Fundamentals of Survival

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Resumo

No mundo contemporâneo existe um nexo fundamental entre a ciência, a religião e as civilizações. A Ciência, como a conhecemos hoje em dia, emergiu na Europa como resultado de processos diversificados e complementares. Ora, a tecnologia produzida pela aplicação da ciência moderna colocou-nos nas margens de um desastre que pode muito bem eliminar toda a raça humana deste planeta. Isto é reconhecido por alguns dos Cientistas mais esclarecidos, e continua a ser uma grande preocupação para todos os que estão interessados na questão da problemática relacionada com o destino da humanidade. Na verdade, esta separação entre uma visão alargada do mundo, moldada por uma ciência triunfante, com suas tecnologias e valores, e a nossa relação com o transcendente é demasiado profunda para ser ignorada.

1. The Great Imbalance

On October 12, 1999, the United Nations celebrated the arrival of the six billionth baby. *The World at Six Billion*, a program of the UN, was announced as an historic milestone in the growth of world population. During the twentieth century, world population increased from 1.65 billion to 6 billion, and experienced both the highest rate of population growth (averaging 2.04 per cent per year) during the late 1960s, and the largest annual increment to world population (86 million persons each year) in the late 1980s.[1] Out of these six billion residents of the world, 3 billion live on less than two dollars a day; 1.2 billion of these subsist on less than a dollar a day. Since the 1950s, nearly 2 million hectares of land, which comprise 23

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percent of all cropland, pasture, forest and woodland, has been degraded. Every decade, another five percent of tropical forests is cleared. More than a third of terrestrial biodiversity is squeezed into habitat fragments covering just 1.4 percent of the earth's surface and could vanish if these fragments are lost. The addition of two billion people to the world's population over the last 30 years has produced megacities which cannot sustain their populace because of poor infrastructure and resources; even the air is unhealthy in these cities.[2] Add to this a whole range of other global epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and water-borne diseases, and we have a glimpse of the great imbalance which characterizes the world in which we live.

In addition to these facts, there are dilemmas which cannot be quantified; numbers do not tell us anything about the spiritual travail of the human race at this point in history, nor do they narrate the tale of devastation caused by erosion of values. But there are tell-tale signs of a widespread discontent that runs through all societies, creating a state of anxiety peculiar to our times. In addition, there are regions of the world where societies have been fractured to such an extent that genocidal conflicts have led to immense human suffering. At another level, the fact that the twenty-first century has already witnessed two wars in which lethal weapons, produced by modern technology, have been used without restraint to cause devastation which differs from all previous war-time disorders and destructions by several orders of magnitude, has something else to say about the future of the human race. But these are, once more, mere words which are incapable of communicating the suffering caused by the radiation from depleted uranium ammunition which was used in Iraq and Afghanistan and which is silently at work, at this very moment, crippling thousands of newly born and yet to be born children.

This great imbalance has not gone unnoticed; in fact, it is so well--known that in September 2000, the world's leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to stronger global efforts to reduce poverty, improve health and promote peace, human rights and environmental sustainability. The Millennium Development Goals that emerged from the Declaration are specific, including one for reducing the extreme poverty that still grips more than 1 billion of the world's people.[3]

But while the political leaders of the world meet, issue declarations and memorandums of understanding—which gather dust on the shelves of

government offices around the world—there is a wide-spread movement of the masses that is asking critical questions about the state of the world. This movement is often seen as the emerging public conscience and is repressed by the official machinery every time it tries to accumulate force. Some of the most critical questions being asked by this world conscience include:

Why is there such a great imbalance between various segments of humanity?

What happened to the fruits of the great scientific revolution that was supposed to usher humanity into a new era of health, prosperity and leisure?

Why are countries with the lowest human development level in the state in which they are?

But while these basic and vital questions are being raised, the forces of globalization, policies of dominance, conquest and outright invasions continue to establish a new world order in which only a particular worldview—accompanied by a particular social and economic ordering—is being imposed on people whose own spiritual and cultural values are not in consonance with this imposed order. Add to this the elaborate system of international financial institutions, debt traps—which are really death traps—quotas, and sanctions which control world economy to a large extent, and we have a glimpse of the roots of tension, disorder, anarchy, genocide and global conflicts that mark our world today.

