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Taha Abderrahmane's Trusteeship Paradigm

Spiritual Modernity and the Islamic Contribution to the Formation of a Renewed Universal Civilization of Ethos

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Abstract

This paper synthetically introduces “trusteeship paradigm” of Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944), a leading philosopher of language, logic, ethics and metaphysics in the Arab-Islamic world. The core of his argument is that the four entities of revelation, reason, ethics and doing (or practice) are neither separable nor antagonistic to each other in the Islamic philosophy he aims at re-grounding; their centripetal force is essentially ethical. Islamic philosophy is primarily ethical. It is only this ethical force that can regenerate the politico-philosophical awakening of the Arab-Islamic world in particular, and can contribute to the formation of a pluralist civilization of ethos in general. Otherwise put, Abderrahmane envisions an ontological-epistemological revisionary revolution in the Arab-Islamic tradition to overcome what may be referred to as “classical dichotomous thought” that dominates some classical and contemporary Islamic thinking as well as much of the Greek heritage and Western modern thought. This ethical revolution is summarized in what he has developed as trusteeship paradigm (*al-ʾitīmāniyyah*) or trusteeship critique (*al-naqd al-ʾitīmānī*), a paradigm the heart of which is a theory of ethics that overcomes dichotomies like religion vs. politics, divine vs. secular, physical vs. metaphysical.

Keywords

Taha Abderrahmane – trusteeship paradigm – re-grounding Arab-Islamic philosophy – spiritual modernity – civilization of ethos – awakening

Introduction

The moral dilemmas of modernity and the political predicaments of the Arab-Islamic world have turned substantial attention to the question of ethics. The proclaimed success of modernity, as channeled through the modern nation state apparatus, in the West and its inability to fare well elsewhere have impacted this direction of thought. Various aspects of global injustices and environmental catastrophes have shed doubts on the ethical grounds on which what could be called “Euro-modernity” stands. Simultaneously, and more particularly, the ongoing socio-cultural and economic-political malaise in the Arab-Islamic world focalize the question further and make the issue of change largely an ethical endeavor. “Renewal and innovation can be only ethical!”—this seems to be the dominant voice. What appears to have dominated the intellectual debate in the region for the last two centuries (since the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798) is that neither modernity worldview *à l’Européenne* nor the Arab-Islamic classical-and-dominant interpretation of ethics has triumphed; the ongoing predicament on all levels originates from this indecisiveness, but not only. Simply put, the former considers reason the “only” source of ethical values, while the latter considers revelation its “not only” source, because reason and revelation do not contradict each other, even when they seem to; contradictions are the result of human differing interpretations. The difficulty with this second view of ethics is that it keeps the door open for what may turn out to be “only” revelational, at the expense of the rational that may be needed in different times and spaces. The current literalist interpretations of Islamic law fall within this scope—these literalists range from pacifist movements to violent ones. Therefore, if the classically dominant interpretation of ethics first had issues mostly with their modern counterparts, it now has issues also with the literalists within its own camp. While this cannot be taken to be the “only” source of the overall malaise, to which other internal and external factors contribute, it is no doubt a controversial—not to say a weakening—point in the intellectual debate in the vast Arab-Islamic region. This has costs on the politico-economic spheres as well, directly or indirectly.

Otherwise said, and apart from external and economic factors, it seems that the major internal factor that contemporary Arab-Muslim scholars find extremely difficult to agree on for what concerns the type of change to endorse is the one deeply related to the core of the Islamic *weltanschauung*: ethics. How to re-appropriate ethical values for cultural and civilizational renewal seems the main question around which revolve (all) other socio-political issues. What is the source of ethics: reason, revelation, or both? What is the place of ethics in the modern age and in state formations and institutions in

particular? What is its place also in international relations? Alternatively, can modernity be ethical? Can religion still contribute to modernity through its ethical dictum, or does modernity create its own ethics? If modern ethics are possible, which implies that there are pre-modern ethics, are they not then historical and changeable? Where has Euro-modernity failed to be corrected by religious ethics? Alike questions are treated here.

This paper synthetically¹ introduces trusteeship paradigm of Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944), a leading philosopher of language, logic, ethics and metaphysics in the Arab-Islamic world. The bulk of his argument is that (the four of) revelation, reason, ethics and doing (or practice) are neither separable nor antagonistic to each other in the Islamic philosophy he aims at re-grounding; their centripetal force is essentially ethical; this ethical force is what can regenerate the politico-philosophical awakening of the Arab-Islamic world in particular, and can contribute to the formation of a pluralist civilization of ethos worldwide in general. Otherwise put, Abderrahmane envisions an ontological-epistemological revisionary revolution in the Arab-Islamic tradition to overcome what may be referred to as "classical dichotomous thought" that dominates some classical and contemporary Islamic thought as well as much of the Greek heritage and Western modern thought. This revisionary revolution is summarized in what he has developed as trusteeship paradigm (*al-i'timāniyyah*) or trusteeship critique (*al-naqd al-i'timānī*), a paradigm the heart of which is a theory of ethics.

This conclusion is achieved through following this outline. First, I present his view of the modern task of philosophy, or what he refers to as "the responsible question." I read his idea of "the Arab right to philosophical difference" as a means of localizing philosophy, in opposition to universalizing it, and thus depriving other cultures and nations from their intellectual freedoms and difference. His three critiques of the influences and mimicry of Greekization, Westernization-Europeanization, and Judaization, will be presented. Second, as part of his work on "the Islamic right to intellectual difference," I introduce the main aspects of his conceptualization of Islamic ethics, and their capacity to contribute to the making of a shared civilization of ethos. Four principles of these ethics will be highlighted: the principles of obligation, reproduction, organization, and expansion. Third, the features of Islamic ethics outlined in the second section of this paper pave the way for the critique of Western

1 The paper does not intend to be analytical or comparative; it is introductory to a philosophical project that needs to be examined; it, however, ends with some reflective and contextualizing remarks at the closure. It is in other "forthcoming papers" that Abderrahmane is examined analytically and comparatively.

modernity that is presented in this section. Here, I exemplify for his theory of ethics through his three principles, bolstered by six pillars, of what he calls spiritual or ethical modernity, two pillars for each principle: the principles of majority (and its two pillars autonomy and creativity), the principle of criticism (and its two pillars rationalization and differentiation), and the principle of universality (with its two pillars extensibility and generality). The paper ends with reflections on the place of Abderrahmane's theory of ethics as presented in trusteeship paradigm within especially contemporary Islamic scholarship. A preliminary sketch of the author's work precedes this outline.²

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- 2 Up to the writing of this article, Abderrahmane does not seem to be studied yet in Western academia, by the English and French scholarship, to name these, unlike his two other compatriots Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Ġabrī (d. 2010) and 'Abd Allāh al-'Arawī (b. 1933), for instance. English works that could be considered "classics" on (contemporary) Arab-Islamic thought still do not refer to his work. I cite some examples of voluminous scholarly works that still do not mention him: the third edition of Majid Fakhry (*A History of Islamic Philosophy*, New York, Columbia UP, 2004), the two volumes of Charles Kurzman (*Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, Oxford UP, 1998, *Modernist Islam 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, Oxford UP, 2000); the two volumes of Ibrahim Abu Rabi' *Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Malden and Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006) and *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, add (London and Sterling, Pluto Press, 2004); the five volumes of Vincent Cornell, *et al.* eds *Voices of Islam*, (Wesport and London, Praeger Perspectives, 2007); the volume of Esposito, John and Voll, John (eds) *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, Oxford UP, 2001), and Shirin Hunter, ed. (*Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, New York and London, M.E. Sharpe, 2009), to list these. To my knowledge, he is referred to in three main works: Lelly Lahoud devotes three pages to parts of his works in her *Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries*, London and New York, Routledge 2005, p. 36-39; Wael Hallaq refers to him as a modern example of what he calls "Sharia ethic" in a footnote in his *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Predicament* (Columbia UP, 2013); and Ebrahim Moosa refers to him in his recent article "On Reading Shatibi in Rabat and Tunis," *The Muslim World Journal*, 104 2014, 451-464. See also this author's (M.H.) unpublished PhD Dissertation which uses Abderrahmane's framework of reading contemporary approaches to the study of the Qur'an in examining the concept of European Islam: "On the Idea of European Islam: Voices of Perpetual Modernity," LUISS University of Rome, 2013.

Only few chapters of the studied scholar are available in English: "Essence of Modernity and Right to Creativity", *ISESCO Journal of Islam Today* 21: 2004, 1-42; "Renewing Religious Thought in Islam: Prerequisites and Impediments", *ISESCO Journal of Islam Today*, 25: 2008, 1-13; these two ISESCO papers were but are now no longer available online; "A Global Ethic: Its Scope and Limits," Abu Dhabi Tahab Paper Series, N.1 June 2008; "Language Matters: A Dialogue on Language and Logic", *Tabah Foundation of Abu Dhabi Paper Series*, 1, 2010, 1-34. Karim Crow has translated one chapter of his work, "Pluralism of Values: Its Scope and Limitations", *Journal of Islamic Civilizational Renewal*, 1.1: 2009, 74-98. In an online trilogy of articles on Islamic Philosophy, I summarized his in the following: "The Question of Ethics:

Taha Abderrahmane: Biographical Sketch

After his primary school in al-Ġadīdah, high school in Casablanca, and Bachelor degree in philosophy from Muḥammad v University in Rabat, Morocco, Taha Abderrahmane went to receive his doctorate of the third cycle (in the French old educational system) from La Sorbonne in 1972, with a thesis that was published in French in 1979 as *Language and Philosophy: An Essay*

Taha Abderrahmane's Praxeology and Trusteeship Paradigm," 17 November 2014, <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022452>.

In French, the work of the Moroccan scholar Abdou Filali-Ansari also does not include any hint to Abderrahmane. *Réformer l'islam? Une introduction aux débats contemporains* [Reforming Islam? An Introduction to Contemporary Debates]. Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

In Arabic, at least five major works have recently been devoted to his thought, besides various journal articles, book chapters and PhD theses in a number of Maghrebi universities: Mashruh, Ibrahim. *Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān: qirā'ah fī mašrū'ihī al-fiqrī* [Taha Abderrahmane: A Reading in His Intellectual Project]. Beirut, Markaz al-ḥaḍārah li-tanmiyyat al-fikr al-islāmī, 2009; Abdessalam, Bouzebra. *Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān wa-naqd al-ḥadāṭah* [Taha Abderrahmane and the Critique of Modernity]. Riyad, Jadawel, 2011; Ben Adi, Youssef. *Mašrū' al-ibdā' al-falsafī al-'arabī: qirā'at^{un} fī a'māl Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān* [The Project of Arabic Philosophical Creativity: Reading Taha Abderrahmane]. Beirut, Aṣḥabaka al-'arabiyyah li-l-abḥāṭ wa-l-našr, 2011; Arhila, 'Abbās. *Faylasūf^{un} fī l-wāḡiḥah: qirā'at^{un} fī fikr Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān* [A Philosopher at the Front: Reading Taha Abderrahmane]. Casablanca and Beirut, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 2012; Humam, Muḥammad. *Ġadalu l-falsafah al-'arabiyyah bayna Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Ġabrī wa-Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān—al-baḥṭ al-luḡawī namūḍaḡ^{an}* [Dialogic Inquiry in Focus]. Beirut—Rabat, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, and Mominoun Without Borders, 2013. 'Abd al-Nabī al Hārī. *Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Raḥmān wa-Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Ġabrī: širā'u l-mašrū'ayn 'alā arḍ al-ḥikmatī al-rušdiyyah* [Taha Abderrahmane and Mohamed Abed al-Jabri: Dissent over the Averroist Wisdom]. Beirut, Aṣḥabaka al-'arabiyyah li-l-abḥāṭ wa-l-našr, 2014).

