

Development: Myths & Truths

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Abstract: The idea that development is mainly about the accumulation of wealth commands widespread support. Dissenters have introduced other dimensions of development, but nonetheless agree on the centrality and importance of wealth. However, Islam is primarily concerned with spiritual and moral development. Teachings of Islam created an inner revolution within the companions of the prophet, which led to the creation of a new form of society with distinctive institutions and ideology. Eclipse of Islamic civilization, and the rise to global dominance of capitalist societies has led to widespread acceptance, even among Muslims, of ideas antithetical to Islam. In this article, we expose and refute one dozen widely believed myths created to support Western hegemony, and provide alternative points of view.

1 PARADIGM SHIFTS

For the majority of readers, this article will present ideas directly in conflict with their core beliefs. This is because core beliefs of the dominant Western civilization have spread far and wide via educational systems as well as ever expanding nets of media. Many of these western core beliefs are in direct conflict with Islamic ideas, but the conflicts are not apparent to most Muslims. A collection of core beliefs, or a paradigm, is the framework we use to understand the world we live in. This means that core beliefs are not really open to discussion or even visible – they are buried within the foundations of our thought processes about the real world. Standard methods of logic and argumentation, compiling of evidence, etc. are not effective in changing core beliefs. This is because core beliefs are a coherent collection of inter-related ideas which are fundamental to the way we look at the world around. When we encounter data or evidence against a core belief, then a large variety of “insulating” strategies are used to prevent us from having to change the core belief. Occasionally, a huge amount of compelling evidence can force a change in a core belief. This creates a “revolution” because we cannot simply change a core belief – we have to re-adjust the entire collection of core beliefs and change the framework we use for understanding the world. In a sense to be explained further below, the world we live in changes when our core beliefs change.

It is our contention that Islam brought about a revolution in knowledge that changed the course of human lives forever. The first lines of the Quran revealed to the Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. are powerfully infused with the importance of knowledge:

96:1-5 Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth; Createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen; Teacheth man that which he knew not.

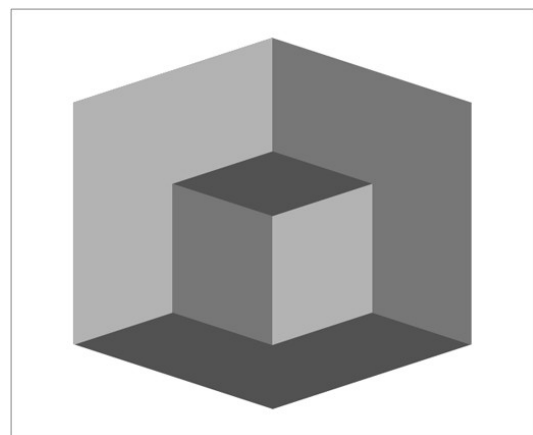
The very first command of the Lord of Creation is to READ, and the very first bounty mentioned is to teach man that which he knows not. It is this knowledge that transformed the lives of those who absorbed the message of Islam, and created a revolution in the world. Today that knowledge has been

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lost, even by the Muslims – it was prophesied that Islam came as a stranger, and will become a stranger. To understand this claim, one must differentiate between theoretical knowledge and applied knowledge. This is the difference between reading a book on surgery, and actually performing surgery. The theoretical knowledge of Islam is perfectly preserved, as was promised to us by Allah. The practical knowledge is promised to us conditional on our struggle to realize these teachings in our lives and in the world around us (just as surgery is learnt by experience). Today the Muslims are struggling for diverse ends, but very few are engaged in the struggle to spread the good and to prohibit the evil that surrounds us. One of the obstacles is that the goals and methodology of this struggle for justice have become obscured by the spread of many false ideas, which have become deeply rooted. This article highlights these ideas (myths) and opposes them by alternatives (truths). It is my hope that this will serve as a necessary preliminary step to understanding and appreciating the deep insights the Islam has to offer about the human condition, and how to improve it. According to current widely accepted western ideas, Islamic knowledge is normative, and hence not really knowledge at all.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify further why paradigm shifts cannot be achieved by standard processes of rational arguments and debate. Consider a paradigm as a collection of interlinked and coherent ideas A, B, C, D, and E. Consider an alternative paradigm based on an alternative collection of ideas V, W, X, Y and Z. All data and observations can be explained by both paradigms, although each may have different areas of strength and weakness. This is the defining characteristic of a paradigm, that it forms a framework for the interpretation of the entirety of the real world around us. So, it will not be the case that we can find a fact which affirms one paradigm and contradicts the other. All facts can be explained by both. Similarly, the standard step-by-step learning process fails to work to achieve paradigm shifts. Taken individually, each of the elements of the alternative VWXYZ conflict with the original paradigm ABCDE. Thus, a person who believes ABCDE will reject each element V, W, X, Y and Z because every single one of them will seem wrong. He will not be able to see that if he abandons his own paradigm, and considers the whole structure VWXYZ together, it forms a coherent whole.

There are two ways to see this cubical picture. One cannot make logical arguments as to which is the “right” way of seeing the picture. So how can we achieve the paradigm shift that we are hoping for? To be able to comprehend an alternative paradigm, one must let go of all of the original core beliefs at the same time – since we interpret the world using our core beliefs, none of the alternative core beliefs make sense if we try to interpret them within our existing framework for understanding the world. This is an act which requires courage, since giving up core beliefs amounts to destroying (our understanding of) the world we live in. It also requires hope and trust, since we will abandon our worldview only if we hope for something better, and we trust the source of information for the alternative (since we cannot evaluate it evidentially). For a more detailed discussion of the difficulties involved in radical paradigm shifts, see Zaman (2018)



This article is addressed primarily to Muslims for this reason. Muslims have already absorbed the fundamentals of an alternative worldview through the teachings of Islam. They trust the Quran and

Hadeeth, and have faith that Islamic teachings are superior to all worldly knowledge. Typically, their education gives them a dual perspective, with some modern and some religious elements. It is possible for them to contemplate the possibility that the fundamentals of the modern world view are wrong – they can jump to the Islamic worldview for safety. A secular audience does not have an option. Abandoning the modernist worldview would leave them with no place to stand, and so they must attempt to reconcile conflicts within the modernist frameworks available, none of which provide any basis for answers to certain crucial questions which we face as human beings.

2 IDEALISM VERSUS MATERIALISM

There are two different approaches to understanding the world we live in. One is a materialist approach, which pays substantially more attention to the concrete realities of the world around us. In contrast, the idealist approach focuses more on our ideas about this world around us. This second approach emphasizes human beings over material circumstances. Materialism is the dominant philosophy in current times. This philosophy creates the biggest obstacles to understanding what development is and how it can be achieved. By focusing only on the material causes of development, it points towards harmful remedies. Our contention, very surprising to materialists, is that wrong ideas about development are the greatest obstacle to devising and implementing correct plans for development. In this section, we start with three fundamental wrong ideas associated with a materialist perspective.

2.1 MYTH #1: MATERIALISTIC DETERMINISM

Materialism is a philosophy which gives primacy to material circumstances as determinants of history. That means that the fate of nations is determined by material circumstances – if they have good geographic location, natural resources, and other favorable materials, then they will progress. Lack of development is explained by inadequacy of natural resources. On this view, nations are undeveloped because they lack material resources. There are two ways to overcome this problem. One is to increase the savings rate within the nation, and the other is via foreign aid. Both of these are methods which have been strongly recommended and utilized by economists in the twentieth century. Both have failed miserably to produce good results.

For example, Mahbubul-Haq was an enthusiastic proponent of the first strategy in Pakistan. Mahbubul-Haq recognized the short run harmful effects of the increased savings strategy for growth:

“It is well to recognize that economic growth is a brutal, sordid process. There are no short cuts to it. The essence of it lies in making the labourer produce more than he is allowed to consume for his immediate needs, and to reinvest the surplus thus obtained.”

Bari (2011) provides the citation above and also shows how experience led Mahbubul-Haq to a complete reversal of views. In the recent past, Sachs (2006) has been an enthusiastic proponent of the second approach, namely foreign aid. Easterly (2001) has provided a sharp critique, showing how this approach has been a gigantic failure in the past, and is unlikely to produce the desired results in the future.

Another easy way to see that the idea of material determinism is wrong is the following. It can be checked that in terms of material resources, USA, Russia, Brazil and India were roughly on par in the

early nineteenth century. Yet all four have had drastically different development trajectories. If the theory of material determinism was even roughly correct, then this should not have been the case.

2.2 TRUTH #1: VISIONS AND IDEAS ARE POWERFUL

The history of mankind is the history of visionaries and idealists, men committed to grand ideas who gave their all and changed the course of history. The greatest example for us is our Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. who took the Arabs from the bottom to the top fourteen centuries ago. At the time, the Arabs were primitive and illiterate nomads in a world which had advanced civilizations like Roman, Persian, Egyptian and Chinese. Historians like Hart (2000) have correctly identified our Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. as the single most influential person in human history. His life changed the course of human history forever, and his work has deeply influenced the lives of more than a billion people on the planet today, fourteen centuries after his passing. What material changes did the Prophet bring about which created this revolution? The answer is NONE. He did not introduce new weapons, techniques of warfare, or any new industry or technology. He gave a new vision to the Arabs, in the shape of Islam, and this vision re-shaped the world.

Throughout history, it has been men of vision who have brought about the greatest changes, unconstrained by material resources. Karl Marx was dismayed by the exploitation of laborers by capitalist as a result of the industrial revolution in England. His vision of an egalitarian world where each would be provided for according to their needs captured the imaginations of many. It changed the course of history in Russia and China; no material means were involved. It is ironic that Marx himself was one of the greatest advocates of material determinism, since the impact of his ideas furnishes such a strong counterexample to his own theories in this regard. In a similar way, it has always been leaders with visions which have, for better or worse, changed the development trajectories of their nations.

It is important to clarify that ideas by themselves *cannot* directly impact the real world – they must *always* be translated and implemented via material means. This means that there will always be an apparent material cause, which allows us to ignore the vision and idea behind the material cause. For example, materialists might argue that the atom bomb led to the US victory over Japan. This ignores the ideas which led to the conception of the atom bomb, as well as the ideas which made it morally permissible to kill millions of innocent civilians as a demonstration of power.

2.3 LESSON #1: DE-COLONIZING THE MIND

If material circumstance will not determine our development trajectory, then what will? My main contention in this article is that the greatest obstacle to development is the vast number of wrong ideas which we have absorbed due to a western education. Removing these blindfolds from our heads will enable us to clearly see the pathways to progress. This must be the first step, though certainly it will not be enough by itself. It is essential to see the goal clearly, before one can take steps towards achieving it. In particular, development will not be achieved by any of the popular nostrums – such as privatization, liberalization, good governance, democracy etc. – being touted as the remedy for our ills. Another important consequence of unlearning material determinism is the importance of people. Human beings like you and I have changed the course of history by learning new and powerful ideas. Thus our ignorance is responsible for current conditions prevailing on the planet, and knowledge will guide us to the efforts required to change them. The understanding that we can change things is one of the most

powerful ideas that is required to make changes. The oft-expressed despair that we are locked into a bad condition, and there is nothing we can do to change things, is a powerful obstacle to progress.

2.4 MYTH #2: THE WORLD IS BUILT OF STONES, MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS

The materialist world view tells us that we live in a world constructed out of mountains, rivers, oceans and continents. There are physical laws which bind every particle to a determinate trajectory. These are concrete hard realities, written in stone, which constrain the scope of our possible actions. As individuals, we have very little power to change things. An individual weighing 80 Kilograms cannot make much of a dent in a world massing thousands of metric tons.

While no one can deny the existence of the world out there, it is also true that we all have a picture of this world in our own minds. This picture is a very rough approximation of the true reality out there. When we think about the world, we have no access to the “true reality” – we only have access to the mental representation of this reality within our minds. Nearly all the furniture in my mental landscape -- Hiroshima, Africa, the Mongols, the Steam Engine, Red Indians, Baghdad – consists of accounts that I have read and absorbed, rather than experienced reality. Our lives and actions are far more strongly influenced by this mental representation of the world, than by the real world.

The materialist world view is based on the idea that the mental representation of reality is a close and accurate match to the true reality. Or, if it is not a close match, then it ought to be. If there is no close correspondence between the real world and our mental model of it, then our mental model is flawed. We must fix the model to bring it into correspondence. This means that there is only one good mental model of reality, and that is the actual reality, which is unique, fixed, and the same for all. These widely believed materialist ideas de-emphasize the role of the mental models that we have of the world we live in. They also lead us to believe that it is only the hard and fixed concrete reality out there which matters.

