

Maciej Czyż (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9160-9847>)

Uniwersytet Wrocławski

Science in Sayyid Quṭb's 'Milestones'

Sayyid Quṭb was born in 1906 in Mūṣā in Upper Egypt, and received his secondary education in Cairo. He graduated from Dār al-‘Ulūm, a conservative teacher-training university. Having worked as a teacher in Cairo, Damietta & Banī Suwayf, he finally settled in Ḥulwān, and worked in the Ministry of Education until 1952. His mentor was ‘A. M. al-‘Aqqād. Quṭb became a renowned editor, author and critic, both of literature (he co-discovered N. Maḥfūz) and of the monarchy. He was also the editor of *The Arab World*, later of *New Thought*. It was closed down in 1948, but Quṭb, instead to prison, was sent to USA, to study education, which he did in New York, Washington, Northern Colorado, and California (1948–50). American materialism, hedonism and support for Israel in the first Israeli-Arab war (1948–9) confirmed his shift from liberalism towards religion, already visible in his 40’s works on Quran, and strengthened further, after 1950 pilgrimage, by influence of Mawdūdī, and Al-Nadwī. Quṭb became the adviser of young army officers, including future presidents Nasser and Sadat. After the 1952 revolution, he advised the Revolutionary Command Council, and reformed Egypt’s education. President M. Naḡīb hailed him as the pioneer of the Revolution, the greatest contemporary thinker of Islam. He also acted as an intermediary between the RCC and the Brotherhood. As Nasser moved towards Arab Socialism, Quṭb joined the Brotherhood, and became its main ideologue. In 1953 he became the head of its propagation, editor of the Brotherhood’s newspaper, and its chief spokesman. In 1954 he was among the arrested due to an assassination attempt at Nasser’s life. He was tortured and sentenced (also by Sadat) to 15 years in prison, but was allowed to write. From prison, he headed organisation trying to restore the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1964, Iraqi president ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif achieved his release, due to frail health. He published *Milestones* the same year, but its menacing popularity and radicalism got it banned. In 1965 his organisation was uncovered, as it was gathering arms. He was arrested, and his works were banned. In 1966 he was executed, despite Saudi intercession. He left 26 books, 3 poetry volumes, and more than 1500 articles & essays. His main works include also *In the Shade of Al-Qur’ān* (a Quranic commentary), and *Social Justice in Islam*. His ideas and martyrdom made him the most influential fundamentalist Islamic thinker of the 20th century, alongside Mawdūdī. He gave fundamentalist discourse a modern, revolutionary, form, shifting the focus from combating external threats to fighting the foundation of Muslims’ own countries, corrupted to the point of not being Islamic anymore. But his doctrine of new *ḡāhiliyya* was opposed not only by traditional Islamic elite, considering him a charlatan, but also by some Muslim Brothers. His death

caused a stir (e.g. radicalised young Az-Zawāhirī), and taught fundamentalists to turn to smaller, adaptable, and moving groups¹.

The Muslim world, with Avicenna, Averroes, Al-Fārābī, Ibn Ḥaldūn and others, developed and transmitted to Europe ancient Greek knowledge, but fell into stagnation. The West developed it even further. The domination of Western science over that of the Muslim World resulted in economic and political subjugation, which also made Western culture appealing to Muslims. Although compared with crusaders, the French and UK didn't spread Christianity. But European colonialism was matched with spread of European ideologies, seen by many as alien, and contrary to Islam. Quṭb and Mawdūdī compare it thus to ideologies, not to religions². For Quṭb it's always about religion, even if the enemies pretend it's not³. B. Tibi mentions the challenge of Islam as a cultural system rather than religion⁴, and indeed, for Quṭb, one cannot differentiate between them (while this conflation makes faith itself hostage to the cultural system, endangers it, instead of defending). Another interesting idea of B. Tibi is seeing relation to science as a Third World response and attempt at de-Westernisation of knowledge⁵, which comes of lack of discerning between institutional and cultural modernity⁶.

All this needed a reply from the Muslim community, and the matter of science became important. Major Muslim thinkers, Al-Afḡānī and 'Abduh, supported science⁷, defending it against attacks coming from some of their coreligionists, just as they defended Islam against a claim that scientific underdevelopment of the Islamic world was due to it. They wanted to transplant Western science to the Islamic world, to make it stronger and able to defend itself against the political menace of the West (as Japan did). But the cultural changes made some question this course.

Quṭb in *Milestones* does praise science, or its results. He claims that Islam is not hostile towards material creativity, as it judges it one of the most important duties⁸; it stimulates industrial, economic and scientific growth⁹; it must *preserve and develop*

¹ J. Calvert, *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of the Radical Islamism* (Oxford 2009), passim; J.J.G. Jansen, *Sayyid Quṭb* [in:] C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, G. Lecomte (reds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, v. 9 (Leiden 1997), 117–8; Sayyid Quṭb, *Milestones*, tr. A.B. al-Mehri, Birmingham 2006, 7; S. Khatab, G.B. Bouma, *Democracy in Islam* (New York 2007), 72–79.

² J. Calvert, op.cit., 130–1.

³ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fī āl-Ṭarīq* (Beirut, Cairo 1979), 12:186.

⁴ B. Tibi, "Culture and knowledge: the politics of Islamization of knowledge as a postmodern project? The fundamentalist claim to de-Westernization", *Theory, Culture & Society* (London 1995), 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, great exemplification 16.

⁷ "Lecture on Teaching and Learning" in N.R. Keddie, *An Islamic response to Imperialism. Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley 1968), 102, quoted in R.L. Euben, "Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 4, No 1 (Spring, 2002), 29 (out of 23–48), n. 24: *There was, is, and will be no ruler in the world but science*. Also *Ibid.*, 30, Al-Afḡānī's and 'Abduh's view of Islam as the rational religion.

⁸ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7:121–2.

the material civilization achieved by mankind through the European genius in material creativity¹⁰. He praises the great capital of science, culture, organization/forms of government and material production¹¹, the wonderful material facilitations and great creativity¹², claims that material progress should not be neglected, that it is Islamic duty¹³, that human values (fully represented by Islam only) do not oppose, but support – through the logic of faith itself – all kinds human viceregency on Earth¹⁴, and this means acquiring raw resources, industry and developing technology. But *material creativity* has no value of its own¹⁵, and science is mostly mentioned as a means of achieving material comfort: the *material* word comes often, while *science* appears at the beginning, only to reappear later in mostly critical context.

Quṭb was a spiritual man, for whom *all the humanity has, previously and today, known*, is insignificant in comparison with religion (shariah)¹⁶. But he was also aware of the awe the material prosperity and political might of the West¹⁷ inspired in Muslims¹⁸, and also knew his ideas about science & culture aren't fully accepted, nor understood, even among religious Muslims¹⁹. He was wiser than to say outrightly it doesn't matter whether there shall be freedom or prosperity in Egypt, as long as Egypt is Muslim²⁰. He exhibited partaking in the common attitude of respect for Western achievements to gain trust of his readers, who aspired to the wealthy life enabled by Western science²¹. Perhaps, just like he sees several distinct stages of Islamic work, he shows his attitude towards science in steps. He believed that one should build faith, and only then demand something. The example, which Muslims should always imitate when they want to restore Islam, is set by God himself. First he strengthened their faith for 13 years, in hostile environment, and without any promise, but that of Heaven. Only when it was strong, and their hearts free of ambition, he organised their

¹⁰ Ibid., 0:4.

¹¹ Ibid., 0:6.

¹² Ibid., 0:8.

¹³ Ibid., loc.cit. & 7:110 although it's not the most important goal; 116; 121 Islam encouraged the material progress in Africa.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7:119–120.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7:115.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11:166; also 8:131. Somewhat 10:157.

¹⁷ Owed to science.

¹⁸ Esp. since the domination of the West used to be bigger than nowadays.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8:125–6.

²⁰ Cf. <https://www.polskieradio.pl/9/947/Artykul/314147,Srebrne-Usta-19922002>.