On the media, Abderrahmane appeared on Aljazeera tv, and was interviewed by Malek Triqi, for five episodes in which they discussed the various aspects of his project. The first episode appeared on line on May 2006, at: <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/pages/e962dd5-ef7f-43a8-a430-f3258f54dd24>; some of his students have established in 2014 a webpage to collect his works, and discuss his ideas: <http://www.tahaphilo.com/>. On 26-27 February 2014, the first international conference in homage to his work was organized in Ibn Zuhr University in Agadir, Morocco, and was attended by international scholars following his work. Maghareb Center for the Humanities, established in Rabat in 2013, is led by scholars that are influenced by his philosophical project; the center honored him by a keynote inaugural speech, on 18 May 2013. The second annual conference in homage to this project was co-organized by Qadi Ayyad University of Marrakech and Qarawiyyine University of Fes between 6-7 May 2015, in Marrakech.

on the Linguistic Structures of Ontology, and a PhD in 1985, which was published also in French as *Treatise on Deductive and Natural Argumentation and Its Models*. Abderrahmane served as a professor of philosophy of language and logic at Muḥammad v University from 1970 until his retirement in 2005. He is a member of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation in Amsterdam, which he represents in his country, representative of *Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie* in Cologne, and director of *Wisdom Circle for Thinkers and Researchers* in Rabat.

Abderrahmane was awarded the Prize of Morocco twice (in 1988 for his work *On the Foundations of Dialogue and the Renewal of Dialectic Theory*, and in 1995 for his *Renewing the Methodology of Appraising the Tradition*, both in Arabic), and in 2006 the ISESCO prize in Islamic thought and philosophy. He received King Muḥammad VI Prize for Thought and Islamic Studies in 2014. He also lectured in front of King Muḥammad VI in Morocco, on “Ethical Modernity and Mercy,” on 11 November 2003, and in front of the Tunisian president Muḥammad al-Munṣif al-Marzūqī in the presidential place Carthage in Tunis, on 15 June 2013, on Religion and Ethics.

Until the age of twenty-two, Abderrahmane's passion was poetry, but the Arab army's defeat during the Six Days War of 1967 against Israel awakened him to what he calls real issues of existence of the Arab-Islamic world, issues primarily rational, and not emotional. For him, the defeat was first and foremost an intellectual one, which required rational examination. That was how his interest shifted to the study of philosophy.³ He theorizes for two awakenings for an innovative and independent change in the Arab and Islamic world in particular. The two intertwine. Still, it is the philosophical awakening (*qawmah falsafīyyah*) that should enlighten the political one (i.e., *qawmah siyāsīyyah*).⁴ At the heart of both is the existential awakening of man. This awakening should touch the core of his essence, *being* and *doing*. It is ethics that can meet up and ignite this task, and he takes the core of the Islamic message to be ethical. While he centralizes the Arab and Islamic world for renewal and change, he also expands the scope of awakening to the globalized world

3 He summarizes his shift in this Arabic poetic form: “al-yawma šī'r wa-ḡadan fiqh” [Today poetry and tomorrow thought/philosophy], meaning that each period of age has its preoccupations and priorities. In Mālik Triqī, interviewer, “Taha Abderrahmane: a New Outlook towards Philosophy,” *Aljazeera TV*, Episode 1, May 2006, available at <http://goo.gl/JDIjvf>.

4 While it is Abderrahmane who uses the term philosophical awakening (*qawmah falsafīyyah*) it is I that infers the term political awakening (*qawmah siyāsīyyah*) from his argument. I refer to the context of the argument in the following paragraphs.

which he thinks needs ethics for more solidarity and understanding among its cultures, religions, and philosophies.

Abderrahmane's overall work could be divided into three thematic (and chronological) stages, which culminate in his current focus, philosophy of religion and ethics. In the first stage he worked on logic and argumentation (1970s, mid-1980s), before developing methods of reading and renewing the tradition through theology and reason (late 1980s).⁵ In the second stage he substantially worked on one of his major philosophical contributions, i.e., the idea of praxeology, or what he calls in Arabic *fiqh al-falsafah*, or the science of philosophy, theorized in two heavy volumes; it is in this same period that his earlier work becomes clearer and contained within this new orientation he brings to philosophy. This period also witnesses the development of his contribution to the study of language and the role of translation in the flourishing of genuine philosophy (1990s).⁶ Abderrahmane started to advance his theory of ethics since 2000 within what has grown to be a larger project of philosophy of religion; this phase deals with major issues like his critique of Western modernity, the Arab-Islamic right to difference, the spirit of modernity, the spirit of religion, and religion and practice, which marks his contribution to applied ethics. This stage also witnesses the introduction of one of his major concepts: trusteeship paradigm (*al-i'timāniyyah*), or trusteeship critique (*al-naqd al-i'timānī*),⁷ as a critique of atheist secularism, modern ethical theories, Islamism (political Islam), and some classical dichotomies like reason vs. revelation and

5 See: Abderrahmane. *al-'Amal al-dīnī wa-taǧdīd al-'aql* [Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1989; *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa-taǧdīd 'ilm al-kalām* [On the Basics of Dialogue and Renovation of the Islamic theology]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1987; *Taǧdīd al-manḥaǧ fī taqwīn al-turāt* [Renovation of the Method in Assessing the Heritage]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1994.

6 See: Abderrahmane, *Fiqh al-falsafah*. Vol. 1: *al-Falsafah wa-l-tarǧamah* [Praxeology of Philosophy. Vol. 1: Philosophy and Translation]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1994; *Al-lisān wa-l-mizān aw al-taqawtur al-'aqlī* [Language and Balance, or Multiplicity of Reason]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1998; *Fiqh al-falsafah*. Vol. 11: *Kitāb al-mafhūm wa-l-ta'īl* [Praxeology of Philosophy. Vol. 11: The Philosophical Sentence, the Book of the Concept and Etymology] Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfī al-'arabī, 1999.

7 I acknowledge that I have consulted Prof. Taha Abderrahmane on the equivalent of the Arabic term *al-i'timāniyyah*, seeing its newness; I proposed "trusteeship" as its English equivalent, to which he replied positively, knowing his carefulness in choosing terms. As to the addition of "paradigm," it captures not only his conceptualization of it as a "critique" but also as a new philosophical and lexical domain that is broader in scope.

religion vs. politics.⁸ One of his students, Redouane Marhoum, has recently edited and introduced a number of articles written some decades ago, when Abderrahmane was still developing his project; in these papers Abderrahmane refers to the new philosophical school of reading the tradition and reconstructing Arab-Islamic philosophy, and calls it “Rabat school.”⁹

The New Task of Philosophy: Posing the “Responsible Question”

Abderrahmane develops a new task for philosophy. While the Greeks considered that the task of philosophy was to raise questions (Aristotle in focus), and the Europeans considered criticism its primal task (Kant in focus), Abderrahmane believes that this age is that of ethical responsibility, so the task of philosophy is to raise a responsible question (*al-suʿāl al-masʿūl*). When there is a question, then there is a responsibility that follows to answer it (in Arabic, the move is from *al-suʿālīyyah* (questioning) to *al-masʿūlīyyah* (responsibility) in philosophy.¹⁰ Accordingly, a question receives an ethical dimension through responsibility; if it is posed, it has to be answered, and the feel of responsibility makes the exercise of answering ethical—“there is no philosophising without

8 See: Abderrahmane, *Hīwārāt min aḡlī al-mustaqbal* [Dialogues for the Future]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2000; *Suʿāl al-aḥlāq: Musāhamah fī l-naqd al-aḥlāqī li-l-ḥadāṭah al-ḡarbiyyah* [The Question of Ethics: a Contribution to Ethical Criticism of Western Modernity]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2000; *al-Ḥaqq al-ʿarabī fī l-iḥtilāf al-falsafī* [The Arabic Right to Philosophical Difference]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2002; *al-Ḥaqq al-islāmī fī l-iḥtilāf al-fikrī* [The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2005; *Rūḥ al-ḥadāṭah: naḥwah al-taʿsīs li-l-ḥadāṭah islāmīyyah* [The Spirit of Modernity: An Introduction to Founding an Islamic Modernity]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2006; *Rūḥ al-ʿamal* [The Question of Practice]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2012; *Rūḥ al-dīn* [The Spirit of Religion]. Beirut and Casablanca, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2012; *Al-ḥīwār ufuq^{an} li-l-fiqr* [Dialogue as a Horizon for Thought]. Beirut, al-Šabakah al-ʿarabiyyah li-l-abḥāṭ wa-l-našr, 2013; *Buʿs al-dahraniyyah: al-naqd al-iʿtimānī li-faṣl al-aḥlāq ʿan al-dīn* [The Misery of Secularism: Trusteeship Critique of the Separation of Ethics from Religion]. Beirut, al-Šabakah al-ʿarabiyyah li-l-abḥāṭ wa-l-našr, 2014. All the subsequent references will be to these editions. English shortened titles will be used, instead of the Arabic ones, for ease of read.

9 Abderrahmane. *Suʿāl al-manḥaǧ fī ufuq al-taʿsīs li-manḥaǧ fikrī ḡadīd* [The Question of Methodology in Constructing a New Model of Thought]. Beirut, al-Šabakah al-ʿarabiyyah li-l-abḥāṭ wa-l-našr, 2015.

10 Abderrahmane. *al-Ḥaqq al-ʿarabī fī l-iḥtilāf al-falsafī* [The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference]. Casablanca and Beirut, al-Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2002, p. 13-15.

ethics.”¹¹ Otherwise put, the new task of the philosopher is to raise questions that are challenging not only to the society where they are posed, or to the world at large, but most importantly now it has to challenge the philosopher himself. As will be made clearer with his theory of ethics, Abderrahmane is challenging especially the gap there is in contemporary Western philosophy in distinguishing posing questions from the real acts of the poser of the questions, the philosopher. He aims at merging thought with deeds, *al-‘ilm wa-l-amal*. The civilization of ethos he aspires to see taking place should replace the current civilization of *parole*—in which philosophers raise questions, critique everything, but do not meet their thought with the ethics required for such a high responsibility philosophers have. Abderrahmane's responsible question is an ethical question that challenges the agency of the philosopher in the first place.