For every collection of facts, there are many theories which fit all available facts. That is, the collection of facts does not uniquely determine a single valid theory. This is called “under-determination” and has been discussed in detail by Salim Rashid (2009). Thus, we always have available to us different theories which will fit all available facts. Thus, we have substantial amounts of freedom in creating a representation of the world which is faithful to all available facts.

As Keynes (1936,p 383) said:

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”

We have a large number of ideas about the world we live in. We are used to thinking in binaries – this idea is true and that one is false. We also believe that there is only one set of true ideas which describes accurately the world we live in. A collection of ideas which shapes the world we live in may be called a worldview. There are many alternative worldviews possible, all of which provide explanations of the facts we see. We have a free choice among worldviews, which is not constrained by facts. Choice among worldviews must be made on other grounds. Believing that there is only one possible view which is factual, objective, and concrete leaves us in ignorance of other frameworks and worldviews. When we

are not aware of the extremely important choice of how to organize the world we see into a coherent and understandable reality, then this choice is imposed upon us by others. That is, without any conscious awareness of having made a choice, we accept a worldview implicit in the ways that the world is described to us by others. In support of these ideas, Eribon (1992, p. 282) quotes Foucault:

There are more ideas on earth than intellectuals imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than "politicians" think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them. Ideas do not rule the world. But it is because the world has ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not passively ruled by those who are its leaders or those who would like to teach it, once and for all, what it must think.

2.5 TRUTH #2: THE WORLD IS SHAPED BY HUMAN CHOICES

In opposition to the materialist view, we would like to argue that the mental representation of the world we live in is extremely important. The world out there is not "knowable". The geography and history of this world is far too rich and complex to be grasped by any mind. This means that the materialist ideal of a perfectly accurate model of reality is impossible to achieve. This corresponds to the Quran[17:85]: *"And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little."* Our experience of the world we live in will be strongly influenced both by the small number of facts that we know, and also by the large number of facts that we never learned during our lives. This places tremendous premium on learning the important facts, since we can never know all of them. But how can we learn what is important, and what is not, without knowing all of them, to enable prioritization? This is the dilemma of human knowledge.

Our mental models of the world, and our normative conceptions of the good and the bad determine the choices we make during our lives. Our lives are far more deeply affected by the collection of human choices than by the material forces around us. It is stated in a Hadeeth that Allah T'aala creates circumstances in response to human actions – if we make good decisions, then good outcomes results. The Quran (30:41) (see also 42:30) shows that bad actions lead to bad outcomes:

(30:41) corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought

Our ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, as well as appropriate strategies for achieving these goals influence our actions. A huge portion of the world we live in is constructed by social conventions – human ideas about how we should live which command consensus of large communities. For example, we live in Pakistan. Pakistan is an imagined community; it does not exist, except in the minds of men. Suppose that we could achieve consensus tomorrow that nations should not exist, and that mankind should live in harmony and peace with no artificial national boundaries. Then nations would cease to exist tomorrow. The mental representation of the world does not consist purely of rocks and stones which are concrete and unchangeable. It also consists of powerful ideas, which have acquired concreteness and substance through our consensus and acceptance. Changing our mental models can change the world we live in.

Imagine a world in which all human beings are kind, considerate, compassionate, truthful, responsible, and have the characteristics described as good in the Quran. Alternatively imagine a world in which people are selfish, competitive, ruthless, power hungry, and have the characteristics praised by

Machiavelli, Friedman and Samuelson. Which world would you rather live in? Would it make a difference if there was a huge amount of wealth in the second world, while people lived simply in the first one? Clearly our lives are strongly shaped by the choices, good or bad, that people in our society make. Islam teaches us to prefer the simple life of our Prophet and the Companions, over the luxury and ostentation of Qaroon and Fir'own. The Quran (3:196) tells us not to be deceived by the apparent luxury of the unbelievers. This is in opposition to dominant western teachings which place selfish pursuit of luxury above any concern for the fate of the poor and the oppressed. These teachings influence humans to choose evil courses of action leading the current state of the world, where tremendous amounts of wealth concentrated in the hands of a few co-exists with huge amounts of misery and poverty for the masses of people. Islam teaches us to care for others over and above our self. The Quran (59:9) praises those who feed others, even though they themselves are in need. The Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. demonstrated that teaching people to make the right choices can change the course of history and the nature of the society we live in.

2.6 LESSON #2: CHOOSING THE GOOD

To build a better world, we do not need more factories and fertilizer. Rather, we need to change the choices that human beings are making during the course of their lives. The Quran (90:10) states that Allah T'aala has "*shown him the two highways [of good and evil]*". That is, this world is a test, and man has a choice between good and evil. The Prophet Mohammed S.A.W. came to teach mankind good and evil, and how to make good choices in preference to evil ones. Today, the world is in a bad state because humans are constantly choosing evil over good. The Quran exhorts us to prefer the good, even though our desires favor the evil. To improve the state of the world, we must carry out the mission of the Ummah to spread the good and prohibit the evil.

2.7 MYTH #3: OBJECTIVE HISTORY IS POSSIBLE

Another important way in which our mental models influence our lives is in our choice of history, which shapes our identities. The materialist view holds that there is only one unique objective history. In contrast, I would like to argue that history cannot be understood without a point of view. All points of view are automatically biased, and there is no such thing as an unbiased point of view. As a Muslim, I identify with Muslims who came to India to spread the benefits of the religion of Islam to the people living here. However, this same history could be entirely different if told from the point of view of the Hindus, Buddhists, or neutral third parties. What Indians call the war of independence of 1857 was a rebellion from the British viewpoint, and it could be called a battle between British and Indians from the Chinese viewpoint. The crucial point here is that there are no neutral, objective, and factual standpoints available. To minimize or legitimize British atrocities committed during the war is to deny validity to the native point of view. To fail to understand that exigencies of war necessitated harsh measures is to deny validity to the British point of view. Understanding requires simultaneous comprehension of alternative conflicting and contradictory narratives, and not that of a single unbiased and objective history. This is radically different from the conventional perspective that there is only one "true" and objective history.

History can never be objective because of many reasons. The complete historical record of all events that have occurred since the dawn of time is beyond the capacity of any human being to absorb and comprehend. Only a tiny portion of this history has been recorded, and there is strong evidence that

only partisans record historical events – those to whom it matters. Even if we select and learn a hundred thousand facts, these will be a small and insignificant portion of the available historical record. There is no chance that such a small collection of facts will be representative, or provide some sort of an objective picture of the totality, which will remain forever inaccessible to humans. Typically we can know or learn only a very tiny percentage of relevant historical facts within the span of a lifetime. As a result, our knowledge of history is automatically biased, and this is a problem which cannot be remedied.

2.8 TRUTH #3: WE CHOOSE OUR PAST, WHICH SHAPES OUR FUTURE

It is only after giving up hope of achieving a perfect, objective and complete record of history that it becomes possible to understand what history is about. Our past is not engraved in stone and unchangeable, as we imagine it to be. Rather, we choose the stories we will tell about our past. There are so many stories that it is impossible to tell them all. We are free to choose the stories we tell about our past, and our choices create the world we live in – they become part of our mental representation of the world. The vast majority of what I consider my history is events that I have read about, not ones I have experienced. So we choose our past by choosing what to learn about our past. The stories we tell about our past will determine what we consider worth striving for, and also delineate the space of actions open to us.

We find three different schools of thought regarding Islamic history – all three believe in the possibility of objective history, and hence dispute among themselves as to which is the “true” history. One school of thought projects the past glories of Islamic civilization, and refuses to look at the dark side. Another school of thought finds only darkness, and virtually no saving grace. A third school believes that objectivity requires that every time we tell a good story about the Islamic past, we must balance it by telling a bad story. Which is the right approach? To answer this question we must consider why we want to tell stories about our past.

A naïve answer is that we want to tell the “true” story of the Islamic civilization. As already discussed, this is impossible. It is not humanly possible to present the true story of fourteen centuries of an infinitely diverse and complex set of social, cultural, economic and political interactions within the vast Islamic empires. The available materials are too vast to be studied within a lifetime of any human being, and what is not known is far greater than what is known.

Going beyond the simplistic “search for truth,” history serves a varied and complex set of purposes which we cannot adequately summarize in a few paragraphs. Instead, we will just focus on a few points of relevance to what follows. History serves to define our relation to other human beings, and to the large scale human projects and visions which shape the world we live in. It provides meaning to our lives, by putting them in the context of a bigger picture. It provides a purpose and direction for our struggles.

2.9 LESSON #3: HISTORY AS A TOOL AND WEAPON

To understand the functions of history, imagine forgetting our history for a moment. Then we become just one anonymous individual, a drop in the ocean. History is what ties us to the past and connects us

to the future, giving our life meaning beyond its finite span. To give a concrete illustration, consider the following summary of Islamic history by Marshall Hodgson (1977, p.71):

Muslims are assured in the Quran, 'You have become the best community ever raised up for mankind, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, and having faith in God.' Earnest men have taken this prophecy seriously to the point of trying to mould the history of the whole world in accordance with it. Soon after the founding of the faith, Muslims succeeded in building a new form of society, which in time carried with it its own distinctive institutions, its art and literature, its science and scholarship, its political and social forms, as well as its cult and creed, all bearing an unmistakable Islamic impress. In the course of centuries, this new society spread over widely diverse climes, throughout most of the Old World. It came closer than any had ever come to uniting all mankind under its ideals.

... Those who have undertaken to rebuild life in Islamic terms have ventured on an enterprise with a high potential reward – that of winning through to the best that is open to mankind; but with correspondingly great risks of error and failure.

Understanding and absorbing this history makes us a part of an enormous enterprise to spread the good to the entire human race. This enterprise has spanned centuries and taken billions of people within its fold. We can identify with its successes and feel sorrow at its failures. Such a history provides courage, vision, perspective, and allows us to be philosophical, put up with short term defeats without losing hope. This is radically different from the bleak perspective of the single individual without history, who is necessarily confined to a single lifetime of experiences with no past and no future.

This is why we must tell stories of heroism and valor, instead of despair and defeat, so that our generations have the courage to face adverse circumstances. We must tie in our lives to bigger projects of mankind so that they acquire meaning. To select exceptional stories from our past, extraordinary examples of good behavior, is not "biased" history. This must be done to create inspiring role models; to allow us to persist in enjoining the good even against overwhelming odds. It is our tremendous good fortune that Islamic history has such extraordinary events. Our ancestors have done things which no other civilization can match. We just give one example, out of a thousand and one possibilities. The way that our Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. forgave bitter enemies, and celebrated the conquest of Mecca with humility, and a night of worship at Ka'ba, has been an inspiration for all Muslim conquerors. It stands in stark contrast with the idea that "all is fair in love and war," and the rapine and loot associated with conquest that is considered part of human nature by some writers.

3 EUROPEAN CONQUEST OF THE GLOBE

All of us who have had a western education directly or indirectly have absorbed certain key tenets of the dominant western world view. Biases in western accounts have now received wide recognition, and are labeled as "Eurocentric" ideas. We will label these ideas as "myths," even though they are perfectly valid and justifiable within their own context. This is because these ideas are extremely harmful to any genuine prospects for development for Muslim countries. We will focus on three central ideas, even though there are many other candidates, and many other ways of classification.

3.1 MYTH #4: THE ENLIGHTENMENT

European historians tell us that the history of mankind begins in the 1650's in Europe with the Enlightenment. Before this, mankind as a whole was immature and ignorant, in a childlike state – the Dark Ages. The Age of Reason lifted the curtains of darkness in Europe, where mankind first learned how to think for themselves, and to understand the world around us. As a result, science, technology, democracy, and virtually all good things known to mankind were invented in Europe. Blaut (2000) has documented that popular and influential thinkers and historians like Weber, White, Mann, Hall, and Landes agree on the idea that “Europeans were uniquely capable of creative and scientific thought.” Muslims see no reason to doubt these accounts, since Europeans are manifestly wealthier and more powerful than the rest of the world, and evidence of their technological prowess surrounds us in our daily lives, in the form of countless inventions. Believing these Eurocentric accounts of history leads to a serious inferiority complex. Salman Rushdie provides a perfect illustration: in his book called “Shame” he denigrates his family. In “Midnight's Children,” he denigrates his country and culture holding them up to public ridicule. In “Satanic Verses” he denigrates his religion and heritage. Cure for the “Rushdie Complex” lies in learning more about the Enlightenment and its consequences.