In order to understand real issues at the heart of contemporary conflicts, we must view these fault lines and economic disparities that exist today as results of a historical process marked by two fundamental transformations. The first is the Scientific Revolution that ushered us into the modern and post-modern worlds, characterized by destruction of the physical world and an unprecedented degree of subjugation of natural resources to human will. The second transformation, which began with the so-called "Enlightenment", has gone through various internal mutations—all of which have been geared toward the replacement of religious order by secularized order, based solely on "human reason"; for our purposes, we will call this second transformation an effort to establish a "Human Kingdom". There are numerous results of this effort, such as "democracies" driven by multi-million dollar corporations working for the interest of a small segment of the population, market economies resonating with the knell of the parting of traditional ways of life that have evolved over centuries, but the most important and far-reaching result of these efforts to establish a

Human Kingdom on the planet is an arrogance that seeks to impose this will on the entire human habitat.

These, then, are the major contours of the tensions and conflicts which threaten the entire human race today. These are also the broad parameters around which a reaction has emerged—a reaction that often turns violent and threatens life, peace, and security.

As we proceed in our attempt to understand the fundamentals of survival, we need to keep in mind that there is no such thing as evil incarnate; evil arises as a reaction to something else; it is not one of the fundamental characteristics of humanity; no one likes to shed blood, kill and be killed. Pathological cases do of course exist, but those alone do not have the critical mass needed for a global reign of evil. Humankind, as a social and distinctively intelligent species, is constituted to live in peace and harmony, rather than in violence and disharmony.

2. The Two Defining Revolutions

2.1. The Scientific Revolution

The first of the two revolutions that define the contours of our world today to a large extent, may not have begun in the summer of 1610 when Galileo turned his recently invented telescope skyward and discovered the satellites of Jupiter, but this little instrument did change certain fundamental aspects of our concept of the world. It was the first real extension of human senses. In one stroke, the cosmos, or more correctly human concept of cosmos, was changed forever. Within the span of one generation, the Aristotelian conception of sublunary and superlunary regions that had defined the cosmos for hundreds of years vanished. So did the concept of permanence and change. Instead of a cosmos populated with unchanging bodies above the moon, the planets were now shown to have much in common with the earth and the fixed stars were found to be further away. When the telescope became known, Kepler was in his late thirties and Galileo in his middle forties. By the time these two men finished their careers, a new common sense had emerged which conceived the cosmos in terms of planets which were much closer to the earth and the stars which were farther and the concept of the "Solar System" had begun to redefine our place on this planet Earth.

This radical transformation of our place in the universe was, however, only the beginning. Within the next two centuries, the Scientific Revolution was to drastically change the way in which human beings lived their lives, how they conceived their relationship with nature and how they utilized resources. This dramatic change was accompanied by a large number of discoveries in almost all branches of knowledge. This sea-change in our ability to harness natural resources was accompanied by an equally fundamental change in human notions about God, life, and the our relationship with the universe. The mechanistic worldview that dominated science at the end of the eighteenth century, the so-called "clockwork universe" conceived God as a perfect Craftsman Who created a universe in which both matter and energy were conserved. Thus preserved through its design, the universe supposedly required no intervention by God.

This mechanistic worldview was accompanied by the concept of "Determinism", articulated most clearly by Pierre-Simon Laplace who thought that the motion of every particle in the universe is completely determined by the state of the universe at that instant of time, so that if God knows the positions and velocities of all the particles at any time, together with the forces they exert on each other, He would know the complete details of the entire past and future. Isaac Newton could not accept this view of God, because it had the potential to lead toward atheism, but Robert Boyle and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz defended it as a more worthy and dignified conception of the deity than one which would continuously require Him to tinker with the universe.

But it was René Descartes' dualistic philosophy that wrought a complete break with the past, for through his separation of spirit and matter, Descartes laid the foundation of an intellectual revolution that would completely uproot our spirituality from its perennial niche. Descartes' formulation, which perceived the physical world as an independent entity, and attempted to explain the phenomena of nature through a fixed set of substances, further removed God from the equation. In biology, this led to the notion of a collection of immutable species; in chemistry, it meant that all changes could be explained on the basis of a list of elements and in physics, it meant that properties such as heat, electricity, and magnetism could be explained by means of weightless fluids.