In so thinking, Abderrahmane is actually corroborating his idea of praxeology of philosophy (*fiqh al-falsafah*) that goes beyond the limitations surrounding the cognitive as well as practical capacities of the philosopher. Abderrahmane argues that philosophy, as a discipline of inquiry and questioning, is a limited one. What seems more open as a discipline is *fiqh al-falsafah* that could be as expansive and inclusive as *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the sources of *fiqh*). The latter includes, disciplines like language and linguistics, logic, sciences of *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, among others. In other words, Abderrahmane is re-grounding Arab-Islamic philosophy in its original sources (*al-manḥağ al-uṣūlī*) for the practice of thought from within, as if going back to the early stage of Arab-Islamic philosophy.¹² He targets what he calls in *The Spirit of Modernity* “the second birth of the Islamic message.”¹³ Without such a renewal, a “second death”—meaning decline/decadence—is possible.¹⁴ Put more clearly, in Arab-Islamic tradition, to be a scholar in *uṣūl al-fiqh* meant not only cognitive capacities but also grounded acts that support this high cognitive skill: to be a scholar meant to apply what one thinks and writes about. It is this link of learning and agency, *al-‘ilm wa-l-amal*, that Abderrahmane underlines. That is why he considers the meanings of *fiqh al-falsafah*—to think, understand and also apply what is understood—more inclusive than mere practice of philosophical thought—which does not bind itself with the responsibility

11 Abderrahmane. *al-Ḥaqq al-‘arabī*. 15. He says: *Lā tafalsufah bi-ğayr taḥalluq* (“Philosophizing without ethics is null and void”).

12 Abderrahmane. *Praxeology of Philosophy*. Vol. 1: *Philosophy and Translation*.

13 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*.

14 Abderrahmane. *The Arab Right*. 141.

of application. Abderrahmane's idea here could be summarized in a term like "reviving applied philosophy."

Binding philosophy to questions that have to be answered responsibly is the task the Arab and Muslim philosopher has to engage with—and the call is directed to all philosophies as well in defense of his idea of multiple modernities, to be presented later when critiquing Western modernity, which I sometimes refer to as Euro-modernity.¹⁵ Abderrahmane here calls for prioritizing some questions over others. He wants Arab-Islamic philosophy to raise questions that concern its status and needs. He aims at concentrating its energies on questions the Arab-Muslim philosopher faces, and not questions imposed by external/hegemonic philosophy of the West that has its own questions. The latter has no right to impose its own philosophical issues/questions on the Arab philosopher.

At this point, Abderrahmane weakens two practices or fallacies that he says many other Arab-Muslim philosophers have fallen into: 1) universal thought (*al-fiqr al-wāḥid*), and 2) *le fait accompli* (*al-amr al-wāḥi*). For the first, he believes that if philosophy in the past sought convergences among cultures, now the opposite is the case. Against falling under the power of questions raised by hegemonic philosophies, as that of the West, current philosophy has to seek difference, otherwise its role of liberating thought and thus its welcoming of criticism and disagreement die and all philosophical traditions become the same, raising the same questions (as imposed by the hegemon). This is against the ideal of philosophy: the liberation of thought. As to the *fait accompli*, it is so much tied to the previous point. Accepting questions raised by a philosophical tradition that is supported by a political-economic hegemon means the intellectual death of other traditions, a death, which the "responsible question" and

15 Abderrahmane has separately defended the ideas of the Arab and Islamic rights to philosophical differences, but has at the same time built strong ties between them. The Arab philosophy he is reconstructing is Islamic, and the Islamic philosophy he is also re-grounding is substantially Arab. However, while the first, the Arab one, is geographically limited and aims at inspiring also the idea of national and political revival, the second is universal, and aims at contributing to world philosophy afresh and to correcting the pitfalls the hegemony of Western philosophy has caused (colonialism, injustice, spiritual dryness, etc.). Because of this link between the two in theory, I do refer to Arab philosophy and his work in re-grounding it. This link is supported, among others, in one of his footnotes: *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference*, p. 15, n. 1. I do so further in the following paper: "Taha Abderrahmane as a Political Philosopher: The Concept of the Awakened Youth in the Context of the Arab Spring". In: *Maroc: les enjeux du religieux dans une société en transition. Actes du colloque de Fès (juin 2012)*. Baylocq, Cédric and Hlaoua, Aziz (eds). Forthcoming.

ethical philosophy do not allow. Unitary thought (*al-fikr al-wāḥid* or *al-taswiyyah al-taqāfiyyah*) is against criticism and difference principles of exercising philosophy, “we, the Arabs, want to be free in our philosophy.”¹⁶ It is only when this freedom is granted, and “our particular philosophy” takes shape that “dialogue” takes place. Liberty brings difference, and difference leads to dialogue, and this dialogue is part of the responsible question process.¹⁷

The Arab right to philosophical difference is a right to liberation from blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of three philosophical projects: Greekization (*al-taḡrīq*), Westernization-Europeanization (*al-taḡrib*), and Judaisation (*al-tahwīd*). The first project is the Greek one.¹⁸ For example, unlike many contemporary Arab philosophers as well as Orientalists, Abderrahmane considers Ibn Ruṣd (Averroes) a mere imitator—his word—of Aristotle. On the other hand, he appreciates the originality of al-Ġazālī who tried to distinguish Islamic philosophy of Greek influence, and has been misread as an opponent of reason for that.¹⁹ Abderrahmane considers al-Ġābirī's work another imitation of an imitator of Aristotle—i.e. al-Ġābirī is known to be Averroes in his approach of reconciling reason with revelation.²⁰ Also, he considers that the division between reason and religion (or ‘*aql* and ‘*ṣar‘*) is a mere Greek philosophical problem that a number of early Muslim philosophers integrated to Arab-Islamic philosophy, either because of imitation or because of mistranslation and inability to find more adequate Arabic terms to Greek philosophical

16 Abderrahmane. *The Arab Right*. 22.

17 Ibid. 22.

18 In Arabic nomenclature, he calls it *al-taḡrīq*, which can be literally translated as the Greekization, or rendering philosophy Greek.

19 Abderrahmane says that while he agrees on al-Ġazālī on many issues, he denies to be his follower because of the different reasons that make the two work on these same issues. For example, Abderrahmane says that al-Ġazālī integrated Aristotelian logic into Islamic philosophy to defend it, while Abderrahmane does not integrate this logic, but develops his logical utensils from the various Islamic sciences, like *uṣūl al-fiqh* and language (thus his use of the term *fiqh al-falsafah*, or praxeology). Also, al-Ġazālī was very critical of philosophers to the extent of rejecting them once and for all, while Abderrahmane not only revises the role of philosophy (remember his idea of the responsible question in philosophy), but also calls for its awakening for national-political and religious renewal (thus his concepts of *qawmah falsafiyah*, philosophical awakening, and what I have inferred from his diction to be a *qawmah siyāsiyyah*, political awakening). Abderrahmane. *Ḥiwārāt min aḡlī al-mustaqbal* [Dialogues for the Future]. Beirut, Dār al-hādī, 2003, p. 119-120.

20 For Abderrahmane's detailed critique of al-Jabri and Averroes, see his *Dialogues* and *Taḡdid al-manhaḡ fī taqwīm al-turāt* [Renewing the Method of Assessing the Tradition]. Casablanca and Beirut, al-Markaz al-taqāfī al-‘arabī, 1994, part 1, chapters 1 and 2, and part 11, chapter 3.

terminology.²¹ Abderrahmane denies originality in the work of classical and pioneering Muslim philosophers like al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā as well; he says they were unable to seek “difference” from Greek philosophy nor were they able to profoundly see the particularity in the Islamic worldview; they sought “reconciliation” with this philosophy that is based on abstract rationalism instead of developing one from their own worldview and language; that is why Abderrahmane claims to be re-grounding Islamic philosophy on its own resources, instead of mimicry and language borrowing; the same critique is launched against contemporary Muslim philosophers whom he considers mere imitators of the modern Euro-Judaic philosophy.²²

As to Westernization-Europeanization (*al-taǧrīb*), Abderrahmane is critical of the European appropriation of the Greek heritage and henceforth the monopoly of all philosophy, as if it were only Greek and now only European. Abderrahmane refers to original texts of Heidegger and Husserl, for example, to defend his idea that German philosophy has tried to appropriate European philosophy and claim itself the only or main heir of Greek philosophy. This aspect belittles the idea of the universality of philosophy that this same philosophy claims. Further than that, Abderrahmane argues that the German claim of leading European philosophy has been influenced by Jewish philosophers

21 Part of Abderrahmane's project is to revive the linguistic ability of Arabic philosophy by means of coining its own concepts according to its grammatical structures and stylistic diction, and not through mere translations of external concepts and philosophies. He does so because he aims at re-grounding Arab-Islamic thought on its own linguistic utensils and lexicon. He believes that translation of Western terminology has also influenced Islamic thought and made it unable to renew itself authentically. Among the contemporary Arab-Islamic philosophers, his innovative use of the Arabic language seems unrivalled. He has devoted two substantial volumes to the issue of translation and philosophy—cited in the biographical sketch. See, for example, his critique of the errors Moroccan philosophy has fallen in while mistranslating European philosophy from its especially German tradition by going through the French translation to reach the Arabic version: *The Arab Right*, part v. Moreover, he translates the Cartesian sentence “I think, therefore I am” as *unẓur taǧīd* [literally: “see to find”] in Arabic, an example he discusses in details in *Praxeology of Philosophy*. Vol. 1: *Philosophy and Translation*, Book IV, p. 409-512. Besides, and as noted in the introduction, Abderrahmane's language in particular echoes a classical Arab-Islamic tradition of philosophical writing and argumentation. His expertise in logic and mastery of some European languages (French, English, German, and Greek) that allow his direct access to the original sources of Western philosophical texts render his Arabic composition (style) and way of coining new terminology an unrivalled project. For him, creativity and change start with linguistic mastery and logical argumentation, not one without the other.

22 Abderrahmane. *The Misery of Secularism*. 20.

that have not hidden their Judaic heritage in philosophizing. He refers to the influences of Ibn Maymūn (Maimonides) on Leibniz through Nicolas de Cues, and the influence of Spinoza and Mendelssohn Mosses on Kant. Hegel and Nietzsche note the influence of the Judaic tradition on Kant, too. Succinctly, the Judaic philosophy mediated the Greek philosophy and the German one through its positioning of the *logos* as the mediator between God and man, which Christian theology would integrate in its theology by interpreting the Holy Spirit as the *logos*. This philosophical aspect aside, it is the politicization of the Judaic tradition through the search for a geographical place for the materialization of the promised land, in turn, through the Zionist movement that makes German philosophy substantially Judaic. Since German philosophy claims itself in the lead of European philosophy, and also the heir of the Greek philosophy, then the universality aspect it claims is Judaic as well—thus the name “Judaization/*al-tahwīd*”.²³

The point here is that (Western) philosophy is first local and national before it is universal, thus the right of other traditions to have also their local and national philosophies first, without this meaning that they cannot be universal, too, or that universality is a negative aspect in philosophy. Rather, the idea is that liberation of thought starts local. If it starts universal, it certainly follows the philosophic guidelines of the universal hegemony, supported by economic and political influence. The target at the end is to shape one's own modernity, thus his idea of multiple modernities. If first modernity claims to be purely European, why then is this same right of shaping one's own modernity—through one's own philosophy—denied to the other? A second modernity is accordingly possible—as section, three of this paper further explains.²⁴

Islamic Ethics: Contributing to the Formation of a Civilization of Ethos

Abderrahmane does not take ethics to be an independent discipline that is separate from human existence and his agency or action. According to my reading of his project, his theory is based on an ontological bond between three major components: religion, reason and ethics are inseparable entities. I add the fourth entity of doing/work as also paramount in his ethical project for philosophic-political renewal. I refer first to the bond between religion and ethics, followed by the bond between reason and ethics, then ethics and doing.

