

Session 2: Elie Kedourie and Modernized Despotism

Introduction

THE idea of “Oriental despotism” did not disappear with Montesquieu. It survived, in altered form, into modern political science as an attempt to explain why some societies repeatedly produced strong states, weak intermediary institutions, insecure property, and subjects with little organized capacity to restrain rulers. What had once been expressed in the language of climate, custom, religion, and “the East” was gradually reformulated as a problem of political sociology: what kinds of social structure permit power to be checked, and what kinds allow the state to dominate society?

The most important twentieth-century revival of the category came with Karl August Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* (1957). Wittfogel was primarily a historian of China, and his famous argument was not intended as a theory of Middle Eastern politics. He linked the rise of despotic political systems to “hydraulic societies,” in which large-scale irrigation, flood control, and water management fostered centralized administration and powerful bureaucracies. Yet the enduring importance of his argument lay less in irrigation than in his broader formulation of the political order such systems produce: the state is stronger than society. Private property may exist, but it does not generate independent political power; officials depend on the ruler; autonomous centers of authority remain weak; and the government possesses the means to prevent the formation of institutions capable of challenging it.

Wittfogel thus gave a modern sociological vocabulary to an old European contrast. In the Western historical model, property, corporations, estates, churches, cities, and feudal obligations generated competing centers of authority. Over time, these constraints limited rulers and contributed to constitutional government. In the despotic model, by contrast, political and military power determined access to wealth rather than wealth providing an independent base of political power. The distinction was no longer simply between free Europe and servile Asia; it was between a state embedded in a plural society and a state capable of overwhelming society.

Elie Kedourie (bio below) repeatedly applies Wittfogel's shorthand to the Middle East for precisely this reason. By the time Kedourie was writing, however, "Oriental despotism" had become unfashionable. Postwar political science generally preferred the languages of modernization, development, authoritarianism, class, nationalism, and later dependency or state-building. The older concept also carried an obvious burden: it could appear to reduce vastly different Asian and Middle Eastern societies to a timeless civilizational type.

Kedourie therefore stands conspicuously outside the main intellectual current. He did not merely retain the term; he argued that it still identified a real and durable political structure. In his 1957 review of Wittfogel, he welcomed the book as a corrective to the habit of forcing non-Western societies into categories derived from European political experience. He believed Wittfogel had recovered a genuinely comparative category that political science had allowed to disappear.

What makes Kedourie especially interesting is that he did not treat modernization as the opposite of despotism. He thought modernization could strengthen despotism. Traditional Middle Eastern rulers possessed considerable authority, but their reach was limited. Religious law, local communities, tribes, poor communications, weak administrative machinery, and simple technological limitations left substantial areas of social life beyond effective state control. Nineteenth-century contact with Europe did not necessarily create civil society. Instead, Middle Eastern rulers first borrowed what Kedourie regarded as another European tradition: enlightened absolutism, which promoted centralization, bureaucracy, conscription, taxation, and the deliberate remaking of society from above. The modern state thereby acquired powers of penetration and mobilization that its supposedly despotic predecessor could only have imagined.

For Kedourie, twentieth-century military regimes carried this process further. Westernized officers overthrew governments in the name of reform, development, equality, and national regeneration, only to concentrate power even more heavily in the state. One-party organizations, security services, nationalization, planning, and oil revenues expanded rulers' ability to penetrate economic and social life. Modernization could therefore produce not the erosion of Oriental despotism but what might be called its modernization: old habits of political domination equipped with the administrative and technological instruments of the modern state.

This argument places Kedourie at odds with much of the optimism surrounding modernization theory and later democratization theory. His central question was not whether a society had elections, development plans, universities, political parties, or modern bureaucracies. It was whether institutions existed between ruler and individual that possessed enough autonomy to limit political power. His contrast between despotism and “civil politics” therefore turns ultimately on the existence of a genuine civil society: secure property, independent associations, rules binding rulers as well as the ruled, and political institutions through which interests can be represented and authority checked. Where these are absent, modernity may alter the instruments of government without altering its essential political relationship.

The readings in this session should therefore be approached as an unusually forceful survival of the old despotism thesis within late twentieth-century scholarship. Kedourie was not representative of the political science mainstream; in important respects, he was an outlier. Yet precisely for that reason, his argument is useful. It poses in stark form a question that has never entirely disappeared: does modernization create the social foundations of constitutional politics, or can it instead furnish authoritarian states with greater resources for controlling society? That question connects the eighteenth-century controversy over Oriental despotism to the modern debate over why liberal and democratic institutions have proved so difficult to consolidate in much of the Middle East.