3.2 TRUTH #4: ALL HUMANS PARTICIPATED IN CREATION OF HISTORY

There are many ways to get a broader perspective on history, which provides deeper insights. It is impossible to cover these perspectives within a short essay, so we highlight some aspects of crucial importance for our present purposes. In the first subsection below, we discuss how the Eurocentric account seriously neglects the contributions of other civilizations. The second subsection highlights the Islamic contribution, as especially relevant to the project of re-writing history from an Islamic point of view.

3.2.1 4.1: Global Systems

World Systems point of view developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and others stresses the linkages between all the human beings living on the planet, as well as the linkages between the artificially separated spheres of knowledge of society, politics, and economy. The one sided Eurocentric view can be replaced by a much richer picture of the joint contributions of all humans in weaving the complex fabric of current society.

In *The Theft of History*, Jack Goody (2012) documents how Europeans borrowed and adopted inventions of other civilizations, and claimed them as their own. The Incas were master botanists and created maize by cultivating and cross breeding inedible and poisonous plants. Their inventions continue to feed the planet. Four great Chinese inventions of compass, gunpowder, paper, and printing have had a lasting impact on human history. Indian contributions in arithmetic, philosophy, manufacture of sugar, have been largely forgotten. Muslim discoveries in cartography, heliocentric astronomy, physics, optics, pharmacopeia and surgery have been largely suppressed, and European imitators have been put forth as originators of these ideas in current histories.

3.2.2 4.2: Islam sparks the Re-naiissance

The Crusades created a hostility to Islam and Muslims in Europe which has survived to this day. The recent western wars against “terrorism” – modern euphemism for Islam – have been recognized and named as the modern crusades by many. While one dimension of these wars is the physical combat, perhaps the more important dimension is the ideological warfare against Islam, which creates doubts, shame, and loss of self-confidence among Muslims. Part of an antidote is to re-emphasize the Islamic contributions to the world. This involves reclaiming the treasures stolen via the *Theft of History* mentioned earlier. It also involves remembering the forgotten heritage of the Islamic civilization. A clue as to how this might be done is furnished by the following passage, taken from an introduction to Graham (2006)

In the Middle Ages, while Europe was mired in superstition and feudal chaos, Baghdad was the intellectual center of the world. It was there that an army of translators and scholars took the wisdom of the Greeks and combined it with their own cultural traditions to create a scientific, mathematical and philosophical golden age. Their accomplishments were staggering, including the development of modern medicine, chemistry, and algebra. Muslim scientists correctly calculated the circumference of the globe in the tenth century. Muslim musicians introduced the guitar and musical notation to the Europe. And Muslim philosophers invented the scientific method and paved the way for the Enlightenment. At the dawn of the Renaissance, Christian Europe was wearing Persian clothes, singing Arab songs, reading Spanish Muslim philosophy and eating off Mamluk Turkish brassware. This is the story of how Muslims taught Europe to live well and think clearly. It is the story of how Islam created the Modern World.

Morgan (2008) highlights Muslim contributions which most Muslims do not know today, as they have forgotten their heritage. Among the greatest inventions of the Muslims are ideas which have become marginalized due to the excessive worship of gold which has become the religion of the economists. These are the ideas of equality of human beings, brotherhood, and mutual responsibility. In “The Enlightenment Quran” Ziad El-Marsafy (2009) has documented the influence of the Quran on Rousseau and Voltaire, as well as other Enlightenment thinkers. The slogans of “Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality” of the French Revolution derive from the Quran. These ideas were implemented in Muslim societies in the form of equal opportunities for education and free health care by waqf institutions in a way that has only recently been matched in some, but not all, Western societies. After observing the senseless slaughter of millions in the two world wars, historian Toynbee (1960) was moved to say: “The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam. In the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue ... of tolerance and peace”

3.3 MYTH #5: THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN

By the late nineteenth century, people of European origins had control of about 90% of the planet Earth. Why and how did this happen? The answer to this question is crucial to understanding the world we live in today. The standard story, which is widely believed, ties in to the Enlightenment myth. After having been given the gifts of reason, science, technology, democracy, and other treasures, the Europeans looked around them and saw that the entire world was in darkness. Ignorance, cruelty, superstition, despotism, and all kinds of evil were spread throughout the world. The Europeans had grown up, while all other human beings were in the stage of infancy. Like Prometheus, they felt burdened by the responsibility of taking these gifts of the Gods to the entire mankind. Out of this sense of responsibility,

they sacrificed the comforts and luxuries of their homes, and undertook the hardships of strenuous journeys to all corners of the globe in a noble effort to spread these benefits to all of mankind. Ignorant barbarians who resisted these advances were eliminated in the “savage wars” to bring peace and enlightenment to the planet.

3.4 TRUTH #5: LOOT AND PILLAGE OF THE WORLD

The announced purposes of the US Invasion of Iraq were to free the populace from the clutches of an evil dictator, to bring them democracy and good governance, as well as to protect the world from Weapons of Mass Destruction in the hands of a madman. Senior White House officials like Henry Kissinger, Paul O’Neill and Alan Greenspan have stated that Iraq war was planned for the control of the vast oil reserves of Iraq; see Weissman (2007) and Cohn (2013). The discrepancy between the announced goals, widely believed by the USA public, and the (not-so) hidden agenda corresponds closely to the discrepancy between the story of the White Man’s Burden and the real objectives of colonization of the globe.

Finding overland trade routes blocked by powerful Islamic empires, Europeans sought sea routes to fabled lands of India, China and others. However, these European explorers were indifferent between murder, theft, piracy and trade as means to make a profit. When Columbus failed to find the gold he had promised to the financiers of his voyage, he captured slaves instead. When the East India trading company conquered Bengal using treachery and a hired army, they imposed heavy taxes leading to death by starvation of 10 million Bengalis. To bring them the benefits of European civilization, Belgian King Leopold taught the Congolese Western work ethics: the Belgians took wives and children hostage and kept them in subhuman conditions until their African husbands fulfilled their quotas harvesting rubber. Soldiers would torture, chop off hands, or kill the inhabitants if they faltered in their work. This resulted in the deaths of 4 to 8 million Africans in the Belgian Congo. This dirty work was advertised as a Christian charity for the benefit of the Congolese natives by the Belgians.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Bengal was the most prosperous region in the area, with abundant crops and advanced industries in textile and steel. Following the British conquest at Plassey, within a period of ten years, rapacious tax policies led to death by starvation of more than one third of the population. The annual transfers of about 30 million pounds from India to the Empire, and prohibitions of development of industry, led to de-industrialization, and repeated famines in a once prosperous land. In real terms, revenues extracted from British India were far larger than those provided by the US to Europe under the Marshall Plan, which permitted European Economies to recover from the complete devastation created by World War II.

Similarly exploitation of Africa, led to complete destruction of several native empires and cultures. To the misfortune of Africa, they had no natural resources. As a result, the human beings were made the objects of a devastating slave trade. Numbers are in dispute, but over 10 million human beings were transported to serve as slaves in Europe and America. It is estimated that for every person transported, about 10 died in the brutal processes of capture and transport. The social fabric of the cultures that constituted Africa was destroyed beyond the hope of reconstitution. Because materialists cannot see social capital, thousands of pages of contemporary journals research the mystery of exceedingly poor rates of economic development in Africa, without touching on its root causes. Similar fates met the

indigenous peoples of Latin America, North America and Australia. The world was enslaved to serve as a production factory for European capitalists. For those with a conscience, the White Man's burden of guilt is heavy. Herder (2010, p 206) writes, ironically, that:

Savages all over the world will become ripe for conversion as they grow fonder of our brandy and our luxuries; they will soon approach our culture and become, so help me God, good, strong and happy men, just like us! ... In Europe slavery has been abolished Nonetheless this did not prevent our raiding three other continents for slaves, trading in them, banishing them to silver mines and sugar plantations. But then, they are not European, not Christian! What is more, we get silver, precious stones, spices, sugar and - secret diseases, in return.

3.5 LESSON #5: THE ETHICS OF IMPERIALISTS

We have all absorbed the dominant myth, that we are now modern and "civilized" and far more advanced than any other civilizations of the past. It is time to take a deep breath and consider an alternative, frightening possibility. Temporarily forget current history and world situation and make your mind a blank slate. Consider for a moment, a situation where barbarians, like the Huns, and Visigoths and Mongols, who razed cities and enjoyed building mountains of skulls of innocent victims, take over the world. What kind of ethics would they promote? What would be their philosophy of life? In other words, what is the opposite of civilization?

A key element in a barbarian philosophy would be the law of the jungle: might makes right. If we can get it by force, than it is rightfully ours. Another element would be lack of compassion and sympathy; we cannot afford to feel pity for the victims of our loot and pillage. Destroying cities and nations, and killing millions of innocents should not disturb our conscience or cause loss of sleep. Another element would be that life is about gathering wealth and enjoying the luxuries and privileges that it entails, without any regard for others. Similarly, the philosophies of cut-throat competition and let the best man win would be a good match for a barbarian life style. Betrayal of oaths of fidelity to intimate relations would be a joking matter, rather than a serious breach of integrity. Barbarian children would play games teaching them to shoot and kill and enjoy watching blood, gore and guts spill out of random strangers, or even friends. Movies and media would teach people to enjoy sadism and senseless violence, and to regard assassins, thieves, prostitutes and other highly immoral characters as normal human beings.

Now open your eyes and consider the world we live in. The world leader USA felt no compunction in launching the Iraq war under false pretenses which has resulted in the loss of more than a million civilian lives. Deliberate destruction of Iraqi infrastructure including hospitals, schools, and water/sanitation works, ruining the lives of millions of Iraqis, was carried out to create profitable business opportunities for the "re-construction" of Iraq. US Secretary Madeleine Albright stated on public TV that death of half a million Iraqi children was a price worth paying for achievement of US policy objectives. In the first lecture on Justice to the future world leaders in a Harvard undergraduate course, Professor Michael Sandel (2013) constructs complex artificial situations where it might be necessary to do murder or cannibalism for the greater good. He states that moral questions have been argued for thousands of years without reaching any resolution. The goal of the lecture is to show that there are no absolute standards for morality, and evil acts may be justified if they lead to larger benefits. This is essential training for future leaders who may have to condemn millions of innocents to violent deaths, in pursuit of higher goals like corporate profits. Dominant economic theories state that the

object of life is to maximize consumption, without any regard for others. Thus we live in world where 25,000 people die every day from diseases related to malnutrition, when the money spent on fighting obesity and obesity related diseases would be enough to end hunger on the planet. Ph. D. economists learn to value academic careers, but do not learn anything about how to help improve the lives of the impoverished bottom billion. Leading textbooks in growth theory state that if we maximize the wealth for society as a whole, it will automatically trickle down to the poor – even though this has been repeatedly disproven empirically. Dominant economic theories hold that the best way to organize business is via cut-throat competition, as this will lead to maximum efficiency. Ruthless exploitation of the world by multinationals unrestrained by ethical concerns has brought the world to the brink of environmental catastrophe. These theories are currently being taught at leading universities throughout the world. The lessons thus absorbed create the world we see around us.

An essential element of the struggle for good must be to replace these barbaric theories by more humane alternatives.

3.6 MYTH #6: SECRETS OF EUROPEAN CONQUEST.

Granted that global conquest was not achieved via surgical strikes which precisely and accurately eliminated evil, without affecting the good. Admittedly, there was a lot of collateral damage; millions of innocents lost their lives in the “savage wars of peace” meant to bring enlightenment to the planet. Nonetheless, we must admit that the Europeans did conquer the world. This is not a small feat. They must be superior in many ways in order to achieve it.

Many have searched for reasons and explanations for this European superiority. To the early writers, it was obvious that the White race was superior to others, and this was the reason why they conquered the world. Blaut (2000) has listed thirty Eurocentric explanations for the rise of Europe to global dominance. Even though he has debunked them all, these explanations are offered by very respectable and influential academics, whose views continue to be cited and to shape mainstream views of history. As an illustration, we list five of these thirty reasons below, many of which have popular books devoted to amplification and justification.

