THE FOUNDATION OF
KNOWLEDGE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ISLAMIC
AND WESTERN METHODS OF INQUIRY

LOUAY SAFI

The Foundation of Knowledge

A Comparative Study in
Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry

أَفَمَن كَانَ عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ كَمَن زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُم

**Is then the one who is on a clear evidence
from his Lord, no better than the one to whom the
wrongness of his conduct seems pleasing, and such as
follow their self-inclinations?**

(The Holy Quran, Muhammad: 14)

The Foundation of Knowledge

A Comparative Study in Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry

LOUAY SAFI

CONTENTS

Preface to Second Edition

Fifteen years have passed since the first edition of *The Foundation of Knowledge* was published in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A lot of research has been done since then to broaden and deepen our understanding of the impact of norms and presuppositions that scholars, wittingly or unwittingly, bring to their scholarly work. A lot has also been written on the relationship between Islam and scholarship historically and in modern society. Today there is a greater awareness of the need to guard against distortions caused by the specific values and presuppositions espoused by individual scholars, as well as the importance of bringing critical analysis to scholarly research underscoring the need to critically engage both modern and traditional scholarship.

The evolution of the debate on the place of modern and traditional methodologies in scholarly research necessitated the reworking of the first and last chapters of this book. Readers familiar with the first edition will find that chapter one has been substantially rewritten, though the question it addresses and the crucial elements of the early discussions remain intact. The last chapter has been slightly modified. Yet the messages of *The Foundation of Knowledge* remain the same; its most fundamental concern is to trace the evolution of scientific methodology and to highlight Islamic scholarship's everlasting contribution to grounding scientific research in social experience while bringing transcendental knowledge to bear on normative frameworks. In addition, the book emphasizes the need to remain open-minded to a variety of scientific approaches to social phenomena. The book, therefore, should be of particular interest to the students of methodology and scientific methods as it catalogues the various approaches to systematic investigation and sheds light on the profound role early Muslim scholars played in laying the foundation of scientific knowledge.

I would like to thank the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) for their decision to publish a revised second edition of this book. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Jamal Barzinji and Obay Altaleb for

their support and help. Printing the second edition in the United States will also make the book more available to the scholarly community and the general reader in North America and Europe.

<div align="right">
Louay Safi
Doha, Qatar
</div>

Preface to First Edition

This study has two primary purposes. The first is to critically examine those research methods and methodological approaches, which are associated with mainstream scholarship, both in the classical Muslim and modern Western scientific traditions. The examination aims not only at understanding methods which influenced the development of Muslim and Western traditions, but also at assessing the extent to which they can be incorporated into a modern Islamic methodology capable of responding to the social and intellectual challenges of modern society. Therefore, outlining an alternative Islamic methodology is the second purpose of this study.

For today's Muslim scholars, two sets of methods aiming at understanding and guiding human action are in use. The first set comes from Western tradition. While these methods are helpful in analyzing social interaction, they present Muslim intellectuals with a serious problem, namely, that they do not recognize Islamic Revelation as a proper source of scientific knowledge. The problem is compounded by the fact that as Western scholarship rejects Revelation, it continues to espouse many of the values and ontological assumptions connected with Western religions and cultures.

The second set of methods available for Muslim researchers today was developed by classical Muslim scholars. Classical Muslim methods are primarily concerned with understanding the Divine Text, applying its injunctions for guiding individual action, and restructuring social interaction. Classical Muslim scholars showed, however, little interest in studying social actions which do not fit into the Revealed norms. And while early Muslim scholars studied history, they did not do that in order to discover the laws and forces of history, but only to be inspired by the personality of historical actors. With the exception of Ibn Khaldun's impressive work, *al-Muqaddimah*, Muslim historians by and large were interested in highlighting the personal struggle and accomplishments of military generals and political leaders.

Yet understanding the laws and forces governing the evolution of history is a must for those who would like to comprehend its happenings, and thus to become active participants in shaping historical events and restructuring social relations in ways that bring actual practices into conformity with the principles of truth and equity.