²³ Abderrahmane. *The Arab Right*. 58-65.

²⁴ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 11-69.

Abderrahmane re-grounds Islamic philosophy on an ontological fact he sees to be lost from early Islamic times, either because of mistranslations of Greek concepts or because of blind mimicry of the Greek ethical debate (recall the Greekization point above). This ontological fact is the “original unity” between religion and politics, and between this-worldly and otherworldly affairs, which makes religion vital to human life, for religion means ethics, and man without ethics is impossible. Abderrahmane argues in length that religion equals ethics, “religion and ethics are one.”²⁵ He does not separate the two. He sees them as one ontological unit. “The existence of man [...] does not precede the existence of ethics, but accompanies it.”²⁶ Since religion (and consequently ethics) has existed with the existence of man,²⁷ the following syllogism is reached: there is “no man without ethics, [...] no ethics without religion, [...] and no man without religion.”²⁸ Linking ethics to work he says, “ethics in Islam are the origin of any work.”²⁹ Based on this project of ethics, he says a new “civilization of ethos” is needed; it is the “awaited for civilization.”³⁰

The same applies to reason. Reason is not considered an independent entity from religion and ethics. Abderrahmane divides rational ability into three basic levels: rationality of abstraction, rationality of living experience, and rationality of Sophist belief, which match three terms abstract reason (*al-ʿaql al-muğarrad*), guided reason (*al-ʿaql al-musaddad*) and supported reason (*al-ʿaql al-muʾayyad*). Abstract reason is limited to description of things; guided reason is devoted to doing things; supported reason represents the capability of knowing its internal identity; Abderrahmane’s sufist inclinations and practices must have influenced his integration of the transcendental aspects of reason and heart.³¹ Supported reason is used interchangeably with expanded

25 Abderrahmane. *The Question of Ethics*. 52. In *The Arab Right*. 178: he says that “religion means ethical behaviour” (*al-dīn innamā huwa makārim al-aḥlāq*).

26 Abderrahmane. *The Question of Ethics*. 54.

27 *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason*. 25.

28 Ibid. 147-149. Abderrahmane also says that religious rationality is more advanced than the human one; the latter is lagging behind. Ibid. 169.

29 Ibid. 188.

30 Ibid. 146.

31 Abderrahmane follows the Qādiriyyah Budšišiyyah Sufi order, founded by Ḥamzah al-Qādirī al-Būdšišī (b. 1922) in North-East of Morocco, which he acknowledges to have taught him a lot on the way of being, see: Bettaoui, Raja. “Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān . . . āḥir ḥukamā’ al-mağrib” [“Taha Abderrahmane . . . The Last Sages of Morocco”]. 26 September 2013, available at <http://www.tahaphilo.com>, accessed 10 July 2014.

reason.³² For Abderrahmane, Euro-modernity has not gone beyond the first two levels of reasoning, which Islamic thought has also mimicked and been unable to overcome.

Following similar categorization, Abderrahmane speaks of three levels of ethics. First, by ethics he means the quest for good *per se*.³³ Ethics distinguishes man from any other species, and not reason. Ethics is the essence of humanness, and without it the human is not human. Ethics then has to be entangled with every single act of man, however simple or abstract it may be.³⁴ Abderrahmane refutes theories that say that ethics are part of religion or follow religion, or the ones that claim that religion is part of or follow ethics, which are independent. For him, Greek and European philosophies have idolized reason and spoken accordingly—as inferred from the first section above. He calls the Western civilization a civilization of wording (*ḥadārat al-qawl*), because according to it man is a speaking or rational animal, and this speaking/rationality is the result of his abstract reasoning. As to the theory of ethics he builds, it is part of the Islamic spiritual worldview, which he calls a civilization of doing (*ḥadārat al-fiʿl*).³⁵ That is, ethics in Islam is³⁶ not a different entity that either follows or is followed by religion or reason. Rather, ethics is the

32 Abderrahmane. *Religious Practice*, parts I, II and III, for details on each of these categories. I note that Abderrahmane's critique of the Islamic reformist and salafi movements, besides Western rationalism, is based on this division of levels of rationality. In particular, *Religious Practice*, p. 102-103, he says that "the Islamic traditional movements have followed two routes to refer to the original Islamic texts: the theoretical *salafiyyah*, which has been especially followed by the *wahhābiyyah salafiyyah*, and the rout of the critical *salafiyyah*, which has been followed by the national and renaissance *salafiyyah*. Both of them have followed the methodology of abstract reason with different applications. In the theoretical *salafiyyah* categories of abstract reason have been applied without resorting to living experience [...]. The critical *salafiyyah* has been more cautious of the importance of the experience but it is not less inclined to abstract reason [...]. Such an inclination to abstract reason is not but a trace of the influence of Western rationality with its Cartesian basis." That is why I noted earlier that Abderrahmane considers the Arab-Islamic Renaissance political and semi-final, and thus a first rebirth; the second rebirth requires "philosophical awakening," nourished by the envisaged theory of ethics.

33 *The Question of Ethics*. 14.

34 Ibid. 14-15.

35 Ibid. 77-78.

36 I use ethics both as a plural and singular form, depending on the context. Its equivalent in Arabic in both cases is *al-aḥlāq* and *al-ḥuluq*, respectively. Some now refer to the study of ethics as *al-aḥlāqīyyāt* in Arabic.

equivalent of religion. Religion and ethics are one.³⁷ I now refer to few major features of Abderrahmane's theory of "supported ethics" (*aḥlāq mu'ayyadah*).

While abstract ethics and guided ethics match abstract and guided reason because they (ethics) are broadly seen as separate from religion and reason and thus can be applied only partially, Abderrahmane refers to supported ethics when he speaks of his theory. He is not just calling for paying more attention to their role in human life. Instead, he is saying that without ethics, there is no man. Ethics is the essence of human existence,³⁸ as seen in citations above.

I refer to four principles of these ethics to clarify the point. One, the principle of obligation (*mabda' al-īḡāb*): ethics in the stage of supported ethics are not optional; they are the essence of human identity; without them, evil or wrong occurs. Like man-made law that entails punishment for those who do not follow it, through particular authorities that are agreed upon, ethics are also a law that entail punishment for those who do not follow them. The difference between the two is that the punishing authority is oneself; it is spiritual and internal. If it is not visible as a punishment, it does not mean it is not there, nor does it mean that the committed wrong is not punishable. A consistent person would feel guilty and not at ease with himself.

Two, the principle of reproduction (*mabda' al-taktīr*): ethics do not have one shape, one form, or one place. Rather, they transform their prerequisites according to 1) time, 2) space, and the 3) consequences they engender. An ethicist would always measure the consequences of his action, and make pursuing the good his target; while a good may seem good in some particular time or space; it does not necessarily bring good consequences in that time and space, as it may in others. This means that a particular ethical attitude can take many shapes and have different consequences according to the above three conditions. Ethics are thus expansive, embracive of time, space, and the intellect that balances the consequences.³⁹

37 *The Question of Ethics*. 157. Ethics is also the equivalent of work, or doing. There is no act/deed that can escape the field of ethics. I come back to this in the subsequent paragraph.

38 *The Islamic Right*. 190: "*al-aḥlāq ḥiyya* [...] *al-muhaddidah li-kaynūnat al-insān*".

39 *The Question of Ethics*. 157. This principle alone makes the theory appear pluralist and consequentialist. While it is so, the fact that consistency is required to avoid harm, as the earlier principle dictates, makes the theory flexible and the individual or society adopting it responsible. Moreover, the principle that follows puts order to the idea of consequentialism or benefits ethics that bring reasonable consistency; the growth of benefits and satisfaction makes one cling to these principles consistently, otherwise harm occurs.

Three, the principle of organization (*mabda' al-tartīb*): ethics are infinite in their scope; the more the ethicist is committed to them, the more ethical attitudes and satisfaction they bring about; as time and space vary, so do the consequences; this means that ethics are not of one degree; the fact that they are expansive, inclusive and makes them classifiable one upon another; each good act brings another when it is measured according to the consequences it brings in different times and spaces.

Four, the principle of expansion (*mabda' al-ittisā'*): this makes the ethicist unable to think of an uncovered field where he may be unethical in his behavior or thought. His doing and thought about humanity and the whole cosmos become ethical. Ethics become identical to his senses, and to his being. Without ethics he feels life is useless, and only through it meaning is gained.⁴⁰

The above principles of supported ethics are based on doing (*al-fi'l*). Doing in turn is based on three principles that I mention in brief: 1) belief in this value system of ethics (that is inseparable from religion) remains incomplete without living ethics (*mabda' al-iṣṭigāl al-mubāṣir*): 2) the previous principles of reproduction and expansion of ethics mean that the ethicist takes some infinite ideals or attributes of ethics as his guide; these ideas are the "attributes of the divine" (*mabda' al-taḥalluq bi-aṣifāt al-ḥusnā*). Their infinity are the only attributes that can guide the ethicist in his path of consistency and ethical perfection and closeness to the ethics of the divine; 3) human beings need concrete examples in their ethical aspirations, and the prophetic example is unrivalled (*mabda' al-iqtidā' al-ḥayy*).

These principles of ethical doing bring about three consequences: 1) the feel of happiness (*aṣu'ūr bi-l-sa'ādah*) through the liberation from possessiveness and slavery to people and men; 2) humility and modesty attitude (*al-naḍrah al-insāniyyah*) towards the self, others, and the cosmos; 3) artistic taste (*al-dawq al-ḡamālī*) which ethics engender, because the happiness they bring render one always appreciative of people and the world; diversity of the world becomes itself an ethical feature that the ethicist likes to see because it brings him joy, and makes him discover multiple levels of humanness within the self, through training it to accommodate itself in different times and spaces.⁴¹

In *The Spirit of Religion*, Abderrahmane says that Western thought has idolized reason (*allaha al-'aql*), and turned it into a tyrant of modernity (*tāḡūt al-ḥadāṭah*),⁴² since it enforces oblivion of the divine (*al-tansiyah* or *nisyān*, or

40 *The Question of Ethics*. 81-84.

41 *Ibid.* 84-89.