²¹ Clearer example of such a trick: J. Calvert, op.cit., 158 *We look with nostalgia to the British Occupation*. Also, Quṭb explains Orientalists' praises of Muḥammad as a rouse (Ibid., 167). He shouldn't be taken literally. His claims about *ʿalims* having sold themselves to Satan (J. Calvert, op.cit., 159), about no Islam remaining, Muslims not sharing his ideas being infidels (Ibid., 216–8) are, or were at first, hyperboles (Quṭb admitted it himself, when confronted: Ibid., 220, 235, 257–8), even though they were conclusions of the ideas of Mawdūdī and Al-Nadwī, who themselves didn't go that far (Ibid., 220). Also, he changed the focus of his call to Islam, depending on circumstances: Ibid., 202; as well as claimed that one should use his own capital before borrowing from someone else. He wouldn't give the same advice to non-Muslims: S. Quṭb, *Al-ʿAdāla ʿal-Iḡtimāʿiyya fī ʿāl-Islām* (1415/1995), 7.

life, made them fight, and win²². Thus Quṭb praises science first, and denies Islam is against it²³, removing obstacles for accepting faith, and appealing to his readers' ambition (leading the World). Only later, when some readers are convinced, he makes his praise conditional, and starts criticism, as well as demands them to make sacrifices, including martyrdom, at the very end. The form and the content intertwine. The change of the attitude he exhibits is clear when he writes (...) *the European genius in material creativity contrived great capital of science, culture, organization/forms of government and material production that the humanity rests upon. One doesn't forgo it easily, nor the ones who represent it. Especially since what is called 'the Islamic world' is almost completely devoid of this adornment*²⁴, yet it doesn't seem hard for him later, where he writes: *These 'civilisations' that have dazzled and broke the spirit of many [Muslims], in their essence are nothing but systems of ḡāhiliyya*²⁵. *They are faulty, worn out and falling, if compared to Islam*²⁶. But while the rhetoric value of the praises is clear, he was able to give a theoretical foundation for it, by claiming that people need science (technology) to fulfill the duty of being the God's representative on Earth²⁷.

But from the start he reduces the importance of science, by focusing on the technical side of it²⁸, and means of achieving material comfort, and by saying it's lived out its life, yet Muslims will not manage to catch up to the West. So it's mentioned as something positive, but only briefly directly, and mostly as material progress²⁹.

Even more so later on, despite his earlier words, Quṭb criticised the West thoroughly, especially as being consumed by materialism; and while communists exalted materialism as a theory, Europe & USA exalted it in praxis, in the form of material production³⁰. He also criticised Darwinism, saying that non-Muslim scientists were fooled by presence of common features between humans and animals to the point they counted humans among the animals³¹. As Quṭb reminds us,

²² Idem, *Al-Ma'ālim*, 2:20–45, esp. 2:38–39. It echoes Al-Bannā's ideas: J. Calvert, op.cit., 84.

²³ Some saw it this way, and not without a reason. The rulers of Saudi Arabia used to defend technology against obscurantist attacks on radio stations, cars, or TV, while promoting shariah: L. McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud. Founder of a Kingdom* (New York 1993) 87–88, 124–6. Fayṣal I was killed by a brother of a man who died in anti-TV protest: J. Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia. Second Edition* (New York 2010), 236.

²⁴ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:6. He sees progress as adornment, not essential. Some take these praises seriously, e.g. S. Khatab, *The Power of Sovereignty. The political and ideological philosophy of Sayyid Quṭb* (New York 2006), 92.

²⁵ *Ḡāhiliyya* (ignorance) is the pre-Islamic period of Arab history, but Quṭb believed that Muslims lapsed into a new *ḡāhiliyya*.

²⁶ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 10:157.

²⁷ Ibid., 7:114–5.

²⁸ This conflation is also seen by A. Bouzid, "Science and Technology in the Discourse of Sayyid Quṭb", *Social Epistemology* 10 (3&4) (1996), 298–9.

²⁹ Ibid., 0:7–8.

³⁰ Ibid., 7:109–110, also 10:160, 3:54, 5:89, 7:110–3.

³¹ Ibid., 3:51–2 directly, 8:128; In his other work, he does point to a link between Marx, Darwin and Freud, who reduced humans to economy, animal and sex, respectively – A. Bouzid, *Man, society and knowledge in the Islamist discourse of Sayyid Quṭb. Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (...)* (Blacksburg 1998), 170.

human beings have other features too, as even non-Muslim scientists had to concede. Hence, while material progress is prescribed by God, one shouldn't neglect the human values. Having lost them, the West is not able to lead the humanity anymore³². Quṭb also claimed that Islam is their only depository³³, thus one asks himself whether the West ever had them at all. But he also claimed that Islam has them to the highest extent³⁴.

Another sign that the superiority of the West is ending is the failure of its ideologies, such as nationalism and communism. The proof of the end of "unnatural" communism was the failure of its economic system³⁵ and – after it was a popular ideology – its reduction to the (matters of) state and government, which (this reduction) is far from what communism used to be about / which (state) moved far away from the original communism³⁶. But Quṭb also claimed that, for centuries, there's no fully Muslim country or society, because there's no shariah³⁷, yet that was not a proof of Islam's shortcomings. Secondly, the proof of barrenness of Western democracy is that it's borrowing from Socialist economy³⁸. That's yet another inconsistency in Quṭb's claims, as this shows Marxism wasn't as dead as he claimed. Quṭb, however, had to describe it as bankrupt, as it claimed to be the outcome of social studies, which he despised³⁹. He claimed: *all individual and collective theories have failed*⁴⁰. They were human-made ones, while Islam is the only reign in which people aren't ruled

³² S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:3–10.

³³ Ibid., 0:4.

³⁴ Ibid., 7:109–110 they are the highest values in Islamic society, their existence elsewhere is not denied.

³⁵ Ibid., 0:3–4.

³⁶ Ibid., 0:3. I am hesitant; the second option is supported by A.B. Al-Mehri (s. Quṭb, *Milestones. Ma'ālim fi'l-tareeq*, tr. A.B. al-Mehri (Birmingham 2006), 23), and fits accusing capitalism that it's borrowing from socialism (theory, while communism imports matter – grain). But in Arabic publications, *the state* is in quotation marks, which means it's about the idea, or the issue(s) of state, and thus makes the last part, which refers to it, less likely to refer to actual states, and more to the general concept.

³⁷ Idem, *Ma'ālim*, 0:5–6. But shariah continued to be used in some places, and even in Egypt, it was mixed with other legal systems less than two centuries before; 0:6, 0:8, 5:91.

³⁸ Ibid., loc.cit.

³⁹ The most relevant part: Ibid., 8:128: *All the schools of philosophy, of historiosophy, of psychology (apart from what was observed and perceived, without any general interpretation), all the studies of morality, all the schools of comparative religious studies, of social studies and interpretations (apart from direct observations, statistics and direct information, without general results or general instructions drawn from them) – all these schools in ḡāhīlī (non-Islamic) thought are (previously and contemporarily) directly affected by the ḡāhīlī worldview concepts, are based on them. The programs of most – if not all – of them have hostility to any religious worldview, and especially towards the Islamic one, at their roots.* This shows the importance of purity. As for his dislike of Orientalists (S. Quṭb, op.cit., 4:64–81), he explained it earlier by that they construct and instil in Muslims *false identity* (J. Calvert, op.cit., 166–7), while Quṭb wants the "true" (ideal) one. Orientalism was matched by earlier *Isrā'īliyyāt*, and Quṭb blames Jews for Freudism, Marxism (Ibid., 169), materialism (s. Quṭb, op.cit., 8:129).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 0:5.

by other people, but by God⁴¹, and thus are equal⁴². Hence, the time has come for God's collective⁴³ theory: Islam (which unites the egalitarianism of Communism and the spirituality of Christianity⁴⁴).

The third sign that the leadership of mankind is slipping away from the West is that *the role of the scientific awakening, which goes back to the age of Renaissance [...] is fulfilled. It reached its climax in the 18th and 19th centuries and it has nothing more to offer*⁴⁵. 20th century is shown by Quṭb as already past the peak of scientific progress. These words came before the explosion of IT and they were less absurd back then. But it still was a controversial statement and if he uttered it, it is because he wanted to believe the West is falling⁴⁶, but also because he claimed, earlier, that the pace of changes is too fast to absorb without losing ethics; Muslims must do it slowly⁴⁷. If the pace continued, the superiority of the West would keep increasing. Thus, to even consider Muslims being able to catch up without joining the destructive race, he had to assume that science is slowing down. By the end of the resurgence of science Quṭb perhaps meant the end of revolutionary changes, not a complete extinguishing of possibilities of progress, as – unless it was mere verbiage – Quṭb claimed that what the West achieved must be furthered, and that Muslima will compete with the West in this matter, after several centuries (of continuous progress). The scientific progress will, thus, be slowed down and its importance diminish, but it will nevertheless continue. Quṭb belittled future scientific progress, and claimed that it will take Muslims *centuries* to catch up to the Europe, if they ever will⁴⁸, because it discouraged his readers from thinking about even trying to do it, and not only defended them against the destructive influence of the fast pace of change, but suggested focusing on more important, and more attainable, matters. He offers immediately a shortcut: Muslims can lead the world not in science, but by Islam⁴⁹, by being real Muslims. As only Muslims can be civilised⁵⁰, but currently there's no Muslim society⁵¹, so it's enough for nominal Muslims to become actual ones to lead mankind. Muslims can't compete in the field of material progress, so they should offer something else to the world: the human values, Islam. Quṭb was aware that these claims may overly discourage Muslims from striving in the field of science, while the importance of science was emphasised by, still popular, Nasser's propaganda⁵², which he opposed. Thus his next

⁴¹ Ibid., 0:8.

