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THE COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY OF ANTI-MODERNITY:  
LEO STRAUSS AND SAYYID QUTB CONCEPTIONS OF THE POST-LIBERAL  
WORLD

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Political Science

Written under the direction of

Professor Eric Davis and Professor Andrew R. Murphy

And approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2018

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

# THE COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY OF ANTI-MODERNITY: LEO STRAUSS AND SAYYID QUTB CONCEPTIONS OF THE POST-LIBERAL WORLD

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In this dissertation, I will investigate Western and non-Western critiques of modernity as exemplified in the political thought of Leo Strauss and Sayyid Qutb. Many scholars argue that Strauss offered two solutions to the modernity problem: one is purely Philosophical, and the other is a combination of theology and philosophy. However, I argue that Strauss proposed a third and fourth solutions to resolve this problem: reviving the classical political philosophy and reconciliation between religion and philosophy. In addition, in this dissertation I argue that Qutb may be considered a Straussian thinker based on particular similarities between the two philosophers' political theories on anti-modernity. In this study I aim to answer the following questions: What are the common problems in Strauss and Qutb's political thought? Does Strauss provide one or multiple answers to the crisis

of Western modernity? How can comparative political theory help us explain and understand postmodern alternatives, such as Islamism? Does Qutb fit the criteria for a Straussian thinker? Is Strauss a Qutbian thinker? In this dissertation, I utilize comparative political theory as a methodology that can enable us, as students of politics, to compare the political thought of Strauss and Qutb and to make it possible to establish a dialogue between them. This comparison will be based on how Strauss and Qutb conceptualize Western modernity as a problematic element in contemporary political and philosophical life.

## **Acknowledgement**

First, my deepest appreciation and gratitude go to my advisors, Professors Eric Davis and Andrew R. Murphy, for their support, and encouragement during my studies at Rutgers University–New Brunswick and the process of writing this dissertation. I am fortunate to have had such experienced and knowledgeable advisors to help me face the challenges I encountered. I am indebted to my PhD committee members, Professors Eric Davis, Andrew R. Murphy, Drucilla Cornell, and Michaelle Browers, for their guidance, suggestions, and comments. I would also like to thank Professor Cornell for her advises, encouragement and support. I am grateful for the wonderful opportunity to co-teach a graduate course with Professor Cornell: Advanced Topics in Public Law: Islamic Political Thought, African Law and Ethics.

I am immensely grateful to Wadha, Reema, and Sarah for their patience, support, and encouragement. Also, I am indebted to my parents, without whose support and prayers this work would not exist. Special thanks go to Dr. Farah Jan for her support, comments, and discussions. Many thanks to my uncle Abdulla Alhbabi for his help in organizing an interview with Dr. Muhammad Shahrour. Finally, I would like to thank our graduate program office's coordinator, Paulette Flowers-Yhap, for her help and advice. I also want to thank all my friends and others who contributed to making this dissertation possible.

## **Dedication**

To my loving wife Wadha Alhanaee and my two wonderful daughters, Reema and Sarah, for their sacrifices and support during my PhD journey.

To my parents and grandparents

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## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose of the study**

This study seeks to examine Western and non-Western alternatives to Western modernity<sup>1</sup> and to provide a more accurate understanding the political theory of Leo Strauss by rethinking his solutions to the crisis of the modernity. More importantly, it seeks to understand whether Strauss offered more than one solution to the problem of modernity<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, this dissertation will explore the political thought of Sayyid Qutb and try to answer the question of whether Qutb is a Straussian thinker. This study will provide an interpretation that challenges the previous literature on political Islam, Islamism, and Straussian studies using the methodology of comparative political theory.

#### **Significance of the study**

Distinguishing between Islamist and Islamic political thought is methodologically significant because it clarifies the roots of each type of political thought. Moreover, it helps

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, Western modernity means the political and philosophical thought that shaped the modern Western world. According to thinkers such as Leo Strauss, Western modernity began when Niccolo Machiavelli rejected ancient political philosophy, which, according to him, could not help us explain and understand the modern world. (See Strauss, 1989, Three Waives of Modernity)

<sup>2</sup> Modernity constitutes a problem for many thinkers and philosophers including Strauss, Hannah Arendt, Eric Voeglein, and Sayyid Qutb. For Strauss, modernity rejects ancient political philosophy and makes the modern man unable to know what he or she wants to achieve. Therefore, modernity represents a crisis for contemporary human beings. However, Qutb views modernity as a threat to the Islamic world because it marginalizes the role of religion in public life.

us determine the character of thought that gave rise to concerns about modernity and ongoing political debates over Islam and democracy, etc.. It is important to distinguish between Strauss and Straussians. Differentiating among these terms will shed light on the development of Strauss's political thought and how interpretations by some of Strauss's followers could create a different kind of Straussianism. This distinction will help us understand why Strauss could have more than one answer to the question of the crisis of modernity, given that many Straussians would suggest that Strauss proposed that ancient philosophy (i.e., practical wisdom) is the solution to the dilemma of the modern world.

This dissertation also incorporates a methodology that is significant for the field of political theory and political science. Importantly, it is one of the few studies that have used a comparative approach to study anti-modern political theories, underscoring the importance of emerging methodological awareness in comparative political theory. In addition, using comparative methodology in studying political theory offers an important opportunity to develop innovative responses to old questions, such as: What is the best political regime? How can we achieve a just society? These and other questions appeared in both Qutb's writings and Strauss's political and philosophical works.

### **Questions of the study**

This dissertation aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does Strauss provide one or multiple answers to the crisis of Western modernity?
2. What are the common problems in Strauss and Qutb's political thought?
3. What is comparative political theory (CPT) and how can CPT help us explain and understand postmodern alternatives, such as Islamism?

4. How Islamists reacts to the challenges of political modernity?
5. What are the differences and similarities in Strauss and Qutb's critiques of Western modernity?
6. Does Qutb fit the criteria of a Straussian thinker?
7. Is Strauss a Qutbian thinker?
8. Who, exactly, is in a problematic position with Western modernity? Islamic political thought or Islamist political thought? Islam or Islamism?

### **Literature review**

This dissertation will make a positive contribution in the literature in that it will enhance the development of comparative political theory studies in the field of political theory. Moreover, it will explore new aspects of the political thought of Strauss and Qutb by establishing an intellectual dialogue between these two influential anti-modern scholars.

The literature on Strauss and Qutb is rich. First, I explore the works of comparative political theory and examine how this literature will serve as a methodological tool to conduct a comparison between Leo Strauss and Sayyid Qutb. Moreover, a critical analysis of CPT will help provide us with an alternative understanding of many contemporary political and religious phenomena, such as Islamism. Secondly, I discuss the Islamic conceptions of religion and politics and highlight the differences between Islamic and Islamic political thought. Third, I analyze the different aspects of Strauss political theory, with special emphasis on his conception of the crisis of modernity and his way of reading and interpreting classical political texts. Fourth, I explore Qutb's political theory of

*Jahiliyah* (the concept of ignorance of divine guidance), with a focus on his conception of modernity as an example of al-*Jahili* (ignorant) society.

### **Methodology of the Study: A Brief Overview of Comparative Political Theory**

The intellectual enterprise of comparative political theory (CPT) focused its methodological critique on the fact that the Western canon of political theory focuses exclusively on Western and European political texts, thinkers, and philosophers. This methodological critique was led by Fred Dallmayr, who focused most of his scholarship on the urgent need to include comparative analysis and study in Western political theory. The works of Dallmayr and others have shed light on the methodological necessity of expanding the Western canon of political philosophy to cover non-Western political thought and philosophical traditions. Andrew March (2009) argued that the rise of CPT as a subfield of political theory suggests that political theorizing is not limited by geographical regions but goes beyond national borders, seeking to reach global encounters. CPT scholar Farah Godrej contended that CPT suggests using intellectual binaries such as “West” and “Non-West” when describing different political thought traditions established on a civilizational basis. Moreover, Godrej (2009) stated that using binaries, such as “West” and “non-West”, has limited our comprehension of global political philosophical traditions. Godrej’s argument about the terminology used in CPT is problematic because it opens the question of what we should call these different intellectual traditions. If we eliminate these terminologies, then, in the task of comparative study, it would be difficult to differentiate between different political thought heritages.

It is important to note that CPT does not aspire to fill the gap among intellectual and philosophical traditions by performing comparative analysis to comprehend the nature of each intellectual heritage. Rather, CPT aims to develop a better understanding of intellectual traditions established on hermetical and dialogical bases (Dallmayr, 1999, 2004, 2010; Godrej, 2011). I would argue that expanding the canon of Western political theory to include texts and authors from non-Western philosophical traditions does not make the academic field of political theory global. Including other traditions in the Western political thought canon will bring our attention to common human problems. Furthermore, it will enhance our understanding of different types of political theory that represent other cultures, societies, geographies, concerns, and systems of thought, such as issues of violence, extremism, justice, and so on.

CPT is not only an instrument used to ensure a comparative understanding of political theory traditions; however, CPT suggests an equality among Western and non-Western intellectual traditions. The Western-centric tendency of European political thought has created the feeling among political theorists that Western political philosophy is superior to other non-Western traditions. Dallmayr (2004) insisted that dialogue is a major part of the human personality and should be used to start understanding Western and non-Western traditions to maintain a balanced and mutual comprehension of global human knowledge.

Defining CPT is a complex matter and understanding what CPT means is important for us to view other world traditions. Dallmayr (2004) understood CPT as “a mode of theorizing that takes seriously the ongoing process of globalization, a mode which entails, among other things, the growing proximity and interpretation of cultures and the emergence of what Marshall McLuhan called the ‘global village’” (p. 249). Dallmayr’s

conception of CPT indicates that CPT represents a global trend within political theory. Moreover, this proposes that the field of political theory has been highly influenced by globalization, which has brought all parts of the world together. According to this understanding, CPT works perfectly with global issues such as global democracy and justice. CPT can promote the global democratic movement against undemocratic political regimes by encouraging democracy and democratic norms (Dallmayr, 2004). CPT's global role has contributed significantly in deconstructing colonial and imperial hegemonies in the world within comparative, hermeneutical, and dialogical bases. CPT offers innovative elucidations to old, complex problems by opening discussions that include new questions and inquires generated via comparisons (Goto-Jones, 2013).

Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent (2013) expressed concerns about the status quo of Western political theory. Freeden and Vincent diagnosed Western political thought as Eurocentric and called for a more pluralistic understanding of political theory traditions. They asked do we need to make political theory a global field? The argument in favor of globalizing political theory is challenging for many comparative political theorists because it questions the purpose of and need for transforming the field of political theory to function on global scale (Dallmayr, 2010). It is significant to affect the Eurocentric nature of political theory by performing comparative analysis within global political theory traditions. In other words, the scope of traditional political theory essentially needs to expand its view to cover other intellectual political traditions, which will allow political theorizing on a global level. Using a comparative methodology in political theory analysis provides the field with huge advantages. Comparative analysis provides political theory with new insights through exploring new discourses and intellectual contexts (Freeden & Vincent, 2013).

CPT faces some critical inquiries concerning its purpose and goal. What does CPT compare? What levels and units of analysis are CPT interested in? Freedden and Vincent engaged with these questions by examining the comparativism scholarship in political science. The use of comparative analysis in political theory is fruitful because it raises new questions that help recenter the scope of political theory to make it plural. Moreover, CPT's comparative tendency opens the door to innovative responses for old political thought questions but in different contexts.

Traditional political thought is facing an identity crisis that makes CPT's existence hard within Eurocentric political theory. After the rise of comparativism in contemporary political theory, the Eurocentric identity of political theory must be converted to pluralism, which will make the field more open to different political thought traditions. To better understand the crisis of identity in political thought, we should question the use of binary terminologies that draw a line between Western and non-Western intellectual political theory traditions. Many world political theory heritages were categorized according to their geographies. The political thought that emerged in European societies and is associated with Western civilization thought, norms, and values are described as Western political theory. In contrast, the political philosophies that existed in the Orient, representing intellectual and philosophical activities and movements, are described as Eastern political thought. The most crucial question here is this: What do conceptual binaries such as Western and Eastern mean to us when we try to understand political thought? The problem of using these conceptual binaries to distinguish between Western and non-Western thought is that both are ambiguous. Neither conceptual descriptor clearly represents the geographical borders of these intellectual entities. A good example of this comes up in the question of how we categorize countries such as Brazil or

Colombia. Do we group them under the Western, non-Western, or some other label (Freeden & Vincent, 2013)? The traditional binary does not fully cover other traditions, causing their exclusion. Freeden (2013) highlighted an important aspect of CPT: the impact of language on shaping political thinking in society. In other words, concepts and discourses constitute key methodological tools to study politics and political languages.

Freeden emphasized that conceptual analysis of political phenomena is best exemplified by the case of religion and political interference, especially in the Middle East. Islam and politics are almost fully integrated in the Arab world, and the intellectuals avoid using political theory to approach how religion and politics affect the formation of political thought.<sup>3</sup> CPT is helpful in terms of offering insights on conceptual changes in the intellectual history of political Islam. For instance, CPT helps us to draw a line

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<sup>3</sup> The majority of Arab scholars have not taken the relationship between religion and politics seriously in terms of political theory analysis. Prominent Arab philosophers such as Muhammad al-Jabiri, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdulla al-A'rabi have not generated a body of political and philosophical works that constitute an intellectual debate on the role of religion in politics. However, this does not mean that they have not produced individual works that focus partly on political and religious issues. These intellectuals have not provided a critical review of what should appear in the arena; instead, they have concentrated largely on rebutting one another's intellectual projects. It would be fruitful for scholars to foster a critical environment that creates a dialogue among all these different perspectives rather than ignoring legitimate criticisms (e.g., the case of Muhammad al-Jabiri and George Tarabishi). During the past century, Muslim thinkers and philosophers have failed to create an intellectual debate discussing many important issues and challenges in the Islamic world, especially the relationship between religion and politics. There is no doubt that many Arabic intellectual moguls have offered intellectual philosophical projects that examine real challenges and problems. These include al-Jabiri's *The Critique of Arab Mind* and Arkoun's *Applied Islamology*. However, it is evident that these philosophers did not succeed in establishing healthy critical communication among scholars about ideas, which will help in the progression or revolution of Arabic and Islamic philosophical thought. In my opinion, the reason for this miscommunication is the philosophical nature of these intellectual projects: they concentrate on the whole matter rather than paying attention to partial issues. Unlike the discipline of philosophy, political theory uses partial matters to study political and intellectual phenomena. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to transform these political theories into policies that help make the world a better place.



between the Salafi and Wahhabi religious traditions. Many works are confused about conceptualizing the Salafi and Wahhabi cultures. In many cases, Wahhabism has emerged from Salafism and constitutes a development of the same tradition. However, Wahhabism is considered a religious reform movement that calls for the oneness of God. The fact that Wahhabism relies heavily on Salafism does not make them the same thing.<sup>4</sup> CPT provides different interpretations on reading political Islam and Islamism. Bassam Tibi (2012) differentiated between Islam as a religion and Islamism as a religious ideological movement. Tibi tried to draw a line between Islam and Islamism using a comparative method and associate Arendt's theory of totalitarianism with political Islam. This distinction between Islam and Islamism highlights the ideological component of Islamism and shows the difference between religion and invented tradition. Islam is a religion that include religious rituals; in contrast, Islamism is an ideological understanding of Islam that aims to revive particular norms and understandings from the past to comprehend the present politics and society.

### **Exploring Islamic Political Thought as a Species of Comparative Political Theory<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> For more details, please see Lauziere, H. (2015). *The making of Salafism: Islamic reform in the twentieth century*. New York, NY: Colombia University Press; DeLong-Bas, N. (2008). *Wahhabi Islam: From revival and reform to global jihad*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; and Commins, D. (2009). *The Wahhabi mission and Saudi Arabia*. London, UK: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>5</sup> This section discusses three major concepts: religion, politics, and the state. I use William's and Geertz's definitions of religion. Geertz (1973) defined religion as

*“(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”*  
(Geertz, 1973, p. 90) (Italic in the original text).

Comparative political theory (CPT), an approach that concentrates on comparing politics, traditions, texts, and systems of thought among civilizations, can be useful for our main topic. The advantage of using CPT to understand the thoughts and practices of Islamist movements is that it can uncover some of the misconceptions associated with analyzing political Islam. Islamic fundamentalism is a good example of the misconceptions that often accompany the study of extremist Islamist behaviors. Fundamentalism is a clearer phenomenon in Christian nations than in non-Christian ones because of its major role in American religious and political history. However, in non-Christian nations, Islamic fundamentalism is more complex. According to Eric Davis (2009), the use of Islamic fundamentalism in analyzing Middle Eastern politics can lead to unreliable generalizations about the region, such as the notion that Islam is contradictory to democracy. Western media has been using this concept to explain “extreme” behavior within religious movements in the Middle East. Davis’s exploration of “the myth of Islamic fundamentalism” is useful because fundamentalism in Islam involves a renewed focus on fundamental religious texts, which does not necessarily indicate a move toward the use of violence. Moreover, this misconception about Islamic fundamentalism tends to suggest the invention of a new Islamic religion; however, it represents an extreme understanding of Islam, which does not relate to the meaning of fundamentalism in Islam. Works of CPT,<sup>6</sup> including those by Dallmayr (1999, 2004,

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As for the concept of politics, we use the definition of “the theory and practices of governing a country” (Collin, 2004, p. 183). I use the word politics here to describe the collective political attitudes and behaviors of political and civil societies toward power and authority. I define the state as “the whole fixed political system, the set-up of authoritative and legitimately powerful roles by which we are finally controlled, ordered, and organized” (Robertson, 2004, p. 457).

<sup>6</sup> Dallmayr, F. (Ed.) (1999). *Border crossings: Toward a comparative political theory*. Maryland: Lexington Books; Dallmayr, F. (2004, June). Beyond monologue: For a

2010), Euben (1997, 1999, 2006), and March (2009), can provide us with new methodological and conceptual contributions that go beyond the Western canon to include the study of non-Western political thought and the Middle East. This would include clarifying misconceptions and comparing basic notions of Western traditions with Eastern systems of thought as a means to form a deeper understanding between East and West. CPT research can be conducted using qualitative methods, such as textual, contextual, and discourse analysis. Moreover, CPT frameworks can be examined using empirical techniques to achieve a generalizable theory that better explains social and political phenomena.

Islam affects broad aspects of life, society, and politics in the Middle East. The deep connection of religion and politics within Middle Eastern culture and society makes studying political and religious concepts difficult for scholars and researchers. Distinguishing between politics and religion to better recognize sacred and secular boundaries will inhibit using religion to achieve political purposes. Using religion as a device to seek political ends is considered abuse of the true goal of faith in life.<sup>7</sup>

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comparative political theory. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(2), 249–257; Dallmayr, F. (Ed.) (2010). *Comparative political theory: An introduction*. USA: Palgrave Macmillan; Euben, R. L. (1997, Feb.). Comparative political theory: An Islamic fundamentalist critique of rationalism. *The Journal of Politics*, 59 (1), 28–55; Euben, R. L. (1999). *Enemy in the mirror: Islamic fundamentalism and the limits of modern rationalism, a work of comparative political theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Euben, R. L. (2006). Changing interpretations of modern and contemporary Islamic political theory. In J. S. Dryzek, B. Honig, & A. Phillips (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political theory* (pp. 297–316). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; March, A. F. (2009). What is comparative political theory? *The Review of Politics*, 71, 531–565.

<sup>7</sup> This argument could be controversial because it raises many legitimate concerns and questions about the true purpose of religion; for instance, do all religions have a political component and seek political objectives? Nevertheless, the reason for this claim is the nature of politics and religion. I believe that religion has an absolute nature, which makes it nonnegotiable in its elements and teachings. In other words, absolutism is a major descriptive element of the nature of religion. The individual cannot negotiate a religion's

It is difficult to determine when politics and religion first combined in Islamic history. The literature in Islam and politics presents various answers to the question and the starting point of the political moment in an Islamic context. Some literature indicates that the first polity in Islam ruled according to the Prophet Muhammad's guidance and teaching, considered the first overlap between politics and Islam (Black, 2011; Crone, 2004; Tareq & Ismael, 2011; Watt, 2007). Other scholarly works argue that the first interaction between politics and Islam began after the Prophet passed away because of internal disputes in Muslim society (Butterworth, 2010; Crone, 2004; Enayat, 2001; Nazir, 2011a). The first Caliph, Abu Baker, started a war with a group of Muslims that refused to pay annual *zakah*; this incident *Hurob Al-Ridah* Wars on Apostasy and the reason behind the *Hurob Al-Ridah* Wars on Apostasy was political economy. *Zakah* constituted a major source of financial revenue for the political leadership of Muslim society. I argue that these readings of religion and political overlap in Islam reduce the meaning of politics to contain only conflict and create a society to rule and do not accurately explain how politics is linked to religion in Islam. Rather than this explanation, the Prophet used a social and moral method to persuade people to join Islam, which eventually led to the spread of Islam over the land (Bowering, 2015). I argue that the leadership practiced by the Prophet Muhammad does not completely represent the Prophet as a politician. Moreover, many scholars of Islam have contended that the conquests and diplomatic activities that occurred during the time of the Prophet were clearly political actions, strongly suggesting that politics was practiced by the Prophet. There is no doubt that some of these acts could partially show a political element;

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belief structure or its conditions for membership. This exists in contrast with the relative nature of politics.

however, it reduces the meaning of politics to merely military acts and international relations. Therefore, saying that the Prophet Muhammad was a political leader with the same meaning of politics being practiced in his time in a different nation is not a solid argument.

### **Islamic Political Thought and Political Islam: History, Thought, and Ideology**

To early Muslim generations, Islam was mainly about worshipping God, and Muslims adopted Islamic teachings to be their high guidance for life. Modern Muslim scholars of religion conceptualize Islam beyond the religious needs of people to take care of peoples' way of life. In other words, modern Islamic scholars have stated that Islam is not only a religion but also a way of life Islam (*Deen Wa Donya*). Understanding Islam as both a religion and a way of life represents a comprehensive view and use of Islam. Accordingly, Muslims have built their understanding of politics on Islamic teachings. This religious understanding of politics leads people to understand the best politics to be Islamic politics. In contemporary times, Islamist movements have developed their understanding of Islam as a religion and a way of life to be Islam as a religion and state Islam (*Deen Wa Dawlah*). This Islamist conceptualization of the reconciliation of Islam and politics transforms Islam from religious teachings to political theory (Hirschkind, 2011).

These various understandings and theories about politics and religion in Islamic contexts raise a significant question regarding the differences between Islamic and Islamist political theory. How can we differentiate between these different types of

political theories? The following table draws a line between what is Islamic and Islamist in political thought.

**Table 1**  
***Comparison of Islamic and Islamic Political Thought***

<b>Islamic Political Thought</b>	<b>Islamist Political Thought</b>
A broad religious understanding of politics	A narrow religious understanding of politics
More diverse and plural	Less diverse and plural
Not always based on ideology	Always based on ideology
Not completely political action-oriented	Political action-oriented
Connected to classical and early Islam	Connected to modern and contemporary Islam
Interacted with Western political thought and other world traditions	Isolated from Western political thought and anti-other traditions

Islamic political thought is different from Islamist political thought for many different reasons. Distinguishing between Islamic and Islamist political traditions is significant for our understanding of the role of religion and politics in society. Unfortunately, the majority of academic literature does not pay enough attention to

differences between what is Islamist and Islamic in terms of political philosophy and thought.<sup>8</sup>

Islamic political thought offers various religious understandings of politics. Islamic jurists have never agreed on how politics can match religion. Islamic political thought is diverse, with many schools of thought that represent different perspectives on the connection of politics and religion. In contrast, Islamist political thought has a limited religious understanding of politics. It can be said that the Islamist conception of political thought does not rely on classical intellectual resources in Islam. Furthermore, Islamist political thought usually based their political theorizing on contemporary political and intellectual texts (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood movements rely mainly on the works of Hasan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb). Diversity and pluralism are not considered in Islamist political theory because of their narrow perspective on what is political and religious. A good example would be how different sects of Islamist movements refuse to adopt and accept each other's views on politics and religion, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis, and Sufis. Another reason that Islamic thought is more plural and diverse than Islamist thought is because of ideology. I argue that Islamic political thought is less based on ideological components and that Islamist political theory relies on ideology as a defining feature.

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<sup>8</sup> It is true that several Western scholars have focused on the intellectual tradition of Islam and Islamic civilization. However, these works neglect the epistemological and ontological discussions and analyses of the tradition of political thought in Islam. Is there a canon of Islamic political thought? Do the works of Muslim philosophers, theologians, and thinkers constitute political thought or political theory in the Islamic intellectual tradition? Such questions are very important to ask to identify the epistemological and methodological structures of political thought or political theory in Islam.

The development of political actions does not completely drive the growth of Islamic intellectual traditions. In other words, political actions do not create Islamic political theory. The intellectual products of Islamic political philosophers and thinkers revolved around promoting the political sustainability of the state and political leadership. This type of political and philosophical literature is famously called the Mirrors of Princes, basically constituting political consulting for political rulers on how to govern and mention their political power. However, Islamist political theory is built upon their intellectual traditions, founded by political actions that happened in their historical and social contexts. The intellectual works and the development of Islamic political thought usually emerged after some political actions occurred. For example, major works of Sayyid Qutb, *Maa'lim fi al-Tariq Milestone* and *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an In the Shade of Qur'an*, were his response to political and social changes in Egyptian society.

The intellectual references are different in Islamic and Islamist political thought. Intellectual references in Islamic political thought go deep into history, dating back to classical and early Islam. Furthermore, Islamic political thought is connected to the classical period as well as modern and contemporary intellectual movements. For example, Islamic political thought, both in classical and modern historical periods, has shed light on political and cultural issues, including democracy and nationalism. In contrast, the Islamist intellectual tradition is connected only to modern and contemporary scholars, texts, theories, and concepts. The key works of Islamist political discourse do not use concepts and ideas produced by classical or medieval political thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun, Al Farabi, and Ibn Rushd. Instead, Islamist political thought creates theory based on its own Islamist core works, generated by the founders and elder leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood.



Throughout history, Islamic political thought has interacted with other intellectual, political, and philosophical heritages. Medieval history presents many interactions among religious traditions such as Islamic, Jewish, and Christian political philosophy. The Medieval interactions among major world political philosophy traditions shared the influence of Greek political thought in forming and developing the Medieval political theory. In contrast, Islamist political theorizing does not overlap with other intellectual traditions, including Western political thought.

The term Islamic political thought is unclear because of the term is not well defined. It is also unclear whether the concept evolves over time. It is crucial to comprehend the meaning of Islamic political thought because it can help us to better understand phenomena such as political Islam. Antony Black (2011) clearly and rightly stated that it is difficult to understand political Islam as a phenomenon and movement without comprehending the intellectual basis on which it is built. Furthermore, defining what Islamic political thought is will identify the historical periods that contain religious and political phenomena and clarify the historical contexts that constitute the intellectual roots of these phenomena. The texts of Islamic political thought revolved around two key issues: promoting the political power of the Caliphate<sup>9</sup> and reconciling politics with religion *Al-Siyyasah Al-Shar'aiyah*. Most Islamic political thinkers believe that protecting the political ruler from decay will help in maintaining the civic state that groups all citizens to be ruled under one ruler. In other words, Muslim political philosophers suppose that the stronger the Muslim Caliphate is, the more stable society

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<sup>9</sup> For more information about the Caliphate, please see Kadi, W, & Shahin, A. A. (2013). Caliph, Caliphate. In G. Boweing (Ed.). *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic political thought* (pp. 81–86). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

will be. Therefore, the majority of *Al-Siyyasah Al-Shar'aiyah* literature concentrated on providing the Muslim political ruler with practical political advice to manage his land and government.<sup>10</sup> Political thought in Islam represents a legitimate source of interactions between politics and religion. Many political philosophers and thinkers were prominent religious figures.

It is important to note that Islamist political theory is a modern phenomenon. Islamist political thought relies on a specific understanding and interpretation of Islam's major sources, the Qur'an and the Hadith (the teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Accordingly, Islamist political theorizing adopts particularly narrow readings and interpretations of Islamic resources that match their political agendas. Therefore, Islamist political theory is inherently ideological because it refuses to accept other views or interpretations that exclude political elements. Moreover, Islamist political theory and thought reflect the practices of Islamist religious groups. Therefore, Islamist political theory concentrates on specific political and intellectual matters related to their path of seeking political power, including "the assertion of divine over secular authority; the requirement for social harmony under Godly supervision; the achievement of Muslim unity; and the obligation to work actively for assertion of Islam, usually associated with Jihad, meaning 'striving' or 'exertion'" (Marfleet, 1998, p. 90).

Ideology is a cornerstone in the structure of Islamist political theory, and it is crucially important to promote the organizational component of Islamist movements. Islamist political thought contains various concepts that describe political interpretations

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<sup>10</sup> For more details on *Al-Siyyasah Al-Shar'aiyah*, see Ibn Taymiyyah, T. a-D. (1998). *Al-Siyyasah Al-Shar'aiyah (religious politics)*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Religious Call and Guidance.

of religious texts to reach political objectives, such as Islamic activism, Islamist movements, political Islam, and Islamization. All these concepts can be implemented by almost every Islamist political movement. The beginning of Islamism in the Middle East generally started with Islamic activism, which focused on the social needs of and religious guidance for ordinary people (Beinin & Vairel, 2011; Esposito, 1997). At the beginning of the 20th century, the spread of Islamic activism over many Arab countries characterized the Islamist exercises at the base of society, interpreted by many scholars as part of Islamists' plan to revive their own version of Islam (Mitchell, 1969). The insistence of Islamist movements on endorsing the practices of Islamic activism represents their will to change the general view of society and politics to be reconstructed based on their conceptualization of Islam and Islamic teachings. One way to do this is through the Islamization of society and politics.

Islamization can be described as the reconstruction of all major aspects of life, including society, politics, economics, and so on, based on Islamist views of Islam and Islamic values. The most important feature of Islamization is that it is a process that aims to change society gradually. Moreover, the crucial element of Islamization is replacing the human-made law with Islamic divine law. Having functional Islamic law in society is the key element that guarantees the flourishing of an Islamist society, which is considered a community of believers. Another perspective to take when examining Islamization is to look at it as a counterstrategy against Westernization or the secularization of Muslim society. Political Islam is the Islamization of politics. Part of political Islam is the transformation of religion from merely religious teachings and rituals to a political instrument. The concept of political Islam can be implemented on the individual level of the Islamist. For Graham Fuller (2004), an Islamist "is one who believes *that Islam as a*

*body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim World and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion”* (p. XI) (Italic in original text). Fuller’s conception of the Islamist relates to the Islamist vision of reconstructing the current political and social systems, based on the Islamist’s understanding of Islam.

The existence of political Islam should be easy because it assumes that the reality that needs to be changed is inherently secular. Therefore, political Islam, as well as Islamism in general, objects to fighting any type of secularism and replaces it with sacred Islamism. One of the difficulties of changing politics is that civic institutions are secular. Therefore, incorporating religion to change the secular nature of institutions essentially require specific interpretations of religion to use it as a tool in the Islamization process. For example, the Qur’an never mentions the term “politics” or any other political concepts, so claiming that political teachings are founded in the Qur’an is highly debatable among Muslim scholars (Al-Azmeh, 1995).

### **Leo Strauss as a Comparative Political Theorist?**

The intellectual project of Leo Strauss reaches various areas of inquiry. It is an exaggeration to say that Strauss’s legacy is encyclopedic. The scholarship of Leo Strauss covers various cross-cultural areas of research in political philosophy. Strauss’s works on political philosophy include many non-Western traditions, including Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The existing body of CPT literature infrequently considers Leo Strauss as a comparative political theorist, and I argue that Strauss should be thought of as one. Comparative analysis of political philosophies was a major theme of Strauss’s intellectual

project. Strauss often mentioned the need to conduct comparative studies of political theories, thinkers, and texts. He sometimes referred to comparative exploration of political theory as (Sociology of Knowledge or philosophy) (Strauss, 1988a, p.7). Furthermore, Strauss stated that there is a need to communicate with other systems of thought that exist in different cultures and societies. Therefore, Strauss contended that comparative studies of political thought can be applied at many levels, including comparison across cultures, geographies, and theologies (Strauss, 1959, 1988a, 1988b). In Strauss's intellectual project, he was interested in approaching CPT from theological, political, and philosophical perspectives. Strauss recognized the importance of comparative perspectives of political thought by creating a canon based on various views and voices of political intellectual traditions. Strauss was concerned with pluralism of political thought, so he brought political philosophers and thinkers from other political thought traditions into the Western canon of political theory (Strauss & Cropsey, 1987). Strauss insisted on constructing a canon of political thought that represented traditional and perennial political and philosophical questions. Strauss contends that the canon of political theory great books and thinkers contains the ultimate truth, which discovered by philosophers and was meant to be exclusive to the political and philosophical elites (Ball 2011). Moreover, the notion of tradition was central for Strauss because of his textual method of viewing political philosophy. Strauss stressed that political philosophy aims to engage with perennial questions through exploring thinkers and great texts from the canon of political thought. In their work *History of Political Philosophy*, Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey edited a massive volume that contains works of key political philosophers. The significance of Strauss and Cropsey's edited work is that it expanded the canon of Western political theory to include major texts and thinkers from non-

Western traditions. Strauss started his canon of political thought with the ancient political philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle because he admired the way that these philosophers claimed to discover the truth of politics and society by posing questions. Strauss stated that reading the canon of political thought essentially requires a unique way of reading it. Moreover, Strauss's choices of political theorists and texts in the canon represent some aspects of his methodology in interpreting texts.

Strauss's method of reading and interpreting political and philosophical texts have affected the field of political theory. Many scholars have followed Strauss's method because it contends that modern notions such as positivism and historicism are major parts of the crisis of the contemporary world (Ball, 2004). Strauss argued that the crisis of modernity accrued with the context of modern philosophy. In other words, the political theory and philosophy of the liberal tradition is the main cause of crisis of our time, generating many problems in our postmodern world. Strauss diagnosed the problem of modernity at many levels, including the intellectual and practical. Moreover, Strauss's criticism of modernity was directed toward the notions of positivism and historicism as productions of modernity.

### **Strauss and the Problem of Modernity**

For Strauss (1957, 1988b), the existence of historicism and positivism constitutes a key intimidation threat to other disciplines, including political philosophy and theory. Strauss contended that positivism objects to the creation of value-free social science and tries to avoid any ethical biases. The main reason behind Strauss's critique of positivist scholarship is that he asserted the essentiality of moral judgments in any social science

analysis. Strauss (1988b) explained this idea further: “The ground which is common to all social scientists, the ground on which they carry on their investigations and discussions, can only be reached through a process of emancipation from moral judgments” (p. 18). Strauss stressed that positivism considers science a high form of knowledge that is superior to others. Therefore, political philosophy would be considered unscientific.

Historicism is another product of modernity blamed for the cause of the crisis of our time. Historicists such as Skinner have argued that analyzing the history of political thought should concentrate on the context that forms the ideas. According to the historicist approach, “the history of political thought becomes a vast burial ground instead of what it can and should be—a source of genuine knowledge and a reliable guide for the perplexed” (Ball, 2004, p. 24). Strauss invited political theorists to seriously consider changing their views about past and rethinking on reflecting the past as a source for solving our current challenges and problems. It is important to note that Strauss called us to consider that the past does not obligate us to neglect the current reality and adapt all ancient tools and strategies. However, Strauss encouraged political theorists to keep thinking on the ancient perennial questions so we do not take them as postulates. What is justice? How can we achieve a just society? What is the best political system? All these questions are denied by historicists, and Strauss stressed that historians can view the past in a better way that considers the timeless questions. Strauss (1959) developed this idea further: “The task of the historian of thought is to understand the thinkers of the past exactly as they understood themselves, or to revitalize their thought according to their own interpretation” (p. 67). Strauss expressed that historicism denied the possibility of political philosophy and replaced political philosophy with the history of political

philosophy. Therefore, Strauss considered historicism to be an enemy to political philosophy.

### **Qutb and the Problem of *Jahiliyah***

The 2011 Arab Spring constitutes a serious challenge to Islamist political theory and Islamist movements. These revolutions brought up the question of democracy and whether it can be reconciled with Islam. Many Islamist movements constructed their intellectual beliefs on radicalism, which justifies using violence to seek political power. Therefore, Islamist movements aim to have political rules grounded on real Islamic teachings that represent an Islamic interpretation of religious texts. The intellectual body of Islamist political theory has been greatly originated by Islamist theorists' works that present violent responses toward the shape and system of the contemporary world. Many Islamist theorists, including Sayyid Qutb and Abu A'la Maududi, have conceptualized the current Muslim states as not Islamic, having lost their way toward true Islamic teachings. It is not an exaggeration to say that Sayyid Qutb is one of the most impactful Islamist political thinkers in the contemporary era because his thought and legacy constitute an inspiration fountain to many extremist religious groups. In many cases, scholars consider Qutb's political theory to be the basic manifesto of radical political Islam. Some literature indicates that the radical political theory of Qutb encouraged using violence as a counter to the local politics in Egypt. His unfortunate experience with Nasser's political regime during his prison sentence generated the radical conceptualization of Nasser's secular political order as the enemy of Muslims and Islam (Al-Khalidi, 2007). Qutb's journey to the United States in 1948 increased his fears and concerns of the existing threat of Western values and culture over Muslim nations. Qutb viewed Western culture as corrupt



because of the unethical behaviors committed by most Western individuals, including drinking alcohol and justifying usury. Therefore, Qutb thought that corrupt Western values and norms would infect the identity and ethics of Muslim nations. To a large extent, Qutb (1979) convinced himself that the Islamic world he lived in was inherently not Islamic because he believed it rebelled against the authority of God. Furthermore, Muslim people would accept some prohibited acts in Islam, such as using usury in their financial arrangements and considering adultery. Therefore, Qutb (1979) argued that contemporary Muslim societies are *Jahili* societies, worse than the old *Jahiliyyah* that existed before Islam. Qutb (2002) extended this idea further:

“If we look at the sources and foundations of modern ways of living, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in **Jahiliyyah**, and all the marvelous material comforts and high-level inventions do not diminish this ignorance. This **Jahiliyyah** is based on rebellion against God’s sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of God, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others.” (Qutb, 2002, pp. 10-11) (Bold in the original text)

Qutb diagnosed the danger surrounding the Muslim nations as *Jahiliyyah*. The only way proposed by Qutb to protect the Muslim community from the negative impacts of Western values is to create an Islamic state and society grounded on the true Islam. For Qutb, to eliminate the impact of *jahiliyah* on society and politics, all society must be reconstructed based on the idea of *hakimiyah* (Khatab, 2011; Qutb, 1979, 2000). It is crucial to state that Qutb has used the concept of sovereignty to analyze the problem of *Jahiliyyah* and to promote his proposed solution of *hakimiyah*. Qutb understood the problem of *Jahiliyyah* as an intervention in God’s authority, and that led him to divide all people in the world into two groups: true Muslims and fake Muslims and infidels (Qutb, 1979, 2000).

According to Qutb, *hakimiyah* is the only way to put all people under the authority of God. The current *Jahili* societies, based on people's sovereignty, contradict the rightful sovereignty of God, *hakimiyah*. Qutb importantly stated that the sovereignty of people does not free them as they believe; without God's sovereignty (*hakimiyah*), people are slaves to their material desires and to other fake powers, including people with wealth and money. To Qutb, *hakimiyah* constitutes the implementation of the will, sovereignty, and authority of God upon the whole earth. *hakimiyah* and *shari'ah* work hand in hand, and each of them complements the other.

Qutb viewed Islam as a universal religion that includes everything people need to live their lives. Qutb's understanding of Islam as a comprehensive religion led him to lose faith in human-made laws and not trust any law except Islamic divine law, *shari'a*. According to Qutb, the further human societies go from *shari'a* and *hakimiyah*, the more people imprison themselves in *jahiliyah* and lose their right path to God.

## Chapter Two

### Comparative Political Theory as Methodology

#### Introduction

The field of comparative political theory (CPT) is inherently new. The first academic and intellectual attempt to create a proper subfield that aimed to bring a comparative viewpoint to political theory was by Fred Dallmayr. Dallmayr and others called for this subfield because comparative discourse was being neglected in the field of political theory, and political science in general, especially by Western academia (Godrej, 2009). According to Euben, “some argue that the designation of ‘comparative political theory’ is redundant, as political theory properly understood is and has always been inherently comparative” (Euben, 2010, p. 261). Euben stated that the Greek origin of political theory goes back to the ancient idea of *theoria*. She elaborated, “Herodotus provides a bridge between the Greek practice of *theoria* and the English word *theory*, most often understood as the systematic investigation and attainment of knowledge” (Euben, 2006, p. 22). It is evident that Euben was going back to the notion of *theoria* to claim that comparativism is rooted in the very first attempts at political theorizing. Euben and other scholars (e.g., McWilliams, 2014; Vacano, 2015) argued that political *theoria* in the ancient sense requires theorists to consider comparisons in their theorizing processes. For instance, Aristotle’s famous work that compared the Athenian constitutions is considered evidence of the essential comparative nature of ancient Greek political thought. The other aspect of *theoria* is that it requires the political theorist to travel to acquire knowledge. While traveling, political theorists must conduct comparisons while

they explore a new kind of knowledge and compare it with their original knowledge. Consequently, comparative knowledge in Greek political theory not only makes political theorists more concrete thinkers and philosophers, it also makes them excellent political consultants to rulers and political leaders based on the vast knowledge gained through travelling and learning from other intellectual traditions (e.g., Aristotle and Alexander the Great).

There are many academic fields in social sciences that have turned to cross-cultural or comparative studies subfields.<sup>11</sup> In the case of comparative political theory (CPT), the subfield is still developing, and there are many CPT works that have started building the cornerstone of the subfield within Western political theory. Nevertheless, the subfield still faces many critical questions regarding its nature and how the comparative approach should be conducted among intellectual traditions. More important, where does CPT come from? Did the emergence of CPT occur because of a reconciliation of two different fields in social sciences? Michaelle Browers (2003) suggested that the CPT enterprise rises questions and discussion between the field of political theory and comparative politics. These subfields, as many have argued (Euben, Dallmayr), constitute a comparative turn in classical political science. However, “by the beginning of the twentieth century, political theory had become less comparative and comparative politics had become less focused on generating theory” (Browers, 2003, p.7). Other scholars believe that CPT’s roots go back to the subfield of comparative philosophy (Godrej, 2011; Panikkar, 1988). Dallmayr, the founding father of CPT, was not sure whether CPT was reconciliation between political theory and political science or a compromise between

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<sup>11</sup> Such as cultural studies, comparative sociology, comparative literature, comparative philosophy, orientalism studies, comparative anthropology, and area studies.

political theory and philosophy (Dallmayr, 1999). Tracing the roots of CPT is crucial because it came from either philosophy or political science (especially comparative politics), as only that would explain the nature of the existing CPT literature. It scholars have argued that the CPT body of literature can be categorized into two major paradigm groups: normative and interpretive (von Vacano, 2015). (I will discuss these paradigms later on).

The overlapping of academic fields generates new subfields such as comparative philosophy and CPT, due in part to the effects of globalization. Globalization affects Western/Eurocentric fields in the social sciences and brings attention to various world traditions that constitute new areas of inquiry. For instance, consider the case of Western political theory and the emerging CPT subfield as a new exploration of non-Western political thought traditions Williams and Warren elaborated:

“The diverse phenomena of globalization have stimulated two relatively new branches of political theory: theoretical accounts of the possibilities of democracy beyond the state; and comparative political theory, which aims at bringing non-Western political thought into conversation with the Western traditions that remain dominant in the political theory academy.” (Williams and Warren, 2014, p. 26)

Western political thought has been dominating the field of mainstream political theory for centuries. Justifying Western political theory’s hegemony is the belief among political theorists that this field is global. According to Anthony Parel (1992), “there is mounting evidence which suggests that the claims of universality made by modern Western political philosophy are being questioned by other cultures, or at least by the significant representatives of these cultures” (Parel, 1992, p. 11). Therefore, “the Western practitioner of political theory/philosophy must relinquish the role of universal teacher

(buttressed by Western hegemony) and be content with that of fellow student in a cross-cultural learning experience” (Dallmayr, 1999, p. 2). Dallmayr’s critiques of Western political thought led to the CPT’s core argument. As Dallmayr, CPT scholars criticize the nature of Western political theory, which they describe as a deeply Eurocentric field that does not recognize a non-Western political thought. This charge is “difficult to refute, and the fact that the canon of political thought taught in universities all over the world tends to consist almost exclusively of dead, white, ‘Western’ men is becoming ever more embarrassing and shameful” (Goto-Jones, 2011, pp. 87-88). This rising awareness of Eurocentrism leads many political theorists to criticize Western canon of political thought from other perspectives such as feminism and racism.<sup>12</sup>

The second chapter of this dissertation concentrates on CPT as a methodological approach to analyzing political thought. It is important to highlight that CPT is designed to function as a methodological tool to compare different intellectual, political, and philosophical traditions. This chapter explores the underlining features and describes the characterizations of CPT. Moreover, it concentrates on types of comparisons to analyze different kinds of political ideas, thinkers, philosophers, and texts. The following section examines the role of CPT in dealing with the problem of Eurocentrism in political thought. In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual binaries that describe the nature of Eurocentrism in political theory, such as the West and East. Finally, I will examine the character of comparative political theorist. The discussion of CPT and its impact on Eurocentrism constitutes a fundamental foundation on which to enhance comparativism in political thought. Furthermore, CPT can contribute to improving our understanding of

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<sup>12</sup> See, Pateman, Carole (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press and Mills, Charles W. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. New York: Cornell University Press.

comparativism as a methodology to study other non-Western traditions. The purpose of this dissertation is to study Qutb's and Strauss's critiques of Western modernity, and such a unique comparison would not be possible without using CPT.

