No reader of al-ʿAdāla al-ijtīmāʿīya fiʾl-Islām (Social Justice in Islam) can help but remark the pronounced way in which Sayyid Qutb begins his earliest effort at elaborating the conceptual basis for an Islamist resistance to classical liberalism and its heirs with a near total disregard for the complex history of Islamic thought’s efforts to grapple with the question of divine immanence.1 It is true that there are far more recurrences of explicit reference to divinity (uluhlīya) in the sixth and last edition, published in 1964, than in the preceding five, whose publication record runs from 1949 to 1958. Nonetheless, those later additions of the term merely make more explicit and emphatic what was already fully in play in the original 1949 edition, which is that uluhlīya is immanent in every particular of existence. This attention to divinity is not, however, as a problematic of legitimate knowledge or

1. Sayyid Qutb, Al-ʿAdāla al-ijtīmāʿīya fiʾl-Islām, 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1949). Henceforth, this work is referred to in the essay as Social Justice in Islam and cited parenthetically as SJ. All translations are my own and are based primarily on this edition, with the occasional inclusion of variations taken primarily from the sixth edition published in 1964 by Matbaʿāt ʿIsa al-Babī al-Halabī wa-shurūkaʿuhu.
authentic faith—that is, it is neither a topic of doctrinaire apologetics and systemic elaboration, as it was for ‘ilm-ul-kalām (rational theology), nor a constellation of systematic contemplations on the workings of inner faith, as it was for Sufism. Instead, it is an aspect, albeit a key one, of a fundamental comprehensive concern with Islam as a historical system of life. In that concern, divinity is not a mystery commanding contemplation or a question fostering speculation; it is a doctrinal point of departure that enables the articulation of a complex system of thought and praxis. Divinity is the principal institution of the historical Islamic system (niẓām). This is why William Shepard discerns in the multiple editions of Social Justice in Islam published after 1949 an increased theocentrism that foregrounds the history of the doctrine of divine sovereignty while disregarding the history of speculation on the concept of divinity itself. Shepard offers this reading in support of a theory of development, by which account Qutb’s concept of divine sovereignty becomes increasingly radical in response to textual influence—particularly Sayyid Abul ‘Ala Maududi’s Al-Muṣṭalahāt al-arba‘a fi’l-Islām (The Four Key Terms in Islam)—and as a consequence of Qutb’s active involvement with the political movement al-Ikhwān-ul-Muslimūn just before the 1952 Egyptian revolution, which eventually led to his repeated prolonged imprisonment and torture by the Nasser regime and ultimately to his execution in 1966. Adhering to this theory, it is possible through textual analysis of the sequential editions of Social Justice in Islam to expose the way Qutb’s concept of theocentrism developed from being merely the point of departure for the elaboration of a theory of social justice in 1949 into a prominent theory of political power by 1964. Despite the care taken with this exposition, however, what Shepard’s reading draws attention to—in fact, what it succeeds in describing—is Qutb’s increasingly emphatic reiteration of theocentrism as the principal concept of a system of material political power. For example, in the 1949 edition, the second chapter, “Tabi‘iya al-ʿadâla al-ijtimā‘iya fi’l-Islām” (“The Nature of Social Justice in Islam”) states:

One begins the serious research of Islam by clearly understanding its general foundational conception about the totality of the universe, life and humanity before considering its views on government and finance, or the relations between nations and individuals, etc. Certainly, all of these derive from this totality concept and cannot be adequately understood without a profound and correct understanding of it. . . .

Islam comprehends the nature of the relationship between the creator and creation, between humanity, the physical universe, and life,
as well as the relationship between humanity and itself, between the individual and the collective and the entirety of human aggregates, and between generations of [humans]. All of this begins with a total concept whose outline is readily discernible in the processes of the [various] branches of knowledge and detailed expositions [of thought]. This is the philosophy of Islam. (SJ, 21–22)

The first of these paragraphs is amended in the 1964 edition to read: “One begins the serious research of Islam by clearly understanding its general foundational conception about divinity, the totality of the universe, life, and humanity.” This additional reference to divinity still does not change the orientation of the research, which is to understand the historical institutions of Islam as a system that derives from a first principle; although it does spell out more explicitly that divinity is the principal aspect of this principle. The subsequent iterations in the sixth edition of the emphatic statement that divinity is the focus of the Islamic principle of total absolute unity of existence—for example, the text adds the terms rubūbiyāh (divinity or divine lordship), manhaj rabbānī (divinely ordained methodology), niẓām ul-Islām-ur-rabbānī (the divinely ordained system of Islam)—are in fact little more than an emphasis of what was already stated in the 1949 edition, where Qutb asserts, “As for the relationship between the Creator and creation (the physical universe, life, and humankind) it is latent in the force of the word; it is the immediate will from which the entirety of created things issue: ‘Verily, when He wills a thing, his command is “Be,” and it is.’ Accordingly, there is no mediation between the Creator and the creature in force or substance. All existence emanates immediately from His perfect absolute will; and by His immediate perfect absolute will existence is sustained, ordered, and dynamic” (SJ, 23).

Theocentrism was always the governing concept of Social Justice in Islam, from the first to the sixth edition, and it was always foregrounded as the principal concept of a system of material political power predicated on absolute universal divine sovereignty—tauḥīd-ul-hākimīya. The increasingly emphatic reiteration of this predication in the last three editions is what brings this early articulation of Qutb’s Islamist project in line with his mature ideology as expressed in Ma’alim fi at-ṭarīq, in which he pronounces the generalized apostasy of all current Muslim states and their cooperative citizenry—a judgment known as takfīr, which has been referenced by present-day Islamist movements such as Takfīr wa Hijra, whose members assassi-

2. Qur’an, Sura Ya Sin: 82.
nated President Anwar Sadat in 1980, and FIS, which engaged in a bloody campaign of insurgency against the whole of Algerian society in 1992 in order to legitimate campaigns of destructive violence against Muslim states and populations.

There is something else, even more significant, that is elided in Sheppard's theory of development, and that is the way Qutb begins *Social Justice in Islam* by elaborating a genealogy of the historical institution of Christianity in Europe. The title of the first chapter, “Ad-Dīn wa al-mujtama‘ bayn al-mashi‘iya wa al-Islām” (“Religion and Society, Between Christianity and Islam”), provides a clear indication of the purpose of this genealogy, which is twofold. On the one hand, the purpose is to challenge the practice by modern Muslim states and society of adopting wholesale Western principles, systems, and legal structures—Qutb explicitly refers to Europe, America, and Russia as the particular sources of these—in order to solve their “corrupt social reality” (*SJ*, 5), while at the same time disregarding any of the solutions that might be available from the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Islam. In this wholesale procurement of either democratic, socialist, or communist principles, Islam is proclaimed as the official religion of state, but with the understanding that religion is a private affair that does not govern or otherwise effect the politics of government or general finance. Nor do any of these things have a place in religion. Qutb’s charge is not merely that this radical distinction between religion and politics, which is “foreign to the nature and history of Islam,” is adopted, but that it is adopted with total ignorance of its genealogy, of “its origins or beginnings, and without ever knowing its foundations or well-spring” (*SJ*, 6).

Recalling the conceptual framework of the institutional history of Europe is merely a pretext, however, for what is the main purpose of Qutb’s genealogy, which is to deconstruct Western political philosophy’s distinction between state and religion with its postulate that religion is a wholly private matter, protected by law but also impervious to the law. What Qutb offers as a history of European Christianity turns out to be a historical criticism of European secularism. More precisely, the aim is to reveal that classical liberalism’s postulate of individual liberty has its ultimate origins in a misconception of Allah and the world that is the constitutive idea of Pauline Christianity. And that is the idea of personal salvation through the resurrected Christ.

In Qutb’s analysis, Paul’s project of Christianity is recognized as superseding the divide between the Hellenic and Judaic world, between pagan cosmology and revealed law, with the idea of personal salvation through the resurrected Christ. The institutional expression of this is Paul’s
concept of apostolic knowledge, which is fundamentally and irreducibly subjective and personal—the truth of resurrection as the Christ-event of redemption was revealed to Paul on the road to Damascus. The absolute subjectification of knowledge of truth as personal revelation logically and historically yields the concept eternal election and the distinction between divine will and the world, which is coincidental with the distinction between the law as basis of right society and the salvation of man’s immortal soul as an event of grace. This is the fatal error constitutive of European Christendom, according to which the sphere of faith, which belongs to religion, is impenetrable by the force of law, which belongs to sovereign worldly power, and the sphere of law is a potential contaminant to faith. The subsequent formation of Western Christendom as a domain constituted on the basis of two heterogeneous dominions—the secular dominion of Roman and feudal law, and the religious dominion of church canon law—establishes the pattern of social and political development in Western Europe that culminates in terms of a dialectical struggle between the secular and the religious, whose synthesis is the modern secular state, in which religion is restricted to the private realm of personal life and fancy.