Thus, between 1500 and 1800, the work of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, Isaac Newton, Antoine Lavoiser, and others

produced a fundamental change in all sciences. Some historians of science insist on using the term, "Second Scientific Revolution", which according to Thomas Kuhn, refers to "successful quantification of the Baconian sciences" that took place primarily in the nineteenth century.[4]

These revolutions accomplished two things: they empowered humanity in a manner and to an extent that was not even imaginable in previous eras and they dislocated humankind from its previously held beliefs. For example, the Aristotelian-Christian paradigms, which were widely held in Western Europe at the time of Copernicus, postulated that the world was created by God in such a manner that everything in the world has its place in a harmonious whole and that all events occur to fulfill an ultimate purpose and humans have access to the spiritual world. But the Scientific Revolution shattered many of these beliefs. According to the "clockwork-universe" paradigm established by the Scientific Revolution, the world consisted of independent pieces of matter whose motion in absolute space is precisely determined by mathematical laws; that events occurring in different parts of the universe can be said to happen at the same time; that humans are qualitatively different from all other biological species and can, if they wish, liberate themselves from the influence of animal passions; and that the physical world has an objective existence independent of our observations of it. These notions—which can be traced back to Descartes and Newton—were to lose force in the second Scientific Revolution wrought by Darwin, Freud, Einstein and Bohr.

The second Scientific Revolution, let us note, was built upon a far more secure foundation than the first. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the success of the mechanistic paradigm was a self-evident fact: motions of planets, satellites, and comets were being "successfully" explained through Newton's law of gravity. Heat, electricity, magnetism, light, chemical reactions, and physiology were all being examined as if their explanations were within easy reach. The collection and quantification of "empirical data", leading to the formulation and testing of general laws, had become a vast enterprise and every new discovery confirmed belief in the power of science. By the middle of the nineteenth century, three concepts—atom, energy and evolution—had been given new meaning pregnant with such force that a total break with the past was now imminent. Atoms and energy were conceptual tools for explaining and correlating general laws which were supposed to be governing the physical phenomena; they also helped to

extend these laws to biological phenomena. Evolution provided a framework for explaining how specific phenomena and structures had come into existence through the action of "natural laws". It was believed that humanity was now ready to answer the biggest question: the mystery of origin of all things in the cosmos.

While intellectual curiosity was at work behind the emergence of these concepts, practical needs were giving birth to specific techniques based on newly discovered scientific principles. The need to measure and maximize mechanical work done by the steam engine demanded an investigation of how heat is used to produce work. Or in a more general sense, energy itself became linked to units of money—the amount one paid to procure a certain amount of energy.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the mechanistic worldview began to wane. A new paradigm slowly emerged from components already present in the nineteenth century though not used in the manner in which they were used during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Max Planck and Albert Einstein atomized energy in their new quantum theory while Charles Darwin's evolution was combined with Gregor Mendel's atomistic genetics to form a new synthesis of biology. On the metaphysical level, mechanism was now replaced with positivism. Space, time, velocity, mass, and energy were relativized; they no longer enjoyed an objective existence independent of the observer.

The brave new world postulated by T. H. Huxley, a Victorian advocate of Darwinism, in his 1869 presidential address to the Geological Society of London, conceived that the doctrine of evolution "embraces in one stupendous analogy the growth of a solar system from molecular chaos, the shaping of the earth from the nebulous cubhood of its youth, through innumerable changes and immeasurable ages, to its present form, and the development of a living being from the shapeless mass of protoplasm we term a germ." In this early version, evolution is both teleological and deterministic; it implies an *unfolding* of an original plan, as Huxley pointed out in an article on the genealogy of animals published in 1869. "It is not less certain that the existing world lay potentially in the cosmic vapour, and that a sufficient intelligence could, from a knowledge of the properties of the molecules of that vapour, have predicted, say the state of the fauna of Britain in 1869, with as much certainty as one can say what will happen to the vapour of the breath on a cold winter's day."[5]