Given the nature of the difficulties facing contemporary Muslim scholarship outlined above, this study purports to overcome the shortcomings of both classical Muslim and modern Western methods by bringing into a synthesis some of the elements developed in the wombs of the two traditions. The synthesis is presented in a unified model outlined in chapter 7. However, the unified model, while building on the achievements of Muslim and Western traditions, is not concerned with bringing harmony between the two traditions, but aspires to integrate the knowledge received from revelation with the one gained from human experience.

Finally, the model presented in this work should not be seen as a full-fledged methodology. Clearly the model requires further development, elaboration, and refinement. The model should rather be seen as a proposal to be examined, and, hopefully, constructively critiqued by those who truly feel the urgent need for the development of an alternative Islamic methodology. It is only in the light of such constructive critique that the proposed model can be enriched.

All Praise is due to the Almighty Allah.
Louay Safi

Part I

THE INADEQUACY OF ESTABLISHED METHODS

CHAPTER 1

GOING FULL CIRCLE

Human Knowledge and the Imperative of Metaphysics

Modern thought rose out of a fierce and protracted struggle in Europe between the pre-modern religious tradition, which locates ultimate truth in divine text, and a philosophical tradition, The Enlightenment, which places truth in human experience, and insists that truth could be attained through the intellectual examination of human reality. Enlightenment scholars succeeded indeed not only in defending the autonomy of rationality and reason, but also in using human intellect to develop modern social sciences.

Methodical and systematic approaches to understanding human experience propelled modern scholarship forward in striving to provide better understanding of human psyche and social conditions. This led to the development of elaborate theories and research methods in the areas of social studies, economics, politics, psychology, administration, and others. But while modern scholarship made impressive advances by using analytical reasoning to shed light on social phenomena, it hit an impenetrable wall in its efforts to base value systems in an empirically defined rationality. Many modern scholars were initially inclined to cast off the importance of values to social knowledge and social understanding. Some even tried to deny the transcendental nature of values. Ultimately, though, the dominant positivist school was forced to give up its attempt to build human knowledge on a purely empirical basis.

The failure of empiricism and positivism to develop a purely empirical foundation of knowledge has undermined rationality and has emboldened postmodern writers. It has encouraged postmodernists to deny the possibility of pursuing truth, hence placing rationalism on equal footing with irrationalism, and drawing no distinction between

morality and immorality. This put modern scholarship in a serious predicament, as it has neither been able to ground knowledge in empiricist epistemology, nor seems to have the will to retrieve transcendental philosophy.

The trajectory of modern Western thought travels in the opposite direction of the trajectory travelled by historical Islamic thought. Although Western and Islamic thought share the conviction that that human reason lacks the tools to ascertain the metaphysical, and that it is bound by its very nature by empirical truth, they have arrived at grossly different conclusions. Long before modern Western rationalism was awakened, Islamic epistemology strove to limit human rationality to the examination of empirical reality and the analysis of sensory data. Al-Ghazālī pioneered the efforts to use rational argument to describe the metaphysical reality. In *Tahāfut al-Falasifah*, he made a compelling argument against Greek philosophy that anticipated the work of European empiricism. However, rather than strengthening the authority of reason, Al-Ghazālī's work, and that of other *Kalam* scholars, undermined human reason. Ibn Rushd's rejoinders in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* did little to arrest the drive to dismiss rational sciences as uncertain sources of truth. *Kalam* scholars invested their rational power in making the discursive sciences of revelation, hence giving an overwhelming authority to traditions and traditionally transmitted knowledge.

Contemporary work to regain access to transcendence and universal norms that has been lost by the evolution of modern epistemology can benefit greatly from marrying modern Western and historical Islamic knowledge. The current volume is devoted to revisiting methodological approaches of Islamic and Western scientific traditions.