The summary history of European Christianity proffered in Social Justice in Islam pays scant attention to the Augustinian elaboration of eternal election into a history of the career of the two cities. Nor does it address in any explicit coherent way Calvin’s systemization of that election into a system of Reformation theological polity. Nevertheless, Qutb’s account recognizes that the conceptual principals of Europe’s secular modernity are indissolubly linked with its historical institutions of power and knowledge, particularly the juridico-theological. Registering the full significance of Bacon’s postulate that the realization of any organization of knowledge is contingent upon its having a determinate relation to power, Qutb understood that the establishment of scientific knowledge Bacon heralded attended to the formation of the modern imperialist European nation-state as an instrument of its power. His own effort to elaborate the conceptual framework for an Islamic resistance to that formation is predicated on the same Baconian postulate.3 Social Justice in Islam is merely the principal, and to a large

3. This lends some credence to Marshall Hodgson’s characterization of the modernist anti-imperialist intellectual and political tendency emergent in Muslim countries after World War II, which he called “neo-Sharı’aism,” as working on the premise that if, as Hodgson puts it, a “technicalistic mutation” had occurred within the precolonial Islamic society before it had in the West, then Sharı’a would have evolved under its own momentum along similar lines as had modern European political and juridical thought without the moral corruption
extent propaedeutic, text in that effort. The fuller elaboration occurred subsequently in the two-part work, *Khaṣa’iṣ at-taṣawwur al-Islāmi* (Conditions of the Islamic Conception) and *Muqawwimāt at-taṣawwur al-Islāmi* (Components of the Islamic Conception). It is in *Social Justice in Islam*, however, that Qutb lays out the aims and scope of the project as well as its fundamental presuppositions. The stated aim is to arrive at an Islamic conception of the right or just society that is historical, both in the sense of being based on the known institutions of practice and thought, and in the sense of approaching those institutions in terms of their material record over time, rather than approaching them as manifestations of theological development. Hence the apparent disregard for the history of speculative knowledge of divinity. Qutb restricted his study of Islamic institutions to those material institutions of Muslim discourse that could verifiably be traced from Muslims’ primary engagement with revelation—that is, those discourses of interpreting and applying the meaning of the Qur’an in this world according to the documented practice of the Prophet Muhammad. From these sources, Qutb extrapolates the principal idea of Islam:

Islam, which is mandated to organize the totality of human life, does not attend to the diverse aspects of that life blindly or randomly, nor does it treat them as fragments or parts. That is because it has a universal integrated concept of the physical universe, life, and humanity, from which all the divisions [of thought] and detailed expositions begin and return, and to which are linked all its theories, legislation, prohibitions, rituals of worship, and its social relations. All these things are founded on this universal integrated concept. Islam does


4. The first of these two works was published in 1962 and republished in an eighth edition by dar-ul-Shuruq in 1983 under the title *Khaṣa’iṣ at-taṣawwur al-Islāmi wa muqawwimātuhu* (Conditions of the Islamic Conception and Its Components), which, in fact, contains only the first part. The second part, *Muqawwimāt at-taṣawwur al-Islāmi*, was completed in the last years of Qutb’s life and published posthumously. It should be borne in mind, however, that, in modern Arabic philosophical discourse, taṣawwur denotes concept in the Kantian sense. This philosophical meaning may very well remark the intervention Qutb makes in the discourse of modern epistemology, most pointedly his explicit effort to place the conceptual framework he articulates on a par with the Kantian edifice. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that this is a critical intervention that seeks to dispose of the philosophical tradition in elaborating an Islamic conceptual framework.
not improvise an opinion for every given occasion, or treat every given problem as separate from the rest of the problems. (SJ, 28)

This existence emanating from the immediate perfect absolutely comprehensive will is an integrated unity, a singularity each of whose particulars are in perfect symmetry:

Islam is the religion of the unity between all the forces of the universe; it is unquestionably the religion of singular unity \(\text{tauhid}\): the singular unity of Allah, the singular unity of all religions in the religion of Allah, and the singular unity of The Messenger [Muhammad] in the evangelizing of this one religion since the dawn of life. . . . Islam is the religion of unity between worship and work, ideology or creed and behavior, spirituality and materiality, economic and symbolic value, the world and mortality, heaven and earth. (SJ, 28)

Islam here is an abstraction, the force of which is formulated as the doctrinal creed of unity, on which is based all precepts, legislation, orientations, prohibitions, as well as political philosophy and political economy (SJ, 28). When Qutb says religion, or, better yet, dīn, he means a historical way of life that entails all these institutions and more like them, based on a coherent, clear doctrinal answer to the question, What is the meaning of it all? The answer to which is that there is one, unified integral event and consciousness underlying all particular appearances and expressions. The way to truth that is life is to bind oneself perpetually to that unity, accounting for the multitude of divergent expressions and institutions as moments of development in accord with the purposefulness of the singular unity. A familiar name for this in modernity is providence. Qutb calls it the absolute harmonizing unity of divine singularity—tauhid. The human endeavor to discover and understand the laws of the physical universe flounders if it loses sight of this unity, resulting in fragmentary and momentary understandings of reality that cannot provide the basis for a universal and sustainable social justice. Attaining that basis requires a new realist science—fiqh al-waqi’i—whose foundations are the Qur’an and Ḥadīth. Three fundamentals of this science form the conceptual basis for Islamic social justice. The first of these fundamentals is at-tahrir al-wajdānī—literally translated as “affective or emotional liberty,” and translated by Shepard as “liberation of the inward soul,” but arguably better rendered in English as “liberty of conscious.” The second

5. A full and proper elaboration of the reasons for this preferred English-language translation are beyond the scope of this current essay. All that will be remarked here in explanation
The third is at-takāfil al-ijtāmā’ī (secure social solidarity). Once the first fundamental is grasped, the other two fall into place (SJ, 34).

The realization of complete social justice (‘adāla ījtimā’īya kāmila) is not attainable, nor is its sustained implementation assured, without relying on an inherent human feeling that any particular individual has a right to justice and that society needs justice. This feeling (shu’ūr) is motive; it is an affective state that finds expression in the doctrinal principle (‘aqīda) that social justice leads to the highest human objective. That same principle becomes identified with the individual’s desire to achieve the best material condition so that he will take up the security and defense of social justice as a necessity. Such an identification of social justice with individual desire cannot be achieved through law before it is achieved in affect, and for that to happen there must be established the material conditions that foster such identification (SJ, 35). Liberty of conscious does not result from radically rejecting or even transcending material reality. Qutb’s remarks in this regard are rather pertinent to discerning just how he thrusts his criticism of secularism:

For the life drives [dawāfi’ā al-ḥayā] cannot be suppressed in every instance, and the material necessities of life cannot be eternally conquered. Of necessity, humanity yields to the pressures of these drives most of the time. Indeed, the perpetual suppression of life’s drives is not good, because Allah has created life, and he has not done so in vain, nor has he created life for humans to neglect or hinder its development. Undoubtedly, it is good for humanity to exceed its physical necessities and transcend its desire, but not to disregard life in the process. The soundest and safest way is to unleash the constitutive potentiality of human nature so that humanity can supersede the humiliating submission to its physical necessities. This is the aim of Islam when it unites the physical necessities and the passions of the spirit into a system, securing the absolute individual liberty with inherent feeling and practical possibility, neglecting neither. (SJ, 35)

Islam begins with the liberation of individual human consciousness from servitude to anything other than Allah, and from submission to any-
thing other than Allah. There is no ruler over the liberated individual other than Allah, nor is there anything that kills or sustains human life other than Allah. Consciousness of the absolute unity of Allah brings about the recognition that there is no true sovereignty besides that of Allah, and it is this recognition that brings about a profound sense of freedom. Absolute liberty of conscious is attained, then, in freedom from fear of anything other than Allah. Qutb is insistent that this means freedom from fear of death at the hands of other humans, or homicide. It is not that the absolutely freed individual thinks homicide is unlikely or not a prevalent danger but rather that the significance of individual death is measured against the immortality of the soul. Liberty of conscious forms the basis for the social contract because each individual’s becoming fully aware of his absolute equality with every other human being, in accord with divine ordinance, fosters a strong sense of solidarity and cooperation.

This concept of liberty of conscious seems to be in direct contradiction to Hobbes’s fundamental postulate that fear of homicide forms the basis for the social contract. Hobbes is a significant figure in Qutb’s criticism of classical liberalism. After all, he is credited with laying the foundations of modern political science, or civil philosophy, with *De cive* and *Leviathan*.6 In large measure, critical engagement with Hobbes’s theory of the social contract is the point of departure for Qutb’s elaboration of modern Islamic political theory. A more lucid understanding of the conceptual orientation of that theory is achieved when it is read in relation to Hobbes’s exposition of human nature, most pointedly his elaboration of the “two most certain postulates of human nature.” This is not to suggest that Qutb is a Hobbesian, however. Although it is significant that he does accede to the Hobbesian postulate that the principal condition of humanity is motive. The life drives Qutb refers to entail both desires for and aversions to things, both of which are motives. Affect—or the passions in Hobbes’s language—does not issue from the will; it is the will.7

6. Thomas Hobbes, *De cive*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1990); *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Henceforth, these works are cited parenthetically as *DC* and *L*, respectively. The first of these books Hobbes himself claimed to be the beginning of civil philosophy. *Leviathan* is generally regarded as marking the beginning of modern political science as a branch of knowledge that is coincident with the modern natural sciences as defined in the work of Bacon and Galileo—the latter of whose resolutive-composition method Hobbes applies in elaborating his study of power—but is fundamentally independent of it.

The first of Hobbes’s postulates concerning human nature is natural appetite. His conclusion that the natural condition of man as the war of everyone against everyone stems from his psychology, according to which human appetite, while originating in momentary sense impressions as it does with animals, in contrast to that of animals, extends beyond the momentary desire. The traditional Aristotelian distinction between the zoological and biological is the conceptual framework; accordingly, the principal distinction between animal and human is the latter’s possession of reason. Animal desire is absolutely bound to the moment—it is, in reality, no more than an immediate reaction to external impressions—so that the animal desires only finite objects. It is always hungry now. The human can imagine moments that are not immediate, those of a past and future hunger. Human desire is, through reason, spontaneously infinite; it is infinite because it is an endless striving for absolute satisfaction that is not limited by immediate perceptions. This is not an increasing desire in proportion to, or in response to, the necessities of survival, or even the want to enhance the conditions of living. It is a spontaneous desire for infinite dominion over everything imaginable. And the imagination generates the sense of sequential event, or time. It is the human capacity to imagine the constancy of change that transforms the animal desire, common to the entire zoological world, to which Homo sapiens belong, into a spontaneous infinite and absolute desire for everything. The desire for absolute dominion over everything is coincidental with human being so that it is without reason—in other words, irrational. Because this irrational striving after everything does not stem from necessity—that is, it is not a function of perception and zoological necessity—it springs from a primal pleasure that humans derive from imagining their own infinite power, the congenital pleasure each human takes in triumphing, at least in imagination, over all others. Hobbes calls this primal pleasure vanity, which he postulates is the origin of human appetite.

