Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: Islam and Modernity

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by
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Abstract

This work analyzes how the conditions of modernity have shaped the contemporary views of the prominent Islamic thinker, Yusuf al-Qaradawi. At the outset, it lays the foundation for a discussion of modernity by reviewing the ideas of prominent philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, as well as of contemporary social scientists, such as Habermas. Based on their understanding of modernity, this work shows how increased education, mass communication, and migration have changed the way Muslims perceive their religion. It also shows how al-Qaradawi’s thinking reflects this. Al-Qaradawi is put into historical perspective through a review of modernity in the Islamic world over the last 200 years. This is followed by an examination of his views on a number of pertinent issues, including science, mass-media, jihad, international relations, democracy, and feminism.

The findings are based on hundreds of fatwas, sermons, and interviews in the Arab media, and on relevant secondary sources, both in English and Arabic. As of yet, no in-depth work of this length has been published on al-Qaradawi in English.
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Biography

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Introduction

Writing about Islam, especially since 9/11, has become extremely controversial. Some argue that Islam is a peaceful religion, and that the extremists who carried out the attacks in New York, Madrid, London, and a host of other places have corrupted it. Others claim that Islam is inherently violent and that those who argue otherwise are apologists. Most of this type of analysis is based on scholarship that attempts to define Islam by its history or its traditional sources. While the religion certainly has a well-documented history and a wealth of sources, contemporary Islam is a belief system, which like other belief systems is based on interpretation. Many Muslims have looked at the same sources and come away with very different understandings of their faith. Therefore, while this work attempts to understand Islam, it does not attempt to define it. It is for Muslims, not for Western, non-Muslim scholars, to do so.

In light of this, there are still a number of ways that non-Muslims can attempt to understand contemporary Islam. The best method is to analyze what Muslims believe and how they practice their religion. Given the wide range of interpretations, the obvious question is which Muslims should be studied. Although all the various interpretations of the religion are valuable for those who want to understand Islam, a reasonable place to begin would be with the most influential and most popular Islamic scholars.

Although there are a number of scholars who could be defined as exceptionally influential, any search on the topic will no doubt bring up one name more often than any other: Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Al-Qaradawi was the driving force behind the formation of the International Association of Muslim Scholars and is the president of the European Council on Fatwa and Research.\(^1\) Gilles Kepel asserts that al-Qaradawi

“sets the tone for Arabic language Sunni sermons across the world,” and the Muslim Council of Britain has suggested that he is “the most authoritative scholar in the world today.” Because of al-Qaradawi’s status as one of the world’s most important Islamic scholars, he has attracted large numbers of both supporters and critics.

While some well-known Western scholars such as John Esposito and Karen Armstrong have argued that al-Qaradawi is a moderate and a reformer, others have claimed just the opposite. In 2004, for example, over 2,500 Muslim intellectuals from twenty-three countries signed a petition calling for the United Nations to set up a tribunal in order to try what they term the “theologians of terror.” The petition mentions al-Qaradawi by name and considers him one of the “sheiks of death.”

This debate reached its peak in 2004 and 2005, when London’s mayor, Ken Livingstone, warmly welcomed al-Qaradawi at a conference sponsored by the Greater London Authority. This incident caused an outburst of negative press in the British media, and a group calling itself Coalition of Many of London’s Diverse Communities decried the Mayor for embracing someone who they claim supports terrorism, female genital mutilation, wife beating, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. Mayor Livingstone defended his decision, arguing that

accusations against him were “based on the circulation of inaccurate allegations to the media, for example that Dr. al-Qaradawi is anti-Semitic, calls for the execution of gay people and advocates domestic violence.” Furthermore, Livingstone rebutted the allegations against al-Qaradawi, who, he says, “is described as a supporter of terrorism when, in reality, he has been one of the most forthright Islamic scholars in condemning terrorism and groups like Al-Qaeda.”

There are obviously some substantive disagreements, which will be discussed throughout this work, between al-Qaradawi’s supporters and his detractors. It is also important, however, to consider how al-Qaradawi is contextualized. When he is compared to other Islamic clerics, he appears to be much more moderate than when he is compared to Western intellectuals. Despite the claims above, most disagreements between al-Qaradawi’s supporters and critics focus on whether he should be held to Islamic or Western standards. After a thorough analysis of al-Qaradawi, the contextualization that I have chosen is neither Western nor Islamic. Rather, I attempt to understand him as an Islamic scholar within the framework of modernity. Al-Qaradawi’s writings are inundated with modern concepts such as democracy and feminism, and the relationship between these concepts and Islam is the most definitive aspect of his work. One could argue that this contextualization is hegemonic and that I am projecting Western values onto a Middle Eastern scholar. While it may be true that ideas such as democracy originated in the West, I am not the one projecting these ideas onto al-Qaradawi. These concepts have spread along with the broader proliferation of ideas in the modern world, and al-Qaradawi has accepted them as the basis for much of his work.

