

# Some Reflections on the Islamization of Knowledge

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# Introduction

1.

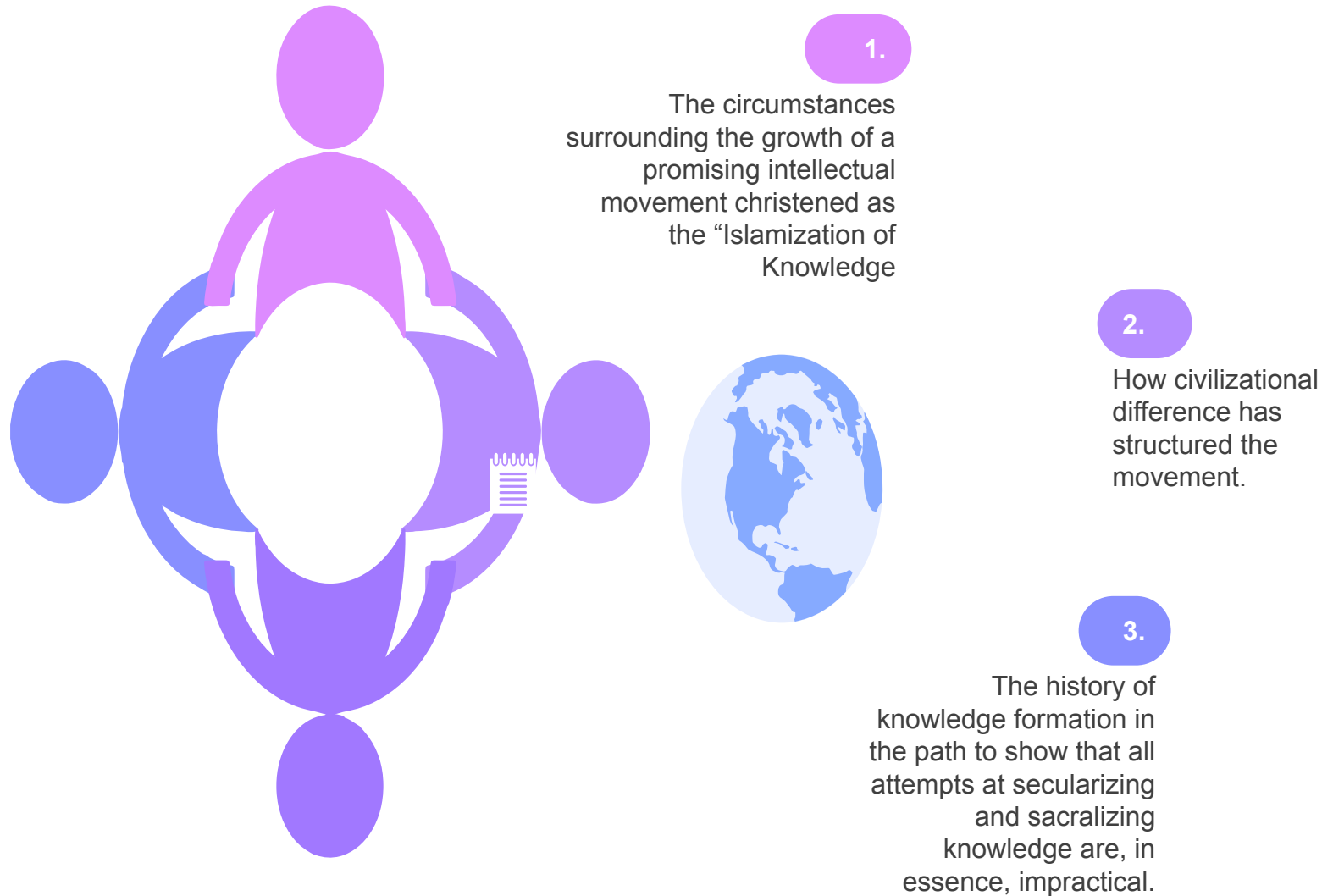
The Islamization of Knowledge project was conceived from the perspective of civilizational difference.




2.

All attempts at disaggregating sacred knowledge from secular academic pursuits and resacralizing modern knowledge are only viable if “sacred” and “secular” knowledge do not share symbiotic features.

# This presentation is divided into three parts:





# The Islamization of Knowledge Project: Origins and Trajectories

Since the 1970s, Muslims in the modern world have been faced with intellectual conundrums which they viewed as a consequence of the infusion of secularism into their homelands.

In response to this dilemma, a new crop of Muslim intellectuals initiated an “epistemological revolution” (Rasnani & Imron, 2013). They saw Western and secular knowledge as detrimental to the Muslim way of life (deen). Secular knowledge, they reasoned, runs into conflict with Islam as it is detached from spiritual and religious values.

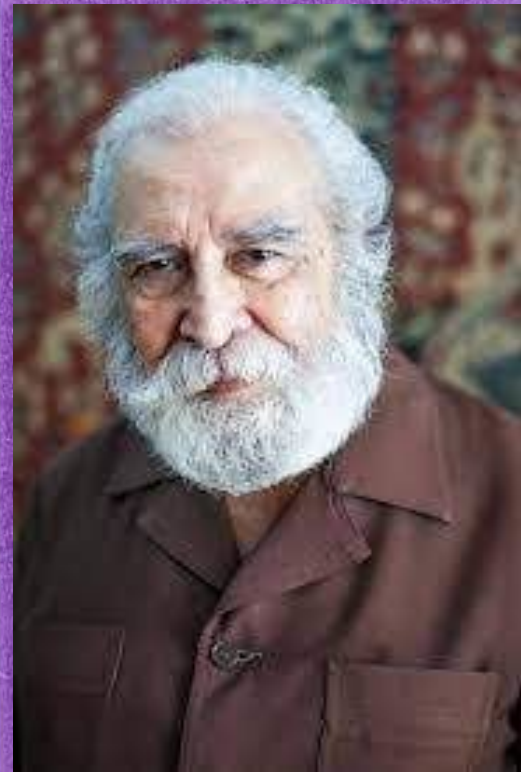


## Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, 1978

The deliverance of knowledge from its interpretations based on secular ideology; and from meaning and expressions of the secular”;  
“dewesternization of knowledge”,  
“desecularization of knowledge”.

## Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 1989

The need to resacralize knowledge



### **Ismail Al-Faruqi (1982: 30)**

The integration of “new knowledge into the corpus of the Islamic legacy by eliminating, amending, re-interpreting and adapting its components as the worldview of Islam and its values dictate.”

### **Ṭāhā J. al ‘Alwānī, 1995: 5**

Emphasizes the importance of reading and understanding both the signs of God in the Quran (ayat al-Qur’aniyyah) and the signs of God in His creation (ayat al-kauniyyah) as the mainsprings of the Islamization of Knowledge project.

### **‘AbdulHamid AbuSulayman (1994)**

Reforming contemporary knowledge and the Muslim mind.