### **Historical Roots of CPT**

There is no consensus among CPT's pioneers on when the notion of comparative political theorizing originated. Some of CPT's theorists argue that the beginning of political theory and philosophy was comparative in nature. The conventional idea of *theoria* represents the mission of seeking knowledge by exploring other lands and traditions. Greek historian and philosopher "Herodotus used the term *the'oria* (*θεωρ'ιης*) when he described Solon's voyage away from Athens. He intended the word to mean the acquisition of knowledge through the process of traveling to 'see the world'" (von Vacano, 2015, p. 466). The Greek notion of theory made travelling an essential element of political theorizing.

### **Medieval Political Thought and Translation as CPT Practice**

Some political theorists have claimed that CPT's point of divergence occurred within medieval political thought (Parens, 2011). Many historical events in medieval times strongly suggest cultural and philosophical interactions among philosophers of the three Abrahamic religions. Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophers and thinkers had clear interactions with Greek political philosophy. These cultural and philosophical interactions are best exemplified by Al Farabi and Averroes, who were influenced by Greek philosophers and philosophy. The medieval encounters of political philosophies

generated many works, such as those on the Greek political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle by Al Farabi and Averroes. These examples are considered early works of CPT that opened the door for many political theorists to complete their mission to achieve more multicultural political theory. These encounters in medieval political thought have been recognized as genuine attempts to create CPT works by many scholars, including Strauss, who described it as the sociology of philosophy. Furthermore, the translation of other political and philosophical texts can be considered a CPT practice because the process of translation includes commentary on the text to achieve as clear a transamination of ideas as possible.

### **Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement**

Greek intellectual traditions have had a huge influence on Arab and Islamic civilizations. Greek philosophical literature has dominated many aspects of human knowledge, including science, geometry, astronomy, and politics. The Graeco-Arabic translation movement was the key channel to transfer Greek knowledge to Arabic and Islamic areas. The translation movement started in the era of Abbasid's dynasty<sup>13</sup>, and it

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<sup>13</sup> The Umayyad dynasty's Caliphs were interested in promoting the translation of non-Arabic texts, which were highlighted by many close politicians to the Muslim ruler, such as influential ministers, secretaries and advisors. J. D. Latham (2010) emphasizes this point, he says,

“From our present point of view the most momentous step taken by the tenth caliph was what we may conveniently term his ‘translation programme’. Prompted by an awareness, either spontaneous or subtly induced by his secretariat, of the need to profit from the heritage of the older civilizations now within the orbit of Islam, the caliph made it his business to familiarize himself with those aspects of antecedent civilizations which seemed most suited to his needs” (Latham, 2010, p. 155).



lasted for almost two centuries (Gutas, 1998). The translation movement's contributions enriched Arabic/Islamic knowledge with learning from advanced Greek civilizations. Importing Greek knowledge added to Muslims' historical awareness of the other. Furthermore, the translation movement promoted the notion of tolerance among Arabic/Islamic people, as is clearly evident from Greek translated works. Gutas (1998) highlighted the significance of the translation movement for Islamic and Arab civilizations:

“Nevertheless, the Graeco-Arabic translation movement of Baghdad constitutes a truly epoch-making stage, by any standard, in the course of human history. It is equal in significance to, and belongs to the same narrative as, I would claim, that of Pericles' Athens, the Italian Renaissance, or the scientific revolution of the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, and it deserves so to be recognized and embedded in our historical consciousness.” (Gutas, 1998, p. 8)

Many historians and other scholars recognize and appreciate the significant role of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in the development of Arab and Islamic intellectual heritage (Adamson 2005). Receiving knowledge from outside the Islamic world was fashionable and profitable to translators because it strengthened their relationship with the ruling political class. Young rulers were interested in learning Greek and Persian knowledge and wisdom, which explains why the translation movement flourished during the Abbasid dynasty (Vagelpohl, 2010).

In the Abbasid period, translators employed specific tactics in their translations of non-Arabic texts. Translators such as Yahya Ibn Al-Batriq and Ishāq Ibn Hunayn had a unique way of transmitting works from Greek to Arabic. These translators viewed the process of translation as the summarization of non-Arab texts (Manzalaoui, 1974). The translation of foreign texts to create summaries led to translated works with information

added by the translator or to the erasure of information that challenged the ethical and religious standards of Islam. There are many reasons to justify the translators' method of summarizing non-Arabic philosophical texts (Bernard, 1988). First, many of these famous texts were translated for high-ranking politicians in different Islamic political dynasties, such as the Caliph and the prime minister. Therefore, during the process of translation, translators were careful to generate the most important and clearest meanings for politicians. Second, if we assume that translated books were eventually made available for the public, then the first task of translators was to make the language of translation more accessible for ordinary people.<sup>14</sup> According to Uwe Vagelpohl (2010), many philosophers were aware of the issue of producing difficult and ambiguous translated philosophical and non-philosophical books in the public sphere:

“As a commentator of Aristotelian texts, al-Farabi's intention was to make Aristotle's ideas accessible to his audience—thus, he finished a task the translators had begun by ‘re-translating’ their products, which were often obscure and formulated in an unfamiliar language, and rendering them into ‘well-known expressions in the Arabic language’ (*bi- -alf a.zin ma ʿshū ratin,inda -ahli ʿl-lis̄ ani ʿl-,arabī* ).” (Vagelpohl, 2010, p. 11)

Books such as Aristotle's *The Secret of Secrets* were attractive weapons for caliphs to use in their politics. During different dynasties in Islamic history, successful empires used literature on wisdom to guide their politics. Furthermore, many Greek texts were translated from Latin to Arabic and other languages to transmit Greek wisdom and assist

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<sup>14</sup> Many Islamic and Arabic philosophers have written books entitled (*Mukhtasar* Summary or Outlines) of many key Greek philosophical works, such as Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *The Republic*. Those attempts represent the classical philosophers' awareness of the necessity of the simplification of serious intellectual texts to make them more readable and accessible to an ordinary audience.

in building political leadership (Betegh, 2010; D'ancona, 2005). Scholars of medieval studies have stressed the origin of *Secretum Secretorum* in Arabic and Islamic traditions. Al-Ma'mun<sup>15</sup> sent a group of translators (including Al-Hajaj Ibn Matar and Yahya Ibn Al-Batriq) to bring back the most important books on wisdom written by ancient Greek philosophers (Manzalaoui, 1977; Moruwah, 2008). Muslim caliphs sought out Greek wisdom texts and were particularly interested in Aristotle. Bernard Dod (1988) explained their interest in reading Aristotle's works: "Aristotle became 'the Philosopher' and the study of philosophy became practically synonymous with the study of Aristotle" (Dod, 1988, p. 68). The reputation of Alexander the Great as one of the most famous leaders in the world contributed to the popularity of his teacher and advisor, Aristotle. Because of Aristotle's popularity as a major figure of philosophy, Muslim rulers sought familiarity with his knowledge, especially *The Secret of Secrets*. According to Latham, "[We] are informed by Ibn al-Nadim (fourth/tenth century) that this caliph's secretary, Abu 'l-'Ala' Salim, both translated and had others translate for him what the *Fihrist* describes as "the epistles (*rasa'il*) of Aristotle to Alexander"" (Latham, 2010, p. 155). Many scholars (e.g., Abdul Rahman Badawi and other classical Arab scholars such as Ibn Al-batriq) have suggested that *Secretum Secretorum* was written by Aristotle. However, many others (e.g., Ahmed Al-Turiki) believe it belongs to another writer. The influence of *Secretum Secretorum* went beyond Islamic borders to reach Europe. The genre of "mirrors for princes" originally stemmed from the European context of governance. In sum, translation is an effective CPT tool that shows comparative practices and intellectual encounters over space and time.

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<sup>15</sup> An Abbasid caliph

### **What Is CPT?**

Defining CPT is crucial because it clarifies the scope and target of this emerging field within political theory. To Dallmayr (2004), CPT is a political theory that critically affected the rise of globalization and forced political theory's structure to consider reading and interpreting different world cultures. Dallmayr's definition of CPT suggests the necessity of political theory to concentrate on intellectual and philosophical issues that interact with globalization, such as global justice, global human rights, and global citizenship. In a similar vein, "the deep forms of social, economic and political interdependence that characterize globalization have pushed the disciplines of moral and political philosophy to find a central place for the normative aspects of world politics" (Held & Maffettone, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, global politics constitutes a real challenge to traditional political theory because of the new questions that rise from global political encounters. Western political theory cannot provide answers to these challenging global questions, and it requires the tool of comparative methodology to understand the culture and context of other non-Western traditions. More specifically, "the idea of global politics challenges the traditional distinctions between the domestic and the international, territorial and non-territorial, inside and outside, as embedded in conventional conceptions of interstate politics and 'the political'" (Held & Maffettone, 2016, p. 2). The emergence of CPT is important to replace the Eurocentrism of traditional political theory and move it toward the global level. Moreover, CPT "seeks to displace the normative and analytic priority of 'Western' interpretations and definitions of fundamental political concepts such as freedom, subjectivity, and society" (Kapust & Kinsella, 2017, p. 1). It is evident that traditional Western political theory prioritized the Western world intellectual

issues and challenges while ignoring how these issues and problems are connected to other nations and regions.

Murad Idris (2016) defined CPT as “an immanent critique of political theory: the discipline presents itself as global, but in practice it is too often confined to studying a few places, histories, and bodies of knowledge” (p. 2). Idris’s definition of CPT captures CPT’s inability to claim a global field. It is hard for a relatively new and emerging trend within an old field such as political theory to achieve the goal of going global because of critical questions about the nature, scope, and limit of comparativism in political thought. We cannot judge CPT’s current core principles and intellectual status based on the recent practices because they do not reflect the complete vision of the field through its transformation from local to global. I would argue that CPT practices represent a gradual change within the traditional structure of political theory. The early literature of CPT did not cover all regions and cultures, and that was evident in its neglect of African and Latin American political thought. CPT still faces critical questions about the nature of the subfield and on who the comparative political theorists are. However, CPT is reflecting steady development regarding responses and discussions as well as the critical question about the basics of the project itself.

Godrej (2011) emphasized that Dallmayr views CPT as the “hermeneutics of difference” (Godrej, 2011, p.8). There is no doubt that the CPT project’s core aim revolves around differences and seeks interpretations to understand these differences. CPT views human intellectual differences as values to communicate rather than to create conflict, as Huntington (1993) declared. It is crucial to note that the CPT enterprise promotes the notion of dialogue among civilizations and traditions. In other words, the CPT project can be considered to be opposing intellectual and academic responses to any claims that take

cultural differences as a source of conflicts. In a similar vein, Williams and Warren (2014) defined the project of CPT as a

“practice of communication—a form of conversation across boundaries of difference—which generates not only enhanced understanding but also the potential to motivate people to take up the burden of crafting shared fates and the of the moral responsibilities that go with them.” (Williams and Warren, 2014, p. 38)

Williams and Warren’s definition of CPT suggests that it is all about practicing communication acts with others. Moreover, this conception of CPT explicitly indicates that the hegemony of Eurocentrism in the field of political theory could be the result of miscommunication between the Western canon of political theory and other non-Western political thought histories. Another definition of CPT is provided by Loubna El Amine: a “mode of theorizing that eschews both universalism and particularism” (El Amine 2016). El Amine went against some aspects of Dallmayr’s definition of CPT. Which is the quest of universalism. Furthermore, El Amine’s definition of CPT puts comparative theorizing in middle position to avoid giving CPT great expectation in practice. Moreover, through her definition of CPT, she describes the current capacity of CPT in its early stages of theorizing processes. El Amine conception of CPT temporarily resolve the identity crisis in political theory by introducing CPT as new development in the field. McWilliams (2104) defined CPT as “a means of bringing political theory up to date with the reality of our lives in a global age, where our experiences are already cross-cultural, [and] the lines between West and non-West already blurred” (McWilliams, 2014, p. 3) McWilliams’ definition of CPT lacks clarity regarding how CPT will be “bringing political theory up to date.” This is a vague statement because it makes the objective of practicing CPT limited

to updating the interpretations of political theory's canonical texts to make them meaningful in contemporary life. Euben (2010) contends that the project of CPT goes beyond McWilliams and other scholars' conceptions of comparative theorizing. Furthermore, Euben (2010) contended that comparative political theory (CPT) is a method of studying ideas that offers broad comprehension of political theory and politics. Moreover, CPT addresses the major questions that Western political philosophers have raised and examines these questions within a context that is different from which other context (Euben 2010). Furthermore, CPT offers an opportunity for different political theories to coexist with Western political theory.

Euben disagreed with McWilliams' conception of CPT in stating that CPT is not about upgrading the conventional canon of Western political thought; rather, it expands the vision of Western political theory toward other political and philosophical traditions in the world. Moreover, CPT, as I will discuss below in detail, helps to create a methodological awareness that expands the scope of inquiry toward more inclusive political theory. CPT is "the representation and reconstruction of systems of ideas that have arisen in cultures or civilizations different from our own. The intellectual challenge of accurately representing these ideational structures is ... a difference in degree more than in kind" (Williams and Warren, 2014, p. 36).

### **What Characterizes CPT?**

Although the body of literature attempts to define CPT, it fails to describe what characterizes CPT. Concentrating on identifying the underlining features of CPT will help to distinguish the field of CPT from other similar fields in social sciences. Moreover, these

underlining features contribute to clarifying the purpose of CPT in exploring and studying other parts of the world and bringing them all under one scope of inquiry. In doing so, it is crucial to understand these underlining features to realize the levels of comparability of the research and academic works in CPT. In the following sections, I will briefly describe each of these underlining features and how CPT's theorists build the characteristics of CPT.

### **1. CPT as a postcolonial mode of theorizing**

There is a contemporary trend in political theory that concentrates on the study and critique of colonialism among many major canonical Western political thinkers such as, Locke, Mill, and Tocqueville (Kohn, 2011). As a subfield, CPT existed after the era of colonialism. Consequently, CPT is a postcolonial kind of theorizing for two reasons. First, CPT opposes colonialism and colonial politics because they are based on a belief in the unbalance between imperial powers and other world's nations. In other words, colonialism promotes inequality among civilizations and nations. CPT has a postcolonial character because it aims to bring balance to the inequality among traditions of political thought. Colonialism assumes that there is no equal relationship between imperial powers and other nations' entities (Fourchard, 2011). This inequality has been promoted by colonialism because of its understanding of the differences of political and military power, and geopolitics and territory size. All these colonial conceptions of power enable it to divide nations based on power scales into superior and inferior nation states. Additionally, CPT is a postcolonial mode of theorizing because it provides the opportunity to rethink and reconceptualize many conventional basic concepts in Western political



thought, including democracy, human rights, justice, the nature of politics, and the relationship between politics and society and politics and religion (Iverson, 2010). Second, CPT criticizes Western modernity, which claims to be universal. Moreover, CPT rejects the dominance of Western modernity over other non-Western regions.

## **2. CPT as a postmodern mode of theorizing**

The concept of the postmodern was first proposed by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard in his work *The Postmodern Condition*, which noted the destroying of the “grand meta-narratives” of history, such as Marxism (Ball, 2004, p. 25). In the same vein, the universality claimed by the Western canon of political thought was questioned and criticized by comparative political theorists. The existence of CPT in the postmodern era enables it to be critical of the one-dimensional approach to studying political theory. Moreover, CPT rejects (or is critical of) the nature of modern political theory because of its rejection of ancient political philosophy and, in some cases, accuses it of being unscientific.

## **3. CPT as a postfoundational mode of theorizing**

Euben stated that twenty-first-century political theory is considered, in various ways, as a postfoundational theory (Euben 1997, 1999). The philosophical premises of the CPT project are not based on the canon of Western political thought. “Postfoundational” implies that comparative political theorizing does not need to follow the chronological order of the historical evolution of Western political theory. In CPT, the comparative study of political thought does not necessarily mean including Western political thought as

an essential element of comparative political theorizing. For example, some CPT studies concentrate on comparisons between two or more non-Western political thought traditions (e.g., comparative studies of Islamic and Chinese political philosophies). CPT takes a position beyond the political thought canon, and it is the foundational basis of political thought because it assumes that political theory does not represent particular culture or region (Euben, 2010).

#### **4. CPT as a contemporary mode of theorizing**

The existence of CPT as an academic field can be traced back to the 1990s. Dallmayr and Euben were the first political scientists to call for the urgent need to seriously consider comparative studies in political theory. It is true that the historical roots of CPT are highlighted by the early attempts toward comparative political interactions among Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and ancient Greek political thinkers and philosophers, such as Al-Farabi, Averroes, and Avicenna. However, all these cross-cultural works failed to yield a solid scholarly study of comparative theorizing because they were separated into individual comparative political theorizing practices, not into unified groups. The emerging of CPT, as a field, concentrates on contemporary issues and phenomena. The first works of Euben (1997, 1999) focus on religious extremists political thought. Euben, in some other work, study the rise of Islamism as critique of Western rationality. The majority of CPT literature dealt with contemporary issues but this does not necessary mean it ignores ancient and modern phenomena.

#### **5. CPT as an inclusive mode of theorizing**

The CPT subfield involves all human intellectual, political, philosophical, and cultural traditions in its mission for understanding and explaining different world phenomena. CPT cannot be excluded from any kind of human intellectual activities, including Western-Eurocentric thought. Although CPT considers the Western-Eurocentric canon of political thought to be an historical error that should not be accepted into the mainstream, the approach still holds that such thought should still be studied and analyzed to understand the context of the historical evolution of human intellectual activities over time. CPT is still struggling to decide what attitudes should be adapted toward the Western/European canon of political theory. Therefore, CPT struggles with “the tension between inclusion and distancing [which] is an essential anxiety in the field” (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 102). In sum, CPT will never exclude Eurocentric political thought from its scope of inquiry and it should consider it as historical development.

## **6. CPT as a multidimensional mode of theorizing**

CPT offers a multidimensional mode of theorizing and does not limit itself to particular dimension. This means that it can take a case study and compare it across time and space. In other words, CPT does not concentrate on a specific time or space; rather, it includes various times and spaces in the comparative study of political thought. CPT’s adoption of the multidimensional mode of theorizing suggests that it rejects notions of unified moral and cultural thought (Euben, 2010). However, CPT emphasizes the diversity and variety of human moral and cultural traditions. Consequently, CPT does not view or consider any political thought traditions to be superior or inferior. All political and philosophical traditions are equal in the eye of CPT.

The CPT project does not indicate a specific direction for comparative studies of political and philosophical phenomena. Therefore, the various ways of using the notion of comparativism are open for political theorists to choose from based on their philosophical premises, research questions, and depth of research inquiry. However, it is important to state that there are levels of comparisons in CPT literature. There are two levels of CPT's degrees of compressions. The first level involves mastering the knowledge of two or more different intellectual traditions (e.g., comparative political theorists whose works focus on Islamic political thought and Western political thought). This level considers the work of political theorists, as a whole, to be contributions to the CPT field. The second level is about engaging in comparative political theorizing by conducting comparative studies across different traditions or ideas (e.g., comparative political theorists whose works concentrate on conducting deep and narrow comparative analyses of specific intellectual objects such as thinkers, philosophers, and phenomena and comparing them across different contexts and traditions).

The CPT intellectual enterprise is not subject to geographical and cultural borders. Therefore, the analytical scope of CPT contains various cultural and national traditions, and it is interested to study their encounters. Dallmayr indicated seven "modes of cross-cultural encounters": conquest; conversation; assimilation and acculturation; partial assimilation and cultural borrowing; liberalism and minimal engagement; conflict and class struggle; and dialogical engagement (Dallmayr, 1996). All the encounters show that CPT has various cases to explore and study. Moreover, these encounters show that knowledge is transmittable across cultures and contexts, which emphasizes the importance of comparative perspectives in political theory and other social sciences disciplines.

## **7. CPT as an anti-Eurocentric mode of theorizing**

The main claim by CPT pioneers is that the nature of political theory field involves hegemony by Western-Eurocentric thinking. Therefore, the CPT project, by definition, involves anti-Eurocentric political thought, such as a colonial political thought that justifies slavery and racism. CPT enterprises promote the critical interrogation of Western political thought to make them focus more on human challenges and not only on the Western world's issues. However, it is important to state that the principles of the critical investigation of the Western canon of political thought must also be applied to other non-Western political thought traditions. Issues of racism, sexism, gender inequality, and slavery and other colonial phenomena appear in non-Western political thought. For instance, the political thought heritage of mirrors for princes in Islamic contexts justify the rule of political rulers regardless of their justly or unjustly ways or policies. It is crucial to note that CPT is anti-Eurocentric in the sense that it aims to reduce it hegemony to the point that Eurocentrism only speaks of the Western context and not of other contexts. As I noted above, CPT is inclusive mode of theorizing and therefore CPT cannot exclude any kind of thought regardless it is tendency.

## **8. CPT as postorientalist mode of theorizing**

CPT considers itself to be in the postorientalist position because of the nature of the questions it asks and the philosophical principles that shape its vision toward understanding political and social phenomena. Many political theorists and scientists have articulated that CPT “has, in some important respects, repeated projects of

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalism” (Thomas, 2010, p. 654). This assumption could be attractive when one thinks that the CPT project is sharing with orientalism the aim of exploring the non-Western others. However, this would be a misunderstanding of the core ideational structure of CPT because it goes far deeper than exploring other intellectual traditions to build a bridge across various political thought histories. Moreover, CPT aims to establish a dialogue among these political and philosophical traditions to change the orientation of the current political theory field toward more human-oriented issues rather than focusing only on Western issues (e.g. Dallmayr, 2010; Euben, 1997, 2010).

## **9. CPT as an interdisciplinary mode of theorizing**

CPT is interdisciplinary in the sense that it can be approached from different academic fields as long as two criteria are met: (a) the proposed study must show a comparative nature when analyzing subject matter, and (b) the proposed study must emerge from social science fields that have common interests and methodological features. For instance, it would be hard to find a connection between CPT and subjects in the natural science field, such as mathematics or geology, to conduct a comparative study that shares similar concerns and interests between the two fields.

### **What Does CPT Compare?**

The existing body of CPT contains some sense of the objects of analysis that are subject to comparative methods, including ideas and characters and geographic areas.

Moreover, some CPT works concentrate on the “cross-cultural normative implications of non-Western thinkers or texts for political problems within the West” (Godrej, 2011, p. 9). The CPT’s invitation for a more comparative study of political thought emerged as a result of the belief that Western political thought is no longer at the heart of political theory as a field (Euben, 1997, 1999, 2002 2010; Dallmayr, 1997, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; Godrej 2011; von Vacano, 2015; Jenco, 2011; Williams and Warren, 2014; Goto-Jones, 2011; and Bashir, 2013). Parel (1992) stated that Western modern political philosophy was not successful in recognizing the comparative political philosophy of the medieval era, which highlighted a clear cross-cultural comparative political philosophy among Muslims, Christians, and Jewish philosophers. Parel elaborated that “comparisons are possible only between mutually recognized philosophical traditions. Comparative political philosophy, as we have already stressed, assumes the validity of cultural pluralism, and philosophical pluralism” (Parel, 1992, pp. 13-14). Parel’s contribution to the comparative turn in political theory emphasizes equivalence among different traditions as a precondition for conducting comparisons. Strauss stresses similar concerns, but within his conception of political philosophy. According to Strauss (1988), political philosophy is “the conscious, coherent and relentless effort to replace opinions about political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them” (Strauss, 1988, p. 12) Strauss suggests that similarities in intellectual structures are significant for conducting comparisons. Consequently, this could explain Strauss’s specific choices of medieval thinkers in Islamic and Jewish intellectual traditions. Based on Strauss’s conceptions of political philosophy, do CPT scholars pay attention to specific elements like “the conscious, coherent and relentless effort” in the structure of non-Western traditions in search of equivalence with the Western canon of political thought? According

to Bashir (2013), “to seek comparisons with other intellectual traditions, and especially in context of political theory . . . requires the presence of an equally well-established non-Western canon” (Bashir, 2013, p. 27). The issue of intellectual equivalence among political thought traditions is not the only challenge for CPT, and the scope of CPT should not be limited to one object. Euben (1999) showed that concentrating on shared human dilemmas and challenging questions will serve as fine starting points for CPT projects, and they will help CPT “avoid the conclusion that cultures are morally and cognitively incommensurable without imposing supposedly universal categories and moral rules” (Euben, 1999, p. 10). By the same token, comparative political theorists have argued that “political theory is about ‘human and not merely Western dilemmas’” and “[CPT scholars] have inaugurated this new sub-field by analyzing political ideas of influential non-Western thinkers in the modern period and comparing them with Western political theorists” (Bashir, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, CPT “directly confronts the challenges presented by encounters with other texts and ideas, while also seeking to highlight how these encounters may disturb or dislocate our familiar understandings of politics” (Godrej, 2009, p. 138). There is no doubt that CPT attempts to create comparisons among different thinkers and philosophers across Western and non-Western political traditions to arrive at a better understanding of others and ourselves. However, it is important to note that “the comparison here strives to interpret comparable as ‘similar,’ or at least as ‘functionally equivalent’” (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 108). It is controversial to argue that there are conditions regarding whether we can conduct comparisons among different political traditions. More important, comparative political theorizing can change the nature of political theory canon. Goto-Jones (2011) stressed the impact of CPT over Western political theory and elucidated the growing roots of comparativism since the time of



ancient political thought. Many political theorists have seen the Western canon of political thought as a continuing series of ideas related to each other and evolving over history. However, Goto-Jones (2011) stressed that CPT highlights the discontinuity in the canon of Western political thought through the performance of a comparative analysis of political theory on different levels.

The canon of Western political thought represents a continuity of ideas that rose within and were integrated into the Western context. The emergence of CPT shakes common beliefs in the Western canon of political thought by questioning and criticizing the universality of Eurocentric political theory. Consequently, the existence of CPT generates the claim that all political theory is comparative in some way. Supporters of this argument have recalled the original Greek roots of the word theory, *theoria* as evidence of comparative nature in early political theory. Goto-Jones (2011) rightly noted that there is no need to argue that the history of political thought is comparative. Rather, the comparative turn in political theory should be central to theorizing political and philosophical phenomena because that will generate various approaches to study political thought histories.

### **Theoretical Approaches to CPT**

The existing body of CPT literature represents different kinds of methodological approaches and tendencies regarding how to conduct comparative studies of political thought. Mapping CPT subfields is crucial to comprehend the directions that comparative political theorizing is taking. Moreover, identifying theoretical approaches to CPT helps illuminate the boundaries among political thought traditions and how to build conceptual bridges to facilitate dialogue or comparative contact between one or more traditions.

Table 1.1 shows approaches adapted by comparative political theorists to study political thought traditions. The normative approach to CPT attempts to seek a “moral end” (von Vacano, 2015). In other words, this approach concentrates on setting the norms and morals of global levels of different human traditions to achieve a better understanding of each other intellectual traditions. In contrary, interpretive approaches to CPT aim to “broaden knowledge of political questions or issues, without an underlying prescriptive object” (von Vacano, 2015, p. 468).

All indicated approaches to CPT show comparative theorists’ reaction to the Western canon of political thought. A variety of comparative analysis of the history of political thought in different contexts highlights the position of CPT as a subfield concerning Eurocentric political theory. These approaches show some extreme and moderate positions toward Eurocentric political theory, such as some CPT theorists’ call for decentering any type of political thought from Western political theory (Godrej, 2009, 2011). If we do this, how will we replace much of the core of Western accomplishments in political theory, such as the meaning of political or social contract tradition? Other approaches to CPT suggest the method of dialogue as a tool to communicate with other non-Western traditions (e.g. Dallmayr). This method will enrich the knowledge of different traditions by transmitting different perspectives about politics and society worldwide.

**Table 2*****Comparative Political Theory Approaches<sup>16</sup>***

<b>Normative Approaches to Comparative Political Theory</b>	
Hermeneutical-Dialogic Approach	Fred Dallmayr
Engagement Approach	Andrew March
Global Democracy Approach	Melissa Williams & Mark Warren
Cosmopolitan Approach	Farah Godrej
<b>Interpretive Approaches to Comparative Political Theory</b>	
“Global History” Approach	Michael Freeden & Andrew Vincent, and Antony Black
The Phenomenological Approach	Roxanne Euben, and Nader Hashemi
The Recentring Political Theory Approach	Leigh Jenco
The Conceptual-Metanarrative Approach	Diego von Vacano
The Historical-Explanatory Approach	Roxanne Euben; Susan McWilliams

In this dissertation, I adapt a combination of normative and interpretive paradigms to study political theory of Strauss and Qutb. This study will combine hermeneutical-dialogic and phenomenological approaches. The hermeneutical-dialogical-phenomenological approach (HDP) is based on two major methodological principles: hermeneutics and dialogue. These methodological principles concentrate on studying different phenomena such as modernity, fundamentalism, and Islamism. Dallmayr best illustrated the performance of comparative political theorizing based on hermeneutical and dialogical principles. The second methodological principle is phenomenological. It represents comparative political theorizing with a focus on studying political and philosophical phenomena. This methodological principle is best exemplified by Euben’s works. In her CPT works, she focuses on phenomena such as fundamentalism and radical Islamism. For the purpose of this study, the hermeneutical-dialogical-

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<sup>16</sup> I have been inspired to create this table from von Vacano, (2015). *The Scope of Comparative Political Theory*

phenomenological approach will serve as a methodological tool for analyzing the crisis of modernity by comparing Western and non-Western perspectives. It will help to set the ground for a comparison between Strauss and Qutb based on hermeneutical and dialogical bases. However, there are some problems with using a dialogic approach to CPT: “Including these voices does not always take the explicit form of a ‘dialogue.’ Often, cross-cultural theorists may simply examine the articulated utterances of individuals whose contributions to political theory are typically excluded” (Jenco 2007, p. 744). This study concentrates on using HDP to analyze the phenomena of modernity and Islamism through comparing the critiques of Qutb and Strauss toward the crisis of Western modernity based on hermeneutical and dialogical bases.

### **Comparing Ideas and Phenomena: Modernity and Fundamentalism**

CPT does not limit itself to conducting comparisons among particular units of analysis; rather, it is open to various intellectual objects for comparison. Nevertheless, I argue that the most important and complete function of CPT would be generating comparative studies of political ideas and phenomena in the first place.

The CPT quest has similar advantages to some other comparative social sciences’ subfields, such as comparative philosophy, that prove useful in the promotion of the cross-cultural analysis of political and philosophical traditions. Panikkar (1988) stated that

“the independent status of comparative philosophy should be distinguished from the conventional notions of comparison used by all systematic thinkers ... every philosopher, willy nilly, stands in dialogue with the surrounding

philosophical world (or some other ancient one).” (Panikkar, 1988, pp. 117-118)

Panikkar invited comparative political theorists to be more innovative and to go beyond the conditional method of the comparative study of systematic thinkers. This implies that CPT should be looking for a recognizable canon in non-Western political thought tradition to achieve the perfect comparison. Moreover, Panikkar’s conception of comparative theorizing contends with conducting comparative analyses of different study objects than of systematic thinkers. This could involve conducting the CPT of political thought of different histories, which requires considering more than one thinker and philosopher, but it could also involve studying the context that shaped such ideas in different political environments (e.g., using the Cambridge School approach in comparative political theorizing).

For the subfield of CPT, the beginning of comparative political theorizing came with a comparative study of systematic thinkers in Islamist political thought and Western political thought. This started with Euben’s (1997, 1999) works on radical Islamist thought represented by Sayyid Qutb and provided a unique understanding of fundamentalism. Euben argued that “the fundamentalist insistence on divine sovereignty must be understood, in part, as a rejection of and rebuttal to modern theories of political sovereignty and the rationalist epistemology that justifies them” (Euben, 1997, p. 28). On the level of comparison of systematic thinkers, Euben took “Qutb’s critique of post-Enlightenment rationalism as a point of departure for a specific comparison with critiques of modernity in contemporary Western political thought” (Euben, 1999, p. 123). Furthermore, CPT scholars have been aware that radical “different non-Western systems of thought can be treated as variants of critiques of Western modernity and rationality.

Westerners often recognize and participate in such critiques when they originate in a more familiar geographic and linguistic setting” (Bashir, 2013, p. 2). However, considering non-Western political thought as only a critique of Western modernity is a reduction of the political and philosophical horizons of world’s political thought traditions. Moreover, instead of conventionalizing non-Western political thought traditions as a critique of Western political thought, we should explore them as independent traditions that are capable of forming their own modernity (e.g., Arab/Islamic political thought and the attempt to create Islamic modernity).

Other CPT scholars have different and more oblique conceptions of how to be a comparative political theorist. Godrej (2011) stated that to practice CPT truly, scholars should show a serious commitment, including the willingness to learn the foreign language of non-Western political and philosophical traditions. Moreover, it is in the nature of a CPT scholar to be familiar with the cultural and geographical contexts of non-Western traditions. For instance, if some Western-trained political theorists want to be involved in a CPT subfield, based on Godrej’s understanding of CPT, it will be difficult for them to practice CPT because it will require a new journey of learning a new language and separating the scope of theorizing from a Western to a non-Western focus. Moreover, a Western political theorist “needs cultural immersion to avoid imposing European categories on his or her studies of non-Western texts and authors” (El Amine, 2016, p. 105). Second, these preconditions of CPT practices are money and time consuming, and that will make the quest of seeking to conduct CPT studies limited to those who already belong to non-Western contexts.

CPT work requires already knowing the methodology to be applied to the research. Unfortunately, many scholars claim that their works are condemned to be CPT, but

achieving results in one intellectual field does not necessarily mean it is a work of CPT. I argue that showing the use of comparative methods in research by comparing the level of thinkers or ideas makes the case for CPT scholarship. Of course, conducting a comparative analysis is a major activity for CPT theorists. The comparison of political thought can be considered on two levels. First, scholars can be considered CPT theorists if they practice comparative theorizing directly or indirectly. CPT scholars should be conducting comparative studies between two or more thinkers or traditions. Second, scholars should be considering CPT theorists based on their intellectual works that contain some aspects of comparative analysis in the broad sense.

### **Why Use CPT?**

The CPT school of thought emerged mainly as a response to and as a critique of Western modernity and Western-Eurocentric hegemonies over academia (Bashir 2013). Besides CPT's critical position regarding the Western canon of political thought, it has many uses to enrich the field of political theory studies. CPT can be used to highlight the significance of particular traditions or to study specific thinkers or ideas and their relationship to other intellectual traditions (Godrej, 2011). CPT provides a rich opportunity to all different intellectual world traditions to be in an equal position in CPT's scope of analysis. More important, another advantage of CPT "is that it makes possible many such unimagined connections and conversations" (Euben, 1999, p. 13). For example, the core purpose of this thesis is about comparing the political thought of Strauss and Qutb. Such a comparative study would find it difficult to exist in the context of the conventional Western canon of political theory because of the dominating Western context that excludes any non-Western traditions from its scope of study and analysis.

Moreover, CPT can help free texts and ideas from governed interpretations (Godrej, 2011). This helps create multi-interpretation environments that enhance the understanding of political theory's texts.

Some CPT scholars (e.g., Euben, 2003, 2006; McWilliams, 2014) call for specific kinds of comparative theorizing that concentrates on the research works of traveling political theorists. The pioneers of this type of CPT highlight its usefulness by exploring and examining different perspectives and contexts. Moreover, as McWilliams stated,

“thinking about travel encourages theorists to adopt an intellectual position of *in-betweenness*: expansive and creative but aware of human limitation, imaginative but aware of material realities, and attuned to the universal but understanding the importance of the particular.” (McWilliams, 2014, p. 140)

Furthermore, CPT as an emerging subfield will direct political theorists' attention to the need for evaluating our methodological awareness and for moving toward more plural approaches and methods in studying political theory various traditions. Godrej (2009) showed that CPT scholars have concentrated on the “question of civilizational ‘canonical’ groupings, arguing that the content of any giving canon is important simply because informed people tend to do their theorizing by drawing on resources created in the past, against a background of ideas and precedents” (Godrej, 2009, p. 140). Furthermore, thinking outside the canon of Western political thought will open new opportunities for exploring new innovative answers through the comparative study of political theory. CPT “claims of an unusual but superior kind of seeing. Theorizing thus seems to require that we learn to see—and teach others to see—through what scholars have often called ‘new eyes’” (McWilliams, 2014, p. 381). For instance, modernity, defined “as a ‘welter of ideas and practices deriving from European Enlightenment, delineates the



arena in which political theorists try to reach a more inclusive understanding of the political through CPT” (Bashir, 2013, p. 17). The issue of Western modernity illustrates the massive gap among intellectual traditions. Consequently, most leading comparative political theorists concentrate on “making the claim that there is an urgent need to bridge the gap in Western political theory between the ‘supposedly’ irrational other and the ‘enlightened’ Western self” (Bashir, 2013, p. 18).

CPT has been used to change the nature and scope of the field of political theory. CPT scholars proposed two ways to deal with Western political theory. Godrej suggested that we should decenter political theory and make its methodological concentration a more cosmopolitan one. Jenco (2007) proposed something different by recommending re-entering political theory and moving away field of theory away from Eurocentrism. Moreover, “Western political theory is parochial and . . . has no claim to universal truth; rather non-Western traditions should be taken as sources of original theory, not just ‘case studies’ for ‘existing theories’” (El Amine, 2016, p. 104).

Euben (1999) highlights the importance in CPT in raising important questions about how one can establish a conversation among different world traditions. Euben insisted on the necessity of having conversation among different cultural and intellectual traditions around the globe, even though they involved widely divergent ideas and practices. Of course, timeless questions contribute to highlighting the links among world political thought traditions; however, these questions cannot be considered the main reason for universality among different political philosophy traditions in the world (Euben, 1999). CPT will explore new areas of inquiry by bringing more non-Western issues, concepts, and ideas into traditional debates on the history of political thought. This

will open the door for new and innovative answers to old questions by moving the debate within different intellectual contexts.

CPT has created new methodological insights that will change political theorists' attitude toward reading and viewing political theory canon. Moreover, CPT aims to provide a new reading of Western political and philosophical traditions within a comparative analysis of ideas. Moreover, CPT provides new methods to interact with the traditional interpretations of political and philosophical texts (Goto-Jones, 2011). According to Dallmayr (2004), the hermeneutical-dialogical approach is useful for the political theory field because it will help to "move toward a more genuine universalism, and beyond the spurious 'universality' traditionally claimed by the Western canon and by some recent intellectual movements" (Dallmayr, 2004, p. 253). CPT can make political theorizing move toward a global level by "develop[ing] a critical, cross-cultural, globally minded theoretical orientation." (McWilliams, 2014, p. 6). However, one of the criticisms of the comparative methodology of ideas is that it perpetuates the discourse that Western ideas are superior and mainstream in the world thoughts. Additionally, considering Western thought as global means that non-Western political thought is secondary (Goto-Jones, 2011).

Williams and Warren (2014) emphasized the importance of CPT by using it as a proper environment that helps to establish global democracy. Moreover, the authors believed that CPT may perform "a role in building discursive capacities for democratic political action that responds to the consequences of globalization" (Williams and Warren, 2014, p. 36). CPT has the ability to create political imaginary domains that host global theories and practices. Furthermore, CPT, with its methodology, can study political thought cross-culturally among different traditions and provide global multicultural

perspectives for many important issues. For instance, global political theories such as human rights, global justice, and global democracy are suitable for studying using CPT. Moreover, CPT “reveals those often forgotten resources and influences that make us who we are as well as what we might become” (Williams and Warren, 2014, p. 48). This will enhance political theory in its methodology because discovering new intellectual resources encourages political theorists to expand their political inquiry to reach new areas of research and theorizing. For example, the comparative study of political ideas highlights the importance of viewing political thought from a broad perspective that exceeds regional and local cultural perceptions (Goto-Jones, 2011). CPT goes beyond the narrow contextualizing of political ideas and puts them into a larger scale of understanding political philosophies within different cultural traditions (Goto-Jones, 2011; Bashir, 2013). The global turn in political theory led by the subfield of CPT “simultaneously resists the assumption that cultural traditions are morally and cognitively incommensurable on the one hand and, on the other, that they are internally homogeneous or unified” (Euben, 2010, p. 260). CPT “enables new modes of political theorizing: it offers the means by which a theorist can formulate questions about political life—and about the cross-cultural encounter itself—from within the framework constituted by other texts, practices, and self-understandings” (Lenco, 2007, p. 742).

### **CPT, Eurocentrism, and Orientalism**

The CPT approaches emerged as a response to and critique of Eurocentric dominance over the field of political theory. Before the rise of CPT, scholars such as Edward Said offered a serious critique of Orientalism and showed that Western scholars try to understand the Orient based on their own terms and rules (Said, 1979).

Unavoidably, discussing CPT as a topic involves Eurocentrism and orientalism in some way because Eurocentrism constitutes hegemony over political theory in academia and CPT rebels against it. Also, CPT forms another kind of criticism of Eurocentric dimension of understanding of the world. Consequently, many critics of the CPT enterprise claim that CPT is similar to orientalism and that it repeats orientalists' works. I argue that CPT has some similarities with orientalism, but it is still different because CPT has a deeper, freer, and more innovative understanding of the world.

In discussing CPT and its relationship to Eurocentrism and orientalism, it is important to ask what Eurocentrism means. Moreover, the idea of modernity is central and crucial to comprehending CPT, Eurocentrism, and Orientalism. Dirlik (1999) stated that "just as modernity is incomprehensible without reference to Eurocentrism, Eurocentrism as a concept is specifiable only within the context of modernity" (Dirlik, 1999, p. 1-2). Associating Eurocentrism with modernity is plausible because the notion of Eurocentrism is a "relatively modern construct" (Amin, 2009, p. 178). Furthermore, Eurocentrism is not only structured in institutions; rather, it is [an] attitude as well (Godrej 2011). The qualities of institutional Eurocentrism are evident in the Eurocentric tendencies in Western universities and academia. The problem with this is that Eurocentrism in political thought and other disciplines claims the universality and the superiority of their conceptions of the world based on Western values only. Furthermore, "a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world, where the particular historical trajectory of EuroAmerican societies was to end up as a teleology worldwide in marking time" (Dirlik 1999, p. 3). Additionally, the universality claimed by Western political theory critically interrogated by other non-Western political thought traditions (Parel, 1992).

Eurocentrism can be defined as “the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (and, generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those of other cultures” (Pop, 2008, p. 1). The idea of modernity is associated with Eurocentrism, so the paradigm of modernity that dominates the world is “Eurocentric modernity” (Dirlik, 1999, p.3). The problem with dealing with Eurocentrism is knowing what CPT and other similar comparative subfields should do with Eurocentric hegemonic thinking. According to Bashir (2013), “As per Dallmayr’s description, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics provides a way to steer a course between “Eurocentrism” and “Euro-denial” and find a midpoint where alone a dialogue between the East and the West can flourish” (Bashir, 2013, p. 17). According to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, hermeneutic-dialogic approach in CPT is a compromise between accepting the fact that Eurocentrism is dominating Western academia and is considered the global standard for other civilized non-Western nations and civilizations. In a similar vein, Dallmayr agreed with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, which explains Dallmayr’s adoption of a dialogical approach to non-Western political tradition. Dallmayr created a methodological approach to bridge the gap among different traditions, which would place all the different traditions in one dialogue. The most important thing about Dallmayr’s approach is that it contains hermeneutical and dialogical features that enable the elimination of Eurocentrism and Eurocentric political theory. According to Dirlik (1999), “for the last century, but especially since World War II, Eurocentrism has been the informing principle in our construction of history—not just in Euro-American historiography, but in the spatial and temporal assumptions of dominant historiographies worldwide” (Dirlik, 1999, p.3). Therefore, it is important to view Eurocentrism as a natural historical development that has highlighted norms and values in Western context

and expanded in the world because of the globalization movement in world history. However, Goto-Jones (2011) stated, “there is an often unspoken missionary element in CPT that seeks not only to make the field inclusive but actually to convert” (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 98). Converting political thought to be only non-Western or to be one-dimensional will make CPT useless and meaningless because CPT survives on the diversity of political theory; without it, there is no meaning and reason for comparisons.

As I mentioned earlier, the hegemony of Eurocentrism has generated a rebellion in the social sciences academic fields. Rebel subfields such as CPT, comparative philosophy, and area studies have similar concentrations and concerns in political and philosophical phenomena. This could lead to some confusion regarding how to differentiate among these subfields. According to Goto-Jones (2011), “some other branches of political theory, such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism, are able to engage with this complicated politics of knowledge.” (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 98). In addition, these subfields concentrate on criticizing the tendency toward Eurocentrism and colonialism and create new discourse that decolonizes knowledge through comparative dialogue (Goto-Jones, 2011; Godrej, 2011). More important, what are the differences between CPT and other intellectual disciplines such as orientalist and area studies? (Godrej, 2009). Not only is there confusion on the issue of distinguishing between CPT and other subfields, but there are similarities in political theory and area studies in, for example, their neglect of some aspects. Some of CPT’s original insights can be found in the area studies. The majority of studies in this field were devoted to exploring the political thinking in different regions; the studies were conducted by scholars from other academic fields such as cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and orientalist studies (Goto-Jones, 2011). Eurocentric political theory did not recognize the local

patterns of political thinking, possibly because of differing intellectual interests or because the Western canon of political thought viewed non-Western political thought as inferior.

The Eurocentricity of many social sciences' fields fails to recognize non-Western thought. The problem is that Eurocentric political theory is well structured throughout its canon. Therefore, Eurocentric political theory requires an equal and well-structured canon in non-Western thought to recognize it. This issue is largely implicit to almost all non-Western political thought. Another issue related to CPT and similar subfields in social sciences is that they have common concerns that are best exemplified by postcolonial studies. Furthermore, "postcolonial theory draws attention to how categories and values particular to Western elite experience, especially those associated with 'modernity,' come to be constituted as universally applicable to societies everywhere" (Jenco, 2007, p. 742). The hegemony of Eurocentrism over social sciences is not acceptable anymore, and there are newly emerging fields and subfields in social sciences that concentrate on marginalize Eurocentrism's impact by criticizing it and providing different intellectual paradigms.