Desires, for Qutb, are never wholly, or even primarily, physiological. Nor are they functions of an anthropomorphic psychopathology in which imagination is the driving force. Humanity, whether considered as a species or with particular focus on the individual, is an integrated unity—that is, its apparent differentiations are, in fact, all functions of a single orientation (muwahhda al-ittijāh). In this respect, it is in accord with the singular unity of the universe. Ignorance of this singular unity is the basis for distinguishing between the material and the spiritual aspects of humanity—that is, between the psychological and the physiological. Both human percepts and concepts are functions of the same singular law, in the sense that they
are mutually harmonious aspects of it, as well as function according to it in their own particular ways. The foundational Islamic principle, according to Qutb, is that there is one substance in the universe, and all particulars are expressions of it. Unity of the universe and the individual is a function of the state of nature. Nature is not divinity but the creation of divinity (SJ, 24–26). This is in contrast to the Christian doctrine as instituted by the church councils—specifically those of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon—according to which the distinction between *ouisa* (*substantia*: essence or nature) and *hypostasis* (*persona*: entity) established that the physical and the spiritual are perpetually at odds. This doctrine determined the historical circumstance in Europe, prompting the necessity for the scientific explanation of natural appetite arising from perception and forming the basis for imagination’s concepts. Hobbes’s postulate that the infinite capacity of imagination for abstraction is what drives natural appetite to such an extreme that the war of everyone against everyone (*al-ma’araka qa’ma bayn hadthi al-quwwa wa tilka*) is humanity’s natural condition is the result of the historical institution of Pauline Christianity. As a distinct historical institution, Islam has no such necessity. Its principal thought is the universal law of hypersymmetry, which is what drives both natural appetite and imagination: “The universe is a singular unity which is a complex of perceivable phenomena and what is beyond perception and unknowable. So too, life is a complex of material and immaterial forces that is not reducible to one or the other unless there is an imbalance of these forces. Humanity is also a complex unity of spiritual desires aspiring to the heavens, and physical inclinations adhering to the earth” (SJ, 26–27).

Because humanity is constitutively like the universe, essentially a singular force with numerous aspects that are ultimately articulations of the “infinite and eternal force” that created and sustains the universe, the transient individual, as Qutb puts it, possesses the means to connect with this eternal force as something immanent in his life. Just as the original principle of the universe is the hypersymmetry of all its particular aspects, the proper state of human consciousness is to be in conscious harmony with the universe. This harmony is, Qutb asserts, “the unity between the particular aspects of the universe and its force, the unity between every aspect of life, and the unity between humanity and itself, between its reality and dreams. It is the unity that assures perpetual peace between the universe and life, life and living creatures, between the aggregate and the individual, between the individual’s desires and inclinations, and, in the end, between the world and religion, between heaven and earth” (SJ, 28).
Postulating that the proper state of human consciousness is peace of mind achieved through recognizing its being in harmonious unity with the universe emanating immediately from the unique force of creation, Allah, gives Qutb the warrant to remove the psychological question about the origin of human nature from the field of Islamic contemplation. More precisely, he preempts the question of how humans know the laws of nature with the answer: by Allah’s will. And it is an answer that is accessible only through direct guidance in revelation, not through the exercise or disciplining of unaided reason.

In dismissing reason as incapable of achieving true understanding of natural law, Qutb contradicts the second of Hobbes’s most certain postulates concerning human nature: natural reason. This postulate is formulated as the principle of the avoidance of death, on the logical assumption that the continuance of life is the requisite condition for the satisfaction of any appetite. According to Hobbes, the continuance of life is the primary good, because only in life is the unhindered continual pleasure of prospering, of having everything, possible. The possibility of having everything, that is, of pursuing everything, is happiness. Happiness is the greatest good, in a radically accumulative sense. Because Hobbes denies the immortality of the soul—the only eternity natural man can imagine is the eternity of prosperity—there is no supreme good, in precisely the sense that Qutb means liberty of conscious as a transcendent state of mind. There is only the greatest good of perpetual accumulation. Death, however, is the primary and supreme evil, because only death can end life and so negate all good. It is important to recall here that, according to Hobbes’s theory of human nature, liberty as the unhindered power of each man to do as he will for self-preservation is a right of nature. In the natural human condition, because every man is equal in his power of self-preservation, in his liberty, every man has a right to everything, even to another’s body. Hence, the war of every man against every man is the natural condition of humanity in its natural rights. Whereas natural rights find expression in the motive animal aspect of human nature, the cognitive aspect of humanity, reason, gives expression to the laws of nature. A law of nature is a precept or general rule, discovered by reason, according to which a man is prohibited from doing that which is destructive to his life, or is enjoined to do that which will best preserve his life. Right is the liberty to do; law is the binding determination and restriction of that liberty.

On their own, the affective natural rights foster the condition of insecurity and permanent anarchic war between all men, which threatens the
destruction of all men. This threat of destruction is recognized by reason as “that danger from the equality between men’s forces” (E, 92) and compels reason to formulate the principal law of nature, which is to seek peace as far as possible, but to resort to war when peace cannot be achieved directly. The second law follows from this and stipulates that every man be willing to seek peace, as long as others are, too, and in peace find self-defense by giving up his right to everything, as others do theirs, agreeing to the mutual and equal limiting of liberty (L, 92). It is fear of homicide—which is an affective state—that compels humanity to reason, which formulates laws in response. The security of life stipulated in the natural laws cannot be achieved unilaterally by the individual human unless all other humans agree to surrender their equal right to everything; and given the force of natural rights, such an agreement cannot be enforced unless there is a greater agent than that of any individual, one that is constitutively the sum of the collective human agency. The solution is the institution of the sovereign as that entity constituted with the natural rights surrendered in equal proportion by individual men, which exercises the unique authority of that agency in order to secure every man’s liberty in safety.

These principles of natural law signal Hobbes’s overcoming a fundamental distinction of political philosophy since Aristotle, that between the natural and artificial state. In overcoming it, Hobbes establishes the distinctive break between his and traditional political philosophy, and so achieves the foundations of modern political science. In Aristotle’s Politics, patrimonial monarchy is the natural state formation, arising from the exercise of superior might, and democracy the artificial or institutional formation, arising from the exercise of reasoned choice. The key distinction is in motive. Fear forms the basis of monarchy; and hope, democracy. Although Hobbes, in the Elements and even in De cive, adheres to this traditional distinction, arguing for the principality of monarchy over democracy in nature if not in legitimacy, by Leviathan, he overcomes it through the reduction of the two motive forces to the one principal force of homicidal fear. With this, he successfully abandons the traditional Aristotelian concept of natural monarchy versus institutional democracy by revealing that all institutional, qua artificial, state formations are ultimately based on the same motive force as the natural state. The institution of the sovereign as the solution to homicidal fear is a function of natural law that, at its base, is the reasoned response to the fact of nature. Both fear and reasoned response are constitutive forces of human nature. Fear is constantly externalized in the natural state of absolute liberty. Reason is an internal potential that can be externalized only after
establishment of the security that occurs with the institution of sovereignty. Through discovering that the motive of hope is based in fear, Hobbes demonstrates that what was traditionally understood to be the basis of the natural state—patrimonial monarchy—is also the basis of the institutional state. The natural fact of power is thus identified with the consensual legal institution of power, so that the natural legal institution of power is that of monarchy. Institutional monarchy is the realization of the laws of nature, providing the requisite security for their externalization as the framework for society. The very natural law that institutional monarchy realizes has its foundation in the intelligence of God. This is the explicit argument of *Elements*, which states that “forasmuch as law, to speak properly, is a command, and these dictates, as they proceed from nature, are not commands, they are not therefore called laws, in respect of nature, but in respect of the author of nature, God Almighty” (*E*, 109).

It would seem, then, that Hobbes and Qutb are in agreement, if the following passage from *Social Justice in Islam* is read in tandem with this argument from *Elements*:

> When the [human] conscious is liberated from the feeling of servitude to and sanctification of any of Allah’s creatures, and is full of the feeling that it is in immediate contact with Allah, then it is not effected by fear for its life, or property, or reputation. These are ugly fears, suppressing an individual's sense of himself, which may induce him to accept humiliation and to surrender much of his nobility and many of his rights. Islam, on the contrary, fosters an adamant desire in people for honor and nobility, as well as a sense of pride in truth and the preservation of justice. By these means—as well as by legislation [‘ilāwa ’alā at-tashrī‘a]—it ensures absolute social justice, neglecting no one. All of which means it takes special care to resist fear for life, property, and reputation; for life is in Allah’s hands and no creature has the power to shorten it by one hour or less. Indeed no creature has the power to shorten it by even a single breath. . . . In this way we must understand the Qur’an’s precepts [taujiḥ] and the general orientation of Islam; this is the true understanding corresponding to its general methodology (idea and philosophy) regarding precepts and law. (*SJ*, 39)

Although Hobbes does offer scriptural evidence in support of the assertion that the institution of monarchy is in accord with divine law, this appeal to Scripture does not signal any theocentrism on his part. Instead,
it is symptomatic of a criticism of Christianity that is quite similar to Qutb’s but, unlike Qutb’s criticism, extends to revealed religion in general. Hobbes’s point in *Elements* is not to subordinate reason’s natural law to revelation but to establish that reason is in accord with revelation: “Finally, there is no law of natural reason, that can be against the law divine: for God Almighty hath given reason to a man to be a light unto him. And I hope it is no impiety to think, that God almighty will require a strict account thereof, at the day of judgment, as of the instructions which we were to follow in our peregrination here, notwithstanding the opposition and affronts of supernaturlast now a-days, to rational and moral conversation” (*E*, 116).