⁴² Ibid., 7:108–110.

⁴³ Ibid., 0:5: *Islam can fulfill its role only when expressed in a form of a society.*

⁴⁴ J. Calvert, op.cit., 161.

⁴⁵ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:4.

⁴⁶ A. Bouzid, art.cit., 293–4 rightly notes the influence of the decline of UK and France.

⁴⁷ J. Calvert, op.cit., 90.

⁴⁸ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:7. Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, S. Korea, or even Muslim Malaysia prove it wrong. Admittedly it wasn't obvious in Quṭb's days, but in fact, earlier he placed Japan as example for Muslims: J. Calvert, op.cit., 96.

⁴⁹ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:7–9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7:106.

⁵¹ Ibid., 0:5–6, 5:91.

⁵² A. Bouzid, art.cit., 292–3.

words were that *it doesn't mean that material creativity should be neglected*, and that God makes it their obligation⁵³.

The scientific & material progress is thus good, obligatory even, but not of first necessity. As well as science is insignificant, if compared with faith⁵⁴. Qutb also claimed that progress goes from animal urges to higher values, thus the civilisation that cherishes human values, and not the one most successful in economy, science & industry, is the progressive and civilised one⁵⁵. Thus, the reborn Muslim community will be the best from the start, as it possesses the apex of human values⁵⁶. Yet it's not enough to claim the leadership of mankind, as Qutb claimed that it's a long journey from rebirth to assuming it (the idea of regaining world leadership by asserting Islamic identity is Al-Nadwī's⁵⁷). Perhaps just to reduce expectations, but maybe it's harmonious progress in both spiritual and material fields that makes a civilisation able to lead the mankind. And to achieve that, Muslims must develop science. But to do that, they should know the milestones on their path: teach faith before starting giving instructions. Likely such is also the case with science: one should build the faith, and only then start solving problems. Only with faith Muslims will overcome them. In the world Qutb envisages, it is enough for a Muslim of strong faith to hear his religion demands something, to fulfill it⁵⁸. Therefore, if, as he says, Islam orders Muslims to develop science, they will.

Qutb emphasised that there should be only one source of guidance for Muslims, Quran, and insisted that early Muslims didn't turn to the great and (also scientifically) developed cultures around them – Romans, Greek heritage, Persians, nor Indians – for guidance, but to Quran only. After the conquests, Muslims added other sources of guidance besides Quran, such as Greek philosophy, and it was that impurity that caused the loss of the world leadership, right after the start of Islam's mission⁵⁹. It's important to note that Qutb, as Salafis, regarded only the first Muslim generation as truly Islamic. The Islamic civilisation disappeared with the advent of Umayyads (661)⁶⁰. Thus what is considered the peak of the Muslim civilization (early to middle Abbasid period and the Umayyad reign in Spain), is for Qutb well into the period of decay⁶¹. And if As'ad AbuKhalil contrasts fundamentalists with *classical Islamic Scholars*⁶² it is perhaps because Qutb does the same. The Muslim thought of those times, under foreign (Greek) influence, is not Muslim at all, because it had sources

⁵³ S. Qutb, op.cit., 0:7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11:166; also 8:131 and 10:157.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7:109–110.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7:106, but also 110–4 etc.

⁵⁷ J. Calvert, op.cit., 158.

⁵⁸ S. Qutb, op.cit., 2:32–33 the Islamic regime became firm when the faith did, and then alcohol, usury and gambling were eradicated, which developed countries exert themselves to do, in vain.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:14.

⁶⁰ Also earlier about it: J. Calvert, op.cit., 136.

⁶¹ Thus sunna was recorded during a “*gāhīlī*” period.

⁶² A. Bouzid, art.cit., 289.

besides Quran, and also turned away from the simple practical approach of early Muslims, who turned to religion for guidance in every aspect of their lives, and did what they were told, allegedly without doubts or questions. They weren't asking for science, either⁶³.

On another hand, he did claim them to be Islamic when he wrote that the experimental method, the guiding force of the modern European industrial culture, originated from the *universities* of Al-Andalus and Mashreq⁶⁴. The idea of great Muslim contribution came from the West, and is true within some limits, but what's telling is that the earlier writers, as Rašīd Riḍā, accepted that Muslims transmitted to the West ancient Greek knowledge⁶⁵. Quṭb didn't. He believed that Greek philosophy, tainting the purity of the sources of guidance, was among the reasons of the downfall of Islam⁶⁶. Hence he couldn't take pride neither in Muslim philosophers (earlier described as mere shadows of Greek ones⁶⁷), nor in the transmission of the Greek heritage, yet the notion of some Western debt in science was apparently too luring to dismiss, and he adopted it, but replacing the Greek thought with experimental method⁶⁸. In another work, he bases his claim on the opinion of Briold and Duhrange⁶⁹.

Perhaps what caused him to claim that is Al-Afḡānī's idea mentioned by A. Bouzid, the *philosophical spirit* inspired in Muslims by Islam⁷⁰. The excuse for linking this method to Islam may also be that Quṭb believed that exact sciences lead to God⁷¹. Note that for him, shariah is as obvious universal law as the laws of physics⁷². Ironically, the claim that the empirical method originated from Islam, and should be restored, resembles Abbasid propaganda, which claimed that they retrieve Mesopotamian knowledge from Greeks, which, was modified Sassanian propaganda, which claimed Greeks have robbed Persians' wisdom after the conquests of Alexander⁷³.

The further inconsistency in the claim that Europe adapted 'Islamic' concept of experimental method, while Muslims grew apart from Islam, which resulted in scientific failure, lies in that Quṭb presented science and its method as something closely linked to Islam, to the point that tainting Islam resulted in the failure of science, yet his words about Europe show that the experimental method can exist without Islam.

⁶³ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 1:12, 14–16, 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8:129 (129–130).

⁶⁵ A. Bouzid, op.cit., 151+.

⁶⁶ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 1:14 (11–19).

⁶⁷ J. Calvert, op.cit., 208.

⁶⁸ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 8:129.

⁶⁹ Idem, *The Future in the Lands of Islam*, tr. Seyed Ali Khamenei, Tehran (1994), 125, quoted in: Y. Bouzarinejad, Sh. Zarpeyma, E. Marandi, "Sayyid Quṭb and Political Islam: Islamic Government from the Perspective of Sayyid Quṭb", *Journal of History, Culture and Art Research*, v. 5 (4/2016), 108.

⁷⁰ A. Bouzid, op.cit., 153.

⁷¹ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:134; also cf. S. Khatab, op.cit., 102.

⁷² S. Quṭb, op.cit., 6:99–100.

⁷³ D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London 1999), 34–52.