### **Multiple Binaries: West and Non-West, Self and Other, We and Them**

It is important for CPT theorists to keep in mind that "western canonical authors have been examined, critiqued, and historically situated with a level of frequency and sophistication which would be problematic to underestimate or ignore" (Hassanzadeh 2015, p. 2). Meanwhile, non-Western political thought is significant because it contributes to intellectual activities and non-Western understanding the meaning of political and religious in their own context. The multiple binary, such as we and them, represents the

mainstream of political theory and the others different political thought. There is a “historical evidence from case studies of actual East-West encounters . . . suggests that the interplay between cultural otherness and canonicity should constitute an integral part of any approach based on philosophical hermeneutics” (Bashir, 2013, p. 10). Therefore, the rise of CPT is concerned with going beyond cultural and geographical borders of the Western world to reach other non-Western realms. This calls for applying conventional binaries that represent some cultural and geographical aspects of each part of the globe. It is true that CPT’s main objectives are bridging the gap between Western and non-Western political thought traditions; however, this will not combine the West and non-West into one unified entity. As Goto-Jones (2011) put it, “in the shadows of this enterprise [CPT], we might hear the words of Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Ballad of East and West’: ‘Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet’” (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 88). Moreover, the CPT’s practices should not affect the current existence of such binaries because eliminating them will lead to the core meaning of doing comparative analysis in political thought being lost. If all the different political theories and thoughts and all Western and non-Western traditions are combined into one global tradition, then the cultural and geographical contexts would not be enough to help us conduct CPT analysis. Furthermore, these contextual binaries existed a long time ago with the emergence of the intellectual activities in the Western and Eastern worlds. As El Amine (2016) said, “as Amartya Sen does, one can wonder whether it is in fact true that ‘the West was the West long before it was modern’” (El Amine, 2016, p. 111). Some other CPT scholars have different argument about crossing boundaries. Godrej (2009, 2011) argued that cosmopolitan political thought tries to go beyond traditional binaries, such as West vs. non-West. More precisely, Godrej (2011) contended that comparative political



theorizing “rather than seeking universal values in these texts, or rejecting the possibility any present-day knowledge in any ‘other’ ideas, should see new political insights as potentially emerging from any set of resources, present or past, ‘our’ traditions, or ‘others’” (Godrej, 2011, p. 162). I argue that these binaries are necessary for understanding the contextual differences of each geographical, cultural, or even civilizational object formed in the process of conducting a comparative analysis of political thought. Moreover, these binaries can tell us about the time binaries of the contexts that shaped political ideas and histories. In other words, “if we reconceptualize the ‘we’ of the history of political thought as ‘moderns’ rather than ‘Westerners,’ then the ‘they’ are the pre-moderns, not the Easterners” (El Amine, 2016, p. 111). CPT needs to concentrate more on comparative study of political thought within the impact of the binaries of the West and East. Moreover, Goto-Jones (2011) contended that the goal of CPT should not be only about reaching new comprehension beyond the different political thought traditions. CPT should create interaction among political, philosophical, and intellectual heritages within critical global conversations, which generates new insights and understandings of global phenomena (Goto-Jones, 2011). Some cases and issues in the history of political thought greatly benefited from the role of binaries in highlighting the edges of the cultural and geographical contexts that adapted to the development of political ideas. For example, “the shared phenomenon of modernity should direct our thinking (at least in some crucial aspects) beyond [the] East and West, to avoid the continuing essentialization of East and West in CPT and related fields” (El Amine, 2016, p. 106). This issue of historical and conceptual binaries is similar of the ancient and modern differentiation in the history of political theory. Furthermore, distinguishing between ancient and modern political theory is beneficial for political theorists and students of political thought because it helps

them to understand better each historical period's contribution to human thought. Accordingly, the ancient tradition of political theory is a rich and diverse intellectual and textual resource. Many political philosophers have used classical ancient traditions of politics to develop their own response to timeless challenging questions (Yack, 2010). Concepts such as human nature, the state of nature, and social contracts can help us understand the distinction between ancient and modern political traditions (Levy 2010, p. 1326). More important, the binary of "we" and "they" states, for instance, that these issues are not an abstract concern; rather, they are a highly practical matter. More precisely, Anandita Balslev proposes that "the hallmark of our time is that 'technology has killed the distance', the dialectical relationship between self and other, us and they, is no more perceived only as a purely abstract or theoretical concern" (Bashir, 2013, p. 2). Many CPT scholars believe that the West and East divide is a major part of the Western/Eurocentric accusation in the Western canon of political thought. Many critics of canonical Western political theory "worry that the East–West divide is misleading and that postcolonial theory tends to essentialize cultures" (von Vacano, 2015, p. 472).

CPT's main claim is that it conducts comparative analyses of different political thought traditions. Such binaries like "we" and "other" are important to conduct a comparative study of political thought. In other words, "in order to compare two entities, you have to start by asserting their separateness, which risks generating (rather than dissolving) a 'them' and 'us' outlook" (Goto-Jones, 2011, p. 102). Therefore, it seems that these binaries help to conduct comparative studies of political thought because comparative analysis searches for differences and similarities in phenomena. Therefore, the comparative methodology assumes that each political thought tradition represents different contexts that essentially fit the binaries of "us" and "them."

These binaries constitute a problem for many scholars, including scholars in postcolonial and cultural studies. The problem is the idea the West represents that, namely, that somehow Western societies and cultures are superior to many other non-Western nations. This is evident in the history of the West's Orientalist and imperialist attitudes.<sup>17</sup> Euben (2010) stated that these binaries provide an advantage for CPT. It is crucial to use them as a methodological tool to build conceptual and intellectual bridges among different political thought traditions. Euben (2010) stressed that CPT's theorists rise the issue of uses cultural and geographical binaries, including the Western and non-Western world and cultures. According to Euben, pioneers of CPT critically inquire as to how these binaries are beneficial to understanding the differences in global traditions of political and philosophical thought.

The contextual differences of each political theory tradition promote many constructed binaries such as "West" and "non-West." A similar issue is applicable to non-Western philosophical and political traditions. Most Non-Western traditions likewise view Western traditions from the viewpoint of "us" and the "other." However, these binaries constitute the starting point of engagement in a comparative study of political ideas that enhances the scope of research and analysis in political theory.

### **What Constitutes a Comparative Political Theorist?**

The existing academic fields in contemporary social sciences help to identify scholars' research and scientific identities. Moreover, scholars' academic works can tell

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<sup>17</sup> For more information of imperialist tendency in Western world, see Pitts, Jennifer (2010). Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism. *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 13, pp. 211-235

us about their fields. For example, audiences can identify political scientists and sociologists through their publications, lectures, and academic departments. However, such identifying is not easy when it comes to describing who is a comparative political theorist. There is no doubt that the first candidate field is political science, specifically political theory and political philosophy subfields.<sup>18</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that to become comparative political theorists, scholars should commit themselves to studying political science. CPT can be accessed through many social sciences' fields with similar comparative scholarship within their own scope of analysis and research. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we should not forget that CPT is an interdisciplinary mode of theorizing, which can be reached through out many other fields. It is not exclusive to political science.

Many political scientists (e.g., Godrej, Euben, McWilliams) have argued that there is a problem with political theorists' self-understanding (Godrej, 2011). This problem can be considered as a reflection of the greater challenges related to the identity crisis that faces political theory in general. This crisis arose as part of the challenge of considering the best way to make political theory a global field. Some political theorists argue that the essence of early political theory was inherently comparative. As Godrej argued, the comparative tendency has been neglected in modern and contemporary political science. Broadly, comparative political theorists considered using comparative methodology in their work to generate comparisons among thinkers and traditions and among Western and non-Western contexts. Other CPT scholars have different conceptualizations of who

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<sup>18</sup> The majority of CPT pioneers such as Dallmayr, Euben, Godrej, and March earned their PhDs in political science. Consequently, this support the claim of CPT is related to political science.

is a comparative political theorist. McWilliams and Euben have described comparative political theorists as travelling thinkers or theorists. The conception of comparative political theorists is based on the early Greek notion of theory (*theoria*), which means the search for knowledge in travelling to different lands. This understanding of comparative political theorist as travelling theorists has precedence in non-Western political and philosophical traditions.<sup>19</sup> As McWilliams stated, “stories about travel and travelers have been a part of the history of Western political thought from its beginnings, dating back to the ancient Greek practice of *theoria*” (McWilliams 2014, p. 5).

Godrej (2009) highlighted that “good comparative political theorists must reconcile methodological imperatives that seem at odds with one another.” (Godrej, 2009, p. 164) This implies that modern methodologies of Western political theory, and social sciences generally, do not have the ability to cross Western/European geographical and intellectual borders to include other non-Western knowledge. Bashir (2013) emphasized that CPT scholars accepted Edward Said’s thesis on Orientalism. CPT theorists have stated that there is a strong relationship concerning “exteriority and power which lies at the core of Western rationality. This insight into the nature of Western rationalist discourse makes it problematic for these theorists to use popular methods of comparison prevalent in Western social science” (Bashir 2013, p. 3). By criticizing Western rationalism, comparative theorists aim to generate comparative political theorizing to expand the canon of Western political theory and include non-Western political texts and thinkers. In doing so, many scholars of CPT, including Dallmayr, have

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<sup>19</sup> In Islamic philosophy and history, Ibn Battuta was a prominent scholar in medieval era. Another example can be the prime ministers in Islamic Caliphates. The majority of this politicians were not originally Arab, there were traveling scholars pointed to their positions due to their respected account of knowledge in politics and other sciences.

adapted Gadamer's hermeneutical and dialogical method to study ideas (Bashir 2013). This comparative perspective brings to our awareness different understandings of rationalism and provides new insights on theorizing.

I argue that looking for innovative answers to old questions and methods of studying political ideas is an essential task of CPT scholars. Consequently, CPT theorists should consider innovation as an aim when practicing comparative political theorizing in research. Innovation is associated with approaching new areas of study and analysis that could never be focused on before. Euben's work on fundamentalism and radical Islamism is innovative because it provides a new horizon of understanding of Eastern and Western political thought (Euben, 1997, 1999).

CPT should not replace Western political theory and should not let non-Western political thought take the place of Western/European political thought. Instead, CPT should play the role of bringing Western and non-Western political thought traditions together. Consequently, comparative political theorists should act as mirrors of political thought history comparisons. Therefore, "the idea of the theorist as mirrorer, then, can be leveraged to make the point that political theory involves a special kind of creative engagement with the world" (McWilliams, 2014a, p. 386).

### **Comparative Political Theory, Strauss and Qutb**

One of CPT's major principles is that all intellectual, political, and philosophical traditions in the world must be compared with equality and recognition. Moreover, CPT as methodology of this thesis contributes in making the comparison between Strauss and Qutb possible and plausible.

Strauss interpreted and read past thinkers and their ideas as they presented their intellectual characters in the past. The Strauss methodology is crucial as a major principle for interpretation of political and philosophical texts. In this thesis, I use CPT to compare the political thoughts of Strauss and Qutb in terms of their attitudes toward the crisis of Western modernity. Moreover, CPT allows me to create a conversation between Qutb and Strauss on many intellectual issues, including how Strauss viewed Islamism as a religious solution to the crisis of Western modernity. In contrast, Qutb expressed a negative attitude toward Strauss's thoughts and proposed solutions of the crisis of modernity that rejected all solutions, theories, and ideas that did not come from the divine authority in Islam only.

Strauss and Qutb's thoughts and legacies have raised complex issues in the interpretation of their political thoughts. The followers of Strauss and Qutb have different understandings of their teachers, and the followers contended that their understandings reflect the intentions of their teachers. In the case of Strauss, there is controversy about how to read Strauss's legacy, or what some call Straussianism. However, Qutb's political thought created much less debate because his followers' behaviors and attitudes match the intellectual premises of Qutb's core political and religious ideas.

In this thesis, I address questions related to contemporary issues such as Islamism. Therefore, I choose to use three different types of CPT's interpretive and normative research approaches to investigate how we can understand Islamism better and how similar perspectives (e.g., Strauss's response to modernity) can inform us how to use religion to meet political objectives.

Strauss's methodological principle of conceptualizing past ideas and thinkers in the same way appeared in their times help us to better understand them. The problem

with Qutb's political ideas is that they still influenced how contemporary realities were shaped. In other words, the followers of Qutb's approach to a changing reality claimed that enforcing Islamic religion is the only way to have an ideal society. The literature that focused on Islam and Islamism did not highlight that the uniqueness of the Islamist religious solution was not completely exclusive to Islam. CPT tells us that another political philosopher and another religion have claimed the religious solution to the crisis of modernity. Strauss proposed that the Judaic religion can be useful as a solution to avoid the crisis of modernity. What is interesting about Qutb and Strauss is that both are teachers—not related to any clergy group—and they promote religion as a solution to fix the problems that Western modernity produced. Usually, clerics and religious scholars propose using religion as a comprehensive solution to our problems, but that is not so in the case of Strauss and Qutb.



## Chapter Three

### Political Theory of Leo Strauss: Perplexity in Facing Modernity

#### Introduction

In her book, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, Anne Norton stated that “the sociologist Gershon Shafir . . . thinks that the world is currently divided between the followers of Leo Strauss and the followers of Sayyid Qutb” (Norton, 2004, p. 110). Shafir’s argument refers to the failure of the liberal system in the Western context, and, therefore, it falls into the Strauss-Qutb divide. In other words, this suggests a quarrel between the ideological schools of conservatism and liberalism. Both Strauss and Qutb represent aspects of conservative political thought in their writings. Even though Strauss does not consider himself a conservative, many writers describe him as a “conservative antimodern” (McAllister, 1995, p. 8). Additionally, some scholars associate Strauss with the neoconservative movement in the United States. Some of them even go to extremes and label followers of Strauss “Leo-conservatives” (Sporl and Br/der Spiegel, 2003).

Anne Norton described the general behavior of the conservative movement toward modernity: “All conservatives reject modernity (which is understood in many different ways) while at the same time [wish] to preserve ‘Western civilization’” (McAllister, 1995, p. 10). The notions of liberal progress and change cause Conservatives’ rejection of modernity.

It is important to note that despite Strauss’s examination of the crisis of modernity, he does not offer clear solutions to the crisis. For example, in his lecture, “Why We Remain Jews,” Strauss stated that there is no promising solution for the contemporary Jewish problem (Strauss, 1997b). Strauss doubted the usefulness of having a solution for every

problem because this idea relates to modernity. In other words, “The idea that for every problem there must be a solution is an Enlightenment fantasy of reason” (Smith, 2005, p. 12).

Many thinkers and interpreters of political thought texts have stated that Strauss includes esoteric writing in his books and articles, which requires special attention by the readers to be able to read between the lines. Many liberal scholars have emphasized the esotericism in Strauss’s writings, including Shadia Drury (Drury, 2005). However, this liberal critique of Leo Strauss’s writings for containing esoteric hidden messages is implausible and self-contradicting. First, it is implausible because the emphasis in Strauss’s early writings of the rediscovery of esoteric teachings in the texts of great political philosophers does not necessarily mean that Strauss is using this method in his writings. Second, this liberal claim is self-contradicting because Strauss himself stated there were reasons for philosophers to use esoteric teaching in their works to protect themselves from the danger of society and political regimes. This liberal understanding of Strauss’s writings makes understanding them almost impossible: “By falling into this trap, one can set out on an endless interpretation and get lost forever in the labyrinth of Strauss’s works. Strauss’s books are not to be classed among ‘hieroglyphic’ or ‘unintelligible’ books” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 3).

This chapter concentrates on exploring Strauss’s political thought, as product of a critical thinker and Strauss’s many faces. After that, I will explore the most important aspect of Strauss’s dualistic investigation of reason and revelation. Next, I will examine Strauss’s conceptions of Western crises, which are the crisis of modernity, the crisis of liberalism, the crisis of the West, and the crisis of our time. In addition, this chapter investigates Strauss’s multiple solutions to multiple crises, which are 1) going back to

religion, 2) going back to philosophy, 3) going back to classical political philosophy, 4) an alliance between religion and philosophy.

In his letter to Alexandre Kojève, Strauss emphasized, “I am one of those who refuse to go through open doors when one can enter just as well through a keyhole” (Strauss, 2000, p. 236). This statement illustrates Strauss’s complexity and his controversial approach to understanding politics and philosophy. Moreover, he does not accept ordinary explanations and answers to philosophical problems.

Strauss was fascinated with emphasizing the broad outlines of the crises generated by modernity. In most of his works, Strauss warned people of the modern world and of the coming danger of modernity and its crises; therefore, many scholars have stated that “Strauss is a modern prophet, warning of impending doom and bringing ancient wisdom” (Drury, 2005, p. 133). Strauss offered us a prophecy that contains warnings of the evil that modernity will bring to the world, such as horrible events in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, another aspect of Strauss’s prophecy revolves around the importance of considering elements of the past, such as classical philosophy and religion, as original sources of wisdom. Strauss was a critical thinker who invited us to understand political philosophy problems through dualistic lenses.<sup>20</sup>

The crisis of modernity deeply shaped Leo Strauss’s political theory. His interpretation of political thinkers’ great works influenced him to reopen a quarrel between two different entities: the ancients and moderns (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994). The crisis of modernity greatly concerned Strauss; therefore, he called us to understand modernity’s crisis of political philosophy through dualistic lenses. Strauss’s dual

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<sup>20</sup> By dualistic lenses mean Strauss’s binaries.

dilemmas were the following: philosophy or reason and religion or revelation or theology. Moreover, Strauss used metaphorical titles to illustrate these dual dilemmas, such as Athens and Jerusalem, progress and return, and philosophy and law. Moreover, Strauss was a “thinker of polarities: he pitted ancients against moderns, Athens against Jerusalem, philosophy against poetry, America against the Soviet Union (in the Cold-War era)” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, p. 58). Strauss discussed some famous and complex intellectual dual dilemmas such as the problem of reason vs. revelation, which he described as the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem. Strauss’s controversial character rose from his attempt to reconcile these two fundamental antagonists. Moreover, McAllister described Strauss’s career by saying, “One may see his entire career as a project with two parts: exposing the ‘modern project’ and recovering classical philosophy” (McAllister, 1995, p. 24).

Strauss’s critical examination of modern political philosophy suggests a complete reunderstanding of the history of Western philosophy. Strauss stated that a serious reading of the traditional view of the history of philosophy is badly needed to fix modernity’s errors. Strauss identified two explanations of why a new reading is necessary: First, Strauss contended that traditional comprehension of political philosophy was urgent and necessary because Western philosophy, at its current moment, had reached its final stage, requiring political philosophers to start anew by rethinking conventional political thought and philosophy (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015). Second, because of the antagonism between liberalism and the Judaic religious teachings, Strauss took an innovative approach to non-Western traditions by examining the influence of Greek thought on philosophers such as Averroes, Alfarabi, and Maimonides (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015).

Leo Strauss was one of the most controversial political philosophers in the contemporary world. Strauss tended to play many characters of the same person. From some of his writings, Strauss appears to be a religious man, whereas in others, Strauss is against religion in public life. Some scholars have noted that “Strauss was an ‘atheist’ who sought to be a ‘god’ in order to create a form of rhetoric that would render the world safe for philosophy” (Deutsch and Nicgorski, 1994, p.1). In a similar vein, many scholars have viewed Strauss as a secular scholar, one more interested in exploring theological-political problems than any modern political philosopher (Deutsch and Nicgorski, 1994).

In contrast, however, some scholars have considered Strauss a Jewish political philosopher because of his Jewish works. Strauss’s Jewish writings primarily investigated two major intellectual dilemmas: first, “whether liberalism or Zionism can solve the problem of the hatred and persecution of the Jews that is the [simplest] exemplification of the human problem, namely, of group hatred and antagonism”; and second, “whether the Torah’s claim to wisdom can survive the modern intellectual critique of revelation” (Deutsch and Nicgorski, 1994, p.4).

### **The Argument of Reason and Revelation**

Strauss stated in his early philosophical examination of Spinoza’s political philosophy that the issue of the political and theological problem is at heart of his academic scholarly investigation. Moreover, Strauss’s inquiry concentrates on “a fundamental intention: to clarify the relation between theology and politics in both modern and medieval philosophy” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 99). This complex relationship between religion and philosophy captured Strauss’s attention. He imagined the

relationship between religion and philosophy as the relationship between two ancient cities: Athens and Jerusalem. Moreover, he associated the conflicts of these cities with the problem of our present and posited that examining the pasts of these cities could provide us with a better understating of this conflict and the possibility of reconciling them. For Strauss, only past experiences offer hope to humans. Moreover, Strauss (1997c) has stated that all dangers and threats within human society are grounded somehow on past experiences and knowledge. The significance of the past revolves around two ancient cities, Athens and Jerusalem. Furthermore, “Western man became what he is and is what he is through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought” (Strauss, 1997c, p. 377).

Strauss considered Athens and Jerusalem related in that he conceptualized “biblical politics as radically other to the politics of Plato and Aristotle; the Bible for him threatens Athens as the very foundation of Western democracy” (Havers, 2004, p. 21). Strauss stated that the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem was necessarily in conflict. Therefore, Strauss believed that there would never be a solution to the conflict between the two cities due to the fact that religion and philosophy cannot refute each other (Salazar, 2010). According to Strauss, “We have this radical opposition: the Bible refuses to be integrated into a philosophical framework, just as philosophy refuses to be integrated into a biblical framework” (Strauss, 1979, p. 113). Therefore, Strauss looked for a third situation that would allow him to partially reconcile philosophy and religion.

Strauss delved into the past for this solution, especially at medieval Jewish philosophy. Strauss concentrated on Moses Maimonides, who believed in the compatibility of religion and reason (McAllister, 1995). Strauss discussed many alternatives to the Athens or Jerusalem problem, but the more he wrote about it, the more

he became ambiguous and vague about where he stood on the issue (Browers 2006). There is the possibility that either religion or philosophy is the singular effective solution to the crisis of modernity. For example, “Reason cannot provide reason enough to follow reason. Philosophy presupposes a faith in reason that reason itself cannot provide” (Smith, 2005, p. 13). This is a problematic situation for religion because of the questioning nature of philosophy. The ultimate solution to the problem of modernity may require the defeat of one of the powers (i.e., religion or philosophy). It is obvious that this problem of Athens or Jerusalem constitutes a serious challenge for Strauss and led him to develop mixed feelings about which one is the right choice for humanity.

Nancy Levene (2008) argued against Strauss’s understanding of the roots of Western civilization. Levene disagreed with Strauss, arguing that the West’s origin was not in Athens, saying, “the West does not originate in Athens; rather, Athens originates in the West as the West’s mythic origins. That is to say, Athens originates not in Athens but in Jerusalem, and can be seen only with Jerusalem’s mirror” (Levene, 2008, p. 117). Levene’s argument does not advance our understanding of the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, but it does imply that considering Athens as the root of Western civilization is some sort of reduction. However, it is hard to argue against the notion that Athens constitutes the real start of the Western political context.

### **Strauss’s Theologicopolitical Problem<sup>21</sup>**

Strauss stated that his interest in the theologicopolitical problem started between

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<sup>21</sup> In this chapter theologico-political problem and the theological-political problem refers to same meaning.

1925 and 1928 when he was working on his book *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Batnitzky, 2009). Strauss made it clear that the theologicopolitical problem is the main theme of his investigation (Strauss, 1965; Batnitzky, 2009). The theologicopolitical problem was attached to young Strauss's intellectual inquiry and grew with his thought. According to Green (1997), Strauss's interest in the theologicopolitical problem involved "the observation that most Jewish philosophical responses to the challenges of modernity were in a state of critical disintegration: For Strauss, this applied to all of the leading theological positions representing modern Jewish thought from Spinoza to Buber" (Green, 1997, p. 729). Strauss used the name "theologicopolitical problem" to illustrate the impact of modernity's crises that have serious consequences in many aspects of Western life because of the modern separation of religion and politics (Batnitzky, 2016). As Batnitzky (2009) argued, "'theologico-political predicament' refers to the ultimate results of the early modern attempt to separate theology from politics" (Batnitzky, 2009, pp. 41–42). Moreover, this leads us to another problem—the problematic relationship between philosophy and religion. Religion's crucial role is to determine the relation toward philosophy and politics.

This section explores Strauss's thinking on the crises of modernity in relation to the theologico-political problem. As I have argued, Strauss's understanding of the crises of modernity suggests that he considered them to be multiple. First, I will discuss the crisis of modernity. Second, I will examine the crisis of liberalism. Third, I will investigate the crisis of the West, or, as Strauss sometimes called it, the crisis of Western civilization. Fourth, I will analyze the crisis of our time, or the crisis of political philosophy.

In "Three Waves of Modernity," Strauss (1989) emphasized that the crises of modernity represent different levels of the problem, insisting that "The theoretical crisis



does not necessarily lead to a practical crisis” (Strauss, 1989, p. 98). Strauss’s statement implies that there are two levels of crises, theoretical and practical. First is the theoretical or intellectual level, which, according to Miller (1975), “consists in the virtual destruction of political philosophy by the most influential movements of thought in our time—positivism and historicism” (Miller, 1975, p. 85). The second level is a practical one, which occurs in the crisis of liberalism or the crisis of the West. Both crises involved historical events that translated the intellectual crisis into practical catastrophes, including the decline of the Weimar Republic of Germany, the Holocaust, and the World Wars.

Many scholars have thought that Strauss strongly preferred one alternative to the other. Salazar (2010), on the other hand, writes: “Strauss does not explicitly prefer any alternative to the other, but he does clearly provide a structured relation between the two sides that comprise the ‘contemporary crisis of Western Civilization’” (Salazar, 2010, p. 56). Therefore, Strauss’s major concern is finding a way to partially reconcile philosophy and religion.

For Drury (2005), the second crisis generated by the crisis of modernity is the crisis of our time: “The second crisis of modernity, the crisis of our time, seems to Strauss to be far more serious and deadly than the first . . . the second crisis is the result of the doubt of the project of modernity” (Drury, 2005, p. 160). However, Drury (2005) failed to see the other crises Strauss highlighted, such as “the crisis of liberalism,” which left a devastating impact on the world by unleashing Hitler and Nazism and the World Wars. Strauss indicated that the West suffered from the crisis of the West, which occurred because Western man lost his certainty. According to Behnegar (1999), Strauss (1997a, 1959) stressed that the West has lost certainty of its meaning and purpose. Behnegar (1999) expressed that Western uncertainty is clear in many major catastrophic events,

including the first and second world wars. Strauss stressed the need for questioning the products of modernity that have shaped modern man (Behnegar, 1999).

Strauss insists that the key reason for the crisis of modernity is the loss of faith in reason and the failure of modern project premises. Some could argue that technology is a product of modernity and it helps us to live better and move forward to the future. On the contrary, however, “Technology will only succeed in making us victims of our own inventions” (Drury, 2005, p. 168). Having advanced use of technology in our lives does not necessarily mean that we are on the right track. Strauss in particular continually reminded us that these modern crises are not completely practical crises; they are theoretical and intellectual as well. Furthermore, Drury (2005) argued: “All attempts to establish a free and prosperous universal society will inevitably lead to global tyranny and to the sort of ‘barbarization’ we have already witnessed in our century. There are no final solutions to political problems” (Drury, 2005, p. 168). Therefore, Strauss contended that humans’ attempts to move forward do not necessarily mean the achievement of civilized progress because Western civilization does not know where it is heading. Moreover, Strauss clearly stated that practical and theoretical crises have no causal relationship; therefore, there could be more than one solution to the crisis of modernity’s political problems.

### **Crisis or Crises of Western Modernity**

A part of my argument in this dissertation is that Strauss discussed more than one crisis in his writings. Strauss used many different titles to describe these crises, including the crisis of modernity, our time, the West, Western civilization, progress, and liberalism. Many scholars and writers have considered these different titles as synonyms for a single

crisis, the crisis of modernity. For instance, Green (1997) was confused between the different crises analyzed by Strauss. He described the features of the crisis of the West, which, according to Strauss, concerns the decline of the Western world and the rise of dangerous ideologies such as communism. Green (1997) referred to this crisis as the crisis of modern Judaism, renaming it, a few lines below, based on Strauss's title "theologicalpolitical crisis" (Green, 1997, p. 729). However, some scholars have succeeded in recognizing Strauss's differentiation of the crises. Behnegar (1999), for instance, rightly noted that there are differences between the crises described by Strauss: Strauss proposed to revive classical political philosophy as a way to avoid "the crisis of liberalism," a smaller crisis within the broader crisis of Western civilization (Behnegar, 1999).

In the following sections, I will briefly discuss the crises generated by the crisis of modernity. First, I will explore the crisis of modernity and how it leads to multiple crises afterward. Second, I will explore the crisis of liberalism, which is a practical crisis that happened through the decline of the liberal democracy model in the Weimar Republic in Germany between 1919 and 1933. Third, I will discuss the crisis of the West, which Strauss described as the decline of the West and the loss of vision and certainty of Western civilization. Finally, I will investigate the crisis of our time or the crisis of political philosophy. Here, Strauss offered a strong criticism of historicism and positivism and how they threaten the existence of political philosophy as a field of study.

### **The Crisis of Modernity**

Strauss criticized modernity, or what he called the modern project. As Armada and Gornisiewicz (2010) explained, "Strauss analyzed the crisis of modernity using the three-

wave hypothesis and focusing on the Machiavellian modification of a pre-modern political philosophy” (Armada, 2010, p. 14-15).

The beginning of the crisis of modernity happened during the Machiavellian revolution against ancient political philosophy. Machiavelli and his successor Hobbes rejected the logic and philosophy of the ancients. Furthermore, Machiavelli led an intellectual movement that rejected the theological world and established a postreligious world. Moreover, modern political philosophers have changed the nature of political philosophy to conceptualize political problems as technical problems. Nevertheless, Strauss (1953) believed that the first crisis of modernity happened with Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

“The first crisis of modernity occurred in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau was not the first to feel that the modern venture was a radical error and to seek the remedy in a return to classical thought. It suffices to mention the name of Swift. But Rousseau was not a “reactionary.” He abandoned himself to modernity.” (Strauss, 1953, p. 252)

It is important to state that, regarding the crisis of modernity; Strauss did not call for a return to the past literally. Rather, he called for a restructuring of the existential relationships among politics, religion, and philosophy. These powers of the ancient world can shape human society and human nature. It is plausible to think that Strauss offered no solution for the crisis of modernity because the crisis had already happened and there was no way to fix the damage. Strauss tried to rescue what was possible to have a sufficient intellectual and theoretical impact and create better contemporary awareness. Drury (2005) rightly stated that Strauss provided no solution to the crisis of modernity: it is important to note that Strauss did not offer an effective solution to the crisis of the modern project, which has led to the crisis of our time. In his assessments of the crisis of

modernity, he highlighted the danger of humanity's rebellion against nature. In Strauss's understanding, humanity rejected the authority of nature in treating it as a servant of human will. Drury stated that Strauss never dismissed the idea of restoring the natural attitude of human beings toward nature as part of his solution to the crisis of modernity. Strauss emphasized that human beings should not cross the line of nature and devalue it as being inferior to human will and authority. Nature must be a fundamental part of Strauss's solution for modernity's problems (Drury, 2005).

In his examination of modernity, Strauss (1989) viewed the impact of modernity in the form of waves: "The theory of liberal democracy, as well as of communism, originated in the first and second waves of modernity; the political implication of the third wave proved to be fascism" (Strauss, 1989, p. 98). Strauss (1989) identified "ideological madness" caused by modernity; however, these are historical events that shaped the political history of many states, and there is no way to undo what has already happened. Strauss analyzed the crisis of modernity but could not solve its mystery; instead, he provided solutions to later crises caused by the crisis of modernity. According to Dallmayr (1994), "Strauss speaks of the looming 'crisis of modernity' or of the 'modern project,' a crisis triggered by the wholesale forgetting or oblivion of basic teaching still available to the 'ancients'" (Dallmayr, 1994, p. 882). Strauss stressed that the ancients constitute the wise Western tradition, which we all should adore and learn from. Moreover, Strauss blamed contemporary people for ignoring the past, saying that they strayed far from the teachings of the ancients, which prevents us from seeing the wisdom and glory of the ancients.

## **Modernity and the Notion of Progress**

For Strauss, the core of the crisis of modernity is the notion of progress. “In contemporary parlance, he [Strauss] inserts himself into the ongoing ‘discourse of modernity,’ that is, the debate over whether the modern age constitutes historically speaking a progress or a regress (or something in between)” (Dallmayr, 1994, p. 881).

Strauss tried to understand the products of modernity (e.g. positivism and historicism) to diagnose the crisis. The main product of modernity is exemplified in the notion of progress. “Strauss is trying to understand the significance of progress—for Judaism and the West and for the human condition as such” (Levene, 2008, p. 127). Strauss (1989) viewed the notions of progress and modernity as being two faces of the same crisis, saying, “the contemporary crisis of Western civilization may be said to be identical with the climactic crisis of the idea of progress in the full and emphatic sense of the term” (Strauss, 1989, p. 97).

Strauss conceptualized modernity as “an expression of crisis,” as Levene (2008) stated: “for the concept of progress implies the discovery of history, the discovery, namely, that truth is subject to time, that tradition changes, and that there is no end to pursuit and becoming” (Levene, 2008, p. 128). Strauss could not locate the origin of the idea of progress in this context. Strauss noted that the concept of progress never existed in biblical text and context (Levene, 2008). The idea of progress is instead associated with the modern era, representing the changes generated by science and enlightened thought. The lack of origin of the notion of progress in both classical philosophy and religion made Strauss very suspicious about it. The ancients did not focus on progress; rather, they concentrated on wisdom and representing the ultimate truth.

Strauss differentiated between the notion of progress in classical and modern political thought. In a classical context, progress meant belonging to the class of the few, not the crowd of the many. Progress was exclusive to philosophers. The classical perspective on progress understood it as intellectual and individual. The ancients did not use progress to achieve social objectives; instead, classical philosophers used it to seek wisdom and truth (Levene, 2008). In the modern age, political theorists and thinkers have offered various definitions of progress. The notion of modernity produced an idea of progress in terms of those involved in its process. Furthermore, the idea of progress is closely related to the idea of social progress and to intellectual development as well (Levene, 2008).

The notion of progress is connected to the different time frames of past, present, and future. “[T]he past is looked at in contempt for its imperfection; there is a pride of achievements of the present, though it is still acknowledged as imperfect; and there is hope towards a perfect future through further progress.” (Salazar, 2010, p. 45). Progress is an important aspect of human society, and at the same time, it is very complicated. It is an ongoing process, and it always views the past as an unsatisfactory account of achievement. Therefore, the present sense of progress tends to consider itself greater than the past in terms of the process. The future sense of progress is problematic for Strauss because it is going in an unknown direction. Modern political philosophers claim that human society is making progress toward freedom, equality, and human rights. Strauss (1978) warned about such unwise progress. The notion of progress promises the achievement of a freer and more just society. The idea of progress also promotes the principle of equality among humans. Therefore, progress endorses global norms and values, including equality, freedom, and justice, to ensure that the majority of nations and

countries are built based on these universal principles. Strauss (1978) indicated that one can believe these global values exist in one society or many societies, which could be difficult to achieve long term. Strauss also contended that to ensure a peaceful environment for Western democratic countries, “one must make the whole globe democratic, each country in itself as well as the society of nations. Good order in one country presupposes good order in all countries and among all countries” (Strauss, 1978, p. 4).

Strauss raised serious doubts about the effectiveness of the idea of progress. He stated that the modern conception of progress suggests a comprehensive spread of ideas, such as property, justice, and equality among men and women, and having a democratic state all over the world. He seems to claim that this kind of progress is imaginary and uncertain, and, therefore, it is dangerous to follow it. Furthermore, for Strauss, modern progress is what we call science in the contemporary sense (Salazar, 2010). Strauss (1979) stated his concerns and doubts about the purpose of science as a whole. According to Salazar (2010), There is no doubt that the development of science and scientific knowledge is part of the idea of progress. However, Strauss was wary of some of the pursuits of science and the rationality of scientific products such as atomic bombs and other weapons of mass destruction (Salazar, 2010). Strauss’s concerns were not against the existence of science as a force; instead, he doubted the rationality that stands before science.

### **The Crisis of Liberalism**



For Strauss, liberalism constitutes a factual crisis. As Zuckert and Zuckert (2015) explained, “His experiences in Germany, both of the intractability of the Jewish problem and of the weakness of the Weimar Republic, led him to hold grave doubts about the liberal-democratic project” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015, p. 1). Many scholars, especially liberals, consider Strauss to be an enemy of democracy and liberalism. Some of them have explained Strauss’s attitudes against liberalism and democracy as stemming from his admiration of classical political philosophy, which does not favor democratic political systems. Critics such as Stephen Holmes (1993) accused Strauss of being “undemocratic and illiberal” (Holmes, 1993, p. 79).

In the words of Behnegar (1999), what Strauss’s opponents “do not grasp is that this critique enabled, not hindered, Strauss’s defense of liberal democracy against its enemies, at a time when many intellectuals yielded to the attraction of modern tyrannies because of their dissatisfaction with liberal democracy” (Behnegar, 1999, p. 98). Strauss showed that Hobbes was the true founder of genuine liberal political theory. However, this liberalism is the product of modernity, and it affects and shapes our contemporary world. According to Tanguay (2011), “for the Strauss of the early 1930s, liberalism no longer goes without saying: it is under attack from all quarters, it is in crisis, and one must examine its foundations” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 101). Strauss’s investigations of liberalism forced him to go back to the founders of modern political thought to understand the philosophical premises of liberalism in the political writing of Hobbes. Corine Pelluchon (2014) argued that Strauss’s understanding of the crisis of liberalism consisted in three historical moments of liberalism: “the weakness of liberal democracy, its failures, and its consequences” (Pelluchon, 2014, p. 10). The amount of horror in the 20th century forms the essence of Strauss’s thinking about crisis. Furthermore, Strauss witnessed “the death

of the Weimar Republic and fled the Nazi menace” (Havers, 2004, p. 19). After the decline of liberal democracy in the Weimar Republic, Strauss was afraid of the increasing ideological threat from the East, as exemplified in communism and totalitarianism. Therefore, Strauss concluded that there is no guarantee of sustainable Western democracy (Havers, 2004). “Strauss thought that no one in the twentieth century could reasonably deny that persecution for questioning official dogma was still a fact of political life” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, p. 49). Strauss “knew that liberal democracy is the only decent and just alternative to modern man. But he also knew that liberal democracy is exposed to, not to say beleaguered by, threats both practical and theoretical.” (Bloom, 1974, p. 375). Strauss does not fully accept the notion of liberal democracy because it solves partly the crisis of Jewish people, however, in the same time it enables Hitler from being in political power.

For Strauss, the crisis of liberalism is highly connected to the problem of the Jewish people. Strauss’s experience in the Weimar Republic led him to recognize the political and philosophical problems of the modern age. Moreover, “The Weimar Republic proved itself incapable of preserving itself against challenges from the fascist right and the communist left” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, p. 64). Strauss warned against accepting liberal democracy (or any other form of political government) as the most ideal type of political rule. He suggested instead that we should keep thinking about classical political philosophy, such as what is the best political system to reach the best possible results.

### **The Crisis of the West**

Strauss was inspired by Spengler's (1926) diagnoses in *The Decline of The West* of the downfall of European civilization after World War I (Strauss, 1978). He stated that Spengler appreciated Western culture as high culture: "But the West was for him more than one high culture among a number of them. It was for him the comprehensive culture. It is the only culture which has conquered the earth" (Strauss, 1978, p. 2). Strauss's understanding of the crisis of the West implies a cultural understanding of Western civilization. Strauss viewed Western civilization as a high form of culture. For Strauss, Western culture is superior to other world cultures. Strauss (1978) contended that culture means—in its original sense—"the culture of the mind," which reflects and impacts intellectual activities as well as believes in and values human society. Strauss assumed that a variety of cultures should have both high and low cultures. In other words, Strauss considered Western culture to be high and superior to other world cultures. He said, "It is the final culture: the owl of Minerva begins its flight in the dusk; the decline of the West is identical with the exhaustion of the very possibility of high culture; the highest possibilities of man are exhausted" (Strauss, 1978, p. 2). Here, Strauss highlighted the importance of the cultural element of the crisis of the West. Moreover, Strauss rightly stressed that the current culture in the West represents the values, ideas, and principles of the modern project, which blinded Western civilization from viewing the right path—the path that will help it avoid falling into nihilism. The decline of Western civilization concerned many scholars, such as Spengler. Consequently, Strauss (1972) diagnosed the crisis of the West as follows:

"The crisis of the West consists in the West having become uncertain of its purpose. The West was once certain of its purpose, of a purpose in which all men could be united. Hence, it had a clear vision of its future as the future of mankind." (Strauss, 1972, p. 219)

Strauss was concerned about the intellectual ability of Western civilization to visualize its future. Strauss blamed the rise of modernity for being an obstacle that blinds us from viewing the wisdom of true philosophy, which originated in ancient political philosophy.

Drury (2005) stated that “The second crisis of modernity, or the crisis of our time, is the result of our loss of faith in the modern project” (Drury, 2005, p. 151). Here, Drury considered the crisis of modernity as synonymous with the crisis of our time. However, Drury’s explanation of the crisis posed the problem as a “result of our loss of faith in the modern project” (Drury, 2005, p. 151). Strauss emphasized that the crisis of the West was caused by losing the ideals, insight, and certainty of Western man and Western civilization. He stated that the crisis of the West emerged as its own system of thought. For example, the Enlightenment contributed to reducing the impact of religion in public the public square and changed the perceptions of seeking truth (McAllister, 1995).

The crisis of our time is an advanced version of the crisis of modernity. Additionally, the crisis of our time represents Western civilization’s disorientation. Strauss described the elements that associate modernity with the crisis of our time. First of all, Western civilization has lost its hopeful perception of the notion of progress, which constitutes the core of Western modernity (Drury, 2005). The idea of progress is clear in science and scientific knowledge achievements; however, the West does not know where the direction of progress is leading us. Second, another aspect of the crisis of the West “is the loss of faith in the miraculous effects of prosperity” (Drury, 2005, p. 160). Third, “the West has lost its purpose because the modern project is without direction” (Drury, 2005, p. 162). Finally, Strauss contended that the Western world is declining and eventually will fall into a nihilistic end. According to Drury (2005), “Nihilism is simply the belief that all

values or ends are of equal worth, or that there is nothing intrinsically more noble or good than any other” (Drury, 2005, p. 162). All Strauss’s indications of the crisis of the West reveal the receding of Western civilization as the leading and supreme power in the world. Losing the vision of the West will destroy the two major roots of Western civilization, namely religion and philosophy. Consequently, this will precede the eternal decay of the West among other civilizations. Strauss’s worry about the civilizational and intellectual status of the West suggests that there is no intellectual and civilizational equivalent for it. Therefore, this could propose a new disruption of the global order.

Drury (2005) stressed that this disorientation of the West will, in the end, lead to what Strauss called nihilism: “The discovery is bound to be accompanied by despair, nihilism, hopelessness and decline. This is the phenomenon that Strauss understands as the ‘crisis’ of the West” (Drury, 2005, p. 160). Here, Drury rightly described what Strauss meant to call the crisis of the West. Strauss (1978) analyzed the crisis of the West as a dilemma of international relations and international systems. Strauss described how in 1913 great Western countries controlled the international arena and maintained peace and order without using violence. Strauss stated that the West lost this control because Western countries do not know their purpose. Strauss (1978) explained that the West is facing another danger (i.e., communism) from the Eastern world that is threatening the existence of Western states. Strauss focused on the power that enabled the West to lead the world. To lead as a civilization requires having massive military power to conquer other lands. Moreover, having the ability to control the world implies the intention of conflict with other nations. Strauss’s understanding of controlling and leading civilization is similar to Huntington’s (1993) conception in *The Clash of Civilizations* of cultural conflict as a source of survival and supremacy. Strauss (1978) emphasized the decline of

the West's power and considered all aspects Western power to be essential to the glory of Western civilization. Strauss indicated that even the power of the Western world may be declining; however, he concluded this does not necessarily mean that the West is in crisis. At the core of the West's crisis is the fact that it does not know its purpose and still believes it has a universal purpose. The West is losing faith in committing to its objective of becoming a superior culture and civilization (Strauss, 1978).

Strauss stated that the decline of the West did not necessarily mean the collapse of Western civilization. Rather, it meant that the West was going to decline because it had lost its vision. Strauss indicated that the crisis of the West was a gradual crisis, meaning that it would take an uncertain path. This fight for global leadership of the West is exemplified in Western civilization's attitudes toward other global powers. "The crisis of the West was more visible in the 1950s and 1960s, when the self-doubting West faced a formidable foe, than it is in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union" (Behnegar, 1999, pp. 99–100). For Strauss, "The crisis of the West is a spiritual crisis" (Behnegar, 1999, pp. 100). Therefore, Strauss believed that political and military victory did not indicate an intellectual victory showing Western civilization's awareness and certainty about its purposes. Moreover, the crisis of the West would not end until Western civilization realized what its purposes and goals were (Behnegar, 1999).

### **The Crisis of Our Time, or the Crisis of Political Philosophy**

Pelluchon (2014) rightly noted that Strauss referred to the decline of political philosophy with two titles, which they are the crisis of our time and the crisis of political philosophy (Pelluchon, 2014). In his famous book, *Natural Right and History*, Strauss

(1953) described the second crisis of modernity as the crisis of our time. He associated the second crisis of modernity with the third wave of modernity by Nietzsche (Strauss, 1953). Strauss stressed that the crisis of our time, like other crises, is caused by the great crisis of modernity that represents the features of the modern project. Regarding the crisis of our time, or the crisis of political philosophy, Strauss thought that positivism and historicism were the core elements of the crisis because they were products of modernity and the modern world. Therefore, the solution of returning and going back to the classics, especially classical political philosophy, was the solution for the crisis of our time, not for the crisis of modernity. Strauss believed that the road to restoring classical political philosophy must pass through criticizing modern notions and thoughts. He directed his critiques toward positivist and historicist approaches, which delegitimize the idea of political philosophy and promote replacing it with the alternative of history of political philosophy (Behnegar, 1999).