### **Kamal Hassan (2022)**

Modern paradigms, theories, concepts and methodologies that are not compatible and in harmony with Islam should not be judiciously incorporated into the heart of what he calls as the “Islamicization of Knowledge,”



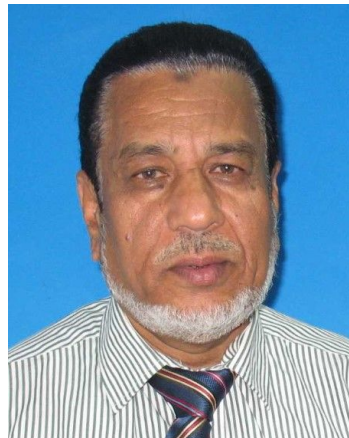
## Issues related to Islamization of knowledge

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### **Osman Bakar (2014)**

He sees the Islamization of Knowledge as rapidly losing its relevance since new perspectives have not been offered to address new global epistemological developments. Among the new epistemological developments is postmodernism, a deconstructive system of thought that encouraged many scholars and institutions to consider various traditions of knowledge into the heart of the Western academe.



### **Mohammad Mumtaz Ali (1999)**

“to make a clear distinction between the Divine and human...the real issue does not lie in the absence of principles and values, rather the real issue arises when we come to their application and this involves the issue of methodology.”



# Civilizational Difference and the Inter-civilizational Nature of Knowledge



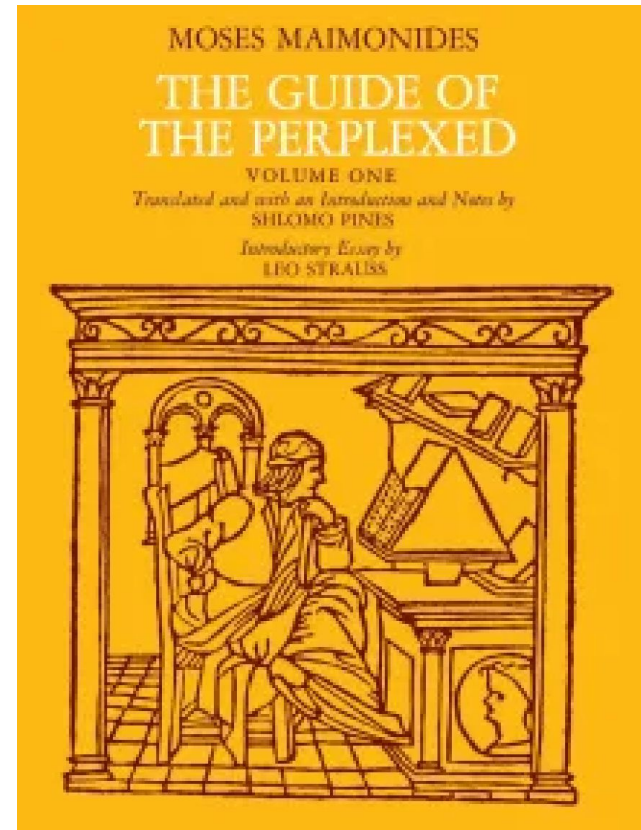




For example, the works of Leonardo of Pisa (Fibonacci) on algebra were mostly derived from his readings of al-Khwarizmi's texts. The reverse held true. Three hundred years before the translation movement in Renaissance Europe began, a similar translation movement was well in operation in the heart of the Islamic world. Classical Greek works such as Euclid's *Elements* and Ptolemy's *Almagest* were translated into Arabic (Al-Khalili, 2010).



Al-Farabi (870-950), benefited from the writings of Greek sages. Conferred the title of a “second master” or “second teacher” after Aristotle, he became a source of reference for philosophers and scholars from other religions and civilizations. Al-Farabi believed that human intelligence originated through inspiration from God. Religious scriptures should, to him, be studied by scientists in their bid to offer new theories and discoveries.



The work of a Jewish philosopher and theologian, Maimonides (1138-1204), entitled Guide to the Lost shows traces of al-Farabi’s ideas. Through the works and ideas of al-Farabi, the Europeans recovered ancient Greek philosophy (Osman Bakar, 2018).

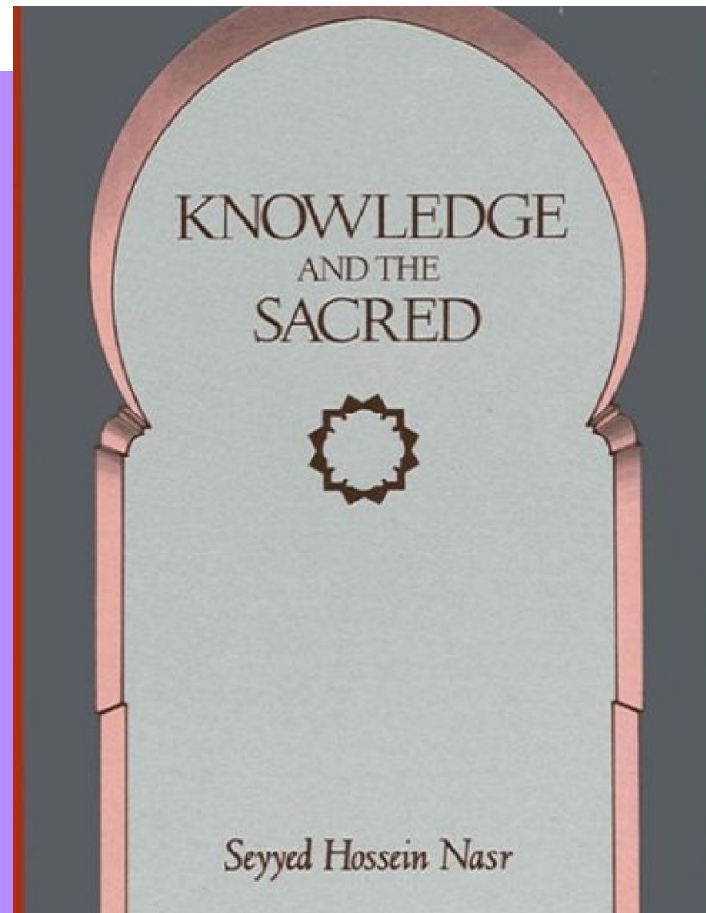
**Islamic  
Science**  
and the  
Making of  
**the European  
Renaissance**

George Saliba



The sacred origins of knowledge especially in European and non-European societies has been highlighted by Nasr (1989: 6-7):

In the beginning, Reality was at once being, knowledge, and bliss (the sat, chit, and, ananda of the Hindu tradition or qudrah, hikmah, and rahmah which are among the Names of Allah in Islam) and in that “now” which is the ever-present “in the beginning,” knowledge continues to possess a profound relation with that principal and primordial Reality which is the Sacred and the source of all that is sacred.”



Scientific discoveries during the Golden Age of Islam, in particular, were inspired by Quranic verses about the relationship between nature and man. To deepen their faith in God and understand the wisdom of divine creation, Muslim scholars studied nature (Faruqi, 2006). They were especially motivated by natural phenomena mentioned in the Quran.