Explanatory notes to the readings appear from page 66.



Elie Kedourie



Elie Kedourie (1926–1992) was an Iraqi-born British historian and political thinker, long associated with the London School of Economics, whose work challenged nationalist mythology, modernization theory, and the moral pretensions of anticolonial politics. Trained in the history of the modern Middle East, he wrote with unusual force on the Ottoman legacy, European imperial policy, Arab nationalism, and the political consequences of weak institutions and ideological ambition. Kedourie rejected the view that nationalism was the natural expression of ancient peoples, treating it instead as a modern European doctrine imported into societies whose political traditions it often disrupted. Skeptical of grand theories and revolutionary promises, he emphasized contingency, inherited political cultures, and the limits of statecraft. His judgments were often severe and controversial, but his scholarship was marked by formidable learning, close attention to texts, and a persistent distrust of explanations that conflated moral aspiration with historical reality.

Kedourie was not only a historian of the modern Middle East but also, in an important sense, a philosopher of history: much of his scholarship opposed theories that purported to discern necessary laws or predetermined purposes in historical development. His early work on Hegel exposed what he regarded as the dangerous political consequences of converting speculative philosophies of history into doctrines of collective destiny. He was especially suspicious of historicist assumptions that nations, classes, or civilizations possessed inherent historical missions, and of the belief that political action could be justified by reference to an inevitable future. Against such systems, Kedourie emphasized individual responsibility, political judgment, and the irreducible complexity of historical circumstances. His work on the Middle East therefore formed part of a larger intellectual argument: history should illuminate the limits of political action, not supply ideological movements with prophecies of their eventual triumph.



The Hydraulic Society (1957)

(Review of *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. By Karl A. Wittfogel.)

That despotism should be Oriental has always seemed a fitting sort of notion. Athenian freedom contrasted with the slavish obedience of the Medes and the Persians, the decline of Rome traced to the day when methods of absolutism were successfully transplanted from the East: such were familiar commonplaces in Europe, confirmed and amplified by the reports of travellers from China, India and the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, it is a curious fact that European political thinkers—and political thinking itself is a European specialty—have given scant attention, in formulating their theories, to the phenomena of Oriental politics. The great exception among the moderns is, of course, Montesquieu, a subtle and imaginative, but neglected writer. As Europe has extended her intellectual and political dominance over the whole world, the general trend has been rather to make concepts and categories which have their origin in European political life do service to explain situations quite alien to the Western tradition. The result has been a prodigious amount of talking at cross-purposes, the creation of influential legends and the perpetuation of obstinate misunderstandings.

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the appearance of Professor Wittfogel's work on *Oriental Despotism* is a landmark in the literature of politics. The author, a well-known historian of Chinese society, examines lucidly and exhaustively in this book a type of society which, in various forms, has endured for centuries in the most populous and most closely settled parts of the world. The sweep of his vision, the breadth of his learning, the skill of his method and the ease of his exposition will ensure for his book the attention of all who care for the study of politics.

The political institutions which Mr. Wittfogel considers arose in different parts of the world, but mainly in the East and in pre-conquest South America. They arose in what he calls hydraulic societies. In these societies, the author explains, geographical conditions make it necessary for

extensive schemes of water preservation and flood control to be set afoot, entailing a powerful bureaucracy and strict supervision by a central authority. It is not necessary for his argument that hydraulic works and bureaucratic rule should be related as cause and effect, nor is it clear that he commits himself to such a rigid relationship; it is enough that they should be observed together, and this Mr. Wittfogel's book amply and conclusively establishes. Another part of his argument shows that the political techniques of a hydraulic society can be successfully introduced into places where hydraulic conditions do not obtain. These are the marginal areas of the hydraulic world, of which the most striking example is Russia after the Mongol invasion.

The political condition of the hydraulic world may be succinctly described in Mr. Wittfogel's words as one in which the State is stronger than society. It is a common premise of European political thought—and one on which Marxism exclusively relies—that property bestows political power. Such an assumption is out of place in the hydraulic world. Under Oriental despotism private property yields revenue but not power. Mr. Wittfogel cites the case of a Chinese general who, to prove that he was politically harmless, tried to show that he was only interested in acquiring land. Legal arrangements, a quick and tenacious intelligence service, an accurate census and land survey prevent the formation of centres of independent power which might challenge the central authority. Feudalism with its contractual obligations, as known in Europe, does not exist under Oriental despotism. Instead, the bureaucrats, servants and sometimes slaves of the despot are rewarded with office, land which is liable to confiscation at their master's pleasure.