“The theme of political philosophy is mankind’s great objectives, freedom and government or empire—objectives which are capable of lifting all men beyond their poor selves” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 10). In a contemporary sense, positivism has affected all social science fields, including political science. Strauss stressed that the transformation of philosophical political science to nonphilosophical political science suggested the elimination of political philosophy in its true original meaning. Therefore, “‘Scientific’ political science is in fact incompatible with political philosophy” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 14). Strauss determined that the devastating impacts of positivism and historicism started after the Second World War. “During the postwar decades, Strauss raised serious doubts about the dominant intellectual orthodoxies of our time, namely, the fact/value distinction, and historicism. Both orthodoxies were often propounded as if they were an

obvious truth” (Deutsch & Niegorski, 1994, p. 5). Positivism and historicism influenced the status of political philosophy and constituted the core of the crisis of our time. Strauss linked the problem of political philosophy as an afterward crisis of our time. It is true that Strauss complained of the impact of positivism and historicism on political philosophy. However, he recognized that the crisis of our time provided us with new and fresh insights for conceptualizing and understanding things differently. Moreover, Strauss explained that the reason for the decline of political philosophy was science and history. Strauss (1959) stated: “Science and History, those two great powers of the modern world, have finally succeeded in destroying the very possibility of political philosophy” (Strauss, 1959, p. 18).

### **Strauss on Historicism**

Strauss (2000) defined historicism by saying that “all human thought is ‘historical’ or that the foundations of human thought are laid by specific experiences which are not, as a matter of principle, coeval with human thought as such” (Strauss, 2000, p. 25). Strauss’s hermeneutical method of studying political philosophy’s texts was based on analyzing perennial questions as transhistorical truths. Therefore, as Zuckert and Zuckert explained (2015), “Historicists deny the possibility of any eternal or transhistorical truths on the basis of the thought that all ‘truths’ are ‘historical,’ determined by ‘history’ and thus none is trans-historical” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015, p. 3).

Strauss (1953) noted the internal contradictions inside historicists’ system of thought, elaborating, “Historicism thrives on the fact that it inconsistently exempts itself from its own verdict about all human thought. The historicist thesis is self-contradictory



or absurd” (Strauss, 1953, p. 25). Moreover, Strauss indicated the historicist denial of transhistorical truths or questions. In his own words, “Historicism, however, stands or falls by the denial of the possibility of theoretical metaphysics and of philosophic ethics or natural right; it stands or falls by the denial of the solubility of the fundamental riddles” (Strauss, 1953, p. 29). As Drury (2005) explained, “Historicism is the claim that all values, ideologies and regimes are historically relative to time and place” (Drury, 2005, p. 163). Strauss offered a strong critique of historicism by applying historicism’s own arguments against its intellectual structure. If historicists denied the notion of ultimate truth and the existence of perennial questions, then they would have to acknowledge that historicism itself is relative and cannot be transhistorical. According to historicism, “political philosophy is impossible: it was a dream, perhaps a noble dream, but at any rate a dream” (Strauss, 1989, p. 81). As Paul Norton (1981) explained, “The relativism that is implied by this is avoided by the more fundamental fact that, although ‘every philosophy is the conceptual expression of the spirit of its time’” (Norton, 1981, p. 134). Strauss (1988b) stated that historicism cannot understand political philosophy within its own context: “The philosophy of the past understood itself in a non-historical manner, but historicism must understand it ‘historically.’ The philosophers of the past claimed to have found *the* truth, and not merely the truth for their times” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 68).

Strauss stressed that the great impact of the crisis of modernity has affected the intellectual status of true political philosophy: “The crisis of modernity is then primarily the crisis of modern political philosophy” (Strauss, 1989, p. 82). Strauss’s statement suggests a strong connection of the first crisis of political philosophy and the crisis of modernity, which leads eventually to the replacement of political philosophy by the history of political philosophy. Historicism contributes to the replacing of political

philosophy by the history of political philosophy. Historicism concentrates on the contextual impacts of shaping political philosophers' ideas. Consequently, as Sharon (2011) stated, "Historicism presumes that each epoch, with its new insights, becomes blind to the insights of the past, and so we can neither grasp the whole nor assess any epoch as having greater or lesser value than another" (Portnoff, 2011, pp. 166-167). Strauss rightly note that "The typical historicism of the twentieth century demands that each generation reinterpret the past on the basis of its own experience and with a view to its own future" (Strauss, 1988b, p. 59). This historical analysis does not necessarily refer to historical understanding in general. Strauss (2000) rightly distinguished between historians and historicists of ideas:

"The goal of the historian of thought is to understand the thought of the past 'as it really has been,' i.e., to understand it as exactly as possible as it was actually understood by its authors. But the historicist approaches the thought of the past on the basis of the historicist assumption which was wholly alien to the thought of the past. He is therefore compelled to attempt to understand the thought of the past better than it understood itself before he has understood it exactly as it understood itself." (Strauss, 2000, p. 25)

Strauss offered this distinction between the mission of the historian of ideas and the one who practices the historicism of ideas to highlight the danger of the latter. Moreover, Strauss believed that we should not adopt relativism in our attempts to study and understand past political philosophies because this can drag us into a trap. The trap involves understanding the original ideas of the past in terms of our current understanding, which Strauss argued is not what the philosopher is trying to express. Strauss suggested, then, that there are transhistorical ideas and truth that never change. As Norton (1981) explained, "Historicism denies the possibility of any trans-historical perspective necessary to know that all thought is historical" (Norton, 1981, pp. 146-147).

What Strauss meant by calling for a return to the past was to have a new beginning of philosophy that provided us with a new understanding of philosophic life. Strauss illustrated that political philosophy began with Socrates who asked the major questions in political philosophy, such as what is justice? (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015). For the crisis of our time, especially for the problem of historicism, Strauss (1959) suggested that “to avoid this danger, it is compelled to engage in ‘cross-cultural research,’ in the study of other cultures, both present and past” (Strauss, 1959, p. 25). Moreover, Strauss (1988b) emphasized that “social science must attempt to understand those cultures as they understand or understood themselves: the understanding primarily required of the social scientists is historical understanding” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 25).

### **Strauss on Positivism**

For Strauss (1964), positivism “is the view according to which only scientific knowledge, as defined by modern natural science, is genuine knowledge. This has the crucial implication that any assertions regarding values cannot be validated, but are mere subjective assertions” (Strauss, 1964, p. 91). Labeling particular knowledge as scientific and others as not is applying a distinction based on high and low standards. Strauss rejected such a differentiation because it excludes many other types of knowledge in the name of modern science norms. For Strauss (1989), “all knowledge which deserves the name is scientific knowledge; but scientific knowledge cannot validate value judgments; it is limited to factual judgments; yet political philosophy presupposes that value judgments can be rationally validated” (Strauss, 1989, p. 82). As a consequence of the dominant positivist view, Strauss (1953) stressed that “Present-day social science rejects

natural right on two different, although mostly combined, grounds; it rejects it in the name of History and in the name of the distinction between Facts and Values” (Strauss, 1953, p. 8).

Strauss viewed positivism as a threat to the existence of political philosophy as an academic field. According to the positivist understanding, scientific knowledge is the only true and supreme kind of knowledge. “[I]n its most mature form positivism announced that there is ‘a fundamental difference between facts and values, and that only factual judgments are within the competence of science’” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015, p. 2). The other problem with positivism is that it decreases the rational scope to the degree that only fits scientific knowledge (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015).

Positivism cannot tolerate the existence of political philosophy because it considers it to be an unscientific field. Strauss (1971) argued that scientific knowledge is not able “to validate or invalidate any value judgments, and political philosophy most certainly is concerned with the validation of sound value judgments and the invalidation of unsound ones, positivism must reject political philosophy as radically unscientific” (Strauss, 1971, p. 1) It is significant that, although scientific standards do not apply to political philosophy, political philosophy is not an unscientific field or form of inferior knowledge. Science is not the only form of knowledge for human life. The world and humans are very complex, and it is not that easy to claim that scientific knowledge alone can solve this world’s mysteries. It is difficult to argue that scientific knowledge is the ultimate and complete kind of knowledge, as the positivism movement declares. Positivist arguments contain self-contradictory elements. Form a positivist point of view, science and scientific knowledge are the superior forms of human knowledge, and they devalue the ancient structure of knowledge and do not consider it scientific. However, modern science and

scientific knowledge have established their foundations based on the old human unscientific knowledge and have shaped major parts of modern human thought (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015). It is important to note that prescientific knowledge contains many intellectual tools and exercises that were rejected by the authority of modern science because they did not match scientific standards, including Socrates's famous dialectical method of investigation (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2015).

Strauss (1988b) asserted that "Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for the truth" (Strauss, 1988b, p. 11). However, modern political thinkers gave up on conceptualizing philosophy as a quest of seeking truth and understood it instead as one of satisfying human desires. Therefore, Strauss (1988b) insisted that "Political philosophy will then be the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things" (Strauss, 1959, pp. 11-12). In the same vein, Strauss (1988b) advanced the quest of political philosophy by saying that "Political philosophy is the attempt truly to know both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order" (Strauss, 1988b, p. 12). Strauss's understanding of political philosophy highlights the problem with the positivist school of thought because seeking truth requires a value judgment to be involved in this noble quest. Strauss (1988b) stated that "only factual judgments are within the competence of science: scientific social science is incompetent to pronounce value judgments, and must avoid value judgments altogether" (Strauss, 1988b, p. 18). In a social science context, positivism calls for more natural social science analysis of phenomena. However, Strauss (1988b) argued that this kind of social science is problematic: "Positivistic social science is 'value-free' or 'ethically neutral': it is neutral in the conflict between good and evil, however good and evil may be understood" (Strauss, 1988b, p. 18).

Strauss (1988b) discussed several points that represent “the theoretical weaknesses of social science positivism” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 21). First, “It is impossible to study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena, without making value judgments” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 21). Second, “The rejection of value judgments is based on the assumption that the conflicts between different values or value-systems are essentially insoluble for human reason” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 22). Third, positivism expresses that scientific knowledge is the highest and finest form of human knowledge, shaping the core of science in modern and contemporary times. Furthermore, the claim of scientific knowledge superiority over other human types of knowledge indicates that classical scientific knowledge is inferior and not scientific (Strauss, 1988b). Finally, “Positivism necessarily transforms itself into historicism” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 25). The crisis of our time not only affects the intellectual reality that we live in, but it goes further than that by influencing the intellectual awareness of thinkers and philosophers. Furthermore, “understanding them to be responding in this way to ‘the crisis of our time,’ Strauss was not surprised to see great thinkers at the ‘end of philosophy,’ like Heidegger, support Hitler and the Nazis” (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, p. 35).

Both positivism and historicism reject the existence of political philosophy in the true, original Socratic meaning. If we apply the scientific view on this claim, it will turn out to be unscientific because it is representing absolute incompatibility between true political philosophy and positivism and historicism. Consequently, Strauss (1959) argued that “We cannot exclude the possibility that a political philosophy which emerged many centuries ago is *the* true political philosophy, as true today as it was when it was first expounded” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 64).

Strauss (1953) stated that the contemporary social science “may make us very wise or clever as regards the means for any objectives we might choose” (Strauss, 1953, pp. 3-4). However, Strauss (1953) continued, contemporary social science cannot “help us in discriminating between legitimate and illegitimate, between just and unjust, objectives. Such a science is instrumental and nothing but instrumental: it is born to be the handmaid of any powers or any interests that be” (Strauss, 1953, pp. 4). Similar issues of contemporary social science appeared in political science as well. The behavioral revolution in social science has transformed old political science into a new nonphilosophical political science. As Strauss (1978) stated, “This new political science is concerned with discovering laws of political behavior and ultimately universal laws of political behavior.” (Strauss, 1978, p. 8).

### **Strauss’s Multiple Solutions to Multiple Crises**

For Strauss, the issue of reconciliation between religion and philosophy was a major concern. The element of politics cannot be eliminated from any human activity in the city; politics is a condition of the establishment of any city. However, religion and philosophy are changing elements; including or excluding one of them constitutes a huge change in human affairs. Through Strauss’s political and philosophical writings, it is not easy to understand his position on the matter of which elements of power should influence the human city. Strauss’s attitude on these influential elements is not easily characterized. In his article, Reason and Revelation, Strauss (2006) states that conflict constitutes the eternal and central character of the relationship between philosophy and theology. He says, “*Philosophy* is incompatible with revelation: philosophy must try to

*refute* revelation, and, if not revelation, at any rate theology must try to *refute* philosophy” (Strauss, 2006, p. 141). The relationship between philosophy and religion is found on conflictual basis, which constitutes a problem for those who belong to the city. Strauss tries to understand the nature of the conflict between philosophy and religion. In his understanding, the conflict between philosophy and religion is a zero-sum game. Therefore, he assumes, no win-win situation is possible for religion and philosophy, and that humanity must choose one of them. Strauss says,

“If we assume on the basis of the account of the Fall that *the* alternative for man is philosophy *or* obedience to God’s revelation, a refutation of philosophy would seem to be tantamount to a *proof* of the truth revelation.” (Strauss, 2006, p. 142) (Italic in original text)

Choosing between religion and philosophy is a complex issue and requires much intellectual and philosophical intention. In the ancient age, said Bloom (1974), philosophy was excluded from the city: “Philosophy is dangerous for it must always call everything into question while in politics not everything can be called into question” (Bloom, 1974, p. 388). The skeptical nature of philosophy and philosophic inquiry make philosophy a threat to other elements of power in the human city. In other words, the utopian and mythical nature of religion and religious belief make religion vulnerable to attack from philosophical inquiry. Therefore, it is normal for religion to take a defensive approach toward philosophy, which constitutes an existential threat to religion in the city and in society. As I stated above, the three elements of power have never coexisted compatibly within one city throughout human history. The conflict among them permits that only two of the three elements can flourish in the city. Furthermore, these formulas of two elements raise the issue of alternatives to face the crisis of modernity. The alternatives



that Strauss seeks to highlight aim to resolve the intellectual and political problems caused by the alliance of philosophy and politics against religion that accrued in the modern age by Machiavelli. Strauss highlights the alternative options between philosophy and religion: “The *alternative to philosophy is revelation—philosophy must try to prove that revelation is impossible*” (Strauss, 2006, p. 148) (Italic in original text). According to Strauss, religion and philosophy are engaged in an existential war that reflects deep conceptual differences regarding the fundamental principles of each. The myth factor<sup>22</sup> constitutes a problematic situation for philosophy and religion. Moreover, myth is a mutual accusation between both philosophy and religion that represents a double-edged sword. Strauss stressed that the aim of philosophy will change once it encounters and attack revelation. Moreover, the solutions that have been provided by both religion and philosophy are different from each other because of their intellectual premises and preferences. For example, “the Bible questions the view that philosophy is the only alternative to myth; according to the Bible, the alternative to myth is the revelation of the living God” (Strauss, 2006, p. 149).

Strauss also contends, “Philosophy *must* interpret revelation as a *myth*” (Strauss, 2006, p. 164). This mythical element in religion constitutes a huge problem for many modern political philosophers, including Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Spinoza. Strauss clearly explains this issue and says, “Spinoza rejects revelation because of its *imaginative* character. Since it is the imagination, and not the intellect, which is the vehicle of revelation, revelation cannot supply the truth” (Strauss, 2006, p. 150) (Italic in original text). The other issue that reflects the scope of the conflict between religion and

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<sup>22</sup> By myth factor I mean the supernatural stories that used in religious texts and discourse. Moreover, the myth factor constitutes a major component of religious faith.

philosophy is that they both claim to be holding the ultimate truth. Strauss clearly stated that philosophy and religion are incompatible because of what they propose as the best way people can live their lives. For Strauss (1997a), “philosophy and the Bible are the alternatives or the antagonists in the drama of the human soul” (p. 119). Therefore, Strauss claimed that religion and philosophy eventually become opponents, not partners, because of their different natures. Consequently, it is difficult for religion and philosophy to coexist because both are antagonists.

Through his examination of Islamic and Jewish philosophy in the medieval context, Strauss concludes that an essential tension exists between the city and philosophy and that, consequently, this tension takes the shape of conflict between philosophy and politics (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994). In other words, “This tension exists because ‘the element of society is faith or opinion,’ and pursuit of philosophy is the attempt to replace opinion by knowledge” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, pp. 3-4). Strauss was looking for areas of agreement between faith and philosophy. This explains why he concentrated on particular philosophers from Islamic and Jewish philosophical traditions. Many political thinkers have argued against dissociating philosophy from religion. For example, political philosophers, such as Alfarabi, Averroes, and Maimonides, from the Islamic and Jewish intellectual traditions contended that reason and revelation are compatible and can coexist (Levene, 2008). The other explanation for Strauss’s selection of specific philosophers from Jewish and Islamic traditions is that all these thinkers were influenced by Greek classical philosophy.

Strauss diagnoses the crisis of modernity in his articles and lectures. Many literatures and scholars have focused on some of his works that critique modernity while

neglecting others.<sup>23</sup> In his famous article “Progress or Return?” Strauss examines the relationship between philosophy and religion, which, he argues, provides us with two options. Either we choose philosophy and go further toward progress or we take religion as a solution and return to the past (Strauss, 1997a; Salazar, 2010). “[B]oth Philosophy and Theology are reciprocally affecting, and are being affected, by one another. However, explicitly missing in the analysis is a reason as to why the relation manifests itself in this manner and not in any other” (Salazar, 2010, pp. 42–43). Strauss tries to understand religion without judging it based on modern conception of rationalism. He says, “the tension between revelation and philosophy is not one between irrationality and rationality but between fundamentally irreconcilable criteria for what constitutes the *rational starting point* of truth” (Batnitzky, 2016, p. 17). Strauss’s argument indicated that both religion and philosophy have their own rationality, and the battle between them is not about rationality against nonrationality. Moreover, Strauss asserted that revelation and philosophy both seek to discover the truth of humanity and this contemporary world.

In this section, I will provide a new understanding of Strauss’s solutions to the grand crisis of the *political-theological problem* and its resulting crises. Contrary to much literature on Strauss’s take on the political-theological problem, I argue that Strauss provides more than one solution to this problem. First, I will explore his first solution, in which Strauss calls for returning to religion as an alternative to modernity. Second, I will

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<sup>23</sup> Many scholars have concentrated on some works in which Strauss critiqued the crisis of modernity. Most of these scholars have cited his article “Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis of Western Civilization 1952,” while some cite “Athens and Jerusalem: Some Primarily Reflections.” These scholars conclude that Strauss suggests that we should go back to classical philosophy to avoid the crisis of modernity. However, other of Strauss’s articles and lectures (e.g., “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy” [1979] and Reason and Revelation [1948]) indicate that he seriously considered religion as a solution to the crisis of modernity.

explain Strauss's solution, popular among academic researchers, which suggests looking to philosophy as a solution to the crises of modernity. Strauss's third solution is about reviving classical political philosophy to fight the products of modernity, such historicism and positivism, both of which constitute a real threat to the existence of political philosophy. Finally, I will discuss a fourth solution that Strauss offers to fight back modernity and its crises, which proposes an alliance between religion and philosophy in their approach to politics and the city. The advantage of this solution is that it protects philosophy from the threats of politics and religion but does not exclude religion from the city. Strauss's political understanding of religion suggests that philosophy and religion may coexist in one city only on the condition that religion protects philosophy.

### **Solution One: Going Back to Religion**

Strauss brings religion to the crises of modernity and the crisis of the West to comprehend the deep meaning of the crises that people suffer. Although Strauss is a secular political philosopher, he cannot not ignore religion's significant role in shaping Western realities, histories, and identities (Havers, 2004). Furthermore, Strauss conceptualizes religion as a core element in the crises affecting Western civilization. Strauss cannot ignore his Jewish roots, and he is obligated to look at religion as alternative solution to the crises of modernity. Consequently, Strauss uses the term *return* to describe his intention to go back to the beginning where and when religion constituted a crucial part of the human city. "A 'return' to the Talmud and Midrash provides the 'rock bottom' of any Jewish culture" (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 14). The solution of religion reflects Strauss's Jewishness; being Jewish was one of the many facets of his individual character.

In his writings on modernity's crises, Strauss always indicates that religion is a possible solution for many crises, such as crisis of Judaism and the crisis of the West. He uses return as a metaphorical term to represent religion beyond the traditional meaning of belief. In other words, Strauss conceptualizes religion as a fundamental source of wisdom and knowledge. To highlight the religious meaning of the term return, Strauss associates it with the Hebrew language. "'Return' is translation for the Hebrew word *teshuva*. *Teshuva* has an ordinary and an emphatic meaning. Its emphatic meaning is rendered in English by 'repentance'" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 87). Strauss tends to view the emergence of modernity as a sin<sup>24</sup> that requires immediate repentance. His description of our losing our way and the need to follow the right path both suggest that Strauss favors religion as a solution to the crisis of modernity. His use of return highlights the significance of religion in his vision for solving the problem of modernity. Moreover, "Judaism is a concern with return; it is not a concern with progress. 'Return' can easily be expressed in biblical Hebrew; 'progress' cannot" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 88). Strauss's call for a return to religion is an apology to religion for all assaults committed by modernity and moderns. It means the return, with regret, from all the horrible and terrifying consequences that have occurred between the time of Machiavelli and the present. Strauss tends to say that because man has gone far away from religion and faith in God, he has lost his way in the darkness.

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<sup>24</sup> Strauss seemed to consider modernity as sin because he recalled religion to resolve the problem of modernity. The existence of sin requires sinners. Strauss believed sinners to be those who adopt modern ideologies, such as communism and capitalism.

Importantly, wisdom is not exclusive to philosophy, but can also be found in religion and religious teachings. Religion and philosophy provide two different understandings of wisdom.

“According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder.’ This divergence in proximity is clearly illustrated by a juxtaposition of Socrates, the original mentor of Western philosophy, and the Jewish prophets. Both Socrates and the prophets were impelled by a sense of mission, a mission triggered in the one case by the Delphic oracle and in the other by divine command.” (Dallmayr, 1994, p. 891)

Strauss does not call for a return to religion only because it represents a solution to our problems through faith and biblical wisdom. More importantly, because Strauss values the past of religion as a golden age, human progress is not necessarily the right path, which could be in the past rather than in the present or the future. Moreover, Strauss stresses, “The past is superior to the present” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 88). The past represents the collective memory of political philosophers and thinkers who created the Western canon of political thought. This notion of the past gives the canon of Western political thought a historical legitimacy that has power over the motion of political ideas. Strauss defends the notion of privileging the past over the present: “The fact that the present is nearer in time to the final redemption than is the past does not mean, of course, that the present is superior in piety or wisdom to the past, especially to the classic past” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 88)

“The recognition of two conflicting roots of Western civilization is, at first, a very disconcerting observation. Yet this realization has also something reassuring and comforting about it. The very life of Western civilization is the life between two codes, a fundamental tension. There is, therefore, no reason inherent in the Western civilization itself, in its fundamental constitution, why it should give up life. But this comforting thought is justified only if we live that life, if we live that conflict.” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 116)

Strauss suggests a return to religion as one of the two major elements of Western civilization that constitutes a source of reason. According to Strauss, religion offers the ultimate divine law for people to live the best life. Therefore, Strauss emphasizes that “The revealed law is the best of laws” (Strauss, 1979a, p. 115). This endorsement elucidates the divine law<sup>25</sup> as the ultimate and ideal law designed for humanity, who should be very close to nature: the individual who has a purpose in life, does not defy human limitations to become the master of nature, and does not rebel against religion and God by denying them. Strauss stated that the revealed law is best situated within human societies, and this law is considered to be perfect and beyond humans’ reasoning (Strauss, 1997a). Strauss states that Western civilization constituted of revelation and philosophy. Moreover, he highlighted the impossibility of combining philosophy and religion incompatible way. Strauss elucidated that Western civilization is grounded in two different codes: philosophy and religion. Moreover, these major codes have always existed in tension and conflict. In other words, religion and philosophy are opponents that never can agree. Strauss (1997a) said, “No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian or, for that matter, a third which is beyond the conflict between philosophy and theology, or a synthesis of both” (p. 116).

According to Strauss, there is no way to have both of religion and philosophy together combined in one entity. This is evident in reality because it is difficult to claim that the individual is represented in revelation and philosophy completely. Strauss explicitly admitted that religion and philosophy cannot be combined due to the disparate

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<sup>25</sup> Strauss understands divine law as generated from the religion and religious teachings. This law constructed by divine authority and it directed to the humans.

natures of their logic and intellectual references. However, Strauss suggests each of religion and philosophy should be open to each other. This openness proposes propose a new way of dealing with religion and philosophy without conflict in the human's city.

Strauss favors a return to religion because religion refutes myths, which make this quest similar to philosophy's rejection of myths. Strauss contended that individuals use philosophy to reject myths because its intellectual premises are based on reason and on an inquiry of beliefs and opinions. Furthermore, Strauss stressed that rejecting myths is the basic structure of philosophy. He reminds us that both philosophy and religion deny mythology. Strauss, however, insisted that religious denial of myths is different than that of philosophy. Religion rejects mythology in the name of God, who is seen as possessing the ultimate truth (Strauss, 1997a).

It is true that Strauss calls for a return to religion to solve our problems through our living our lives with faith in the Bible. "However, Strauss in no way favors a return to theocracy or, like his contemporary Carl Schmitt, a turn toward political theology" (Batnitzky, 2009, pp. 41–42). Moreover, Strauss attempts to revive the religious biblical norms and virtues as guidance for us to find the right path of life and avoid the negative influence of modernity.

Strauss states, "Man is not meant to be a theoretical, a knowing, a contemplating being; man is meant to live in childlike obedience" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 115). What Strauss is trying to say is that through religion there is no way to seek wisdom without absolute obedience to divine law. Therefore, joining a religious institution theoretically is not acceptable and will not open doors for people to realize the wisdom of religion. Showing a practical and serious commitment to divine law requires a strong will to translate religious values and teachings into daily practices. Consequently, Strauss tends to state



that the obedience to divine law constitutes a condition for good citizenship. However, “the good of humanity is not the primary concern of Strauss, not if that ‘good’ undermines natural right and therefore political stability” (Havers, 2004, p. 23). Total obedience to divine law could provide social and political stability for the city, which is the most important thing to Strauss. Going back to the past to revive religion will lead us to ancient philosophy as well, the second core element of Western civilization. Strauss states that both religion and philosophy coexist in tension with each other. Therefore, ancient political philosophy “cannot be collapsed or coalesced with religion or theology—and this is due not to any mutual ill will but to the gulf yawning between critical human inquiry and the unconditional demands imposed on human thought by revelation” (Dallmayr, 1994, p. 891). Strauss seems to have suggested that both religion and philosophy exist in tension, and they cannot be eliminated from life; therefore, they should work independently but share the same public sphere. Moreover, Strauss stressed that a loss of religion or philosophy will lead to a loss of Western civilization’s true meaning because both of them constitute its origins.

### **Solution Two: Going Back to Philosophy**

Most scholarship on Strauss’s critique of modernity, even that of some Straussians, indicate that Strauss proposes, as a solution to the crises of modernity, a return to ancient philosophy to revive its original Socratic understanding. Strauss believes that returning to philosophy’s original meaning and living a philosophic life will provide us with a new beginning to avoid the crises of modernity. In his own words, “Philosophy is the quest for the ‘principles’ of all things, and this means primarily the quest for the ‘beginnings’ of all

things or for ‘the first things’” (Strauss, 1953, p. 82). The nature of philosophy, which questions all objects by investigating their beginnings, will restore the contemplative aspects of philosophy and the philosophizing process. Consequently, understanding the whole and ultimate truth will guide us to the right path and help us to avoid the crises of modernity.

Strauss does not forget to mention the mutual antagonistic relationship between religion and philosophy, which is based on two different systems of ideas and beliefs. Religion will never accept philosophy as an alternative to provide guidance to humanity in the city. Strauss stated that philosophy would be in a winning position as long as it held off attacks from theology and its scholars. However, philosophy could be defeated if it launched attacks at theology in attempting to disprove the existence of revelation (Strauss, 1979).

Replacing biblical faith with other alternatives is not easy. Modern thinkers take the easy way by eliminating religion from the city and from public life. Strauss takes the hard way by searching for a real alternative from the three elements of power in the world that have shaped both the character of humanity and its city. When Strauss examined the relationship between theology and modern philosophy, he said they are incompatible because of their antagonistic views. He suggested that we should reconsider the ancient form of philosophy because it does not totally reject the existence of religion (Strauss, 2006).

Strauss’s solution of philosophy as an alternative to religion does not allow any room for religion and biblical faith in public life. The philosophical questioning of everything, including religion, presents faith as irrational entity because of its unrealistic concepts such as miracles. However, Strauss cannot not adjust the nature of philosophy

and philosophic questioning to exclude religion from philosophical inquiry: “For if there were certain knowledge, there would be no need for faith, for trust, for true obedience, for free surrender to God.” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 127). Strauss highlights the importance of *certain knowledge*, which, for the purposes of this philosophic solution, means the knowledge of the whole. Here Strauss raises his doubts and suspicion of religious knowledge. Moreover, his statement reflects his concern that a religious solution will inhibit people’s freedom. Furthermore, the solution of religion cannot allow for the open questioning of God’s existence or the city’s need for religion. Such questions could represent a threat to the institution of religion though raising doubts and skepticism in believers’ minds. Strauss discusses the philosophic solution thus: classical philosophers are not totally interested in following the divine law and authority; however, they concentrate on seeking the beginning of things, which is one of the most definitive features of philosophy (Strauss, 1979).

Strauss believes that the solution of classical philosophy is more effective in the city, understanding classical philosophy as a human act to seek knowledge and truth of the whole. Moreover, Philosophy represents the human endeavor to seek truth, while prophecy aims to deliver divine will (Dallmayr, 1994). In other words, philosophy rises from within human society, and prophecies come from outside the human sphere to guide humans to reach their best life though obeying divine orders.

Strauss compares the characters of philosophers with those of prophets. He considers a philosopher to be a “man who dedicates his life to the quest for knowledge of the good” (Strauss, 1997c, p. 403). For the prophets “there is ‘no need for the quest for knowledge of the good’ because God has already disclosed to humankind the meaning of goodness” (Dallmayr, 1994, pp. 892–893). According to Strauss’s differentiation, “the

prophets tend to address the people as a whole through hortative speech” (Dallmayr, 1994, pp. 892–893). By contrast, classical political philosophers such as Socrates and Plato interested in participate in controversial conversations about complex, conflict-laden human issues (Dallmayr, 1994). This suggests that Strauss highlights the importance of the few who wish to become wise. Moreover, Strauss’s comparison of the philosopher with the prophet emphasizes that wisdom belongs to the few and could be dangerous for the masses. The goal of the philosophically wise few is to spread virtue over the city through living a philosophic life based on wondering and questioning. Furthermore, Strauss states that “the goal of political life is virtue, and the order most conducive to virtue is the aristocratic republic, or else the mixed regime. But in modern times, we find a great variety of fundamentally different political philosophies” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 40). Going back to classical philosophy, he maintains that “certain ways of life or modes of conduct are naturally proper or right, a view which furnished the premise for what he calls the doctrine of ‘classic natural right’” (Dallmayr, 1994, p. 885).

### **Solution Three: Going Back to Classical Political Philosophy<sup>26</sup>**

Strauss always shows that classical political philosophy is superior to modern political thought. As Strauss mentions, although we cannot go back to the ancients completely, we can restore them as much as possible from classical wisdom and

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<sup>26</sup> One could ask how Strauss distinguished between classical philosophy and classical political philosophy. He made the distinction based on the solution to the crisis of modernity. Classical philosophy represents the concerns of the best way of life. Classical political philosophy as a solution to the problem of modernity signifies timeless questions, such as, What is the best political system? In sum, the nature of political and philosophical questions is between classical philosophy and political philosophy.

knowledge: “we cannot define our tasks by our powers, for our powers become known to us through performing our tasks; it is better to fail nobly than than to succeed basely” (Strauss, 1997c, p. 377). The powers of modernity<sup>27</sup> control our thoughts and awareness, but Strauss wants to reach for anything noble, and wisdom from the ancients is within that reach. To fix the problems of modernity, we must, according to Strauss, go back to classical political philosophy:

“We have to think of restoration of political philosophy. We have to go back to the point where the destruction of political philosophy began, to the beginnings of modern political philosophy, when modern philosophy still had to fight against the older kind of political philosophy, classical political philosophy, the political philosophy originated by Socrates and elaborated above all by Aristotle.” (Strauss, 1972, p. 217)

Strauss wants to restore<sup>28</sup> the ancient political science based on contemplation and seeking the knowledge of the whole truth. Therefore, Strauss diagnoses the crisis of political philosophy by identifying modern changes to its direction: “According to that modern project, philosophy or science was no longer to be understood as essentially contemplative, but as active” (Strauss ,1972, p. 219). Furthermore, Strauss elaborates, “The core of that crisis, I submit, consists in the fact that what was originally a political philosophy has turned into an ideology” (Strauss, 1972, p. 218). Therefore, Strauss highlights that political philosophy does not help us to solve our problems and does not create a wise vision for humanity. Thus, Strauss wants to return to the age of classical

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. positivism and historicism

<sup>28</sup> Strauss used two terms to identify his solutions to the crisis of modernity. These terms are *restore* and *return*. Strauss used *return* to specify a particular historical period that represents certain intellectual objects, such as traditional rationality in medieval philosophy. He used *restore* to revive a specific way of thinking about things (thinking about the whole), such as Aristotelian political science.

political philosophy to resolve our intellectual modern crises. It is important to mention that Strauss's call to return to classical political philosophy does not involve adapting Athenian political structures. Rather, it means that we should consider restoring the true original meaning of political philosophy, as founded by Socrates. In its original classical meaning, political philosophy is the quest of seeking the knowledge of truth of whole. Moreover, this return to ancient political philosophy does mean to restore "only a Socratic understanding of philosophy, but also an Aristotelian understanding of political science" (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, p. 56).

Strauss analyzes the intellectual crisis that has led some scholars (e.g., David Easton, 1951; Peter Laslett, 1956) to declare the death of political philosophy. Strauss elaborates further: "the decay of political philosophy into ideology reveals itself today most obviously in the fact that in both research and teaching political philosophy has been replaced by the history of political philosophy" (Strauss, 1972, p. 226). This replacement is a serious issue to Strauss; he views it as an attack on original political philosophy. Further, he says that replacing true political philosophy with the history of political philosophy "means to replace a doctrine which claims to be true by a survey of errors, and that is exactly what Sabine, for example, does. So political philosophy cannot be replaced by the history of political philosophy" (Strauss, 1972, p. 227). Strauss stressed that political philosophy is an intellectual act that aims to offer new analyses and explorations of reality as a whole. However, Strauss contended that the history of political philosophy cannot replace political philosophy because it never aims to produce new philosophizing of any phenomena. Rather, the history of political philosophy studies the interactions of political philosophy with different contexts and histories. Strauss thought that ancient classical teachings are foundational for us to learn and use to determine our purpose.

Therefore, Strauss conceptualized classical philosophy to be a condition in which we can better understand ourselves and view our future path.

This crisis does not affect the status of political philosophy as a field of study, but it goes beyond that in its effect on social science's nature of inquiry. Strauss is concerned that this crisis has a bad influence on the setting of the social sciences. In other words, Strauss's concerns are best explained in the increased skepticism present in the nature of social science: "Social science has not always been as skeptical or as restrained as it has become during the last two generations" (Strauss, 1972, p. 224).

Strauss emphasized that the attempt to return to classical political philosophy is urgent:

"Such a return to classical political philosophy is both necessary and tentative or experimental . . . The relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics, a kind of society in which the classical principles as stated and elaborated by the classics are not immediate applicable ... An adequate understanding of the principles, as elaborated by the classics, may be the indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of present-day society in its peculiar character, and for the wise application, to be achieved by us, of these principles to our tasks." (Strauss, 1972, p. 229)

Crucially, Strauss somewhat admits the success of modern political philosophy. Many products of modern political philosophies have helped us to understand many important issues of human political life. For instance, social contract theory, on the basis of which many modern countries and political systems are built, is central to understanding modern and contemporary politics. Many modern political institutions and countries are built on social contract theory basis. Is Strauss aiming to replace social contract theory with another framework from classical political philosophy? Or does he aim to modify it based on the norms and values of the ancients?

Strauss's intentions of reviving classical political philosophy are a broad claim that goes beyond the field of political philosophy. He aims to return the theoretical foundations of "old political science" (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, pp. 56–57), calling for a return to classical political philosophy that would support his understanding of the importance of religion in that era. In other words, "Ancient philosophy offers ethics that are alternative to what is offered by biblical religion, and one may privately question the value of the religious tradition even as one continues to live a life of right action" (Portnoff, 2011, pp. 41–42). Strauss also favors the solution of political philosophy because it constitutes the inspirational fountain for democracy. "He sought to defend and so to preserve liberal democracy because he thought that the preservation of a variety of different regimes with limited governments was a necessary condition for the preservation of philosophy" (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006, pp. 57).

One of Strauss's motivations for calling for a return to classical political philosophy is to understand political philosophers exactly as they understood themselves. Therefore, Strauss hardly criticizes any hermeneutics based on historicist points of view (Portnoff, 2011, p. 41). Importantly, Strauss's return does not imply restoring structures or systems of the past (Portnoff, 2011) or to replicate identical notions, institutions, and beliefs from the old times; rather, it aims to modify current awareness by considering old ways of thinking. Strauss emphasizes the return to the era of the ancients, which demonstrated more "concrete natural consciousness of the political phenomenon. His truly astonishing clarity and freshness in describing the things around us came in large measure from the way he used old books to liberate himself from the categories which bind us" (Bloom, 1974, p. 376). Strauss thinks that Ancient classical teachings are foundational for us to learn and determine our purposes. Therefore, Strauss conceptualizes classical philosophy



to be condition for us to better understand ourselves and well view our future path.

Allan Bloom, a prominent Straussians, argues that Strauss's return to the ancients' intellectual traditions is intended to highlight the wisdom hidden between the lines of their texts. Strauss aimed to revive classical political philosophy using a special method of reading and interpreting great political and philosophical texts. Recalling esoteric reading practices that had fallen out of favor in modern times, Strauss insisted on ignoring the various approaches of his contemporaries to study political theory and concentrate only on the meaning of the text as the author intended to express it. Strauss committed to esoteric interpretation of great texts and philosophers to reach the clearest meaning and understanding possible (Bloom, 1974). Classical political philosophy represents true philosophical inquiry, because classical philosophers believed that the wise knowledge or knowledge of truth was not for the public but only for the wise men. The esoteric techniques of analyzing political and philosophical writings were major components of Strauss's methodology in studying and understanding political thought. Strauss emphasized that philosophers were aware of the political situations in which they lived and therefore exercised caution in what they expressed in their writings and speeches. Accordingly, to protect themselves, philosophers and intellectuals hid their true opinions and ideas between the lines of their written texts. In using this esoteric strategy, Strauss turned his attention toward the significant works of political philosophy (Smith, 2009).

In attempting to return to the classics, Strauss attempts to overcome the obstacles of modern thinkers to reach the classical philosophers' understanding of man and the world (Behnegar, 1999). Strauss views modern philosophy as an obstacle that constitutes a great wall preventing us from obtaining the wisdom of classical political philosophy. Moreover, Strauss calls for returning to ancient thought, not only for its original meaning

but also to restore the original function of political philosophy. Strauss states that there are three functions of political philosophy: First, “it must protect the philosopher as questioner”; second, it must “lead the best citizens to philosophy”; and third, it must “move with circumspection concerning the salutary role of religious beliefs in society” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 7). Strauss was conscious that political philosophy can put the philosopher in danger because of the critical inquiries of all societies’ belief systems, including religion.

Importantly, Strauss’s call for a return to classical political philosophy, especially to a Socratic understanding of political philosophy, does not offer any promises “of a rational politics or morality; it instead includes only a kind of writing that makes contributions to the edification of the reigning civic virtues, while leading a few morally serious readers toward the philosophic life” (Burns, 2013, p. 781). Moreover, such attempts are not intended “to return to the political structures of the past, but to reconsider ways in which premodern thinkers thought it necessary to grapple and live with the tensions, if not contradictions, that by definition arise from human society” (Batnitzky, 2009, pp. 41–42). Strauss recognizes that people have lost their faith in political philosophy: “Whoever is concerned with political philosophy must face the fact that in the last two generations political philosophy has lost its credibility” (Strauss, 1971, p. 1). Furthermore, Strauss contended that political philosophy is universal because it concerns the nature and status of the whole. However, politics concerns specific matters (Strauss, 1971).

Strauss further explains the nature of political philosophy and politics. For Strauss, political philosophy concentrates on the whole, constantly asking philosophical questions such as “What is the best regime?” or “What is the just city?” while “politics is

concerned with the being and well-being of this or that particular society (a polis, a nation, an empire) that is in being at a given place for some time” (Strauss, 1971, p. 1). Therefore, political philosophy must explore politics though out focusing on perspective of the whole.

#### **Solution Four: An Alliance Between Religion and Philosophy: The New City**

In his writings, Strauss makes clear comparisons between philosophy and religion and their abilities to provide alternatives or solutions to the crises of modernity. However, Strauss claims from time to time through his articles and lectures the possibility of creating an alliance between these two great antagonists, religion and philosophy. “Since philosophy has not provided ‘wisdom’ or a final account of the whole, Strauss concludes that revelation is possible and political philosophy is necessary” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 7). Strauss clearly states the impossibility of a complete synthesis between religion and philosophy. Combining two antagonistic entities into one object is not be feasible for the human mind:

“No one can be a philosopher and a theologian, or, for that matter, some possibility which transcends the conflict between philosophy and theology, or pretends to be a synthesis of both. But every one of us can be and ought to be either one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy.” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 116)

If, as Strauss claims, religion and philosophy cannot be synthesized, why does he keep looking for areas of agreement between different metaphorical concepts that belong to the great group of religion and political thought, including reason and theology, or Athens and Jerusalem? Strauss thinks that a third position reconciling religion and philosophy is possible but on different terms.

Strauss invites us to distinguish between two kinds in wisdom: “Not only the Greek philosophers but the Greek poets as well were considered to be wise men, and the Torah is said in the Torah to be ‘your wisdom in the eyes of the nations’” (Strauss, 1997c, pp. 380). Recognizing that wisdom is not exclusive to philosophy and that wisdom can exist in religion will open the door for partial agreements between each of them. In Strauss’s words, “According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder” (Strauss, 1997c, pp. 379-380). Each side claims to have its own wisdom, and we should choose to seek one of these kinds of wisdom. Strauss encourages us to be open to the two choices and follow what is convenient for us, emphasizing that humans are not wise beings but that they desire to become wise: “We are seekers for wisdom, *philosophoi*. By saying that we wish to hear first and then to act to decide, we have already decided in favor of Athens against Jerusalem” (Strauss, 1997c, pp. 379-380).

J. Christopher Paskewich asserts that Strauss was not a religious man. Strauss appreciates the role of religion but does not consider himself as having a personal faith (Paskewich, 2010). This suggests that Strauss considers religion useful in ways other than worship and contemplation. Therefore, the notion that Strauss had political understanding is not impossible; indeed, his justification of the noble lie makes it more plausible (I will discuss this idea in detailed later). Strauss views these alternatives (religion and philosophy) as significant because they are the true roots of the Western civilization. Thus, we confront a real challenge in choosing between these two key elements to find exist of the cave of modernity crises. It is crucial to understand that “No alternative is more fundamental than the alternative: human guidance or divine guidance” (Meier, 2006, p. 6).

I argue that Strauss suggests a fourth solution to the crisis of modernity. Strauss believes that he can propose a third<sup>29</sup> position that locates religion and philosophy within the border of the city, promising that this solution will prevent any conflict between religion and philosophy. An alliance between philosophy and religion is what Strauss proposes as solution but in a different relationship from that in his other solutions. In other words, this alliance would bring both religion and philosophy together, but religion would provide a protective shield for philosophy. The solution combines and uses the conceptual features of religion and philosophy: the populism of religion would facilitate the safe existence of the elitism of philosophy in the political reality. In the following sections, I will discuss Strauss's conception of elitism. Then, I will explore the centrality of the question of the best political regime in the philosophical side of Strauss's solution. After that, I will explore Strauss's attempts to shed the light on the areas of agreement between religion and philosophy.

### **Strauss on Elitism**

In a broad sense, Strauss's works on religion and philosophy demonstrate his ambivalence regarding the most suitable solution to the crises of modernity. However, Strauss tends to side with philosophy over religion. Strauss was a professor of political science, and philosophy was his subject of specialization and field of study. Consequently, it was most plausible for him to choose what he understood best and admired most. Moreover, of both alternatives, Athens, rather than Jerusalem, constitutes an inspiration

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<sup>29</sup> First solution is in choosing religion only and the second is in selecting classical philosophy

and vision for democracy in Western civilization (Havers, 2004). In the Athenian context, democracy is the rule of the few, which suggests that elitism is essential to understand the philosophical and political foundation of democratic rule. In other words, the *reason* that Athens embodies can be understood only by the few, while the *faith* that Jerusalem incarnates is for the many (Havers, 2004). Strauss supports the notion that only a philosophically wise and rational few individuals could run the state and society justly (Havers, 2004). However, the complex city contains a rational few along with the faithful masses. Such a city does not give equal consideration to few and the many. It is important to state that the notions of elitism and populism cannot be reconciled together in the same public space. Each idea represents a different context—elitism representing the Greek perspective of society and politics and populism relating to clerics and religion (Havers, 2004).