## Surah Mu'minun Ayat 14

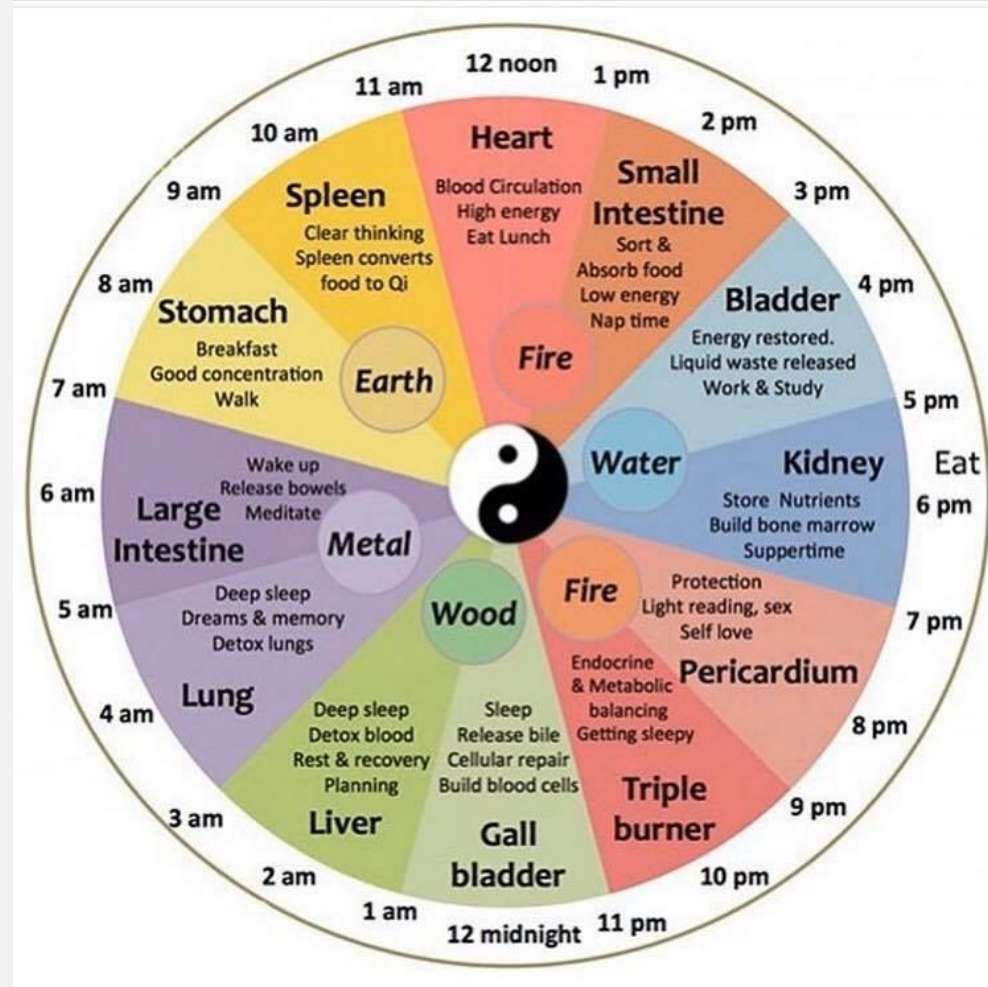
ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَاقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ  
عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ  
الْخَالِقِينَ

*Summa khalaqnan nutfata 'alaqatan fakhalaqnal 'alaqata mudghatan fakhalaq nal mudghata 'izaaman fakasawnal 'izaama lahaman summa anshaanaahu khalqan aakhar; fatabaarakal laahu ahsanul khaaliqeen*

**Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump [of flesh], and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators.**

**MY  
ISLAM**

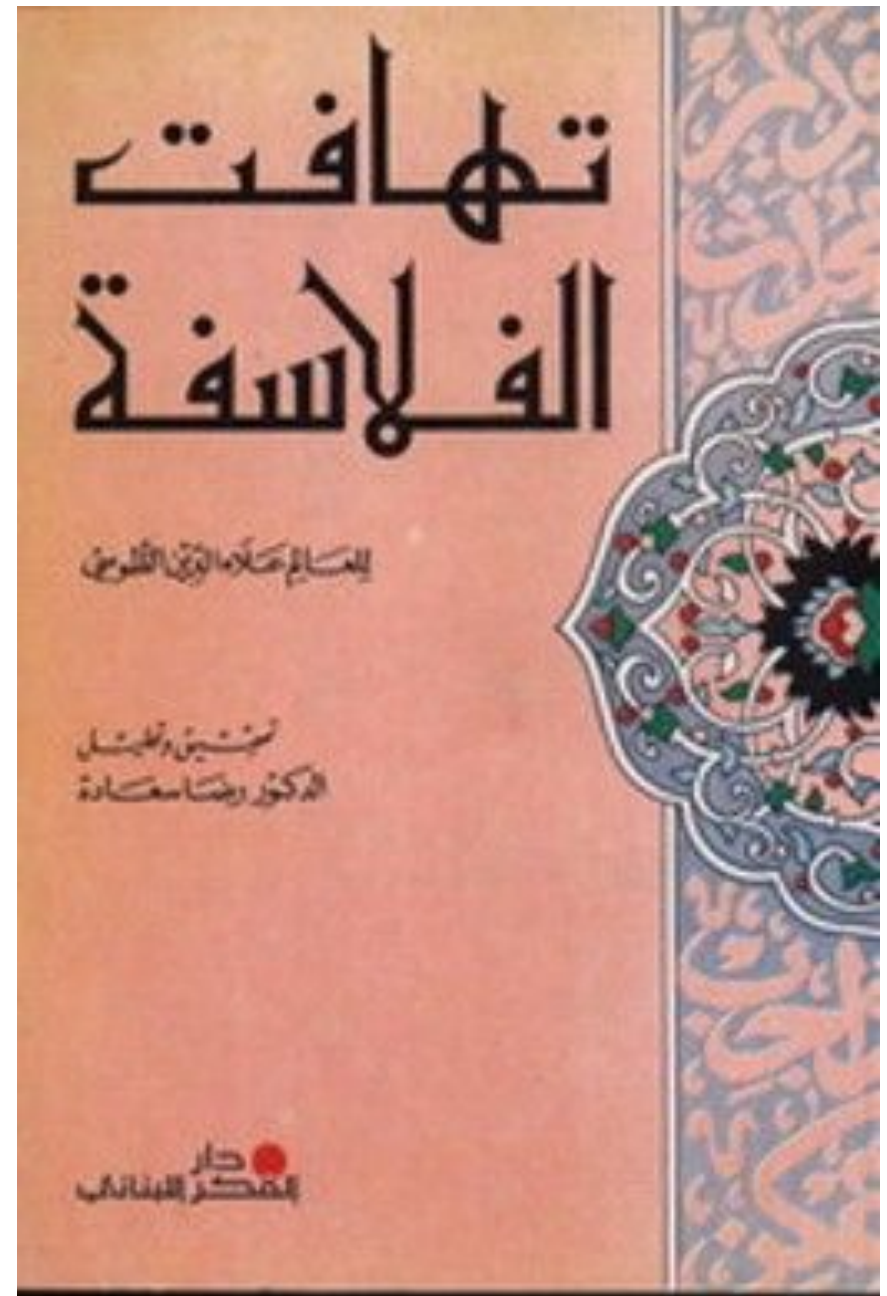
The Chinese also contributed to medical discoveries through the study of Daoist texts. They deliberated on the concept of Qi that pays emphasis on longevity. Daoist texts stress on preserving one's self and nature through the philosophy of Daodejing. This goal can be achieved through nurturing a life of meditation and proper living (yangsheng) (Raphals, 2015).