1. People of the white race have an inherited superiority over the people of other races.
2. Europeans were uniquely rational, innovative and progressive.
3. Europeans were uniquely capable of creative and scientific thought.
4. Europeans uniquely, in ancient and/or medieval times, developed the concept and institution of private property and/or that of markets.
5. Europeans were uniquely venturesome, uniquely given to exploration and overseas expansion.

Several authors have debunked these myths, showing that Europeans were not unique in the ways imagined above. That still leaves us a puzzle: how to explain the rise of the West? We offer a simple alternative to the dominant theories listed above. Throughout history, advanced civilizations become decadent, and are defeated and destroyed by youthful, energetic barbarian tribes. Ibn-e-Khaldun (2004) noted this as a regular cycle in his history. The defeat of Muslims at the hand of Europeans has striking

similarities to the earlier destruction of the Muslim civilization by the Mongols. More specific evidence is provided below.

3.7 TRUTH #6: A COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN VIOLENCE

An amazingly large number of different ideas have been presented as causes of the Rise of Europe, and new theories continue to come up. The vast majority of these are materialistic explanations, based superiority of European lands, or resources, or humans. We would like to propose an idealistic explanation. Certain unique European ideas, different from those prevailing among the rest of humanity, led to the global conquest. We list three European inventions which eventually led to the conquest of the globe by Europe.

3.7.1 6.1: Glorification of War

Hoffman (2012) provides an explanation of the European comparative advantage in violence in the following terms:

In Europe, the kings and princes had been raised to fight one another, with toy soldiers, pikes, and firearms as children and actual training in their youth. Advisers like Machiavelli might tell them that princes “ought to have no object, thought, or profession but war.” Their own fathers would teach them that war was a path to glory, a means to “distinguish [kings] . . . and to fulfill the great expectations ...inspired in the public,” in the words of Louis XIV’s instructions for his son. They took the lesson to heart and once enthroned often surrounded themselves with images exalting their role as military leaders or glorifying the martial exploits of their reigns, as Louis XIV himself did at Versailles. And they pursued war with gusto, at least if they ruled over a major power. Fighting had gone beyond the needs of defense and become, in the words of Galileo, a “royal sport.”

The glorification of war, and its acceptance as a natural state, led to the Military Revolution of early modern Europe, discussed by Geoffrey Parker (1996). This was a product of the intense rivalries between the nascent nation-states that led them to make significant innovations in strategy and tactics, armament, and logistics. This was done efficiently by the use of gunpowder, which was substantially advanced in the West. Nearly three centuries of continuous warfare in Europe gave them a "comparative advantage in violence," as Hoffman (2012) puts it. The trend continues to this day, where leaders of US and UK find the most effective boost to lagging popularity to be good fortunes in a war. For instance, victory in Falklands brought popularity to Thatcher, and victory over Russians made Reagan popular. D’Ambrosio (2011) has documented the dramatic difference between the Hollywood glorification of war in Sands of Iwo Jima, and the tragedy of it in the real life of the war hero Ira Hayes. In contrast, the vast majority of the rest of humanity enjoyed and preferred peace to war. For example, Hoffman (2012) writes that the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, who died in Peking in 1610 after spending 28 years in China– noted that although the China could easily conquer neighboring states neither the emperors nor Chinese officials had any interest in doing so. “Certainly, this is very different from our own countries [in Europe],” he noted, for European kings are “driven by the insatiable desire to extend their dominions.”

Children learn from the popular computer game “Civilization” that the goal is to achieve global dominance by destroying other civilizations. Among societies which have experienced it, civilization has an entirely different meaning. As Gandhi put it: “Western civilization? I think it would be a good idea.”

3.7.2 6.2: Insularity, Intolerance, and Racism

For reasons too complex to describe here, Europeans never managed to develop the cosmopolitan culture of the Ottomans or of Islamic Spain. There is some truth in the lyrics to a popular song “ ...The French hate the Germans. The Germans hate the Poles. Italians hate Yugoslavs. ...” It is hard to tell if the perpetual warfare in Europe was a cause or an effect of this; it seems likely that there was mutual reinforcement of inherent tendencies. One of the driving forces behind the development of the European Union was the hope that tying the countries into interlocking economic relationships would be a way to prevent the warfare which has characterized European history.

This warfare eventually led to the development of “nationalism,” perhaps the most deadly philosophy invented by man. Millions died for their countries in the two conflagrations named as world wars in the twentieth century. The idea that perpetual warfare is the natural state of being between different nations has become deeply ingrained in the European psyche. Countless fictional works (like the War of the Worlds) as well as academics assume that encounter between different nations must necessarily be on hostile terms. The most recent example is the “Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel P. Huntington (2011). The idea that two civilisations can meet, learn from each other, trade, enjoy benefits of mutual friendship simply does not occur to Huntington and similar scholars in the European tradition. It is assumed that war, conflict and attempts by one to dominate the other must inevitably result from contact as this is the lesson of European history.

Racism was rampant, and there was near consensus that non-white races were not fully human. Thus Europeans had no compunctions in hunting Australian aborigines like animals, and in shooting and killing the inferior races. In the US Supreme Court decision Dred Scott v. Sandford issued on March 6, 1857, Chief Justice Roger Taney declared negroes to be “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Lord Cecil Rhodes (1902) declared that “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings; what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence ... ” The millions of pounds transferred from the colonies of inferior beings to the white colonizers led to Lord Cecil Rhodes becoming the richest man on the planet. Western academics have argued that these transfers were just and equitable payments for the good governance provided to the colonies. The same process continues today, using different mechanisms. Shah (2005) provides the following statistics regarding money transfers from the poorest countries to the rich: For the poorest countries (approximately 60), \$550 billion has been paid in both principal and interest over the last three decades, on \$540bn of loans, and yet there is still a \$523 billion dollar debt burden.

3.7.3 6.3: All is Fair in Love and War

Since warfare in Europe was often justified on religious grounds, European intellectuals sought a secular political philosophy as an alternative to religion. The “social contract” became the secular basis of

morality. Hegel noted that the social contract was by consensus within a nation-state. If the state lost a war, then the conquerors would re-write the social contract and thereby re-write morality. To defend themselves, states could act in ways that went beyond any moral codes – states create morality and therefore are not bound by it. This creates a justification for any atrocity “for reasons of the state.” Glover (2012) has noted the dark record of the many atrocities committed in the twentieth century. For example, continuation of British blockade of food to Germans after the surrender of Germany, led to death by starvation of about 800,000 Germans. Bauman (1989) has analyzed the Holocaust, in which million of civilian Jews – men, women and children – were scientifically exterminated in specially designed ovens. Baumann argues that the rational philosophy that ends justify means, which continues to be taught at leading universities, was, in the final analysis the cause of the holocaust. That is, lack of absolute moral codes have caused, and will continue to cause human disasters.

Another unique European invention is the philosophy of social Darwinism. The advent of British colonization of Africa coincided with the era of scientific racism as represented by social Darwinism (survival of the fittest). The British believed that because they had superior weaponry and were therefore more technologically advanced than the Africans, that they had a right to colonize and exploit the resources of the Africans in the name of promoting civilization. It is, of course, inherently contradictory for an invading force to usher in “civilization.”

Similarly, no other civilization can offer a parallel to Machiavelli, whose wisdom continues to guide Western leaders. He advised princes to be cunning and duplicitous, to command by fear, rather than love, to deceive by making and breaking promises, and to be ruthless in treatment of enemies. This was taken to heart and made the base of western politics; political scientist Ludlow (2005) has documented how faithfully US Politicians follow Machiavellian prescriptions. The western conquest of the globe was accompanied by unmatched ruthlessness and treachery, as has been documented in numerous “subaltern” accounts that have emerged – for a moving example of the native American perspective on the English-American conquest of the continent, see Brown (1991). As Machiavelli had correctly foreseen, the vast majority of people are simple and honest, and hence easily deceived.

3.8 LESSON #6: FINDING OTHER PATHWAYS

The primary lesson of “modernization theories” is that Europeans have reached the apex of civilization, and we must imitate them to achieve their success. There are two fundamental difficulties with this idea. Firstly, it is not possible for us to conquer the globe and the loot the wealth of other civilizations, in order to imitate the European formula for success. Secondly, even if it was possible, it would not be desirable for us, as human beings, to achieve the comparative advantage in violence, ruthlessness, and treachery that led to the European conquest of the globe. Simplicity and honesty are precious human qualities, to be prized over cunning and ruthlessness.

It is true that the so-called “underdeveloped” world is in very bad shape. We were living peacefully, when alien invaders came and destroyed local institutions and cultures. All natural resources were captured as raw material to feed capitalist production processes. All of the population was turned into cogs of a capitalist machine designed to maximize production and wealth at the center. Instead of developing human potential, an educational system was designed to teach students that the goal of life is to sell their labor for money. Those who did not cooperate were ruthlessly eliminated as being

obstacles to progress. Our best minds have absorbed these lessons of a western education, and sell their services to the west for high salaries, depriving the Ummah of precious manpower. The ideals that service to mankind and Ummah takes precedence over a life of personal luxury have been forgotten. It will be very difficult to recover from this damage. Creative strategies are required. The first step is to liberate ourselves from the narratives of Eurocentric history, which prevent us from looking in the directions required for progress. This essay provides the foundations for alternative sketch of history.

4 DECLINE AND FALL OF THE EAST

Corresponding to myths of European superiority, we have myths of Eastern inferiority. After all, it was necessary to come up with some justification for the ruthless exploitation of human and natural resources of the entire planet. Although the myth of racial superiority has lost intellectual respectability, it still survives in covert forms. It is worth stating and rebutting since swallowing the myth leads to despair about the possibilities of change and improvement. This despair is itself one of the biggest obstacles to change.

4.1 MYTH #7: SUPERIORITY OF THE WHITE RACES

There was an intense debate in the 1980's about the Eurocentric bias of a course at Stanford which taught the Great Books of the Western Civilization. While some advocated including books from other traditions and civilizations, there was a minority which publicly expressed the view of Lord Macaulay (1958) that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Perhaps the majority was in agreement, but remained neutral due to pressures to be politically correct. Similarly, the issue of whether or not the Muslims can "self-govern" has been debated at the highest levels in USA. Harvard professors Herrnstein & Murray (2010) have published the "The Bell Curve" which suggests that Blacks are genetically inferior to Whites in intelligence.

Some years ago, in the process of researching education in Pakistan, the World Bank administered some intelligence tests via a large, expensive, and time-consuming survey to a target population. Dr. Ali Khan of Johns Hopkins was assigned to review the project. He noted that the particular tests administered were designed for people of subnormal intelligence. It had been well established in the psychological literature that these tests had no validity for people of normal intelligence. As another observer remarked, the World Bank experts consider the people of Pakistan to be morons².

The idea of racial superiority of the whites has played a far greater role in history than has been recognized. Entire peoples were exterminated and enslaved in Latin America, Africa and Asia in order to capture their natural resources. This would not have been possible if these "miserable specimens" of inferior beings had been regarded as human beings equal to the Whites. What accounts for the difference between the development trajectories of Australia, USA and India, all former colonies of England? Racism allowed ruthless exploitation of one, and prohibited equally ruthless exploitation of the others. Even today, the same lessons are being applied. The destruction of the entire nation of Iraq in order to capture its oil resources is only possible because Arabs are not fully human. It would not have been possible to carry out this war if Iraq had been part of Europe or peopled by whites.

² Personal conversations with Dr. Ali Khan of Johns Hopkins, in which he discussed this event.

4.2 TRUTH #7: BROTHERHOOD

Against this myth, there is strong evidence that all human beings belong to a common genetic pool, and hence are genetically equivalently endowed. The idea that only Europeans have accomplished great things is based mainly on ignorance – Macaulay (1958) acknowledged that he did not know a word of Arabic or Sanskrit, in the same tract in which he condemns the entire literature. When Australian aborigines were being hunted as animals, they had the knowledge to live off the land which Australian immigrants lacked and hence had to face frequent famines in a land of plenty; see Hughes (2010). Similarly, all civilizations have made original contributions and achieved excellence in ways that others have not.