Strauss' denials of reconciliation between religion and philosophy suggest his endorsement of using biblical populism to protect philosophy's elitism. Strauss expressed that there is a hierarchical nature among philosophers and nonphilosophers because philosophy represents the normal status between those who seek the ultimate truth and wisdom and those who are not interested in those issues (Beiner, 2014). Furthermore, the more important distinction between political philosophers and everybody else in the city is that the former is concerned with the question of the best regime for the city and how the city can reach a good, stable political system (Smith, 2011). Strauss wants to restore the natural relationship between philosophers and nonphilosophers, which is a hierarchical relationship. Strauss stated that Plato's cave can help us draw the line between who is a philosopher and who is a nonphilosopher. A philosopher is the only one who can exist in that cave and can reenter it to show nonphilosophers what is outside the

cave. Therefore, Strauss emphasized that philosophers are superior to nonphilosophers because they exist in the cave and seek the truth (Beiner, 2014).

In many of Strauss's writings, he continually reminds his readers that he is neither a theologian nor a biblical scholar (Strauss, 1997). All of these denials tell us that his conceptualization of religion goes beyond the traditional meaning of understanding religion as a belief or faith or worship. Kenneth Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski (1994) elaborate further on this idea:

“For Strauss, Judaism is not a misfortune, but possibly a ‘heroic delusion.’ It is characterized by a ‘righteousness or charity’ that provides ‘the one thing needful,’ but that is ‘not defensible if the world is not the creation of the just and loving God, the holy God.’ No nobler dream than ‘the Lord shall be king over all the earth’ has never been dreamt. Such a dream or aspiration involves ‘the truth of the ultimate mystery.’” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 14)

Strauss's political understanding of religion proposes that religious faith is effective in directing the masses. He considered religion's impact on people to be an illusion that compels them to follow the few who rule the city. Crucially, Strauss indicates that religion “cannot teach the importance of elitism and natural hierarchy” (Havers, 2004, p. 22). However, Strauss does not offer an explanation or rationale for giving the wise few the power to rule over the unwise masses (Havers, 2004). Strauss seems to understand the elitism of the few as an essential condition of politics in the city. Strauss's political elitism differs from other elitisms mainly in that Strauss considers them to be wise men because they are philosophers. But almost all elite groups claim to be wise. The wise use of power is the legitimate basis for the power of the elite. Furthermore, “Philosophy is necessarily a function of the ‘few’ or an elite that must conceal its activity from the hostility of the ‘many.’ ... The philosopher's way of life is forced to pay homage

to politics” (Smith, 2011, pp. 69–70).

### **Religion and Philosophy Agreement Areas**

In analyzing the relationship between philosophy and religion, four possibilities determine their association. First, philosophy rejects religion; second, religion refutes philosophy; third, philosophy and religion may be reconciled; finally, philosophy and religion may be discarded from humans’ public affairs (secularism). Of these options, Strauss tends to choose the third, which aims to find areas of agreement between philosophy and religion. Strauss states that philosophy must accept that revelation is possible. However, this could put philosophy in an inferior or insignificant position. “To grant that revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic life is not necessarily, not evidently, *the right life*” (Strauss, 1953, p. 75).

Strauss states that both religion and philosophy have never refuted each other. In other words, philosophy, with its questionable nature, refuses to be part of a religion dogmatic structure. On the other hand, religion refuses to be part of philosophy and its theoretical discourse of wonder and inquiry (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994). “Strauss seems to have decided that for himself the philosophic life—the pursuit of the good of the intellect—was more virtuous than a life of faith entailing ritual and simple moral action” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 11).

Strauss does not deny the near-impossibility of reconciling religion and philosophy, which he calls *irresolvable antagonism*, clearly stating that no one can be both a theologian and a philosopher simultaneously. This suggests that Strauss admits the impossibility of uniting religion and philosophy in one entity (Strauss, 1979).



Nonetheless, Strauss struggles to find another solution that does not exclude any of the roots of Western civilization. I would argue that Strauss suggests a third alternative position that could bring religion and philosophy in one city.

Smith (1991) explains how Strauss understands the areas of agreement between philosophy and religion. Both religion and philosophy agree on “the place of morality in the overall economy of human life” (Smith, 1991, p. 80). Another aspect of agreement between philosophy and religion is the notion of family: “Both Greek philosophy and the Bible agree that the locus of morality is the patriarchal family that is the basic cell of society” (Smith, 2005, p. 9). Family is significant in classical political philosophy, especially in Aristotle’s philosophy. Moreover, religion and philosophy agree that the essence of morality is justice. “By justice is meant primarily obedience to law. Law is understood here to mean not just civil law but divine or religious law, law with some transcendent sanction” (Smith, 1991, p. 80). Strauss suggests that the problems of modernity “can be best addressed in our time by a restoration of the study of both classical political philosophy and medieval Jewish and Arabic rationalism.” (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994, p. 5). The notion of noble and nobility is a major theme of classical political philosophy, which Strauss invites us to restore. “Yet one cannot make a distinction between noble and base nihilism except if one has some knowledge of what is noble and what is base” (Strauss, 1965, p. 48).

Many scholars consider Strauss a secularist. If so, why Strauss does not choose the secular solution to protect philosophy? I think because Strauss is not a true believer in secularism. Moreover, Strauss’s understanding of secularism makes him doubtful of secularization in both theory and practice. Strauss explains, “Secularization means, then, the preservation of thoughts, feelings, or habits of biblical origin after the loss or atrophy

of biblical faith” (Strauss, 1989, p. 83). Strauss’s conception of secularism clarifies his rejection of it because he considers it an ideology, which is a problematic theme in Strauss’s political philosophy.

From the beginning of his comparison between the major alternatives of religion and philosophy, Strauss tends to choose the side of philosophy over religion:

“According to the Bible, however, the first founder of a city was the first murderer, and his descendants were the first inventors of the arts. Not the city, not civilization, but the desert, is the place in which the biblical God reveals Himself. Not the farmer Cain, but the shepherd Abel, finds favor in the eyes of the biblical God.” (Strauss, 1997a, p. 109)

Strauss attacks the beginnings of religion in comparison with those of philosophy, asserting that the beginnings of philosophy were more civilized and less violent than those of religion. Clearly, Strauss hardly accepts the option of religion as a solution for the crisis of modernity. However, the crucial question is why Strauss discusses the alternative of religion, if he does not believe it is an effective solution to the problems of modernity. The only explanation of Strauss’s attitude toward the alternative of religion is the political aspect of religion and faith. There is no doubt that all religion can be politicized or understood in political sense. The characters of prophets are complex and interesting because they play multiple roles in society and politics: “The prophet is at the same time philosopher and statesman; he is the founder of a regime and the legislator par excellence. The wisdom that the prophet teaches is not theoretical wisdom, but practical wisdom” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 7). Strauss’s political understanding of religion demonstrates a close connection between politics and religion. “Politics cannot entirely free itself from theology; in one way or another, the political needs the theological” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 207).

Strauss attempts to show that even religion has a reasonable component, contrary to scholars of modernity and enlightenment's understanding of religion as an irrational entity. Therefore, Strauss claims, "We shall start, that is, where both the traditional and the historical study of the Bible necessarily start" (Strauss, 1997c, pp. 382). However, he rightly states that in deciding to understand biblical faith from a historical point view, we have already chosen Athens over Jerusalem (Strauss, 1997c). "We begin at the beginning, at the beginning of the beginning. The beginning of the beginning happens to deal with *the* beginning: the creation of heaven and earth. The Bible begins reasonably" (Strauss, 1997c, pp. 382). Strauss highlights the component of reason in religion, which makes the mission of reconciliation, to some degree, possible. Strauss attempts further to bridge the gap between philosophy and religion by comparing their two major characters, the philosopher and the prophet:

"The fact that both Socrates and the prophets have a divine mission means, or at any rate implies, that both Socrates and the prophets are concerned with justice or righteousness, with the perfectly just society which as such would be free from all evils. To this extent Socrates figuring out of the best social order and the prophets vision of the messianic age are in agreement." (Strauss, 1997c, p. 403)

Strauss finds that both religion and philosophy have different intellectual structures, but that they have common purposes. They are both concerned with achieving justice and following the right path. Both traditions have their own version or way of life. Both prophets and philosophers aim to find solutions to the problems of human life and seek human excellence. Moreover, both philosophers and prophets endorse the notion of obedience as an effective tool to achieve the best, most just form of the city. Strauss contended that philosophical happiness can be reached through obeying the laws of the city. In terms of religion, the only way to seek happiness is to obey God's orders and

authority (Meier, 2006). Strauss suggested that the return to the pre-modern age would result in human happiness for two reasons: First, because it promotes the reconciliation of religion and philosophy; second, because the classical age maintained a natural balance between nature and humanity.

### **The Best Political Regime**

Like the Greek philosophers, Strauss is concerned with perennial questions, including identifying the best political regime, a question which he associates with the notion of the good citizen: “The practical meaning of the notion of the best regime appears most clearly, when one considers the ambiguity of the term ‘good citizen’” (Strauss, 1959, p. 35). Aristotle’s famous work *The Constitution of Athens* indicates that a good citizen follows his state’s laws and serves his country well. Therefore, Aristotle considers any citizen a good citizen based on his loyalty to his political regime. However, for Strauss, the criteria for being a good citizen takes the political regime into account: “A good citizen in Hitler’s Germany would be a bad citizen elsewhere. But whereas good citizen is relative to the regime, good man does not have such a relativity” (Strauss, 1959, p. 35).

The existence of the two cities (Athens and Jerusalem) leads somehow to the question as to which city provides the best political regime: “Men who do not see how the problem of the best man or regime arises from actual living in the polity will not inquire about the theoretical best and its location” (Schall, 1996, p. 36). All real earthly cities for ancient philosophers, including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, “are less than the best. The best regime existed in speech, in the argument that established its necessity, the argument which all potential philosophers must re-create in their own souls through study and

discipline” (Schall, 1996, p. 35).

For Strauss, a political system must enjoy political stability. Thus, stable political systems should be based on the sustainability of nature. This leads Strauss “to conclude that the Bible, although apolitical, is politically subversive. Scripture teaches that political regimes are to be judged according to their adherence to the moral law of God, not to nature” (Havers, 2004, p. 22). The Biblical text does not mention the notion of nature and does not accept it as basis of political and religious life in the city of humanity (Havers, 2004). Although classical philosophy considers nature in its system of ideas, Strauss states that classical philosophy does not necessary reject religion and promotes atheism. It is important to state that philosophers do not necessarily commit to atheism, and their presence in society does not delegitimize the role of religion in the public sphere. Moreover, the existence of philosophers in the city is beneficial because they represent good citizens by obeying the law (Deutsch & Nicgorski, 1994). Strauss tries to show how philosophers are not against religion or what people in the city wanted to believe. However, his defense of philosophers is not completely successful because the nature of philosophy depends on inquiry and on questioning all people’s given beliefs about anything, including religion. For philosophy, nothing in the world is immune from questioning.

Strauss did not neglect the significance of religion for the masses. “Biblical faith provides Western civilization with its noble delusions. Political philosophy uses its clever rhetoric to sustain these delusions in the very act of introducing contrary principles that cater to the sordid business of political survival” (Drury, 2005, p. 166). Strauss recognizes the significance of religion in social and political contexts. Additionally, Straussians believe that the secularist splitting of state and church should never have happened,

particularly in the American context, because they contend that people demand religion. For many people, religion is an essential part of their lives and an influential component of their intellectual system (Zuckert & Zuckert, 2006). Straussians' support of existing religion in the public sphere could be turned toward easy control and manipulation of the masses regarding public and political affairs.

For Strauss, philosophy is a quest to seek and understand the truth of the whole. Moreover, Strauss claims that philosophy aims to replace opinions with true knowledge (Strauss, 1959). "By its nature, philosophy is the effort to understand the whole or cosmos by means of one's unaided reason alone. Philosophy must submit, and submit ruthlessly, everything to the bar of its own critical rationality" (Smith, 1991, p. 79). However, religion begins in people's awareness of fearing of biblical God. Based on biblical faith, believing in God is crucial for human life and people cannot live based only on their abilities and their self-capability. Moreover, being in need of divine guidance to find the right path and seeking God's satisfaction is what defines ourselves as good people (Smith, 1991).

Regarding religion, religious belief cannot compromise any part of the structure of faith. Religions' membership approved to individuals through accepting all faith believes in religion as post rational entity. Religion cannot tolerate any negotiation regarding faith. Furthermore, Strauss (1959) expressed that the beginning of political philosophy started in Athens, not Jerusalem. And the invitation to have an open view toward religion and theology must be performed by philosophers because intellectual openness is primarily one of philosophy's basic features (Paskewich, 2010). Strauss finds himself facing a dilemma. He never completely chooses one alternative over the other; instead, "he found a way to embrace both without completely denying either. However, this optimistic settlement was only achieved with his writings from the 1950s and 1960s"

(Paskewich, 2010, p. 123). Furthermore, Strauss looks back to the Medieval era, where philosophy and religion converged. Allan Bloom writes, “Strauss found that the harmony of reason and revelation was Maimonides’s and Farabi’s public teaching, while the private teaching was that there is a radical and irreducible tension between them” (Bloom, 1974, p. 381). The political domain is the object for both religion and philosophy. Moreover, understanding the political sphere is crucial to approaching and understanding the nature of the whole. Therefore, Strauss considered political philosophy as more than just a subfield of philosophy. To Strauss, “political philosophy is a kind of first philosophy” (Smith, 2011, p. 67). “The political is the most comprehensive human grouping within the order of nature” (Smith, 2011, p. 68). Consequently, Strauss stresses that the knowledge of the whole begins with political philosophy (Smith, 2011). Strauss chooses political philosophy as a starting point because Ancient philosophers were highly focused on politics. Moreover, classical political philosophy inquiries about the issues that connect politics to society with a specific concentration in analyzing phenomena from a holistic perspective (Smith, 2011).

Choosing to live a philosophical life is not an easy thing to do. “There have always been and there always will be certain natural obstacles to the philosophical life: Strauss mentions natural ignorance, the power of the imagination, and superstition” (Smith, 2011, p. 69). This framework of natural ignorance could be applied to religion because of miracles, which could be regarded as a combination of superstition and human imagination.

Strauss defends the existence of philosophy and the right to live the philosophical life. It is safe to say that, “as a man of Athens opposed in the freedom of his own judgment to Jerusalem-obedience, Strauss chose to be an Athenian friend of Jerusalem, offering

arguments to the obedient that have an Athenian look” (Lampert, 2013, p. 230). Strauss is against eliminating religion from public life (Smith, 2005).

The relationship between philosophy and the city is always based on tensions. “Philosophic reflection always threatens to disrupt the conventional moral order of the city by calling into question the legitimacy of its opinions” (Tanguay, 2011, pp. 206–207). Furthermore, “the city itself rests on a necessary illusion, namely, that the justice of the city is justice itself” (Tanguay, 2011, pp. 206–207). Strauss recognizes the significant of illusion (in philosophy and religion) in keeping political system sustainable.

The similarities in religion and philosophy make them successful candidate to work hand in hand to approach the political domain. “Both are intimately bound together: the grounding of political philosophy and the confrontation with faith in revelation are two sides of one and the same endeavor” (Meier, 2006, p. xi). Both religion and philosophy share the mission of providing justice and building the just city. Moreover, they also aim to seek and claim the ultimate truth. Importantly, the God of Religion is the God who promises to maintain justice in the universe for all of creation. “It is Jerusalem, not Athens, that supports democracy by valuing humanity and its transcendent God above the god of Greek philosophy who transcends human justice and injustice” (Havers, 2004, p. 28).

### **What Is a Noble Lie?<sup>30</sup>**

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<sup>30</sup> The term noble lie appeared in many philosophical works as a synonym for lie, deception, and falsehood. However, Karl Popper uses “lordly lie” in his *Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 1.



Some believe that using the notion of a lying in politics began with Niccolo Machiavelli due to his separation of values and politics. In fact, the justification for using lies for political purposes goes back to Socrates and Plato. Socrates justifies using the lie as a strategic tool to achieve a just society. Socrates's noble lies for a just city is best exemplified by the myth of metals categorizing individuals based on irons from highest to lowest class in Athenian society. "The noble lie implies that a guardian's child will pass to the lower class if its soul is iron or bronze, but also that a talented child of farmers or laborers can become a guardian (415b-c)" (Pappas, 1995, p. 72.). Socrates clearly states that noble lies are essential and conditional elements for political rulers to achieve a just society. In Plato's *Republic* (414c), Socrates says, "We want one single, grand [noble] lie which will be believed by everybody—including the rulers, ideally, but failing that the rest of the city" (Plato, 2000, p. 107). Thus, Socrates intends to design a noble lie as a grand policy for governing in the political and social structure of the city-state. The Socratic justification of noble lies clearly shows the importance of implication of this over citizens of any particular society to function well. Socrates considers noble lies to be medicine for society to motivate individuals to seek justice in society. He says in *The Republic* 469d,

"The probability is that our rulers will need to employ a good deal of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those they are ruling. And we said, if I remember rightly, that useful things of that kind all came in the category of medicine."  
(Plato, 2000, p. 157)

Socrates's view is that any society that does not achieve total justice among its members is an ill community in need of treatment; therefore, noble lies constitute an unpleasant but necessary medicine for the dangerous illness of injustice. What is surprising is Socrates did not consider the act of lying unethical and used it as a tool to seek the noble

notion of justice. It could be said that Socrates uses noble lies as effective tools that make his strong desire of a just city-state a reality in the Athenian context. He elaborates on this idea in *The Republic* 389b,

“... truth is another thing we must value highly. If we were right just now, if lies really are useless to the gods, and useful to men only in the way medicine is useful, then clearly lying is a task to be entrusted to specialists. Ordinary people should have nothing to do with it.” (Plato, 2000, p. 75)

Socrates's greatest fear of an unjust impact on people and society led him to suggest that the noble lie would accomplish the reality of a just city. However, it is important to note that Socrates limited the mission of using noble lies to specific individuals: politicians and elites. One reason for such limitation is that politicians and elites have the ability to convince people of what they are doing or going to do. Politicians and elites have some sort of power based on their political and social status in the city-state. Therefore, the notion of the noble lie will be plausible within their rhetoric toward society. The same is applicable in the example of a physician. Patients take medicine prescribed by physicians once they are convinced that they need it to cure themselves. Usually, the knowledge that physicians have given them power and a higher status than the patients because the physicians know what is best. Consequently, patients will take the medicine despite its bitter taste. In a political context, “... lying and falsehood are seen as pervasive necessities in the politics and culture of the good city, and in this regard there is an asymmetry between rulers and ruled” (Schofield, 2007, p. 141). Socrates offers the noble lie as a major element of social contract between citizens and the ruler. In other words, Socrates suggests that without using noble lies, it is impossible for a well-structured society to maintain justice as its highest virtue. Moreover, the noble lie is motivated by human

nature, making people realize the value of being a member of a city that protects them from any outside and inside threats. All cities defend against outside threats and dangers; however, the just city is the only city that protects its members from outsider dangers and inside threats including political tyranny. Therefore, “the Noble Lie serves a political function in that it provides both an explanation and justification of a particular political arrangement” (Morrice, 1996, p. 29).

### **Strauss’s views on “noble lies”<sup>31</sup>**

Leo Strauss has a different view on the noble lie and how it functions politically. Karl Popper, for instance, considers that using a noble lie leads to totalitarianism (Popper 1947). Popper rejects the use of noble lies in any way, especially by philosophers-kings. He thinks using the noble lie contradicts philosophers’ quest for truth. On the contrary, Strauss believes that the noble lie has strong political implications within city-states. Consequently, politicians, rulers, and elites legitimately must use a noble lie as a tool to convince the masses of their interests and of the best interests of the city or state. In other words, a noble lie can bring legitimacy to politicians by persuading ordinary citizens to support their policies. Strauss justifies using a noble lie as an existential condition of creating a good city-state that protects people and their political and social life. He says, “The good city is not possible then without a fundamental falsehood; it cannot exist in the element of truth, of nature” (Strauss, 1978, p. 102). Moreover, Strauss justifies use of noble lies as essential to the ideal city. Strauss elaborates further, saying, “Given the

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<sup>31</sup> For more information on how Straussians used “Noble Lie” in American politics, see Mason, John G. (Spring 2004). Leo Strauss and The Noble Lie: The Neo-Cons At War. *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture*, Vol. 3, No.2, pp. 1-14

impossibility of creating a rational and universal society, the city will always stand in need of a ‘noble rhetoric’ that rests on ‘noble lies’” (Tanguay, 2011, p. 97).

Strauss states that a noble lie consists of two major elements. The first is the “replacement of the earth as the common mother of all men, and therewith of the fraternity of all men, by a part of the earth, the land, the fatherland, the territory, or fraternity of only the fellow citizens” (Strauss, 1996, p. 185). The second is about “ascribing divine origin to the existing social hierarchy with the natural hierarchy; that is to say, even the *polis* according to nature is not simply natural, or even the most rational society is not simply rational” (Strauss, 1996, p. 185).

The first element of the noble lie, says Strauss, “is meant to make the citizens forget the truth about their education or the true character of their becoming citizens out of mere human beings or out of what one may call natural human beings” (Strauss, 1978, p. 102). In other words, Strauss’s description of the first element of the noble lie implicitly suggests that individuals could be deceived by the illusion of threatened nation. Here, the noble lie plays a crucial role in creating this illusion of living under a constant threat that threatens to fragment the unified nation. As Strauss mentions, the second element of the noble lie is based on the notion of the hierarchy. Inequality is inherent to a hierarchical system, which operates from top to bottom. Strauss elucidates thus:

“The second part of the noble lie qualifies his qualified fraternity by the fundamental inequality of the brothers; while the fraternity is traced to the earth, the inequality is traced to the god. If the god is the cause of all good things . . . inequality would seem to be a good thing.” (Strauss, 1978, p. 102)

Inequality is essential for a noble lie to work its purpose, because the superior (political or intellectual) class must tell noble lies to the inferior class (the people) More

importantly, religious factors can promote inequality. The divide between believer and nonbeliever constitutes a perfect schema for inequality. This religious divide was used in the famous case of Socrates when the Athenians charged him with blasphemy (Plato, 2000). According to Strauss, the noble lie is a tool of the wise (philosophers) for the unwise (masses and citizens). Among all people, the wise are the only group that can and deserve to know truth. Therefore, Strauss, like Socrates, considers truth a very dangerous thing that ordinary people cannot handle. Socrates indicates clearly that the notion of truth is dangerous and that it is not safe to speak of or reveal to the public. Therefore, it must be shared only among reasonable friends (Leibowitz, 2010). Based on Strauss's conception of the noble lie, it seems that threats to religion and nation constitute the most powerful and effective structure of the noble lie. "The city could not survive without a certain 'noble rhetoric' made up of 'noble lies.' Religious accounts play a privileged role in this 'noble rhetoric.' Indeed, religion is a powerful and indispensable support for moral and political life" (Tanguay, 2011, p. 208). Noble rhetoric based on groups of noble lies can ensure the just city-state. Strauss emphasizes this notion further:

"The philosophers and the *demos* in the sense indicated are separated by a gulf; their ends differ radically. The gulf can be bridged only by a noble rhetoric, by a certain kind of noble rhetoric which we may call for the time being accusatory or punitive rhetoric. Philosophy is incapable of supplying this kind of rhetoric."  
(Strauss, 1958, p. 296)

Consequently, Strauss assumes that the noble lie can bridge the gap between ruling elites (e.g. philosophers, politicians) and unify rule and ruled in one strong city-state. Therefore, Strauss considers the noble lie to be a tool for governing society and the state (Xenos, 2008)—a secret kind of governing based on esoteric teachings. Jim George emphasizes the crucial needs of ruling through noble lies. It is significant that the political

elites used noble lies to justify their purpose in society and politics. Moreover, for political elites, noble lies represent a protective shield to prevent outsiders from entering their group, which claimed to understand the truth (George, 2005). Using noble lies in public affairs indicates the existence of an esoteric circle that keeps truth from a city's citizens. Esotericism goes hand in hand with noble lies; they are inseparable.

### **Criticism**

Strauss was concerned with finding solutions for the crisis of modernity. He offered four solutions to resolve the problem of Western modernity. Strauss criticized most of modernity's products, including the shape of political systems. Unfortunately, Strauss failed to provide a clear theory of state that describes the postmodern political system. Strauss called for a return to classical political philosophy but without providing a clear plan for what to do with the existing political theories that have shaped the contemporary world. Strauss did not tell us what to do with modern political thought. If we agreed to adopt classical political philosophy, what would happen to the modern state? Moreover, the social contract theory illustrates the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, which is a major theme in modern theory of state. Strauss did not specify what alternative political theory should replace the social contract theory.

In his fourth solution, Strauss justified using political lies to control society. Furthermore, these political lies involve using religion as a political instrument. The problem is that Strauss reduced religion to a mere political tool meant to control society. Moreover, the conception of religion he presented contradicts a key element of religion,

which is morality. His political understanding of religion led him to ignore the moral perspective of religion and transform it into political lies.

### **Strauss and Democracy**

Strauss maintained a negative intellectual attitude toward the notion of democracy for several reasons. Strauss's view of democracy was close to the view held by ancient Greek political philosophers. For Greek philosophers, democracy was not the preferable way to politically govern human societies. Aristotle characterized democracy as a bad form of government. Strauss adopted a similar attitude toward democracy and its more recent variant, liberal democracy, which he viewed as a product of modernity. In this way, reckoning with ancient Greek political philosophy was the first problem for Strauss in understanding and accepting liberal democracy. In the early 1900s, the Weimar Republic in Germany adopted liberal democracy as a form of ruling the people. The Weimar political regime reached the further goal of liberal democracy by considering the Jewish people as complete citizens (Tanguay, 2007).

Strauss did not fully trust the democratic political system, especially liberal democracy, because it could lead to tyranny. Historically, democratic election in the Weimar Republic facilitated the rise of Hitler in establishing his dictatorship through his Nazi party. Although all types of political systems have their disadvantages and weaknesses, the disadvantages of the liberal democratic system were devastating and terrifying for Strauss.

Straussians try to present Strauss as a close friend of democracy. Strauss's problem with liberal democracy was that it did not guarantee that the wisest of the wise, the philosophers, would be the elite who held political power (Drury, 2005). Strauss endorsed

the exclusive political and philosophical knowledge of elites. The holding of secrets was a major component of the Straussian understanding of political truth and the role of the political elite (Gunnell 1958). Liberal democracy promoted the principle of transparency, allowing people access to information as their right.

Liberal democracy functions best within a secular political system. For Strauss, the original roots of liberal democracy were found in the first and second waves of Western modernity (Strauss, 1989; Zuckert & Zuckert, 2014). Therefore, liberal democracy was problematic for Strauss because it arose from modernity and was liberal.

Many scholars consider Strauss to be a strong proponent of liberal democracy. However, Strauss expressed in his writings a preference not to have a liberal democratic political regime. Although the original roots of democracy existed at the beginning of classical political philosophy, this democratic political system executed Socrates, the prominent political philosopher. Strauss tended to prefer a political system that enabled political elitists to attain power. For Strauss and the Greek political philosophers, philosophical elitism is attracted not to earthly desires, such as money and sex, but to the truth. Therefore, philosophical elitism is less corrupt and wiser, ensuring the good governing of society. However, Strauss here endorsed a dictatorship of philosophers, which is not that different from any other kind of despotism. Philosophical elitism, in the end, still involves human beings who have their own earthly desires and can be corrupted. Strauss also argued that equality did not exist and was a false product of the Enlightenment.

### **Strauss on Women and Gender**



Strauss neglected to discuss issues concerning women, gender, and feminism in his scholarly and philosophical works. More to the point, Strauss's writings can be described as misogynous. This misogynistic tendency in Strauss's writings has a religious and philosophical basis. Strauss elaborated on and extended his ideas, saying, "The Bible traces Adam's Fall to Eve's temptation. Plato traces the fall of the best social order to the covetousness of a woman" (Strauss, 1997a, p. 105). Unfortunately, religion and philosophy have not often shown women any appreciation for their important parts in society. Although Aristotle considered women to be crucial parts of the household, he believed men to be superior to women. Religious scriptures promote the idea that women will never be superior to men because man was a major part of the original creation of woman. Strauss stressed this idea in saying

"man is created first, thereafter the brutes, and finally only the woman out of the rib of man. Woman, that is the presupposition, is lower than man. And this low creature, I apologize woman, lower still than man, begins the transgression."  
(Strauss, 1997, p. 372)

According to Strauss, woman from the first moment is subordinate to man because she existed from a minor part of man. Moreover, woman is the first responsible for man's misery. Man and woman enjoyed living in heaven but were both punished because of Eve. "The first move came from the serpent, the most cunning of all the beasts of the field; it seduced the woman into disobedience and then the woman seduced the man. The seduction moves from the lowest to the highest" (Strauss, 1997c, p. 386). Strauss conceived of woman as inferior to man because of her creation as a minor part of man and because of her incomplete behavior, which does not lead to the good of society. The narrative of religion supports the lowering of the character of women generally. For

example, the Abrahamic religions hold that all of their prophets were men. This indicates that God chose men to be the messengers to deliver religion to the people. Furthermore, Strauss penned his political and philosophical writings in the early to mid 1900s, at a time when women's rights were not granted and the status of American women was not appreciated. Strauss was interested in defending the best way of life, concentrating on achieving justice and creating a just society. However, the just community that Strauss sought was a community led by man, specifically, the white man, who subordinated all other races, ethnicities, and women under his control and service. Strauss emphasized the importance of having a canon of political philosophy; however, it was completely composed of male philosophers.

## Chapter Four

### Sayyid Qutb Political Theory of *Jahiliyah* <sup>32</sup>

#### Introduction

Sayyid Qutb's major book, which represents his ideology and political theory, is *Maa'lim fi al-Tariq Milestone*, published in 1964. The main object of Qutb's *Maa'lim fi al-Tariq Milestone* was to diagnose the problem of *jahiliyah*<sup>33</sup> in human societies. Moreover, he provided a different interpretation of Islam as a religion through literal readings of the Qur'an. Qutb was not a religious scholar or cleric; however, he reinterpreted Qur'anic texts to reflect the status quo of the Islamic and Muslim nation. Moreover, Qutb read Islam as more than the teachings of a faith, but as a concept offering an approach to life. William Shepard observes, "The conception of Islam as a system supports Sayyid Qutb's view of the relation between the material and the spiritual in the most varied senses of those terms, including the relation between divine initiative and human response" (Shepard, 1989, p. 39). Moreover, Qutb situated Islam in a contentious battle with *jahiliyah*. In other words, he stated that Western modernity is a condition of *jahiliyah*. Even though Qutb criticized modernity as the main cause of *jahiliyah*, his analysis and interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an are considered a product of modernity itself (Soage, 2009). Consequently, Qutb understood the rise of Islamism to be a master plan to change the current status of *jahili* societies. Qutb's approach to Islamism did not

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<sup>32</sup> In this dissertation, (*jahiliyah* and *jahiliyyah*) and (*hakimiyah* and *hakimiya*) (*shari'a* and *shari'ah*) refer to the same meaning.

<sup>33</sup> According to Qutb, *jahiliyah* is any other society that is not follows the true path of Islam. For him, non-Muslims are fake Muslims, Christians, Jews and any other people that deny God's authority including atheists, communists, and secularists.

adopt gradual change as its method. However, Qutb stressed that radical change is the only way to fix the problem of *jahiliyah* in human societies (Moussalli, 2012). For Qutb, the status quo in Arabic and Islamic countries is catastrophic and the Muslim nation urgently needs to change. He contended a radical change is needed to modify reality. Radical Islam is the only way to change the destruction of Muslim society, he stated.

This chapter addresses the following questions. 1) who, exactly, is in a problematic position with Western modernity? Islamic political thought or Islamist political thought? Islam or Islamism?; 2) what does modernity mean to Qutb?; 3) What are the underlining features of Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah*?; 4) how Qutb conceptualizes *hakimiyah*<sup>34</sup> and how it differ from other conceptions provided by Haj Hamd and Shahrour? 5) how Islamists react to the challenges of political modernity such as, democracy, constitutionalism, and the role of women?

Andrew March argues that Islamism has risen as a counter domain for Western hegemony and its corrupted culture and values. Qutb's political theory is a major part of Islamism's intellectual structure. Part of Qutb's political views revolve around the necessity of fighting the imperial and colonial cultural tools to aim to control and invasion of the Muslim world. Islamism<sup>35</sup> is best understood in the modern context. In other words, "political Islamists have tended to accept uncritically some of the main features of modern politics, particularly the state, the institutions of centralized bureaucratic domination, and the use of technology" (March, 2015, p. 107). Islamists face a dilemma

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<sup>34</sup> *Hakimiyah* means that God's sovereignty and authority must be dominant over human society. Moreover, *hakimiyah* constitutes the divine's will and it contains God's codes represented in *shari'a* Islamic law.

<sup>35</sup> This dissertation draws line between what is Islamic and Islamist in the first chapter. Islamism represents Islamists' believe of Islam and ideological and political tool to rule humans' society.

about how to situate themselves in the contemporary world. The role of religion in public life is at the core of Islamists' identity crisis. Islamists partially accept the world of modernity but they are still nostalgic to their Golden Islamic age.<sup>36</sup> Qutb provided a different ideological understanding of religion. His theory of *jahiliyah* represents an inspiring resource for many radical and extremist political groups. Qutb's radical theories of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* constitute a working manifesto for Islamist militants across the globe (Khatab, 2006a; Moussalli, 1992, 2013; Lincoln, 2006).

Sayed Khatab argues, that Qutb uses of term *jahiliyah* have been controversial for those engaged in interpreting his meaning. However, Khatab insists that the study of the concept of *jahiliyah* suffers from lack of deep, scholarly systematic study and analysis (Khatab, 2006a; 2006b). The supporters of Qutb's radical Islamist discourse understand that the term *jahiliyah* represents backward forces that make humans inferior. They argue that Qutb defined *jahiliyah* as the dominance of materialistic norms over any other spiritual values: for example, that the rise of atheism, secularism, communism, and other non-theist perspectives would ultimately lead to the elimination of religion from the public sphere. On the other hand, many other scholars have argued that Qutb's uses of the concept of *jahiliyah* established a perfect ground for radical and extremist Islamist movements. Consequently, Qutb's ideological discourse, which contains many political and religious terms such as *takfeer*<sup>37</sup>, *hakimiyah*, *jahiliyah*, and *Ala'lamiyah* universality,

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<sup>36</sup> For Islamists, the "Golden Age" was the early rise of Islam, particularly the Prophet Muhammad's call to Islam, until the rule of four Wise Caliphs (Abu Baker, Omar, Othman, and Ali). Islamists consider these early years as ideal because of the strong presence of religion in the public sphere. For more details see, Lapidus, Ira M. (2010). *The Golden Age: The Political Concepts of Islam*. In Dallmayr, Fred (Ed.) *Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction* (pp. 33-38). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>37</sup> *Takfeer* is an accusation of being non-Muslim. Moreover, this charge represents a rebellion against God's authority and severe challenge of his will.

gave Islamist movements an intellectual and theoretical source to guide their activities in reality.

Qutb formed his conception of *jahiliyah* from Qur'anic texts in which the term *jahiliyah* and many other descriptions of ignorant people are present. Some of these descriptions are of people who lived in historical periods before and after the rise of Islam. Sayed Khatab points out the Qur'anic verses that influenced Qutb's understanding of *jahiliyah*:

“In the early Makkan period of Islam, the term *jahl* and its derivations, not *jahiliyyah*, were used in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says: 'Show forgiveness, speak for justice, and avoid *al-jahilin*' (Qur'an 7:199). 'And the servants of the Merciful are those who walk humbly on the earth, and when *al-jahilun* (ignorant) accost them, they say: 'Peace!' (Qur'an 25:63). 'I am here to convey to you the message. But I can see that you are people *tajhalun*' (Qur'an 46:23). 'We seek not *al-jahilin* (ignorant)' (Qur'an 28:55). 'Had God pleased, He would have given them guidance, once and for all. So do not be amongst those *jahilun*. (Qur'an, 6:35).’” (Khatab, 2006a, p. 32)

It is true that these concepts (e.g. *jahiliyah*: the state of ignorance and *jahilun*: the people of ignorant) have appeared in the Qur'an and they certainly influenced Qutb's political theories. However, the term *jahiliyah* has different meanings and context in each Qur'anic verse. Qutb considers *al-jahilun* to be the followers of *jahiliyah*, which therefore makes them guilty of unbelief, for which they must be punished. However, God describes *al-jahilun* as people who commit mistakes with innocent intentions and who need appropriate guidance. The only appropriate guidance that God described, however, was to send prophets and messengers for these ignorant people to show them the right path. Qutb, however, adopted extreme interpretations of these Qur'anic texts and chose radical approaches to solve such problems.

## Modernity in Islamic and Islamist Political Thought

The sense of danger in the crisis of modernity has caught the attention of many American political philosophers, including Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and Hannah Arendt. Moreover, many political thinkers in the Muslim world<sup>38</sup> have shared similar fears and skepticism about Western modernity. Western modernity has been introduced to the Eastern world by colonial and imperial European powers. Eastern nations, especially those in the Muslim world, received the notion of Western modernity and modernization movements with suspicion because of Western colonial practices. For example, Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century experienced many political, economic, social, and intellectual transformations that interacted with the arrival of the British occupation. Two major intellectual changes that happened in Egypt were the rise of political and intellectual entities resulting from the foreign invasion of the Egyptian society and state. Both secular and religious intellectualism shaped the political national fronts to counter the foreign occupation of Britain. Saa'd Zaghloul of the al-Wafd party *Hizb al-Wafed* represented the secular forces and led a revolution against the British occupation of Egypt. A religious political movement started in 1928 named the Muslim Brotherhood *al-Ekhwān al-Muslimoon*, led by Hassan al-Banna, proposed another way to resist colonialism in Egypt (Anderson, Seibert, & Wagner, 2009). Both political

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<sup>38</sup> Religious intellectuals in the Muslim world are divided into Islamic and Islamist thinkers. Islamic and Islamist designations represent different orientations of intellectuals. This distinction follows this dissertation's differentiation between Islamic and Islamist. I argue that an Islamic thinker is concerned with the search for truth and scholarly investigation of issues within deep historical and civilizational aspects of Islam. The Islamist thinker is concerned with Islamism as an ideological interpretation of Islam. In some cases, a thinker could be both Islamic and Islamist, such as Muhammad Abduh and Mohammad Rashid Rida.

movements represent different intellectual visions on patriotism and fought British colonialism in Egypt.

The civilizational catastrophic trauma generated by the colonial and imperial states that occupied many nations and states in the Middle East, especially Egypt, contributed in shaping the intellectual attitude of Muslims toward Western modernity. Furthermore, religious political thought in Islam has engendered two major approaches toward modernity: Islamist traditional fundamentalism and Islamic modernism. The pioneers of traditional fundamentalism adopt the attitude of total rejection of any productions of Western modernity as a part and creation of European colonialism and imperialism. To Islamist fundamentalists, Western modernity is a second plan to empower the Western occupation of Muslim nations in the Orient. The traditional fundamentalist approach adopts the task to provide an alternative to the British domination over Egyptian society by proposing Islam as a way of resistance. This approach famously has been called “Islamic fundamentalism,” but what does this concept mean? Islamic fundamentalism is a reaction to Western modern perspectives on politics, society, culture, and economics. Moreover, many Islamist scholars have argued that Islamic fundamentalism is a counter to the imperial and colonial project of the Westernization of the Muslim world (Ismail, 2006).

It can be said that the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism represents two different types—recessive and progressive. Recessive Islamic fundamentalism rejects almost all Western structured intellectual systems, including socialism, secularism, and Marxism. Furthermore, recessive Islamism denies the existence of any of these ideational systems of thought in the Muslim nations’ context. In contrast, the progressive Islamic approach tries to reconcile human theories and ideologies with Islam. Moreover, the



supporters of this approach argue that Islam is capable of coexisting with other human intellectual products, which will enable Islam to find new ways to interact with all different human contexts. Western scholars who study the relationship between Islam and modernity (e.g., Fouad Ajami, Shaker al-Nabulsi, and Bernard Lewis) contribute to marketing the idea that Islam and modernity are incompatible. Sayyid Qutb is a prominent figure of the recessive Islamic fundamentalism that criticized and rejected the modern Western project. I will discuss Qutb's political thought against modernity later in this dissertation.

The progressive Islamic fundamentalist approach aims to bridge the gap between Islam and modernity, concentrating mainly on the interpretation of text to achieve a moderate religious understanding of modernity. Prominent Islamic progressive thinkers<sup>39</sup> (e.g., Mohammed Abduh, Refa'a al-Tahtawi, and Ali Abdi al-Raziq) try to propose modern perspectives of Islam and not isolate Islam to be understandable only in the old times. Generally, the main argument regarding Islam and modernity is that they can never be reconciled because the key elements of modernity contradict the idea of religion (Hunter, 2009). Ideas such as secularism, revelation, science, and the nature of society can cause incompatibility between religion and modernity. In contrast, progressive Islamic thinkers such as Muhammed Abduh have criticized the argument of the incompatibility of faith and modernity by focusing on common features between them, including rationalism. Abduh contended that Islam can be compatible with

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<sup>39</sup> For more details on progressive and modernist scholarship in Islam, please see Kurzman, Charles (2002). *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Kurzman, Charles (1998). *Liberal Islam: A sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

modernity by seriously considering the matter of interpretation to offer new discourses that bring them together (Euben, 1997, 1999).

### **Qutb's Understanding of Western Modernity**

Qutb has different conception of modernity and Western world. In his Islamist writings, one can clearly notice the basic features of the Western world. This part of world has nothing in Qutb's mind expect the lack of faith and poor of values and morality. In Qutb's perspective, Western societies constitute the failing of human's purpose on the earth. Western societies are nothing than corrupted entity that lost its way. Modernity, on other hand, is the product of these corrupted societies and it will be exported to Eastern world to spread their immorality and atheism. In his major work, *Maa'lim fi al-Tariq* Milestones, Qutb started his early pages by evaluating the current status of contemporary world, which is falling due to lack of values (Qutb, 1979).

For Qutb, modernity<sup>40</sup> is the major cause of all problems in the contemporary world. He describes modernity as new kind of *jahiliyah* that will lead eventually to the destruction of people in both Eastern and Western world. In his writings, Qutb indicates that *jahiliyah*, the Western world, and modernity constitute same problem for people and it tends to corrupt Muslim countries as well. Qutb contended that we are experiencing a *jahiliyah* that is darker and more profound than the *jahiliyah* that existed in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Moreover, he opined that every aspect of our lives is impacted by *jahiliyah*. Qutb (1991) also stated that Islamic values do not even influence Muslims or make them true believers like the first generation of early Islam (Euben, 1997).

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<sup>40</sup> Qutb uses different concepts to describe modernity such as modernization, the West, modern world.

Qutb views modernity as an existing threat to Muslim nations. Therefore, Muslims, according to him, must take an action towards such real danger. Qutb's understanding of contemporary society as *jahiliyyah* leaves us with an inescapable crisis: the binary of Muslims and non-Muslims. In other words, Qutb's conceptualizing of *jahiliyyah* does not leave true Muslim followers any choice: either join him or die. The notion of *jahiliyyah* did not exist suddenly in Qutb's political thought. Qutb's understanding passed through many stages to reach his political theory of *jahiliyah*.

### **The Development of Qutb's Theory of *Jahiliyah***

It is important to emphasize that Qutb did not produce the notion of *jahiliyah* in its final form. However, Qutb developed it through his personal and intellectual experience. *Jahiliyah* was present in many of Qutb's writings, but it represented different degrees and meanings. Sayyed Khatab has stated that Qutb developed his thought on *jahiliyah* in four different stages. However, my readings of Qutb's political thought indicated three stages similar to Khatab's four of the development of *jahiliyah* in Qutb's political theory.

#### **The First Stage of *Jahiliyah*: 1925–1939**

Importantly, Qutb developed his notion of *jahiliyah* based on three waves or stages. Moreover, throughout his development of *jahiliyah*, he was also constructing his own new vision on sovereignty and politics. *Jahiliyah*, sovereignty, and *hakimiyah* constitute the basic vocabulary of Qutb's political theory (Khatab, 2006a; Yonis, 1995). In the first stage of Qutb's conception of *jahiliyah*, he was more interested on literature and

literary criticism. He was influenced by Mahmoud Abbas Al-Aqad, one of the Arab world's major writers and thinkers, and Al-Aqad's liberal understanding of the world. Moreover, according to Khatab, "Al-'Aqqad (Qutb's mentor) used the term *jahiliyyah* to describe the condition of social injustice and to distinguish between truth (*al-haqq*) and deviation (*dalal*: straying) from the truth. This indicates how the word *jahiliyyah* was being used in Qutb's environment" (Khatab, 2006a, p. 61). The first stage of *jahiliyah* began with Qutb's awareness of following the right and wrong path. These binaries provide the cornerstone of his theory of *jahiliyah*. Qutb started to feel that something was wrong with the Islamic countries. His diagnosis of the Muslim and Arab world states suggested that they were heading toward a crisis. This crisis consisted of two levels: individual and collective. Regarding the individual level, Qutb believed that the relationship between people and their religion, Islam, was problematic. Regarding the second level, which concerned the collective actions of Arab countries, Qutb insisted that Arab countries were failing at the level of civilization. In other words, the Arab nations had stopped contributing to world civilization, which placed them into the lowest tiers of nations. Moreover, the weakness of Arab and Islamic countries was evident when foreign, imperial Western powers occupied and colonized many parts of the Arab nations.

Qutb thought that the human and divine divide must work hand in hand, which would constitute a pronounced harmony between them. For Qutb, the weakness of Arabic and Islamic countries suggests that the relationship between the divine and human is more about conflict than about harmony. Furthermore, "Qutb's critique of the modern *jahiliya* stems from his identification of Islam with the dynamic unity of the universe as much as it does from his assertions of the particularistic and autonomous character of human actions" (Lee, 1997, p. 100). *Jahiliyah* is built on the destruction of relationship

between God and people. For Qutb, *jahiliyah* encouraged people to revolt against their own God and religion. As a result, Qutb called for what he describes as great unity. Moreover, Qutb invited people to adopt *hakimiyah*, which includes *shari'a* and that would establish the necessary common ground for the divine and the human to be in great unity. Great unity means that people must be obedient to their creator and must not disagree with or reject his law and religion. For Qutb, the contemporary secular and Westernized world lead to the separation of people from God's will. Therefore, the "Great Unity" inevitably must rejoin people with God's will.