During most of the nineteenth century, it was the "nebular hypothesis", first formulated by the French astronomer Laplace and the British astronomer William Herschel around 1800—rather than natural selection—that was the dominant paradigm of evolution. Geology was strongly influenced by the assumption that the Earth was formed as a hot fluid sphere in accordance with Laplace's mechanism; the process of cooling and contraction was widely thought to have determined its surface features; volcanoes and earthquakes were proofs of the eternal heat still remaining from the Earth's fiery beginnings. It was believed that new and complex forms of life appeared as the Earth reached more moderate temperatures; thus a "progessivist" and "directionalist" synthesis of astronomy, geology, and biology emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century—a synthesis which did not point toward Darwinian evolution. However, Charles Lyell did not accept the notion of progressive synthesis; he based his own ideas about Earth history on "uniformitarian" geology. He urged geologists to explain the present surface of the Earth by invoking only those physical processes that were still in operation. Lyell asserted that the rate of intensity of processes such as erosion and uplifting was not much different in the past; and that these processes have been going on for millions of years to produce observable results. Lyell also accepted the notion of transmutation of species and the attack of his theory by the physicist Lord Kelvin neutralized the scientific opposition to the evolutionary worldview. The net result of this encounter was a victory for the evolutionary perspective in the physical world, which would later facilitate acceptance of evolution in the life sciences.

The emergence, and acceptance, of Darwinism has been seen as a challenge to the religious worldview but its apparent success is not merely a theoretical reformulation of belief systems; Darwinism now rules the world in more insidious forms and various social and cultural off-spring of Darwinism lie at the very heart of the current state of the world. Darwin's mechanism of change, misleadingly called "natural selection" is based on four postulates: (i) each generation of offspring contains variations from the inherited characters of the parents; (ii) there is a fierce struggle for survival among these organisms and the other species in an environment with limited resources; (iii) those variations that help the organism to survive and reproduce in a particular environment will be more likely to persist in future generations. This process automatically causes the species to evolve into another species better adapted to the environment; and (iv) the process of sexual reproduction favours the development of certain characteristics, such as bright

colors, distinctive shapes and odors, that are attractive to potential mates even though they may seem to have zero or even negative survival value in a jungle full of predators. But the most sensational implication of Darwin's theory was that we ourselves are the product of evolution and thus in some sense, are just another species of animal. With the acceptance of this kind of evolution, from a lower animal to human race, "social Darwinism" was only a step away. During the late nineteenth century, it became a component of social theory in England, the United States and some European countries. When mixed with Marxism and other doctrines that postulated evolution toward a desired future state of society, and with the tendency to see human beings as members of distinct races, some of which were superior to others, social Darwinism provided the strongest intellectual platform for colonization of much of the world.

Many consequences of Darwinism still hold sway, though not in such open fashion as they did in the nineteenth century. At least three such consequences are directly related to the current state of humanity. The first is the cultural evolution, with built-in notions of racism and sexism, which postulates that "primitive man" was at a lower stage of evolution than "modern man" and that the colored races and white women have not yet achieved the level of evolution of the white male. Homo sapiens are evolving but until the less advanced races have caught up with the more advanced, they must submit to the dominance and tutelage of their evolutionary betters.

The second concept is that of Hereditarianism. This postulates that each one of us is born with a fixed inherited capacity to learn and achieve success. The unfit must be weeded out so that better fitted can maximize the use of resources in the struggle for survival. This hypothesis was used in the United States in the early twentieth century to prohibit immigration from countries thought to have "inferior" populations. The intelligence--test movement, still a corner stone for admission into many US universities, emerged to place everyone on a linear one-dimensional scale. Its main concern was to identify "idiots" and "imbeciles", but it has evolved into a multi-million dollar business; the IQ testing still dominates recruitments in many departments of government. Believed to be determined by heredity (and in some "liberal" formulations fixed early in life), IQ supposedly measures one's capacity to succeed in any intellectual endeavor. It has led to the emergence of "sperm banks" and notions of development of a "super race".

The third concept that attempted to redefine our humanity goes back to Freud, for whom the slogan "anatomy is destiny", was the only real measure of humanity. Thus, Freud tried to explain all human behavior on the basis of animal passions—lust, fear, anger. In Freud's scheme, there was no room for anything higher than emotions; this led to a further degeneration of concepts dealing with spiritual aspects of human nature.