This claim of indebtedness of the West to Egypt is seen in older Qutb work, where he once described the world as an undutiful boy, who was taught by Egypt, but is ungrateful, and even tries to kill her, and didn't support Egypt against Britain and Israel⁷⁴. He saw Egypt as obvious leader of the East, which he saw as the treasury of spiritual values⁷⁵, and having the best climate⁷⁶. Belonging to it (and the wider East⁷⁷) undoubtedly gave him feeling of pride and belonging, while focusing on more tangible, current issues wouldn't. The appeals to ambitions of Muslims in *Milestones*, to lead the world, could be projection of what he found in his own heart as well. Due to de-colonialism reality⁷⁸, he saw the world in sharply divided between the Western and the Eastern culture (which seems to mirror orientalist view in fact⁷⁹), and while he resembles, or even quotes, anti-materialist thinkers of the West⁸⁰, he nevertheless equals the West with materialism⁸¹, transposing political divisions on cultural ones. This provides self-assurance to conservatism, enabling it to change the focus from *progress vs obscurantism* to *we vs them*, while simultaneously deny spiritual values in the West, thus appropriating them to the East he felt part of, making it – and him – better. This *tendency to divide the world into culturally distinct and ethically unequal categories*⁸² seems to have served a psychological purpose⁸³. It's humiliating to see oneself not on equal, but only on the taking side, so one has to boost one's identity by reliving former glory, or claiming one's got *something to offer*⁸⁴. For Qutb, this equation gave him explanation and excuse for *hating* the West (for political reasons)⁸⁵. In order to fight it, one should instill in the youth pure conscience, confidence in the country, religion, and glorious past⁸⁶. And while perhaps, in the beginning, he supported Islam because it was a core part of regional, and his own, identity⁸⁷, his opposition towards the West was expressed in Islamic form just like earlier in nationalist (or even racial⁸⁸): he used it *to enhance the identity of the virtuous national Self against the different and competing Other of the West*⁸⁹, while

⁷⁴ J. Calvert, *op.cit.*, 149–150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 105, 118, 161 non-Muslim Indians were part of it. Perhaps the split of India changed his opinion; 162 Al-Afḡānī invented the Eastern solidarity.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 116–8 and 170–1, A. Memmi wisely claims that the colonisation experience is likely to lead to some kind of chauvinism. Also 204.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 90–92, 213.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸³ A similar narrative of bringing back values to rich, but hollow, EU existed in Poland.

⁸⁴ As he claimed about Muslims: *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118, 121.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 126. Which was further enhanced by similar ideas of Al-Nadwī *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸⁷ S. Qutb, *Al-Adāla*, 7; J. Calvert, *op.cit.*, 161.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 149 white man being the biggest enemy.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 127. Note that his *quasi-takfirism* hyperbole is matched by his earlier excluding Westernised Egyptians as “brown Englishmen”: *Ibid.*, 160.

the Brotherhood was the greatest obstacle for Western influence⁹⁰, and perhaps during his USA stay, his religiosity didn't manifest itself⁹¹, but from mid-50's, it seems to become an independent, and central, belief⁹², especially in prison⁹³. But even faced with death, he thought about coming of Islamic revolution, not meeting God⁹⁴. The form and the content interact. Also, Quṭb's insisting on understanding Islam as a society may come from that for Quṭb, his association with Islam may have been, originally, association with a community, something giving a feeling of belonging⁹⁵. And it took different forms: Egyptian, Arab, Muslim, Eastern, Brown. But one should also note the similarity of his changing focus with his claim that Muḥammad could have fought for Islam under the banner of nationalism, socialism, and morality, but the right path is to do it under the banner of faith⁹⁶. Isn't this summary of his own way?

It's hard to assess to what extent Quṭb's claims about science are honest. His claim that Muslims should develop science, surely was, as he bases it, in his other work, on a – weak – *ḥadīṭ*⁹⁷ (but direct religious support for science plays less role in *Milestones* than his own religious theories and pragmatic utilitarianism). But the rest not necessarily so. As mentioned, Quṭb was not necessarily truthful when he praised Europe, as well as it's hard to believe he didn't know that *attacks* of Zionism, which started in late 19th century⁹⁸, and crusades (late 11th century⁹⁹), couldn't have contributed to the decline of Islam after its first generation (in 7th century)¹⁰⁰. In 19th century, Muslim science was in stagflation for several centuries already. One may not exclude such ignorance, but the ahistoricity is so vast one surmises a deliberate manipulation. Or perhaps *one should not regard such accounts as history, but as literary devices designed to make certain points about morality and religious identity*, Tāhā Ḥusayn's point about Quran¹⁰¹. The motif of fight against Zionism (Israel) supported by *crusaders* (UK, France, USA) was popular in Egypt, which, before Sadat, lead the fight against them. Just a year before *Milestones* appeared, Egypt made its

⁹⁰ Ibid., 145. Perhaps that, and the existence of The Nation of Islam, allowed him to regard Islam as the vanguard of restoring just change. When he speaks about American Islam, focused on piety and ritual, he means Americanised Egyptians (Ibid., 165–6).

⁹¹ Ibid., 147.

⁹² Ibid., 127.

⁹³ Ibid., 200. Note he wrote this in 3rd person, as in *Child from the Village* (Ibid., 37).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 260.

⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 170. About his need of it, Ibid., 186.

⁹⁶ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 2:34–36

⁹⁷ Idem, *Al-ʿAdāla*, 10, 15; Ibn Māḡa, *Sunan Ibn Māḡa*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (no place, no date), 81, no 224.

⁹⁸ 1897 the first Zionist congress. 1917 the Balfour declaration. 1948 the independence of Israel. He also writes Europe severed its link to Islam & religion *after* that, which may explain why it started falling.

⁹⁹ 1095 the council of Clermont.

¹⁰⁰ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:130 (129–130).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 71. But it is in fact an old approach. Quṭb himself (in 1947) tried to rationalise even Heaven and Hell as metaphors of psychological states, and emphasises emotional role of Quran (Ibid., 114, also 111–3).

grand film production about Saladin's defeat of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and it's quite clear that Nasser was Saladin, and Israel was the new crusaders, backed by London, Paris etc., as during the 3rd crusade, described in this film. It may thus seem that Qutb included references to popular motives to increase the appeal of his book. This didn't have to be completely dishonest, though. Qutb himself was influenced by this historical background. His radicalisation was due to his appalment with how decadent, but also how pro-Israeli, USA was¹⁰². Also, Qutb became a Salafi, and, as such, was focused on the times of the Prophet and his Companions. In the formative years, there was a conflict between Muslims and the Jews of Medina, which ended in expelling two, and massacring the third Jewish tribe¹⁰³. There was, later, no great conflict with Jews until Zionism, so the painful defeats at hands of Israel went hand in hand with focus on this period, and the influence of Western antisemitism, to result in anti-Jewish bias¹⁰⁴, which may explain the absurd claims¹⁰⁵.

That is not the only time where the political situation of his country seems to have influenced the contents of his book. He focuses on the defeat of Sassanian Persia¹⁰⁶, while neglecting that of Byzantium, even though he lived in ex-Byzantine Egypt, and Byzantium was the archenemy of Islam. This may be coincidence, or explained by that the defeat of Persia came quicker, and was complete. Persia fell in 651. Byzantium in 1453/1461, and Greece, its successor, remains majorly non-Muslim. But there are two other possible reasons. Referring to the Muslim conquest of Egypt could point to the issue of Copts¹⁰⁷, and hinder channelling thoughts towards strict Islamic identity. And the most important Western allies in the region were Iraq (before the recent revolution of 1958) and the Shah in Iran, which also supplied Israel with oil through the Egyptian-controlled Tiran Strait. Sassanians ruled Iraq, and their capital was close to Baghdad – the capital of Iraq and the symbol of the pro-Western Baghdad Pact. At the time of writing of this book, Iraq was in hands of a Qutb's fan, 'Ārif¹⁰⁸.

Also, since Qutb believed that even a tiny divergence from the purity of Islam means its loss¹⁰⁹, only the first generation was purely Islamic¹¹⁰, and the world relapsed into *ġāhiliyya* (the history is divided into pre-Islamic (*ġāhili*) and Islamic)¹¹¹, it perhaps indicates that (due to overfocusing on this divide, disregard for the difference

¹⁰² S. Qutb, *Milestones. Ma'ālim fi'l-tareeq*, op.cit., 8 (A.B. al-Mehri's introduction).

¹⁰³ Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, tr. T. Le Gassick (Ann Arbor 2000), v. 3, 2–11, 100–109; 139–190. It even left traces in *ḥadīths* and Quran, i.e. 33:26–27.

¹⁰⁴ S. Qutb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:129 worldwide Jewish conspiracy.

¹⁰⁵ Similar claims: J. Calvert, op.cit., 167–9.

¹⁰⁶ S. Qutb, op.cit., 4:75, 10:151; 11:166–8.

¹⁰⁷ He did see them earlier: J. Calvert, op.cit., 88.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁰⁹ S. Qutb, op.cit., 8:135. In this context, the claim (J. Calvert, op.cit., 96) that Qutb, even in *Milestones*, saw civilisations not as indivisible entities, but as assemblages that could interact fruitfully with others, while retaining their core identity, surprises with trying to see continuity where it ceased, and overlooking the role of these passages: appealing to Muslims' ambition to attain supremacy over the West, but not in its field (material creativity), but through Islam.