### **The Second Stage of *Jahiliyah*: 1939–1948**

The second stage of *jahiliyah* represents the starting point from which Qutb transformed his thought on the Qur'an's concepts and shaped his early Islamist thinking and view of the world. Moreover, this second stage shows Qutb's interest in criticizing the status quo of Egypt under the rule of King Farooq. Qutb believed that the royal and revolutionary political regimes that ruled Egypt were secular. They adopted hatred and rejected Islamic life and teachings.

During this stage, Qutb began to show an interest in Qur'an as solution or a guide for the Arab and Muslim nations to avoid the crisis of modernity and *jahiliyah*. The notion of *jahiliyah* brought the Qur'an's concepts to Qutb's attention, as Khatab observes: "Qutb suggests that the Qur'an, which challenged jahiliyyah in the past, is still the Qur'an which is challenging the present jahiliyyah" (Khatab, 2006a, p. 85). Qutb here recalled what happened in early Islam and was trying to imitate how the Prophet Muhammad characterized the battle between Islam and the *jahiliyah* of Arab society. Qutb stresses that one has only two choices in the battle between Islam and *jahiliyah*. One must choose

a side: either defend Islam or join *jahiliyah*. Qutb stressed that the natural relationship between *kufer* and *Iman* is based on eternal conflict. The issue of kufer and Iman can be illustrated by two prominent persons in Qureshi society: Omar Ibn Al-Khatab and Al-Waleed Ibn Al-Mughirah. Ibn Al-Khatab's piety and the purity of his soul have led him down the road of Islam; whereas Ibn Al-Mughirah's *kufer* has led him to *jahiliyah* (Khatab, 2006a; Qutb, 1995). Qutb's example of *Iman* and *Kufr* in the story of Umar Ibn al-Khattab and al-Walid Ibn al-Mughirah suggests that the form of this battle of Islam and jahiliyah could take place in other times and places. The binary of *Iman* and *Kufr* as theoretical frame could apply to any society or nation. Qutb contended that *jahiliyah* does not describe the past historical period of Arabs before the advent of Islam. However, the concept of *jahiliyah* could also apply to other current places and time periods (Khatab, 2006a, 2006b; Al-Namnam, 1999).

Sayyed Khatab states that the second stage of *jahiliyah* was where Qutb compared basic concepts of *jahiliyah* with concepts of the Qur'an. The beginning of this comparison led him to view it as an endless battle between evil and good. During his travels in the United States, Qutb's fears threats facing Islam and were alerted threatening to opponents, and his fears regarding the decline of religion developed in serious ways. The second period of *jahiliyah* represented Qutb's core ideas of his discourse and made him consider Islam as the only comprehensive solution for all of humans' problems, including the crisis of *jahiliyah*. Moreover, Qutb's commitment to Islam was clear from his writings when he famously declared many times, "I found Qur'an." This greatly impacted his final *jahiliyah* discourse.

### The Third Stage of *Jahiliyah*: 1948–1950

The third stage of *jahiliyah* was about Qutb's deep journey into Islamism. His years in the United States made him decide to adopt Islamist revival and the application of *shari'a*. In his book, *Sayyid Qutb: From Birth to Martyrdom*, Salah Al-Khalidi states that Qutb's decision to commit to the call to Islam (*al-da'wa al-Islamiyah*) started with his passage by sea to United States (Al-Khalidi, 2007). During his trip to New York, Qutb sensed a battle waged between Christian missionaries and Islam and therefore felt obliged to fight this danger by performing Friday prayer before all the people on the ship (Al-Khalidi, 2007). Qutb's journey to the United States caused him to create a binary between true Islamic and non-Islamic *jahili* societies. To analyze the danger of corrupt Western values to Islamic society, Qutb called for applying the concept of *jahiliyah* to contemporary society:

“In this regard, there is no difference between our present condition and the condition of Arabia during the time of the Prophet. Some people think that the call for liberation of the people from the *'ubudiyyah* to the lords is nonsense today. No! The worship (*'ibadah*) of the sundry lords today is not less than the worship (*'ibadah*) of the sundry lords in the *jahiliyyah*. What has been changed is only the type of the lords, not the worship of the lords . . .” (Qutb, 1993, as cited in Khatab, 2006a, p. 158).

This vision of *jahiliyah* captured Qutb's thought clearly during his visit to the United States. Qutb witnessed the Western *jahiliyah* in America, which he considered a product of capitalism. Furthermore, Qutb observed the lack of a spiritual element in American society, which made him feel that religion was in danger of elimination from the lives of individuals. Qutb criticized American civilization, stating that it lacks an appreciation of the spiritual life. Moreover, Qutb (1995a) offered an example: one doctoral student may

submit a dissertation on the best way to clean dishes, which may be considered more significant than a thesis on theology and the Bible (Qutb, 1995a; Khatab, 2006a). Because of the spiritual emptiness of American society, Qutb found that America is the main source of political and moral corruption. Roxanne Euben states that “Qutb was assaulted by what he perceived as anti-Arab stereotypes, unequivocal support of the new Israeli state, and a moral corruption evinced by flagrant sexuality and excessive consumption of alcohol” (Euben, 1999, p. 58). Qutb and most Islamists conceptualized the Western world as a set of corrupted values, beliefs, and people while ignoring the fact that these human behaviors existed almost in every society and country.

Qutb criticizes the *jahili* societies in both the West and the East that promoted injustices and inequality. Moreover, as Ahmad Moussalli notes, “Qutb identifies complete liberation of conscience, human equality and mutual social responsibility as the three principles that guarantee administering justice” (Moussalli, 2012, p. 18). Qutb argued that, while it is true that humans are not equal in term of physical and intellectual capacities, humans are equal on spiritual and theoretical levels (Moussalli, 2012). The silence of Western and Eastern *jahili* societies over injustice and inequality required an immediate purge from these societies of corrupted Western values, which eventually generate *jahiliyah* (Shepard, 1997).

For Qutb, *jahiliyah* challenges God’s sovereignty and must be eliminated. The main problematic feature of *jahiliyah* is that it enables humans to rule other humans as their servants. Islam, as Qutb argued, serves as a liberating force to free humans from other humans’ dominance and injustice. This condition of *jahiliyah* is intolerable and must be resisted because it rejects God’s divine power (Shepard, 2003). This suggests that the problem that troubled Qutb is that human authority challenges God’s divine authority.



Qutb seemed to view this problem as a battle between earth and heaven: that in no way could human will defeat divine power. In Qutb's mind, *jahiliyah* is built on nonsense because the human rejection of divine authority will not bring them anything but total destruction.

Having made the comparison between Islam and *jahiliyah*, Qutb clearly stated what he meant by *jahili* society. Qutb defined *jahili* society as "every other society than the Muslim society." (Shepard, 2003, p. 525). This generalization came to Qutb after his comparative view of old and new *jahiliyah*, leading him to conclude that *jahiliyah* is not over and that it can be revived.

### **Qutb and The New *Jahiliyah***

In Qutb's view, the new *jahiliyah* was best understood in Egyptian context. During his visit to the United States, Qutb compared what he had witnessed in America to the Egyptian *jahili* society. The British colonialism in Egypt represented the resulting impact of the new *jahiliyah* in Egypt. British occupation of Egypt succeeded because of the hegemony of *jahiliyah* over people and their will to live freely and independently. Moreover, the arrival of foreign imperialism to the Islamic world constituted a real threat to the existence of Islam in the minds and hearts of Muslims (Euben, 1999). The weakness of Islamic and Arab nations led Qutb to question people's commitment to their faith. He started to investigate the bigger picture describing the relationship between the creator and his creation.

Qutb's conception of the relationship between human and divine authorities as a conflict leads us to question his understanding of history. Says Euben, "To Qutb, history is an arena of battle, a story punctuated and defined by the cosmic struggle between faith

and disbelief, Islam and jahiliyah, tyranny and justice” (Euben, 1997, p. 42). Qutb insisted that history is a series of declines after the collapse of Ottoman Empire. Qutb viewed this modern *jahiliyah* as more dangerous than the old *jahiliyah*. The old *jahiliyah* existed on a primitive basis, which included certain inhuman violent behaviors adopted by the Quraysh people before the rise of Islam, such as people killing female babies because of shame. But contemporary *jahiliyah* denies God’s will and authority and has replaced it with human authority (Taweel, 2012).

Qutb believed that the most dangerous impact of *jahiliyah* was the creation of false gods (Euben, 1997), the existence of which represents a serious challenge to God’s *hakimiyah*. Moreover, the false gods constitute a deceitful power that controls people and makes them worship the false gods instead of the true God. For Qutb, the false gods are not meant to be gods of other faiths and religions; rather, he included many human ideas, ideologies, and theories such as capitalism and communism as gods that work against *the* God. Moreover, as Euben puts it, “The *jahili* society is thus one that refuses to submit to Allah's sovereignty in the realm of belief, worship, and law, through a denial of His existence, restriction of His authority, or dilution of His sovereignty with false ‘gods’” (Euben, 1997, p. 35).

Qutb used religious slogans to support his theory of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah*. He understood the first part of the Muslim’s declaration of joining Islam as the dominance of the divine over all creation, according to Euben: “‘There is no God but Allah’ is a direct challenge to all forms of human sovereignty and, by implication, to all political constructs whose authority and logic are founded on something other than God's absolute omnipotence and omniscience” (Euben, 1997, p. 39). According to Qutb, this requires implementing *hakimiyah* as a logical translation of divine power over humans’ reality and

promotes virtues as equality among people. Qutb contended that real equality could not exist outside Islam. The total submission of all people to God would make them all equal without any differences.

Qutb imagined *jahiliyah* to be the only factor that has corrupted human society through false values (e.g., inequality) and the only thing that could defeat it, as happened in Islam's early period. For Qutb, this modern *jahiliyah* would lead people eventually toward the real truth of following the true faith and religion of Islam (Lee, 1997). Importantly, as Robert Lee observes, contemporary *jahiliyah* "makes it more difficult for human beings to discover themselves beneath superficiality" (Lee, 1997, p. 96). This is because, according to Qutb, humans are immersed in pleasure and thus are marginalizing the role of religion that once held dominance over all societies. Therefore, such a nation could not be capable of any political action to rebuild their states and communities.

Andrew March argues that Qutb, as an Islamist ideological theorist, constructed "theoretical interpretations of Islam that do point to a desire to improve the human condition through political action" (March, 2015, p. 109). Qutb stated that the religious revival of true meaning of Islam would not be possible without the use of politics as an instrumental tool. Qutb's conception of *jahiliyah* did not only mean denial of God's sovereignty and authority; it also included any (complete or partial) implication of human laws and any kind of human sovereignty. Furthermore, "its essence is a rejection of Allah's sovereignty in favor of a philosophy and epistemology that claims for humans the right to create values and to legislate rules for collective behavior" (Euben, 1999, p. 57).

Qutb denied all human political, legislative, and judicial systems because he considered them a product of *jahiliyah*, which worked in place of God's *hakimiyah*. Moreover, Qutb believed that all human institutions are based on imperfect laws that

pretend to insure justice and equality in society. Qutb contended that the current laws that are practiced are not taken from God's orders and do not reflect His divine authority. Moreover, these human laws promote secular institutions and a secular society. Consequently, secular laws have replaced God's sovereignty with the peoples' sovereignty. Qutb (1991) stressed that sovereignty must be left only to God (Euben, 1999).

It did not make sense for Qutb that these human institutions were built on the long, historical accumulation of human experiences in many fields, such as law, politics, and science. For Qutb, all these human creations aimed to weaken Islam and undermine God's authority. Qutb also rejected the modern rationalism that many philosophical and natural sciences have adopted as a major epistemological system (Euben, 1999). Moreover, he considered all these philosophical and natural sciences to be threats to Islam because they provide many non-religious alternatives for humans. The nature of philosophical questions and inquiry has no limits. Consequently, it questions the existence and nature of God and the limitation of divine authority. Qutb's attitude toward philosophy is not the first in Islamic history. Many theologians and Islamic scholars (e.g. Al-Ghazali) have adopted an attitude of refusal toward philosophy and consider any one who deals with philosophy to be a heretic. Moreover, Qutb and other religious scholars have concluded that philosophy and philosophical inquiry corrupt the human mind and thought by encouraging atheism and secularism.

Qutb viewed *jahiliyah* and Islam as engaged in a battle that must end with the victory of Islam. In *Maa'lim fi al-Tariq* Milestone, Qutb clearly argued that everything in which we live is generated by modern *jahiliyah*:

“We are also surrounded by jahiliyyah today, which is of the same nature as it

was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws—is jahiliyyah, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic thought are also constructs of jahiliyyah.” (Qutb, 2002)

Therefore, Qutb considered even Muslim societies to be non-Muslim and considered them part of modern *jahiliyah*. Moreover, “today's jahiliyyah is in more open rebellion against the authority of God than the ‘simple and primitive’ jahiliyyah of Muhammad's time.” (Shepard, 1997, p. 262). The real danger of Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah* is the accusation of *takfeer* for anyone who do not fully accept *hakimiyah*.

### **Discourse of *Takfeer***

*Takfeer* is a core concept in Qutb's theory of *jahiliyah*. It means literally that majority of Muslims are not true Muslims and therefore are not included in the Islamic faith (Moussalli, 2012). This also means that Qutb classified non-true Muslims (ordinary Muslims) and the followers of other religions in the same group of infidels. “Qutb's conclusion intends to lead his reader to believe that the Muslims who do not commit themselves to Islam as a system of life are not true Muslims” (Moussalli, 2012, p. 12). Qutb's conception of Islam did not tolerate anyone who did not show a serious commitment to Islam. The binary of belief and unbelief was central in Qutb's political theorizing and constituted a source of legitimacy for defeating the forces of *jahiliyah* by any means.

In some of his writings, Qutb indicated that any denial of God's sovereignty is

considered to be fallen in different degree of *kufur*, which is a *shirk*<sup>41</sup>, or engagement in polytheism (Moussalli, 2012). The accusation of *shirk* is no different than *kufur* because both share the same characteristic: losing faith in the religion of Islam. Qutb preferred to use the terms *jahiliyah* and *jahili* to describe misguided society. Furthermore, the concept of *kufur* applies to “individuals and only by extension to larger groups. *Jahiliyya*, by contrast, applies in the first instance to societies, and then the adjective, *jahili*, is applied to individuals connected with that society” (Shepard, 2003, p. 529). This type of thinking has had the huge effect of changing reality, especially considering what has happened in Egypt over the last three decades (Shepard, 1989). Qutb clearly stated, “The present Islamic society is by no means Islamic” (Shepard, 2003, p. 528). Many radical Islamist movements in Egypt have used Qutb’s description of *jahili* society as a legitimate way to use violence and to kill people to eliminate them physically. For Islamist movements to make this world follow God’s will, true Muslims must fight against God’s enemies, who are non-Muslims, according to Qutb.

Because of the nature of *jahili* society, *jahiliyah* would also affect the state and politics. Qutb and many other radical Islamists believe that “the systems of the present Muslim states are not different from Western democracies of *kufur*. They want to establish a caliphate ruled by their own terms of *shari’ah*, and they agree on jihad to overthrow governments” (Khatab, 2011, p. 95).

Qutb started to feel the danger of *jahiliyah* during his visit to the United States. He considered the leaders of Arab and Islamic states to be *kufar* (infidels) and therefore

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<sup>41</sup> *Shirk* polytheism means that worshipping more than one god. In Islamic sense, *shirk* means also including other entity in worshipping God such as idols or mediator between God and people.

wrote a letter to Egyptian intellectuals to ask them to react to such a coming risk. Qutb says there are Egyptian intellectuals who are silent about bad policies and decisions. Moreover, Qutb urged Egyptian intellectuals to adopt sedition acts and form a disobedience movement that will challenge the state's wrong decisions. Of course, Qutb understood the Egyptian intellectuals lacked courage because they had to fight the Westernization of Egyptian society that corrupts the Islamic culture. Therefore, Qutb (1950) stated that intellectuals must approach the dangers surrounding Egyptian society with anger (Khatab, 2006a).

The silence of intellectual and prominent thinkers in Egypt led Qutb to believe that all these cultural elites were traitors. Moreover, many of these intellectual elites had adopted Western discourses and ideologies such as liberalism or communism, leading Qutb to imagine all these human-made ideologies and approaches as opponents to Islam that aimed to distract from it.

### **The Concept of Religion in Qutb's Thought**

Qutb described the followers of *jahili* societies as corrupt people who would like to marginalize the role of religion to a limited sphere. Qutb was blaming intellectuals to have no reactionary attitude toward people of *jahiliyah*. Qutb stressed that the intellectuals' silence and laziness do not protect Islam from foreign attacks. Furthermore, Qutb criticized the intellectuals' concept of religion, which they believe is related only to faith rituals and not to earthly affairs. Qutb (1950) viewed these intellectuals as corrupted spoilers (Khatab, 2006a). Qutb's statement suggests that rising anger among the youth could lead to hope of bigger change in society. In other words, he suggested that spreading anger in society would lead somehow to a revolution that would eliminate the role of

political tyrants in Islamic and Arab countries.

Qutb stated that associating his conception of Islam with power and authority would lead to the rise of new, strong, true Muslims. He contended that Islam would not be affected and would not play an important role unless it represented in shape of society or state (Qutb, 1979). For Qutb, Islam “is a ‘political religion’. The unity between religion and politics is a great principle in Islam. To him, the link between religion and politics is a very important and critical matter.” (Khatab, 2006b, p.7). Qutb viewed Islam as a comprehensive religion that did not miss any various aspect of life including the political. However, this claim was based only on his modern interpretation of Islam and Qur’an. He continually mentioned in his writing the glory of the Islamic Empire and how it contributed to expanding Islam as a strong religion.

A part of Qutb’s understanding of religion was his concentration on Islam’s practical aspects (Akhavi, 2012). “Qutb does not view Islam simply as a religion in the Western sense but rather as a comprehensive and inclusive way of living in this world and the afterlife” (Moussalli, 2012, p. 11). For Qutb, Islam must be practical, not theoretical. Moreover, his theory of *jahiliyah* and *hakimyah* suggests that collective actions of Islam and Muslims are the only way to implement God’s sovereignty and will throughout the world. Furthermore, Qutb’s definition of Islam expands it beyond rituals and worship to reach other aspects of life, and he describes Islam as:

“a system in which all spheres aimed firstly and fulfill the meaning of worship; in the system of government, economic, criminal law, civil law, personal status law and all laws and codes aimed to fulfill the meaning of worship.” (as cited, in Khatab, 2002, pp. 151-152)

Shepard states that Qutb conceptualized religion as a system, suggesting an ideological



understanding of Islam. Shepard partially analyzed Qutb's uses of vocabulary in his writing: "The verb *inbathaqa* indicates a particularly close relationship, almost of a logical or essential nature, much closer, he tells us elsewhere, than a 'firm bond' (*irtibat wathiq*)." (Shepard, 1989, p. 35)

Qutb kept warning his readers of reducing Islam to a "set of abstractions." (Lee, 1997, p. 95). According to him, the current major failing of Islamic nations is that they understand Islam as a theoretical religion. Qutb stressed that theoretical Muslims should understand their religion as set of rituals for worshipping God. For Qutb, this is not enough to consider any theoretical Muslims to be a true Muslim, genuine Muslims. After his return from America, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood and proclaimed his famous slogan, "I was born in 1951." Ana Belen Soage stresses that one of the major concepts that shaped Qutb's ideological discourse was activism (Soage, 2009). The activism of Islamism is the most effective way to change the contemporary nature of jahili societies. For Qutb, Islam was a comprehensive program for all aspect of life: "Islam is a religion for reality; a religion for life; a religion for movement; a religion for action" (Soage, 2009, p. 192). Qutb refused any reconciliation between Islam and any other human theories or ideas. For him, no way existed to incorporate divine and human power in ruling and legislative spaces. Therefore, Qutb rejected any "adjustments [of any humans' ideals and systems] to become Islamic, or who link Islam to other ideologies in order to make it more attractive, e.g. by speaking of 'Islamic socialism' or 'Islamic democracy'" (Soage, 2009, p. 193). Qutb argues that Islam is the only alternative for all humans made intellectual systems and approaches. Therefore, "the Islamic program is the only one that is adapted to men's *fitra*, which is both spiritual and material, and therefore it alone can guarantee happiness in this life and the next" (Soage, 2009, pp. 195-

196). Therefore, Qutb believed that *hakimiyah* does not contradict human nature because it comes from the same creator.

### **The Solution of *Hakimiyah*: Qutb, Haj Hamad, and Shahrour**

Shahrour (2014) argued that the historical roots of *hakimiyah* go back to the early periods of Islam. Specifically, they go back to the *Kharijites*, a group considered to be the first in Islamic history to use specific verses from the Qur'an as slogans. The *Kharijites* stated that all the types of ruling belong to God himself only. They built their argument on the foundation of the following Qur'anic verse: "What you worship besides Him are nothing but names that you and your fathers have assigned, for which no sanction has been sent down by God. Authority belongs to God alone. He commands that you worship none but Him. This is the right way; but most men are ignorant" (*Al-Qur'an*, 1994). Moreover, Sharour argued that the ideological and Islamist conceptualization of the term *hakimiyah* emerged in the modern world, particularly after the British Empire's occupation of the Indian subcontinent. The concept of *hakimiyah* has gained great significance in Islamic culture, especially in South Asia. Because of the clash between local Islamic cultural values and British imperial and colonial logics, many scholars and intellectuals have called on the notion of *hakimiyah* to defend their culture and religion from outside invasion. Abu A'la Maududi became the first modern Islamist intellectual to provide ideological and political usage of the term *hakimiyah* in our contemporary world. According to Maududi (1984), Islam states that this universe is under the authority of God, the creator; therefore, God is the supreme ruler, and supreme authority belongs to him only. As for man, he is the successor of God in this world, and by this statement man

must apply God's rules and follow his orders (Maududi, 1984). This description of the relationship between God and humans leaves individuals no space to choose any other option in their lives. According to Islamist interpretation, complete obedience is a condition of becoming a true believer.

Shahrour (2014) further stated that this version of *hakimiyah* can be understood through three major underlying features<sup>42</sup>: (a) the authority of God is the only authority that man must be subject to; (b) man must completely obey the prophet Muhammad, as a representative and deputy of God on earth; (c) the divine law is the only law that must govern people (Shahrour, 2014). All of these elements suggest that Islamists' version of *hakimiyah* aims toward dominance over all society and state, and it leaves no other choices for human beings to practice their lives.

In the case of Qutb (1948 and 1963), and Mawdudi (1984), the theories of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* do not criticize the West theories, but rather he denies the Western intellectual tradition of rationalism or political theories of sovereignty, the state, and the social contract so influential for many Western political theorists and philosophers. Instead, Qutb's political theory constitutes a total denial of any human efforts at interpreting and theorizing, ascribing these exclusively to the divine powers.

In this section, I examine three different interpretations of the notion of *hakimiyah*. I start by addressing Qutb's (1948) conception of *hakimiyah*. I then explore Al-haj Hamad's (2010) understanding of *hakimiyah*. Finally, I discuss Shahrour's (2014) conception of *hakimiyah*.

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<sup>42</sup> Qutb, Mawdudi and majority of Islamists agree on these principles. Rejection of these principles will devalue the political and ideological aspect of Islam.

### **Qutb's Conception of *Hakimiyah***

The theory of *hakimiyah* raises critical questions about the relationship between politics and religion. In other words, *hakimiyah* stresses a necessity to inquire about the shape of the state in Islam. Moreover, "It will elucidate that the government in Islam is a limited and constitutional government and that the Islamic State is not theocratic or autocratic or anything but 'Islamic'" (Khatab, 2006b, p.7). Qutb (2000, [1953]), in his first Islamist work, *Social Justice in Islam*, described the nature of God's sovereignty, *hakimiyah*, and how it can unify the whole world in one harmonious entity, where, as Khatab (2006b) summarized, "Every part is in harmony with all parts in an integrated unity. Every part has a reason for being and that is related to this complete and absolute harmony." (Khatab, 2006b, p. 21). This comprehensive harmony and liberation of men cannot exist without the dominance of *hakimiyah* in society. Qutb (1953) stated that *hakimiyah* contains many significant divine principles, such as *shari'a* and *tawhid*. These major Islamic principles together constitute *hakimiyah*, which eliminates *jahiliyah* from society and returns people to the right path. Qutb insisted that the believers in God's *hakimiyah* must in the beginning accepted the idea of *shari'a*. For Qutb, implementation of *shari'a* guarantees the dominance of God's *hakimiyah* and ensures that people are committed to living under God's authority (Khatab, 2006b).

The notion of *tawhid* is crucial for Qutb because it supports *hakimiyah* as an exclusively legitimate belief in the oneness of God and the dominance of his authority and sovereignty over people. Shahrough Akhavi (2013) stated that there are many instruments that can be used to make plausible and natural the invitation of applying God's *hakimiyah* over human society. He expanded on this idea by saying: "One of the

ways this call would succeed was to remind the people of the admonitions of sacred scripture. Qutb utilized as a vehicle of persuasion innovative interpretations of key Qur'anic verses (5:44, 45, 47; 12:47, 60)" (Akhavi, 2013, pp. 164-165). According to Khatab (2006b), Qutb interpreted many Qur'anic verses politically and ideologically, including the following:

"To whom belong the earth and that all that it contains?" (23:84). "Who is it in whose Hands is the sovereignty of all things . . . Who protects all but is not protected of any (say) if you know" (23:88). "Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the Mighty Throne?" (23:68). "Say: O Lord, Sovereign of all sovereignty. You bestow power on whom You will, and take it away from whom You please (3:26)." (as cited in Khatab, 2006b, p.28)

Qutb was not the first to understand that the term *hukm* meant "political rule." According to Khatab (2002), "Ibn Manzur defines *hukm* as follows: 'Allah is the Sovereign (*Ahkam*) of sovereigns (*hakimin*) and His Qur'an is the *hakim* for and among you.'" (Khatab, 2002, p. 145). Additionally, Qutb, and many other Islamists, have used the concept of *hakimiyah* in its political meaning to construct the Islamic state. Moreover, Khatab (2002) stated that the concept of *hakimiyah* "is closely bound to the concept of *tawhid*, the corner stone of Islamic belief." (Khatab, 2002, p. 147). Without *tawhid*, *hakimiyah* cannot exist because God's sovereignty will not be the only sovereignty in reality.

Consequently, as Khatab (2002) stated, "This means that Allah is the only '*Hakim*' or Sovereign and He has the right to ordain the programme of human life; people must live according to the *shari'ah* ordained by Allah in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*." (Khatab, 2002, p. 154). Because Qutb comprehended Islam in a universal and comprehensive sense, he insisted that Islam is a religion and a state (Khatab, 2002). In other words, Qutb contended that Islam contains political teachings that enable Muslims to create their

Islamic state. Qutb transformed Islam from being a religion of faith to one of politics by imposing an ideological perspective built on a different tradition called Islamism. In this context, Khatab (2002) explained the following:

“After accepting the *hakimiyyah* of God, the government in Islam, according to Qutb, is then based on (i) justice in the part of the *hukkam* (rulers), (ii) obedience on the part of *mahkumin* (ruled), and (iii) *shurah* (consultation) between rulers and ruled. These are, as Qutb asserts, “broad basic lines from which spring all principles which lay out the shape, the form and the nature of government.” (Khatab, 2002, p. 155)

Implementing *hakimiyah* in society launches man’s will with no fear of anything except God. Moreover, in the words of Moussalli (2012), “man is not a slave to nature or afraid of its consequences like death anymore, because he then views all of nature as well as his life as part of a totality designed by the divine will” (Moussalli, 2012, P.14). Here, Qutb highlighted the weakness of human will as an inescapable thing. He contended that following the right path, as designed by God, is a natural act, whereas disobeying God and declaring an independent human will is an act of rebellion against the divine will and therefore an unnatural act.

Qutb and the Islamists called for the establishment of an Islamic state to apply *hakimiyah* and fight against *jahiliyah*. However, this call for a religious state is in part self-contradictory. As Moussalli (2012) pointed out, “the quest for an Islamic state is realistic in that sense, and not because it actually exists. Islamic realism is also idealistic in the sense that it attempts to raise humankind to adopting an ideal” (Moussalli, 2012, P.14). Qutb and many pioneers of Islamism argued that creating an Islamic state is a very realistic idea. Yet, Qutb asked people to adopt a higher, divine authority to govern the Islamic state, which is an ideal claim, not a realistic one. Moreover, Qutb stated that

*shari'a* represents the most just law for human society and one that can ensure justice in society (Moussalli, 2012). Qutb's conceptualization of *shari'a* goes beyond its traditional meaning offered by early *Umma*. For him, *shari'a* is a comprehensive system that covers many social, cultural, moral, legal, and economic areas. Therefore, *shari'a* is suitable for all humankind and functions perfectly. Here, Qutb ignored that the contemporary world of diversity and multiculturalism cannot be integrated with *shari'a* because of his understanding of *shari'a* as perfect. Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* denied any kind of elitist structure for political rule (Moussalli, 2012). However, this suggests that there is an internal contradiction within Qutb's theorizing of Islamizing society and the politics of Arab and Islamic countries. The contradiction is that the caliphate system is a hieratical political structure based on elitism. It is not clear what Qutb means in saying that his theories of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* reject all elitist forms in society.

For Qutb, according to Khatab (2011), *hakimiyah* is "the highest governmental and legal authority." (Khatab, 2011, P. 97). Therefore, Qutb and the Islamists who adopted a similar conception believed that *hakimiyah* is a major feature of divine nature and at times understood it as synonymous with God. Moreover, Khatab (2011) wrote: "The *hakimiyah* means that the *shari'ah* of Allah is the foundation of legislation. Allah does not descend Himself to govern, but sent down His *shari'ah* to govern." (Khatab, 2011, P. 97). It is true that Qutb argued that applying Islamic law in any society would not prevent people from enacting legislation for their affairs (Khatab, 2011). However, this implementation of *shari'a* would leave no space for people to enact legislation outside the nonnegotiable role of Islamic law. Euben (1997) argued that "the fundamentalist insistence on divine sovereignty must be understood, in part, as a rejection of and rebuttal

to modern theories of political sovereignty and the rationalist epistemology that justifies them.” (Euben, 1997, p. 28). Euben rightly stressed that “Qutb’s political theory yields an understanding of (Sunni) Islamic fundamentalist thought as a challenge to modern political sovereignty in both the Middle East and the West” (Euben, 1997, p. 31). It can be said that most radical and extremist Islamist movements have utilized Qutb’s political theory as a roadmap for changing nonbelieving societies and states.

There is no doubt that the concept of *hakimiyah* contains a concrete Islamist ideology component. The importance of the term *hakimiyah* lies in its legitimacy to establish an Islamist state through its application in politics and society. In his first Islamist intellectual work, *Social Justice in Islam*, Qutb (1953) presented the term as one of great unity between earthly and divine powers. Qutb elucidated that there should be no other power claiming authority in the universe except God’s power. As Khatab (2006b) explained, the supreme power on earth must be divine *hakimiyah*, which translates the divine will into practices in all aspects of life (Khatab, 2006b). Qutb contended that the core of political practices in Islam is the expressed belief that there is no god except Allah. Once Muslims state that Allah is the only true god, Qutb stated that Muslims should commit to *hakimiyah* as their way of life. For Qutb (1949), any theoretical framework that does not recognize *hakimiyah* would be considered *kufir* and part of *jahili* society (Khatab, 2006b).

Khatab (2006b) continued by insisting that Qutb’s political theory of *hakimiyah* concentrates on five major political issues: (a) “The system of government in Islam is not similar to any other systems”; (b) “It is distinct from all forms of government in secular democracies”; (c) “It is constitutional”; (d) “It is not inherently theocratic or autocratic”; and (e) “The form of Islamic government has no impact on the Islamic identity of the



state” (Khatab, 2006b, p. 28).

Qutb stressed that *shari’a*, with its own divine codes, is much more suitable for human societies and is more perfect than earthly legal systems, which are based on very limited human knowledge and understanding. Here, I argue Qutb raised the issue of limited human horizons and unlimited divine knowledge. This comparison has methodological and logical problems. First, the methodological problem of Qutb’s comparison relates to the issue that, as humans, we never claim that our knowledge is perfect or complete; we declare instead that we learn and try to build our knowledge. The second problem is logical, in that Qutb makes the mistake of comparing religious knowledge to complete and full knowledge, and he expects that it will be convincing for all people because it challenges all other kinds of knowledge. Religious knowledge cannot be applied to reality without human interpretation because it takes the form of books and divine orders. Interpretations of divine texts are necessary for our incomplete knowledge. The Qur’an and the Hadith cannot speak in themselves, and, therefore, interpretation of these religious resources is subject to human comprehension. Moreover, as a response to Qutb’s argument rejecting all human interference in the world, it can be noted that human interpretation is the only way to connect with divine knowledge. For Qutb, these matters are presented as undeniable facts for all people. Moreover, as Khatab (2006b) argued, “The Qur’an is a fact with a constant essence like that of the universe itself. The universe, as Qutb asserts, is the visible book of God, while the Qur’an is His legible book” (Khatab, 2006b, P.22). Qutb’s calling for the application of *hakimiyah* and *shari’a* suggests that the Qur’an’s messages can be applied in a universal sense (Lee, 1997, p. 94).

Qutb contended that applying *hakimiyah* over society would ensure that humans followed the right path and avoided God’s anger. For Qutb, the perfect historical period,

constituting a golden age for Islam, occurred during the era of the Prophet and the four Caliphs in early Islamic history (Khatab, 2006a). Consequently, this golden age is the best model for reviving *hakimiyah* and applying it to transform *jahili* society to be Islamic. To make us aware of the danger of *jahiliyah*, Qutb invited us to look at how the Prophet Muhammad interpreted the old *jahiliyah* as a threat to humans (Khatab, 2006a).

As mentioned above, Qutb and many extreme Islamists, such as Mawdudi, interpreted Qur'anic verses to form a theory of *hakimiyah* to rescue people from the danger of *jahiliyah*. In contrast, many Islamic thinkers have expended massive effort to criticize the Islamist radical and extreme interpretations of Islamic teaching and the Qur'an through new interpretations. In the following, I will explore Haj Hamad's and Shahrour's conceptualization of *hakimiyah*.

### **Haj Hamad's Conception of *Hakimiyah***

Mohammad Abu al-Qasim Haj Hamad is a prominent Sudanese philosopher who has had a huge influence on developing and criticizing the idea of *hakimiyah*. In his book *Al Hakimiyah*, Haj Hamad (2010) refused the comparison between God's *hakimiyah* and the people's *hakimiyah*. His refusal came from the essential differences between Godly and humanly natures (Haj Hamad, 2010). On these grounds, Haj Hamad strongly rejected any kind of comparisons between Godly and human *hakimiyah*. Toward providing a contemporary reading of *hakimiyah*, Haj Hamad distinguished among three kinds of *hakimiyah*, namely God's *hakimiyah*, the *hakimiyah* of succession, and human *hakimiyah*.

### **God's *Hakimiyah***

Haj Hamad asked a significant question: if we have God's *hakimiyah*, when does God practice *hakimiyah*? Haj Hamad tried to find historical evidence to support his suspicion of the uselessness of previous literature on *hakimiyah* in its distinguishing between divine and human implementation of *hakimiyah*. Haj Hamad argued that God has exercised his absolute *hakimiyah* only once in this world. That happened when the Pharaoh of Egypt attacked the Israelites.<sup>43</sup> The writer relied on specific Qur'anic verses to support his claim. The first verse is "So We let loose upon them the flood, and the locusts, and the lice, and the frogs, and blood—all explicit signs—but they were too arrogant. They were a sinful people" (The Quran, 2012, (7:133) p. 81). From further verses of the same surah of The Elevations (*al-A'raf*), Haj Hammad quoted the following: "And We made the oppressed people inherit the eastern and western parts of the land, which We had blessed. Thus the fair promise of your Lord to the Children of Israel was fulfilled, because of their endurance. And We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had built, and what they had harvested" (The Quran, 2012, The Elevations (*al-A'raf*), (7:137), p. 81). Haj Hammad concluded from these Qur'anic verses that God had made an absolute and direct intervention in human affairs. Furthermore, this divine involvement does not change the general critical situation between the Pharaoh and the Israelites, but instead goes further to manage all aspects of life for the Israelites, including telling them what to eat and what to do. According to Haj Hamad, God's *hakimiyah* represents the total and

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<sup>43</sup> I have consulted three different translations of the Qur'an (Talal Itani, 2012; Ahmed Ali, 1993; and Sayyed Hossein Nasar, 2015) to locate the specific descriptive term for the people of Israel in this Qur'anic context. All three versions use "Children of Israel," but I prefer to use "Israelites" to refer to the people of Israel mentioned in the Qur'an.

absolute divine dominance and hegemony over man and nature. The biblical and Islamic stories of what happened between the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Israelites clearly show the divine involvement in creating miracles to allow his chosen people to survive the Pharaoh's persecution.

### ***Hakimiyah of Succession***

The second type of *hakimiyah* involves the role of human intervention in managing and determining human affairs. This *hakimiyah* highlights the major transformation in human history through which the Israelites demanded a new *hakimiyah* to replace the absolute and exclusive *hakimiyah* of God. Regarding this *hakimiyah* of succession, Haj Hamad (2010) showed that the divine power allows humans to govern their affairs gradually (Haj Hamad, 2010). The first attempt to appoint a successor is highlighted in the following Qur'anic verse:

“Have you not considered the notables of the Children of Israel after Moses? When they said to a prophet of theirs, “Appoint a king for us, and we will fight in the cause of God.” He said, “Is it possible that, if fighting was ordained for you, you would not fight?” They said, “Why would we not fight in the cause of God, when we were driven out of our homes, along with our children?” But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. But God is aware of the wrongdoers.” (The Heifer (al-Baqarah), (2:246), pp. 18-19)

It is important to note that this *hakimiyah* of succession does not mean that divine guidance does not exist anymore. Haj Hamad (2010), as well as many other scholars, such as Mohammad Shahrour (2014), have argued that the continuous sending of messengers and prophets suggests the divine commands and supervision of gradual control of the *hakimiyah* of succession (Haj Hamad, 2010).

### **Human *Hakimiyah***

The third type, human *hakimiyah*, is a declaration giving humans complete control to manage their affairs. Haj Hamad insisted that this final kind of human *hakimiyah* began with the prophecy of Muhammad, the seal of all prophets and messengers. Many Islamic scholars interpret the ending of the divine contact with humans throughout the message from the prophet Muhammad to be a clear expression of divine will ordering humans to handle themselves in every aspect of their lives (Shahrour, 2014). Another feature of human *hakimiyah* is that people should take control over nature and the earth's natural resources without any divine assistance or intervention. In other words, humanity should completely manage their own earthly affairs. The end of divine connection through, for instance, miracles, new messengers and prophets, and divine revelation gives humans the freedom to care for themselves, and what they learn from the divine gradually builds up human independence from God's guidance. Haj Hamad (2010) stated that human *hakimiyah* is the most dangerous type of *hakimiyah*. Because humans can become slaves to their desires for rule and power, they risk believing that God has created this world to build his own kingdom on earth. These beliefs therefore give his followers, the true believers, the right to enslave other people and rule them in the name of God (Haj Hamad, 2010). The paradox here is that God has stated clearly that he does not desire or need anything in this universe. This is the predicament of Islamism and Islamists. There are no clear interpretations of the Qur'an that demonstrate any political theory of the state. Nor are there any political connotations on how to establish a political community. All that they argue about is the imperial tendency of the Islamic caliphate.

### **Shahrour's Conception of *al-Hakimiyah***

Dr. Muhammad Shahrour is one of the few scholars to provide a deep analysis of the problem of *hakimiyah*. In his book, *Religion and Authority*, Shahrour (2014) traced the original roots of the notion of *hakimiyah*. He rejected most of the *hakimiyah* theories offered by prior Islamist intellectuals and Islamist movements. According to Shahrour, all Islamists have conceptualized the idea of *hakimiyah* politically. In contrast, Shahrour argued that the notion of *hakimiyah* has nothing to do with politics and political affairs. Instead, he showed that *hakimiyah* is more about the moral domain and provides a general guide for human life. Shahrour distinguished among three types of *hakimiyah*: divine *hakimiyah*, divine–human *hakimiyah*, and human *hakimiyah*.

### **Divine *Hakimiyah***

Shahrour provided a new interpretation of *hakimiyah*. What is interesting in Shahrour's conceptualization of *hakimiyah* is that he did not apply an authority analysis from a human perspective. In other words, Shahrour did not examine *hakimiyah* as a tool for governing people's lives. Furthermore, he approached *hakimiyah* from a moral perspective. For Shahrour, divine *hakimiyah* is clear and obvious in the Qur'an. It is not controversial, and there is no reason to debate it. Because it constitutes a divine order, humans must follow it. Moreover, Shahrour described divine *hakimiyah* as God's taboos in the Qur'an, the 14 forbiddances.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The 14 forbiddances are in Qur'an (Livestock 6:151-153),

“Say, ‘Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden you: that you associate

Shahrour (2014) highlighted some descriptors of divine *hakimiyah*, stating that the elements of divine *hakimiyah*, the 14 taboos, are comprehensive and constant. With the notion of comprehensiveness, Shahrour meant that any taboo in divine *hakimiyah* is applicable for all humans. In other words, the forbidden is not for specific peoples or groups; rather, it is forbidden for everyone on the earth. Constancy is the second element of divine *hakimiyah*. All divine taboos mentioned in the Qur'an are considered forbidden in the past and present, and they will remain forbidden in the future. For example, killing is one of the taboos that Islam forbids. The two descriptive elements of divine *hakimiyah* mean that the act of killing is a taboo from the past and will continue to be forbidden for all time. Moreover, this act is forbidden for all humans, without exemption.

The importance of Shahrour's (2014) conceptualization of divine *hakimiyah* is that it closes the door on debating taboos. He argued that the taboos are very clear in Islam. Shahrour stressed that all taboos are listed in the Qur'an, stating moreover that no one on earth has the right to forbid anything in the name of God. Forbidding is a divine right

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nothing with Him; that you honor your parents; that you do not kill your children because of poverty—We provide for you and for them; that you do not come near indecencies, whether outward or inward; and that you do not kill the soul which God has sanctified—except in the course of justice. All this He has enjoined upon you, so that you may understand.' And do not come near the property of the orphan, except with the best intentions, until he reaches maturity. And give full weight and full measure, equitably. We do not burden any soul beyond its capacity. And when you speak, be fair, even if it concerns a close relative. And fulfill your covenant with God. All this He has enjoined upon you, so that you may take heed. This is My path, straight, so follow it. And do not follow the other paths, lest they divert you from His path. All this He has enjoined upon you, that you may refrain from wrongdoing." (*The Quran*, (2012). Trans. Talal Itani, Dallas and Beirut: Clear Quran, p. 72)

and must be practiced by him only. Furthermore, Shahrour stressed that even the prophet Muhammad himself has not the right to interdict, although he can prohibit.

### **Divine–Human *Hakimiyah***

Shahrour described the divine–human *hakimiyah* as a grey zone, meaning that it is the place where human and divine can be joined together to govern earthly affairs. According to Shahrour, differences between the two elements, human and divine, in this *hakimiyah* represent two different principles. The first is constancy, which means that the divine part of the human–divine *hakimiyah* is constant as a phenomenon. Constancy is a major principle in divine power and superior to any other kind of powers. Therefore, humans will function as inconstant, changeable elements in legislative matters.

### **Human *Hakimiyah***

Shahrour (2014) insisted that human *hakimiyah* is located outside of both divine and human–divine *hakimiyah*. Shahrour argued that this human *hakimiyah* represents all permitted, nontaboo issues in human life, that is, all things that are Halal, or those things that Muslims can do that do not contradict divine taboos, according to the Islamic religion. Consequently, humans have the right to practice Halal alone as they want and how they feel is best for them. Shahrour contended that humans should take control over their own affairs because Halal matters do not require controversial debate because Halal is clear with respect to the 14 taboos in the divine *hakimiyah*. Humans have the freedom to do whatever they desire outside the 14 taboos indicated in God’s *hakimiyah*. Shahrour’s understanding of human *hakimiyah* undermines the authority of *Umma* (religious



scholars or clerics) because, in this view, their power to control people by generating *fatwas* is no longer necessary to facilitate people life. These various interpretations of *hakimiyah* show the evolution of the concept itself from political and ideological readings to moral interpretation.