Defining Modernity

Because the concept of modernity is central to this work, it is necessary to provide a detailed definition of the term. The idea of modernity has been debated for more than a century. In the nineteenth century there was a belief that the world was modernizing in a steady linear manner.

7. “Why the Mayor of London will maintain dialogues will all of London’s Faiths and Communities,” pp. 1–2.
This belief was accompanied by a normative analysis that equated modern with good. As Derek Hopwood points out, “To such believers in Victorian England, what they lived was good and getting better; to them traditional was backward and non-European . . . According to this belief the more that traditional (Eastern) backward people became Europeanized, the better.”8

This view was severely challenged by the events of the twentieth century. The Second World War showed that along with electricity and medicine, modernity could also produce nuclear weapons and gas chambers. This realization blurred the normative aspects of modernity, but it did not eliminate the idea that the world was going through a process of modernization and that this process was linear and universal. These beliefs became the foundation of “modernization theory” in the 1950s. The basis of this theory was that “the cultural program of modernity as it developed in modern Europe and the basic institutional constellation that emerged there would ultimately take over in all modern societies; with the expansion of modernity, they would prevail throughout the world.”9

Nevertheless, many societies that went through a process of modernization did not follow the pattern put forth by modernization theory. S. N. Eisenstadt points out that “many of the movements that developed in non-Western societies articulated strong anti-Western or even anti-modern themes, yet all were distinctly modern.”10 Put simply, Eisenstadt’s main assertion is that “modernity and Westernization are not identical.”11

Moreover, modernization theory had a secular bias, which is of special interest to this study. It understood religion as a relic of traditional society, which would disappear as societies modernized. For example, Richard P. Mitchell, writing in the 1960s and no

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10. Ibid., p. 1.
11. Ibid., p. 2.
doubt influenced by modernization theory, claimed in the preface of his important work, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, that while the Brotherhood was certainly an interesting phenomenon, “its increasingly less relevant Muslim ‘position,’” was something whose time had come and gone. He continued, “Our feeling, for some time now shared by others, is that the essentially secular reform nationalism now in vogue in the Arab world will continue to operate to end the earlier appeal of this organization.” Mitchell’s book was first published some forty years ago, but the Brotherhood, along with other Islamic groups, is as popular as ever.

While this establishes what modernity is *not*, the question of what modernity is, still remains. To answer this, some contemporary scholars have preferred to look back to the theories that preceded modernization theory. Perhaps the most influential of these thinkers is the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas asserts that in early modern Europe, urbanization, industrialization, mass education, and enlightenment created modernity, but that these institutions are not the essence of modernity itself. These phenomena created a situation in which people understand what Hegel called “subjectivity.” Habermas clarifies Hegel’s understanding of the term:

Subjectivity carries primarily four connotations: (a) *individualism*: in the modern world, singularity particularized without limit can make good pretensions; (b) *the right to criticism*: the principle of the modern world requires that what anyone is to recognize shall reveal itself to him as something entitled to recognition; (c) *autonomy of action*: our responsibility for what we do is a characteristic of modern times; (d) finally, *idealistic philosophy* itself: Hegel considers it the work of modern times that philosophy grasps the self-consciousness (self-knowing) Idea.

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For Habermas this means that the essence of modernity is essentially the individual’s self-awareness. This allows for “each person” to “pursue the ends of his particular welfare,” as opposed to accepting what he is born into, or what was passed down to him from previous generations. Farzin Vahdat, in his book God and Juggernaut, makes a similar point. After a thorough review of the philosophies of Kant and Hegel he comes to the conclusion that

in premodern society . . . individuals found identification in public life and the common experience, but this freedom of subjectivity was limited in scope and confined to a few men. In modern society, however, the freedom of the individual subject has pitted the individual against the collective, public life and institutions, hence the alienation of the individual.