Of course, there have been several notable exceptions to this general trend in the making of our world. Franz Boas rejected Darwinism in anthropology. He opposed the doctrine of cultural evolution and argued that each culture must be studied on its own terms, without judging it advanced or primitive. His student Margaret Mead tried to dispel Western stereotypes of "less advanced" societies. In the 1960s Williams Masters and Virginia Johnson refuted some of Freud's claims about female sexuality by clinical observations. Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould have postulated the theory of "punctuated equilibrium" in the 1970s, according to which changes are not the result of slow natural selection but can be explained by long processes of stasis that are broken by short periods of rapid change. But in spite of these alternative views, some of which are merely a rehashing of the same foundational principles, the contemporary world is dominated by various forms of Darwinism.

2.2. A Kingdom of Man

The second revolution that has brought us to the present state was a revolution in thought that sought to establish a Kingdom of Man on this planet in defiance of the Kingdom of God that had hitherto remained the orientation of humanity. In a world that aspired to establish a Kingdom of God, let us note, Pharaohs did exist but the general thrust of humanity had been toward that Kingdom of God. But in the post-Renaissance world this general movement was reversed. Now, humanity sought to establish a Kingdom of Man on earth—a Kingdom borne out of revolt against the ancient order which sought to reenact ancient laws, customs, beliefs, and practices on the basis of Man's own knowledge; a Kingdom, moreover, which was enshrined and sanctified through his own wisdom. In short, this new effort attempted to remove God as the measure of all things and placed Man in His stead.

The two scientific revolutions went hand in hand with this effort. They facilitated, supplemented and often helped in this process by creating a

powerful belief in Man's own abilities to achieve marvelous results through overpowering the natural world in a manner that could not have been dreamt of by the ancients. This human-centered Kingdom has been established in stages and now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century after the birth of one who had come to establish a Kingdom of God, we are witnessing the full harvest of this effort in the form of a world which is in utter chaos and where some of the most fundamental values of humanity have been reversed.

The belief system that has arisen out of this second revolution, which makes Man the ultimate measure of all things, rests on certain basic notions. These basic notions construe the history of the world in a linear fashion. Thus construed, this worldview sees the march of humanity from "darkness to light" and from being "underdeveloped" and primitive to be "enlightened" and making "progress". "Progress", "enlightenment" and "development" are categories of thought which have become engraved in our thinking through repeated usage. But if we are to understand the true extent of our dilemma, these categories need to be re-evaluated. Take, for instance, the term "progress", which is one of the most important conceptual categories of our time. That we as humanity, have "progressed", is a generally acceptable notion. The testimony to this "progress" generally comes from the physical sciences and what has been achieved on the basis of physical sciences; that is, through technology. But built into this notion is a framework already loaded with bias. In other words, what defines "progress" as well as the place where one should look for this "progress" have already been determined through these biases. But if we were to reconsider the criteria for progress, we may find a totally different answer. "Any intelligible conception of progress," writes Lord Northbourne, in his *Looking Back on Progress*:

> must be directional; that is to say, it must imply the simultaneous conception of a goal. When the conception of progress is applied to humanity as a whole, or to any section of it, the manner in which that goal is conceived depends on the answers given to certain questions that are as old as mankind: questions such as "What is the universe?" "What is life?" "What is man?"[6]

This "directional" aspect of progress assumes a point of departure. For contemporary beliefs, that point of departure is our "primitive" and "backward" past, when humanity was still "underdeveloped". It is this

perception of a "point of departure" that loads the question about "progress" in a certain manner. It is this assumption that previous generations were, somehow, lesser than us, that sets the framework of question in a certain background predisposed to a certain answer.