4.3 LESSON #7: THE COURAGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Quran asserts that man can only get what he strives for. The false idea of racial inferiority, and the false idea that our ancestors never accomplished anything worthwhile, limits the range of our ambitions. Once the lesson of brotherhood of all human beings is absorbed, it becomes possible to strive for the highest goals that humans have tried for. These highest goals are NOT, contrary to dominant myths suitable for looters of the world, the maximization of wealth. Rather, every man has been given the potential to become superior to the angels, and also the capability to be worse than the beasts. Depending on the environment and the efforts made, men can develop to a greater or lesser extent. Those who remain undeveloped spiritually can, like Machiavelli, prefer to rule by fear, because they cannot sense the warmth in the hearts of fellow men. They can drop fire bombs on cities, frying human beings on hot pavements, without feeling any compassion. Spiritual development leads to an awareness of the linkages between all human beings. The most developed of all human beings was our prophet Mohammed S.A.W. who was sent as a mercy for all mankind. His heart was so full of compassion that Allah T'aala counsels him in the Holy Quran not to kill himself with sorrow on the behalf of those who would not believe and thereby condemn themselves to eternal suffering. Our goal in life is to try and emulate this excellence, to the extent possible for us. This does not involve maximizing happiness, as the utilitarians believe. Rather, it involves the opening of our hearts to all of the creation of God, which may result in increased suffering, because we are able to feel the pain of others.

4.4 MYTH #8 ORIENTAL DESPOTISM

Just as the liberation of Iraq was a convenient pretext for its invasion, so the idea that the world was governed by despots and dictators furnished a convenient excuse for invasion by colonizing imperialist powers. Examining the history of the idea, Armagan (2006) documents how the idea of “despotism” has been used for centuries as a means for slandering systems of government which differ from western systems. The term is conveniently flexible, and can be stretched to fit many molds – four different interpretations and usages are identified by Armagan. Figueria (1995) has examined how the myth of oriental despotism was useful, became widely accepted, and was adapted for a variety of political purposes in European literature, without having any contact with the reality of Eastern history. Eisenstadt (2003, Chapter 17, p 418) writes about the Myth of Oriental Despotism that “According to this very widespread myth in large parts of Western analyses of Asian politics, these societies were ruled by Oriental Despots, and of the political regimes that developed within them as Oriental Despotism, in which all power was seen as concentrated within the hands of the rulers, and the various sectors of the society were not granted any autonomy beyond purely local affairs, and even these affairs were tightly regulated by Great Despots.” Similarly, Balahnova

(2005-6) revisits the idea that the Eastern societies were "despotic societies". She collects a lot of examples demonstrating that there were some democratic states among Eastern societies, and even in the societies where the royal power was really strong, the kings were limited in their desires by law. And even such social categories which we consider slaves were protected under the law.

Edward Said's (1978) book "Orientalism" is the classic study of how myths about the East were manufactured in the West. The unfortunate part is that even the Orientals learn their own history from these western accounts and therefore end up believing these myths. Thus they believe that democracy was invented in the west, that our societies have always been autocratic, and that this is one of the reasons that we are "backwards", and will remain backwards.

4.5 TRUTH #8: DESTRUCTION OF WELL FUNCTIONING SOCIETIES.

Entirely contrary to the enlightenment myth, the world was not in darkness when the Europeans managed temporarily to forge peace among themselves by agreeing to conquer the world instead of fighting each other. All over the world, in all cultures, there was a wide variety of functioning systems for education, health, social welfare and justice. These systems were of no use to the imperialist invaders, and were completely destroyed in the process of colonization. The destruction was so thorough that not even the memory remained within indigenous populations:

Oh! the loss of the treasures of the caravan; Even worse, the loss of the sense of loss. – Iqbal (free translation)

New educational systems were put in place which had two functions:

1. To indoctrinate student to love the imperialists and hate their own roots, heritage and ancestors.
2. To train bureaucrats, administrators, armies, and other personnel required for the governance of the empires.

This training was essential to create people who could ruthlessly exploit their own people on behalf of the alien invaders. As Lord Macaulay (1958) put it: *We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.* A special class of people who would act on behalf of the imperialists was created in all the lands conquered by the Europeans. In return for power, wealth, and special privileges granted to them by the European ruling class, the *compradores* betrayed the interests of their own people by acting on behalf of the imperialists. This class, not recognized clearly, plays a very important role in the world today. Frantz Fanon (2008) studied how the psyche of Africans is distorted by dominance of whites. Dabashi (2011) emphasizes the importance of this "compradore" class in the Islamic Mediterranean.

All Muslims are required to learn the Quran, which has led to traditionally high literacy rates within Islamic societies. Muslims paid heed to the call of the Quran to spend generously of their wealth in charity. As a result, an extensive numbers of properties were donated as trusts (Awqaf). These provided for health, education and social services throughout the Islamic lands. These were systematically seized and appropriated by colonizers, and nothing was put into place to replace them. This led to creation of

illiteracy, misery, poverty, famines, and social problems on a huge scale, in previously well functioning societies. Similar processes occurred in all colonized societies as functional systems of self governance were replaced by colonial systems designed with a single minded focus on economic exploitation. Entire societies were completely uprooted and destroyed. As a single example among many, Elkins (2005) author of *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* writes that:

I discovered that British forces wielded their authority with a perverse colonial logic: only by physically and psychologically atomising almost the entire Kikuyu population of 1.5 million could colonial authority be restored and the civilising mission reinstated.

I used archival evidence collected in Kenya and Britain, along with eyewitness testimony that I collected from hundreds of detention survivors. A number of former detainees told me that electric shock was widely used, as well as cigarettes and fire. As I wrote: "Bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, and hot eggs were thrust up men's rectums and women's vaginas. The screening teams whipped, shot, burned, and mutilated Mau Mau suspects, ostensibly to gather intelligence for military operations, and as court evidence."

It is very important to understand that colonial structures of education, justice, governance, policing, markets, taxation, transportation etc. were all designed for maximally efficient extraction of resources from the native population. In all of the colonies, these were top-down structures – the population had no say in governance, and no opportunities to voice complaints. The Americans successfully rebelled against "taxation without representation," and the Australians were granted self-governance, but the rebellions of the lesser races were ruthlessly crushed.

Understanding colonial governance structures and their purposes is of extreme importance in understanding the nature of the world we live in today. The myth that these were meant for the benefit of the natives is widely believed. For example, the infrastructure of roads and train-tracks is considered a gift of the British to the Indian Empire. In fact, these were explicitly constructed to enable quick transport of troops to put down anticipated rebellions. As we have seen, native educational systems were destroyed, and alternate systems were designed to produce subservient administrators for the empire. Similarly, transport systems were designed all over the colonies to allow extraction of raw materials and for convenient supply of exports from the mother countries. Local justice systems were shut down, and alien justice systems introduced which made justice almost entirely inaccessible to the vast majority of the populace. As an illustration, George Monbiot (2012) reports on British suppression and concealment of records of its imperial atrocities:

The story of benign imperialism, whose overriding purpose was not to seize land, labour and commodities but to teach the natives English, table manners and double-entry book-keeping, is a myth that has been carefully propagated. Last week's revelations, that the British government systematically destroyed the documents detailing mistreatment of its colonial subjects, and that the Foreign Office then lied about a secret cache of files ... was ignored by ... the British press.

Suppression of evidence was scarcely necessary. Even when the documentation of great crimes is abundant, it is ... simply ignored. In an article for the Daily Mail in 2010, for example, the historian Dominic Sandbrook announced that "Britain's empire stands out as a beacon of tolerance, decency and the rule of law ... Nor did Britain countenance anything like the dreadful tortures committed in French Algeria." Could he really have been unaware of the history he is disavowing?

The myth of a “benign imperialism” suggests that there were no adverse effects on development of the colonies even though millions of pounds of resources were siphoned off yearly, and entire populations virtually enslaved to serve imperialist aims. This myth is extremely harmful as it serves to divert attention from the root causes of “under-development”. Without a correct diagnosis of the causes, it is impossible to administer a correct remedy.

4.6 LESSON #8: REBUILDING FROM RUINS

Weber (1930, Chapter 2) wrote that the “spirit of capitalism” is the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself, to the point of being “absolutely irrational.” Rapacious greed of multinationals has led to tremendous damage to environment. Nearly every day, many kinds of birds and plants species become extinct due to loss of habitat. The last bird of its kind issues mating calls, but there is no one left to hear. Once they die out, there is no way to re-create them.

Over the past few centuries, large numbers of ways of living, cultures, languages, ways of thinking about the world, and ways of relating to other humans, have been destroyed beyond the possibility of re-building by the processes of colonization. The philosophy of survival of the fittest, which continues to dominate western political thought, suggests that this is a good thing. The power to destroy other civilizations confers the right to do so. The new generations in the colonies have been brought up on the myths that their ancestors were inferior sub-humans, and that hope and progress lies only in imitation of the west. The resulting inferiority complex prevents the formerly colonized peoples from thinking for themselves. Instead, foreign experts tell us what problems we face, and how we can solve them.

It is necessary to create less Eurocentric histories, and emphasize accomplishments of non-Europeans, in order to create self-confidence among the colonized people. Only this will allow us to look for ourselves at our problems and create the solutions. The list of 20 issues in the new Washington Consensus does not include any of the problems which are of high priority for us to solve. Efforts are wasted in discussing irrelevant and peripheral matters, while urgent and burning issues are ignored. Methods of solutions based on using local strengths and resources do not figure in solutions given by western experts. For example, there is no mention of Zakat and Islamic injunctions for generosity and charity in the IMF plans for reduction of poverty in the Islamic world.

4.7 MYTH #9: BLAMING THE VICTIM.

Suppose that I hit another person on the skull with a hammer. His skull breaks open, and his brains spill out. Now I call in the learned doctors to do research on the skull. They find manufacturing defects and structural weaknesses in the skull, which led to this failure to perform under stress. In this section, we discuss several myths of this nature about development. For instance, in the pre-Civil War slaving USA, Negroes were not taught how to read and write since they were not considered capable of learning these skills. At the same time, their general inability to read and write was cited as a proof of their lack of capability for doing so.

In his book “The Wealth and Poverty of Nations,” Professor David S. Landes (1999) contrasts the characteristics of successfully industrialized nations--work, thrift, honesty, patience, and tenacity--with those of nonindustrial countries. Thus our failure to develop is because we are lazy, dishonest, extravagant spendthrifts, and lack the strength of character to persevere in face of difficulties. This

breathtaking ignorance and racism among the educators of the nation would deserve ridicule, but for the serious tragedy it leads to. When the culture of violence necessary for global domination led an unstable youngster, Adam Lanza, to murder 20 children in a USA school in cold blood, the nation mourned. No compassion or sympathy was expressed in the press for the million civilians killed and the 40 million lives of the inferior humans destroyed in Iraq.

Hernando de Soto (2003) propounds the influential thesis that secure property rights in the west led to development, and lack of them in the east led to failure to develop. Secure and accurate systems for demarcating and settling property rights had functioned for centuries in India. In a land grab typical of imperialists everywhere, “Resumption” officers demanded documents of ownership, and declared them invalid at the slightest pretext, seizing all undocumented property for the British. This led to closure of schools, hospitals, and indigenous social welfare organizations funded by trusts, throughout India – officers in charge of the resumption proceedings admitted that “they were harsh in the extreme.” Similar arbitrary seizures of property via force majeure or legal trickery occurred in the colonies throughout Africa, North and South America, and Asia – upsetting centuries of traditions of settled land use rights.

Different authors have attributed our current poverty to our lack of creativity, inability to think rationally, authoritarian traditions, etc. which led to our failure to have an industrial revolution. Kennedy (1989) provides evidence for the strong industrial manufacturing sectors of India on the eve of colonization. In textiles, ship-building, steel industry, and glass blowing, among others, India was second to none. The Indian manufacturing sector was creative and efficient, and many technologies flowed from India to the backwards England. However, adoption of power looms in India posed a threat to British textiles and were banned. When muslin weavers shifted to hand production, their thumbs were cut off to prevent production of competitive muslins. Similarly many attempts at development of industry, tanneries, and even indigenously invented steam engines, etc. were prevented directly by British intervention, which saw the future of India as a supplier of raw materials to England, and not as a producer of industrial goods. This transformed India from an industrial country to an agricultural one, and led to deaths in large numbers of those who had once earned comfortable livelihoods from industry. In a confidential note, William Bentinck, Viceroy of India stated that “the bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India. The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce” (see Ghosh & Ghosh, 2011, p 26). It was not that we failed to industrialize – rather, we were de-industrialized in the process of colonization. Similarly, attempts to modernize and industrialize throughout the Islamic world (such as the effort by Mohammad Ali in Egypt) were blocked and defeated by active Imperialist policies, which opposed such ventures.