Conversation between natural reason and divine law implies an argument for natural theology, that there is a natural knowledge of God as the Principal Cause. Yet, regarding natural knowledge of God unaided by revelation, Hobbes argues in *De cive*: “It is therefore almost impossible for men, without the special assistance of God, to avoid both rocks of atheism and superstition” (*DC*, 310). Revelation shores up natural reason’s knowledge of God by providing a historical record of the covenant between man and God, Scripture, that underwrites the conversation between divine and natural law. The danger in natural theology is that it formulates “an opinion of right reason without fear,” which means that there is no necessity or compulsion to adhere to the laws of natural reason, except the expediency of circumstance, which tends toward being mutable. Such expedients are precepts or rules “by which a man is guided, and directed in any action whatsoever” (*L*, 356). Without any coercive force that compels one to obey them under fear of immanent penalty, such rules are not law. Law proper has the force of the civil sovereign to compel compliance. Here is where Qutb and Hobbes part ways sharply.

On the Hobbesian side of things, if Scripture offers evidence that the laws of natural reason are in accord with divine law in order to support the postulate that institutional monarchy is the only naturally legitimate formation of state power, the question is, What is the power to make the Scriptures Law? Hobbes’s well-known final answer to this question is the civil sovereign. Moses is the exemplary case where God’s law and civil authority coincide, because Moses was the sovereign of the commonwealth of Israel. It was his sovereign power that instituted the commandments as law, so that the Books of Moses are received as law proper. The Gospels of the apostles, in contrast, are canonical—that is, they are rules of guidance, precepts—but they can have the force of law only if a civil sovereign says they do. The distinction Hobbes draws between the Old Testament as law and the New
Testament as canon turns on the fact that Israel was a worldly monarchal commonwealth, while Jesus Christ's Kingdom of God is not of this world, in which case any interpretation of the Christian Scriptures can acquire the force of law only by being sanctioned by the civil sovereign. And, insofar as such interpretation is a function of the teachings of any given church, whether Episcopal, Independent, or Congregational, its power in law issues from the civil sovereign authority. The teachers teach the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ at the sufferance of the earthly monarch. Religion is subordinated to the state in a manner that, Hobbes hopes, will dispel the disruptive tendencies of confessional dispute, and so overcome the doctrinal error Qutb discovers plagues European Christianity.

What is most pertinent to our concerns here is that Hobbes reads the Scriptures in a manner that subordinates the interpretive force of reading to civil authority. Salvation may indeed come from Jesus Christ, but belief in that salvation is an act of confession mandated by the sovereign. In other words, the force of interpretation is the will of the sovereign, who has the only legitimate power to determine the material circumstances of any methodology of interpretation. Hobbes's methodology is historical and materialist, which is why certain scholars of Hobbes have read it as a form of Bible criticism in complement with Spinoza's. The appeal to Scripture, rather than sustaining a theological principle of power, occasions a historical analysis of power. The focal point in that analysis is the distinction between precept as a rule and law as a force of domination. Bacon had already discerned that scholasticism's chief weakness was ignorance of history. His primary concern was with the authority of Aristotelian natural philosophy. In that same vein, Thomas Blundeville remarked about Aristotelian moral philosophy that because it consisted only of general precepts and rules, it offered no concrete examples of the fact, or human experience, of power. Such examples, Blundeville argued, could not be arrived at through philosophical teaching, but only through what "the historiographers doe teach."

Hobbes's distinction between precept and law is an expression of the distinction between political philosophy and political science. The method of the one is careful elaboration of the conceptual structures of thought about the just society, based on dogmatic principles. The method of the other is contemplation of the material history, the human experience, of power, based on historiographical evidence. What Hobbes offers as a psychological anthropology of human nature is an elaboration of the Epicurean account of primitive, oversexed humans without religion, language, or law, who inhabited solitary caves in the primeval forest, subsisting on nuts, berries,
and crudely slaughtered animal flesh. The expressed natural theology of that anthropology implied a historical criticism of revealed religion. It is not revealed religion but history that aids natural reason in realizing its precepts as civil law. Scripture is read as a document of evidence in an incipient materialist history of civilization as the natural institution of power. In this way, the doctrine-driven wars of religion spawned by the Reformation are recognized as instances in the war of every man against every man. This is the main thrust of Hobbes's beginning political science.

There have been those readers of Hobbes, like Michel Foucault, who recognize in his postulate of the war of every man against every man a concept meant to obfuscate rather than depict the historical circumstances of societal and state formation. For Foucault in particular, there are two targets of Hobbes's obfuscation. One is the very real and, for Hobbes, rather immediate, material conditions of the English Civil War, with its scandal of regicide. The other is the conceptual framework that, in some measure, enabled the war by legitimating Puritan claims that reason was their law. This latter target Foucault refers to as what he calls the historiography of race war articulated in the English chroniclers' account of the fact and continuity of Anglo-Saxon law before and after the Norman Conquest, but most elaborately formulated in the work of Henri de Boulainvilliers. This work, Foucault effectively argues, recognizes society to be constituted in war and a form of war, rather than as a solution to it. In such a reading, Hobbes's absolute sovereign as the anthropomorphic personification of collective human agency is not the best and only true means of preempting absolute anarchy and social destruction. Instead, this concept of the sovereign is revealed to be a figure through which Hobbes disqualifies from consideration, if not contemplation, the violence constitutive of society by placing voluntaristic choice as the constitutional act of commonwealth. The whole point of the homicidal fear postulate is to make choice necessary as the prerequisite of sovereign legitimacy—no matter the particular institutional form the anthropomorphic abstraction achieves, whether monarchy (the most natural form), aristocracy, or the constitutional parliamentary state, it is founded in the willful choice of all its human elements to live under the sovereign power rather than die at human hands. For Hobbes, this is universally so, even in the case of conquest, for it is not the moment of defeat on the battlefield that constitutes the commonwealth but the moment of surrender to the conqueror as sovereign rather than being killed by him. If it can be successfully established as axiomatic in the historiography of legitimate power that society is constituted in the moment of willful surrender in
and under the law, and not that of violence, then all other variant historiographies of power are disqualified as illegitimate. The underlying contractual nature of every instance of legitimate sovereignty makes any assault on the sovereign ultimately a violation of natural law. Hobbes's war of every man against every man appears to be, then, a war without any dead bodies, to put it crassly. It establishes not fear as the basis from which society is formed but choice, a choice that is based itself on an abstract fear—that of vanity-driven homicide, which is abstract precisely because, in Hobbes's account, it is purely psychopathic without any discernible sociological elements. It is as if, and Hobbes very nearly states this to be so, in nature everyone exists principally in a state of solipsistic imagination, where the congenital pleasure of absolute dominion over everything is fulfilled. This natural state of solipsism—which for Hobbes is an illusion of perspective—is disrupted only by the equally imagination-driven fear of homicide. In order to deracinate the historical circumstances of the commonwealth's establishment as an act of war, Hobbes posits psychotic phobia as the foundation of society. Fear of homicide is the only factual basis for humans achieving immediate consciousness of self as distinct from the external world of danger, so that it is in homicidal fear that all outward virtuous activity begins.

Qutb was not the historiographer Hobbes was. He invests no effort at all in elaborating a theory of the origins of civilization, or the nature of pre-Adamite humanity. Whether civilization was begun by brute beast or erudite thinkers is simply not a problem that concerned Qutb. Nonetheless, he shared with Hobbes one of the fundamental presumptions of modern historiography that distinguishes it from the historiography of the classical Mediterranean world and Christian Europe. Qutb understood humans to be peculiarly historical beings, subject to forces of change that transcend any individual, national, or racial drive, to repeat in a different context what was stated earlier about his understanding of life drives. He need not have learned this from Hobbes, however. Ibn Khaldun postulated the same some three hundred years before the publication of either De cive or Leviathan in Al-Muqaddima, the introduction to his history of civilization, Kitāb ul-‘ibar.

Indeed, Qutb's realist science owes a good deal to Kahludun's ʿilm-ul-ʿumrān (science of civilization). The etymology of the term ʿumrān indicates that the subject of this science is not civilization in the sense of civitas—juridical and legislative order—but temporal duration in relation to human being. The root is ʿamara (to live long, prosper, and endure). This gives ʿumar and ʿamār (duration of life, lifetime). It also gives ʿimāra (architectural structure), which is why ʿumrān is generally translated as "human civilization,"
in the sense of material culture as a sign of development. Ibn Khaldun’s project was an attempt to temporize social constitution as an event of duration in order to understand the historicality of human being. Undoubtedly, this entails a specific concept of change. In fact, theorizing change was the key innovation of his science. Hence, the question of history is theoretical for Ibn Khaldun. This is a question of how one thinks about the force or power expressed with social change. In Khaldunian historiography, power is understood epistemologically, and the subject of epistemology is the condition of human being—this is evident in the organization of both Kitāb ul-‘ibar and its more well-known introduction (Al-Muqaddima). Much more attention needs to be paid to what is invested in the term ‘umrān, as a conceptual category, than can be given here. That attention will lead to a fruitful comparative analysis of Marxist, neoliberal, and Khaldunian historiographies. This, in turn, will lead to a closer examination of the question of ideology, which, like change, is a crucial category for Ibn Khaldun. Indeed, the relationship of knowledge, and its organization, to societal structure is the focus of his work. What is pertinent to our concerns with Qutb is the way the Khaldunian concept of historical time relates to revelation as an institution of Islam.