This understanding of modernity allows for what Eisenstadt calls “multiple modernities.” Modernity can be religious or secular, capitalist or socialist, Western or anti-Western. What is important is the agency of the individual and the understanding that whichever modernity people exist in has been chosen from a number of options. For example, a Sunni Muslim born in modern Cairo can choose to be secular, or even to emigrate and live a Western life in Europe or the United States. If he chooses to remain a practicing Sunni Muslim in Cairo, this is also a choice. These choices did not exist for premodern residents of Cairo, who were unaware that the way they lived their lives was only one of several options. Because self-awareness and awareness of others is essential to modernity, both increased literacy and education have played major roles in its expansion.

These conditions also help to increase awareness, for instance of what Habermas calls “modernity’s consciousness of time.” This consciousness results from the individual’s understanding that other, contemporary — and only contemporary — options exist for him. In essence, he needs to look towards the future if he wants to increase

his options beyond the present ones. Therefore, Habermas claims, “the modern world is distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future.”

Vahdat takes this argument a step further when he highlights the universal nature of Hegel’s subjectivity. Essentially, he argues, once a person understands his subjectivity, they understand that others have the same options. On some level, this leads to a degree of universal equality. Thus one element of modernity can be understood as the awareness of universal subjectivity.

The focus of the present study is to determine how modernity, as defined above, has affected Islam and, specifically, al-Qaradawi. It is essential, however, that we first examine how modernity, a phenomenon that began in the West, has affected the Middle East.

18. Ibid., p. 6.
Chapter 2

Al-Qaradawi’s Approach to Modernity

Science, technology, development, and the mass media have, perhaps more than anything else, helped to promulgate modernity. It is therefore not surprising that al-Qaradawi deals with these topics often. Since al-Qaradawi is known in Islamic circles as a centrist, we will discuss his worldview in general, as well as assess Islamic centrism and its effect on his thought.

Al-Qaradawi and Islamic Centrism

Al-Qaradawi has made several significant contributions to Islamic scholarship in his lifetime, but he is perhaps best known as the founder of what is called the wasatiyya, or Centrist school of Islamic thought. Sagi Polka dealt with this topic extensively in an article based on his PhD dissertation. He claims that the basis of al-Qaradawi’s ideology is Qur’anic sura 2:3.

We have appointed you a middle nation (according to one interpretation, the Islamic nation serves as a religious via media between excessive Christian asceticism and overt Jewish negligence to the point of prophet slaying), that ye may be witness against mankind (according to Koranic exegesis: that ye bear witness on behalf of prophets affirming that they indeed transmitted God’s message, each unto his nation, though these nations many deny it) and that the messenger may be witness on your behalf.⁹⁰

Polka discusses seven principles that generally define the Centrist school. First, centrists maintain that there is a “logical fusion between al-salafiyya\textsuperscript{91}... and tajdid.”\textsuperscript{92} Salafiyya can generally be translated as returning to the way of the Islamic forefathers, and tajdid as renewal. In combining the two concepts, al-Qaradawi argues that the Islamic past, when properly understood, offers an example of how modern Muslims can reclaim their proper place in the world. For al-Qaradawi the two terms are completely compatible and anyone who claims they are not “believes the religion is anachronistic and cannot be rejuvenated.”\textsuperscript{93} Second, following in the path of other fundamentalist thinkers discussed in chapter one, those adhering to the Centrist school understand Islam as an all-encompassing system rather than as a set of personal beliefs and rituals. More specifically, centrists pay particular attention to five aspects of Islam: “religious, social, political, legislative, and cultural.”\textsuperscript{94} Third, there is “equilibrium between the fixed tenets of religion ... and the modifiable rules of conduct.”\textsuperscript{95} Thus, Islam provides a moral framework within which specific ideas can be discussed. To determine how to handle specific issues, al-Qaradawi calls for the revival of reason in Islamic jurisprudence, or ijtihad. Fourth, similar to the third principle, centrists make “vivid distinctions between Divine ordinance and Muslim legislation.”\textsuperscript{96} Essentially, they accept the commandments in the Qur’an and the hadith, but they reject the way past scholars have applied them. Fifth, though centrists accept the concept of faith in the unseen, their thought is based more on human reason and historical lessons. Though they are grounded in tradition, they do not see this as a contradiction to intellect. Al-Qaradawi summarizes the first five principles well in a Friday sermon delivered in 2003:

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\textsuperscript{91} Gudrun Kramer distinguishes between the salafi thought of al-Qaradawi, which is generally reformist, and the “modern salafi trend advocating a literalist approach to the normative sources [and] rejecting any kind of adaptation or innovation.” G. Kramer, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{92} Polka, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 43.
\end{flushleft}
Renewal means reviving *ijtihad* by the learned *ulema*. We actually call for *ijtihad*. We must not think with the heads of our predecessors, because our problems, needs and time are different from theirs. We cannot let people who died centuries ago think on our behalf. The imams changed their personal opinions even within their lifetime ... We must change our discourse to conform to our age, environment and the requirements of our life. As for the renewal sought by those who claim to be neo-conservatives when they aren’t, this is something that we reject.