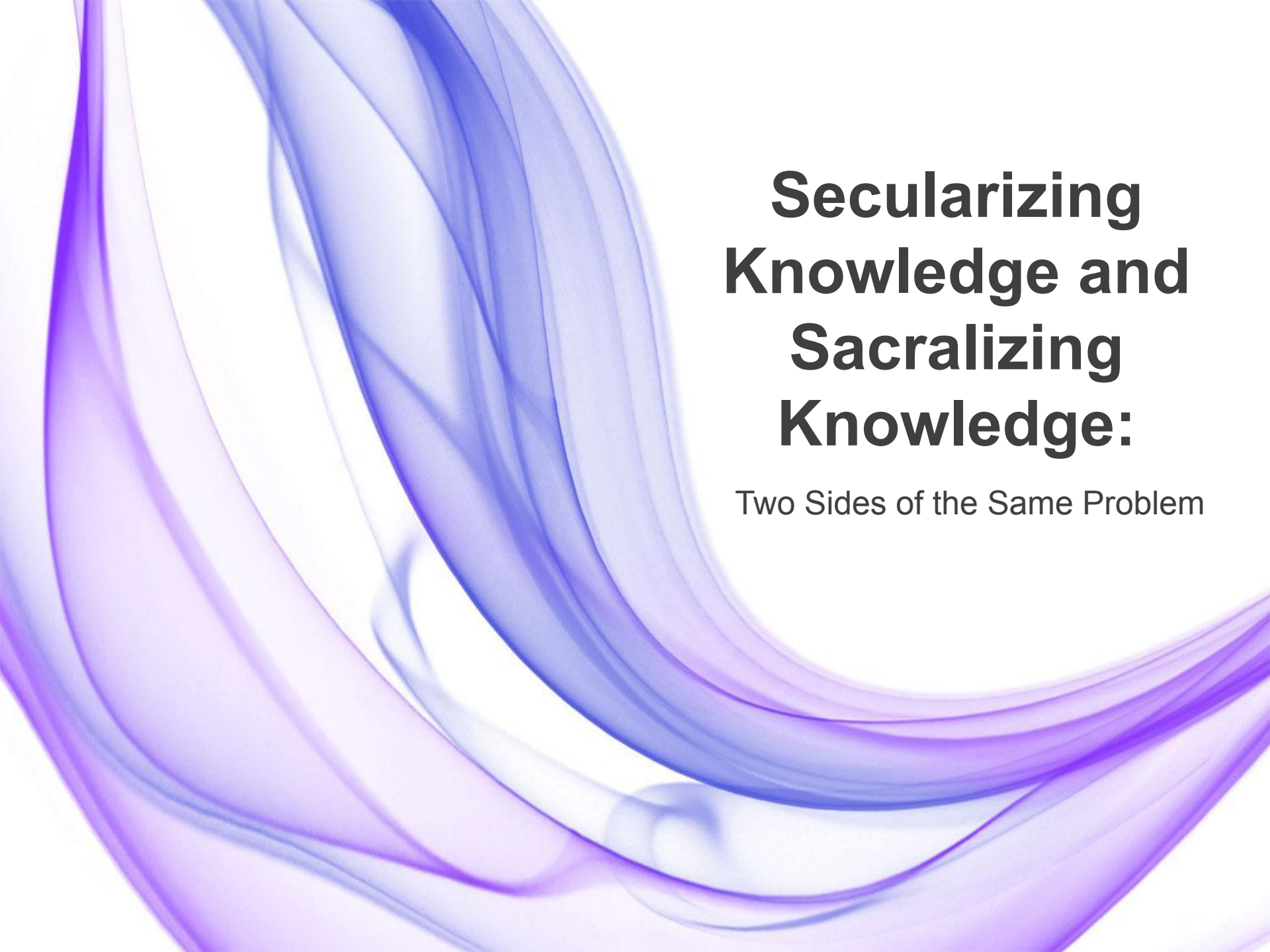


It is obvious from the above account that knowledge is a product of inter-civilizational exchanges. The so-called “Western knowledge” in our times trace its genealogy to interactions with other bodies of knowledge. By distinguishing Western knowledge and Islamic knowledge, the proponents of Islamization of Knowledge are presumably disowning the contributions of other civilizations.



Muslim scholars of the past did not reject but rather sought to harmonize any traditions of knowledge they considered as inconsistent with Islamic values. Such harmonization of knowledge was not without contestations from within the Islamic intellectual circles. Ibn Sina (980-1037) was criticized by Al-Ghazali in *Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of Philosophers) for being overly enamoured by Greek philosophy and contravening Islamic principles.