If al-Islām—and this we should carefully translate as “the time of Islam”—is the conclusion of all knowledge and the completion of all things, then this means that nothing can occur in the future that is not foreseen by it. The time of Islam, of course, is identical with zaman-al-wahī, “the time of revelation.” They are the same time. Revelation, then, is the eternal present. Consequently, it is necessary to distinguish between two temporalities: the time of revelation, and historical time, the emergent—that is, transient time. In other words, there is an eternal essence behind every transient event; and that eternity is the eternal present. There is no return to a place reserved for the future, because there is only the present that is always arriving. So that the guaranteed praxis is revelation, it is to live in the present of revelation, that is, the future. The temporality of revelation is contrary to the Greek temporality of Chronos, which brings things into being and annihilates that which it brings into being. In contrast, the temporality of revelation is transcendent to the activity of creation and annihilation, the activity of change and transience. The temporality of revelation is what it is from its emergence to eternity. In other words, revelation is not known in time; on the contrary, time is known through it. Even more precisely, revelation is the agency of time; time is not the agency of revelation. This means that religious thought (al-fikra ad-dinīya) is transcendent to time, that is, history. Historical evolution is transient marginalia; it has no value in itself. Value
is exclusively with revelation—the thinking that transcends history and its developments. There is, in other words, a sense of continuity against which transitory events (waqi‘at) occur, and this is the eternity that is the now. Just because occurrences are in time does not mean that they have time. Rather, they are encountered as events that pass through a permanent present, so that every encounter of every event is in a now that is carried on to another now in a determined sequence. The events of history can be explained as a sequence that is on a curve, moving back to its beginning. Still, the direction of the sequence is irreversible; it moves in one direction forward, back to its beginning. Within the domain of revelation, every now is just like every other, and every event moves toward the same inevitable end. The homogenization and irreversibility of now is a pronounced characteristic of zaman al-wahi. What this achieves is the assimilation of time to space, precisely because all dynamic change is expressed into a permanent present. Time is mathematized, or as Aristotle maintains in Physics (bk. IV, pt. 11, 219b), time is the calculable measure of dynamic change, αριθμος κινησεως. Arguably, zaman al-wahi is the reduction of time to arithmetic sequence change. Eternity is conceived of as a domain that is comprehensive in totality. This comprehensiveness is expressed in historical time through revelation (al-wahi). That is to say that zaman al-wahi, expressed as the Islamic state, is the repetition of eternity in space. It is with all this in mind that Ibn Khaldun’s account of change can be read as duration. Again, a closer look at ‘ilm-ul-‘umrān discovers an attempt to come to an understanding of the human through a careful consideration of the possible modes of being known to Ibn Khaldun. Precisely in this sense, his concept of human is historiographical and not derivative of an ideal type abstracted out of a specific ideology (‘asabīya), which is why ideology is always a problematic category for him. It is a function of power; remember, authenticity equals ‘asabīya in Ibn Khaldun’s analysis.

In the same fashion, for Qutb, authenticity equals the proper Islamic ideology. Still, the notion of humans as historical beings is why Qutb’s history of Islam focuses on institutions and economic and social formations rather than intellectual treatises and narrative disputation about authentic lines of transmission. In this aspect, his historiography is one of the institutions of authority as well as power. The proper history of authority and power does not begin, as Hobbes conjectured, with human nature, however. It begins with the origin of human nature, knowledge of which is achieved exclusively through contemplating the signs of divine revelation. The social contract does not emerge out of homicidal fear. Its basis is the liberty of
conscious, or the Islamic spirit, as Qutb also calls it, achieved in individual submission to Allah through reading qua contemplation of the signs of divine revelation. Once the Islamic spirit is awoken, it is subject to the supervision of Allah’s force, and not the force or power of the state as instituted in its legislation. *Shari’ā* does not cause or even sustain consciousness; it is symptomatic of it. *Shari’ā* is a legislative institution whose sovereign power is Allah. This sovereignty cannot be personified, precisely because it is not the issue of human agency or desire. Humans do not institute sovereignty through their willful or coerced surrendering of their agency to an anthropomorphic abstraction, whether the monarch or the constitutional state. Nor is Allah’s sovereignty delegated to any mortal person. There is no High Priest like Moses in Islam, so that Hobbes’s argument for the conjunction of divine law and natural reason in the person of the civil sovereign does not carry. Here Qutb is careful to quote the Qur’anic statements about the limitations of Muhammad’s authority as a human: “It is said of Muhammad (SAW): ‘Muhammad is nothing but a messenger; messengers have been created before him. If he were to die or be killed will you turn back on your heels.’” And it addresses the Prophet directly with forceful candor: ‘Not for you [but for Allah] is the decision: Whether he turn in mercy to them or punish them’” (SJ, 37).

The legitimate civil authority, whether Muhammad or, after him, the Caliph, rules only in accordance with divine ordinance, with the mandate to institute the societal conditions under which the possibilities for contemplating the signs of Allah’s absolute immanence, and so achieving liberty, are preserved and guaranteed. Any system of human knowledge and social organization that rejects the truth of Allah’s immediate and eminent guidance of the universe, or otherwise preempts the possibility of engaging that truth, is the very definition of ignorance, *jahiliya*, according to Qutb. To imagine, then, that humanity exists in a state of nature in which it is free in concept and action from the truth of divine unity is the purest form of *jahiliya*. So, too, are any and all formations of power, including Muslim, that deviate from the truth of Allah’s sovereignty.

Qutb’s postulate of Allah’s sovereignty is the conceptual foundation for a historiography of power that is oppositional to what he called the fable of liberalism’s society in security. The extent to which this fable informs not only the Muslim misconception of liberalism’s danger to its way of life but

also the self-delusion of liberal society Qutb described in a series of corres-
dpondences written immediately after completing Social Justice in Islam
while residing in the United States from 1949 to 1952. These letters were
subsequently collected and published under the title Amrikā allātī ra‘aytu: fi
mīzān al-qīm al-insāniya (The America I’ve Seen: In the Measure of Human
Value). In them, Qutb struggles to think about the significance of America
as the exemplary instance of the most advanced and positive political and
social realization of classical liberalism. Referencing Henry Nash Smith’s
Virgin Land, he observes that violent struggle is the American’s first nature:

The nature of the American population is competitive struggle,
whether that of class, factionalism, or the struggle between nations
and ethnicities. I have no idea on what basis the world, especially the
Orient, has come to accept the fable of the peace-loving American
people. In fact, in his constitutive nature, the American is warring, a
lover of violent struggle. The thought of war and struggle is predomi-
nant in their blood and expressed in their behavior. This is in accord
with their history. The first wave of [Europeans] arrived in America
with the explicit aim of colonial domination, competition, and struggle.
Accordingly, they murdered each other in large numbers and waves,
then they murdered nearly all the original inhabitants (the American
Indian), and are still waging a war of annihilation against them up
to this very moment. The Anglo-Saxons murdered the Latins [His-
panics] and expelled them to Central and South America. The Ameri-
can colonials, under the leadership of George Washington, waged a
war against their own nation, the English, until they achieved inde-
pendence from the British Crown.10

This state of constant war is not a function of human nature. It is an
aspect of America’s historical formation as a state predicated on classical
liberalism’s concept of absolute liberty. No matter that Locke’s solution of
institutional democratic sovereignty is the immediate point of reference in
the founding war, that war was conceivable on the basis of the Hobbesian
concept of natural rights. The theory of security under sovereignty, which
Qutb calls a fable, is an instrument of American power deployed in the con-
tinual war that is American society. Qutb recognizes that the personification

10. Sayyid Qutb, Amrikā allātī ra‘aytu: fi mīzān al-qīm al-insāniya, in Amrika min ad-dakhil
bi-minzār Sayyid Qutb, ed. Salah ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, 2nd ed. (Jiddah, al-Sa‘udiyyah:
of this instrument is the normative white man, the subject of law. He calls this the greatest enemy to humanity, because the progressive dissemination of this subject—a dissemination he understood to be a chief function of the universal rule of law then being promulgated by the United States in the new institutions of Bretton Woods and the United Nations—meant that the American war was planetary in its scope, putting all other ways of being human at risk of annihilation. Both the fact of constant war and the fable of peace under institutional democratic sovereignty rest on the same conceptual error of absolute human liberty, whose ultimate origin is the constitutive idea of Pauline Christianity.

It is not so much that Qutb misconstrued the deployment of modern historiography in antithesis to Scripture as simply another form of Christianity. Rather, he understood the thesis to provide the historical circumstances for which the antithesis became necessary. The Pauline doctrine of salvation through Christ in the kingdom that is not of this world, incorporated into the juridical structures of Imperial Rome, is what called for the secular solution. The fact that the doctrine is in fundamental error about the nature of the universe and life, and that the secular solution responds only in terms of that error—producing the sort of perpetual warfare characteristic of American society—is what places it within the scope of the doctrine. In other words, classical liberalism’s concept of individual liberty results not from the abandonment of knowledge of the universe as immediately emanating from divine will—nature as the signification of Allah’s will—for the subject of knowledge, but from this constitutional idea of European Christianity, which misconstrues God’s immanence as a matter of personal faith rather than an objective fact.