42 *The Spirit of Religion*. 462, n. 21.

al-insāʾ).⁴³ It creates a world governed by oblivion (*ʿālam nāsī*), in opposition to a contemplative world (*ʿālam dākir*). The former is inhabited by a horizontal man who conceives just what he sees, while the latter is inhabited by a vertical man who conceives also what he does not see.⁴⁴ Abderrahmane's project of Islamic modernity uses the same plans but innovatively, and makes the fusion of ethical reasoning and piety the axis of the project. In so doing, he claims to foster continuous innovation that preserves ties with the tradition (*ibdāʿ mawṣūl*), instead of discontinuous innovation (*ibdāʿ maḥṣūl*).⁴⁵

The point here is that reason is not only an isolated part of the whole/entity of man. Reason is not only that mechanical part that is invoked to categorize and differentiate items or components that man needs to analyze. Abstract reason stops at this level of mechanical analysis. If Euro-modernity has rationally pigeonholed human action in categories, and has thus led to differentiating morality from actual action, ethics from business, religion from politics, management of the world from contemplation of the world, etc., the second modernity Abderrahmane proposes espouses reason to ethics, and the latter to religion—which I summarize in this equation: religion = ethics = reason. The essence of human reasoning becomes religiously ethical. This link between the three is connected to the earlier interpretation that the majority (i.e. maturity) of man cannot be universally beneficial to himself unless it is tied to the divine attributes of the good. Otherwise put, the ontological bond between the Creator and Creation, between the divine and the physical world through revelation, finds its utmost resonance in man's Testimony to live the trust (*amānah*) that is fused in his capabilities to act in the world. That is, the natural, or original, trait of the spirit of man is good. Reason, religion, or ethics are but means to activate this good and channel it through for concretization. Religion is the ethical path that rationally seeks the good of man.⁴⁶ This makes his thesis that there is no ethics without work, and vice versa, as further developed in his *The Question of Doing* (2012).⁴⁷ Accordingly, expanding the earlier equation to

43 *The Spirit of Religion*. 466.

44 *Ibid.* 14.

45 *The Spirit of Modernity*. 194.

46 *The Question of Ethics*. 159.

47 See: Abderrahmane. *Suʿāl al-ʿamal: baḥṭʿun ʿan al-usūl al-ʿamaliyyah li-l-fiqr wa-l-ʿilm* [The Question of Doing: A Search for Practical Origins in Thought and Science] (Casablanca and Beirut, al Markaz al-ṭaqāfi al-ʿarabī, 2012) Read Part II, 55-110. I have translated *al-ʿamal* as “doing” instead of “work” or “practice” for two reasons: first, the emphasis is on action, or the agency of the person, and second because this action “doing” is so much tied to the practice of “knowing,” thus the Arabic expression of *al-ʿilm wa-l-ʿamal*, which can be rendered as “knowing and doing,” which someone else may prefer to translate as “science and practice.”

include work is feasible: religion = ethics = reason = work (doing). Only such an equation can contribute to the formation of the civilization of ethos.

Essence of Modernity: Principles and Pillars

Abderrahmane's project of renewing Islamic thought is based on his idea of the right to difference in culture, religion, and philosophical thinking, because there is no creativity without particularism.⁴⁸ The right to difference overcomes two major obstacles that have weakened and imprisoned Islamic thought: one is the concept of unitary thought (*mafḥūm al-fikr al-wāḥid*) their philosophies despite the which standardizes and imposes one style of thinking over all cultures and its difference, and the other obstacle is the concept of the *status quo* (*mafḥūm al-amr al-wāqī'*) which gives in to especially the political hegemony that is backed up by its previous concept of unitary thought.⁴⁹ The right of difference is but a reclamation of a natural right that characterizes the universe, "This right cannot stand without liberty as a natural right."⁵⁰

From this premise Abderrahmane moves to distinguish between two kinds of modernity as a way of finding space for the right of difference to be exercised by Islamic thought. One is "the essence of modernity", or "the spirit of modernity" (*rūḥ al-ḥadāṭah*), and the other is "the fact of modernity" (*waqī' al-ḥadāṭah*). The latter manifests itself in the way it is realized by the West, or what I have been referring to here as Euro-modernity. This kind of modernity practices three absolute sovereignties of costly results on the modern world: sovereignty on nature, on society, and on the individual.⁵¹ Mostly, the fact of modernity has sometimes been summarized in rationalism, and at others in secularism; sometimes it has been condensed in the ideals of humanism, individualism, and at others in liberty. Seeing its repercussions that have been exported sometimes by force to the rest of the world, it has to be rejected, not in its entirety, but in the way its principles have been interpreted and practiced. Modernity has to grow from within. Any other option is mimetic. Multiple modernities are possible through understanding the spirit of modernity or the essence of modernity.⁵²

48 Abderrahmane. *The Arabic Right to Philosophical Difference*. 17; see also *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference*, Chapter 4, on the types of intellectual difference and the principles of preserving it.

49 Ibid. 17.

50 Ibid. 21.

51 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 19-23.

52 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 24-32.

As to the essence of modernity,⁵³ it is innovative because it recovers to man his ethical essence. "The essence of man is ethical."⁵⁴ In this second modernity, man's wholeness is recovered, and is not divided: his material outer being is considered an indivisible part of his spiritual inner being.⁵⁵ In the second modernity, which gives man his role of the prime free agent who can revise and devise concepts, modernity becomes minor, and not the opposite as the first modernity (the fact of modernity of the West) has dominantly exercised it. Man recovers his majority (i.e. maturity) place, which means that this same man can revisit modernity and its practices. This is what the second modernity aims at, "man is more powerful than modernity."⁵⁶ Such a role is given back to him because his ethical essence urges him not to accept mimicry and subjugation position. Since the essence of the actor is ethical, so becomes of what he innovates: the essence of modernity is equally ethical.⁵⁷ What Abderrahmane does through his ethical reading of modernity is that he expands the premises of the first modernity, and allows other cultures, religions, and philosophies to contribute to it, instead of making it the one and only correct version. As will be further explained below, the horizontal values (i.e. physical/ material) of the first modernity are backed up by vertical ones (metaphysical/ spiritual) to overcome the limitations of the fact of modernity.⁵⁸ The second modernity is more open to accommodating the diversity that characterizes the modern world.

The essence of modernity is based on three principles, and each of them is built on two pillars: 1) the principle of majority (*mabda' al-rušd*), and its two pillars of autonomy (*rukn al-istiqlāl*) and creativity (*rukn al-ibdā'*), 2) the principle of criticism (*mabda' al-naqd*) and its pillars of rationalization (*rukn al-ta'qīl*) and differentiation (*rukn al-tafšīl, or al-tafriq*), and 3) the principle of universality (*mabda' al-šumūl*) and its pillars of extensibility (*rukn al-tawassu'*)

53 The term "essence of modernity" is used interchangeably with other terms like the "spirit of modernity," "second modernity" (Ibid. 56, 67), and "spiritual modernity" (Ibid. 48). It is also very close to "continuous innovation" and "innovative creativity" (Ibid. 193-196). Islamic modernity is a version of the second modernity, though the religion of Islam and its ethics are its inspiring nourishment.

54 Ibid. 59.

55 Ibid. 58.

56 Ibid. 53.

57 I reiterate my synthesis of Abderrahmane's overall approach: religion, ethics and reason are made equal in their moment of creation, inseparable ontologically-epistemologically, and are thus the essence of man. This means that religion and reason are not supposed to antagonize, and the same applies to religion and modernity, and obviously to reason and modernity.

58 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 59.

and generality (*rukn al-ta'mīm*). It is clear from the start that Abderrahmane refuses to base his reading of modernity on classical concepts (like liberty, rationalism, and secularism) either because his basic principles—as will be illustrated below—cover them or because they have been separately abused and their interpretations exaggerated.⁵⁹ This will be made clearer as these concepts are explained, along with a critique of the way they have partly been interpreted by the first modernity.⁶⁰ I visualize these principles and pillars in the table below, before explaining them.

TABLE 1 *Taha Abderrahmane's Principles of Modernity and Its Pillars*

Principles Pillars	Principle of Majority	Principle of Criticism	Principle of Universality
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1a	Autonomy		
1b	Creativity		
2a		Rationalization	
2b		Differentiation	
3a			Extensibility
3b			Generality

59 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 24, n. 3. Abderrahmane also notes that the principles and pillars of the essence of modernity as he classifies them does not mean that clear cut lines can be drawn among them; he says they intertwine; for example, creativity is impossible without rationalization and differentiation; and differentiation is impossible without rationalization (Ibid. 29, n. 17).

60 Abderrahmane derives and coins many new terms in Arabic, in a genuine manner, which other contemporary philosophers and reformists do not generally do. Translating his concepts from Arabic into English would not have been easy here if he himself had not provided their equivalents in his footnotes. Besides the original books in Arabic, this section has made use of a conceptual introductory chapter on modernity from his book *The Spirit of Modernity*. 11-69, from which I also borrowed the framework of innovative humanization-historicization-rationalization. This introductory chapter is luckily fully available in English, at *Islam Today Journal*, 21 (2004), and from which I have used most quotes instead of translating them myself. Therefore, the quotes in this section are not my translations; they are the direct words of Abderrahmane. However, I give the pagination according to the Arabic text to keep harmony with the previous section that built its framework based on a chapter from the same book.

1) The Principle of Majority (*mabda' al-rušd*)

By the principle of majority in modernity is meant the development of man and the realization of his majority (i.e. maturity) capacities. Two pillars uphold this principle. First, autonomy: the major human being enjoys his inalienable rights and pursues his goals without deterrence from any other human authority. Second, creativity: the major man quests for being creative in his way of thoughts, sayings and actions based either on newly devised values or those developed from old ones in a more updated and creative manner.⁶¹

This principle and its pillars, as briefly presented above, have been practiced by the West in a form of intellectual tutelage on Islamic thought. At the level of autonomy, intellectual tutelage has been practiced based on three hypotheses, which particularly colonial and hegemonic West advances: a) "the tutelage of the strong outsider equates care for the weak"; b) "the internal tutelage is that of religious entities"; c) "modernity is autonomy from internal tutelage."⁶² Abderrahmane considers these hypotheses erroneous, in three corresponding ways: a) paternalism goes against the spirit of majority and autonomy; b) Islamic history did not experience a religious authority like that of the Church and the clergy; c) because Islamic history did not experience a similar religious tutelage as that of the Church, so its adoption of modernity cannot be the way Europe adopted it; religious authority cannot be annihilated in the modern age simply because Europe did so to break away from the tutelage of the Church. Abderrahmane says, "the tutelage prevalent in our environment is not that of religious scholars but of the coloniser and foreign hegemony that take myriad shapes, going even so far as to use us as its spokespersons;" thus "all that we need to do is strive to liberate ourselves from this tutelage by embarking on the process of thinking for ourselves."⁶³ Autonomy in thinking is then of two kinds: one is responsible autonomy (*istiqlāl mas'ūl*), which cuts ties with the Western tutelage and renders its autonomy creative (creative autonomy, *istiqlāl mubdi'*), and the other is minor autonomy (*istiqlāl qāṣir*), which seems free but its practice of freedom takes place within a traced premise created by someone else; that is, free as it may seem, it does not reach the level of autonomy; this autonomy is mimetic (*istiqlāl muqallid*).⁶⁴

As to the level of creativity, Abderrahmane considers that Western modernity has adopted it in its own way, based on three hypotheses. These are as

61 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 25-26.