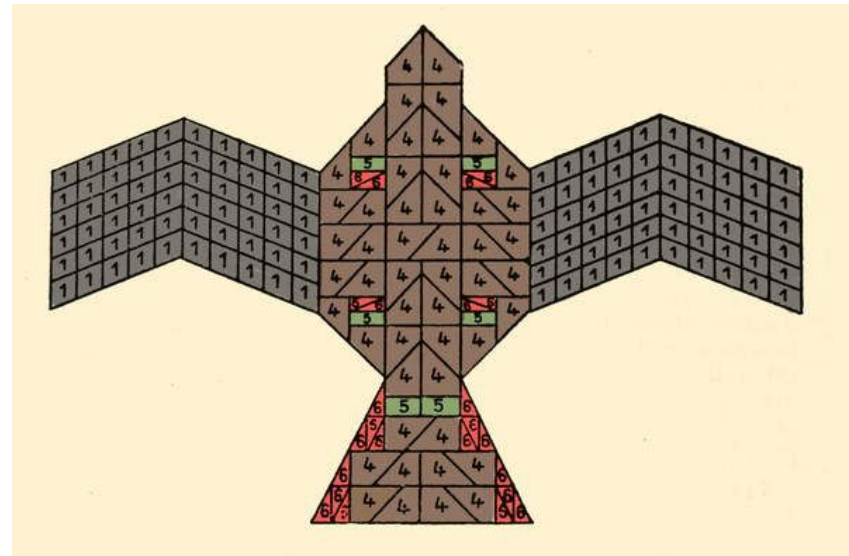


# **Secularizing Knowledge and Sacralizing Knowledge:**

Two Sides of the Same Problem

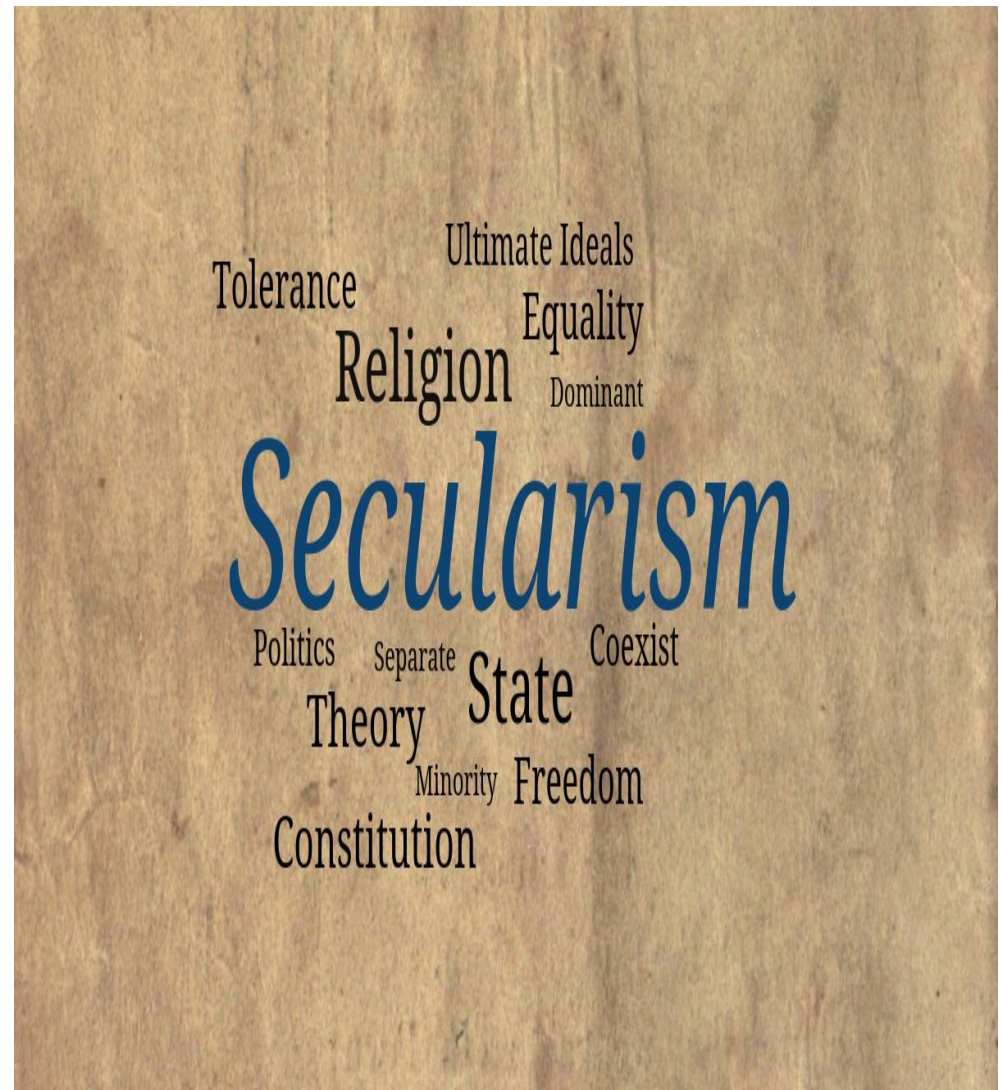
Modern secularists' claim that secular knowledge can be objective and value-free if methodological agnosticism is adhered to. Extending the views of Robert Proctor (1991), we would like to stress the fallacious nature of this claim for the fact that secular knowledge too has metaphysical foundations. Many scientific discoveries were inspired by or even grew out of religious teachings and convictions.

Knowledge of sacred scriptures have given rise to various branches and forms of knowledge about the world and these two bodies of knowledge alternately affected one another. The symbiotic relationship between the sacred and the secular meant that any attempts to secularize or sacralize knowledge is unfeasible.

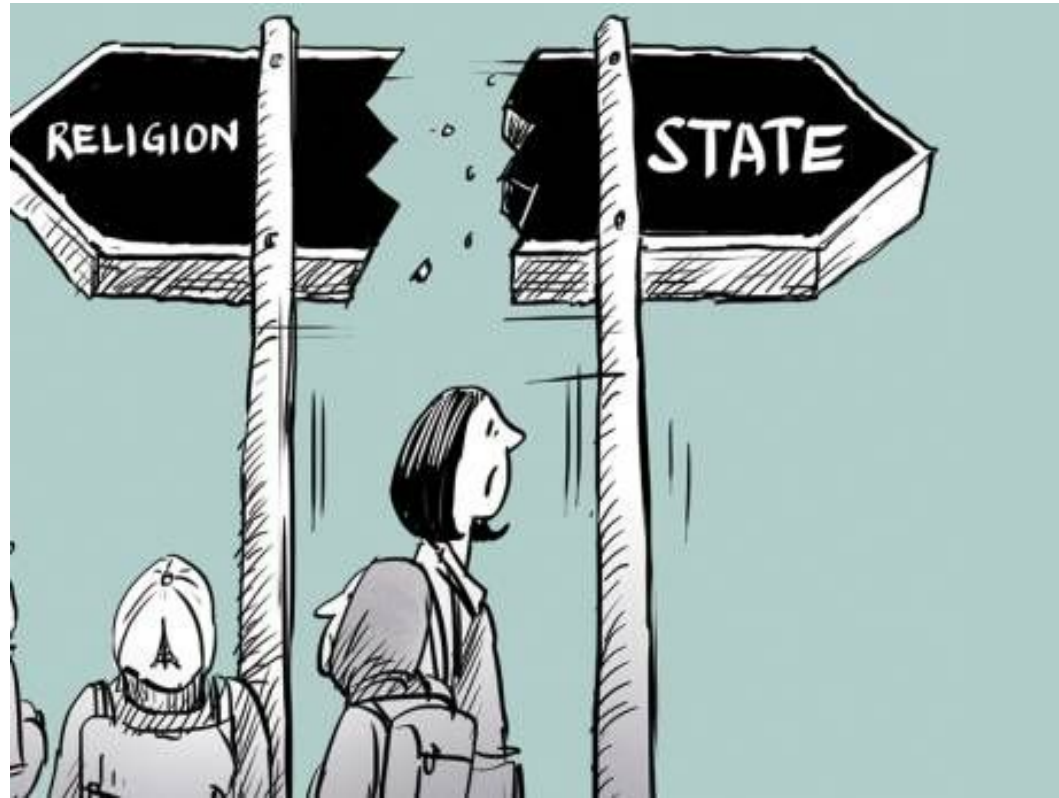


**The term secularism was coined as early as 1871 by George Holyoake in his book *The Principles of Secularism*:**

Secularism is the study of promoting human welfare by material means; measuring human welfare by the utilitarian rule, and making the service of others a duty of life. Secularism relates to the present existence of man, and to action, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life-having for its objects the development of the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of man to the highest perceivable point, as the immediate duty of society: inculcating the practical sufficiency of natural morality apart from Atheism, Theism, or Christianity.



- The term “secularization,” in turn, was discussed in the influential work of the Dutch theologian Cornelis Van Peursen (1959). Al-Attas also uses Van Peursen’s definition of secularization as “the deliverance of man first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language (1993:15, See also Cox, 2013: 2).”