There is ample basis in text for this reading of Qutb’s having attempted an Islamic materialist historiography of power, analogous to Hobbes in its understanding that the evidence of the true nature of power—and through it the proper conditions for the just society—is discernible in the material history of human institutions, but opposed to Hobbes in its conceptual orientation. The fundamental difference between Qutb and Hobbes is their respective historical examples of legitimate power. Hobbes draws his from what he supposes to be the full breadth of human experience, Scripture being one historical institution of this. Qutb draws his exclusively from the history of Islam, the Qur’an being the divine beginning of this. Yet, a discernible conflict is apparent between Qutb’s piety as a true believer (mu’min) and the eminently secular orientation of his historiography.

Meditating on the Islamic just society based on the fundamental con-
cept of divine singularity as the only legitimate understanding of sovereignty, Qutb explicitly excludes every inconvenience resulting from the epistemological political endeavor of *al-falāsifa*—specifically the work of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd—whose epistemological arguments for prophecy amount to anthropologies of human thought that do little more than delineate the limits of conscious human intelligence but do not discover its origin in singular unity. These are Greek—that is, pagan in orientation and method—elaborations of why humanity of necessity postulates Allah’s existence to preserve the reasonable meaning of the world. Such elaborations are finally apologia for reason’s capacity to discover the full meaning of revelation—implying that the text or Qur’an is allegorical or otherwise obscure, and that Ḥadīth falls short in clarification—in order to secure its relative liberty from revelation. Qutb’s own engagement with the texts of the Qur’an and Ḥadīth dispenses so completely with the theoretical controversies associated with the philosophers, however, that even the legalist tradition of *ʿilm-u-Sharīʿa* (jurisprudence), with its attendant exegetical corpus, is put aside in favor of a methodical reading and utilization of the texts as documentary evidence for his historiography.

In a way remarkably similar to how Michael Servetus’s work in criticism of the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity documented the divergence of the two main momentum of the Protestant Reformation—on the one hand, his work precipitated the Protestant reinvestment in creedal community; on the other, it precipitated the anti-Trinitarianism that would develop into Unitarianism—Qutb’s criticism of Islamic philosophy and theology fostered a radically critical attitude toward reductivism while at the same time it became the basis for that very reductionism. His having left no record of ever resolving this conflict contributed, in some measure, to the rather intense pamphlet war that ensued between various constituencies of Muslim intellectuals and ideologues in the last few years of the twentieth century over whether his views—particularly the theory of *ḥākimīya* (Allah’s sovereignty) and the assertion of *takfir* (the declaration of the generalized apostasy) against all current Muslim state governments and their subject populations—were heretical. The specific charge being that his work instituted a school of thought called *Qutbiya* (Qutbism), which is the modern expression of the extremism of *Khawārijija*.

11. The focal point of this dispute is a Web site called Salafipublications.com, where a series of pamphlets making this assertion were circulated. The original Kharijite, as they are termed in English, were a group of ‘Ali’s supporters in his contestation with Muʿawiya
this pamphlet war, being heavily invested in the ideological foundations of the Algerian Civil War, as well as the then emergent campaign of al-qā’ida against the Saudi regime. The intensity of this dispute was fueled by the historical complexity informing Qutb’s effort to formulate an Islamic historiography of power, which called for considerable methodological innovation.

This effort to elaborate a rather materialist historical understanding of Islamic thought was dependent on a Qur’an criticism—whose text is Qutb’s voluminous fi Ṣīlāl-ʾil-Qurʾān (In the Shade of the Qur’an)—the methodology of which is remarkably minimalist, effectively dispensing with any philological complexities, and pronouncedly historicist in orientation with a great deal of certainty invested in the capacity of the modern reader to comprehend the totality of Islamic thought in concreto, as it were, without relying on the speculations of antecedents. The critical apparatus of Qutb’s approach, or its determining figure, ẓilal ul ma’anā (traces of meaning), was first articulated in his 1936 book of modernist literary criticism, Kutub wa Shakṣiyāt (Writing and Identity). The methodology of that criticism is fundamentally humanistic in the sense that, while presuming the immanence of divine will in human intelligence, Qutb’s formulation of Islamic thought is in terms of material practices of reading and interpretation as the exclusive historical institutions of that thought, not as a continuous unchanging methodology of thinking but as documents of possibility for thinking in an Islamic way. Qutb’s concern is not to continue the practice of /ay-nilm-u-Sharī/a but to formulate an Islamic political theory based on the postulate of absolute divine sovereignty. In other words, in lieu of either the natural theology implicit in mod-

over succession to the Caliphate after ‘Uthman’s murder. After the battle of Siffin in 657–658, these supporters rejected the terms of arbitration by neutrals between ‘Ali and Mu’awiya on the question of the legitimacy of Uthman’s murder. Legitimating their rejection with a radical renunciation of all prevalent forms of Muslim governance, except that of democratic populism based exclusively on the Qur’an, they withdrew from ‘Ali’s party—a literal translation of Shi’/a ‘Ali—and formed a camp of extreme opposition that waged war against both Mu’awiya and ‘Ali. The overall effect of identifying Qutbiya as the most current expression of Khawārijīya was to both dismiss it as a completely heretical, and so illegitimate, innovation and to underscore its being profoundly dangerous to the integrity of any legitimate Islamic polity. Efforts were made to legitimate this assault on Qutb’s thinking by claiming that it was based on explicit statements of condemnation made by some of the most prominent scholarly intellectual leadership (mashāyikh) of Salafiyya, such as Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan, Shaykh ‘Abdul ‘Aziz ibn Baz, Imam al-Albani, as well as the widely renowned scholar Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Saalih al-Uthaymin. The dispute became rather intense, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Office of the Presidency of Islamic Research and Legal Verdicts stepping in, in 1997, to defend Qutb.
ern historiography or the rational theology of philosophy and ‘ilm-ul-kalām, Qutb substitutes a sort of rational civil theology of divine providence. For all its disavowal of the abstractions of intellectualism, in which direct immediate engagement with the text of revelation is displaced by an elaborate semiotics that itself assumes the role of transcendent referent, Qutb’s theory of a civil Islamic polity based on absolute divine sovereignty results in an Islam that of necessity is inhuman in its methodology.

In fact, there is much mystery about Islam, and precisely the Islam Qutb is supposed to be referencing. It is, as he asserts, a complexity of ways of thinking whose historical expressions and institutions are appreciably dynamic and variegated. Those expressions and institutions involve a perpetual mimetic relationship to the primitive scriptural event of prophecy—the historical events of revelation and the Prophet Muhammad’s life as the Messenger of Allah—that is properly understood as poetic. Each occasion of encounter with the primitive event—and the encounter is profoundly worldly in the sense that the event is represented institutionally, habitually, as well as literally as a historical problematic—entails a striking inadequacy of language and concept, married with the unavoidable call to make it make sense for the moment. The poetic character of the relationship stems from its being the human effort to make the incomprehensible understandable in a way that sustains a praxis, a doing of thoughtful life. The actual complexity of expressions and institutions are the material trace of that doing. The problem is how to engage in any coherent way this complexity as a way of life. The poetic response is to do so dynamically. Each encounter with the primitive event is a beginning that institutes its own series of interpretations whose divergence is informed by a myriad of elements from politics and culture to communal histories and geography.

At its crux, the fundamental problem Qutb’s work grapples with is a recalling and revitalization of the *ijmāʿ* (consensus) of Muhammad’s original Medinan *umma*, particularly in situations pertaining to the authentic Islamic attitude or orientation—*madhab*, in the sense of the directional plane—toward immediate historical events and circumstances. The Arabic term *umma* is a complicated term to translate. It is generally translated into English as “community.” This is a rather misleading translation, however, because it suggests a limited customary horizon to Muhammad’s project in instituting Medina out of Yathrib—the name of the city prior to Muhammad’s *hijra*. A better sense of how this term works is needed in order to gain a richer perspective of the principal constitutive element of the historical Medina for Qutb’s theory of a civil Islamic polity.
Etymologically, *umma* derives from the verb *ummata*, meaning “to give birth or become a mother.” This same root verb gives us the substantive *imām*, meaning “the head or leader of a collective”—usually religious, as in the *imām* of prayer or the mosque. It also gives us the substantive *al-ummu*, meaning “original,” in the sense of foundation or principal beginning as institution (*institutio*). This is the sense of such phrases as Mecca *umm-ul-qurā*, “the foundation of all towns.” The substantive *umma* itself means both “the mother” (*al-wālida*), in the same sense of origin as *al-ummu*, so it refers to an aggregate (*jama‘a*) of people, the majority of whom have a common origin. Although this approaches the classical Latin sense of *gentius/gentium*, it would be in error to translate *umma* as “nation,” because the term also means “the collecting of people” as a function of heritage, convention, or faith, or even way of life (*dīn*). It is noteworthy that the Latin *gentius* is derived from *genera*. Besides meaning “to beget, bear, bring forth, produce” (in the passive, “to be born, to spring, arise, proceed”), this same root gives us the French term *agencer*, a transitive verb meaning “to arrange, to dispose, to organize an aggregate by a combination of elements.” The substantive of this is *agencement*, and a cognate *agence*, meaning “agency,” in the sense of the office or function of an agent or factor. This last sense is related to the English *agency*, which as a verb means “the faculty of an agent or of acting; active working or operation; action, activity; as well as action or instrumentality embodied or personified as concrete existence.” Of particular interest to us here is the sense in which *agencer*, echoing its derivation from *gentius*, evokes the agency by which something is “brought forth.” In this sense, it not only marks the action of aggregation by which arrangement takes place, but it also marks the disposition of the arrangement. This sense of *umma* as *agencement*, as the arrangement of an aggregation of elements into an ordered disposition, is supported by the etymology of the term, which cites two Qur’anic verses as examples. The verse “Therefore We made you a justly balanced *umma*” clearly indicates the sense of an aggregation of elements into an ordered disposition. Then there is the verse “Abraham was indeed an exemplary original [ummatan], devotedly obedient to Allah and true in faith [ḥanīfan],” which indicates foundational matrix or institution. In precisely this double sense of agency and arrangement, the Medinans con-

---

15. Qur’an, Sura Al-Baqara: 143.
16. Qur’an, Sura Nahl: 120.
stituted themselves as an aggregate. In terms of historiographical concerns of Qutb’s civil theology, they formed a *civitas*, a civil order, under the sovereignty of Allah, whose authorized administrator was Muhammad (*SJ*, 37).