4.8 TRUTH #9: OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

More baffling than what is being said about the cause of development is what is NOT being said. In early twentieth century, European powers had direct or indirect economic control of about 90% of global resources, which they ruthlessly exploited to the hilt, not being constrained by moral considerations. The imperialists became rich, and the colonies became poor in the process. Is this such a mystery? None of the authors listed above mentions this as a possible explanation of why rich countries are rich and why the poor countries are poor. This is such a simple explanation that it is a mystery why no one refers

to it, and the solitary text which provides detailed documentation validating this thesis has been out of print for decades. We quote from Stavrianos (1981):

The "backwardness" of colonial peoples was taken for granted. The "natives" were viewed as inherently different from and inferior to, their European rulers. ... Colonial rule generally was considered to be not the cause, but the only feasible solution for the prevailing backwardness.

...it is beginning to be realized that the underdevelopment of the Third World and the development of the First World are not isolated and discrete phenomena. Rather they are organically and functionally interrelated. Underdevelopment is not a primal or original condition, to be outgrown by following the industrialization course pioneered by Western nations. The latter are overdeveloped today to the same degree that the peripheral lands are underdeveloped. The states of developedness and under-developedness are but two sides of the same coin.

If, as seems eminently plausible, under-development and development are opposite sides of the same coin, then remedies for under-development must be sought in radically different directions.

4.9 LESSON #9: POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

The truth is very damaging to the colonizing powers, who are still very much in control of the world. This truth has been ignored or suppressed, and myths have been developed to distract attention. It is thus that structures of knowledge support existing structures of power. Dangerous knowledge, of the type being discussed here, is a threat to status quo.

5 DEFINING PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT.

One of the most fundamental myths is that of western progress. That is, over the past few centuries, the west emerged from obscurity and became world leaders. Obviously, this means that they have progressed and that this is a feat worth emulating. The deeply entrenched language of "development" and "under-development" reflects this assumption. To deny this seems tantamount to denying the existence of rocks and trees, and the oceans and continents. Yet this is precisely what we propose to do. First, we must understand that progress is an idea that the mind imposes upon a sequence of historical events. There are no inherent flags in history itself which signal progress. In fact the measure of progress is carefully chosen by those with power.

For instance, when Great Britain ruled the waves, progress was related to sea power and other criteria which favored Britain. The Encyclopedia Britannica of 1930 does not contain an entry for the word "Democracy." After the two world wars depleted the wealth of the European powers, USA emerged as the world leader, and redefined the criteria for progress to be wealth – GNP per capita. When statistics showed that the per capita income of some oil kingdoms in the Middle East exceeded that of USA, the criterion was modified to require a reasonable income distribution. When Scandinavian countries went ahead of the USA in both GNP per capita and equitable income distribution, it was realized that the wealth of nations also lay in the infrastructure. The massive USA had huge networks of roads, dams, railroads etc. which could not be matched by the tiny European nations. The point is that we know in advance that the USA is the world leader, and only criteria which prove this "fact" are considered valid.

Two recent books with “lies, damned lies, and statistics” in their titles, graphically describe the power of statistics to deceive. After all, you can’t argue with “facts”. The sleight of hand involved in highlighting one set of facts instead of another is usually invisible to the audience. To pick one example at random, out of thousands available, a gruesome rape case in India was recently highlighted in the press. As pointed out by Vigo (2013):

living in the UK and reading its media, one could easily think that rape solely existed in India and that there is only injustice against women in the subcontinent and other ‘developing countries.’ ... (yet) ... As recorded by the police registries of each country rape offences in India show 1.8 rapes for every 100,000 versus 28.8 rapes reported for every 100,000 in the United Kingdom:

It is not that the police statistics are necessarily reliable, but that judgments are made based on facts projected in the media, rather than the reality which remains unknown to all. Rapes, murders & mass murders, violent crimes, cyber-crimes, are all substantially higher in the west than in the east. The choice of which facts are highlighted and which are suppressed, ignored, or hidden plays a crucial role in forming our worldview. If newspapers presented arguments and discussions on why police statistics show 15 rapes in England for every one in India, the public would not develop a worldview according to which women are oppressed only in under-developed countries.

5.1 MYTH #10: WEALTH AND FREEDOM ARE MEASURES OF DEVELOPMENT

Suppose someone robs me of all my possessions at gunpoint. Clearly he is more powerful and (now) wealthier than me. Does it follow that he is better than me and worthy of emulation in all respects? This is a logical consequence of the idea that wealth and power are the central characteristics of development. While these are admirable characteristics among barbarians, nearly all civilizations prize other virtues.

Across civilizations, cultures, religions, there is almost universal consensus on the idea that pursuit of wealth is harmful. The Bible states that the “love of money is the root of all evil,” and that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”. Lao Tzu said “Do not race after riches ... or you will let slip the Heaven within you.” Similarly Islamic teachings condemn greed, selfishness and hoarding of money, and praise generosity and spending for the sake of Allah. In nearly all societies except for the modern western society, people are praised and honored for character, spirituality, wisdom, heroism, literary, artistic and many other accomplishments, but not for acquisition of wealth by loot and plunder. However, in modern society, wealth trumps all other accomplishments. There are no moral bars to the most powerful country in the world making a naked unprovoked attack on a weaker country, killing one million civilians and destroying the lives of forty million, in order to secure oil supplies and makes profits for the military industrial complex.

Books by Polanyi (2001) and Tawney (1926) detail the strange and twisted story of how it came to pass that the pursuit of wealth went from being an undesirable characteristic to a desirable one. This great transformation has resulted in governments all over the world single-mindedly pursuing the goal of increasing GNP per capita, under the assumption that wealth will solve all problems. It is only recently that a number of spectacular failures have led to a questioning of these assumptions. A recent report by

Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009) questions the use of GNP per capita as a yardstick for progress on several grounds. Some serious objections to this measure are as follows:

1. GNP measures production but not destruction or depletion. In effect, by using up exhaustible resources, damaging environment beyond repair, destroying species of plants and animals, we are robbing our posterity to create wealth for ourselves. Many authors like Schumacher (2010), Douthwaite (1993), have shown negative accumulation of wealth when costs of growth are properly accounted for.
2. Many intangible social costs are ignored. Worse, if environmental hazards lead to sickness, expenses on medical care are actually add to the GNP. Destruction of communities, stability of families, moral decline, etc. are very important to human welfare, but not accounted for in GNP.
3. Because of these gaps, perceptions of how the economy is doing can differ widely from what official figures suggest. In addition, the Easterlin(2010) paradox shows that huge increases in GNP per capita do not have any effect on happiness/welfare/life satisfaction in the long run. This suggests that we are putting our efforts in the wrong direction in trying to maximize wealth.

In the same way, freedom is highly prized in the West. The French Revolution provoked Hegel to believe that 'the History of the World is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom.' There is no doubt that certain types of freedom are extremely valuable. However, freedom is a plastic word, and can be reshaped to have many different meanings. Should the poor be free to sell their organs to the rich? Pedophiles are currently demanding the freedom to practice their perversion. This is not what Hegel, or other principled advocates of freedom had in mind.

Use of freedom as a defense of capitalism is one of the most egregious abuses of the word. On the surface, "Laissez-Faire" or let everyone do as they please, appears to be a most egalitarian philosophy. All are to be given freedom. The laborers are free to sell their labor for the market wage, and the capitalists are free to earn suitable returns on their wealth. The grossly inequitable nature of this freedom is not immediately apparent. Millions were given the freedom to starve in Irish and Bengal famines so as to preserve the freedom of the markets. Grains guarded by military against hungry mobs were shipped out of Bengal at the height of the famine, because higher prices were available elsewhere.

Figure 1: Income Inequality in USA (Gilson & Perot, 2011)

Freedom for everyone hides the fact that the poor have no choices, while the rich can use their wealth and power to freely exploit the rest. All of the gains from the production are captured by the powerful, while propaganda is used to eliminate the word "exploitation" from textbooks of economics. Piketty & Saez (2003) document the extent of inequality generated by the policy of laissez-faire in USA. Dramatic graphical presentations of the data are available in Gilson & Perot (2011); for instance, the top 0.01% has average income of more than \$27 million, while the bottom 99% has only \$31,000. Should we blind our eyes to this thousand-fold inequality, and allow all to freely compete in the market? This is exactly the current policy, and the results of this supposed freedom for all results in all of the gains from

production going to the already rich – the vacuum cleaner effect (as opposed to trickle-down); Piketty & Saez (2003) show that most of the wealth gains from increased production. are captured by the already.

Economic freedom is ideal if the playing field is level, but when a few are enormously advantaged, then “freedom” is equivalent to freedom of the rich to enslave the poor. The poor have no choices, and cannot take any advantage of their supposed freedom.

5.2 TRUTH #10: DUAL NATURE OF FREEDOM AND WEALTH.

As Aristotle (1999, Book 1, Chapter 5, N. 8, p 5) noted: “wealth is not the good we are seeking and is merely useful for the sake of something else.” This knowledge was lost in the west. In a secular society, goals of life were left to be determined by individuals, since common social goals could not be agreed upon. In absence of common goals, social agreement was only possible on providing freedom and wealth, as the means to all possible goals. Gradually, failure to prescribe realistic and meaningful life goals at the social level, led to these instruments and means becoming prized and valuable goals. This has led to a social disaster. Although older generations knew and understood this truth, the current generations have completely lost sight of the fact that wealth and freedom *as goals* are deadly, even though both are valuable *as means* to the attainment of meaningful life goals. This apparent paradox is expressed in the Quran as follows:

Q(9:34) They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, unto them give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful doom.

The hoarding of gold and silver – pursuit of wealth for its own sake – leads to a painful doom. At the same time, spending in the way of Allah is highly prized and encouraged. Wealth acquired for this purpose leads to tremendous rewards. This dual nature of wealth is explained clearly in many different traditions of Islam. For example, Zakariyya (1999, Book 1 Stories of Sahaba, Chapter 9, Section 9) reports that the Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. said:

Hakim! Wealth has a deceptive appearance. It appears to be very sweet (but it is really not so). It is a blessing when earned with contentment of heart, but there is no satisfaction in it when it is got with greed.

Money can be a blessing, provided that it is obtained and spent for useful purposes, without love of money entering and corrupting the heart. The Quran is full of encouragement to spend money, especially that which is beyond your needs, on others. Curing the disease of the love of money is essential to spiritual and human progress. As the Quran states, spending on others is required to cleanse the heart of the love of wealth, and to purify it.

92:18 he that spends his possessions [on others] so that he might grow in purity

This is in direct contrast with the wisdom of Keynes, currently being pursued with vigor all over the world:

When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals. ... we have exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues. The love of money as a possession (... is ...) a somewhat

disgusting morbidity ... But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight" (Keynes, 1930 cited in Skidelsky, 2001).

Keynes understood that love of money is a disease, but felt that encouraging it would lead to the accumulation of wealth in the society that would eventually solve all human problems. This was a mistaken idea. Wealth does indeed accumulate in the hands of the greedy, but their love of money prevents them from spending on others. The process of accumulation of wealth by greed causes tremendous harm to both society and the planet. Massive amounts of luxury and opulence co-exist with massive amounts of misery and poverty in the world we see around us. The greed of the rich prevents them from using their wealth to help the poor.

Exactly as wealth has a dual nature, so freedom has a dual nature. If used wisely to the pursuit of good ends, it is extremely valuable. If used unwisely to pursue bad goals, it can cause tremendous damage to all. The Quran contains the clear message:

33:72 Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up - verily, he has proven to be most wicked, most foolish. [Zamakhshari comments on this verse: "and then failed to measure up to the moral responsibility arising from the reason and the comparative free will with which he has been endowed."] This obviously applies to the human race as such and not necessarily to all of its individuals.