### **Political Islam and The Challenges of Political Modernity**

Qutb's attitude toward many political modernity products is negative. He harshly criticizes the role of democratic systems, constitutionalism and liberating women. The majority of Islamist movements adapts Qutb's intellectual perspectives and implemented in contemporary society. The following part examines Islamism and democracy and constitutionalism. Then, I investigate Islamist attitudes toward women and how they attempt to undermine their roles in society with an especial concentration on Egyptian context.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is undoubtedly a product of Western modernity, and it is not completely favorable for religious movements such as Islamists. Islamist groups view democracy as a political idea generated in a Western context that was gradually adopted by many states in the contemporary world. Most Islamists, including Qutb, believe "Islam contains many basic principles which would make it highly responsive towards some of these moral and legal, as distinct from sociological, prerequisites of democracy" (Enayat, 1982). The values and norms embedded in Islamic teachings do not cause any contradiction with democracy; however, this does not make Islam's notion of *Shura* synonym to democracy (Abou El Fadl, 2004). From the beginning of Islam, the only

legitimate political system that ruled Muslim nations until 1928 was based on the Islamic concept of the Caliphate al-Khelafah (Black, 2011; Crone, 2004; Enayat, 1982; Montgomery, 1968). It is important to note that democracy in the Western context was never practiced in the Islamic countries in ancient times. Instead, Muslim scholars represent the notion of *Shura*, which is mentioned in the Qur'an and signifies God's order to practice consultations regarding their political and social matters. Muslim jurisprudence linked the idea of *Shura* with the political rule of Muslim leaders. The major role of *Shura* is to offer political consultation and advise political leadership about Muslims' affairs. The problem of *Shura* is that it is only consultative and does not form any obligatory force upon the political ruler in a Muslim polity. From the perspective of Islamist political philosophy, *Shura* is an original Islamic concept that can fully function in an Islamic polity, but democracy is a Western product that has been practiced in non-Islamic states, and this delegitimizes the value of democracy and the importance of democratic rule in society (Shavit, 2010). Islamist political theorists argue that Islam and democracy are incompatible because Western democracy was built to replace *shari'a* as a way to govern people (Ehteshami, 2004). Moreover, the idea of *Shura* does not contain democratic mechanisms such as equality of opportunity, rights, and freedom of speech (Bayat, 2007; Ehteshami, 2004).

The notion of democracy and Islam is a controversial debate among Islamic and Islamist thinkers. Islamists such as Qutb do not support democracy, whereas Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Abduh contend that Islam and democracy agree on ethical principles such as justice and equality (Abduh, 2002). Many Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist groups, try to show tolerance toward democracy to ensure their existence (al-Jabiri, 2009; Taweel, 2012). The Islamists' partial acceptance

of democracy and being part of democratic rule represents a transformation in Islamist political theory. In the last three decades, political candidates representing the Muslim Brotherhood have gained large numbers of seats in the Egyptian national parliament<sup>45</sup> (Barsalou, 2005). The Arab Spring increased the Islamists' appetite to participate in the democratic process and to be part of the post-revolution political structure. The Salafist religious groups in Egypt entered the world of politics by creating its own political party, the Light Party *Hizb Al-Noor* (Masoud, 2014). Islamists' eagerness to participate in democratic elections was not limited to Egyptian politics; the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia established the Renaissance Party, which contributed to the post-Tunisian revolution government.

These Islamists' attempt to commit to democratic transition reflects notable changes in Islamist political discourse. This tactical shift can be explained by two reasons. First, Islamist groups conceptualize the idea of democracy in a pragmatic sense that able them from dominating political power, such as the Islamist governments in Egypt and Tunisia after the Arab Spring. Islamist political movements see practicing democracy as a means to justify their endeavor to gain political power. Moreover, Islamist political theory provides some justification for using democracy by Islamizing it, and it will contribute to bringing Islamic governance to society. Second, Islamist religious groups have experienced radical violent strategies in their political discourse, which prevent Islamists from engaging in civic and political affairs. For Islamists, democracy constitutes an important opportunity to reappear from within the national context in society. Moreover, participating in the democratic process creates a legitimate channel for

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<sup>45</sup> In 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats in the Egyptian parliament.

Islamists to show that they are compatible with democracy and can tolerate political modernity. However, Islamist experience with democracy, at least in the Egyptian context, did not reflect a serious transformation in their political philosophy. During their political rule in 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood showed poor performance in terms of democratic practices and political management.

### **Islamist Perspectives on the Idea of Constitutionalism**

Qutb and Abduh have different debatable understandings of constitutionalism. The main question on constitutionalism is whether Islam can tolerate constitutionalism. Islamist political thought is suspicious of constitutionalism because of its European roots. Islamic political thought aims to understand the idea of constitutionalism and how it can benefit Muslim societies. Therefore, Islamic scholars object to harmonizing Islam and constitutionalism by coining the concept of Islamic constitutionalism (Arjoman, 2007; Grote & Roder, 2012). For Islamists, the problem with constitutionalism is that it delegitimizes the function of *shari'a* in society and values human-made laws to organize society. The majority of Islamic countries have integrated *shari'a* in their laws, but they never claim that they have Islamic constitutionalism. However, the only country in the Middle East that denied using *shari'a* in its legal system is Turkey, which instituted secular laws (Zubaida, 2003). There is no doubt that adapting Western legal concepts within the traditional legal structures of Islamic countries constitutes a real test for Eastern societies. Islamists argue that constitutionalism has existed in the European context and that bringing it into Eastern societies would not be appropriate because of the social, cultural, and religious differences between East and West. In the following, I

will discuss both Islamic and Islamist perspectives on constitutionalism and whether it should be accepted in the Islamic context.

### **Qutb on Constitutionalism**

Qutb views constitutionalism as a product of modernity and as part of the Western legal system. Moreover, Qutb believes that constitutionalism is designed to replace the Islamic legal tradition that protects the ethical and legal principles of Muslim societies. Furthermore, Islamists, including Qutb, stress that importing Western concepts and theories would lead to the Westernization of Muslim societies and states. When Muslim societies adopt constitutionalism in their judicial systems, Muslim judges will be forced to consider positive and secular laws in their judgments (Arjoman, 2007). Qutb's universal view of Islam, lead him to believes that it is plausible to think that this religion will have its own ideal legal system created by divine power. Qutb clearly stated that Muslims have the most perfect divine legal structure, which will help Muslims to live their best life according to God's will (Bergesen, 2008). Qutb's (1979) assessment of constitutionalism is that it will negatively affect the true Islamic spirit of Muslims, implying that Western ideas such as constitutionalism will contribute in creating a *Jahili* society of non-believers. Moreover, Islamists, including Qutb, argue that adopting Western notions and perceptions such as constitutionalism will increase the possibility of spreading secularism and weaken the appearance of religion in public life (Abo-Rabi', 1996).

### **Abduh on Constitutionalism**

Abduh provided a different understanding of constitutionalism. He used the cultural and civilizational differences between East and West to offer a moderate view of Islam toward human ideas. Against the Islamist radical perspective, Abduh proposed an interpretation of Islam that does not oppose the ideas and theories of modernity. This approach, represented by Abdu and others (e.g., Al-Tahtawi), is a major tendency in Islamic political thought known as the modernist (or progressive) school, which emerged in the 19th century. Abduh's moderate position constitutes a critique and serious challenge to the scholars who argue Islam and modernity are incompatible (Hadad, 1994; Sedgwick, 2010). Abduh's intellectual efforts shed light on the deep problem of Islamist discourse, which refuses to tolerate European concepts and theories such as democracy, equality, separation of powers, and constitutionalism. Moreover, the scholarship of progressive Islamic political philosophers shows that the problem is the interpretation of Islam, not Islam per se.

While Abduh would say that constitutionalism is not an Islamic idea, he insisted that constitutionalism can help Muslim societies and states flourish. Abduh accepts the fact that incorporating constitutionalism with Islamic tradition will require some adjustments in terms of interpreting texts and ideas. To resolve these differences, Abduh suggests the Islamization of Western ideas to situate them within Muslim culture. Islamization helps to reconceptualize the Western ideas and concepts to fit them into Islamic society. Murad Idris (2013) asserted the usefulness of Islamization: it helps in the "redefinition of various pagan, Abrahamic, or native practices against the backdrop of conversion, and expansion" (p. 263). Moreover, Islamization can provide a smooth transition for Western ideas to be practiced within Islamic society and states. To be clear, the Islamization of ideas supports "the integration of cultural, political, legal, or scientific

systems with Islamic doctrines, language, and ethics, or their production from an Islamic perspective” (Idris, 2013, p. 263). Abduh’s proposal of using Islamization as strategy to make Islam and Western ideas compatible is plausible because Islamization includes a serious interpretation that established a common ground between Islamic teachings and other traditions’ ideas.

It is worth noting that the Islamization called for by Abduh differs from the Islamization that Islamists ask for. Abduh’s Islamization concept is based on a comparative understanding of the other non-Muslim traditions, but Islamists’ conceptualization of Islamization is grounded on their interpretation of Islam, which they use mainly to seek political power.

The role of women in Arab and Islamic societies constitutes another challenge to Islamism and Islamist movements. The Arab Spring helps us to understand Islamists’ attitude toward women because they participated in political rule in Egypt. The practices of Islamist movements represent the core ideas of Qutb’s political theory. Despite the differences among radical Islamist movements, they cannot reject Qutb’s political theory outright because rejecting Qutb’s discourse, which is based on the Qur’an, is considered a denial of God’s authority. The following part explores how Islamist movements react to women and try to undermine the role of women in the name of religion.

### **Islamism and the Role of Women: Political Thought, Movements, and Power**

Islamist religious movements have massive control over the masses of ordinary people through their power dynamics. Usually, Islamist movements’ power dynamics give

them the power to impose their religious opinions and interpretations upon people, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt 2011. Women are a controversial and sensitive topic for Islamists. Islamist movements throughout the Islamic world share a similar attitude toward the role of women in public life. To best understand the Islamist movements' power discourse, it is necessary to discuss two major methodological approaches. The first approach involves the social transformations, which concentrates on contemporary social changes that occur with society such as the change in women's role. This theoretical framework is beneficial to elucidate the political and religious attitudes of Islamist movements toward the changes in the role of women after revolutionary events in Egypt. The second approach that will be considered here is the social movements theory, which is useful to illustrate the symbolism used by Islamist movements to marginalize women in Egyptian society by providing hegemonic religious interpretations. These religious interpretations offered by Islamists lead to the recreation of public opinion about many issues related to women's role. Moreover, the revolutionary events in Egypt served as a critical juncture for social and political systems. Furthermore, the revolutionary climate generated major and minor social and political changes in the traditional systems in Egypt (Bayat, 2017; Esposito, Sonn, & Voll, 2016). Therefore, social and political revolutions constitute a source of shakeups that caused critical changes in existing social and political systems. It is important to state that an effective revolution must have the element of "comprehensiveness," which means it must affect large parts of people's daily life, and it must have speed to gain its objectives (Kubik, 2012). The Arab Spring had a massive impact on changing the dominant authoritarian rule. Therefore, many political powers, including Islamist groups, took the new post-revolution situation as a unique opportunity to gain control of Egypt. 2011 brought the first Islamist president, Muhammed Morsi, to



power, constituting a real encounter with political modernity challenges such as committing to democracy, transition of power, and gender equality. Islamist scholars argue that Muslim women must be secured from any corruption that could desecrate their piety. In the name of protecting women, Islamists started to marginalize women in public life by minimizing their role. The Egyptian revolution required Islamist political theory to adopt changes that enabled them to interact effectively with challenges of political modernity including how they treated the new status of women. The changes that Islamists claimed to have occurred in their political thought was only temporary for collecting votes in presidential and parliamentary elections. The revolution of 2011 in Egypt occurred because of a long era of despotism; the Egyptian people were thirsty for freedom and equality and dreamed of living in a country that would enable women to participate in public life (Whitehead, 2015). An example of the Islamist refusal to expand the role of women in public life can be seen in the post-revolution presidential election in Egypt. The two major Islamist groups, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist *Al-Da'wa Al-Salafiya*, refused to allow female candidates to run for the presidency. The Islamists claim that women should not be considered for supreme political positions *Al-Welaya Al-a'amma* because many religious texts recommend what is best for women. Islamists support their argument on the role of women by referring to their interpretation of Islamic texts. Furthermore, they used Islamist interpretations to maintain their intellectual and cultural domination, consolidating their power within Egyptian society.

### **Following Qutb's Footprints: Islamists and the Role of Women in the Public Sphere**

The beginning of Islamist religious movements involved providing social and religious guidance for ordinary people and poor families in suburbs. Moreover, Islamist movements' social and charity services created an emotional sense between ordinary people and the purpose of these groups. The services provided by Islamists were performed in the name of their duty to help Muslims have a strong Muslim nation *Umma*. According to the Islamist view, having a strong and well-established Muslim nation is the key to creating an Islamic state. The interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith constitute a double-edged sword because a particular interpretation can undermine or empower the role of women in public and political life. The religious scholars, the *Ulama*, are the group responsible for generating the required interpretation to achieve specific interests. Moreover, the *Ulama* generate fatawa to regulate the role of women in society (Laroui, 2007). Accordingly, this makes the role of the *Ulama* critical because they can support authoritarian political and religious authorities by expanding the equality gap between men and women or by declaring women inferior (Bayat, 2010). Islamic thought encourages all Muslims to make the effort to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith (*Ijtihad*) to have a better understanding of the divine orders and the best way to incorporate them in daily life. The process of interpretation must go on continuously because it is the only way to guarantee the existence of diversity in Islamic thought. Islamic scholars have always insisted on the importance of *ijtihad* to prevent any group of Muslims from limiting the truth to their interpretation only.

When someone performs an interpretation of the Qur'an or Hadith, it is crucial for the interpreter to highly consider the context of the texts because it could lead to misleading conclusions. Within Islamic history, *Ijtihad* and the interpretation of religious texts were limited to clerics; however, the calls for *Ijtihad* were for individuals basically

to find solutions for their concerns. It is crucial to note that the hegemonic Islamist thinking and interpretation of religious texts are conservative by nature. The conservative interpretation by Islamist scholars claims that they are following the right true path, and they deny the legitimacy of any differing interpretation or reading of Islamic texts. In an Islamic sense, Islamist practices of regulating the role of women in society contradict the Prophet's empowering of women in Islamic society (Abu-Lughod, 2013). The best example of the Prophet Muhammad empowering women was his letting Muslim female companions provide consultations and participate in Islamic conquests. The major Islamic text of Islam is the Qur'an, and it certainly does not indicate any differentiation between male and female except in the principle of religious piety (Wadud, 2007). The Islamist interpretations of Qur'anic verses represent a misogynistic understanding that marginalizes the role of women in society. Therefore, the domination of Islamists' misogynistic interpretation of holy texts continues to undermine women's existence in public life through their discursive power. Islamist exercising of power is clearly seen in individuals' behaviors that reflect Islamists' beliefs and understanding of Islamic resources. How does this work? As described in Robert Dahl's (1957) definition of power, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (pp. 202–203). Islamists practice this conception of power to control the masses of ordinary people through declaring that the symbolic representation of individuals is a major part of true Muslim faith.

David Laitin (1986) expressed the meaning of hegemony as "*the political forging—whether through coercion or elite bargaining—and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state and the concurrent idealization of that schema into a dominant symbolic framework that reigns as common sense*" (italics in original) (p. 183). Islamist

religious movements provide a hegemonic subculture to govern the public domain that affect existing meanings and symbols that define the Egyptian national culture. These changes that occurred in the Egyptian main culture allowed subcultures to rise within the national culture and dominate the minds of ordinary people. For example, the Islamist movements' attitude toward women in general reproduces Islamism's symbolic powers and interpretations that constitute a hegemonic type of thinking over Egyptian society.

There is no doubt that the *Ulama* play a crucial role in enforcing Islamists' hegemonic culture upon masses of ordinary people. To a large segment of people, clerics are trusted and respected characters in society because of their enormous religious knowledge. Islamist scholars have used particular symbolic language to build symbolic meanings that were reflected in the outside representation of Muslim women such as wearing hijab. In many countries that experienced political and social revolutions, including Egypt, the women's hijab is considered a significant symbolic sign of Islamist dominance through their ideological interpretations of Islam upon Muslim society (Hirschmann, 2003). Furthermore, Islamist controlling of specific details of Muslim women really shows how their religious and cultural discourses affect society. After the rise of revolutionary events, sexual harassments spread over all Egyptian cities, especially in the times of protests. Unfortunately, the religious scholars responded to this problem by blaming women instead of the men who committed these horrible acts. Clerics' misogynistic response indicated that sexual harassment occurred to women who did not commit to wearing proper modest dress. Accordingly, these women deserved to be sexually harassed because of their refusal to wear hijab and modest dress. According to this logic, Muslim women who properly wear full hijab and dress modestly are protected from any sexual harassment because they do not encourage men to do so. It is crucial to

state that the Islamist concentration on the symbolic presentation of women weakens the main message of Islam and reduces it to Muslims' presentation styles.

Islamist movements' attitude toward managing women through deciding what they wear contributes to the marginalization of Egyptian women. Furthermore, Islamists' strategy of delegitimizing the participation of women through using "marginalizational oppression" (Young, 1990). Using "marginalizational oppression" is helpful in elucidating the Islamists' misogynistic understanding of the role of women in society. Moreover, Islamists' symbolic discourse toward women leads them to live in oppression because of the thought that they are best functioning at home only. The danger of Islamists' discourse toward women is that it omits an important role of women in society. Compelling Egyptian women to wear hijab represents Islamists' grand project of Islamizing (Shari'aizing) society. For example, the strategy of Islamizing society was clearly implemented by the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt by reshaping the society and state based on the beliefs of Islamism. However, any attempt to Islamize the society and state does not necessarily mean reviving the norms and values of early Islam (Tibi, 2012). Another issue related to Islamization is that it affects the diversity of Egyptian society. Islamization aims to reconstruct the national identity. The danger of Islamizing the public sphere is that it marginalizes and decreases minority groups. Unifying plural cultural identities to represent only Islamic culture is considered a political act. For Islamists, having a cultural religious identity dominating Egypt constitutes political and popular legitimacy.

## **Conclusion**

Due to the spread of *Jahiliyah* in contemporary societies, Qutb invited true Muslims to immigrate from secular Egyptian society to a community of true believers. Qutb considered this immigration to Islam a religious duty (Moussalli, 2013). Qutb calls to leave *jahili* society would not be possible without fully accept God's authority, such as applying Qur'anic notion of *Shura*.

Qutb viewed democracy as the sovereignty of humans' desires, which the Qur'an described as people who do not understand. For Qutb, the Muslim nation is a large religious community that must be governed based on specific Islamic norms and values. Therefore, Islam must be understood as a force that manages human societies. In other words, Muslims must live their whole lives based on Islamic teaching (Allam, 2014). Accordingly, Qutb argued that there is no need to implement democracy from the Western world into Islamic countries.

Many Islamic thinkers offer justification of Muslim participation in the democratic political system because it does not contradict Islamic teachings. But Qutb rejected such positions on democracy and invited Islamic scholars to deny the ridiculous interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence<sup>46</sup> that not declaring it is submission to Islamic *shari'a*. Islamic scholars were obligated to show commitment to God's Islamic *Shari'a* and reject any other human ideas through which to govern Muslim societies (Allam, 2014; Qutb, 1979).

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<sup>46</sup> Qutb rejected the argument that considers Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic law *shari'a* to be the same thing (Qutb, 1979). For Qutb, Islamic jurisprudence is a product of human interpretations, and it does not necessarily reflect the true meaning of Islamic texts.

Islamist pioneers accepted the idea of democracy as a tool to achieve their political purposes; however, they did not recognize democratic values and norms, including transparency and protecting the rights of minorities. Furthermore, many Islamist scholars and movements did not fully reject the notion of participating in the democratic political system because it is their religious duty to not leave political institutions (e.g., parliament) dominated by nonIslamic forces such as secularists, socialists, and nationalists (Allam, 2014).

Qutb stated that the notion of Shura is no different than democracy. According to him, Shura is constructed as people consultations to the political ruler, which makes people the only source of authority. Qutb stressed that, in Islam, a political ruler receives authority of political power from Muslim individuals' political will through the al-Bay'a process, which is similar to the election process. Islam releases people from any political and economic constraints that put them at the mercy of the despotism of a political ruler (Allam, 2014; Qutb, 1969). Furthermore, Qutb contended that the Islamic political category and method of political ruling would ensure justice and freedom in the Muslim nation.

Qutb offered the notion of *hakimiyah* (God's sovereignty) as an alternative to contemporary political regimes. It is difficult to analyze and study Qutb's political philosophy of ruling without considering his theories of *hakimiyah* and *Jahiliyah* (Allam, 2014). Qutb expressed that the notion of *hakimiyah* has two major components: First, it strongly binds social and political systems and religious perceptions, and second, it does not distinguish between religion and social reality (Qutb, 1988). For Qutb, Islam is a system of faith and legislation codes that constitute a perfect Muslim nation. Qutb stresses the concept of religion is comprehensive because it is a divine approach to human

life. Furthermore, the divine approach relies upon Islamic law *Shari'a*, which can be the intellectual and religious basis of social, ethical, and economic systems in Muslim society (Zakariya, 2013).

Qutb continued to discuss the urgent necessity of establishing an Islamic state in many of the locations of his political and religious writings. Qutb stated that, in some places, creating an Islamic state in Muslim nations would allow God's kingdom to exist on earth, which would ensure the spread of Islam as God's true religion (Allam, 2014).

Qutb was concerned about the role of women in Muslim societies. Therefore, he called for protecting women from any outside ideas that could corrupt their original, authentic nature. For example, Qutb rejected the notion of liberal gender equality between males and females because he considered such ideas part of Western cultural occupation that would corrupt the modest behavior of Muslim women (Calvert, 2013). For Qutb, Islam has granted real equality of gender relations between males and females. According to him, Islamic law *shari'a* represents equality in obligations between male and female duties in their family and community (Calvert, 2013). He believed a woman should play her noble role within Islamic society by being a good mother and wife, and that, furthermore, God has granted women full rights in the Qur'an by determining the rules of marriage, divorce, and the treatment of women in the Muslim community (Qutb, 1992, 2000).



## **Chapter Five**

### **Leo Strauss and Sayyid Qutb: Face to Face**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the following questions. What are the similarities and differences between Qutb and Strauss's political theory; Since Strauss calls to use religion as a solution to the crisis of modernity, what does Strauss think about Qutb's Islamism as a solution to the problem of modernity?; To what extent that Qutb fits the criteria of Straussian thinker?; and is Strauss a Qutbian thinker?

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate issues that constitute differences in Qutb and Strauss's political theory. Second, I will examine the similarities between Strauss and Qutb in their political theory. Finally I will address some topic and questions that integrates Qutb and Strauss.

#### **Strauss and Qutb: The Differences**

Strauss and Qutb share many common features that shaped their political theories; however, their attitude toward the crisis of Western modernity highlights many different perspectives on how to avoid the crisis of modernity. Moreover, these differences in the political theory of Strauss and Qutb underlie the basic features of their visions of Islamist and conservative responses to the modern project. In other words, the variances of both thinkers' methods reflect how they conceptualize theory and practice and battle the Western modernity crisis.

### 1. The source of legitimacy

Qutb and Strauss propose two different critiques to Western modernity, which are based on different legitimacy sources. Qutb rejects any kind of legitimacy source except Islam; for him, Islam is the fountain of all legitimacy for all human life. Strauss, in contrast, endorses both religion and philosophy as key sources for legitimacy. It is important to know what these thinkers rely on to form their responses to the crisis of modernity legitimate.

Strauss's political and philosophical writings highlight the significance of philosophy and religion as major components of his solution for the modernity crisis. For him, religion is the crucial element for dealing with contemporary society, politics, and the crisis of Western modernity. Strauss asserts that religion and philosophy constitute the major intellectual roots of Western civilization (Strauss, 1997a). He conceptualizes religion as a very rich source of wisdom and knowledge. Before the existence of philosophical thinking, religion offered answers to people's perennial questions such as "Why do we exist?," "Is there an afterlife?," and "Does God exist?" Providing answers to such major questions represents a crucial contribution toward early human experience. Strauss relies heavily on religion as a basic element in his response to the crisis of Western modernity. Furthermore, Strauss finds in religion necessary concepts to incorporate into his political theory discourse regarding Western modernity. Modernity contributes to marginalizing the role of religion in people's lives and the public sphere. The modern age has promoted the separation of politics and religion by separating the state and church in Europe. Strauss knows best the importance of religion in people's lives, and, therefore, religion must be a component of his political and philosophical responses to the crisis of

Western modernity. Moreover, religion has historical legitimacy, and the use of religious texts and stories promotes religion's legitimacy by being a major portion of historical collective memory.

Throughout his writing, Strauss reminds us that he is not a religious scholar. He is a professor of political philosophy, and he values the significant role philosophy plays in the public and private spheres. However, Strauss endorses only classical philosophy as original and legitimate regarding answering questions on the nature of things. According to Strauss, philosophy is "the quest of for the 'principles' of all things, and this means primarily the quest for the 'beginnings' of all things or for 'the first things'" (Strauss, 1953, p. 82). The nature of ancient philosophy has led Strauss to consider it as source of legitimacy. Ancient philosophy is interested in investigating phenomena to understand the whole and fundamental truth, which will lead people to follow the right path and avoid drifting toward the crisis of Western modernity. Strauss highlights the importance of classical philosophy and voices his concerns about the notion of authenticity. The authenticity of classical philosophy leads Strauss to admit that it is a legitimate source to fight back against the crisis of modernity.

In his battle against the crisis of Western modernity, Qutb's issue concerning legitimate sources is less complex than Strauss's standards of legitimacy. For Qutb, the only source of legitimacy is Islam. He states that Islam is the only force that possesses a rich balance of values and civilizational experiences that enable it to lead the world of humans (Qutb, 1979). Therefore, Qutb proposes that we replace all human approaches or systems with the Islamic method to liberate humans from worshipping other human beings and show them the path toward worshipping God only (Qutb, 1979). Consequently, Qutb believes Islam is the only legitimate source and the basic element of his project of

eliminating Western modernity's danger.

Qutb is convinced that Islam is the only true legitimate method that should be practiced by Islamist movements and the only way to rescue Muslims' *ummah* from it is *jahiliyah* (Qutb, 1979). Qutb invites all Muslims to imitate the first Qur'anic generation (generations of Prophet's companions) because they practiced the true Islamic values and lived within the border of *shari'a* (Qutb, 1979). Furthermore, Qutb's Qur'anic generation was the group that best understood Islam because it acquired the knowledge as direct learning from the Prophet Muhammad, who rescued them from *jahiliyah* and directed them to the right path of God.

## 2. What is the best way of living a life?

The question of what is the best way of living a life was a central theme of classical political philosophers. Strauss also shares the same concerns about how to live our lives, and he investigates this question within the context of the modernity crisis. He argues that the momentum of the modernity crisis has dragged people's attention away from thinking about how they should live their lives.

Strauss states that the Arab political philosopher Al-Farabi indicates that Plato examines the question of the best way of living a life by looking at the core of human happiness (Strauss, 1952). Strauss contends that the best method for living is the one that adopts philosophy and philosophical inquiry because "the ignorance, the evident fact of this ignorance, evidently proves that quest for knowledge of the most important things is most important thing for us. Philosophy is, then, evidently the right way of life" (Strauss, 1997a, 122). Major parts of Strauss's writings show that he endorses the ancient political philosophers' answers that the best way of living a life is the philosophical life. However,

Strauss's alternative to the crisis of modernity is to return to religion as the right way of life (Strauss, 1997a, 1979). Strauss cannot neglect the importance of religion. For him, religion plays a major role in shaping people's best life. His interest in a religious best life grew because wisdom is not exclusive to philosophy itself. Religion also constitutes a different source of wisdom. As we discussed early in chapter three, Strauss recognizes that some aspects of religion and philosophy are incompatible. However, his later writings suggest a solution that enables religion and philosophy to work together. For Strauss, the best way of living a life exists in both philosophy and religion because of what each of them offers to people.

Qutb has a different conception of the best life. According to his theory of *jahiliyah*, the world that we live in is built upon false values, norms, and understanding. All human activities are misguided because of corrupted ideas and cultures that generated from materialistic Western civilization. Therefore, Qutb's comprehension of the best life is equal to a religious life. Living our lives under God's *hakimiyah* is considered by Qutb as the best life and the ideal way to make people behave according to God's will. Consequently, Qutb argues that living in true Islamic society is progressive and gives one clear direction. Qutb indicates that Islamic life is the only life for God and with God's order. The question of the best way of living a life is crucial for Qutb, and the best way to respond to it is by using Islam's instructions for constructing an Islamic society. Implementation of Islamic *shari'a* will provide a necessary amount of discipline for the human soul. Qutb views the human soul as evil because it encourages people to sin. Therefore, applying *shari'a* in Muslim societies will protect people against sinning. For example, stealing, adultery, and lying are considered sins in Islam, and Muslims must not commit such immoral acts. For Qutb, Islamic *shari'a* redefines sins and transfers them

from being a personal and private matter to being related to the individual's commitment to following God's authority. It is obvious from the Islamist understanding of *shari'a* that there are sets of punishments and regulations that must be implemented to ensure a disciplined society. Qutb warns us against disobeying God and his *shari'a* by addressing Qur'anic verses that promise punishment and eternal torture for sinners on judgment day (Qutb, 1979, 2000, 1992).

### 3. Accepting others

The literature of Straussian legacy sheds light on the conservative aspect of Strauss's political philosophy, which implies that conservatives are less accepting of others and more concerned about preserving their own groups of trusted individuals who share similar concerns. For Strauss and other conservatives, intellectual heritage is a significant source and needs to be preserved and protected from outside changes that could affect the purity of its values, teachings, and beliefs. However, a careful and close reading of Strauss's political and philosophical writings shows that he seems to be open to accepting other political and philosophical intellectual traditions.

I have argued earlier that Leo Strauss is a comparative political theorist, and this argument would be meaningless if Strauss limited his vision to one particular Western political heritage tradition. Strauss has expanded his research and investigation to reach other philosophical traditions including Islamic and Jewish to broaden his perspective of how to resolve problems generated by the crisis of Western modernity. Strauss criticizes the Western centrality of political thought as the fundamental intellectual core of the field of political theory, and he states that "To avoid this danger [Western centrism], it is compelled to engage in 'cross-cultural research,' in study of other cultures, both present

and past” (Strauss, 1988b, p. 25). He thus seems to suggest that intellectual diversity enables us to better understand the danger of the Western modernity crisis, which does not impact the West itself, but influences other parts of the world and changes the origins of other intellectual and philosophical traditions including Islamic and Jewish heritages.

Qutb claims his political theory of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* are exclusive for specific people. Qutb is clear that his understanding of the world forces him to exclude other theories because of the nature of his binary thinking system. It is evident from his writing that the use of binaries of true and untrue Muslims, theoretical and practical Muslims, right and wrong paths, *jahiliyah* and Islam, shapes his vision of including one particular group and excluding others. Therefore, Qutb’s political theory is inherently an Islamist theory that represents a narrow understanding of Islam. All people who are not included in Qutb’s “league of true believers” are considered *kufar* (heretics). The application theory of *jahiliyah* over the contemporary world places the majority of Muslims outside Islam because of Qutb’s *takfeer*. Therefore, non-Muslims must either pay the required *jizyah* (tax) in exchange for keeping their religious faith and being protected from any threat, or reject such guardianship, which would be considered a declaration of war. Qutb states that true Muslims must fight non-Muslims as long as they follow their *jahiliyah* beliefs.

#### 4. The use of violence

Qutb’s diagnosis of *jahiliyah* leads him to search for an immediate effective response to the illness of Western modernity. He feels that the danger of corrupted Western cultures and values will invade Islamic countries and turn them into copies of

immoral Western nations. Qutb suggests using radical methods to restore the true Muslim *fitrah*. For him, Jihad is the ideal tool to construct the true and real community of believers (*Ummah*).

It is significant to note that Qutb's theory of *jahiliya* serves as an intellectual foundation to explain why Muslims need to reshape their human nature and justify their actions and beliefs according to true Islam. Consequently, he calls for a revival of the real Islamic teachings that existed in the early periods of Islam, during the time of the Prophet and his companions. Qutb modifies the notion of jihad as an essential way to reconstruct the societies of ignorance to build communities of true Islam.

The notion of jihad is one of the most controversial themes in Islam and Islamic history. Islamic religious texts (Qur'an and Hadith) have indicated two kinds of jihad, which are lesser, or offensive, and greater, or defensive, jihad (Bonner, 2008; Cook 2005). Many political Islamic movements claim to practice both kinds of jihad. The greater jihad is mainly a spiritual one, which concentrates on individual motivations to struggle against evil. In other words, greater jihad is about controlling oneself from drifting toward humanly pleasures and desires, which are considered a corruption of the human soul. Meanwhile, the lesser jihad focuses on direct, violent, armed encounters with the enemies of Islam.

Myths and supernatural stories are a major part of jihad's intellectual structure because it is important to convince people of its mission and purpose (Bonner, 2008). Moreover, supernatural religious elements attract people's desire to be part of a group that serves under God's will, even if it requires committing violence to please God and enjoy bliss in paradise. For many Islamists, greater jihad is the beginning of lesser jihad because it encourages individuals to fight, in the name of God, any enemies that aim to



attack and destroy the Islamic nation. Therefore, Qutb contends that to be true believer, you must fully commit to the notion of jihad as a religious duty because this act is part of Muslims' true purpose, which is to preserve the true and genuine meaning of Islam.

It is important to note that jihad is not considered one of the five pillars of Islam; however, Islamists conceptually attribute jihad to more of a significant religious duty anything (Nazir, 2011). In his article, "To Those Who Are Lazy on Jihad," Qutb begins his writing by citing a Qur'anic verse as an evidence of the mandate of jihad against infidels. He says:

"O you who believe! What is the matter with you, when it is said to you, "Mobilize in the cause of God," you cling heavily to the earth? Do you prefer the present life to the Hereafter? The enjoyment of the pre- sent life, compared to the Hereafter, is only a little." (The Quran, 2009 [9:38], p. 94)

Qutb's citation of Qur'anic verses highlights the significance of jihad as a religious duty for all Muslims. The holy texts of Islam emphasize the importance of greater jihad over the lesser one because it represents the real struggle with self and human soul. Moreover, referring to the Qur'anic text legitimizes the notion of jihad and presents it as a crucial part of Islam. Qutb's political discourse brought a conceptual change to the Qur'anic meaning of jihad from a method of defending Muslims from armed attack into a tool of liberating mankind from worshipping false Gods.

Qutb rejects the Islamic jurists' distinguishing of defensive and offensive jihad. He claims that there is only one type of jihad, and its purpose is to free people from human hegemonic thinking, which distracts them from obeying divine authority. Qutb denies any attempt to change the meaning of jihad to make it theoretical. For Qutb, the issue of jihad has only practical meaning (Haddad, 1983).

Qutb divides the contemporary world into two parts, the land of war and land of Islam. The land of war is any non-Islamic nation, whereas the land of Islam includes all Islamic countries. Moreover, Qutb insists that the land of Islam is the only peaceful land, and therefore, Muslims' relationships with non-Islamic countries is either based on conflict or based on peace treaties (Qutb, 1979; Al-Mawla, 2012). In addition, it is important to state that Qutb considers jihad a defensive tool for religion, not for states or countries. It is mandatory to protect religion from any Imminent dangers. Islamist movements use the notion of jihad as a way to counter the Western colonial and imperial forces of Arab and Middle Eastern nations. In sum, Qutb and Islamists' practices impacted and changed the original meaning of jihad and made it a significant part of Islam's structure.

##### 5. Nation and nationalism

Nation and nationalism are significant perspectives in the political theory of both Strauss and Qutb; however, both thinkers differ in their stances on nationality and the role of nationalism in people's lives. For Strauss, nation and nationalism are problematic aspects in shaping forms of political thought. The idea of nation was always a concern for Strauss because Jews suffered from diaspora across many lands. Uniting Jewish people and forming their intentions to be one nation was a major dream for Strauss; his writing often emphasizes the crucial role of political Zionism in trying to establish a Jewish nation. According to Strauss, part of the crisis of Western modernity occurred by killing and relocating Jewish people. For Strauss and other Jewish intellectuals, Jews were the greatest victim of the crisis of Western modernity.

The later writings of a more mature Strauss provide another aspect and interpretation of the idea of nation. Strauss argues that nation is a crucial component of any state, and therefore it must be protected from any threats. Strauss highlights how politicians can invest in using nation in their political claims and arguments to convince people to support their state's policies and politics. The best way to understand Strauss's political conception of nation is to situate it in a noble lies framework. As I mentioned earlier in chapter three, Strauss has located two major elements of Greek understanding of noble lies: religion and nation. According to Strauss, these two illusions are necessary for controlling society and the masses. To spread noble lies among people, leaders must show that religion and the nation are under real threat. The threat of dividing a nation can lead to serious consequences, including war or civil war, which eventually endanger the status of the state. Strauss concentrates on the notion that, as a whole, a nation is the only candidate capable of change and fighting the crisis of Western modernity.

For Qutb, the idea of nation and nationalism constitute another of modernity's challenges to his political thought. Qutb stresses that there is one nation he recognizes among the many nations that represent *jahiliyah*. In his writing, Qutb argues that we do not have nations in the Islamic and Arabic world; instead we have one nation, *Ummah* (the Muslim nation). Qutb distinguishes between *dar al-Harb* and *dar al-Salam* (Qutb, 1979; Saood, 2017). According to Qutb, *dar al-Harb* represents all places, states, and societies that lost their way to the true religion of Islam, and *dar al-Salam* represents a status of peace, in which the majority of people are true Muslims; even though there are non-Muslims who live within *dar al-Salam*, they can be protected and treated well as long as they pay the required amount of *jizyah* (state tax). *Dar al-Harb*, in contrast, characterizes a state of war. Qutb argues that it is a true Muslim's duty to fight against

any kind of *jahili* appearances. For Qutb, *dar al-Harb* constitutes a stark opposition to God's authority and a real challenge to true genuine Muslim *Ummah* that needs addressing.

Qutb believes that having a strong unified nation of Muslims is crucial to altering the reality of Western modernity. For him, this new Muslim *Ummah* must lead the contemporary world to place people on the right path of Islam. Qutb seems to suggest that an Islamization of all aspects of life would be the best way to survive the predicament of Western modernity.

Nationalism constitutes an existing challenge to Qutb, not only because he rejected many Arab nationalists' policies (e.g., Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser) but also because Arab nationalists have used nationalism to fight Islam and find other alternatives to Islamic identity. Qutb and the Islamist movement do not believe there should be any national borders between Arab and Islamic states. He states that national borders and national identity are products of colonialism. This rejection of colonialism and imperialism is not surprising because it is generated by Western modernity. Qutb (1993) criticizes the Western Orientalists for convincing many Arabs and Muslims that colonial power helped these nations to develop. He states that Western Orientalists tried to highlight that Islamic identity is not superior to any other identity. Instead, Qutb finds Orientalists attempting to make Islamic identity a sub-identity beneath nationalism and national identity.

### **Strauss and Qutb: The Similarities**

At first glance, one might say that Strauss and Sayyid Qutb represent completely different fields and ideologies. However, Strauss and Qutb interestingly shared many

similarities regarding various intellectual issues, including their political theorizing. In this paper, I will concentrate on the similarities between Strauss and Qutb in their critical understanding of the crisis of modernity and their critical attitude toward Western modernity.

### 1. The crisis of modernity

Strauss and Qutb are known for their critical attacks on the effects of modernity on daily intellectual life and political thinking. Regardless of their shared confrontation with modernity, they represent two different approaches that derive from Western and Eastern perspectives.

Strauss utilizes two approaches to analyze and criticize modernity. First, Strauss studies modernity in general by describing it as the crises. This general description implies that he views the major underlying features of modernity as a problem. In Strauss's article "Three Waves of Modernity," he states that modernity was initiated by Machiavellian's concepts of political thought. The second approach is about describing the problem of modernity based on its historical implementations. Strauss indicates through his writings that the crisis of modernity has taken many forms across history, such as the crisis of the West, the crisis of our time, the crisis of Western civilization, the crisis of liberalism, and the crisis of political philosophy. Strauss blames Western modernity as the cause of the "ideological madness" in our contemporary world. For example, Strauss contends that the rising tides of communism and fascism in the twentieth century were the products of waves of modernity.

Qutb shares the same critical attitude toward modernity as Strauss and claims it as a source of all the intellectual ills in our world. Qutb associates the concept of *jahiliyah*

with modernity to emphasize its danger to contemporary Muslim nations and countries. Furthermore, he considers modernity as a major condition of *jahiliyah* and *jahili* societies. For Qutb, modernity influences people's attitudes toward their lives, politics, and religion. He contends that modernity creates a *jahiliyah* and *jahili* society. This *jahili* society is more dangerous than the old *jahiliyah* that predates Islam. Qutb highlights that *jahiliyah* societies create false Gods that people worship. Qutb insists that Muslims who live in this *jahiliyah* are not considered proper Muslims because it forces them to practice polytheism. Qutb clearly states that people leave the religion of Islam once they worship beings other than God. In the case of *jahiliyah*, Qutb identifies that people worship other people. In other words, ordinary people who do not consider themselves as strong fear people with power and the supreme elites of society and politics.

Another aspect of the crisis of modernity is that it promises progress; however, the idea of progress is controversial, and it constitutes a critical problem for both Qutb and Strauss.

## 2. The notion of progress

Progress is at the core of modernity. For Strauss and Qutb, the idea of progress comes from a position of doubt about its effectiveness. In his article, "Progress or Return," Strauss investigates whether modernity constitutes real and clear progress in historical, social, political, and cultural aspects—or whether we failed to progress and instead regressed. Strauss is not only dissatisfied with modernity itself but he also criticizes many products of modernity such as positivism and historicism. He investigates progress by looking for its roots in the modern and contemporary context. Because he views a return to religion as a solution to the crisis of modernity, he states that the notion of progress

never existed in biblical texts (Strauss, 1979; Levene, 2008). Moreover, Strauss values classical philosophy over other philosophies. Because the ancients did not concentrate on the notion of progress, Strauss does not trust progress and views it as an insignificant modern idea.

Modern political philosophers provide different conceptions of what progress means. Modern philosophy presents progress as a set of political and social assumptions that help us understand society and politics. Strauss states that modern conceptions of progress tend to highlight the relationship between progress in social levels and the role of intellectuals in making this progress possible (Levene, 2008). Strauss hates the notion of progress because it makes the classical period look inferior to later eras.

Strauss does not reject the most prominent aspects of Western progress, which are science, scientific research, and knowledge, but he does raise doubts and questions regarding the modern conception of progress. In contrast, modern political philosophers contend that the Western world has made steady progress toward stressing the importance of many human values including freedom and equality. Strauss (1997b) explained that positivism theorizes that science will achieve endless progress. Moreover, he cautioned readers against assuming that the products and conclusions of science are immune from critics. Strauss further stressed that scientific theories must and will be subject to criticism and review in the future. Positivists contend that science represents the only superior knowledge. Furthermore, the pioneers of science stress that, by its nature, scientific progress is endless and flourishing (Strauss, 1997b).

Strauss's analysis of the problem of positivism is crucial because understanding that science and scientific knowledge is the highest form of human knowledge is problematic. The problem with the positivist claim is that it considers science as the only kind of

knowledge that can achieve progress for human societies. However, this devalues the importance of many other fields such as political philosophy and political science because they are nonscientific fields.

According to Qutb, there is no real progress in our contemporary world. The existing progress, for Qutb, is backward because it is non-Islamic. Islamic progress “based on the last of a series of prophetic missions which began with Adam, included figures such as Moses and Jesus, and ended with Muhammad” (Shepard, 1997, p. 256). The prophet Muhammad’s message of Islam constitutes the progress toward a perfect society of Muslims. However, after the end of the period of the four guided caliphates, Qutb and many other thinkers argue that progress stopped and was replaced by a series of declines that resulted in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the spread of *jahiliyah* in the contemporary world. Qutb and Islamists’ critique of Western progress cannot deny scientific and technological developments (Shepard, 1997). However, they consider that technological progress is not more important than spiritual and ethical progress. For Qutb, spiritual progress is crucial because its lack means faith in religion will decline in society.

Qutb rejects the idea of Western progress because it is based on a deep materialistic understanding and lack of spirituality, especially religious spirituality. Qutb claims that modernity and its progress encourage people to follow their sexual desires. Qutb is concerned that Western culture and values constitute a threat to Islam and Islamic culture (Shepard, 1997). Qutb believes that Western civilization led by white men is not able to lead the contemporary world anymore (Shepard, 1997). He further argues that white man’s civilization is unable to contribute any human values and ethics because it already gave us all it has to offer, especially materialistic values and culture (Qutb, 1983).



Qutb is not convinced that humans can make any progress with theories and approaches that go against their *fitra* (human nature). According to Qutb, “Humanity moves within a broad range; it may rise till it is higher than the angels, or descend until it is lower than the beasts” (Shepard, 1997, p. 262). Qutb contended that the Qur’an identifies different types of people based on their human nature. Moreover, Qutb stressed that human nature exists between two superior and inferior axes. People who follow God’s order through *hakimiyah* and *shari’a* will perform ideally and put humans into the ranks of angels. On the other hand, those who do not adopt God’s orders are reduced to a rank lower than animals (Qutb, 1997). Qutb’s statement demonstrates that there is only one way for humans to survive in this world and make progress toward a flourishing society. He considers any existing human progress to be a form of *jahiliyah* that will lead eventually to the destruction of human societies.

Qutb not only rejects the idea of progress but he also denies any association exists between progress and Islam. For him, there is no such thing as progressive Islam. Many scholars describe the Muslim thinkers’ methods of interpreting religious texts as being a form of progressive Islam that is compatible with modernity. Qutb stresses that progressive Islam cannot be accepted because the divine origins of Islam mean its principles cannot be changed (Shepard, 1997). Furthermore, Qutb says that any call for progressive Islam will be considered a new religion, and, for him, Islam has one original version that cannot exist with any other modified version. Therefore, Qutb denies human progress and progressive Islam because both are products of *jahili* societies that he views as regressive and not progressive. The only progress considered by Qutb is Islamic progress. In other words, moving from *jahiliyah* toward true Islamic society is the only path that can enable humans to progress (Qutb, 1983).

### 3. The Theological-Political Problem

Strauss and Qutb address the theological-political problem in their writings. For Strauss, the theological-political problem constitutes a major theme for his philosophical and political investigations. In his early writing, Strauss reflected on his concerns about Jewish, Islamic, and Christian responses to the challenges of modernity (Strauss, progress or return & the mutual influences between philosophy and theology). For Strauss, the great break since the times of Machiavelli's modernity has led to the tension between religion and politics (Batnitzky, 2006, 2009). The separation of religion and state is a product of modernity, and this leads Strauss to reopen the debate about the relationship between politics and religion.