The sixth principle is that centrists adopt the notion of gradual application of laws. They believe that Islam can provide an all-encompassing system of life, but also assert that “one must not abrogate the laws that already regulate these societies until an Islamic equivalent has been devised.” Finally, centrism allows for “learning from the experience of other peoples and nations, as far as political and social structures are concerned.” Al-Qaradawi not only allows for the integration into Islam of knowledge from outside Islam, he considers it a duty. In a fatwa on this subject, he writes, “Among the collective duties enjoined on the Muslim nation as a whole is learning the languages of others when necessary, especially if such people enjoy what Muslims lack, be it science or knowledge.”

While it is obvious here that al-Qaradawi is open to ideas from the West, one should not assume that this means westernization. In the Friday sermon quoted above, he qualifies his statement by adding, “As

97. Al-Qaradawi is not referring to the Western intellectual movement sometimes called neo-conservatism. He is referring to a stream of Islamic thought that wishes to revive the conservative practices that al-Qaradawi is challenging.


99. Polka, p. 44.

100. Ibid.

for what is advocated by those who want to westernize the nation, this will not happen. In fact, some of them said that the East could only advance if it got rid of its prophets and books.” In a later interview he adds,

Moderate or centrist rhetoric does not mean we should relinquish our rights, holy places, Islamic personality, or cultural identity. This is a wrong understanding of moderation. Moderation means steering away from both the radical, extremist, and fundamental stream ... as well as the stream of neglect and looseness because these two trends pose a threat to the nation. We call for the kind of moderation that abides by the principles and takes variables into consideration.

From this understanding of the Centrist school, which he was so influential in establishing, it is clear that al-Qaradawi is calling for a very modern form of Islam. Although he certainly looks to the past for inspiration, he is attempting to create a religion that is relevant to his time and looks toward the future. This centrist ideology has had a pronounced effect on al-Qaradawi throughout his life, and it has no doubt also influenced his view on what will be the next topic of discussion, namely mass media.

Mass Media

Apart from his role in the development of the Centrist school of Islamic thought, no single issue has been more important to al-Qaradawi’s legacy than his embrace of the mass media. He is cautious, but unlike more radical scholars in the Taliban or Saudi Arabia, he leaves no doubt that mass media is not inherently “evil” and that in many cases it can be used for the common good. He released a fatwa on this subject, ruling:

TV, radio, magazines and newspapers are used for many purposes. We cannot qualify them as good or evil, lawful or unlawful. It depends on the way they are used and on the quality of programs and information they present. For instance, a weapon used by a person in fighting in Allah’s Cause can be used by another person to commit crimes ... In brief, I can say that TV as well as all means of media presents good and evil and what is lawful and unlawful. The Muslim in this case is to judge the situation by himself. He can watch TV when it presents good and Islamically interesting program and put it off when it presents the otherwise.104

While this may not seem like a revolutionary position, and it certainly is not, al-Qaradawi’s early understanding of the importance of media as a tool to spread the Islamic message propelled him onto the world stage. As Gudrun Kramer states, “What marks him out among the scholars-cum-activists of his generation is his early involvement with the new media.”105 In 1970, when Qatar opened a radio station, al-Qaradawi straightaway started broadcasting religious programs. Soon after, when television was launched in Qatar he set up similar programs there. The television station’s Friday and Ramadan sermons eventually gained popularity throughout the Middle East. In the mid-1990s, al-Jazeera began to broadcast satellite TV from Qatar and in 1996 al-Qaradawi began to appear on a weekly program entitled Shari’a and Life, which gained a large following. In the late 1990s al-Qaradawi launched two Internet sites: www.qaradawi.net in 1997, and www.islamonline.net in 1999.106

These activities have allowed al-Qaradawi to break away from the traditional role of an Islamic scholar. He does not have a circle of student followers, as is customary for a scholar of his caliber.107