Freedom places a tremendous responsibility on our shoulders – the heavens and the earth shrank from bearing it. This is the responsibility to be wise (have knowledge of the good), and to be virtuous (to act on this knowledge). In general, human beings have failed on both counts. They have been foolish, in failing to learn what is the best course of action, and they have been wicked, in failing to act on the knowledge of the good, even when they had it. Thus, instead of being a blessing, freedom has been the bane of mankind. Those with wealth and power have abused their freedom by using these to exploit the poor and powerless:

30:41 corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought

In practice, as noted by many authors, freedom of the rich to pursue wealth, without any social constraints, has translated to their freedom to destroy the planet. Commenting on the interpretation of the Quran 30:41 cited above, the translator Asad (2008) writes:

Thus, the growing corruption and destruction of our natural environment ... is ... "an outcome of what men's hands have wrought", ...(human) activity ... threatens mankind with previously unimaginable ecological disasters: an unbridled pollution of land, air and water through industrial and urban waste, a progressive poisoning of plant and marine life,... and the gradual extinction of many animal species essential to human well-being. To all this may be added the rapid deterioration and decomposition of man's social life, the all-round increase in sexual perversion, crime and violence.

It is certainly possible to use our freedom to the benefit of mankind, but this requires wisdom and virtue.

5.3 MYTH 11: WISDOM OF THE WEST

In Europe, a tremendous battle took place between science and Christianity, with famous highlights being the recantation of Galileo, and the burning of Bruno at the stake. Science won the battle, and sought for itself the sacred status earlier accorded to religious knowledge. The philosophy of logical positivism was invented to show that scientific knowledge was the only knowledge worthy of the name, and all other kinds of knowledge – including religious knowledge – was merely an illusion. This philosophy became widely popular in the early twentieth century, and continues to be extremely influential, even though it was proven wrong around the middle of the twentieth century. The misunderstandings created by this philosophy led the majority of western intellectuals to exclude the most precious and valuable kinds of knowledge from the domain of knowledge itself. The most important type of knowledge is to know what it means to be a human being, to learn the meaning and purpose of life, and to know how to achieve excellence in conduct. Because science could not address them, all of these questions came to be regarded as meaningless questions without any answers. Thus, over the past century, instead of progress, there has been a significant and serious decline of knowledge in the west.

2:257 God is near unto those who have faith, taking them out of deep darkness into the light - whereas near unto those who are bent on denying the truth are the powers of evil that take them out of the light into darkness deep

Under the influence of logical positivism, western intellectuals came to a nearly unanimous conclusion that “good” and “evil” are meaningless metaphysical concepts. For example, a leading philosopher Ayer (1936) expressed what came to be the consensus view as follows:

We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgements ... because they have no objective validity whatsoever . . . They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable.

Ethics was taken out of the realm of knowledge, and given the reduced status of a feeling, like a cry of pain. The arguments of Nietzsche for going “beyond good and evil” and subsequently Skinner for going “beyond freedom and dignity” came to be widely accepted. As a result, the concept of morality was dropped from Western education in a gradual process spanning the twentieth century; see Reuben (1996) for details. The idea that an education is a means of development in all dimensions: spiritual, social, and human, was gradually forgotten. It was replaced by the idea that education is a means to earn money or acquire job skills. As many critics have come to realize, the educational goal of turning humans into productive cogs in a machine displaces essential knowledge about what it means to be a human being. For instance, Gatto (1998) writes:

“ level, anxious, spiritless families, godless and conforming; people who believe that the difference between Coke and Pepsi is matter worth arguing about. The American economy depends on schooling us that status is purchased and others run our lives. We learn there that sources of joy and accomplishment are external, that the contentment comes with the possessions, seldom from within.”

Higher education in the west, just like mass education at lower levels, is no longer designed to produce character development. It was not illiterate savages, but graduates of the finest educational systems of the West who designed the gas chambers used to burn millions of innocent men, women and children in Germany. Julie Reuben (1996) has documented how the efforts to build character were gradually

abandoned in western universities in the twentieth century. This has led to a situation where brilliant scientists design weapons which can cause deaths of millions, or fry innocents in heat. Ph.D. physicists who developed the nuclear bomb denied any responsibility for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Displaying the moral blindness created by this educational system, Oppenheimer’s testimony about the effects of the atom bomb before Congress first describes the spectacular light, fire and smoke show that would result, and then turned to the deadly slaughter of all within effective radius (see Valiunas, 2006). David Halberstam (1993) has documented how graduates of Yale and Harvard ran the Vietnam War on the pattern of an efficient business, with callous disregard for human suffering: more than one million civilians died as "collateral damage" in the mass bombings and napalming, and atrocities and massacres were common. Leading biologists work for salaries to develop non-fertile varieties of genetically engineered high yield grains so that multinationals can profit from the hunger of humanity. Profits and wealth trump ethics and morality, as explicitly stated by Milton Friedman, who encouraged businesses to pursue profits and ignore social concerns. Pursuit of these principles in leading business schools has led to a “terrible failure,” as the following quote from Harvard Professor Zuboff (2009) indicates:

“I spent a quarter-century as a professor at the Harvard Business School, including 15 years teaching in the MBA program. I have come to believe that much of what my colleagues and I taught has caused real suffering, suppressed wealth creation, destabilized the world economy, and accelerated the demise of the 20th century capitalism in which the U.S. played the leading role.

We weren't stupid and we weren't evil. Nevertheless we managed to produce a generation of managers and business professionals that is deeply mistrusted and despised by a majority of people in our society and around the world. This is a terrible failure.”

5.4 TRUTH 11: IGNORANCE MASQUERADING AS KNOWLEDGE

Given that we have only one chance to live, what is the most important kind of knowledge? Obviously, we need to know: what is the best way to live our lives? The Quran informs us that demonstration of excellence in conduct is the purpose of the creation of life and death:

67:2 Who hath created life and death that He may try you, which of you is best in conduct;

Because of science replaced religion as sacred knowledge in the west, science was called upon to give answers to deep and difficult questions about what it means to be human, what is the purpose of life, what is excellence in conduct, and suitable rules for social and political organization. The attempt to find scientific answers to these questions was labeled the “Enlightenment Project.” Contrary to the hopes of the Enlightenment philosophers, science did not prove to be capable of answering them. Scientists learned how to do heart transplants, but could not learn how to purify the heart of deadly emotions like envy, lust, greed, pride and others. This process, the purification of the heart, is among the central teachings of Islam.

The mistaken idea that scientific knowledge is the only kind of knowledge, and that social science must be patterned on physical science, led to a huge number of misunderstandings, which continue to dominate intellectual discourse in the west. It is impossible to list them all and document these errors, which are built into the foundations of a modern western university education. We can only sketch a few major ones, and indicate why they are wrong.

1. *Misunderstanding Human Beings.* Since science deals with inanimate particles subject to physical laws, the school of behavioral psychology proposed to treat human beings as robots which can be programmed via conditioning. Skinner (1972), the founder of this school, wrote “Beyond Freedom and Dignity,” which denied both reason and volition to human beings. This became the dominant school of thought in psychology for most of the twentieth century. Many problems, including the collapse of logical positivism, have led to serious reconsideration and emergence of alternatives, but behavioral psychology continues to command intellectual respect and dominate orthodoxy. In contrast to behavioral psychology, Islam offers deep insights into the nature of human beings, and the sources of satisfaction and well-being. Thousands of US soldiers have converted to Islam after having close encounters with Muslims; see Phillips (1998). Many cite their amazement at the ability of Muslims to cope with extremely difficult and stressful situations on the basis of Islam; see for example, Campbell (2013) . Similarly, psychological teams in post-Earthquake Pakistan found Muslims much better able to cope with deep trauma created by massive personal and social catastrophes.
2. *The Search for Quantifiable, Observable, and Universal Laws:* Since science is based on universal laws, which do not vary by country, culture, or time, social science also attempted to do the same. However, this is impossible. Human behavior is conditioned by particular historical circumstances, and cannot be studied by means of universal laws applicable to all societies at all times. To understand human beings, we must understand the society in which they live, and the particular historical circumstances they face, including their political economic and social environment. Gray (2007, p. 2) writes that “political philosophy ... cannot even begin to grapple with the political dilemmas of an age in which political life is dominated by renascent particularisms, militant religions and resurgent ethnicities.” Similarly, the stark failure of economists to foresee the massive global financial crisis of 2007-2008 was blamed on unrealistic mathematical models (imitating the laws of Physics) by many Nobel caliber economists. For example, Krugman (2009) said that the profession of economists as a whole went astray because they mistook the beauty of mathematics for truth. In Zaman (2013) and related writings, I have shown that Islamic teachings offer a far deeper understanding of economic problems of man, and also provide excellent solutions, not within the ambit of contemporary modern economic teachings.
3. *Justice:* When abstractions like ethics and morality were taken out of the realm of knowledge, western intellectuals decided that these were just social conventions. That is, anything that a society agrees to is valid as a conception of justice. In ancient Roman times, opposing parties would be represented by Gladiators, and legal cases would be decided in favor of the party whose champion won the fight. Today, the identical concept of justice prevails, except that gladiators have been replaced by lawyers. As explicitly stated by a panel of lawyers (Stanford Magazine, 1983), the judicial system is adversarial in nature. Both lawyers on opposing sides have the duty to do their best to win the case for their client, regardless of whether or not the outcome will be just. Islam has a radically different concept of justice. The judge and both parties seek to arrive at a solution which is just to all. There is an effort to achieve consensus: all should agree that the solution is just. Thus the system is not necessarily adversarial in nature, though conflicting interpretations of justice may arise.

Historical developments in the west have led to an extremely distorted understanding of the nature of human knowledge. The ability to build an atom bomb is classified as scientific knowledge. The idea that

it is wrong to kill innocent men, women and children by bombing entire cities, is not classified as knowledge. This is just a feeling, and normative propositions are not worthy of the name of knowledge. With this disastrously mistaken epistemology, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Gulag, and burning alive of millions of innocent Jews and genocides without end become possible.

5.5 MYTH 12: THE PROGRESS OF THE WEST

Perhaps the most fundamental myth is that of progress. Over the past few centuries, western civilization has scaled heights hitherto unknown to mankind and reached peaks of excellence. Is this really true? There is no doubt that there has been fantastic progress in science and technology. However, all this progress has been purchased at a huge cost. Does it really count as progress that we have learnt how to fry thousands of innocents (men, women, and children) on burning streets by fire-bombing Dresden and Tokyo? That millions died in senseless world wars in the twentieth century? That the resulting shortage of young men led to a rapid decline in moral standards, which has had the outcome of destroying family life in the west?

The Enlightenment dream was that reason, embodied in achievements of science and technology, would solve all human problems. In particular, they hoped that reason would lead to stronger basis for a better morality than one provided by Christianity. This dream turned into a nightmare in the twentieth century. Nietzsche (cited in Glover, 2001) had far greater insight into the consequences of abandonment of religion:

As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness - there can be no doubt of that - morality will gradually *perish* now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe - the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles.

Nietzsche was contemptuous of the ideas of compassion, love, sympathy, humility as being signs of weaknesses. He admired the virtues of the barbarians who triumph over civilizations which become weak through degeneration and luxury. The popular philosophy of Social Darwinism suggested that the human race would improve by extermination of the weak. In line with this philosophy, Nietzsche despised the majority, including most Europeans of his own time. He even says, 'the great majority of men have no right to existence, but are a misfortune to higher men. There are also peoples that are failures.' He celebrated the "Supermen," a small and select group of ruthless leaders, who would 'accept with a good conscience the sacrifice of innumerable men who ... have to be suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments.'

Does it matter what Nietzsche said or thought more than a century ago? Philosopher and Ethicist Jonathan Glover (2001) thinks so. He devotes to Nietzsche the first chapter of his book "Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century" which documents many of the extreme atrocities which took place the twentieth century. Glover writes that "Poor answers to {ethical} questions have contributed to a climate in which some of the disasters were made possible." Many have attributed Nazi excesses to the influence of Nietzsche. Recent human disasters, like presidential authorization of torture, and imprisonment of innocent children in western Gulag of Guantanamo Bay, and countless other massacres, are due to people like Nietzsche who think that "To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more. ... Without cruelty there is no festival ..." As we have stressed earlier, it

is ideas which move history. It is certainly true, to paraphrase Macaulay (1958) , that the entire Arabic literature can produce no match for the writings of Machiavelli, Marquis De Sade, Nietzsche, and the Kubark Manual of CIA³. Many inhuman ideas have become embedded into the foundations of western thought, and are responsible for a huge amount of human misery that we see around us.

The wonders of science and technology are often cited as proof positive of the progress of the west. There is mounting evidence that these advances may actually destroy the possibility of life on our planet. Diamond (2005) finds that today's global, technologically advanced civilization is very far from solving the problems that plagued primitive, isolated communities in the remote past. Diamond comes close to despair when contemplating the environmental havoc engulfing our rapidly industrializing planet. Technology has created more problems than it has the capability to solve. To take just one example from a long list, Monsanto genetic engineering has caused the emergence of superweeds, wreaking havoc on grain harvests in the USA.