THE INADEQUACY OF EMPERICIST METHODS

The intellectual impasse faced today may be traced back to the Enlightenment scholars' efforts to sever human values from their transcendental basis and to marginalize the importance of religious beliefs, or the lack thereof, in shaping the scholar's attitude, and providing

the transcendental presuppositions essential for social research. Indeed, modern scholars have been acutely aware of the importance of religious beliefs and transcendental values for social experience: from Descartes who insisted that the notion of God was the most fundamental notion of human understanding, to Rousseau who underscored the desirability of a civic religion, to Kant who thought that all moral acts presuppose a belief in human accountability before divine justice, to Hegel who stressed that social experiences are rooted in ethical life.

Yet, they all felt compelled to deny the relevance of religion and religious sources for human understanding and knowledge, and they were all determined to establish the autonomy of human reason. As we will argue in subsequent chapters, epistemological debates have eventually come full circle to the realization that truth lies ultimately in meanings informed by authoritative texts.

Many are still reluctant to acknowledge the centrality of authoritative text for human understanding of the meaning and quality of Being. The debate over approaches to truth is usually framed in the form of dichotomies including fact versus value, subjectivity versus objectivity, science versus ideology, truth versus interest. We do not intend here to reproduce the debate on these dichotomies, but only to point out that those who question the need for, or even the possibility of, an Islamic methodology see methods as purely technical procedures, lacking any normative elements, and hence completely objective. While we agree with the notion that methods can be purely technical, we contend that methodologies which establish the conditions for using methods — such as limitations or sources — cannot be described as purely technical.

In Part III, we will delineate some of the aspects of the methods developed by Western scholars which reveal their Western specificity. Here we will note the inadequacy of Western methods by briefly pointing out their cultural specificity.

First, ever since their early formulation in the works of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, modern Western methods have had an empiricist bias which culminated in the logical positivistic approach embodied in Western behaviorism in contemporary times. It is true that many Western social scientists have already abandoned behaviorism under pressure from its critics who have demonstrated the impossibili-

ty of separating fact from value in social studies. Yet, post-behaviorism does not signify a genuine change in the mode of scientific research, but merely a strategic move aligned at silencing critics. The positivistic bias of Western methodologies will be discussed at length in the second part of this work.

By employing empiricist--and hence ahistorical--methods, modern methodologies rise to the level of universal practices abstracted from contemporary Western society, thereby elevating norms embodied in modern society to the status of universal laws. As such, the methods embraced by Western scholarship, even when they remain purely technical, produce normatively biased laws and theories.

Secondly, throughout the last three centuries, Western scholarship was able to completely eliminate revelation as a source of knowledge, thereby reducing it to the level of mere fiction and myth. Although this elimination occurred as a result of the conflict between Western scholarship and revelation in its biblical form, a Muslim scientist finds it impossible to incorporate revelation into social scientific research by relying on modern Western methodology. A Muslim scientist has to either embrace Western methods, and hence exclude revelation as a source of knowledge, or accept revelation at the expense of completely abandoning modern methods and confining himself to purely classical methods.

Two European scholars played crucial roles in devising research methods that reduced the scope of reasoning -to individual contemplation and trapped human experience in empirical experience: Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant. The former did so by extracting reasoning from textual knowledge and the latter by insisting that the truth humans are capable of expounding is the empirical truth.

ANCHORING KNOWLEDGE IN PURE REASON

Rene Descartes introduced his new method of ascertaining the truth in *Discourse on Method,* which he later refined in *Meditations on the First Philosophy.* In *Discourse on Methods,* Descartes outlines his method in four rules:

The first was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.

The second, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

The third, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.

And the last, in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.[1]

Descartes begins his search for truth with *hyperbolic doubt,* whereby all the ideas and thoughts he received through education or based on trust in authority were declared doubtful and suspended in a state of negation until such time that they could be grounded in certainty.[2] He justifies his *wholesale* rejection of his ideas by arguing that it would be an "endless task" to run through all of them individually. He then proceeds to argue that even after we have doubted the existence of all objects we are capable of perceiving that one thing can never be doubted, namely, that we, the subjects who undertake the task of doubting, do exist. The conscious self, which is capable of thinking and doubting, is therefore the most fundamental basis of certainty. Hence the famous Cartesian axiom: "I think, therefore I exist."[3]

