the absolute values and all metaphysical aspects of life. This view gives rise to theories based on the material aspect of the universe, considering materialistic knowledge as the only measure of ethics; and that man is dominated by the materialistic nature not the spiritual one. Thus, it is also termed "natural materialistic secularism." See Al-Messeiri. (2002). *Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism*, Cairo, Dar Al-Shorouq, 2002, vol. 2 pp 219-220, and vol. 2 pp 471-472. The difference between the so-called "partial secularism" and "comprehensive secularism" is the difference between two historical periods in defining secularism. It was first confined to political and economic domains, but some humanistic and Christian values were still there, but, with the deep infiltration of the influence of the state and its institutions in the daily lives of the individuals. The secularist state became the only agent that forms a comprehensive view of man's life without reference to metaphysics. Vol. 2, p. 222 ff.

4. "If ye realize this not, ask of those who possess the Message." The Qur'an, XVI, 43. And "Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they may learn to guard themselves (against evil)." The Qur'an, IX, 122.

5. See: Maxime Rodinson, *La Fascination de l'Islam*, p. 57. Hesham Djaït, *Europe and Islam*, pp. 61-62. Muhammad Osman Al-Khosht, *Islam, Positivism and Orientalism*, Cairo, Nahdat Misr, 2007, p. 113-114.

6. Bassam Al-Battoush put them, for insufficient reasons, in the context of the liberal thought in Egypt. See his book: *Social Thought in Egypt*, p. 93 ff.

7. See "Bibliography of Taha Hussein 1889-1973," *Al-Kahira Magazine*, issue 132, Nov. 1993, pp. 120-122.

8. "Akkad's Intellectual, Literary and Political Influences on the Arab Reality" in *Al-Tale'a*, Cairo, issue 3, March 1966, p. 2 and 126 ff. And Salah Zaki Ahmed, *Prominent Figures in the Islamic Arab Renaissance in the Modern Age*, Cairo, Arab Civilization Center, 1st ed., 2001, p. 168 ff. And Bassam Al-Battoush, *Social Thought in Egypt*, p. 93 ff. From him we gleaned the historical and bibliographical information on the liberal trend in Egypt.

9. For instance, Muhammad Al-Bahayy heavily criticized Zaki Naguib Mahmoud's book in *Modern Islamic Thought and its Ties with Western Colonialism*, 239 ff.

10. Emerging in the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment was termed the Age of Enlightenment in most common books of history, but there is a difference over determining the date and the place of enlightenment. For more details see: Muhammad Sabila, *Modernism and Postmodernism*, Morocco, Tobqal Publishing, 2nd ed., 2007, p. 44.

11. See Fuad Zakariya's مستقبل الأصولية الإسلامية "The Future of Islamic Fundamentalism" in "الفكر الديني والفكر العلماني" "Religious Thought and Secular Thought" in *Fikr Magazine*, issue 4, Dec. 1984, pp. 18-50. And Mohsen Al-Mayli, *The Phenomenon of the Islamic Left*, Carthage, Tunisia Press. 1983.

12. Muhammad Arkoun, "Our adoption of materialistic modernism, rather than the intellectual modernism accompanying it, further deepened our backwardness." In *The Civilized Dialogue* by Nasser Al-Ghilani, issue 199 – 24-7-2002.

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