# BEYOND ALL REASON

## THE LIMITS OF POST-MODERN THEOLOGY

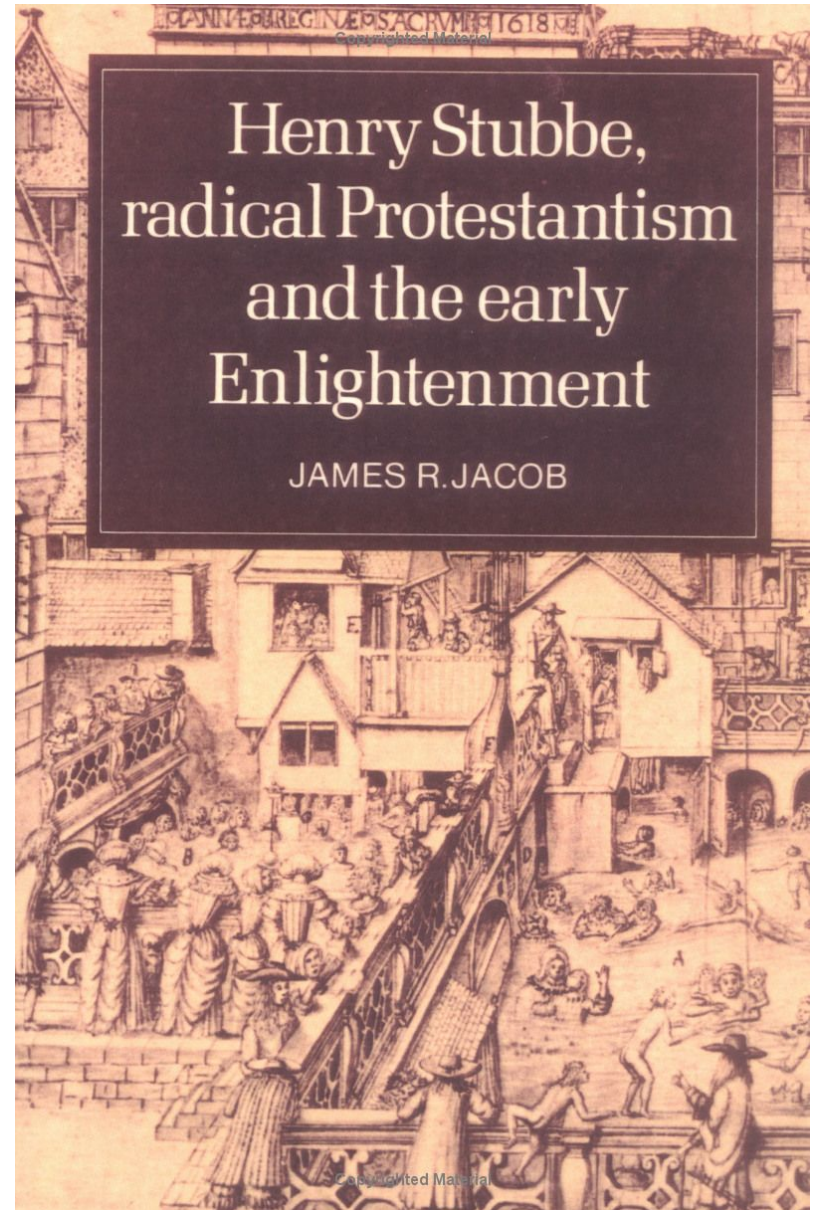


JOHN READER

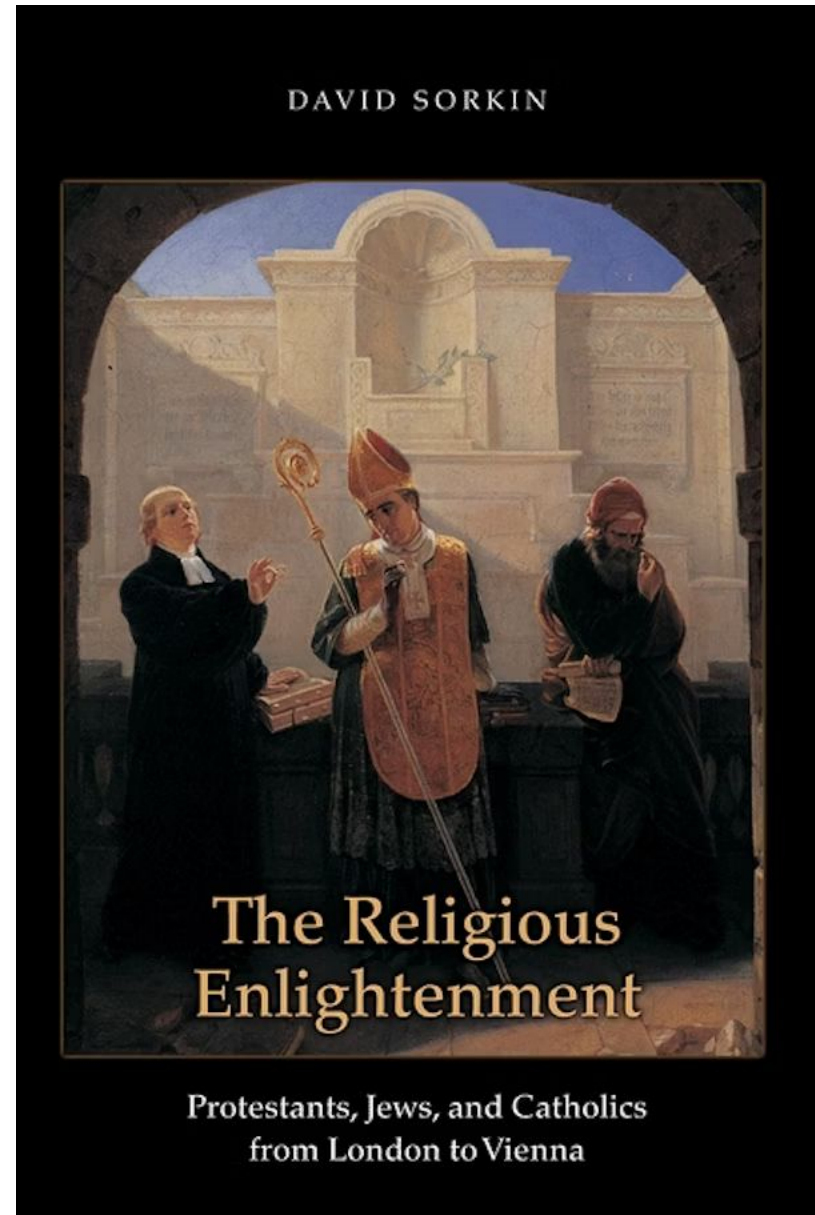
The Enlightenment in eighteenth century Europe was an era when secularization expanded. More emphasis was given to worldly domains of life and learning and religions were viewed with scepticism and cynicism (Jacob, 2019).

According to Reader (1997:4) the Enlightenment was “an emphasis on the primacy of reason as the correct way of organizing knowledge, a concentration on empirical data accessible to all and a belief that human progress was to be achieved by the application of science and reason.”

Charles Taylor (2007) maintain that secularism itself had theological origins and eventually influenced the rise of Christian monotheism and Protestant Reformation. Protestantism underscored individual liberty and raged against the authority of the Church. In effect, Protestantism further strengthened the Enlightenment era in the West.



- A recent work by David Sorkin shows that there were different Enlightenments co-existing within the same times and spaces, a strand that emphasised reason over religion and another strain that highlighted the roles of religious beliefs in the enhancement of knowledge. Both Enlightenments were in competition with each other and interactions between both was commonplace (Sorkin, 2008).



- Some Enlightenment Philosophers and scientists such as Spinoza and Leibniz wrote their works based on metaphysical and theological grounds (Phemister, 2006).