Descartes' conclusion of the certainty of his existence is in itself problematic because this certainty is not based on the immediate and self-evident awareness of the conscious self of its existence, but rather on the mediated process of thinking. In the latter case, the statement "I

think, I am" can be true only when we accept the truth of the principle of non-contradiction, which says that something can never exist and not exist at the same time. Yet Descartes makes no attempt to establish the principle of non-contradiction. This is a principle whose validity is presupposed by the notion "I think, therefore I am." At any rate, *Descartes has found a bedrock foundation on which he can reconstruct his ideas, viz. the certainty of a thinking existence.* The second step is to establish a connection between his thinking activities and an outer reality. Descartes finds this connection in judgment. For among all the mental concepts that the individual may possess, only judgments refer to external objects and are, therefore, susceptible to error and deception. Wants, desires, and imaginations cannot be declared to be true or false, since they make no claim of resembling or duplicating outer reality.[4]

Despite all the problems, ambiguities, and difficulties associated with the Cartesian method, it was celebrated and embraced by the Enlightenment philosophers and intellectuals -- for it embedded an ingenious mechanism that allowed these intellectuals to break with the past and provided an easy way out of the traditional frame of reference. The Enlightenment now possessed a method of theorizing that it could use to start anew. The method was quickly embraced and employed for the purpose of revolutionizing both the intellectual and social life. Thomas Hobbes was among the first philosophers to make use of the new approach and to translate the Cartesian transcendental subjectivism to political individualism.

LIMITING REASON TO EMPIRICAL TRUTH

The onslaught on transcendental ideas took its sophisticated form in Kant's critical philosophy. While Descartes shifted the locus of certainty from the objective to the subjective world, Kant was able to move it from the transcendental to the empirical. Descartes saw the idea of God as the fundamental basis for the establishment of the truth of objective reality, whereas Kant placed the same idea outside the sphere of ascertained knowledge and endeavored to ground 'truth' in sensible Objects.

Kant saw his mission as one of building the epistemological foundation for the emancipatory project of Enlightenment. He recognized that if reason were to replace revelation as the guiding principle of human thought and conduct, then reason would have to be able to furnish not only the theoretical ground for thought and judgment, but also the moral ground for conduct. His three highly influential *Critiques (The Critique of Pure Reason, The Critique of Practical Reason,* and *the Critique of Judgment)* were written for the purpose of ensuring the autonomy of human reason and to end its reliance and dependence on other sources.

His efforts led, however, to the further differentiation and formalization of reason and, ultimately, undermined the authority of substantive reason. By dividing reason into the three areas of theoretical cognition, practical rationality, and aesthetic judgment, giving each a foundation unto itself, the Kantian critical philosophy differentiated what Weber later referred to as the "value spheres of culture."[5]

Kant set out, in *The Critique of Pure Reason,* to examine "whether such thing as metaphysics be even possible at all?"[6] That is, the main question which prompted Kant to write his *Critique* was to find out whether it is possible for the mind to acquire knowledge apart from experience: *a priori* knowledge as Kant terms it. He observes that all judgments, in which two heterogeneous elements (the subject and the predicate) are united, may be divided into two types: analytic judgments, in which the predicate is already manifested in the subject, and synthetic judgments, in which the predicate lies outside the subject. Analytic judgments are, therefore, tautological since the predicate adds nothing new, which is not already included in the subject. Synthetic judgments, however, add to our knowledge because the information brought to bear on the subject cannot be deduced by analyzing the latter. Kant further observers that synthetic judgments are of two types: posteriori, obtained through experience and is therefore, part or the empirical world, and a priori, preceding all experience, and is part of the metaphysical world.

Having made this distinction, Kant can now reduce the initial question about the possibility of metaphysical knowledge into a more manageable question: "How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possi-

ble?"[7] Kant, obviously, has a practical interest in examining the possibility of *a priori* synthetic judgment. Since dogma and superstition could be ascertained only through this kind of judgment, establishing criteria that would exclude these two types of judgment would definitely contribute to human progress. Like Descartes, Kant recognizes that judgments are the only mental entities that connect mind with outer reality and link the realm of thinking with the realm of objective being. Judgments establish an absolute identity between the subject, which is "particular and in the form of being," and the predicate, which is "universal and in the form of thought." Unlike Descartes, however, he is intent on discrediting metaphysical inquiry and limiting the scope of theoretical research.