62 Ibid. 36.

63 Ibid. 36-38.

64 Ibid.

follows: a) "the highest form of creativity is what constitutes an absolute rift"; b) "creativity creates need in the same way that it satisfies it"; c) "the most authentic creativity is one where the self reaches ultimate fulfilment."⁶⁵ Abderrahmane refutes these hypotheses as follows: a) no absolute rift with the past is possible; most human values are ahistorical since they are tied to the essence of humanity, and the essence does not change; creative modernity is not that which cuts ties with the past, but that which builds on it; it is a modernity of values and not a temporal modernity;⁶⁶ b) high increase in economic and technological progress has also increased the level of consumption and material self-fulfilment to uncontrollable levels; to make of modernity a process of equilibrium for human development, spiritual nourishment has to increase, too, so that the modern man avoids loss of meaning of liberty and being; for this purpose, inventing aesthetics and morals that take the modern conditions into account is of tantamount importance; c) self-fulfilment turns into selfishness and indulgence if the wellbeing of the other is not considered as part of self-fulfilment; the individualism of first modernity can be faced by the solidarity values of second modernity, for the "good is a transcending rather than a limitative value," and "charity to the other is a charity to the self."⁶⁷

2) The Principle of Criticism (*mabda' al-naqd*)

The principle of criticism means a shift from a state of belief to one of questioning and criticism. It is backed up by two pillars: 1) rationalization, i.e. the sovereignty of reason, and 2) differentiation, i.e. the action of drawing distinctions among coherent elements to facilitate the comprehension of the mechanisms of a concerned element or component. Rationalization is best represented through the achievements of natural sciences, bureaucracy, technocracy, capitalism, and techno-science. Differentiation has touched all the institutions and forms of social and individual life. This includes differentiation in the field of knowledge (differentiation between science, law, morals, arts), in the field of culture (between the spheres of theoretical, practical and symbolic values), in the social arena (between the tasks and roles delegated to the diverse social actors), in the field of economy through work division, and in politics through the principle of secularity (that differentiates between religion and the state).⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 39.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 40.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 41.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 26-28.

However, despite its importance, Abderrahmane says that the methods of this principle have in most part been blindly borrowed from the West without taking into account the difference of the material on which it has been applied in the Islamic environment and its tradition. This has opened an era of mimicry and distortion of facts as accumulated in the tradition over the centuries. Applying this principle and its pillars endangers the spirit of modernity, so unveiling their erroneous premises is what he does.

Abderrahmane argues that the premises upon which the pitfalls of rationalism are first exercised by Western modernity are threefold. These premises are: a) “the mind grasps everything”; b) “man is the master of nature”; c) “everything is open to criticism.”⁶⁹ He refutes these premises, and expands their interpretation. Against the first (a) premise, he brings up his logical utensils to argue that, firstly, the mind cannot bring itself to reason, though it does fall within the ‘all’ that the mind is said to be able to comprehend, the rule being that the means should be stronger than the object it seeks to rationalise. Henceforth, to rationalise the mind, a mind that is stronger than it is needed, and to rationalise this second mind, another one that is stronger is needed, thus falling in a vicious circle. Secondly, the mind cannot rationalise the whole, as it is part of this whole; the part cannot encompass the whole. There are then things or phenomena to which reason in its abstract version cannot be applied. It needs expansion to engender supported reason or expanded reason as will be noted below in introducing differentiation pillar. For Abderrahmane, man carries within himself a spiritual world where values and ideals mingle with knowledge and machines. Contrary to what is widely believed, the realm of passion and emotions is no less rationalistic than the world of knowledge though its form of rationalisation is lighter. The desired mind—or expanded mind—should accommodate this emotional world in the same way that it accommodates sciences and values. The rationalisation engaged in by the reasonable man is therefore one that seeks knowledge and manufactures machines in light of the noble imports profoundly ingrained in man’s soul.⁷⁰

As to the second (b) Cartesian premise of “man is the master of nature,” Abderrahmane considers it a kind of fiction, “this premise is no more than a metaphor that falls within the realm of beautiful fiction.”⁷¹ Man did not create nature; he does not own it, so he cannot master it. Its mysteries do not stop from enthralling the modern man at times, and at revolting against him at

69 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 43.

70 Ibid. 43-44. For further details on the types of reason in Abderrahmane’s project, see, for example, his *Religious Practice*.

71 Ibid. 44.

others owing to human waste, contamination and over-technologization. The perception he holds on this is that of an ethical being with nature that requires a treatment of gratitude, "Nature is the mother to man, not his slave [...] and the mother can never be a slave to her infant."⁷² The alliance between man and nature should expand to include also the intangible world, which is part of the whole.

The third (c) premise—"everything is open to criticism"—is narrow in scope, too. There are matters that have no tangible sings such as spiritual values and ideals. The most convenient way to understand them is to live them and experience them. Criticism here would require another or other reasoning levels and analytical criticisms to reach some of the realized aspects of these values and ideals. This is referred to as "varied criticism", as opposed to "uniform criticism".⁷³ Abderrahmane recognizes a strong connection between the three premises (a, b, c), that is why he calls for a constant communication (dialogue) between the three in light of the interpretation he has given to each. He puts it this way:

Once we acknowledge that man, nature and life are different but interrelated, we will realise that proof can differ in three ways. First, each of the three fields has its own critical logic if tackled on its own; second, the logic of each field should be adjusted in accordance with its degree of interrelation with that of the other fields; and third, that the logic reached, when consideration is taken of this interrelation, may help guide the specific logic of each sphere, this guidance being of course different from one sphere to another.⁷⁴

As to the pillar of differentiation, Abderrahmane alleges that it has focalized the issue of distinction in at least two premises: the premise of a) "dissociating modernity from tradition" and that of b) "separating politics from religion." For mimetic modernists, or Euro-centrists, this means that the Islamic heritage is cut off from modernity; so, it has to build these ties following modernity values. However, for Abderrahmane projecting these differentiations on the Islamic tradition can be rejected for a number of reasons. First (a), modernity spirit is not purely Western-European. Previous influential civilizations also experienced it, though according to the human achievements of the time; otherwise, how could the fact of civilizations, their rise and fall, be explained? They were

⁷² Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 45.

⁷³ Ibid. 45-46.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 46.

modern in the fashions of their own times. Second (b), the Islamic civilization has contributed to planting the seeds of modernity in Europe. Third (c), even in case the Islamic heritage may not clearly show that the spirit of modernity is part of its tradition, and the current realities illustrate the absence of any signs that defend this argument, the principles of modernity still make part of this tradition; the tangible aspects of this spirit are not necessary conditions to say that they are absent when they are not visible.⁷⁵

Regarding the second (b) premise of “the separation of politics from religion,” a very important premise that characterizes especially Western modernity, it is given particular attention in the various works of Abderrahmane, which certainly cannot be presented in this limited space. Overall, his argumentation targets redefining the concepts of religion and politics according to the principle of criticism and the pillar of differentiation. The argument starts as follows. The above premise, in Western modernity, is based on three assumptions: a) “the dissociation of modernity and tradition is an absolute separation”; b) “the dissociation of reason and religion is an absolute separation”; c) “differentiation is conditional upon the demise of sacredness.”⁷⁶

Abderrahmane refutes these assumptions, one by one. For the initial assumption above (a), he first considers that a big confusion took place in using interchangeably the concepts of Church and religion in European modern history. The politicized clergy that was tyrannical in its practice of authority does not represent the religion of Christianity. Supposing that the political clergy represents this faith, this does not necessarily mean that when this clergy is no longer in power this religion will consequently disappear. Second, he asserts that modernity did not grow in one surge, but had been a process that infused a lot of the past achievements before it came up with its worldview. Its origins could be found in the Greek, Judaic, and Islamic traditions, too. Seeing that it emerged out of these dominant religious traditions, its spirit cannot deny religiosity as its component. In this sense, it does not totally cut ties with the past, including religion. Third, humanist modernity concepts have built on the classically religious ones: perfection, brotherhood and time, for example, have turned into modern concepts equivalent to progress, solidarity, and linearity in history, respectively. Fourth, religious leaders, and scholars of religious background or interest were also among the pioneers of the European Renaissance and later Enlightenment, like Erasmus, Descartes, Newton, Kant and Hegel.⁷⁷

75 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 47.

76 Ibid. 48.

77 Ibid. 48-49.

The second (b) assumption—"the dissociation of reason and religion is an absolute separation"—is also refuted because it is based on understanding religion as mythical, transcendental and irrational. The relegation of religion to invisibility in Western modernity is based on linking religion with irrationality. This assumption can be contested if at least three possible significances of the irrational surface in the discussion. The first (1) is that the irrational stands for the impossible, such as bringing together two extreme opposites; the second (2) stands for what cannot be grasped by the mind, either because it goes beyond its premises or falls in a different category; the third (3) stands for that which cannot be judged by reason, either for confirmation or refutation. So, what then is referred to as transcendental may be irrational in one of the above three senses. Yet, the point is that irrationality here is measured or judged through ordinary reason that is critical of tangible components only. Religion requires a higher mind to understand it, or part of it. This higher mind is called the soul or spirit. What follows from this is that the impossible as in one above (1), or "what cannot be grasped by the mind" as in (2), or "that which cannot be judged by reason" as in (3) may be contrasted only with ordinary reason whose mechanisms are unable to go to the level of the three assumptions. Other possible mechanisms of a higher reason may be able to approach these levels and assumptions, and thus make the contrast between religion and reason weak or even absent. That is, if what is called religious is transcendental, then there is no logical need to subject it to an ordinary reason that does not match its requirements, mechanisms, and levels.⁷⁸

The third assumption of differentiation—"differentiation is conditional upon the demise of the sacred"—is equally refuted by Abderrahmane because it has wrongly considered sacredness and magic equal. Since magic is found irrational, through the differentiation methods applied to it in both the social and exact sciences, so is said of the sacred. In his differentiation, sacredness is the attribute of worshipping something that transcends this world and rises high above, while magic is used to describe something that comes into contact with this world and interacts with it, even merging totally with it. Sacredness is connected to cosmic signs (*āyāt*) that are of high significance in human life, and their significance remains a human quest, part of their rational classification/differentiation, while magic soon falls under this classification, and proves to be limited in its significance. It is this deep significance contemplated in the universe that can turn one into a spiritually rational being, and thus a connected part with the intangible part of the universe. Abderrahmane words it this way:

⁷⁸ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 49-52.

Man is inherently not a discontinuous whole [...]. Our relationship with the world is no longer one where we seek to take away all the secrets of the world in order to exploit it, but to discover them in order to people and develop the earth; nor is this relationship one of detachment from the universe's phenomena but of harmony with them because they are the only key to its innermost secrets.⁷⁹

Communion with the world, as described above, opens the principle of creativity in modernity to new horizons of exploring nature and dealing with the sacred. The exploration of the hidden mysteries of the world unveil creativity energies in man, endorses his trust of nature and hope in life, and turns fear of the sacred a means of inspiration. To use terms from *The Spirit of Religion* (2012), the expanded reason develops the idea of the expanded man who leads a vertical life (transcendental) besides the horizontal (physical) one. He becomes a "connected man" (*insān muttaṣil*) with the transcendental and intangible in the universe.⁸⁰

Creativity in the pillar of differentiation, henceforth, is based on two principles, according to Abderrahmane: 1) the rationalization of religion, and 2) the distension [expansion] of politics.⁸¹ He affirms that most of religious Sharia-based rules are rational but "should be placed within their contexts in each of modern life's fields."⁸² As to the rules that seem irrational, "we need to endeavour to rationalise them in accordance with new circumstances, or to re-conceptualise rationalisation in such a way as to encompass these rules."⁸³ Religion and reasoning faculty are bound together to find justifications that either rationalize religion or religionize reason by expanding its horizons in dealing with the transcendental.⁸⁴ From his Islamic perspective, religion

79 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 53-54.