¹¹⁰ S. Qutb, op.cit., 1:11–14 (eg.).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 0:8–9.

of lengths and internal divisions within the longer period) these periods are taken as solid entities, and there's no difference how many centuries passed: it's still the next period, nevertheless¹¹². Thus, this manipulation of Qurṭb may not have been intentional, but came from his deep faith making him distort history in front of his own eyes. His vision aims to explain why did the Islamic world – once so successful – come to such a sorry state. Driven by the good image of Islam (own identity), this fall is attributed to moving away from the (eulogised) original Islam. Which both explains the weakness of the Islamic world, gives easy solutions, and entails dichotomic vision of history. As cognitive dissonance theory indicates, we tend to keep a clearly good, or bad, image of periods of time, and if something doesn't fit this simple image, our brain *corrects* the dissonance by removal or blurring¹¹³. The first generation is good, later changes are bad. We don't hear much about *munāfiqūn* in Medina¹¹⁴, nor about the quarrels between the Companions¹¹⁵, not to mention controversial events, because Qurṭb – not necessarily intentionally – tries to keep uniformly good image of this period, and negative of the later history (which also, by contrast, enhances the positive image of the early times).

Moreover, for the sake of his argument about Islamic scientific method, Qurṭb seems to place the first civil war of Islam and the start of the denominational (Sunni-Shia) fractions within Islam (656–661¹¹⁶), the end of Muslim conquests (751 or later, perhaps as late as 1699¹¹⁷), as well as the decline of the sciences within Islam (after 13th century or so¹¹⁸) somewhere around the same time (as interlinked and allegedly caused by the same factor). While Sunni-Shia divide, and the generation of the Companions of the Prophet (d. 632), which for Qurṭb was the ideal one¹¹⁹, happened long before Muslims even entered Al-Andalus (711), not to mention its ascendancy under local Umayyads (756–1031). But, as Bouzid mentions, everything was result of Islam for him, from Reformation to the French Revolution¹²⁰. In analysis, we take into account the information that we have, especially what we deem important. Qurṭb didn't even necessarily

¹¹² Similarly, people treat Middle Ages as unity, while it's a number of periods lumped together due to a vision of history: moving away from the revered ancient legacy, like new *gāhiliyya* moved away from Islam.

¹¹³ M. Dymkowski, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii historycznej* (Gdańsk 2003), 99–100. Based mostly on D.R. Beike & L.S. Landoll, "Striving for a consistent life story: Cognitive reactions to autobiographical narratives", *Social Cognition* 18 (3), 292–318.

¹¹⁴ Just an accidental mention in a quote of another author: S. Qurṭb, op.cit., 4:55.

¹¹⁵ W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad. A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge 1997), passim.

¹¹⁶ 656 murder of 'Uṭmān; 661 murder of 'Alī, and the start of undisputed Umayyads' rule.

¹¹⁷ After the four rightly guided caliphs (632–661), who were Companions of the Prophet, and conquered Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Iran, the conquests continued under Umayyads (661–750: Maghreb, Spain, Central Asia, Indus valley), and even later: Sicily, Crete (9th century), Anatolia (11th-14th), Sudan (14th-16th), Balkans etc. (14th-17th).

¹¹⁸ Abbasid dynasty (since 750) supported science. In 10th century, Abbasids experienced rapid political decline. In 1258 non-Muslim Mongols captured their Baghdad.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:11–19.

¹²⁰ A. Bouzid, op.cit., 151.

know the history of his own Muslim Egypt well¹²¹, and thus, his analysis is based on knowledge (ideal vision) of early Islam. Also, while writing *Milestones*, he was in prison, and had few written sources as his disposal¹²². So perhaps this contributed to shaping the history according to his feelings, and using what he remembered – Quran.

Quṭb boasted with the cultural achievements of Islam¹²³, while claiming it wasn't Islam anymore, because only the first generation of Islam was purely Islamic¹²⁴. And the above explains why the positive events and changes that took place after the first generation – scientific and cultural flourishing – are disassociated from the period they do not seem to fit in (because it's in the neo-*ḡāhiliyya* period), and thus, albeit not clearly, associated with the period they should fit in, based on pre-existent positive image of it. That's how *Greek philosophy and its logic*, and other cultural influences, which usually are seen as something that contributed to Islamic culture, and its importance (due to transmitting it to Europe), are seen by Quṭb as something which poisoned pure Islamic spring, destroyed Islam¹²⁵. This also allows to remove the debt to non-Muslim Greeks in science, and, at the same time, increase the debt of Europe towards Islam even more. It also allows to explain the decline of Islamic civilization, and yet to find the reason not in itself, but outside, thus protecting Quṭb's good image of his religion (and thus, oneself), and strengthen the bad image of others (Greek thought), which (by contrast) increases the positive image of oneself even further¹²⁶.

And this attitude towards Greek thought is symptomatic for the difference of attitude towards others, and learning from them. And it is at odds with the attitude of the rulers who sponsored the Islamic golden age, as well as the early reformists of Islam, such as Al-Afḡānī. One should try to understand the possible outcome of Quṭb's ideas. The Islamic world's cultural success was owed also to its openness (to non-Islamic knowledge), perhaps owed to its confidence, due to its political victory. Quṭb's ideas, born in the times of political weakness of Muslims, and in defense of Islam against foreign cultural influence, are not likely to give similar results. While Abbasid caliph Al-Ma'mūn, who allegedly paid for Greek books' translations their weight in gold¹²⁷,

¹²¹ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 12:186 mentions Muslims of various ethnicities, like Kurd Saladin (who retook Jerusalem) and Mamluk Tūrān Šāh, defeating crusaders. Indeed, during T.Š's reign St Louis was defeated at Al-Manšūra (1250). But by Kipchak Mamluk guard, before T.Š. came. He was not Mamluk, but of the same dynasty & origin as Saladin, and Mamluks killed him. The person Quṭb refers to is the *New Saladin* Baybars, a Mamluk who fought at Al-Manšūra, co-killed T.Š., fought Mongols, conquered Antioch. See P.M. Holt, *The Age of Crusades. The Near East from the eleventh century to 1517* (New York 2013), 82–98. There are more blunders in Quṭb's works, e.g. that Reformation was a positive outcome of Crusades, that Luther and Calvin fought the Trinity: S. Quṭb, *Haṣā'ish at-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa-Muqawwimātuhu* (Cairo, Beirut, 1995?), 62.

¹²² J. Calvert, op.cit., 206.

¹²³ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:129 the *universities*...

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:11–14 etc.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:14. Similarly, some Umayyad nostalgists saw Abbasid interest in science and translating Greek works as accepting a Trojan Horse provided by Byzantium: D. Gutas, op.cit., 156–8.

¹²⁶ It is a valid claim that philosophy contributed to the quarrels within early Christianity and Islam.

¹²⁷ Adnan K. Abdulla, *Translation in the Arab World. The Abbasid Golden Age* (New York 2021), 91.

is mentioned by a Byzantine chronicle to have written that he's burning with love for science, insisted race and religion do not matter, and promised gold and eternal peace for a certain scientist¹²⁸, and Al-Afḡānī, believing in rationality of Islam, wrote *science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation*¹²⁹, Quṭb makes it conditional, relating to exact sciences and only within limits¹³⁰, and adds: *When it comes to all that concerns the sciences relative to the meanings of faith, influencing human views on existence, on life, on human activity, on customs, on values, on morality, mores, and all of what concerns human soul and his activities in these matters, Islam doesn't know a claim that one [should] distinguish knowledge from the one who has it*¹³¹. And note that Al-Ma'mūn was a brutal supporter of rationalism, who persecuted Hanbalis, including Ibn Taymiyya, who inspired later fundamentalism. Also, Quṭb's attitude to science is early Byzantine: hostile due to previous conflict¹³², while Quṭb's distinctions are interesting in the context of Al-Ġāhiz's Islamic apology, in which he presented Islam as a rational religion, while Byzantines as not having science, but only artisans, while credits Jews with the idea that philosophy is a cause of unbelief¹³³.

As already mentioned, according to Quṭb, the Muslim world drifted away from Islam and, in result, from science, due to the impurity of the sources of guidance it's adapted from other cultures. Some of Quṭb's remarks on science can be explained as an attempt to show how to avoid a similar pollution of the Islamic knowledge in the future. His ideas in *Milestones* are development of what he already presented in *Social Justice...*, where he claimed that pursuing knowledge/science is obligatory for Muslims, but simultaneously claimed that every right/true (*ṣaḥīḥ*) science leads to God. That is: if science contradicts Islam, it ceases to be *true* science¹³⁴. So religion cannot be judged by the merciless glare of science or reason – it can be just used to understand its orders¹³⁵ – science is judged by religion. Namely Islam, because if Christianity opposes science – for the same reasons, which he ignores – it is conflict and oppression¹³⁶. But Islam is the true religion (that everyone'd accept, unless ignorant or forced¹³⁷), and Christianity isn't. Islam is the message from God, the Truth. It is thus part of knowledge (*'ilm*), and science (*'ilm*) cannot contradict it

¹²⁸ J. Skylitzès, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, tr. B. Flusin (Paris 2003), IV.15, 91 (90–92).