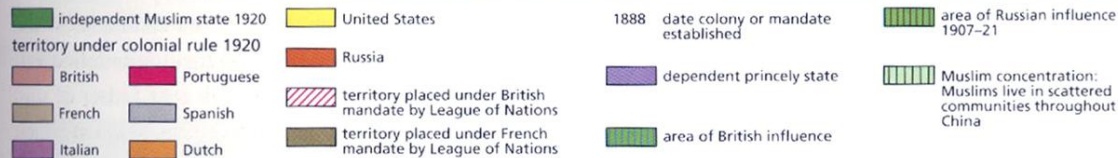
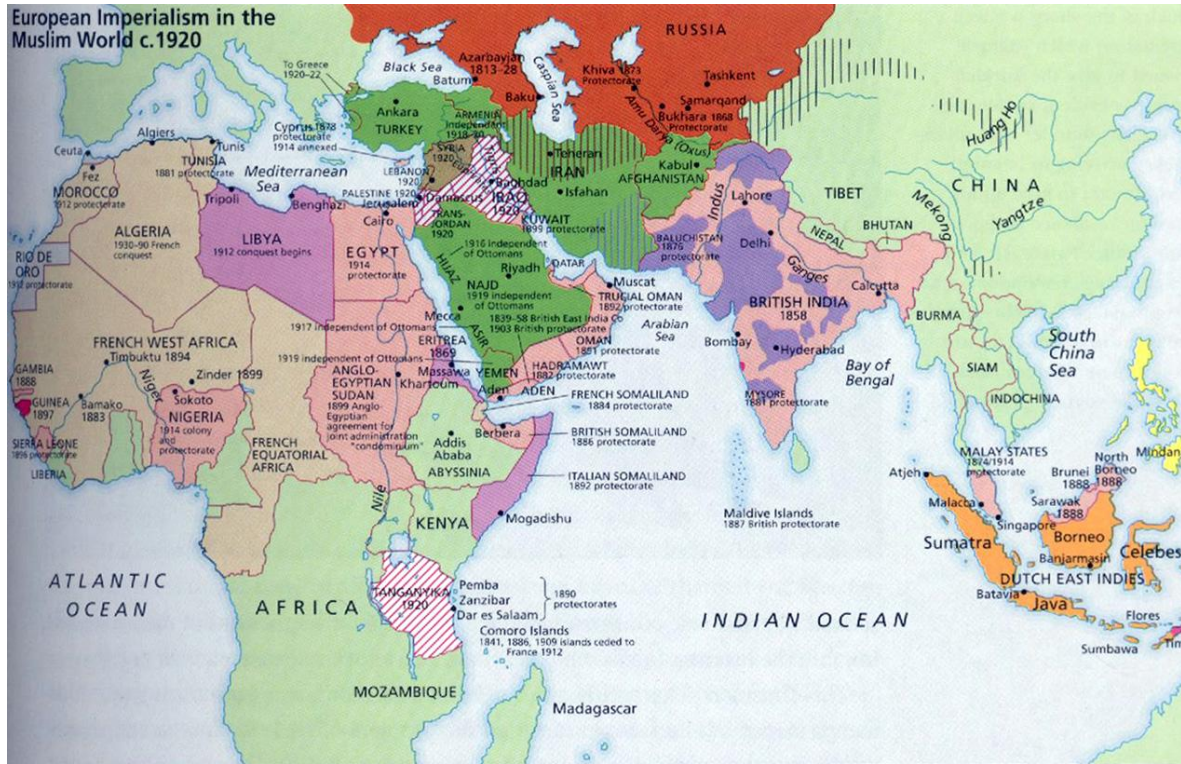


- One of the renowned rationalist philosophers, René Descartes (1596-1650), developed scientific arguments based on metaphysical foundations. According to Descartes, all human knowledge including the knowledge gained through the senses stems from knowledge of God though he departed from Christian theology. “And thus I see plainly that the certainty and truth of every science depends exclusively upon the knowledge of the true God, to the extent that, prior to becoming aware of him, I was incapable of achieving perfect knowledge about anything else (Descartes, 2008/1641, p. 47).”

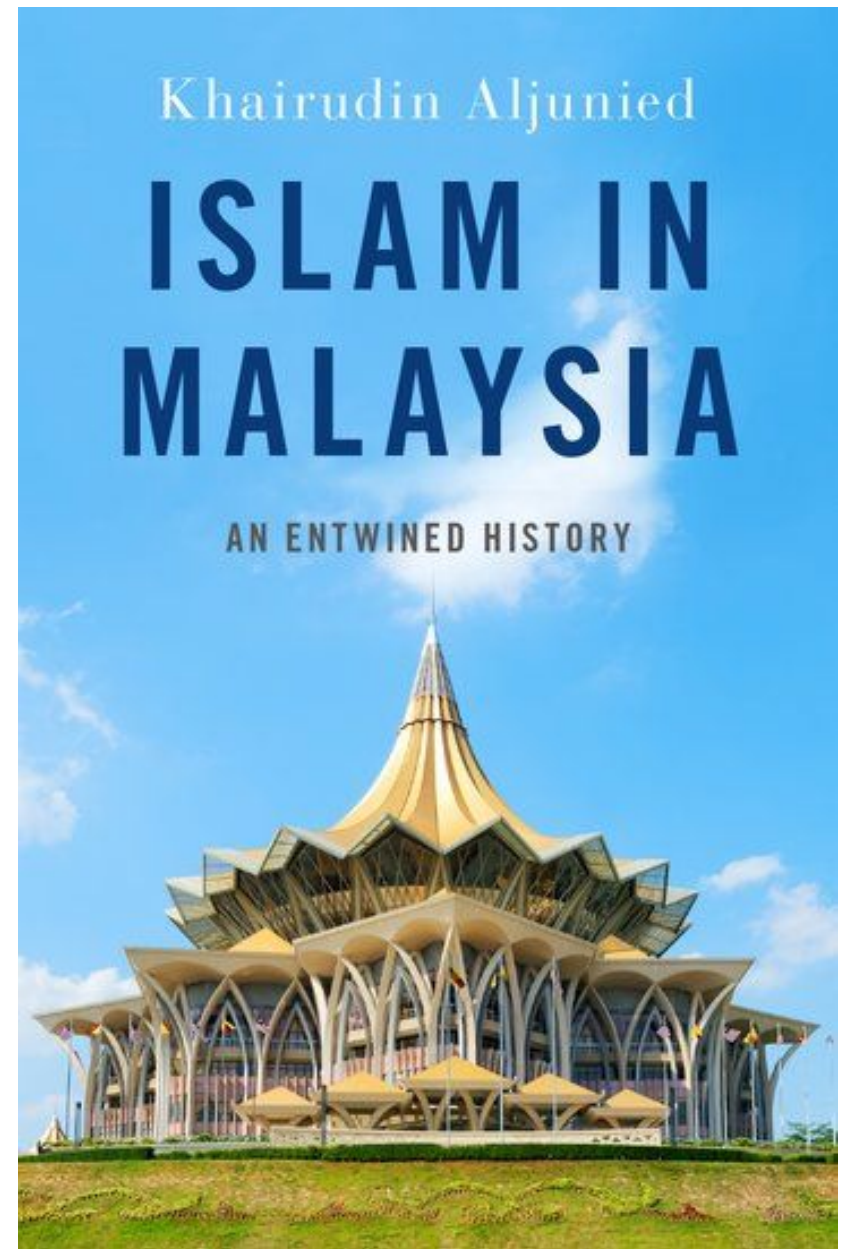


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- The post-Enlightenment period witnessed the expansion of European colonialism into Muslim lands. By the early twentieth century, most Muslim empires have succumbed to Western domination. The secularization process became more comprehensive than ever so much so that some would-be nation-states such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Turkey adopted secularism as state ideologies.
  - Be that as it may, colonialism, Western modernity and other secularizing processes did not totally obliterate Islamic piety from hearts and minds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals.
  - Granted that some Muslim countries such as Turkey and Tunisia took on aggressive secularist stances and marginalized Islam from public space and from education, but such secularizing policies had a reverse effect decades later. Many studies have shown that modernity and secularization spurred the coming into of new waves of Islamic revivalism and modernity defined in Islamic terms (Lapidus, 2002).