Strauss writes that the theological-political problem has existed in many different forms and with numerous names, such as "Athens and Jerusalem," "Reason and Revelation," "Progress or Return," and "Ancient and Modern." These different subtitles represent political, religious, and philosophical elements of state and society. Strauss conceptualizes the relationship as the antagonists' conflicting views of politics, religion, and philosophy. For example, Strauss's argument on "Athens and Jerusalem" examines the philosophical and religious responses to the crisis of modernity. Strauss believes that the emergence of modernity constitutes a serious attack on classical philosophy and religion. His juxtaposition of Athens and Jerusalem reflects his concern with the importance of the past. Both Athens and Jerusalem have a vast heritage in philosophy and religion. Strauss develops this notion in his writing:

"All the hopes that we entertain in the midst of the confusions and dangers of the present are founded positively or negatively, directly or indirectly, on the experiences of the past. Of these experiences, the broadest and deepest, as far as

we Western men are concerned, are indicated by the names of the two cities Jerusalem and Athens. Western man became what he is and is what he is through the coming together of biblical faith and Greek thought.” (Strauss, 1997c, p. 377)

For Strauss, these two major cities represent the ways religion and philosophy affect politics within a city. The theological-political problem forces Strauss to probe the history of political philosophy to search for a solution that ensures a reconciliation of reason and revelation (Strauss, 1997c; McAllister, 1995). Strauss concentrates on medieval times as the era in which philosophers attempted to interpret political and religious texts to reconcile reason and revelation. Ibn Rushd (also known as Averroes) states that religion and philosophy should not be incompatible. He believes that religion and philosophy must be in harmony because there are no contradictions in their original nature (Ibn Rushd, 1997).

An important part of Strauss’s political philosophy is devoted to the dilemma of dualities.<sup>47</sup> One of his most important dualities is the battle between ancient and modern political thought. The significant question here is whether there a quarrel between ancients and moderns. If so, how is this differentiation between modern and ancient political thought helpful for us to understand world’ issues better? It is important to state that it is possible to draw a distinguishing line between classical and modern political philosophy. Strauss (1978a), among other political philosophy scholars, contends that Italian philosopher Machiavelli starts to highlight the differences between classical and modern political philosophies. Machiavelli criticizes the logical premises of ancient political theory—especially Aristotle’s political philosophy. Moreover, Machiavelli’s

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<sup>47</sup> Dual dilemmas mean Strauss’s metaphorical titles, including “Athens and Jerusalem”, “Reason and Revelation”, “Progress or Return?”, “Ancient and Modern”, “Philosophy and Law”, and “Philosopher and the City”.

critical examination of classical political theory leads him to argue that politics and ethics are separated. According to Strauss (1978a), “Machiavelli does not bring to light a single political phenomenon of any fundamental importance which was not fully known to the classics” (p. 295).

For many political theorists, differentiating between classical and modern political philosophy is helpful because it provides comprehension of each historical period’s contribution to the development of human reasoning. Consequently, there is no doubt that the classical sources of political thought are rich and extremely useful for modern and contemporary political thinkers to use when building their own political theories. Moreover, classical political theory presents significant questions that generate many theories, debates, and conversations among different political philosophers across history (Yack, 2010). Modern political philosophy has made its own significant contributions, such as social contract theory, that help us better understand the context of ancient and modern societies (Levy, 2010). This quarrel between ancients and moderns represents many aspects of the theoretical-political problem, especially the relationship between politics and religion in European contexts. Moreover, Strauss states that the break between ancient and modern raises many crucial questions and discussions about the meaning of religious and political thought.

Qutb uses the theological-political problem as a major theme in his writings; he expresses how political and religious dimensions complement each other as long as they both exist on the divine authority. Furthermore, the theological-political problem represents a deeper and more complex issue regarding the relationship between politics and religion in Islamic and Arab context. Qutb considers all political leaders as unbelievers because they adopt non-Islamic politics, and he blames Arab states and their

political elites because of their secular policies. Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah* is mainly directed at the political elites because they rule the Islamic and Arab nations. Moreover, Qutb does not accept the concept of separating religion and politics because that would be considered human interference in the divine authority of Islam.

Secularism emerged as a consequence of the theoretical-political problem that defines new relationships between political and religious domains. Qutb accuses the West of trying to use this issue to marginalize Islam by eliminating politics from it. Qutb would argue that the theoretical-political problem is not an Islamic issue. Politics and religion in Islam exist in harmony, and no one has the right to separate political understanding from its Islamic context. Therefore, Qutb attacks communism and secularism for their marginalizing role of religion in public affairs issues.

#### 4. Just society

Strauss's political philosophy focuses on achieving justice and a just society. One of the reasons that Strauss calls for a return to ancient philosophy to understand their noble endeavor is to define the concept of justice and how to achieve it. Strauss emphasizes that political philosophy is interested in exploring the meaning of justice. He expands on this idea in his writing:

“Political philosophy was concerned with the best or just order of society which is by nature best or just everywhere or always, while politics is concerned with the being and well-being of this or that particular society (a polis, a nation, an empire) that is in being at a given place for some time.” (Strauss, 1983, p. 29)

Strauss is inspired by the way classical political philosophy examines the meaning of justice and how great ancient political philosophers investigate justice. He asserts that

Socrates started teaching philosophy to youth in Athens through many dialogues. Socrates strongly believed in educating people and youth to enable them to use philosophy in pursuing the common good. Athenians were not satisfied with Socrates' activity because they thought that he corrupted the youth by teaching them philosophy and attacking their Gods (Strauss, 1996).

Socrates and his partners in the dialogue initially faced the problem of defining justice. According to Socrates, the first step toward seeking a just community is to define justice. Socrates feels that the Athenian community was unjust because there was no freedom of speech in Athens. Consequently, Socrates could not imagine a true Athenian democracy without freedom of speech for its citizens. Therefore, the charge that Socrates corrupted the Athenian youth by teaching them philosophy led him to believe that a city without freedom of speech is unjust (Plato, 2000).

In Book I of *The Republic*, Socrates engages in a controversial discussion with contemporary Athenians thinkers (Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus) on the meaning of justice. All these discussions propose various aspects of defining justice. However, Socrates does not accept any one of them, and he remains confused about the true meaning of justice (Plato, 1991).

From Socrates' point of view, philosophy can create a just community. His writings reveal a profound belief in the importance of philosophy and the philosopher in the city. Therefore, Socrates believes in creating educated people by familiarizing them with philosophy. In *The Republic*, he emphasizes the importance of justice at the public level, or the justice of the whole city (Strauss, 1978). Indeed, it is much easier to discuss the issue of justice as a whole than to discuss it on the individual level because at the public level the form of justice is much clearer. On the individual level, justice has various

meanings and it is hard to reach a consensus on conceptions for a just society based on individuals' judgments. However, justice as a whole is much easier and clearer for a philosopher seeking to create a conception of justice based on the role of laws in establishing a just society.

A just community, in Socrates' view, includes people who care about the common good more than the private good. He considers the pursuit of individuals' own interests as something that can threaten Athens because people motivated primarily by self-interest will never consider the common good as a whole. This distinction between the private and public spheres is crucial because it shows that caring about the common good provides an important element of justice and makes the city more just. Prioritizing individual interests will destroy the just community by limiting justice for specific groups of people.

In Book I of *The Republic*, Thrasymachus' definition of justice as "the advantage of the stronger" describes the limitation of justice for a particular group and defines justice on the basis of one element of society. All societies contain strong and weak individuals and groups, and using this definition leads to confusion about the nature of justice. At the End of Book I in *The Republic*, discussants seem to agree on the core elements of justice. Justice is considered a virtue of the human soul; therefore, Socrates defines justice as desirable in society. Socrates emphasizes that justice is necessary for the just city because he would like to prevent attacks on philosophy or a philosopher in the city-state, which is not a just act.

Book II of Plato's *Republic* starts with a discussion of political justice. Defining justice as political justice is an attempt to clarify the meaning of justice on a political level, which describes justice as a whole. Political justice as a whole considers justice on the

constructive level of the city-state. In other words, Socrates begins to establish the just community by describing the steps for constructing the city-state based on three major social classes: producers, gardenias, and philosopher kings. From Book II to Book IV in *The Republic*, Plato describes the process of establishing the just community. He emphasizes the importance of education as a major element in establishing the just city and the significance of education in the socialization process as a necessary prerequisite to having active and knowledgeable individuals in society. Education also protects guardians from becoming savage by training their souls to balance kindness and savagery.

Socrates has many difficulties reaching a clear and convincing definition of the concept of justice. This difficulty requires him to look at justice on a broad level, which is justice as a whole. This shift helps him create a model of the structure of the just city, which he discusses with his companions. The idea of the just community emerges in Socratic thought as a reaction to the injustice apparent in Athens. Therefore, he wants to defend philosophy through the establishment of a just city based on rule by reason, which means the rule of a philosopher king.

Plato includes several discussions on justice in *The Republic*; however, by the end of the book his concept of justice is still ambiguous. Plato is not the only philosopher who writes of the relationship between justice and the just community. Aristotle also discusses the complexity of understanding justice and how we achieve a just society. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, 1129a, Aristotle begins by questioning the meaning of justice and injustice.

Understanding justice in our world requires identifying the opposite concept. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, 1129a and 1129b, Aristotle starts to define justice and injustice by admitting that these words are ambiguous. According to Aristotle, identifying



justice and injustice as concepts includes acknowledging the inverse relationship of these terms. He understands injustice as something outside the law (lawless) or related to inequitable treatment (unfair). Developing an understanding of injustice clarifies the meaning of justice; therefore, justice must be linked to lawful and fair acts (1129b).

It is noteworthy that in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle dismantles the concept of justice, dividing it into several types of justice such as particular, political, domestic, and universal justice. Aristotle's division of justice indicates that his main concern is how to maintain a balance between things, such as the distribution of wealth, and honor to create a just community. Consequently, Aristotle understands injustice as an imbalance in the city-state, causing disorder among citizens.

Aristotle does not conclude his discussion of the idea of justice in *The Nicomachean Ethics*; he continues to describe his beliefs on the just community in *The Politics*, where he concentrates more on distributive justice, a particular type of justice. Distributive justice plays an important role in Aristotle's continuing discussion of the creation of the just community. In Book III, Chapter IX, Aristotle asserts the idea of distributive justice within the political context. In his view, distributive justice should be based on the individual's contribution to the state; because contributions are varied, benefits should be distributed accordingly to the citizens. Aristotle tries to further clarify this point by considering justice as equality:

“Thus it is thought that justice is equality; and so it is, but not for all persons, only for those that are equal. Inequality also is thought to be just; and so it is, but not for all, only for the unequal.” (Aristotle, 1980, *The Politics*, Book III, Chapter IX, 1280a7, p. 195)

At this point, Aristotle imagines the just community according to the individual's contribution and how each citizen should be treated equally. To have a just community, Aristotle believes that justice must include equality and inequality. He tries to understand justice in a realistic way and believes justice can be applied to the human world, which differs from Plato's idealistic approach to justice. Consequently, Aristotle's justification of slavery would fit perfectly within his conception of distributive justice.

In Book I of *The Politics*, Aristotle starts his discussion on creating a just state by analyzing power relationships among different levels of society. He thinks that slavery is an important element to establish a just community. One can argue that Aristotle's aristocratic background is the main reason for his defense of slavery in the city-state. In Book I, Chapter IV (1254a1), Aristotle considers slaves as tools for their masters in the city-state. However, I think his justification of slavery extends beyond his aristocratic roots. Aristotle might want to make citizens more involved in public affairs. The political participation of citizens can become possible by engaging individuals in political thinking, which requires providing them with leisure time. Slavery facilitates the owners' involvement in the public affairs of the city-state.

Aristotle did not accept all of his teacher's ideas in *The Republic*. Aristotle decided to approach justice and understanding how to achieve a just community in a realistic way. Consequently, in *The Politics*, Aristotle admits that to reach justice we must be aware that equality and inequality are basic components of a just community. In sum, for Strauss, as for classical political philosophers, the just society is a philosophical society. For Strauss classical political philosophers have truly investigated the concept of justice. Therefore, the ancient philosophers are the ideals who provided an understanding of what justice and just community look like.

Qutb also sought a just society. In his writings, he does not endorse any human conceptions of justice and just community and rejects any kind of human theorizing, even if it is compatible with Islam. Qutb stresses that the implementation of true divine authority and *shari'a* ensures justice for people and creates a just city. Qutb expands his conception of justice in Islam:

“Justice in Islam is a human equality, envisaging the adjustment of all values, of which the economic is but one. Economic equality is, to be precise, equality of opportunity, combined with the freedom to develop one’s talents within the boundaries set by the higher purposes of life.” (Qutb, 2000, p. 47)

Qutb’s understanding of justice represents the importance of equality as a major component of justice in Islam. Moreover, Qutb is clearly influenced by the inequality and injustice in Egyptian society under King Farooq’s rule. Qutb believes that Islam itself can eliminate injustice completely from society through the implementation of *hakimiyah* and *shari'a*, and humans’ *fitra* (human nature) will discipline their behavior. Pursuing justice in society will be a matter of public concern; it will be a private matter as part of people’s duty to follow God’s orders. Therefore, an Islamic political system will guarantee justice through the just Muslim political ruler. Qutb supports his argument on the idea of justice in Islam and the role of the just Muslim ruler by addressing Qur’anic verses:

“There must be first be justice on the part of the rulers. “Verily Allah commands justice.” (16:29) “And when you judge between the people, you must do so with justice.” (4:16) “And when you speak, act justly, even though the matter concerns a relative.” (6:151) “And be not driven by hatred of any people to unjust action; to act justly is closer to piety.” (5:11) “Verily on the Day of Resurrection he who is dearest of all men Allah, and he who is nearest to Him will be the just leader; but he who is most hated by Allah on that Day, and he who is most bitterly punished will be the tyrannical leader.” (Qutb, 2000, p. 120)

By citing these Qur’anic verses, Qutb presents Islam as an alternative to the fake

justice produced by human theories. Qutb states that Islamic justice is based on mutual responsibilities between a ruler and his subjects. A Muslim ruler must apply Islamic *shari'a* and, therefore, people must obey their leader. This understanding of the power relationship, according to Qutb, will ensure the existence of justice in Islamic society due to the absence of *jahiliyah*.

According to Qutb, the equality that Islam promises is part of the human liberation process. Qutb stresses that Islamic *shari'a* can free people from worshipping other people because of the fear of their power and authority. Making people fear and follow one God's authority will make them all equal.

#### 5. Identity crisis: Rejecting the present and adoring the past

Both Strauss and Qutb have called for us to return to the norms, values, and systems that existed in the past. Their call for revivalism suggests that they both think their societies face an identity crisis. The core of this identity crisis highlights that both Qutb and Strauss value the past over any other historical period, and it constitutes an ideal that should be adopted for our contemporary world.

Strauss values the past as a true genuine and perfect human experience from which we can learn many lessons. Moreover, he appreciates the fact that almost everything in the past is much better than anything that has come after it. According to Strauss, the classical philosophers claimed that they were looking for the truth and that they uncovered it (Strauss, 1959). Therefore, Strauss seems to suggest that classical philosophy is superior to modern and postmodern philosophy.

Another aspect of Strauss's conception of the identity crisis we live in is that we do not know the value of classical philosophy. Our modern interpretation and understanding

of the past constitutes a major barrier that prevents us from viewing the sources of wisdom (Strauss, 1959, 1988b, 1989). This is obvious from his critique of historicism and positivism. According to Strauss, a historicist reading implies we should focus on the contexts that contribute to shaping ideas. Furthermore, this understating of the past eliminates the possibility of finding new answers to old questions, and it means that political ideas are only useful for their own times. What concerns Strauss the most is that historicism rejects any possibility of existing political philosophy. Instead, historicists' interpretation of the past provides us with only the history of political philosophy, which is different, according to Strauss, from political philosophy itself.

Like Strauss, Qutb is also concerned with the crisis of identity. Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah* and *hakimiyah* suggests that he faces both a political and religious identity crisis. He rejects the status quo of Arab and Islamic political systems because they are far from the right divine path. For Qutb, all these Islamic and Arab countries are secular in many aspects, including in people's daily lives. Qutb blames Arab and Islamic political regimes for the decline of nations and reduction of religion and faith in public spheres as well as personal matters in people's houses.

The status of religion is the second aspect of Qutb's identity crisis because he rejects the contemporary world. His theory of *hakimiyah* represents the lack of divine reflections in the individual's life and constitutes the perfect grounds to implement *shari'a* (Islamic Law) to recreate a new vision for *Ummah* to rise again in glory and flourish. For Qutb and Islamists, applying *shari'a* helps people control their human nature. Seeking human perfection is not exclusive to Qur'anic verses; it can also be reached in the application of God's *shari'a*. Muslims can be directed to the right path through protecting the original human nature *fitrah* (Coward, 2008).

The radical discourse of Sayyid Qutb inspired many radical religious groups in the world, and many religious scholars consider Qutb the founder of radical Islamism. Bergesen (2008) argued that Qutb's radical attitude emerged as a reaction to Egypt's domestic policies in the 1950s, which Qutb said should be rejected because they were not Islamic and represented secularism. Qutb's experiences during his journey in the United States increased his fear that Islam was in constant danger from Western culture. He believed Western culture and values were corrupted and would contribute to Westernizing Muslim societies. Therefore, Qutb felt that the Muslim nation and culture must be protected from the danger of Western culture.

Qutb's political and radical discourse represents his urgent call to adopt his theory of *jahiliyah*, which differentiates between true Muslim and fake Muslim societies. He believed that adopting Western culture and values would marginalize religion in people's lives to the point that it would become unnecessary. Qutb stressed that original human nature led people to be close to committing sins and people should therefore protect themselves from that by adopting God's *shari'a*. Adopting and practicing *shari'a* will lead Muslims to follow the right path that will protect them from danger.

### **What Do Strauss and Qutb Think about This?**

#### **1. Is Qutb a Straussian thinker?**

Strauss's examination of the history of Western and Eastern political thought traditions builds a commutative legacy called Straussianism or the Straussian school of interpreting political and philosophical texts. However, what does Straussian mean? It is

hard to define due to the vagueness and ambiguity that surrounds the concept. Many scholars believe that Straussians constitute some kind of secret group or brethren that contain people who believe in Strauss and his thought (Smith, 2006). I argue that Straussian is associated with Strauss himself and the legacy of his works; it reflects aspects of his intellectual and philosophical character. Strauss's legacy of investigating political philosophy texts represents specific sets of questions and phenomena in which Strauss was interested. Other than his focus on classical philosophy, the most prominent aspects of his intellectual and research concentration are studying the value of the past over present, teaching esoteric, criticizing modernity, studying the crisis of modernity and elitism, and reconciling politics and religion. These basic features of Straussian character can be applied to any other intellectual who shares similar concerns. Strauss values the role of elites in society and politics. Strauss expressed that philosophers hide their true meanings and messages within their texts, only to be understood by the elite who deserve to know the ultimate truth (Strauss, 1959, 1988). These secret writings create two different kinds of teachings, esoteric and exoteric. Strauss wrote,

“They will distinguish between the true teaching as the esoteric teaching and the socially useful teachings as the exoteric teaching; whereas the exoteric teaching is meant to be easily accessible to every reader, the esoteric teaching discloses itself only to very careful and well-trained readers after long and concentrated study.”  
(Strauss, 1959, p. 222)

Qutb adopted a similar conception of elitism that was evident in his role in establishing the secret organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, which contains the true believers, the elite that will construct the pure Muslim society. Strauss stresses that elites are the only ones who can be trusted to understand the secrets and deep interpretations of texts. The

important ideas must not spread beyond the elites, which in the case of Strauss is philosophers, and for others can be by any kind of ruling elites.

As part of my comparison of the political theories of Qutb and Strauss, I would argue that Qutb to a large extent fits the intellectual criteria of a Straussian thinker. Qutb, however, never considers himself to be a philosopher, and he does not show any interest in studying philosophy. The best description for Qutb is a thinker or theorist.

Qutb can be described as a crisis thinker based on his Islamist writings about the crisis of modernity. Qutb warns us about the danger of *jahiliyah*, which exists as a modern condition. The majority of Qutb's political and Islamist works are driven by the danger of the coming crisis of *jahiliyah*. Qutb and Strauss have read books that argue about the decline of the West, including those by Oswald Spengler, Bertrand Russell, Alexis Carrel, and Arnold Toynbee (Bozarslan, 2015). These Western writings on the decline of Western civilization lead Qutb and Strauss to diagnose that an error exists in the Western world. For Qutb, these kinds of writing convince him of the necessity of a revolutionary Islamic reaction to the Western modernity crisis.

Qutb investigates the responses of many Egyptian intellectuals on the crisis of modernity, and he notices that these intellectual elites do not recognize the danger of the *jahili* society in which they live. Consequently, Qutb raises the important question of how we should live our life. In his analysis of the problem of *jahiliyah*, Qutb recognizes that our society has lost its way, and we as individuals are living a fake life. Like Strauss, Qutb examines the aspects of people's lives and how modernity affects them. Qutb presents an alternative to the false life produced by Western modernity and proposes that this *jahili* society must return to the right original path of Islam. For him, Islam must be the center of human society, and people are obligated to follow God's *hakimiyah* and *shari'a*.



There is no doubt that philosophy is one of the tools that Strauss uses to fight the crisis of Western modernity. As part of his solution, Strauss returns to medieval political philosophy because it reconciles politics and religion. Similarly, Qutb argues that as a comprehensive religion, Islam contains everything people need in their lives, including philosophy. Qutb stresses that Islam represents a higher form of philosophy because it comes from a divine source, and religious divine philosophy and human philosophy are not equivalent because the latter is an incomplete form of philosophizing, and it cannot help people find the right path that avoids modern dangers. Qutb's understanding is that Islam offers all the answers to humans' basic questions including political questions. Qutb's writing is concerned with the question of the ideal political system for humanity. Of course, for Qutb, an Islamic state or caliphate is the ideal political regime because it is designed by religious teachings under God's *hakimiyah*.

The high value of the past over the present is a major theme of Straussian philosophy. Qutb is no exception to that; he also values the past and devalues the present as an inauthentic form of life. It would not make sense to regard any thinker or philosopher who considers the past to be more important than the present as a Straussian. However, Qutb is different because he and Strauss point to specific golden ages that represents an ideal time and space that can help us avoid the crisis of modernity. Both men value the past because of the different traditional rationalism that existed in the past. Moreover, Strauss and Qutb criticize modernity by referring to specific ancient historical cities. Strauss, for instance, calls the debate between philosophy and religion as "Athens and Jerusalem." Qutb calls on us to imitate the golden age of al-Madina al-Munawara (The Shining City, Prophet's City) as a perfect ideal. When reading Qutb's and Strauss's works, it is obvious that they intended to value the act of return as a master plan to avoid

the damage accrued by the crisis of modernity. For both thinkers, returning to the past constitutes something they are sure about, and they are suspicious of any progress promised by modernity and its pioneers.

## 2. Is Strauss a Qutbian Thinker?

Because we asked the question of whether Qutb fits the Straussian criteria, it is crucial to apply the same question: can Strauss be considered a Qutbian thinker? The political theory of Qutb indicates the basic features of intellectual structure of Islamist theorist.

Even though that part of Strauss's intellectual scholarship concentrates on Islamic philosophy and philosophers, he did not show any interest in exploring political Islam and Islamism. In the 1950s and 1960s, political Islamism flourished and greatly interacted with the local politics in the Middle East. Islamism could constitute an interesting topic for Strauss because it relates to major Jewish issues, including the rise of the state of Israel.

The Qutbian discourse emphasizes the need to hold radical attitudes toward politics and society. Therefore, to be a Qutbian thinker, one must commit to change contemporary reality by any radical means, even by using violence. Qutbian theorists never deny the necessity of using violence for religious and political purposes. Moreover, they provide religious justification to perform it in the name of God. Strauss never called for or justified using violence. Straussian thinkers are divided into two groups: professors and politicians. Straussian thinkers who work as professors interpret the works of Strauss, which concentrate on many intellectual issues, including the crisis of modernity

and the Jewish problem. Moreover, Strauss never clearly endorsed the use of violence to deal with intellectual and political problems. Instead, Strauss aimed to provide a theory and philosophy about the human problem to eventually change reality through changing their minds about how they view reality. However, the second group of Straussian thinkers, as politicians, gained power in the 1980s (Ronald Reagan administration) and in 2001 (George W. Bush administration). Many writers argue that Straussian politicians are responsible for causing wars.<sup>48</sup> However, Strauss's legacy does not contain justification for using violence, even in the name of religion, as Qutb clearly states in his major work of *Milestones*.

Both Qutb and Strauss state that it is important to believe in elitism. Strauss believes in philosophical elites to rule society and for politics to be just and ideal. However, Qutb contends that the elitist youth are the only group in society able to guarantee the required changes in social and political spheres. For Strauss, the only elites able to govern human society wisely are the philosophical elites. To Strauss, youth are an important segment of society, but they lack philosophical knowledge.

Strauss proposes religion as a solution to the crisis of Western modernity. However, unlike Qutb, Strauss proposes religion in its original form, not any other invented tradition of religious faith. To Qutbian thinkers, religion is comprehensive and contains solutions to all humanity's problems. Moreover, Qutbian discourse

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<sup>48</sup> Some scholars have argued that the political philosophy of Leo Strauss constitutes the intellectual source for Straussian politicians to support the decisions of war during the Republican presidencies of Reagan and Bush. For a more detailed analysis of this argument, please see Aggie Hirst (2013), *Leo Strauss and the Invasion of Iraq: Encountering the Abyss* (London and New York: Routledge). Conversely, some scholars have argued against associating violence with Strauss's thinking. For more details on this argument, please see Robert Howse (2014), *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

conceptualizes religion to encompass political, social, cultural, and economic aspects of life.

Qutbian political thinkers aim to eliminate the current existing political and secular systems and replace them with religious regimes. Moreover, the current political systems are considered by Qutbian thinker to be evil regimes that work to maintain the enslavement and oppression of people. However, Strauss aims through his writing to improve the performance of democratic political systems by showing them the wisdom of the ancient teachings.

Qutbian political thinkers do not deal with philosophy, because it does not tolerate the existence of religion. Therefore, philosophy must be omitted from the theoretical and intellectual systems of ideas. On the contrary, Strauss is mainly concerned with philosophy as one of the important sources for humans to learn from and take as intellectual guidance to face life challenges.

The attitude toward democracy is another important issue that concerns Qutbian thinkers. Qutb clearly states that Muslim societies must not consider democracy as a way to govern because Muslims have their own divine order that meets their needs. Qutbian thinkers such as Muhammad Qutb should reject the notion of democracy; accepting it in any way would be considered a violation of God's will and orders. According to Qutb, *Shura* is the only perfect divine order for Muslim nations, and they must accept it; they should not look for another human alternative.

Straussian thinkers are concerned about the decline of Western civilization and try to theorize how we, as humans, can avoid such devastating problems. However, for Qutb, civilization and society have already declined, and therefore, they must be revived again. Therefore, Qutbian thinkers view this world as collapsed, eroded, and in urgent need of

being restored based on Islamic teachings. Here, radical solutions, not normal solutions, are considered by Qutbian discourse.

Contrary to the Straussian methodology of interpreting political texts, Qutbian thinkers adopt historicist views on ideas and historical events. For example, Qutb rejects using any diplomatic means with those whom he considers the enemies of Islam. He replies to anyone who uses the example of a peace treaty between Muslims and Jews in early Islam that it was a historical event subject to its own circumstances and governed by its historical, political, economic, and social contexts.

Qutbian thinkers should not care about any classical age before Islam, even though the classical ages represent common human ideas and norms. Furthermore, the classical period in Islam was a foundational era that represents, for Qutb, historical lessons that legitimize his thoughts and practices in the name of Islam.

Qutb emphasizes in his writings that organized religious groups are the only segment of society able to reshape current societies and politics based on God's will and authority. Accordingly, Qutb views the Muslim Brotherhood as the only religious organized movement that has an impact on reality. Therefore, Qutbian thinkers must be part of organized movements to facilitate the translation of ideas, theories, and visions into realities. Qutbian thinkers are concerned with practical matters more than theoretical issues. In sum, Strauss more likely does not fit the criteria of Qutbian thinker due to the differences between Strauss's intellectual character and Qutb's political thought principles.

### 3. What does Strauss think about Islamism?

One part of Strauss's solution to the crisis of modernity calls for reviving religious

norms and perspectives on society and politics. Modernity provides us with the concept of progress, and this is a problematic for Strauss because progress does not clearly indicate where it is heading.

Qutb is also suspicious of the Western concept of progress, and he presents an alternative to it: Qutb believes that Islam is the perfect solution for all the illnesses produced by the crisis of Western modernity. Qutb's conceptualization of religion transforms Islam from rituals and faith to grand theory. The original sense of Islam cannot be useful for Qutb to present as a grand theory to solve the Western modernity crisis; therefore he is forced to provide an ideological interpretation of Islam to convert its form to Islamism. Islamism is an ideological form of Islam that represents different invented traditions that have their own texts, theorists, and theories.

As with Strauss's solution of returning to religion to avoid the crisis of Western modernity, Qutb's Islamism can provide a similar function; however, it would be interesting to know what is Strauss's assessment of Qutb's Islamism proposal. Qutb's Islamism proposal suggests that there is no conflict between Islam and politics as long as it works under God's authority and sovereignty. Additionally, Qutb's interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an suggest that political teaching existed in the Qur'an. These political teachings can be found in God's *hakimiyah* and *shari'a* commitments.

Strauss would agree with Qutb that religion has political connotations and would be helpful in fighting the illnesses of Western modernity. Moreover, political interpretation of religion, as Strauss emphasizes, has a strong effect on society and politics. Therefore, Strauss and Qutb agree on the influence of religion in controlling the masses and bringing them back to the right path. Of course, for Strauss it seems that any other path would be better for human society than the devastating path of modernity.

However, a careful and close reading of Strauss's work suggests that he rejects the implementation of Islamism because Islamism is a modern, ideological interpretation of Islam. Qutb argues that Islamism represents a *manhaj* (method) that proposes a blueprint to build Islamic society (Shepard, 1989).

Another of Strauss's disagreements with Qutb's Islamism would be that it is considered part of modernity's intellectual production. Furthermore, Strauss would criticize Islamism because it includes historicity. Qutb's reading of history embodies a historicist understanding and reading of Islamic history. Strauss would not favor implementation of Islamism because it takes a similar position toward philosophy. Because Islamism is an invented tradition, it does not have philosophical roots in Islamic philosophy. Qutb's writings do not rely on any Islamic philosophy and philosophers such as, Al-Farabi, Averroes, and al-Kindi. Qutb rejects Islamic philosophy because it lacks an ideological component and because part of its formation was influenced by Greek philosophy, which, for Qutb, is corrupt and unnecessary.

#### 4. The idea of inventing tradition

It is obvious that the political theories of both Qutb and Strauss aim to establish new traditions as a response to the crisis of modernity. Since the breaking with classical philosophy led by Machiavelli, the field of philosophy has taken a direction toward building modern traditions based on historicism and positivism. The birth of modernity has produced new traditions that marginalize other classical traditions. Therefore, I would argue that Islamism is an invented tradition that constitutes a different understanding and interpretation of the original form of Islam.

To understand this notion, it is important to comprehend what invented tradition

is. Eric Hobsbawm defines it as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 1). The invented tradition lives on the old previous traditions through representing the weakness of these traditions in understanding the contemporary phenomena of the world. Moreover, the limitations of old traditions highlight the strength of new traditions. The new invented tradition does not separate itself from the original tradition due to the need for legitimate cover for its structures. As Hobsbawm states, “How far new traditions can thus use old materials, how far they may be forced to invent new languages or devices, or extend the old symbolic vocabulary beyond its established limits” (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 4).

Qutb and many other Islamists (e.g., Hassan al-Banna and Abdul a’la-Mawdudi) argue that politics and religion are compatible in Islam. Therefore, Qutb stresses that Islam is *Din wa Dawla* (religion and state), so an Islamic state is fundamental to Islamist political thought. What is important is that this understanding of alliance between politics and religion in Islam is the product of modernity. Additionally, the Islamist political theory of Islamic state is fundamentally considered to be a modern phenomenon (Roberts, 2015). Another aspect of Islamism as an invented tradition is that it offers alternative political concepts of state, which is the caliphate. Islamists, particularly Qutbain, recall the idea that the caliphate constitutes a critical challenge for the modern political theories of state. More importantly, this challenge is that politics and religion go hand in hand in harmony within caliphate political systems.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

In this dissertation, I investigated Leo Strauss and Sayyid Qutb's responses to the crisis of Western modernity. Their responses considered being critiques rise from Western and Eastern backgrounds, which have different understandings of theology, politics, and philosophy. Furthermore, the first chapter of this dissertation addressed the following questions: What are the common problems in Strauss and Qutb's political thought? Does Strauss provide one or multiple answers to the crisis of Western modernity? How can comparative political theory (CPT) help us explain and understand postmodern alternatives such as Islamism? Does Sayyid Qutb fit the criteria for a Straussian thinker? And is Strauss a Qutbian thinker?

This dissertation adapts comparative political theory as its methodology. In chapter two, the core argument of CPT is that the Western canon of political thought is Eurocentric and needs to be expanded to reach other political thought traditions. In other words, the field of Western political theory needs to expand its intellectual inquiry beyond Western geographical and cultural limitations. CPT as a methodology can help us better understand Islamic political thought through understanding similarities and differences between Western and non-Western political thought. Additionally, I drew a line between two different kinds of political-religious thought in Islam: Islamist and Islamic political thought. Using CPT to explore Islamic political thought allowed me to differentiate it from the thought adopted by many radical religious groups in the Middle East. Islamist political thought is different from Islamic political thought due to its distinctive

underlining features and intellectual references. For instance, Islamist political thought emphasizes the ideological component more than Islamic political thought.

The main objective of this dissertation was to compare the critiques of Qutb and Strauss regarding the crisis of Western modernity. Of course, there are many critics of Western modernity; however, Qutb and Strauss provided different alternatives to avoiding the problem of modernity. Qutb and Strauss's criticisms of Western modernity are important because their solutions contain reconciliation between religion and politics.

The third chapter examines the political theory of Leo Strauss and his proposed solutions to avoiding the crisis of Western modernity. Secondary literature on Strauss's political philosophy legacy indicated that Strauss provided two solutions to solving the problem of modernity. However, in this dissertation, I argued that Strauss proposed four solutions to the crisis of Western modernity: going back to religion, going back to philosophy, going back to classical political philosophy, and forging an alliance between religion and philosophy.

Strauss chose religion as one solution to the problem of modernity because of its huge impact on society and politics. For Strauss, religion constitutes an original and authentic source for ideals; therefore, returning to religion would help to avoid the dangers present in modernity. Moreover, Strauss found in the solution of religion the importance of the past over the present. The idea of the past was reassuring to him because in following it, the path that humans should follow is well known. Strauss stressed that religion can provide people with wisdom.

Strauss's second solution was going back to philosophy. Strauss valued philosophy as a powerful candidate for fighting the crisis of Western modernity. Strauss stated that classical philosophy was the last important and most complete form of philosophizing

before the breaking of modern philosophy led by Machiavelli. Strauss stated that ancient philosophy was concerned with the search for truth. Additionally, ancient philosophy was concerned with asking questions and investigating the beginning of things. This nature of philosophy prevents humans from losing their way while asking questions and seeking truth.

The third solution Straus proposed was going back to classical political philosophy. Two major aspects of the crisis of Western modernity are the focus on politics and religion. Strauss was concerned with restoring the original meaning of political philosophy, the one practiced by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. For Strauss, modern political thought has rejected classical political philosophy because it does not utilize scientific inquiry. Moreover, Straus believed that historicism and positivism are the most influential products of the age of modernity that have negatively impacted the field of political philosophy. Historicism transforms political philosophy into simply the history of political philosophy, whereas positivism considers science to be superior over all human knowledge, and it devalues political philosophy because it is not scientific.

For his fourth solution, Strauss suggested forging an alliance between religion and politics. However, Strauss tries to find the connection between religion and philosophy to solve the problem of Western modernity. Strauss realized that philosophy and religion were incompatible, and modernity promoted the conflicting nature of these entities. Strauss admitted that religion and philosophy, in the basic sense, were incompatible because of the suspicious nature of philosophy. Moreover, the nature of philosophical inquiry does not exclude anything from questioning, including sensitive religious subjects like the nature and existence of God. Strauss uncovered ways to make religion and philosophy compatible in man city. Furthermore, Strauss used the notion of noble lies to

make religion and philosophy more compatible and offered a political understanding of religion. In other words, Strauss stated that noble lies constitute from two elements, which are religion and nation. Furthermore, Strauss contended that religion and nation are necessary illusions that need to be spread among people to control them. Spreading the illusion of religion and nation under threat brings all individuals together to support their politicians and state's politics. The most basic feature of the noble lie is that it must keep the truth inclusive only to the political elite. Classical philosophy shares similar concerns about elites and deems them the only group that deserves to know the truth.

The fourth chapter examined Sayyid Qutb's political theory of *jahiliyah* and how it can diagnose the crisis of Western modernity. Qutb believed that modernity constitutes the condition of *jahiliyah*. I discussed the meaning of modernity in Islamic and Islamist political thought. The term "modernity" has different meanings and reactions in the Islamist and Islamic political perspectives. Islamist political thought argues that Western modernity is incompatible with Islam. Furthermore, Islamists thinkers, including Qutb, contend that products of modernity, such as democracy, are not necessary; instead, Islam and the Qur'an provide everything we need. However, many other Islamic and modernist Islamist thinkers stress that Islam is compatible with Western modernity through providing necessary interpretations of religious texts. Qutb's understanding of Western modernity confused with other notions such as the West, the United States, and Western civilization. For Qutb, there was no difference between modernity and Western civilization because he considered them as both immoral sources of all illness in the world. Qutb's concept of *jahiliyah* developed over time to reach its final form. There were three developmental stages of the *jahiliyah* concept in Qutb's political theory: the first stage of *jahiliyah* from 1925–1939, the second stage of *jahiliyah* from 1939–1948, and the third

stage of *jahiliyah* from 1948–1950. During his journey in the United States, Qutb reached his final stage for his concept of *jahiliyah*, which led him to the discourse of *Takfeer*. The idea of *jahiliyah* encouraged Qutb to differentiate true Muslims from *kufar* infidels. The accusation of *Takfeer* constitutes not only religious crime but is considered a political charge as well. Qutb offered political understanding of religion. For him, religion and politics were compatible, and they work in harmony. In other words, Qutb's comprehensive view of religion led him to consider politics a part of Islam and insist that politics must not be practiced outside of Islamic contexts.

As part of his solution to the problem of *jahiliyah*, Qutb proposed the theory of *hakimiyah*. Qutb conventionalized *hakimiyah* based on reconstructing the relationship between politics and religion. Furthermore, Qutb insisted that God's authority must dominate the world, and His law must be implemented through *shari'a* Islamic law. Qutb's conceptualization of the theory of *hakimiyah* is inherently political. However, the development of the concept of *hakimiyah* shows different directions in what it means. Haj Hamad and Shahrour highlighted the other important aspect of *hakimiyah*: moral perspective. Haj Hamad and Shahrour's analysis of the theory of *hakimiyah* demonstrated that Muslims already live with *hakimiyah*, and Qutb's interpretation of *hakimiyah* is an ideological reading. The final section of chapter four examined Islamism's responses to the challenges of political modernity. Islamists' attitudes toward the challenge of Western modernity are almost identical to Qutb's views because he built his political theory on evidence from the Qur'an. Islamist political movements consider democracy and the democratic political system incompatible with Islam because they did not arise from Islam. Recent Islamist religious movements (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists) demonstrated a pragmatic understanding of democracy as way to

achieve power in Egypt; however, the year after the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011, the Egyptian government led by the Muslim Brotherhood's president utilized undemocratic practices, including declaring a state of emergency and constitutional declaration that suspended the constitution. The other challenge that Islamist movements faced is the role of women in public life. Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists rejected the idea that women can run for superior political positions like the presidency. This is not surprising because Qutb and other Islamists have identical attitudes regarding the role of women in the public sphere.

Chapter five compared the political philosophies of Qutb and Strauss by comparing and contrasting thinkers' critiques of Western modernity. Both Qutb and Strauss were concerned with the crisis of modernity. Moreover, Western modernity forced Strauss and Qutb to form intellectual projects to respond to this problem. Another aspect of modernity was the notion of progress. Interestingly, Strauss and Qutb both raised suspicions about the path of progress promised by Western modernity. Strauss and Qutb stated there was no certainty of where progress is headed. The theological-political problem of Western modernity was another common concern between Strauss and Qutb. Both thinkers called for a return to past historical periods to find reconciliation between politics and religion.

Chapter five also explored the differences between Strauss and Qutb's anti-modernity political theories. It is true that both thinkers fought against modernity, but they differed in their sources of legitimacy. On the one hand, Strauss valued both philosophy and religion as fundamental sources of legitimacy. On the other hand, Qutb's only trusted source of legitimacy was Islam. Consequently, both thinkers offered different versions of the best way of life. For Strauss, the best way of life was a philosophical life. In contrast, Qutb stated that the best way of life was to live under Islam. Of course, Qutb

viewed Islam as a grand theory that included all aspects of human life. Accepting the other is another difference between Qutb and Strauss. Strauss's legacy of political philosophy also delved into other philosophical traditions, including Islamic and Jewish heritages. Moreover, Strauss concentrated on the links among three different philosophical and political traditions to compare ideas across civilizations to fight the crisis of modernity. However, Qutb had a different perspective on accepting the Other. For Qutb, there was no Other; there was only the true Muslim nation. Therefore, Qutb considered anyone outside the circle of true Muslims an inferior group (e.g., Christians, Jews, and fake Muslims). Moreover, Qutb believed there was no equivalence for Muslims' *Umma* nation, and he tended to be aggressive toward the others (non-Muslim nations). Because Qutb accused others of being infidels, *kufar*, this suggests a hostile attitude toward other Muslims.

Qutb suggested that the realities shaped by modernity must be changed by any means necessary. Therefore, Qutb revived the notion of jihad as a necessary tool to transforming modern societies into Islamic ones. Qutb understood jihad to be offensive toward any threat to Islam; therefore, young Muslims must use violence against non-Muslims. In many writings, Qutb stated that he hoped to see young Muslim pioneers taking his call to change *jahili* societies to Islamic ones.

The last section of chapter five dealt with the issues (e.g., Islamism) that constitute major influencers in contemporary politics and society. By using CPT in understanding Qutb and Strauss's thoughts, I explored the encounter between Qutb and Strauss's perspectives. I argued that Qutb could fit the Straussian criteria of thinker. From reading Qutb's discourse regarding the crisis of Western modernity, I concluded that Qutb's Islamism project fits Strauss's standards of an anti-modernity political thinker. Qutb's

thought shares many common features with Strauss's perspective on the problem of modernity. For instance, both thinkers believed that religion can be used as a political instrument to govern societies. Moreover, both Strauss and Qutb believed that a return to the past was more beneficial than focusing on the present or following modernity's progress. For Qutb and Strauss, the past represents, in specific historical periods, a golden age that contains the most idealistic forms of thought and political rule.

The aim of this dissertation was to bring together two controversial thinkers of the contemporary world. The rise of Islamism in the modern world affects many countries and has changed many modern societies. Strauss's solution of using religion is especially interesting because it was created by a thinker who did not adopt religion as a way of life. Because Qutb's political theory was anti-modernity and his character fit the Straussian criteria of a political thinker to a significant degree, it is important to know Strauss's position on Qutb's project of Islamism. Strauss would have likely disagreed with Islamism because it is considered a product of modernity. Moreover, Strauss would have rejected Islamism because Qutb justified the use of violence through jihad to implement Islamism in society. Islamism implies some sort of historicism because it considers particular historical periods locked in their contexts (e.g., the Abbasid and the Umayyad periods).

Many scholars associate Islamism with Islamic traditions; However, I argue that Islamism is not Islam but rather an invented tradition. Islamism is a product of modernity, and it has its own concepts, theories, and theorists.

### **Future Research Projects**



This dissertation analyzed Islamists' and conservatives' responses to the crisis of Western modernity. Due to the time limitations in writing this dissertation, I explored specific aspects of Qutb and Strauss's anti-modernity political theories based on comparative political theory methodology. In the following paragraphs, I will address possible future research projects.

The field of comparative political theory needs to be focus more clearly on the methodology to study different political thought traditions. This dissertation utilized CPT methodology to conduct a comparison between Qutb and Strauss's political theories. More comparative studies of political thought traditions should use CPT methodology to better conduct comparative analyses of political thought. The CPT literature contributes to clarifying the underlining features of comparativism in political theory. However, the field of CPT still struggles with the question of what is the best way to conduct a comparative political analysis of political thought. One of my future projects will be to concentrate the methodological dimensions of CPT.

Another proposed future project would be exploring Strauss's legacy in Islamic political philosophy. Strauss performed many political and philosophical studies in Islamic philosophy. Strauss, as a CPT scholar, included comparative perspectives across different political and philosophical traditions, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions. Strauss's approaches to Islamic philosophy are an important part of his legacy, and they need to be better understood through studies that shed light on this crucial topic.

This dissertation explored the conservative and Islamist reactionary political discourses against Western modernity, as exemplified by the political thought of Strauss and Qutb. Future projects will expand the comparison between conservatism and Islamism. Of course, increasing the cases of comparison will enhance our understanding

of various phenomena, including Islamism and Eurocentrism. Moreover, the various cases will enhance a comparative analysis of political thought and will open new dialogues between Western and non-Western traditions.

The distinction between Islamic and Islamist political thought is another future research project. This dissertation highlights the basic features that differentiate between Islamist and Islamic political thought. However, there are many major questions that need to be addressed to better understand these differences. For example, when was the first interaction between Islam and politics? When did Islamic political thought start? To what extent does Islamic political thought heritage constitute a canon? These questions and many more could be addressed through future study.

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