105. G. Kramer, p. 190.
106. Ibid., pp. 190-1.
107. Ibid., p. 192.
Instead, as Bettina Graef points out, he has worked to construct what he calls a “global Islamic community.” In doing so he attempted to establish himself “as religious authority for Muslims world wide.” In this sense, as Gudrun Kramer shows, al-Qaradawi “is a distinctly modern religious figure that could not have existed, and be considered a religious authority, before the age of modern mass media communications.” This argument can be taken one step further. Not only is al-Qaradawi modern, but his audience and followers are thoroughly modern as well. In this new “global Islamic community” there are not mechanisms in place to enforce al-Qaradawi’s religious rulings. Instead, he appeals to the agency of his followers. With the education and access to information that have come with modernity, al-Qaradawi’s followers increasingly make their own decisions about how to practice their religion. Al-Qaradawi understands this and uses it to his advantage. Without a state to enforce his religious edicts, the agency of his followers is the only way he can have any effect.

Science and Technology

Science is one of the most important and most controversial subjects for modern Islamic thinkers such as al-Qaradawi. No call for Islamic renewal can circumvent science; even so, the principles of scientific thought present a problem for Muslims who believe in the absolute truth revealed in the Qur’an. As Basam Tibi points out, “Western science has long accepted the Cartesian principle by which ‘doubt and conjecture’ ... are seen as essential ingredients of scientific methodology.” However, “scientists who hold the Islamic world view

110. G. Kramer, 193.
Modern Islamic thinkers have dealt with this problem in a variety of ways. Some Muslims, such as Talbi and Shahrur, have called for an Islamic Enlightenment where the fundamentals of Islam are reevaluated. Thinkers holding this view dismiss “scripturalism and ask ... Muslims to rely on reason instead of the authority of the text.” Other Muslims have taken a more extreme view. The Washington-based, Saudi-funded International Institute of Islamic Thought (I.I.I.T.) has called for the “Islamization of science” and the development of an “Islamic technology.” It has attempted “to reformulate knowledge on Islamic grounds,” and has endeavored to “determine and classify the available information and to reconsider the ways in which they were acquired and how they are linked to one another.” In doing so, they have challenged the most basic conceptions of modern science in an attempt to understand the universe on the basis of revealed truth. Those who accept the need for either an Islamic Enlightenment (Talbi and Shahrur), or the Islamization of science (I.I.I.T.) work on the assumption that there is an inherent conflict between revelation and science; not all Islamic thinkers, however, accept this claim. Prominent Pakistani thinker, Hussein al-Sadr, has argued that there is no conflict between Islam and science, that “the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not an end in itself; it is only a means of acquiring an understanding of God and of solving the problems of the Muslim community . . . Reason and the pursuit of knowledge has a very important place in Islamic society but it is subservient to Qur’anic values and ethics.”

This view is closest to the position al-Qaradawi takes on Islam and science. In several fatwas, he leaves no doubt about the compatibility between Islam and science. For example, he writes:

Islam embraces scientific progress and research, as throughout Islamic history there has been no evidence of conflict between Islam and science. In fact, it is regarded as Fard Kifayah

111. Tibi, p. 74.
112. Ibid., p. 90.
113. Ibid., p. 89.
114. Ibid., pp. 74–5.
(collective duty) in Islam for a nation to achieve progress in every field of science. However, this progress, like everything in life, must not collide with faith.115

Al-Qaradawi grounds his understanding of modern science in his interpretation of the Qur’an. He refers to verse 16:8, “And (He has created) horses, mules and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge.” In this verse, al-Qaradawi claims the phrase “of which ye have no knowledge” refers to modern “cars, trains, aircraft and spaceships,”116 as well as “scientific advancement” in general.117 In another case, al-Qaradawi uses the principles, not the literal text, of Qur’anic verses when referring to modern technology. For example, verse 8:60 states, “Make ready for them all thou canst of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby ye may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy.” This verse praises the raising of horses for jihad but, al-Qaradawi claims,

that was because horses were the military vehicles then, which is not the case today, when things have changed and horses have become no longer significant in fighting except limitedly in certain areas. Thus, we can say that today’s horses are the tanks, armored vehicles, and suchlike military weapons used in wars today. Those who perfect using them are the cavalry of our age.118

Al-Qaradawi’s methodology here is very similar to the reasoning used in Talbi’s justification for liberal reform. Like Talbi, Al-Qaradawi takes the principle behind a Qur’anic verse and then applies it to the modern world. In this case, it is a good deed to create modern technology for the cause of jihad.