As a historical institution, Medina replaced the society of Yathrib with the *civitas* of Islam. More precisely, society was subsumed under and made identical with Islamic civilization, which is absolute in its universality. The principal basis of aggregation in the new civil order was the members’ explicitly consenting to adhere to Muhammad’s Sunna. Even prior to Islam, the Arabs referred to a customary habitude that was accepted as normative and practiced by the entire community as *sunna*—a more literal-minded translation would be “the well-worn path,” recalling the substantive’s metaphoric derivation from the verb *sanna*, which describes the repeated action of wearing something into a desired form, whether that means to sharpen a blade or mold a rock. Muhammad’s Sunna was profoundly dynamic, articulating the most authentically Islamic attitude to the material situation of any given moment in complement to divine communication. In Muhammad’s case, however, the source of knowledge about authenticity was not the ancestral habitude but the divine communication personally given to him and for which he was the principal and sole human agent of articulation. This was subjective experience, which meant that authenticity in attitude was immanent with his personal life-practice, with his Sunna.

If adherence to Muhammad’s Sunna was the principal constitutive element of the historical Medina, the second was that this adherence established a personal relationship in law between all individuals that superseded and displaced prior relationships of family, tribe, origin of birth or nation, and caste, constituting them as members of a civil order rather than persons subject to a limited community. Because Medina was constituted in common adherence to the Sunna of Muhammad, there was a homogeneity of lifestyle, albeit one of common Arab custom, but modified by the collective allegiance to Muhammad. Together, these elements sustained a consensual conscious submission to the immanence of divinity in the world. This is a key point in Qutb’s anthropology of the concept of divine immanence.

As an idealized model or primitive institution, on the other hand, Medina is characterized by a set of three principles parallel to those of the historical Medina. The first of these is that Muhammad was the living agency through which the principles and terms by which authentic daily life was to be lived were realized. Because of his personal relationship to revelation, he was the guarantor of correct interpretation, and so the human executor of divine sovereignty. This authority did not derive from his character but
from his election by Allah to be an example. Although, Muhammad’s char-
acter was a determining factor in his being believed in the early days of
his prophethood and was the substantive object of emulation in formulation
of Ḥadīth. The second principle follows from this, and it is that civil order
in Medina is not constituted based on a tradition of legislation inherited or
deduced from a set of universal principles passed down in memory like the
Roman concept of *jus genitum*. It is dynamically constituted in the everyday
empirical experience of practice—Muhammad’s Sunna—that is immanently
sanctioned by divinity. The third principle, then, is that the immediate experi-
ence of this civil order in action is second only to the Prophet’s personal
enactment of revelation in authenticity. It is its constitution qua Muhammad’s
Sunna that makes Medina ideal.

This exemplary umma is limited to the first three generations of the
original society of Medina under Muhammad, consisting of the Compan-
ions of the Prophet, their children and grandchildren, for whom the lived-
experience of Muhammad’s prophecy—the eventfulness of Qur’anic reve-
lation and Muhammad’s associated habitual life-practice (Sunna) as an
institution of revelation—was within living memory.17 The authenticity, and,
hence, authority, of that experience is a matter of temporal proximity to the
Prophet Muhammad’s lifetime, with the generation of his lifetime Compan-
ions the most authentic, and the generation of their grandchildren the limit.
The ways in which these salaf (founding fathers) articulated that principal
experience are the historical institutions of Islam. In restricting his histori-
cal examples to the institutions of the founding fathers in order to elaborate
a legitimate rational civil theology, Qutb is unquestionably in line with the
Salafīya reform movement, whose intellectual roots begin with the work of
the nineteenth-century Egyptian reformer Muhammad ‘Abdu. Strict adher-
ence through reasoned analysis to the historical example of the institutions
of the founding fathers is what gives Salafīya its name. The key concern is
sustaining the authentic Islamic attitude toward these principal institutions,
which is fundamentally a question of the authoritative determination of the
authentic Sunna as habitual practice. That is, it is an issue of methodology,
according to which the techniques of method articulate the object of analy-
sis, so that the validity of the object is established only through valid meth-
oodological attitude.

17. Throughout this essay, *Sunna* is capitalized when referring to Muhammad’s habitue
in keeping with the established convention of romanization. Otherwise, it is italicized and
in lowercase when referring to other habitues or habitue in general.
Qutb's demonstrable Salafi orientation is why the charge of Khawarijīya made against him is so highly charged and politically complicated on two counts. Besides the depiction of Qutbiya as heretical, the charge presents what is purported to be the correct Salafiya understanding of Islam, according to which Islam is profoundly homeostatic. It is represented as a system that retains and preserves its internal equilibrium—an internal dynamic whose terms remain constant and immutable in their relationships to one another—in the face of disruptive external environmental conditions. Not only is Islam homeostatic, but so is the supposed proper Salafiya way to think about historical events. Both the conceptual frame of reference as well as the events perceivable within it are presented as symptomatic of the system's own internal dynamic. There is no change in the sense of emergent events and attending innovative ways of thinking—that is, ways of thinking whose innovation presumes possibilities completely beyond the range or logic of the internal dynamic. There is only change within the scope of the dynamic—an immutable pattern of perspectives and orientations. Within the scope of so homeostatic an understanding, the epitaph Kharijite designates a cancerous pathology congenital to Islamic civilization that must be aggressively treated from time to time. Such an understanding is a perverse radicalization of what Muhammad ‘Abdu postulated as Salafiya. While he represented the first three generations of Muhammad’s Medina umma as the genetically defining population—in Vico’s sense that genesis is nascence—which articulated the constitutive ethical attitudes of Islam, he discovered them to be more flexible theoretically. The homeostatic change postulated in ‘Abdu’s reform was the constancy of ethical orientation in the course of considerable theoretical and political acclimatization. In other words, the homeostasis of ‘Abdu’s Salafi was ethical and not conceptual. How Muslims approach and understand the Salafi is subject to tremendous nonhomeostatic change, in accordance with the open-ended dynamics of human thinking. The conviction that the absolute horizon of human interpretive understanding was already achieved within the first three generations of Islam is not in accordance with the Salafiya reform initiated by ‘Abdu, or with those, like Qutb, who explicitly engage his project. Such a conviction is attributed to what is perhaps more fittingly called neo-Salafiya.

It cannot altogether be ignored that the neo-Salafiya portrayal of Qutbism is in keeping with that offered recently by the recognizable neoconservatives Daniel Piper, Stephen Schwartz, Stanley Kurtz, and Dinesh D’ souza. While distinguishing between Qutbism and what they refer to as “mainstream Islam,” Schwartz and Piper, in particular, attribute the root causes for
Judy / Sayyid Qutb’s fiqh al-waqqi’i

Qutbism to the corrupt social conditions of the Arab world and specifically associate it with Salafiya itself. To underscore the connection between the image of corrupt despotist Arab rulers and reactionary Islamic tendency, they anachronistically label Salafiya “Wahabism,” after the eighteenth-century Najdi founder of the movement that has become the religious establishment of Saudi Arabia. Schwartz’s and Piper’s assertions that Wahabism has deliberately laid the grounds in which Qutbism can flourish is in harmony with the tale proffered in more politically diverse U.S. and British circles that Qutbism is a Western-oriented deviation from mainstream Islam, a claim to which the anti-Qutbism pamphleteers now tenaciously cling, recirculating quotations from sundry Western journalists—mainly analysts associated with conservative far-right think tanks—and even secularist Muslims. The collection is astounding in its ideological variety, from John Gray and Malise Ruthven—the latter, significantly enough, has been a visiting fellow and lecturer at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, England, which is supported by the Aga Khan Development Network—to Robert Worth and Amir Taheri, as well as Ladan and Roya Boroumand, founders of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran. As far as the neoconservative attack is concerned, there is a certain cynicism in its being embraced by elements among previously staunch one-time Reaganite allies of the Saudis in the U.S. government, who in effect are now holding the Saudi government chiefly responsible for failing to hold up its end of the alliance by not curtailing or otherwise policing the destructive forces of Qutbism. It was with U.S. consent and cooperation during the Reagan presidency that the Saudis aggressively established institutions of Salafiya in former Soviet central Asia; and with a particular domestic disregard, the U.S. government studiously ignored the serious inroads made by Saudi-financed Salafiya institutions among the rapidly growing Muslim population in America’s inner cities and federal penitentiaries. The immediate political pertinence of all this policy-oriented attention to Qutbism notwithstanding, its complete disregard for the documentation of his thinking preempts any erstwhile attempt to understand and so grapple with the serious efforts of Muslims such as Qutb to articulate a constitutive function for Islam in modernity. Indeed, preemption of thinking is a hallmark strategy of the neoconservatives—and in the instance of Islamic thinking, it is a strategy with which the U.S.-based Left concurs. With an eye toward the broader stakes of imagining a truly historical critical secularism, however, while not altogether ignored, the political facts of the moment cannot be permitted to occlude the thinking at issue here. And what is at issue is
whether Qutb demonstrated the feasibility of a critical Islamic historiography of power.