Kant distinguishes among three levels of apprehension: intuition, understanding, and reason. *Intuition* is the faculty of sense-perception, whereby the representations affected by the sensible objects are apprehended. The received representations are then organized through the concepts of the *understanding*. The faculty of understanding furnishes the rules by which sense-data are subsumed under the various concepts, hence imputing unity and order to the world of appearances. Finally, *reason* provides the principles which permit the unity of the concepts.[8] Kant maintains that this series of menial activities, in which intuition is connected with pure reason through the understanding, are interrelated. He further claims that the validity of each can be ascertained only insofar as the connection between the three levels of apprehension is maintained. That is to say, the validity of the mental processes that take place at the level of reason could be ascertained only as long as reason is employed for the purpose of demarcating the principles of logic, as to which functions are to regulate *posteriori* syntheses. Kant justifies the limitation he imposes on the use of pure reason by arguing that sense-data is the only access the mind has to the objective world. The correspondence between thoughts and objects has to be substantiated by intuition.

With Kant, transcendental subjectivism, inaugurated by Descartes, became a firmly established meta-theory. Interestingly enough, Kant employed transcendental arguments to rescue empiricism, which came to a dead end with Hume, and then to undermine transcendental

ideas. Kant distinguished between understanding and reason which he considered to be two separate "faculties" of the mind. The Objects of the former are empirical beings, while the objects of the latter are transcendental entities. Kant employed reason to show that *a priori* synthetic judgment is possible through the unity of appearances in the concepts. That the concepts themselves, though, are not part of the empirical world cannot be doubted because their existence is necessary for giving meaning and order to the empirical world.

Yet Kant refused to employ reason for the purpose of ascertaining, or even recognizing, the truth of other transcendental ideas even though their postulation is necessary for giving meaning and order to the moral world. Such ideas as infinity, freedom, dignity, equality, and responsibility have no reality unless they are expressed in mathematical or physical forms: unless the idea can be reduced to number or matter, it can be stripped from its truth and turned into fiction. Clearly, the Kantian epistemology is a theory of empirical knowledge, not of knowledge in general. It takes mathematical reasoning as its prototype. Yet by insisting that all truth has to be firmly grounded in the empirical world, Kantian transcendental subjectivism has postulated the absoluteness of finitude and empowered modern empiricism.

THE INADEQUACY OF TRADITIONAL METHODS

The difficulties facing the effort to reclaim transcendental truth, vigorously pursued by contemporary Islamic scholarship, are made more acute by the fact that pre-modern scientific methods cannot be employed in the task of overcoming the inadequacy of empiricism. This is because traditional sciences are themselves inadequate for guiding the ever evolving human experience. This inadequacy has been highlighted by a number of scholars.

Ismail al Faruqi, for instance, argued that the inadequacy of traditional methods reveals itself in two diametrically opposed tendencies. The first tendency is to restrict the field *of ijtihād* to legalistic reasoning, i.e. subsuming modern problems under legal categories, thereby reducing the *mujtahid* to a *faqīh* (jurist), and reducing scientific endeavors to legal research. The other tendency is to eliminate

all rational criteria and standards by adopting "a purely intuitive and esoteric methodology." Thus, sought-after methodology should avoid the excesses of these two approaches. That is to say, it should avoid restricting reasoning to the extent that modern problems confronting Muslim scholarship are placed outside the realm of scientific research, and at the same time, it should not allow the admission of fiction and superstition into the realm of true knowledge.[9]

The same concern is echoed by AbdulHamid AbuSulayman who links the crisis of modern Muslim intellectualism to the methodological inadequacies besetting contemporary Muslim thought, manifesting itself in the employment of exclusively linguistic and legalistic patterns of thinking. According to AbuSulayman, the dilemma of contemporary Muslim intellectualism is that while the *faqīh* as jurist is trained to handle legal/moral problems, he continues to be perceived as an all-around, universal intellectual, capable of resolving all problems of modern society. As he put it:

> The crisis [of Islamic thought] also lies in the nature of our Islamic methods of research, which are confined to textual studies of language, traditions and orthodox jurisprudence. These two attitudes are manifested in our tendency to regard the faqih (jurist) in the historical sense as one who is capable of resolving the crisis of thought, culture, and knowledge.[10]

Another aspect of the inadequacy of classical methods is highlighted by Mona Abul-Fadl. The reason classical methods are inadequate, she points out, is that while the study of social phenomena requires a holistic approach whereby social relations are systemized pursuant to universal rules, classical methods are atomistic, relying primarily on analogical reasoning.[11] That is, traditional Islamic methods are incapable of reconnecting the particular fields of knowledge to the overall meaning of revelation and human experience.

The inadequacy of modern Western and classical Muslim methods points to the need to forge alternative methodological approaches capable of transcending the limitations of both; however, efforts aimed at overcoming the above-mentioned inadequacies have been hindered

by mounting difficulties. Understanding the difficulties associated with the task of introducing alternative methodological approaches will be our primary concern in the next section.

TRANSCENDENTAL RATIONALITY

Post-modern critique of modernism is, in many ways, a revolt against the latter's efforts to elevate historical—and hence culturally-specific—forms of reason into the level of universal truth. Rejecting the tyranny of modern rationality, post-modernism adopts the opposite extreme by diluting the very notion of reason and truth, and hence threatens to replace modern order with post-modern chaos. Is there then any way out of the current impasse?

Classical Islamic scholarship seems to suggest an alternative approach to knowledge and truth, whereby reason and received texts do not stand to negate each other, and neither can claim final authority. Classical Muslim scholars realized that all texts, including the revealed text, need interpretation. Since all normative systems are ultimately rooted in a religious text of sorts, rejecting the relevance of religious sources to social knowledge is both arbitrary and deceptive. A more methodical approach requires the recognition of the need to root the transcendental presuppositions of scholarly knowledge in divine text and the systematization of all knowledge in a rational discourse.

That is, claims about what is socially desirable cannot be made by provoking the authority of the revealed text, but by illustrating the internal cohesiveness and external consistency of all normative systems that are embedded in authoritative sources. All claims to transcendental truth must be mediated by rational arguments. This would allow a plurality of truth claims without doing away with the possibility of pursuing higher truth, and without stifling meaningful exchange and dialogue among competing systems.

To avoid lapsing into the realm of irrationalism and intellectual tribalism, it is imperative that transcendental values and metaphysical suppositions be openly acknowledged and straightforwardly attributed to their religious sources. This would not only make a fresh beginning of an un-apologetic intellectualism, but could potentially redirect intel-

lectual progress away from the track of irrationalism and moral chaos. As long as religiously discovered truth is defended through rational argumentation, the possibility of falling back into absolutism remains far removed.

While this approach may, understandably, create unease among those whose exposure to intellectual traditions is limited to those of the West, Muslim intellectuals in particular would take comfort in a long Muslim tradition in which science and rationality thrived by asserting, rather than denying, the centrality of divine revelation to human life and thought. Muslim intellectuals and scholars are particularly obligated to provide the leadership needed to reconcile intellectual tradition with modern human consciousness that is increasingly yearning for meaning and value.

This leads us to the question of inadequacy raised in connection with the traditional methods of *al-usūl*. It is significant to note that although the question of inadequacy is usually raised in relation to traditional methods, it is by no means exclusive to them. Modern Western methods are also inadequate for the development of a social science that considers divine revelation an intrinsic source of knowledge. At this stage, however, the term *inadequate* should be understood to mean *less than adequate,* and not *invalid.* The task of contemporary Muslim scholars is, therefore, to examine methods developed in both Western and Muslim traditions to determine the source of their inadequacy, and the possibility of being developed, supplemented, or invalidated.