It should be noted that al-Qaradawi wants to do more than simply appropriate technology from the West. He wants Muslims to develop their own expertise. To accomplish this, he supports education reform. When asked about young Muslims who abandon studying modern science in order to concentrate on more traditional Islamic studies, al-Qaradawi releases a fatwa ruling that studying science “is considered an inescapable obligation. This applies to many fields such as mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, biology, oceanography, desert studies, physiology, and other branches.”¹¹⁹ He argues that even though earlier Islamic scholars ruled differently, the requirements of the modern age require Muslims to adapt. He claims that

there is a fierce competition between nations in these fields, in which each of them tries to have an advanced position and, at the same time, gives its citizens the chance to excel others in this competition. Had nations not delved into such fields, we would have not witnessed the splitting of the atom, the exploration of space, and the revolutions in computer science, the Internet, IT, biology, communications, and in many other fields. All these achievements have become distinctive characteristics of modern age.¹²⁰

Some Islamic fundamentalists may see this as calling for the acquisition of scientific knowledge and not the scientific method used to acquire it, but al-Qaradawi makes a deeper point. He is calling for

¹²⁰. Ibid.
a complete restructuring of education, arguing that “our education in the Arab and Islamic countries is still based on memorizing and cramming rather than understanding and comprehension,” and that “we must change the philosophy and system of education.”

It is clear that al-Qaradawi is calling for some level of free thought. Still, he puts limits on what science should be permitted to do, claiming that knowledge should be “nursed by faith and directed by principles and manners.” As opposed to the Islamization of science by the I.I.I.T. mentioned above, al-Qaradawi’s main reservation does not deal with the construction of knowledge. Instead, he deals with how knowledge should be used. For example he argues that

because of the separation between religious belief and knowledge in the West, this knowledge has become — in the military field — a danger threatening the whole world with weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical, and biological. Knowledge separated from belief has also given way to the manufacture of unsafe and even illegal drugs, which are marketed by people who neither fear the Creator nor show mercy to the created.

In this quote, it is not the truth of the scientific method that al-Qaradawi is questioning. He is concerned with the morals behind the use of science and reason. He makes normative judgments about what science should do, not what it can do. There is, however, one significant exception to this. Since Al-Qaradawi does not believe that science is able to directly contradict the Qur’an, he runs into problems when dealing with concepts such as evolution.

While al-Qaradawi seems to accept the basic principles of the scientific method, he does not always accept the results of its

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123. Ibid.
124. One significant restriction on free thought is the case of apostasy, which will be discussed in later chapters.
application. In an interesting fatwa prohibiting the video game “Pokemon,” al-Qaradawi argues against Darwinism. He states:

The cartoon contains items that run counter to the Muslim’s creed, as it indirectly tries to give support to the controversial Darwin’s theory of evolution, which indicates that every living species undergoes a gradual development, in the sense that the existing species produces new ones through adaptation to new surroundings. According to this theory, man, before reaching his present form, has undergone a series of evolutionary changes, from simpler forms up to the stages of being in the form of an ape, deemed to be closely related to man. This cartoon tries to enhance this theory, by instilling in children’s minds, Darwin’s idea on the gradual development of characteristics of insects.  

Here it is clear that the above-mentioned issues of “doubt and conjecture” come into play. Al-Qaradawi accepts them as a reasoning device, but only as long as they do not contradict the Qur’an. In addition to arguing against evolution, al-Qaradawi deems it important to show that modern science cannot contradict the principle of divine creation. In his fatwa prohibiting cloning, al-Qaradawi makes sure to point out that

the process can never be viewed as a kind of creation or even recreation [sic, re-creation]; rather, it is a process that involves destroying the nucleus of the egg cell of the species to be cloned. The nucleus is then removed from a body cell of an animal of the same species. This donor nucleus is injected into the egg cell. The egg, with its new nucleus, develops into an animal that has the same genetic make-up as the donor.

This section of the fatwa does not deal with the main question — namely whether cloning is permitted or prohibited — that al-Qaradawi is answering. Nevertheless, when addressing the issue of cloning it

is very important for him to make clear that cloning is not creation because that would directly contradict the Qur‘anic principle of God as the creator.