¹²⁹ R.L. Euben, art.cit., 30–31.

¹³⁰ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 8:128–130.

¹³¹ Ibid., 8:130.

¹³² D. Gutas, op.cit., 18–20.

¹³³ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁴ S. Quṭb, *Al-'Adāla āl-Iḡtimā'iyya fī āl-Islām* (1415/1995), 10, 15. A corresponding tendency to accept as science claims that affirm a priori held views: J. Calvert, op.cit., 109 Quṭb justified his views with *findings at the Egyptian University that claimed to prove women's biological suitability for domestic, rather than public, responsibilities*. Cf. Ibid., 133.

¹³⁵ S. Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Islām*, v. 2, 807 (found thanks to S. Khatāb, op.cit., 93), he himself claims it's a middle way, because he doesn't negate science nor religion, and Islam is *the religion of reason*, because one can use it to understand its orders, and obey, or not.

¹³⁶ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālīm*, 8:135; Idem, *Ḥaṣā'is*, 61–6; S. Khatāb, op.cit., 113. The author takes Quṭb's praises of science at face value (also Ibid., 114–6 when he uses the *even they...* trick).

¹³⁷ J. Calvert, op.cit., 135.

(the lack of distinction in Arabic between those terms contributed to the problem). It's sophisticated circular reasoning. Claiming there's no contradiction is perhaps also necessary for him to paint the image of Islam as a religion of harmony with nature and its laws¹³⁸. At one time, he mentioned his friend trying to prove his beauty by holding high his own, much retouched, photo¹³⁹. It's a good description of how he proves his ideas, two decades later. But the goal for Quṭb seems to be the feeling of peace and harmony. Even if it's an illusion, the feeling is real. He focuses on one factor (Islam), and negates others, and not seeing conflict, he perceives harmony. For the same reason he makes ahistorical claims: he doesn't want realism. The way to know the truth is for him, in his prison works, not through intellectual endeavours or philosophical speculations, but the beauty and inevitability of the Islamic worldview; thus knowledge of the mind is of no concern¹⁴⁰. He doesn't tell truths, he tells what ought to be truth, and if one emphasises his sincerity, the emotional sincerity should be distinguished from the intellectual one. Quṭb may have never lied in his heart, he doctored his view of reality, both history, and the present¹⁴¹. *No doubt he "cherry picked", exaggerated and even invented some of his accounts of American life. But he did so in order to make a grand point*¹⁴². What he wrote, not only about America, should be treated in the context of his belief in appealing to the feelings, which he inherited from 'Aqqād (and saw in Quran), and the claims of Vilfredo that ideological structures are mostly rationalizations of deeply held, non-logical sentiments¹⁴³. Quṭb achieves that by manipulating definitions, which he mentions himself in one case¹⁴⁴.

What he does in Milestones is to show what is true science, and what is not. He thus divides sciences into those that are not in contradiction with Islam and those that are, and accepts *pure* sciences: chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, medicine, industry, farming, technical aspects of administration and art of war, as these sciences do not concern the basics concepts of Muslim life and bear no danger of distorting the faith. In fact, he claims that, unless Muslim community has specialists in each of these fields of knowledge, it should be deemed sinful¹⁴⁵. Moreover, he believed that the sciences concerning the rules of the Universe, such as astronomy, biology, physics, chemistry and geology, lead to God, unless they are, as in Europe, influenced by personal bias¹⁴⁶. And it seems it's in order to avoid being infected with antireligious

¹³⁸ Ibid., 79–80, 102 etc.

¹³⁹ Mohamed Soffar, "Epistemological Shifts in Sayyid Quṭb's Discourse of the Early 1940s", *Hemispheres*, v. 28 (1/2014), 6.

¹⁴⁰ J. Calvert, op.cit., 209.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 144, the author rightly doubts that hospital employees in Washington rejoiced at the death of Al-Bannā, unknown to them; 149 I doubt such legend exists; 218 about France losing every war since 1870, while it won ww1.

¹⁴² Ibid., 153; a Holocaust hyperbole 154.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 212–3.

¹⁴⁴ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 4:64.

¹⁴⁵ About this distinction and implications: Ibid., 8:125–135 (126 on having specialists in all fields of knowledge & learning from non-Muslims; second list 130–1: chemistry, physics, astronomy, medicine, industry, farming, management and bureau administration).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 8:134 (134–5).

bias of Europe that Muslims shouldn't learn from non-Muslims, unless there are no pious Muslim specialists available in these fields of knowledge. In fact, Quṭb says that *all scientists nowadays* are preoccupied with the material world, and God orders to stay away from such people¹⁴⁷. Another reason is that, as God warns Muslims in his opinion, Christians and Jews have bad intentions towards them¹⁴⁸.

When it comes to social sciences and humanities, the case is different. As A. Bouzid mentions, even ʿAbduh and Al-Afḡānī were suspicious of them, but not to the point of the latest work of Quṭb¹⁴⁹, according to which *the interpretation of human strives, individual or collective*, such as theory of human nature or interpretation of history, the beginnings of the world or human life; philosophy, psychology (apart from experiments), ethics, comparative religion, sociology (apart from statistics and outright observations) should be left to God¹⁵⁰. One can make some observations, experiments, statistics, but should not try to go beyond that, construct general rules. He says: *What suffices Muslims in these matters is the explanation of the Truthful Lord. [...] all the human attempts [to give answers] in these fields seem comical and laughable [in comparison with God's]. These matters directly concern the faith and full servitude towards God*¹⁵¹. Because all of these sciences, and most of all Darwinist biology, are intrinsically hostile towards any religion, especially Islam¹⁵². Quṭb sometimes seems to believe that religion is under deliberate attack from these branches of science. He wrote that *Darwin biology goes beyond observations for the sole reason to give an opinion basing on an assumption that there's no reason to assume existence of a higher force*¹⁵³ and spoke of a deliberate attempt of gradual destruction of the foundations of the Islamic society¹⁵⁴. On another hand, elsewhere he claimed *scientific ḡāhiliyya* representatives to be just misled (in considering humans animals)¹⁵⁵. He also claimed that, due to the problems the scientists had with the oppressive church, they turned against every religion, but he believed that Islam is targeted by the anti-religious bias of science the most¹⁵⁶.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., loc.cit. That may apply to their books as well, and there were no e-lessons back then. But that also fits in his earlier, broader claim (Idem, *Al-'Adāla*, 7) that one should use his own capital before borrowing.

¹⁴⁸ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:131–3.

¹⁴⁹ A. Bouzid, op.cit., 183–5.

¹⁵⁰ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 8:127–8. According to A. Bouzid, op.cit., 186, it is because they reduce man to an object of science, and an attempt to explain the human being without God is un-Islamic. The division was inspired by Alexis Carrel (Ibid., 220). In an earlier work, Quṭb claimed that everyone is able to perceive nature with his mind, and doesn't need intellectuals nor psychologists for it (s. Quṭb, *Ḥaṣā'is*, 66), which fits also his idea that one doesn't need (Al-Azhar) clerics (J. Calvert, op.cit., 160), nor the heap of tradition (Ibid., 173).

¹⁵¹ S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim*, 8:128.

¹⁵² Ibid., 8:130, 133–5. But even Al-Afḡānī was hostile towards it.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 8:127.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 8:135 (129 indication he seems to believe Jews are behind it).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:51–52.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., loc.cit.; 8:135 Quṭb sees other religions' rule as oppression.

Also, in his earlier *Basic Principles of Islamic Worldview*, he remarked that opposing religion is the *main goal* of European schools of thought¹⁵⁷; in general, however, he wasn't as suspicious towards science, even humanities, in some of his earlier works. In *In the Shade of Al-Qur'an*, he writes *Anyone with any real knowledge or appreciation of literary styles, or expertise in philosophy, psychology, social science, or any other science at all, will not fail to recognize that whatever the Qur'an has to say in any field of knowledge is unique, unlike anything human beings would say*¹⁵⁸. In *In the Shade...* he treats science as something useful in explaining the hidden meanings of Quran: he presents shariah as something that was (and in some cases still is) ahead of science, which only now discovers why did Quran forbid something. The support of science for the orders of shariah is a proof that it deserves *unlimited trust*¹⁵⁹. He quotes *contemporary scientist's* opinion on the creation of Earth (!) as possibly in accordance with Quran and useful in explaining it¹⁶⁰. He quotes scientists elsewhere, too¹⁶¹. He clearly believes in science, just *knows* that we still know little and, thus, human reason is not the arbiter of what Quran states, and God can bend his own rules anyway¹⁶².