The folly here is to reduce all "progress" to material progress and all development to a horizontal development of sciences. This criteria, which does not take into consideration anything higher than "means", and which does not acknowledge any spiritual states, must then produce results that are equally unidirectional and limited. Hence, the prevailing notion of "progress" has, indeed, taken shape in a materialistic sense and by making this horizontal progress measure of all things, this notion has given rise to the idea of a world in which each successive era is considered to be promising more and more progress whereas, in reality, humankind is descending further and further into a dark abyss which can be fathomed by the outward signs so obvious in our world today: violence, breakdown of family life, rampant corruption, a state of forgetfulness that has eclipsed all higher goals from the sight and an indulgence in quantity at the expense of quality. These signs are there for everyone to see but their most expressive aspect can be found in the rise of an intolerance that results in violence at a scale never before witnessed in human history.

This most obvious fruit of the revolution that sought to establish a Kingdom of Man is a daily occurrence that fills the pages of newspapers. But sadly, this direct result of a deeper disease is often attributed to this or that segment of humanity, as if violence were an inherent quality of that social group. The facile analyses that often accompany such news go no deeper, and few seem to be interested in exploring the question upon which our very survival rests.

The most obvious question to ask about this rampant violence in our world is, of course, the basic "why" question. Why does an individual or a group of human beings resort to violence? What are the conditions that produce violence? What are the root causes of this attitude which is a reaction to something else by definition? Sadly, these questions do not form the framework of our contemporary discourse. Instead, most commentators are satisfied with placing the blame on a group as if that group, or social unit, was inherently violent.

If we reflect on the nature and extent of the chaos that characterizes our world today and the accompanying suffering of humanity, we will find it

rather odd to discover that this same world is the one that has come into being through "progress". If we reflect on the disparities that exist between our "achievements" and their consequences, we will find it rather puzzling that our claims to progress have actually produced results which are opposite to the claim. Take, for instance, our ability to produce food. Through technologies and chemical processes, today we are capable of growing and producing food for the entire human populace, on a small portion of planet Earth yet, large segments of humanity routinely face famine and still a larger percentage subsists in terrible conditions. Through our technologies, we are capable of producing drinkable water, free of disease-carrying pathogens, yet there are regions on this planet where millions suffer from these diseases. Our medical science claims to have achieved wonders, yet a large percentage of humanity lives with health standards far below what was enjoyed by their predecessors.

Our "progress" was also supposed to create more leisure, yet we find that the prevailing complaint of humanity today is: I don't have time! These disparities between our "progress" and the resulting world that has emerged on the basis of this "progress" can be extended to all realms of life and thought. If this reflection can lead us to any insight, it will invariably be to the question: what went wrong? In order to avoid circular paths, the answer to this question must be sought at the most fundamental level. And no matter how disconcerting this may be, it must be sought with the full realization that the correct answer may force us to abandon some of our most cherished beliefs.

3. Islam and the Plight of Modern World

That something is terribly wrong in our world is an obvious given. That this state of the world has been a consequence of our own doings, is equally plain. What did the human race do to get here? What has brought us to this point where our very survival is at stake and where a large number of human beings live in a state of turmoil, anxiety and fear? This question can lead us to different conclusions depending upon our background, personal beliefs and commitments; we may even arrive at mutually exclusive and contradictory conclusions. There are, however, certain self-evident facts which cannot be disputed; one such fact being lack of justice and there can be no peace without justice.[7]

An unjust world is, by necessity, a world in which "survival of the fittest" is the rule; such a world will never know peace because peace and injustice cannot coexist. Thus, one of the most important aspects of the contemporary world is this lack of any just social, economic and political order. And one of the most important reasons for this state of the world is the imposition of the "fruits" of the two revolutions onto the rest of the world by those who view these to be the ultimate achievement of humanity. The fruits of these twin revolutions are, indeed, a bitter harvest. They have created a world defined by strife, disharmony, large-scale economic disparities, and perpetual violence.

There are two important questions that require our utmost attention: "What went wrong?" and "What is to be done?".[8] It is through a very lucid investigation of the first question that one can hope to provide some answers to the second. The question "what went wrong" presupposes that there is something fundamentally wrong in the world today, and I hope the foregoing has established that. If that is the case, then one might search for the causes of the plight of the contemporary world in the twin revolutions that define this world. This is not an easy task because of two reasons: a widely held and almost unshakable belief in the absolute benevolence of these two revolutions and secondly, the fact that our worldviews have been shaped by them to a large extent. These two initial hurdles can be overcome if one is willing to re-examine certain basic beliefs which have come into existence through these two revolutions.

