

SCIENCE, APRICOTS, AND THE SACREDNESS OF NATURE

Muzaffar Iqbal

Islamic scientific tradition is now a non-existent entity, at least in the concrete and physical realm of laboratories. No laboratory in the contemporary world pursues scientific activity anchored in a conceptual framework different from the one that emerged in the West after Bacon. No longer are men and women engaged in pursuit of knowledge of the physical universe conceived as a cosmos inalienably linked to an unchanging, permanent, and absolute Truth. Today, the distinction between a research laboratory located in Massachusetts and one situated in the Hijāz is merely that of geographical coordinates; the scientific activity at each is indistinguishable. This is true of all disciplines of science and of all places on this planet.

Not only have the instruments, techniques, and procedures used for scientific research become similar, even the theoretical framework that governs each scientific discipline—as well as the entire enterprise of science—suffers from a monochromasia that has abolished all other conceptual frameworks. This reduction is a direct result of the aggression committed by Western civilization against other civilizations through the violent occupation of their intellectual space. This occupation, which has long survived the physical departure of Western armies from most of the colonized lands, has not only impoverished these civilizations, it has also simultaneously brought the entire human race to a catastrophe resulting from the pursuit of a science that views its subject—the physical cosmos—as a mere aggregate of atoms and molecules at its disposal. This manipulative and utilitarian concept of nature has led to the rise of a science that now holds the entire physical cosmos hostage to its relentless exploitation for short-term economic, political, and social goals.

That something has gone wrong at the most fundamental level of human existence is glaringly obvious, a situation only the most dogmatic blindness would contest. That it is modern science and its auxiliary

technology which are the underlying causes of this calamity remains a rarely acknowledged truth in a world dominated by de facto scientism. This lack of general acceptance of the obvious correlation between the two does not, however, change things. For instance, the nexus between modern science, its offshoot technologies, and the environmental crisis now in its advanced stages is clear; the causal lines are drawn, yet are not openly accepted. Likewise, there are verifiable links between the technological alteration of the genetic composition of grains, fruits, and vegetables and the emergence of hitherto unknown diseases, between the mechanical penetration of humanity into wildlife habitats and the resulting destruction of entire sanctuaries and displacement or extinction of species, between the use of certain industrial chemicals and vast ecosystemic changes and disorders.

The fact that no other science exists in the contemporary world but the one built upon the Baconian model—now wedded to the state and the corporation—is generally used as a rationale for the claim that no other science is *actually possible*. This reasoning is patently absurd, and is imbued with the same illogicality that has given birth to the Darwinian and neo-Darwinian theories which have collectively been anointed as the official religion of contemporary science: only the fittest survives; what has survived *is* the fittest.

Science, as a human activity, could only attain this universality if all human beings living on this planet were to become uniform in terms of their faiths, worldviews, and concepts of reality. As a process of investigation of the physical world, science could only attain this monolithic dimension if its subject—the physical world—were understood by all human beings in a like manner. This is obviously not the case.

The apricot divested of its original nature by a corporation's genetic engineering is not viewed in the same manner by a farmer in the Hunza Valley of the Himalayan mountain range; for the corporation, it is merely an object which can be manipulated for increased production, shelf-life, and profit; for the farmer, it is not only a fruit which is cultivated and tended for its economic benefits, but is simultaneously a fruit whose archetype exists in the other world and whose essential nature, *fiṭrah*, must be respected for no other reason than the fact that it is a Divine trust to humanity—a trust that cannot be violated if we are to remain human, because our own humanness stems from our *fiṭrah*, which defines, distinguishes, and honors humanity as a distinct species capable

of bearing witness to the Divine and able to hold the trust vouchsafed. For the corporation interested in extracting maximum profit from its genetically-modified apricots, it is inconsequential if its apricots merely look like apricots and have neither the taste nor the fragrance of the fruit produced in the Himalayan valley. But the farmer growing apricots in the Hunza Valley and his family, friends, and relatives relish the taste of the apricots plucked from their orchards not only because these apricots really have a delicious taste and fragrance, but also because the fruit evokes in them a yearning for its archetype awaiting them in Paradise when, God willing, they will enter that sanctified realm which remains the focal point of their earthly existence.

True, not all farmers have this conscious reverence for the apricots that have been growing in their orchards for hundreds of years; some may even be succumbing to the same greed as that of the corporation which now holds patents to the genetically-modified plants—but does this universalize the reign of modern science? Does this mean that all human beings now accept a concept of apricots that considers them as mere objects made up of atoms and molecules, whose composition can be altered at will and which can be divested of their innate nature? Certainly not. And since there remain many different concepts of the physical world, there remains the possibility of investigating this physical world in ways very different from those of modern science. It is, therefore, merely the tyranny of contemporary science which touts the universality of this enterprise anchored in a single worldview held by a relatively small minority of human beings.

It is true that this minority has unprecedented global reach and influence, and its scientific enterprise, now held hostage by market forces on the one hand and state interests on the other, has certainly succeeded in fundamentally altering the ways millions of human beings now procure their food and other provisions, construct their dwelling places, and even how they establish interpersonal relationships. It is also true that technologies developed by a small segment of humanity now construct—and constrict—human existence to the extent that nothing is beyond the reach of these technologies, from the modes of transportation to the performance of religious rites and from the simple act of making a cup of tea to the procedures used during the birth of a child. This penetration of a certain kind of technology into all spheres of contemporary life and society has destroyed—and is destroying—some of the most essential and defining characteristics of humanity itself; for

when technology destroys the innate nature of apricots it simultaneously destroys something within us and makes us poorer.

In a world dominated by technologically-produced objects, all civilizations have succumbed to the god of science and technology, its utilitarian extension. A world so defined and constructed has experienced a vast dislocation of things and their functions. We thus live in a world divested of order and purpose in which violence is the most manifest reality. Violence breeds violence. Humanity cannot retain its innate nature, *fiṭrah*, while simultaneously destroying the innate nature of other species. The violence being suffered by the physical world through modern science and technology is not only making the planet inhospitable, it is also destroying something within each one of us. The resulting reduction of quality of life cannot be compensated by quantity; the corporation that can increase apricot yields cannot compensate for the loss of quality.

Realism counsels us to accept the effective absence of scientific traditions other than the modern Western now prevalent around the globe, but it also invests in us a responsibility to hold the mirror in which humanity can see the true face of modern science and the destruction it has wrought. Seen in this mirror are not only the explicitly deadly products of modern technology—the cruise missiles and cluster bombs dismembering human limbs and bones in Fallujah and Tora Bora—but also the pervasive and invisible currents that now permeate our lives, constructing a notion of nature that has been divested of all higher meaning. It is true that the Islamic scientific tradition does not exist in practice today, but this does not mean that it has been destroyed forever because that which gave birth to it has not been destroyed and cannot ever be destroyed—the sacred concept of nature that respects each and every apricot that comes into existence.



Wuddistān

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