The Task Ahead

We have, thus far, attributed the inadequacy of traditional methods to three factors: being exclusively legalistic, being overtly linguistic, and being excessively atomistic. Although the above characterization reveals a great deal about traditional methods, and is in the main a fair description of them, it nonetheless overlooks streams within classical thought which attempted to balance some of the mainstream excesses. For example, the theory of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah (purposes of Sharī'ah),* advanced by *al-Shātibī,* was intended to systemize the science of fiqh and counterbalance the atomistic tendency in classical legal thought.

It may be concluded, therefore, that there can be no hope for escaping the pre-methodological state of contemporary Muslim scholarship without having a serious and profound encounter with methodological approaches generated in both traditional Muslim and modern Western scholarship. This very idea of examining both classical Muslim and modern Western methodological approaches in order to build on their strengths and overcome their shortcomings is what constitutes the primary task of this study. In our examination of classical and modern methodologies, we aspire to answer four interrelated questions:

1. What methods should one use for deriving social concepts and categories from revealed sources?
2. What methods should one use for deriving concepts and categories from empirical sources?
3. What methods should one use for the differentiation (horizontal ordering) and stratification (vertical ordering) of concepts and categories derived from both revealed and empirical sources? And finally,
4. What methods should one use for linking transcendental concepts and categories with empirical ones?

To deal with the epistemological challenge of reclaiming transcendence and transcendental knowledge as part of the notion of knowledge and truth leads ultimately to issues of methodology. What methods are scientifically defensible in pursuing knowledge grounded in truth? This is the main focus of this book; delineating proper methods for pursuing knowledge occupy the remaining chapters of this book. As the work in this volume underscores methodology and methodological inquiries, a definition will provide a useful frame for the remainder of the text. Methodology is the field of scientific inquiry concerned with the examination of the methods used in the study of natural and human phenomena. A scientific method consists of a number of rules a researcher must follow in the study of the subject matter of his research. Those researchers who apply scientific methods may claim that the knowledge produced by their research is scientific. However, researchers who fail to employ scientific methods may not

lay claim to science, even when the results of their research happen to correspond with the true nature of things. For, lacking the support of a sound method, the correspondence between knowledge haphazardly *produced* and the true nature of things may be a sheer coincidence. This does not mean, however, that inquiries must always use methods currently acknowledged by the scientific community as scientific, for it is quite legitimate for a researcher to use a new method, never used before, provided he can demonstrate its "soundness." The determination of the soundness of scientific methods is the task of methodology.

Methodology is thus the field of scientific inquiry in the justification, description, and explanation of the rules and procedures that constitute scientific methods. As such, methodology is not confined to description of scientific procedures, but involves the analysis of the grounds that justify their use. This means that the study of methodology impinges on questions studied under the label of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. However, while scientific examination is extended in epistemology to all theoretical questions relating to Knowledge, in methodology the examination revolves around those questions which directly relate to the use of scientific methods.

In this study, we will concern ourselves with exploring methods developed by both classical Islamic and modern Western scholars, in an attempt to arrive at alternative scientific methods more congruent with Islamic norms and concerns.

"... *the Foundation of Knowledge*'s most fundamental concern is to trace the evolution of scientific methodology and to highlight Islamic scholarship's everlasting contribution to grounding scientific research in social experience while bringing transcendental knowledge to bear on normative frameworks. In addition, the book emphasizes the need to remain open-minded to a variety of scientific approaches to social phenomena. The book is of particular interest to the students of methodology and scientific methods, as it catalogs the various approaches to systematic investigation and sheds light on the profound role early Muslim scholars played in laying the foundation of scientific knowledge."

Louay M. Safi is director of the *Center of Governance and Public Policy* and professor of political science at University of Hamid Ben Khalifa, Doha, Qatar. He writes and lectures on democracy, human rights, leadership, and Islam and the West. He is the author of fourteen books and numerous papers, including *The Tensions and Transitions in the Muslim world* (University Press of America, 2003) and the Qur'anic Narrative (Pragaer, 2009).