In any case, Qutb claimed Muslims are allowed to learn the opinion of non-Muslim authors in these fields to know their distortions and to correct them¹⁶³. As it seems, it is fine to learn the theory of evolution etc., as long as one religiously knows it is wrong. Qutb claimed that the *Are those who know equal to the ones who don't?* Quranic verse (39:9, which may be interpreted as encouragement to ask for truth the ones who know) is often used out of context, as it relates to the knowledge that leads us towards religion, and not what makes us go away from it¹⁶⁴. And the use of it is unacceptable when it comes to sciences relating to faith, religion, morality, values, customs, habits and human relationships. By which Qutb didn't mean one should not read non-Muslim opinions in these fields, but rather that he shouldn't agree with them. But it is strictly forbidden for a Muslim to learn his own faith, implications of his concepts, interpretation of Quran, *hadīths*, Muslim history etc. from someone else than a pious Muslim, because a *hadīth* claims that Christians and Jews have bad intentions¹⁶⁵. It also shows lack of faith in ability to test or verify claims.

Science played an unique role in Qutb's discourse. Qutb was very unwilling to share the details of the organisation of the future Muslim community, offering a paper crescent in a box, claiming that theorising is alien to Islam, and demands for details are a *mockery of Islam and distraction*¹⁶⁶, for Islam is practical and solves problems as they appear. But

¹⁵⁷ Idem, *Basic principles of Islamic worldview*, tr. Rami David (New Haledon 2006), 10.

¹⁵⁸ Idem, *In the shade of the Qur'an*, <http://www.kalamullah.com/shade-of-the-quran.html>, sur. 39.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., sur. 108.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., sur. 80.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., sur. 82 & 87.

¹⁶² Ibid., sur. 105.

¹⁶³ Idem, *Ma'ālim*, 8:127, 131.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 8:134 (133–4). For what God says is the surest knowledge.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 8:132–133.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:44–45.

whatever Islam offers is the best by default, and people who truly believe will accept anything happily¹⁶⁷, and now it's time to build faith, not to give specific orders¹⁶⁸.

And yet, in this case, he presents theory and details. Perhaps it's not because it's so important. Au contraire, because it's more important for the struggle, and propaganda, and less for the steady state phase. Because, as J. Calvert claims, Qutbism shares with fascism focus on change and neglecting the phase after the enemies are gone¹⁶⁹.

Or perhaps he believed science is a problem requiring an urgent solution¹⁷⁰. Allegedly it would be encouraged, albeit within certain limits. But should he be trusted, and was it viable?

Qutb mentions that the perfect early Muslims used to take guidance from Islam alone, even though there were (much more) developed civilisations surrounding Arabs before Islam – which were subsequently conquered by them – and the fall of Islam was due to taking guidance from them. He also mentions, at the same time, that Muslims weren't searching for culture, nor science, in them, nor even in Quran. They were only interested in receiving and carrying out instructions¹⁷¹. It is clear he regrets Muslim interest in the knowledge of the Greeks. And this is one of the reasons he is so insistent on delimiting the permissible use of science. But since even one drop of non-Islamic thought may poison Islam (is science worth the risk?)¹⁷², and since even what we know as Islamic philosophy is not Islamic, and a *complete* breaking up with non-Islamic past is to be made¹⁷³, one can surmise how scarce choice of what is permissible in Islam would Qutb make, as the practical side of his theory. One can also surmise, even if Qutb says science should carry on (but not much is to be

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 2:37–38 *Milestones* reduces everything to faith. Perhaps it's result of Qutb's strong faith, but perhaps also of fear of the ever-complicating world, in which human (despite all the material progress) is lost (which can be seen e.g. in S. Khatab, op.cit., 79, 92, 113). This hinders the possibility of self-amendment of society, as it leads to dismissing problems by claiming the situation, under Islamic rule, is the best it can be. And as the regime is ordered by God, a malcontent ceases to be Muslim. Note also J. Calvert, op.cit., 68: his loneliness and longing for cosmic unity in his early poetry, 88 the earlier search for harmony, 90 belief the changes are too fast, 127 *he adopted the Islamist approach in response to an existential need for ideological certainty in a time of political crisis and social agitation*, 128 religion fulfilled his spiritual needs, but in this context also 170 about similar paranoid style in USA politics, Participating in changes of cosmic scale probably gave Qutb a feeling of importance, just like the attitude of the surrounding people 207; 130 the issue of *niẓām* description of Islam: it may denote longing for order.

¹⁶⁸ S. Qutb, op.cit, 2:45.

¹⁶⁹ J. Calvert, op.cit., 211. But in fact, his ideal vision of Islam (when Islam comes, cutting thieves' hands is not barbaric, because they have no reason to steal anymore: Ibid., 212) reminds of the eternal building of Communism as well.

¹⁷⁰ This difference could indicate he doesn't treat these words as seriously, if he didn't insist it's God's opinion, not his own. He knew it's controversial: S. Qutb, op.cit., 8:125–6, 131–2.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 1:13–14.

¹⁷² Ibid., 8:135. Yet de-Islamisation was *gradual* (130). And in his earlier works, he sees Islam as late as 19th and 20th century (J. Calvert, op.cit., 208, 219), but that's because it allows him to blame colonialists, Zionists, and modernising Muslims for the fall of Islam.

¹⁷³ S. Qutb, op.cit., 1:17–18: *Even much of what we count as Islamic culture, sources, philosophy and thought is also created by this ǧāhiliyya.*

expected from it), what would come of it. There's *beauty and science* in Quran, *everything what people [who wish to] learn something or [seek] pleasure need*¹⁷⁴. Why should anyone look elsewhere, especially in a pool of sharks? Qutb never claimed all knowledge is in Quran¹⁷⁵, but believed scientific method came from Islam¹⁷⁶, so science would eventually come out of it. It would take centuries to catch up to the West anyway¹⁷⁷. So the result could be to stay focused on the priority of *knowledge of living*, that is religious and moral values¹⁷⁸, while continuing, even more so, to neglect other knowledge, especially without competition with extra-Muslim world. But faith is sufficient for all that is required in life¹⁷⁹.

One should also ask if it is at all possible to develop certain sciences, while partly or completely eradicating other ones. Qutb tried to explain why Europe progressed in science, and Muslims stagnated, his answer is hardly convincing. Many claim that's because there's a link between the Western post-Enlightenment culture and the scientific progress, and, as Bouzid mentions, Qutb himself used to see that in his earlier works¹⁸⁰. In *Milestones*, not anymore. Also his demand that, once there are Muslim specialists in a field, Muslims should learn just from them, appears to either deny continuous progress of science, or create Potemkin villages that could cut Muslims off from new outside discoveries. The first option is in bigger agreement with his aforementioned belief that the greatest scientific discoveries are past, but this is mostly what he needed to say to claim the West is in decline, and the world in peril, waiting for Islam to save it¹⁸¹.

Another reason is that the anti-theoretical attitude of Qutb (which is clear both in his refusal to depict any details of Islamic government theory¹⁸², and in allowing some sciences to make observations, but not to draw general rules from them) would undoubtedly influence science. For example, he praises biology and medicine, but just as long as they merely make observations, without *some form of philosophical interpretation*¹⁸³. That limits human mind to just *registration*. And while he speaks of *registration of results of experiments*, to make an experiment, one usually has a theory to test, and that may require this forbidden *interpretation*. We do not have means of answering a question right after it was posed. Also, e.g. biology makes use of evolution to explain vestigiality, and it is *more than just hypothesis*. Yet that would be wrong for Qutb. Social sciences can be practically useful, yet making general rules is unacceptable, so

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:18.

¹⁷⁵ A. Bouzid, art.cit., 301. The author is unduly optimistic.

¹⁷⁶ S. Qutb, op.cit., 8:129.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 0:7.

¹⁷⁸ B. Tibi, art.cit., 1, quoting Watt.

¹⁷⁹ J. Calvert, op.cit., 209.

¹⁸⁰ A. Bouzid, op.cit., 171; Idem, art.cit., 298.