Has all the scientific and technological progress, plus the accumulation of wealth, led to better lives in the West? All evidence points to the opposite: human lives have become progressively impoverished, in many dimensions. Among the most important dimensions of human existence is social contact. Solitary confinement is a form of torture. Today there is an epidemic of loneliness in the west. In recent survey, *The Lonely Society?* by Griffin (2010) of the Mental Health Foundation, about 80% of those surveyed admitted to feeling lonely, and 40% admitted to being depressed due to loneliness. Families have broken down because people marry less, marry late, and marriages don't last very long. Because of this, there has been a tremendous increase in people living alone, and also in people feeling alone while engaged in nominal relationships with others. Survey data from Wilson & Moulton (2010), details loneliness in America. Edmondson (2010) sums up the striking statistics as follows: "Over 44 million people are lonely and longing to connect with another living, breathing soul. Even sadder is the fact that they are ashamed of their loneliness, and that shame hinders their efforts to meet and bond with another person."

The reasons for this striking rise in loneliness and breakdown of families is simple. Freedom from political, economic and social oppression was made into an over-riding virtue in the western civilization. Later, the meaning of freedom was expanded in directions never intended by the original seekers of freedom. Freedom came to mean freedom from social obligations, from commitments to family and community, and freedom to pursue selfish goals without concern for others. Unfortunately, what people value most is love, friendship, social relationships. Paradoxically, in a society where everyone pursues pleasure selfishly, no one can get the unselfish love from others which gives the maximum amount of satisfaction and happiness.

³ Alfred McCoy (2007) has documented the evolution of the European tradition of torture of heretics (including Muslims and Jews), which started with the Spanish Inquisition. He describes the CIA manual for torture (The Kubark Manual) as "the first real revolution in the cruel science of pain in more than three centuries." This manual describes techniques developed by 'scientific' research on mental patients funded by the CIA. These methods, used in Al-Gharaib and Guantanamo Bay, are in stark contrast with Islamic rules for Jihad.

5.6 TRUTH 12: THE MORAL DECLINE OF THE WEST.

The idea that wealth and power – created by weapons and technology -- are measures of progress is suitable for barbarians intent on loot and pillage, not for the civilized. Islam teaches us that learning how to be human is the measure of progress. Human beings have the potential to be the worst of creation (Asfala Safeleen) and also the best of creation (Ahsane Taqweem). Measured in terms advances in humanity, the west has been declining rather than progressing.

In late nineteenth century, Lord Acton (n.d.) re-iterated the prevailing belief that “Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity.” However, Bertrand Russell (1903) captured the spirit of the twentieth century in the following passage:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

A natural consequence of the denial of God is this lesson, that all human effort is meaningless. This lesson has been deeply absorbed by secular western societies, and has resulted in tremendous harm. The most important harm has been a loss of understanding of what is the purpose of life? But also, the idea of morality as an internalized value has been replaced by the idea of morality as a social convention. In the 1970's homosexuality was a social evil, a crime, and officially listed as a psychological disease requiring therapy. In the 1990's it became acceptable as a lifestyle choice, gay marriages were legalized, and to speak against homosexuality became a crime. Without religion, there is no foundation for moral beliefs – anything that society agrees to, from torture to child pornography, can become moral. With the loss of the religious anchor, morality has virtually perished in the west, exactly as Nietzsche foresaw. The results have been catastrophic for human beings.

Glover (2001) writes that contrary to Enlightenment expectations that humans were maturing and growing out of their warlike past, “much of twentieth-century history has been a very unpleasant surprise. Technology has made a difference. The decisions of a few people can mean horror and death for hundreds of thousands, even millions, of other people.” He documents large numbers of atrocities, such as the British continuation of embargo of food to Germany, after German surrender, which led to death by starvation of about 800,000 Germans.

The cold and calculated burning, in scientifically designed ovens, of millions of innocent Jews – men, women and children --, is a landmark in human history. Bauman's (1989) award winning analysis in “Modernity and the Holocaust” buries the idea that this was an exceptional event due solely to a deviant madman. Rather, he argues that every ingredient of the Holocaust was a normal part of modernity, which has no safeguards against recurrences. In a secular democracy, morality is created by the majority, and not subject to external validation. If reason leads the majority to the conclusion that

extermination of a recalcitrant minority is the most efficient route to progress, modernity poses no barriers to the implementation of this Final Solution. Bauman shows that the extermination of the Jews occurred with the knowledge and tacit compliance of the majority of the population. Similarly, such final solutions have often been inflicted on inferior races outside of Europe without attracting attention. More recently, the “Shock and Awe” strategy was explicitly designed to terrorize Iraqi’s into complete submission to the US. To achieve this goal, hospitals, schools, power and water infrastructure, cultural landmarks, and libraries were deliberately destroyed, in order to create terror in the hearts of the population. These rational calculations which killed more than a million and destroyed the lives of the remaining forty million could not have been contemplated in a civilized society.

There are two major sources of moral training for the younger generations: family and school. As Reuben (1996) has documented, the idea of character building and training in civic duties was explicitly dropped from goals of a university education over the course of the twentieth century. Similarly, breakdown of the family in the west has destroyed the other basis for moral education. Center for Social Justice (2006) reports in “Fractured Families,” :

This Report paints a worrying picture of family breakdown in the UK. We now have one of the highest divorce rates in the Western world and the fabric of family life has been stripped away in the past thirty years. This study also shows more clearly than ever the destructive effects of family breakdown upon millions of children, as well as the links between family breakdown and addictions, educational failure and serious personal debt.

With no sources of moral guidance, it is small wonder that 75% of the students were caught cheating recently in a large undergraduate course at Harvard – see Carmichael (2012). There are many indicators that the young generation has lost its moral bearings completely. A recent Josephson Institute (2008) survey showed rates well over 30% of theft, cheating, and lying among high school teenagers in 2008. What is worse, the vast majority did not find anything wrong with such behavior.

Not only is there lack of guidance, but there is active effort by the media to misguide people regarding morality. In a phenomenon which picked up steam in the 1970’s movies increasingly started to portray immoral behavior as normal. Today, movies have heroes and heroines who are paid assassins, criminals, savage brutes, thieves, prostitutes, torturers and murderers. Perhaps as a consequence, USA has the world’s largest prison population in real numbers, 2.3 million people behind bars. Liptak (2008) reports that with 5% of the world population, the US has 25% of the world’s prisoners. Solnit (2013) reports a rape a minute and a thousand corpses due to violence by an intimate partner every year. There are increasing incidents of mass murders and shooting sprees, by people who apparently derive pleasure from killing. This can hardly be unexpected in a society where the average child watches 8000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence (Anderson, n.d.), and play computer games teaching them to enjoy killing random strangers and watching the blood flow.

And this is called progress, and civilization.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The teachings of Islam transformed a barbaric and ignorant population of Arabs into standard bearers of morality, who lit the torch which guided mankind for a thousand years. What Islam gave to mankind has

been documented by many historians, including Syed Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi (2005) in his classic work “Islam and the West” which been translated into more than thirty languages. The Bible prophesies that the message to be brought by Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. (referred to as the Spirit of Truth) is too powerful to be borne by the companions of Jesus:

John 16:12-13: I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

The standards of excellence that Islam sets are outside the ambit of western conceptions. The Quran states that within human being lies the potential to rise above the angels, and encourages us to struggle to realize this potential for excellence. It also provides us with guidance on how to carry out this struggle.

6.1 ISLAM ASKS US TO BE FAIR, EVEN TO ENEMIES:

Q5:8 O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

In obedience to this command, Salahuddin Ayubi did not take revenge on the crusaders who had slaughtered all civilians and prisoners when he recaptured Jerusalem. Many Muslim conquerors have followed the shining example of the Prophet, and forgiven enemies, in stark contrast to the European maxim that “All is fair in love and war.”

In the siege of Edirne during the First Balkan War (March 1913) even in dire circumstances with compelling necessity, the ruling of Islamic law that the property of the non-Muslims could not be seized for purposes of defence was obeyed punctiliously by Muslims under siege. This is in stark contrast with USA’s seizure and placement of civilian Japanese in concentration camps during World War 1.

6.2 ISLAM HAS EXTREMELY HIGH STANDARDS OF JUSTICE:

Q4:135 O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

Throughout history, we can find examples of Muslims who have followed these teachings and borne witness against themselves and their own kin or communities, in the interests of justice. This is in stark contrast with the idea that this is beyond human capabilities, and hence the Fifth Amendment allows people to refuse to testify against their own selves.

6.3 ISLAM HAS EXTREMELY HIGH STANDARDS FOR GENEROSITY:

Not only should spend on others, but we should give the best of what we have:

3:92 never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend - verily, God has full knowledge thereof.

The Quran praises those who give to others, even though they are themselves in need:

59:9 (They prefer the refugees) above themselves though poverty become their lot. And whoso is saved from his own avarice such are they who are successful.

This is in stark contrast to western teachings that self-interest can and does dominate human motivations.

6.4 ISLAM HAS EXTREMELY HIGH STANDARDS FOR COMPASSION:

The Prophet Mohammad S.A.W. was sent as a Mercy for all Mankind. He embodied excellence in conduct, and provides a perfect model for us to follow. He cared deeply for all human beings, whether Muslims or not, and took their sorrows for his own

9:128 INDEED, there has come unto you [O mankind] an Apostle from among yourselves: heavily weighs -upon him [the thought] that you might suffer [in the life to come]; full of concern for you [is he, and] full of compassion and mercy towards the believers

Those trained in western intellectual traditions have an immediate problem with a listing of normative ideals like the one provided above. What does this list mean? What matters is whether or not these norms translated into actual behavior. Do Muslims actually adhere to these standards of excellence?

6.5 METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

These questions arise due to the fundamental mistake of confusing social science with physical science. Indeed in the physical sciences our goal is to describe, and the normative has no role to play. However the Islamic methodology for social science is radically different, as it ought to be. First we describe a goal, which is the highest standard of excellence. Then we motivate human beings to strive for these goals. There is no expectation that all will come up to these standards at all times. Indeed it is understood from the outset that these standards are beyond our reach – no one can actually match the excellence of our prophet Mohammad S.A.W. Just like the North Star sets that the direction for sailing, without being attainable, so these standards set the direction for our struggles. There is explicit recognition that not all will meet these standards. Thus it is said in Hadeeth that excellence is to return an evil with a favor. If this is not possible for us, then we should try to forgive the evil done to us. If even this is not possible, then it is permissible to take revenge, but in no case should the revenge exceed the harm done to us. Thus three levels of acceptable conduct, ranging from excellent to good to average are described.

The second major difference with western social science is that Islam is strongly focused on the struggle for excellence, and not on the outcome of this struggle. Allah T'aala promises us that those who struggle will be guided to His pathways:

29:69 And those who strive in Our (cause),- We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily Allah is with those who do right.

The idea of the “Invisible Hand,” that people can act selfishly but achieve socially beneficial outcomes makes no sense at all in terms of Islamic ideals. This is because generosity and unselfish behavior is itself the goal of Islamic teachings. Only those who are saved from the avarice which is present within the human soul are the ones who are successful. People who give to others out of selfish motives such as gaining a good reputation will be condemned to the hellfire. A more complete discussion of Islamic methodology for economics, and ten dimensions of contrast with western methodology is given in Zaman (2013) “Re-Defining Islamic Economics”.

6.6 FINAL WORDS

It was prophesied in the Hadeeth that Islam came as a stranger, and it will again become a stranger. This prophecy has come true. Today none of the teachings of Islam are reflected in the collective lives of the Muslims. Islam has distinctive systems of governance, justice, education, trade, markets, welfare, and social norms. In each of these dimensions, Islamic societies are not only following western patterns, but advocating the adoption of western patterns as the solution to our current ills. These western patterns are often strikingly similar to the patterns of the Jahiliyya that existed before the advent of Islam. Islam brought a revolution to the world fourteen hundred years ago, and it has exactly the same revolutionary potential today. The challenge for us Muslims is to realize this potential by translating the teachings of Islam from the books into our lives. May Allah grant us the capability to participate in the struggle for the good that has been enjoined upon the Muslims. Ameen.

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