80 Ibid. 53.

81 Ibid. 50-52.

82 Ibid. 52.

83 Ibid. 52.

84 It was seen earlier that Abderrahmane uses terms like higher mind or expanded reason as a higher stage compared to ordinary mind or mechanical mind. I note here these types as he explains them further in one of his recent works. In *Religious Practice*, Abderrahmane divides Rational ability into three basic levels: Rationality of abstraction, Rationality of living experience, and Rationality of Sophist belief, which match three terms Abstract Reason, Guided Reason and Supported Reason. Abstract Reason is limited to description of things; the Guided Reason is devoted to doing things, whereas the Supported Reason represents the capability of knowing its internal identity. In my understanding, Supported Reason is the same as Expanded Reason. Abderrahmane. *Religious Practice*. 121.

and reason are not supposed to be opposing entities but parts of one whole. Abderrahmane tries the same with the second principle of differentiation pillar: politics. He distances his definition from its Western counterpart.

The right to difference as a natural right based on human liberty to choose, started with earlier, has to be born in mind here. While in the West politics is conceived as “running the public affairs through rules and regulations *laid down* by the *Western* people themselves,”⁸⁵ in the Islamic context Abderrahmane conceives of it as “running public affairs through rules and regulations *selected* by the *people*,”⁸⁶ thus drawing a lucid distinction between choosing and drawing up. What he reaches with this distinction is the right to decide how public affairs should be run: either through pure human creativity, or through human creativity as inspired by the divine, a choice Western modernity cut off in devising its modern politics, “I may choose what I have not devised. The rules in our [Islamic] context may be of our own devising or of divine inspiration, but they are all of our own choice.”⁸⁷ Accordingly, politics in its new definition is based on the right to choose first, and on the right to devise next. What this implies is of high importance. The rationalization criteria used to evaluate the political act would follow the same definition of politics above: rationalization criteria have to be based not on examining the rationality of rules as laid down by people but as chosen by them first. Henceforth, the rationalisation of the political act becomes conditional upon the degree of choice available within it.⁸⁸

3) The Principle of Universality (*mabda' al-šumūl*)

According to this third and last principle, modernity is intrinsically based on a move from particularity, or individuality, to universality. Universality denotes “the process of surpassing the particularity of modernity in its two senses, the contextual (*al-mağāl*) and the social (*al-muğtama'*).”⁸⁹ These two senses are what Abderrahmane terms 1) extensibility and 2) generality (or generalizability), two pillars that back up the principle of universality. Extensibility means that “the process of modernity is not restricted to one or more specific fields. It permeates all the spheres of life and levels of behaviour, influencing thought,

85 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 50.

86 Ibid. 50.

87 Ibid. 50.

88 Ibid. 51.

89 Ibid. 28.

science, religion and morals, as well as law, politics and economy.”⁹⁰ Its action within a given field impacts other fields and triggers transformations that transcend the limits of this field. Generality means that modernity does not confine itself to the society where it emerges. Its highly sophisticated products and values which call for the liberation of man are applicable to other societies, heedless of the historical and cultural differences existing between them.⁹¹ Generality paves the way for “a new phase of modernity called globalisation.”⁹² The two pillars are further explained below, first as the West has interpreted them, and next as Abderrahmane re-interprets them.

Abderrahmane analyses the pillar of extensibility first by unveiling the way it has been conceived by Western modernity. Following this pillar, (Western) modernity has been interpreted based on three premises, or assumptions: a) “modernity is inevitable”; b) “modernity engenders absolute power”; c) “the essence of modernity is an economic one.”⁹³ The first assumption asserts that modernity is unavoidable, in all its aspects because they are comprehensive and the most developed. The second premise gives reasons for exporting modernity principles by force or by will, and turned it into a hegemonic discourse. The third premise makes of economy and consumerism the main manifestations of modernity, and turning its other values (liberty, equality, justice, etc.) into means for the economic end. Economy in Western modernity is not part of the social fabric; rather, it has become an independent field that influences all the other fields, which gradually turn into its servant-fields. They consequently lose their independence, their creativity, and their ability to contribute to human flourishing. Socio-cultural norms become useless, and a mere means to the consumerist mind-set. This threefold extensibility of modernity cannot be Universalist in Abderrahmane’s view.

Abderrahmane presents three truths⁹⁴ to counter the three premises of extensibility as interpreted by Western modernity. These three truths give extensibility its authentic universality. One, the defeatist logic⁹⁵ of the first premise—“modernity is inevitable”—that accepts Western modernity as the only way for human development falls in the same logic that created it: Western modernity was not inherently imposed on man from outside by some other human faculty, nor was it divinely imposed; rather, it was man himself

90 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 28.

91 Ibid. 29.

92 Ibid. 29.

93 Ibid. 55.

94 “Truths” here do not mean absolute epistemological facts; they mean “facts” or “assumptions”—to follow the argumentation in this context.

95 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 56.

who devised it and chose it. This primal value of liberty is denied to the non-Western other. Western modernity is a historical phenomenon,⁹⁶ and it should not be considered an insurmountable model; otherwise, creativity becomes repetitive and uncreative. The first truth that counters this first defeatist premise is that “man is more powerful than modernity”:⁹⁷ while the Western version can become obsolete with age, man cannot, because it is he who influences human history and the world of ideas in light of the historical circumstances of his time. Extensibility has to take this truth into consideration for continuous renewal. This consideration allows the Islamic perspective to be creative, and so it does for other perspectives. Modernity frees itself from Eurocentrism based on such new premise/truth, and allows new contributions from other cultures, civilizations, religions, and philosophies to create a new global project of development that may shape a better second modernity or even take a different name.⁹⁸

Two, against the second premise of extensibility as conceived of by Western modernity—modernity engenders absolute power—Abderrahmane proposes a second truth. That is, egotism, materialism and self-indulgence are challenged to be wholly extensive by equally increasing interest in the inner self and psychology of man. The second truth works following this principle: “man’s corporeality is part of his spirituality.”⁹⁹ Recalling ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s view of complementariness between the physical and transcendental/metaphysical, it becomes evident now that gratifying just one side at the expense of the other does not grasp the wholeness of man. The inner side has to be developed as is the material side. In his words:

If the application of one of the principles of modernity involves the permeation of all the aspects of human life, this premise entails that modernity incorporates man’s soul in the same way that it does as regards his body, catering to his spiritual needs in the same manner as to his material needs. It even makes the fulfilment of material needs conditional upon that of the spiritual ones.¹⁰⁰

The point here is that “material modernity” has to match “spiritual modernity,” and vice versa.¹⁰¹ If material modernity has to revisit its values so that they

96 Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 57.

97 Ibid. 56.

98 Ibid. 56.

99 Ibid. 58.

100 Ibid. 58.

101 Ibid. 58.

accommodate human diversity and inner demands, so is required of spiritual modernity that has to renew faith radically in order to encompass material needs. In other terms, the horizontal values (material values) of man have to open up to the vertical dimension (transcendental dimension) of his life.¹⁰²

Three, against the third premise of Western extensibility—"the essence of modernity is an economic one"—Abderrahmane proposes the "third truth" which works on the basis that "the essence of man is a moral and ethical one."¹⁰³ Accordingly, self-gratification that economy satisfies hides behind it the quest for human perfection that starts in the present and lives the idea of the future, or what Abderrahmane calls continuous perfectibility (*al-istikmāl al-mutawāṣil*) and futurity (*al-istiqbāl al-āḡil* or *al-mustaqbaliyyah*).¹⁰⁴ Due to the fact that material gratification alone cannot grasp the inner side of man, spiritual gratification, with its possibly various worlds, has to accompany it (material gratification). The practice of perfecting one's material aspirations become bound by morals derived from divine inspiration, spirituality, and the ethics they teach. The future then is not a purely modern concept, but it is deeply rooted in religious vocabulary, "religious morals and ethics are truly the morals that confer perfection on man because they carry within themselves the awareness of the future."¹⁰⁵

As to the second pillar of universality principle, i.e., generality, it means that "modernity does not confine itself to the society where it emerges."¹⁰⁶ Its values, which call for the liberation of man, are applicable to other societies, regardless of the historical and cultural differences that may characterize them. However, Western modernity has misinterpreted this pillar in practice mostly because it has presented the abolishment of religion as a condition for the realization of this practice. Western modernity has conditioned the generality of modern values by preventing religion from contributing to this generality. This malpractice has been based on three premises, according to Abderrahmane: a) "modernity sustains individual thinking"; b) "secularity preserves the sanctity of all religions"; c) "the values of modernity are universal."¹⁰⁷ The three premises share the principle of viewing religion as irrational, so individual thinking and the preservation of religion are this worldly based, which does not make them universal, since other societies do not hold the same Western

¹⁰² Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 59.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 59-60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 62.

negative view of religion; the fact that Western secularism preserves religion does not mean that it welcomes it as a contributor to its values, a fact that affects both individual thinking and its universality. As he does with the previous principles and pillars, Abderrahmane re-interprets these premises of generality from his Islamic perspective to make them more accommodative of religion.