The first and the most important aspect of this investigation is deeply rooted in the notion of human nature which has been inculcated in the modern mind. This concept, now firmly established in the Western psyche, removes everything higher than human from the scale of being. By measuring human nature through this transmuted scale, modern civilization has removed the nexus that has always defined the human condition in traditional civilizations. This cleavage which has produced a host of pseudo-religions has not only degraded the level of the study of human nature to that of human behaviour, it has also produced an endless stream of unrelated "scientific" facts which lead us nowhere. This "careful 'scientific' study of fragmented human behaviour is incapable of revealing the profounder aspect of human nature, precisely because of *a priori* limitation that so many branches of the modern behaviouristic sciences of man—veritable pseudo-sciences if there ever were any—have placed on the meaning of the human state itself."[9]

Thus, in order to restore to humanity its rightful place in the order of things, one first needs to restore to human nature its rightful dignity. It is in this metaphysical dimension of basic formulations where Islam has a major role to play in restoring balance. Seen from the perspective of Islamic metaphysics, human beings are defined through an ontological relationship with the Creator Who alone is the Sustainer and through Whom all things exist. This ontological relationship between the Creator and the Created extends to all domains of existence and is intrinsically linked to the Islamic notion of creation.

In the Islamic metaphysics, placed in the very centre of the whole scheme is a transcendent Ultimate Reality, God, Who is referred to as the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward. (Q. 57:3). All things are related to each other through this transcendent Reality; because they are rooted in an ontological relationship with the Creator, their mutual relationship is defined in the same terms. This relationship among various members of our fragmented humanity has been obscured by recent currents in human history, and the first real step needed for any restoration of balance is the re-rooting of this severed bond.

The second important aspect of the question, "what went wrong?", is related to our scientific endeavours. Contemporary science has become so intimately linked to the military and the market that it has lost its independence.[10] There is also a widespread belief in scientism which reduces all reality to physical reality and all human search for truth to that which is verifiable through measurement. This has obscured fundamental truths about life and the human condition. In order to restore these truths to their rightful place, modern science needs to be relocated to its own rightful place in the hierarchy of knowledge; through this restoration, humanity can restore its own balance. Once again, Islamic tradition has a great deal to contribute in this realm.

A third important aspect of the contemporary world is its injustice, often sanctioned through flawed political analyses. This root cause of most violence, cannot be wished away. Anyone with access to objective realities of our world can see the connection between injustice and violence. We now live in a world where occupation of other people's lands and state-organized violence against whole nations have attained the status of sanctioned methods of operation. There is no possibility of peace in such a world.

The fourth important aspect of the plight of the modern world is a two-fold movement of the East and the West. The West seems to be breaking down from within where as the rest of the world is blindly following the path of the West. This is true of the Muslim world to such an extent that it is repeating the mistakes of the West in all domains of life—from environmental degradation to that of educational values and social morals.

The fifth important aspect of human tragedy today is the rapid eclipse of universal truths. All civilizations are suffering from this phenomenon. This means that the entire human race faces a danger of living in a world that has been "relativized"; thus one person's truth is not his or her neighbour's truth. This, in itself, is a major source of contemporary violence.

The sixth tragedy is the absence of visionary leadership. The rapid erosion of values, recent confrontations and a host of other factors have left us with a world in which one hardly finds a statesman, a poet or a scholar who is globally respected. Likewise, there are hardly any institutions toward which the whole human family can look with hope. The universal human tragedy of which William Faulkner spoke so eloquently in his address to the Swedish academy on the occasion of his acceptance of the Nobel Prize[11] has now become a terrible reality of our times and unless we soon return to the Center of all things, the core of Reality and the veritable truth of our existence, there may be no future left to us as a race.