Another interesting aspect of the above quote is the scientific language al-Qaradawi uses while addressing a religious issue. This appeal to science is directed at a modern audience, which puts its trust in scientific thought. Al-Qaradawi knows that Islam is competing with various ideologies and that, if he does not appeal to universal principles, he may lose some of his followers to other, more intellectually appealing, ideologies. Along these lines al-Qaradawi also uses other non-Islamic methods when writing fatwas on modern issues. For example, when a religious cleric in Nigeria ruled that children should not be given the polio vaccine, al-Qaradawi released a fatwa disagreeing with the cleric. In addition to the usual Qur‘anic references, al-Qaradawi claimed that in order to be sure that the vaccine was safe, he had discussed it with the World Health Organization.127

When al-Qaradawi asserts that science must be kept within a moral framework, he cites Western intellectuals, scientists, and politicians who have made similar points. He offers quotes from John Dewy, Arnold Toynbee, John Steinbeck, Alexis Carrel, Henry Link, John Foster Dulles, and even President Woodrow Wilson.128 This is more than a rhetorical tool used to show that even Westerners know their society is flawed. Al-Qaradawi is appealing to the credibility these scientists, authors, and politicians have with his audience.

However, this does not imply that al-Qaradawi favors all aspects of the cross-cultural flow of information. In fact, he is staunchly opposed to the globalization of both culture and values. In an interview on al-Jazeera he states, “In the past, we used to be wary of customs inherited from the days of Islamic backwardness. Now, we are wary of traditions coming in from the West. The West is trying to impose its

128. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, “Has Western Civilization Brought any Comfort?”
traditions, ideology and philosophy on us on the pretext of seeking a global culture; namely, globalization.”

Al-Qaradawi uses Islam as a framework to justify what can be “borrowed” from other cultures and what is prohibited. If an idea developed in the West helps promote his view of a modern Islam, he permits it — if not, he rejects it.

**Development**

Hussein al-Sadr is quoted above as having claimed that “the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not an end in itself; it is only a means of acquiring an understanding of God and of solving the problems of the Muslim community.” Al-Qaradawi believes this as well. He is not interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but wants to use science to address the problems of the Muslim world. In his sermons he often deals with the problems facing the Muslim world. For example in one Friday sermon he exclaims:

> We have not achieved progress unfortunately. We have not tackled the problem of poverty. The poverty rate is high. There are still those who live on dry bread. There are still families that live in one room or basement. There is still poverty, although our countries are rich in agricultural lands and mineral resources. But we have not cultivated or industrialized. Our countries are still backward. They are considered part of the third or fourth world.


Al-Qaradawi complains about the lack of industrialization,\textsuperscript{132} and the high unemployment rate.\textsuperscript{133} While he hopes that science and technology can help to improve the situation, he also feels Islam has a role to play in these fields. In an earlier sermon, he claimed, “Some people blame religion, saying Islam is the cause of this backwardness. This is a lie,” adding that Islam could be beneficial for development.\textsuperscript{134} He made it his goal to help the Muslim world in this respect: “We want to develop our countries, economies and the individual, who is both the aim and the means of development.”\textsuperscript{135}

In order to encourage development and modernization, al-Qaradawi has worked to create solutions to the impediments posed by traditional Islam. One of the major hurdles for development in the Muslim world was the Islamic prohibition on usury. Most of the modern world has developed through individuals or corporations taking loans to start business ventures. Thus the opening up of opportunities to borrow money has become essential for economic growth. Al-Qaradawi has been one of the foremost proponents of a system of Islamic banking, which gets around the restriction on banks collecting interest. In a fatwa on the issue, he explains:

The interest on bank accounts is unlawful or \textit{haram} because such interest is an increase of money made without effort or trade. Allah says, “O you who believe! Fear Allah and give up what remains of your demand for usury if you are indeed believers. If you don’t, take notice of war from Allah and His messenger. But if you turn back, you shall have your capital sums. Deal not unjustly and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.” (Al-Baqarah: 278–9) The repentance meant here is keeping original capital


\textsuperscript{133} Qatar TV, “Live Sermon from Umar Bin-al-Khattab Mosque in Doha,” (5 January 2007).