# European Imperialism in the Muslim World c.1920



- In other words, secularisation of Muslim lands in the modern period, as Aljunied has shown, marshalled Islamization by other means. And yet, such Islamization became, at times, defensive as part of the postcolonial responses to Western domination (Aljunied, 2019). Just as secularization had a theological and metaphysical origins, the Islamization also had a secular antecedent.



- Instead of bringing knowledge back to its pluralistic forms where the secular and the religious were taken as harmonious, Islamization of knowledge proponents end up marking divisions between the metaphysical, theological and religious knowledge with what they call as “secular” or “secularized” sciences. Secular knowledge was barely divorced from its religious past and what is needed instead is for Muslims to use and advance such knowledge to reflect their convictions and value systems.



the arts and  
humanities



Individual achievement  
and expression

the  
social  
sciences



Human products  
collectively produced or  
with collective impact



The way humans organise  
around economic, political  
and cultural systems



Human populations

the natural  
sciences



The natural world, the  
universe, and all forms  
of life

our world

# What are Humanities and Social Sciences?

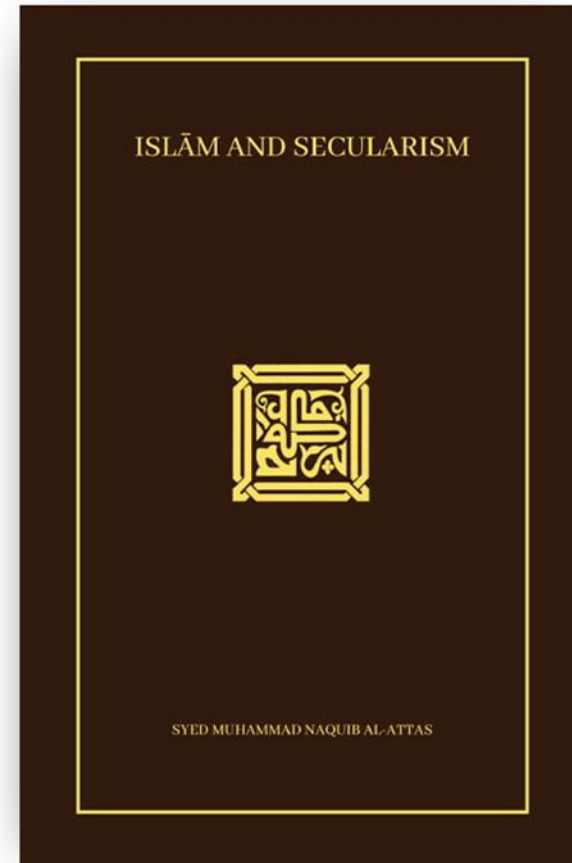


- Furthermore, instead of formulating new theories, building new concepts, founding new fields, ushering new disciplines and introducing new axioms for the study of the natural phenomena and human societies for the benefit of humankind, proponents of the Islamization of knowledge have merely engaged in what we call as adding “Islamic veneers” to the established bodies of knowledge. Hence, sociology becomes “Islamic sociology” and physics as we know today is prefixed with the term “Islamicized” without any radical changes to the disciplines.


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# **Conclusion**

Over the past few decades, Muslim intellectuals have sought to rectify the intellectual crisis that has plagued the Muslim world by embarking on the 'epistemological revolution.' Known as Islamization of Knowledge, thinkers within this movement desired a dewesternization of global epistemology and infusion of Islamic values into modern knowledge. They hoped to synthesize the social sciences and humanities with the natural sciences and the incorporation of religious principles in heart of academic pursuits. Grounded in the tawheedic paradigm, they affirmed the holistic and sacred nature of knowledge.



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However, the application of the Islamization principles and strategies has yet to be achieved due to the fallacy of civilizational difference and a mistaken idea of knowledge formations. The unresolved methodological issues in the Islamization project have further reinforced dualism. The fight against secularism coupled by the politization of Islam eventually has led to more secularization couched in Islamic terms (Humeira, 2011).

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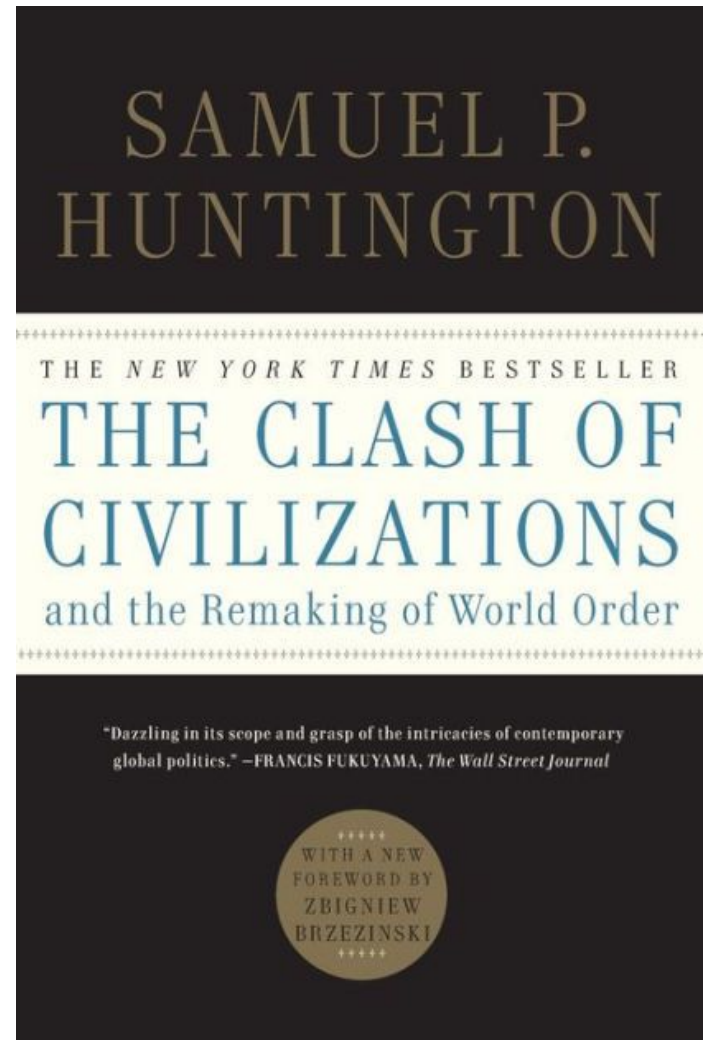


**Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Law (AIKOL)**


October 5, 2021 /



- The concept of dewesternization was based on the notion that Western civilization is in conflict with the Islamic and Asian civilizations. In reality, knowledge has diverse origins hence inter-civilizational in nature. The so called Western knowledge that we inherit today were products of interactions with the Muslim, Indian, Chinese and other influences. Furthermore, the claim that the only valid scientific knowledge is secular can be refuted since most of scientific discoveries in great civilizations were religiously-inspired.



- Knowledge has been imbued with both secular and sacred elements such that decoupling the two is a utopian venture.
- The attempts to resacralize knowledge are noteworthy yet ill-founded.
- It is not knowledge or institutions of knowledge that should be resacralized but the manner to which Muslims think that should be reformed to manifest the ideals of unity and universality.

A landscape photograph showing a dirt road winding through a field of tall, dry grass. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Islam doesn't need reform, we  
need to reform the Muslim mind.

Tariq Ramadan

quote fancy