Notes and References:

1. Though the world population growth rate has fallen from its peak of 2 per cent per year to around 1.3 per cent, nonetheless, world population will continue to increase substantially during the twenty-first century. United Nations projections (medium fertility scenario) indicate that world population will nearly stabilize at just above 10 billion persons after 2200. However, the twenty-first century is expected to be one of comparatively slower population growth than the previous century, and be characterized by declining fertility and the ageing of populations. "State of the World Population 2002: People, Poverty and Possibilities", http://www.unfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm, accessed on July 24, 2003. In addition, it is helpful to note the following:

(1) World population did not reach one billion until 1804. It took 123 years to reach 2 billion in 1927, 33 years to reach 3 billion in 1960, 14 years to reach 4

billion in 1974 and 13 years to reach 5 billion in 1987; World population was estimated to cross the six billion threshold on October 12, 1999;

(2) World population is projected to cross the 7 billion mark in 2013; the 8 billion mark in 2028; the 9 billion mark in 2054. World population will nearly stabilize at just above 10 billion after 2200;

(3) It has taken just 12 years for the world to add this most recent billion people. This is the shortest period of time in world history for a billion people to be added;

(4) The highest rate of world population growth (2.04 per cent) occurred in the late 1960s. The current rate (1995-2000) is 1.31 per cent;

(5) The largest annual increase to world population (86 million) took place in the late 1980s; the current annual increase is 78 million;

(6) Eighty per cent of the world population currently resides in the less developed regions. At the beginning of the century, 70 per cent did so. By 2050, the share of the world population living in the currently less developed regions will have risen to 90 per cent;

(7) Of the 78 million people currently added to the world each year, 95 per cent live in the less developed regions;

(8) The population of the world is ageing. The median age increased from 23.5 years in 1950 to 26.4 years in 1999. By 2050, the median age is projected to reach 37.8 years. The number of people in the world aged 60 or older will also rise from the current one-of-ten persons to be two-of-nine by 2050. Currently around one-of-five persons in the developed countries are aged 60 or older; in 2050 nearly one-of-every three persons will be aged 60 or older;

(9) World life expectancy at birth is now at 65 years, having increased by a remarkable 20 years since 1950; by 2050 life expectancy is expected to exceed 76 years. However, in spite of these impressive gains, recent years have shown a devastating toll from AIDS in a number of countries. In addition, in some Eastern European countries, health has been deteriorating and mortality, particularly among adult males, has been rising;

(10) Couples in developing countries today have on average 3 children each; thirty years ago they had six. More than half of all couples in developing countries now use contraception;

(11) The number of persons who have moved to another country has risen to over 125 million migrants today from 75 million in 1965;

(12) The world has become increasingly urban. Currently, around 46 per cent of the world population lives in urban areas; the majority of the world's population will be urban by 2006. (*Source*: United Nations Population Division.).

2. Ibid.

3. "The Millennium Development Report" of the United Nations Development Program, http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/pdf/hdr03_MDC.pdf, accessed on July 24, 2003.

4. Kuhn, Thomas S. (1977), *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 147, 218-20.

5. Quoted from Brush, Setphen G. (1988), *The History of Modern Science*, *A Guide to the Second Scientific Revolution, 1800-1950,* Iowa State University Press, Ames, pp. 8-9.

6. Northbourne, Lord (1970, reprnt 2002), *Looking Back at Progress*, Sophia Perennis Et Universalis, p. 7.

7. Let us recall that the ancient subtitle of Plato's *Republic* was *On Justice* and that a large part of Book II is devoted to the theme of justice which Socrates considers to be the original and fundamental purpose for which political communities—cities—were founded.

8. The first of these two questions, now the title of an infamous book by Bernard Lewis, has been asked in reference to Islam. Ironically, Lewis does not extend his question to any other civilization, as if the Islamic civilization is the only civilization which has suffered something terrible. The fact is, all civilizations have decayed and this widespread erosion of values has produced a world rich in strife, blood-shed and violence. At the same time, the post-September 11, 2001 world has seen the emergence of renewed efforts to impose a monochromatic world order in which the twin spectres of fundamentalism and violence have attained new dimensions. Lewis, Bernard (2001), *What Went Wrong,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

9. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1975), *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man,* Longman, London, p. 7.

10. For the relationship between science, technology and military, see the two volume study by Mendelsohn, Everett, Smith; Merritt Roe; and Weingart, Peter (eds. 1988), *Science, Technology and the Military*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.

11. Faulkner, William, Address to the Noble
http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/faulkner/faulkner.html, September 29, 2003.