

## MUSLIM INFLUENCE UPON EUROPEAN SCHOLARSHIP AND LEARNING

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### *Introduction*

Most European scholars unjustifiably ignore the achievements of Islamic science and philosophy in order to trace the origin of their civilization directly to ancient Greek legacy. According to them the only contribution Muslims made was to transmit to Europe what they had inherited from Greek science and philosophy with not much addition.

But nothing could be further from the truth than seeing Western civilization as the continuation of ancient Greek legacy, since we know that it was none other than Islam, the rightful owner of modernity in the Golden Age (i.e., from the eighth century until the fourteenth century), that woke Europeans from their slumber of the Dark Ages and launched them on the course which resulted in today's modern civilization.

Although Greeks had developed the cores of paradigms in astronomy, optics and other sciences, they did not and could not deal with normal science, since they were after the properties of species, and were not interested in particulars. Their aim was to contemplate the intelligible structure of species or reality. Even Aristotle himself was not interested in particulars and did not carry out any experiments, though his starting point seems to be individual objects.

If Europeans had directly inherited the paradigm-cores from Greeks, even they could not have extended them because of their belief in an inscrutable and unknowable world, since, until the impact of Islam, they rejected "nature...as it was of no use and even obstructive to the Christian endeavour to attain to the world of spirit."<sup>1</sup> Of course, without the fully developed Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur:

paradigms (or Islamic legacy) it was impossible for them to run into anomalies and achieve the Scientific Revolution.

Since neither Greeks nor Europeans could apply the paradigm-cores to particulars or facts, the whole world owes to Muslims for the establishment of the tradition of normal science for the first time in the Kuhnian sense. Although Muslims could not revolutionize science, they did practice normal science through which they worked out the implications of the paradigm-cores of Greeks and extended them both in a theoretical and a non-theoretical way.

Furthermore, Muslim scientists of the Golden Age not only worked within the paradigms of Aristotle, Ptolemy and Galen, but also prepared the necessary groundwork for the advent of the Scientific Revolution.

Europeans first translated almost all scientific and philosophical books from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and then established medieval universities in order to assimilate and improve the ideas of Greek and Islamic authors. In fact, "it was the very idea of the university and its reality as an institution that grew out of ... the [Islamic] systematization of knowledge."<sup>2</sup>

And "universities helped to bring about the transition from ...[a dark Age] to the... [modern] world"<sup>3</sup> by training curious, active, and critical intellectuals who, under the influence of Islamic achievements, paid special attention to the natural world and particulars.

As Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas suggests, Europe has always swung from one extreme to another, since "dualism abides in all aspects of Western life and philosophy: the speculative, the social, the political, the cultural—just as it pervades with equal inexorableness the Western religion."<sup>4</sup>

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Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Alain de Libera, "The Arab Forebears of the European Renaissance," *The Unesco Courier*, February 1997, Interview Section.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of*