Bear in mind that the point of Qutb’s historiography is to recall the conditions of *umm̄a Muḥammad* in Medina and revitalize its principles as the authentic dynamic way to achieve the pious individual who is a member of what we now more properly understand as the pious civility. We have, then, a problem of how to make dynamic a situation lost in time. The answer Qutb proffers is a literary attitude: the principal institutions are approached as textual documents of the Islamic civilization’s historical beginning, which is the exemplum, bar none, of just society. Accordingly, the practice of understanding is that of reading, which, as a practice, is highly dynamic and historical. It is impossible to undertake such a practice without an acute awareness of complete contemporaneity or temporal duration. One is always reading now, even when engaging antecedent readings, such that the relationship one’s own reading has to those antecedents is one of adjacency. The literary attitude, then, is a dynamic practice of engaging the historical customary habitude of communal understanding—meaning a habitude that is contemporaneous with the moment of the understanding. Authenticity remains an aspect of the lived-experience of the *salaf,* which is recounted and transcribed as an elaboration of precepts. As a corpus, these recordings of direct experience of the Prophet’s life-practice are what became known as Ḥadīth.

Equating knowledge with experience poses very real practical problems. Foremost among these is the incongruence between telling and recording stories of past events and the experience of them, and the experience of imminent events and situations. The problem is how to—as in, by what authentically prophet-derived method—adduce the authentic Muslim attitude toward imminent events without the Prophet’s agency. From the early days of Islam’s conquests and expansion, the way of adducing the authentic Islamic attitude toward questions of legal and personal life was called *fiqh* (understanding), a hermeneutic practice in which authoritative inferences were drawn first from interpretive readings of the Qur’ān text—as is attested to by the example of Ibn ʿAbbās—then from recollections of pertinent prophetic utterances or practices (Sunna), and then from recognized communal practice (*sunna*) and reasoning (*ijtihād*) among the Prophet’s Companions.

The dispersal of the Companions across the emerging polity meant that many equally authoritative understandings were occurring, so that the practice of *fiqh* was remarkably localized in its beginnings, with each garri-
son town formulating a normative code of law based on the norms immediately at hand. The most prominent of the localities were Kufa in Iraq, whose preeminent faqih was Abu Ḥanīfa, and Medina in the hijaz, whose leading legate was Mālik ibn Anas. Both Abu Ḥanīfa and Mālik understood fiqh to be a practice of legal criticism in opposition to Umayyad, and initially Abbasid, imperial policy. They were engaged in an explicit effort to formulate and realize, at least locally, an authentically Muslim subjectivity based on individual responsibility to revelation and prophetic Sunna directly, rather than through the mediating political institutions of power. Abu Ḥanīfa, who publicly refused to swear allegiance to the Abbasid, maintained the view throughout his tenure as the preeminent Iraqi faqīh that, besides the Qur’an and Ḥadīth, local consensus and ijtihād was a valid source on which to base the normative code of piety. Mālik, in contrast, held to a narrower view, according to which the legitimate sources for legal understanding beyond the Qur’an and Ḥadīth are limited to the consensus and ijtihād of the original community of Medina under Muhammad. The eventual ascendancy of the Medinan school was due in large measure to the formulation of Mālik’s legal criticism into a theory of law and jurisprudence by his student, Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Idris as-Shāfi‘ī (767–820). Imam as-Shāfi‘ī systematically standardized the various efforts of fiqh, excluding all sunna except for Ḥadīth—effectively eliminating all other living sunna—and establishing the now familiar hierarchy of sources or foundations of understanding (usul-ul-fiqh) that became the basis for ‘ilm-u-Sharī‘a. Restricting sunna to Ḥadīth made more pronounced the problematics entailed in basing legitimacy on authentic experience. Shāfi‘ī’s restriction meant that experience must now be verifiable through an objective method. The evaluation of Ḥadīth as a source of legal understanding second only to the Qur’anic text underscored the need to regularize the process by which the events of Muhammad’s Sunna were presented in the record and to establish objective criteria for verifying the authenticity of transmission. The subsequent endeavor at regularization and verification became the discipline of ‘ilm-ul-Ḥadīth—literally translatable as “the science of Prophetic habitude as narrative” and commonly translated as “Prophetic tradition,” but more aptly rendered as “the archaeology of knowledge about the Prophet.” The methodology by which authentic transmission was achieved was isnād—the supporting genealogy of transmission. This is a specific narrative form through which the chain of transmission of any particular prophetic utterance or act is recorded and authenticated. Authentication is determined according to the authoritative arrangement of the collected enunciations of the Medina consen-
sus—the literally recorded speech acts of the Prophet's Companions, their children, and grandchildren. As the authenticating narrative mode of transmission, *isnād* is a normative logic for the transmission of knowledge. Each *isnād* exhibits the genealogy of its own composition and compilation, recording who received what from whom when, all the way back to the principal interlocutor with Muhammad, or witness of the event of record. It is in this sense that *‘ilm-ul-Ḥadīth* is best translated as “the archaeology of knowledge about Muhammad” and best understood as a narrative practice of authorship and not a policing action, which is to say it is a way of formulating authoritative lines of transmitting readings, genealogies, if you will, and not an institution of imperial hermeneutics. It provides us with genealogies of knowledge that define our understanding of the Medina consensus. Shāfi’i did not, in fact, exclude all living Arab *sunna* from the foundations of understanding. He excluded only those that could not be verifiably traced back to the Medina consensus, the presumption being that as a *sunna*, the continued habitude of the Medinans and their immediate descendants perpetuated the homogeneity of orientation of the original *umma*. If *ijmā’a* still meant consensus in the sense of an *umma* of judgment, it was made as conservative as Ḥadīth, so much so that Shāfi’i restricted juridically binding consensus to the first three generations of the original society of Medina. This is an extreme posture that Qutb did not hold, concurring instead with Muhammad ‘Abdu’s position that *ijtihād* is still available as the agency of consensus for subsequent generations. This reopening of the door of *ijtihād* is what enables the historiography that characterizes Qutb’s project, in which the consensus achieved by the original *umma* becomes a determinate fact fixed in time. For Qutb, the relationship between *umma* and *ijmā’a* is indissoluble. Proper knowledge of this relationship is treated as a constant order of thought translated across time and space with no loss of value or meaning. The consistent integrity of this knowledge is conditio sine qua non for authentic legal judgment and is guaranteed both through the regularization of the written record and the way it is read. As a conservative practice of reading, his historiography constitutes and sustains in a worldly way the Allah-ordained civil order of Muhammad in the present by reiterating the methodology of the *salaf* as regularized by Shāfi’i. As Shaykh Muqbil ibn Hadi al Wadi’i is reported to have said, Qutb was an *adīb*—literati.

It is simply not humanly possible to preserve the purity of the principal situation of the revelation of Muhammad at Medina—neither the individual nor collective awareness, let alone consciousness, of the Medinans can be “returned to” as a permanent or constant state of being-in-the-world.
What can be achieved, indeed, what is achieved, is a recollection of their attitude as a function of literacy—The Stories of the Companion, Sīra nabiwiyyah (The Biography of the Prophet) by Ibn Hisham, and the recognized compilations of Ḥadīth. These are *figura* insofar as they appear as exempla to be realized in the world. As a model, the Medina community is an appearance accessible only—and this point is absolute—as an attitude of thinking in literature. As an attitude of thinking, even the Sunna is a train of ideas or thinking about things that passes through our minds in the course of reading rather than a constancy of events. Another way of looking at this situation is to recall that it is precisely the authority of the genealogy of thought described in and by *ijmāʿ*—the material expression of which is *isnād*—that forms the basis for what is designated in Islam as ‘ilm. The polysemia of the term ‘ilm is best echoed in the German Enlightenment concept of Wissenschaften. This is an interpretive translation that is not simply fortuitous but speaks directly to Qutb’s principal assumption that his Islamic political theory is an epistemological project for individual liberty. In this way, *ijmāʿ* can be reimagined as the collective process of reading, characterized by a principal attitude toward the infinite.

This familiar problem of the relationship between justice and transcendence is what Qutb’s thinking grapples with. Can there be a humanistic Islam whose constitutive principle is divine immanence in all particulars of life? The answer Qutb proffers is the grounding of justice in a transcendent inhuman intelligence, which means that the principal concern is with the institution of an Islamic polity in which it is possible to foster and sustain ways of human life that are neither simply anthropological and rational—in the way that positive law is—or solipsistically reverential. The challenge that Qutb faced was how to assume an attitude toward infinity while avoiding both the risk of historicizing the activity of thinking as the expression in the world of the transcendent law (Allah) and the tendency to think the infinite as a horizon to be approached with the expectation of subjective fulfillment. Qutb clearly fell prey to both risk and tendency. But the way of his failure is instructive.

Having come to understand America as a dynamic force that articulated and disposed of communities as a matter of course and to no end, Qutb sought to discover the condition for sustainable community in an inhuman intelligence. Qutb held that such an intelligence is a transcendent personified force manifested with revelation and enacted in habitual practices of reading and interpretation. This is not a question of morality but one of narrative possibility or ethics. His own enactment of the habitude of lit-
erary Islam compelled him to supplant the rule of law with divine judgment as the only way to achieve social justice and the preservation of human intelligence against global ignorance. Plainly stated, Qutb's *Social Justice in Islam* is concerned with answering the question, What is the alternative to the global ignorance of immanence? To the extent that the answer he proffers is the grounding of civilization in a transcendent inhuman intelligence, then the principal concern is not with the institution of an Islamic polity but with the instituting of an Islamic region of humanity in which those possibilities of the ways of man that are neither anthropological or rational—in the way that positive law is—can be sustained. The pertinence of Sayyid Qutb's effort to the issue of secularism lies in the simple fact that it engages us in thinking about what it is to be human in the historical circumstances of opposing a discourse of universal justice derived from the Pauline doctrine of salvation.