¹⁸¹ Which is *ad populum et baculum vanitatemque*, but he also uses *ad verecundiam*, esp. when he forbids accepting social studies and humanities from non-Muslims and insists it's God's will: Ibid., 8:131–2.

¹⁸² Ibid., 2:38, 41 the idea that a theory should come before praxis is alien to Islam, 2:44–45 refusal to give details on the Islamic system, 3:48–51 the theory is *šahāda*, 4:61; 4:66 on jihad.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 8:128, also 134.

even this is limited. There's also little place for valuing knowledge in itself, for curiosity¹⁸⁴. Science's & technology's role is practical: either in giving material comfort (technology)¹⁸⁵, or *leading to God* (exact sciences)¹⁸⁶. While many a time it's curiosity that gives information that (often much later) becomes useful. As Tibi writes: *The dilemma of Muslim fundamentalists is that they simultaneously envisage adopting the instruments of modernity (military technology), and rejecting its cultural underpinning, i.e. the cultural project of modernity... They seek to adopt modern knowledge as instrumentality, but reject its undergirding rationale: cultural modernity. They separate the achievements of modernity from the very knowledge that led them and first made them possible*¹⁸⁷. It's mostly about the attitude which Akbar Ahmed summarised as *faith versus scepticism, tradition versus iconoclasm, purity versus eclecticism*¹⁸⁸.

There's also psychological factor. Science, knowledge are not really important for *Milestones*. Only faith is¹⁸⁹. Other issues matter when they lead people to, or away, from faith. And it's faith, not science, what Muslims should try to dazzle the world with, as catching up to Europe in science is impractical. Europeans – Christians and Jews alike – have bad intentions, and learning from non-Muslims, and even impious Muslims, means danger. While Quṭb claims some sciences are neutral, some can even lead to God, these are marginal, conditional, one-time mentions in specific context. Most of the time, either science and technology are mentioned as a potential danger to Islam (in his earlier works he sees reason – and science, its product – as a competition for Revelation in guiding people¹⁹⁰, or sees a danger of subduing religion to it, as during Enlightenment¹⁹¹), or Islam as a potential danger to them. Islamic danger to what people aspire to – material comfort (fruit of technology, seemingly fruit of science¹⁹²) is dismissed, while scientific danger to (Quṭb's) Islam is emphasised, but defined, lest should one think Islam is against science bringing progress in medicine and technology. The distinction between exact sciences and humanities & social studies is essential. Some sciences are completely out of bounds, one should be wary of others, just like of all the scientists.

Making scientists afraid of committing a thoughtcrime, or falling victim to the miasma of European anti-Islamic bias, would likely discourage them. The ethos

¹⁸⁴ Which is expressed openly by Ḥ. Ṣadr (B. Tibi, art.cit., 12). It's ironic that Quṭb accuses the West of materialism, while his attitude towards science is so materialistic, not valuing knowledge for itself.

¹⁸⁵ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 0:7–8.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 8:133–5. They are useful in confirming what a believer already knows, thus less so once faith is strong.

¹⁸⁷ B. Tibi, art.cit., 9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 10. Scepticism is necessary in science, tradition is ever-expanding without scepticism, and purity means it would be hard to keep this *semi-modernity* (a term used Ibid., 3). Ibid., 5, 12 about the importance of subjectivity.

¹⁸⁹ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 8:131.

¹⁹⁰ Idem, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, v. 2, 1098; S. Khatab, op.cit., 99 (the quote is not quite faithful).

¹⁹¹ S. Quṭb, *Ḥaṣā'is*, 64.

¹⁹² There's no clear mention of the link between science and technology in the early part, albeit they are mentioned together. But Quṭb regards industry, farming, administration, warfare etc. as sciences in the latter part of his work (Idem, *Ma'ālim*, 8:126).

of scientific work (as science is not valued on its own) would be taken away, and they would navigate between the coral reefs of European bias, and would be told that they will not catch up to Europe anyway, or not in foreseeable time, and when they finally do, they will not go much further, as science is already in decline? Why bother? Also, Quṭb said that *all 'scientists'* in his days do not care for God enough and are preoccupied with material world¹⁹³. He gives science capitulation conditions, reduces it to mere adornment, yet expects it to prosper.

Knowledge and pleasure are not to be the primary Muslim goal, although they can be found in Quran¹⁹⁴, and they should, above all, know what Quran wants them to do¹⁹⁵. God will – eventually for sure¹⁹⁶, maybe not in their own times¹⁹⁷ – grant believers earthly success, if they truly believe, and don't expect it, just want to serve God¹⁹⁸. Expecting anything is a *distraction, ploy, fraud, pretext*¹⁹⁹. God is the wisest: *do people know more than God?*²⁰⁰, and Quṭb's wants people to believe first. Political, social & moral justice will follow, but are all secondary²⁰¹. If you believe, they will come, in Quṭb's field of dreams. And if not – it's not what it's all about anyway. If you strip it down to pieces, only *believe* is left. But that's no surprise: *the theoretical basis, on which Islam rests throughout the human history, is the declaration of faith: 'there's no god but God'*²⁰². Quṭb believed in the strength of faith, and mocked secular powers claiming that in Islam, it's enough to order, and it is done²⁰³. He apparently believed it's enough to tell Muslims to propagate science²⁰⁴, and they will. The strength of faith is undeniable, but my faith in this assumption is not so strong.

Summary

Milestones' aim is to make its readers turn to Quṭb's idea of Islam. Science, which was seen as a means of modernisation and improving living conditions (which was, in turn, the price for supporting the regime²⁰⁵) was an issue he had to address. And just as he believed there are phases in building Islam, they seem to exist in how he delivers his message. Quṭb praises science at first, and claims it's obligatory to develop it, not wanting to attack it openly from the start. First he built faith, and only later presented what it

¹⁹³ Ibid., 8:133. So a Muslim scientist is a theory.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 1:14–15.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 1:18. Although it's mostly about knowledge in the context of Quran, it can be generalised.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 11:168–9.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 12:173–186, esp. 181: The People of the Ditch died, killed by the infidels, and were not avenged in this world. Quṭb mentions such possibility only at the very end.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 2:30–31.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:44–45.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 5:94; Quran 2:140, also 2:216, 17:85.

²⁰¹ S. Quṭb, op.cit., 2:23–31.

²⁰² Ibid., 3:48.

²⁰³ Ibid., 2:32–33.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 8:126.

²⁰⁵ J. Calvert, op.cit., 254.

requires. Subsequently he reduces science to technology, means of achieving material comfort, and while he claims it's necessary, he denounces materialism, thus undermining the importance ascribed to it. He does oblige Muslims to develop science, but also claims that science is in decline, as well as that Muslims won't catch up to the West until after many centuries, if ever. He also divides sciences into the permissible ones, and the ones that should be shunned, or reduced to amassing information; he also claims that Muslims should take scientific knowledge from pious Muslims, once they learn it, which not only limits future spread of knowledge, but is also rendered impossible (for the moment, at least) by that one should keep away from scientists, because they are all materialists. Therefore, while nominally supporting it, he reduces the value of science, undermines the sense of developing it by Muslims, sets limits to it, and hinders acquiring it from non-Muslims, claiming that sciences (some more than the others) are dangerous to Islam. His praise of science is partly a rhetorical duplicity, but not all, because observing world's laws can lead to religion. Science (*'ilm*) is knowledge (*'ilm*), and the knowledge granted by God is bound to be surer than the fruit of defective human reason. The essence of his book is urging people to believe, and do whatever Islam orders. His claims about science are instrumental to achieving it, by dispersing distractions and doubts, and reaffirming the ideal vision of Islam. Thus they are an important part of his main message, but also depend on the expediency of delivering it.

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Abstract

The article concerns the topic of science in Sayyid Quṭb's *Milestones (Ma 'ālim fī āl-Ṭarīq)*, including its place within his other ideas, and within the book, as well as the viability of his ideas of science development. It is mostly focused on internal interpretation of *Milestones*, and less on its place within Muslim thought history. It is argued that – despite the outright claims of admiring science, and obliging Muslims to develop it – the author mostly presents it as a possible danger, attempts to reduce its importance and tries to undermine its appeal to Muslims, as well as sets limits to both its development by them (dividing them in two groups), and acquiring it from non-Muslims. The incongruence between the initial praises, and the general attitude towards it, is explained by expediency, as the attitude declared towards science is secondary to the greater goal of making the reader subdue to his faith, and this has to be achieved in steps, in line with the main motif of the book.

Keywords

science, fundamentalism, interpretation, Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Quṭb