\textsuperscript{135} \textit{BBC Monitoring: Near/Middle East: Round-Up of Friday Sermons 1 May 05.} (accessed 29 April 2005).
and refraining from taking any increase made without effort or joint investment. Islam prohibited depositing one’s wealth and taking specified increase without the risk of either loss or profit making. Therefore, the type of investment allowed is where a person deposits money in an account and shares both the risk of making profit or losing. This is the definition of the Islamic investment method.\footnote{136}{Yusuf al-Qaradawi, “Bank Interest in the Eyes of Shari’ah,” \textit{Islam Online}, (18 July 2004), <http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503543118> (accessed 3 July 2007).}

Islamic banking remains controversial in some more conservative Islamic circles, but rulings like this have helped make al-Qaradawi one of the most popular scholars for Muslims who want to live a modern lifestyle. Al-Qaradawi’s attempt to accommodate modern Muslims is part of a method of jurisprudence called \textit{taysir}, or facility (i.e. facilitating the practice of Islam), which has become a “trademark” of al-Qaradawi’s fatwas.\footnote{137}{Alexandre Caeiro, “The European Council for Fatwa Research,” Paper presented at the Fourth Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence and Montecatini Terme (19–23 March 2003), organized by the Mediterranean Program of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.} This methodology allows the jurist to take into consideration what Muslims are/would be able to do under modern conditions.\footnote{138}{See Yusuf al-Qaradawi, \textit{Taysir al-Fiqh li-lMuslim al Mu’asir fi Daw’ al-Qur’an wal-Sunna} (Making Fiqh Easy for Contemporary Muslims in the light of Quran and Sunna),” (Beirut: Muasasat al-Risala, 2000).} It is important to note that al-Qaradawi’s interpretations are not the first attempt by a Muslim jurist to circumvent the prohibitions against interest-taking. In fact, Islamic scholars have faced this problem since classical times so that they have had to find different methods of circumventing the restrictions.\footnote{139}{For an example, see Khalid Abou el-Fadl, “Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities from the Second/Eighth to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries,” \textit{Islamic Law and Society} 1, No. 2 (1994), p. 180.} However, al-Qaradawi and other modern proponents of Islamic banking differ from their
premodern counterparts, both in the modern banking methods they propose and the extent to which they are willing to stretch the limits of Islamic law. More on this topic will be discussed in chapter 4.

Although al-Qaradawi links science and rational thought to development, he does not limit his reasoning to this. He often associates the idea of economic growth with freedom. For example, he argues that

the nation is backward ... it is a question of freedom. Without freedom, slaves cannot make anything. As long as our nation is driven by whips, our free men are sent to detention camps and prisons, and the ruler rules the people with a thick stick, and as long as judges are arrested, imprisoned and beaten, and there is no freedom of the press or the formation of parties, our nation will remain in the circle of backwardness. A nation is created by free men. Progress is made by free men. But, if we remained in the circle of bondage, the nation will not create anything worthwhile. It will always remain on the margin.140

Establishing a connection between economic development and institutions such as freedom of the press and political parties requires rather sophisticated reasoning. However, al-Qaradawi’s idea of freedom is not necessarily what a Western audience might assume it to be. The traditional Islamic definition of freedom is complicated and often connotes freedom to practice Islam rather than the typical Western interpretations of the term, which connote individual liberty.141 Though in this case it is not clear which definition al-Qaradawi is using, his emphasis on development of the Islamic world nevertheless shows that he is thoroughly forward looking. As discussed in the introduction, this is a definitive trait of modernity.

141. Franz Rosenthal, *The Muslim Concept of Freedom* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1960), pp. 5–6. Although I only mention Islam here, it should be noted that this definition of freedom is found in traditional Jewish and Christian sources as well.
Conclusion

Like many modern thinkers, both Islamic and Western, al-Qaradawi continuously wrestles with the definition of modernity; and like many in the Islamic world he attempts to make a clear distinction between modernization and westernization. As Basam Tibi points out, for al-Qaradawi “modern civilization is indisputably Western, but it is not the only modern civilization possible or desirable.”\(^{142}\) Al-Qaradawi has spent the last several decades attempting to develop an alternative modernity in the Islamic world. This modernity would accept what he considers to be the positive aspects of scientific advancement while using Qur’anic principles and ethics to filter out what he sees as undesirable aspects of Western civilization. In doing so, al-Qaradawi believes that he can help to develop an alternative to Western civilization that will one day be more appealing to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

While al-Qaradawi worked hard to turn his vision into reality, opening up the Muslim world to modernity presents additional challenges. Mass media and modern education continue to bring new ideas into the Islamic world — ideas which sometimes present challenges to traditional Islamic theology. The following chapters will address how al-Qaradawi has dealt with several of these more controversial concepts.

\(^{142}\) Tibi, p. 75.