One, against the individualist thinking that the first premise of generality—"modernity sustains individual thinking"—engenders, Abderrahmane proposes reviving the meaning of "human being" as a universal being. The view of society as composed of "a gathering of individuals that we take as a whole entity but whose hearts are divided, each preoccupied by furthering his own interests" does not make of modernity a universal enterprise.¹⁰⁸ It is the human being who can render a value, or values, universal, and can thus contribute to the making of a universal society (*al-muġtama' al-'ālamī*) because he thinks beyond society, a limitation the individual falls in. As a practitioner of what Abderrahmane calls extensive thinking (*al-tafkīr al-muta'addī*) versus the restrictive thinking (*al-tafkīr al-qāṣir*) of the individualist individual), the human being engages in thinking "with the assumption that our [Muslim] thinking is about the other as much as it is about ourselves".¹⁰⁹ Extensive thinking implies that intellectual parity (*al-alma'iyah al-fikriyyah*) is a practice exerted by all human beings for the sake of the universal society. The necessity for this parity is justified by at least three facts. First, extensive thinking takes into account the fact that a problem that touches one society can travel to other parts of the world; so, solving such a problem would require solving it at the global level. Second, the cultural disintegration of communities in the globalized current world has amplified the need for their interaction; the problems they face are similar, and solving them individually is not easy. Third, non-governmental associations, like independent persons, are crossing borders all over the world, making involvement in society not the sole duty of that particular society in a particular geography. Extensive thinking has allowed for extensive action on the ground, weakening by thus the restrictive action of the individual who cares only for self-gratification.¹¹⁰

Two, against taking for granted the premise that "secularity preserves the sanctity of all religions," Abderrahmane demands of modernity to exert its criticism principle on all religions to differentiate between them, and see which of them is more rational or not, and which of them can be learnt from in devising

¹⁰⁸ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 62.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 63.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 63.

public affairs. He says, “To say that all religions are equal would be as much of a fallacy as to say that policies, philosophies and thoughts are equal. There are differences between religions as there are differences between these.”¹¹¹ Applying differentiation for clarity among religions can solve the major issues of differentiations in Western modernity—religion versus politics, revelation versus reason, private versus public. Some religions are more rational than others, the way some philosophies and policies are more rational, and thus beneficent, than others. For Abderrahmane, Islam is more rational, at least among the three monolithic religions, and if the West has put all religions in one basket, Muslims have to rethink this Western differentiation, by overcoming them in light of considering the essence of modernity and not the fact of modernity. Nonetheless, modernity hides either its inability to go into such a level of criticism and differentiation of religion or its contempt for them as equally irrational and thus its superficial discourse of protecting them and treating them as equals. Both options (either/or) show that religion is not of importance to Western modernity. To surmount this restrictive thinking, rationalizing religion and expanding the meaning of politics—as explained when dealing with the previous pillars and principles—is the way out to regain trust in religion as a contributor in the management of world affairs. Besides, extensibility in thinking contributes to comparative studies of religions and to dialogue.¹¹²

Three, against the misapplication of the third premise of generality pillar—that “values of modernity are universal”—Abderrahmane recalls that human values have always been universal, but their contextual interpretation have made the difference and created diversity in the world. Western modernity is itself a historical variety of universal values; the difference they have made is that they have their particular circumstances, and exporting these values with these particular circumstances which other societies may not have gone through goes against the spirit of modernity itself, “the Western application of modernity as we witness and experience it is far from being universal.”¹¹³ It follows from this line of argumentation that Abderrahmane distinguishes between (1) contextual universality (*kawniyyah siyāqiyyah*), where an idea or an object, though created in a given society, may be re-invented in another one, going beyond its primary innovative aspect to be added on and enriched by another or other societies, and (2) non-contextual universality, or absolute universality (*kawniyyah iṭlāqiyyah*), where an innovation first emerged in a particular society is fostered as such by others that adopt it, mimic it, or even

¹¹¹ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 64.

¹¹² Ibid. 64.

¹¹³ Ibid. 65.

consider it immutable. It is contextual universality that caters for the spirit of modernity, and allows diversity in creativity, a fact that endorses its universality, "values cannot be disconnected from their context, either the context in which they are created or the context in which they are re-created."¹¹⁴ Contextual universality allows for the multiplicity of applications of universal values, and feeds cultural exchange and hybridization.¹¹⁵

In sum, Abderrahmane's three principles of modernity (majority, rationality, and universality) have first been presented as they have been narrowly interpreted by the first modernity, or quasi-modernity, of the West, and have subsequently been re-interpreted from the Islamic perspective, in light of the achievements of Western modernity, and world continuous changes. Six pillars have been developed, each for every principle above: creativity and autonomy for the first principle of majority, rationalization and differentiation for the second principle of criticism, extensibility and generality for the third principle of generality.

Succinctly put, and corresponding to each of the six pillars of the essence of modernity that are required to initiate a second modernity, the following conclusions are deduced. One, autonomy does not mean freedom from the religious tutelage that the West suffered from, but means autonomy from the Western monopoly of modernity, which has turned it into a colonial tutelage. Two, creativity does not require total break from the tradition and revelation because modernity means renewal of values; these values, to be recreated, need inner energy which spirituality substantially contributes. Three, rationalization of religion is required, but this does not mean that the mind can grasp everything, because its consciousness cannot encompass itself, nor can it criticize everything because not all that is around it is tangible; the mind cannot prevail over nature; it lives with it as a mother with her child. Four, differentiation cannot be total, because man is part of the whole, part of the world that he lives in; levels of reason are required to capture the cosmic signs; expanded minds are needed for that practice. Five, extensibility does not mean that the first modernity is the only and final version of its essence; man is more powerful than modernity. As a moral entity, man can always reshape the first dominantly material manifestations of modernity and colour it with values that give him meaning. That is the genuine extensibility and not the economic alone. Six, generality means that extensive thinking of the human being considers the universal society in whatever it thinks about, and thus shows that solidarity with the other is a requisite in generality. This means that the universality

¹¹⁴ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 67.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 66.

of values renders them contextual, able to be reshaped by different cultures and philosophies, and cannot be replicated based on one model that claims absolute universality.¹¹⁶

In renewing the principles of modernity, Abderrahmane has been driving to the following conclusions. One, the spirit of modernity differs from its reality. Two, Western modernity is but one realization of the spirit of modernity. It is quasi-modernity, or first modernity. Three, all nations are equal in appropriating the spirit of modernity. Four, contemporary Islamic thought and the reality in the Islamic majority societies has been closer to quasi-modernity than to the essence of modernity. Five, modernity is internal and creative; it should be home-made. Six, creating our (Islamic) internal modernity requires *rejecting* the first modernity that is pregnant with many pitfalls.¹¹⁷

Reflective Closure

The scope of Abderrahmane's ethical project, which may be summarized in his concept of trusteeship paradigm, appears to be aiming at shaking not only contemporary Arab-Islamic scholarships, and its classics, but also modern Western scholarship, and its Greek philosophical classics, a scope only the iceberg tip of which this paper has tried to introduce. His philosophical and linguistic command of these two main traditions seems to have allowed him to revisit their foundations and summarize the new critique he launches in the question of ethics and deeds, i.e., consistency in the practice of the claims of their ethical abstract claims. His unique logical argumentation makes him stand apart in contemporary Islamic scholarship, an argumentation enriched by an original and remarkable linguistic ability to generate new terms and concepts in Arabic, the language of the main sources of the Islamic worldview as introduced in the Qur'an and the Sunna. However, this project that overall aims first and foremost at renewing Arab-Islamic philosophy and re-awakening its polity, besides a critique of Western modernity, faces a number of limitations that may be summarized in three points that correspond to world-society-individual axes.

One, Abderrahmane's worldview as encapsulated in trusteeship paradigm is conservative in the sense that it does not appear to break away with the dominant classical view that this-world and the-other world are complementary and inseparable. This assumption on which he builds his project is what

¹¹⁶ Abderrahmane. *The Spirit of Modernity*. 68-69.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 67-68.

makes it religious, and more particularly Islamic. It is based on his understanding of the major sources of the religion of Islam, as well as his own spiritual-Sufi experiences. Such a view makes him refuse to differentiate between the four items or concepts of revelation, reason, ethics, and doing/practice. The implications of this on philosophy, sciences, and politics do lead to the paradigmatic world he envisions: an ethical world where well-being is impossible without well-doing for the other before the self—a note to be raised below. Simultaneously, and that is what makes the project challenging, this trusteeship paradigm is rationally well argued. His logical equipment has contributed to making of his intellectual edifice a very heavy one that is not easy to challenge—if his assumption of complementarity, and not unity, of the two worlds is put aside.

Two, Abderrahmane's claim that he is re-grounding Islamic philosophy on its authentic worldview may not be easily accepted by other projects, classic or contemporary, that also claim to be Islamic in their approaches. Abderrahmane's critique of some classical philosophers like al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rušd, and contemporary ones like Muḥammad Arkūn, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ġabrī, Muḥammad Šaḥrūr and Ḥasan Ḥanafī, and his comfort with very few ones like Muḥammad Iqbāl and Faḍl Raḥmān Mālik, makes his project "different." According to him, the classicists were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, and the contemporaries are heavily influenced by Western modernity and its philosophy that is too secular or atheist, and leaves no space for the right to difference. He suspects their historicist approaches as being imitations of European readings of their tradition and history with religion, which he thinks is different from the Arab-Islamic history with its own religion, especially in its foundational prophetic moment. While he re-grounds Islamic philosophy on its main sources, he does not illustrate his suspicion and views with historical evidences from the socio-political realities of the centuries old history of various Islamic societies. This may render his project too abstract—a point of critique he launches against Greek and Western philosophies. Greek and modern Western philosophies.¹¹⁸ So, since he aims at philosophical re-grounding for socio-political awakening and independence in the Arab-Islamic world, his a-historicist approach may be somewhat disconnected from realities on the ground.

Nonetheless, Abderrahmane's critique of European modernity may still make his trusteeship paradigm appealing, and historicist through its logical

118 I leave out mentioning his critique of contemporary readings of the Qur'ān. I do that in a different forthcoming paper.

argumentation (see his re-formulation of modernity principles and pillars above). His goal of changing the philosophical question into a responsible and ethical one renders his Islamic approach of modernity universally acceptable. That is, his defence of the idea of second modernity or ethical modernity empowers other traditions and cultures to overcome the dominant divinely-free Western version of modernity. His spiritual modernity seems pluralist, accommodative of differences, and more caring for global justice and solidarity.

Three, on the individual level, trusteeship paradigm challenges the values of liberty and rationalism, to name these, not to belittle them but to upgrade them to a higher conception of ethics through practice. Values that do not prioritize common good and the good being of the other are suspected of not being universal and of high worth. In his work for renewal, Abderrahmane considers that these two values have been used by Western hegemonies and colonizers to block the independence of whole societies and cultures, and to project on them irrationality, which contradicts the ideas of modernity and change. What aborts autonomy and creativity in traditional and colonized societies is Western tutelage, and not religion. To overcome such tutelage and to rectify the misuse of such values requires consistency in comportment, which trusteeship paradigm advances. While this claim may be supported by critics of Western hegemonic modernity, others who see that individual liberty and ethical demeanour as universal values do not need to resort to religion and practice as requirements for genuine change (read: different modernity); while they may be critics of Western modernity, they may still endorse a lot of its values to gain autonomy and bring about change, without resort to inspiration from the divine or the-other world; for such a view, ethics do not need transcendental reference. While Abderrahmane may not object to such possible objective ethical attitudes for the good they bring despite the absence of reference to the divine, he may still not consider it a higher type of ethical attitude (remember his three levels of ethics and rationalism) because it may fall prey to human mundane desires that defend the good only minimally. Because Abderrahmane does not provide historical evidence to his abstract descriptions of ethics and practices, and depends largely on his spiritual experiences and Sufi readings, his proposals may be more individual-oriented than society-oriented as he also wishes them to be. Since they appear individual-oriented first, the concerned individuals may then interfere in appropriating these ethical teachings as they appear in the Islamic sources but re-interpret them according to their time-space context. This means that however conservative may appear the ethical teachings Abderrahmane adopts for his trusteeship paradigm, their extensibility and generality (as he describe in the principle of

universality) can render them flexible and changeable. Their ethical impact may be as diverse as individuals and their contexts are. It is in this sense that trusteeship paradigm appears relevant also in multicultural and liberal societies where various Western modernity values are already cherished. Clearly put, Abderrahmane's spiritual modernity cannot be founded on an island and from scratch. However critical he is of Western modernity, there are intertwining territories they share, which require further examination.