We recognise the world of the Thousand and One Nights, its capricious potentates, its eunuchs, slaves, glitter and magic, and its sudden catastrophic transformation into the drab world outside the West which today is given over to grim, monstrous upstarts, smooth demagogues and conspiratorial colonels; while the hydraulic works give way to five-year plans, development boards and State capitalism.

These are the more powerful, the industrial or industrialising heirs of the hydraulic despots. The author observes that despotism is the same, only the methods change. The system of Oriental despotism is obstinately durable; unchecked power has a cumulative tendency. Where it has weakened and lost grip, this has been the result of European political and military action; and even then such action has unwittingly destroyed the existing order to

make way in many cases for an even more oppressive one. Is there a kind of inevitability about Oriental despotism? It is very tempting to think so. It is also safer to work on such an assumption and take one's precautions accordingly, rather than be lured and eventually betrayed by Point Fours, Technical Aid, pictorial ballots and similar pleasantries.

Good political writing is a Sisyphean enterprise. Words become slipshod, ideas perverted and debased, and perpetual effort is necessary to restore the sanity of discourse, and affirm that things are what they are. China and Russia interpreted by the help of Marx, or Turkey by that of Durkheim, or India by that of J. S. Mill have resulted in an intolerable strain on the vocabulary of politics. Not the least thing for which Mr. Wittfogel will be applauded is that his work is a rare and powerful attempt to ease this strain.



“Civil Politics” in the Middle East (1988)

The expression “civil politics” can bear more than one meaning. “Civil” at first blush is the opposite of “uncivil,” and this contrast immediately evokes for us the idea of manners, of norms of good behavior in polite or civilized society. In private life, good manners are learned by example, by the young emulating and imitating their elders. Norms are here implicit and usually unspoken, but that good manners involve following rules is undoubted. In social life, it is only when there is some lack or disorientation, or some breakdown in the customary transmission of codes that there arises a need for books of etiquette that purport systematically to set out civilized modes of behavior. Social intercourse is of course not the only field where rules are necessary. Rules, in particular, play an essential part in political life, but in contrast to private life, here rules do have to be spelled out with precision and made publicly available: rules of debate, rules governing forms of legislation or the conduct of litigation. When these activities are rule-bound, government is said to be constitutional. The range of meanings associated with civility thus becomes greatly enlarged.

There is another meaning that may be attached to the word. We may contrast “civil” with “military.” The usage here is unequivocally associated with public affairs, yet it is not entirely separate from the earlier range of meanings. Military government, which is at the opposite pole of civil

government, is by definition arbitrary government. Such government is simply the fiat of a military leader, and thus the expression of unrestrained caprice. Whether capricious rule is good or bad, it remains true that it cannot be the government of laws. Military government, it follows, is less civilized than civil government.

There is a third meaning attached to the word “civil” that is probably the most important in a political context. We can use the word as Hegel uses it in the phrase “civil society.” The phrase was used in eighteenth-century writings to denote a variety of meanings. Hegel appropriated it in order to describe a state of affairs that he believed to be characteristic of modern European life, to be indeed an integral part of the idea of the modern European state. Hegel’s discussion of civil society is one of the most original features of his treatise *The Philosophy of Right*. And if we look at civil society as delineated by Hegel, we may indeed see connections between the three meanings of the word civil mentioned here.

Man, as Hegel sees him, is by definition free. He is such because he has mind and will. Who says mind says will, and who says will says freedom. What, however, makes modern European society so different from other and earlier societies is that in it man has become aware of his freedom. This was by no means always the case. Previously men thought that they were under divine rule or the rule of a master. They were not aware that each one of them is a focus of thinking and willing. What men always were in themselves, now in modern European society, they became for themselves.

But what, according to Hegel, is freedom? It is not simply the awareness that I can dispose of my own thoughts, that I am a free agent who can decide right and wrong for himself. This is not enough. Such freedom has to be externalized, to be made actual, and the first step in this direction is the possession of property. If you cannot possess property, you cannot begin to realize your freedom and must remain a diminished human being.

Possession, however, remains precarious until it becomes a right. A right becomes such when it is recognized by fellowmen. Property thus implies mutual recognition of rights and entails the idea of contract by which property transactions are regulated. Contract in turn implies rules and judges who adjudicate quarrels between property owners according to these rules. A society of property owners entails also the existence of a market in which mutually beneficial exchanges become possible. The market gives

men the opportunity to better themselves by exercising to mutual benefit their ingenuity and inventiveness. The development of man's ingenuity and inventiveness is also an enlargement of human freedom. The market, then, the field where men realize more fully their freedom, is what Hegel means by civil society. And it is in modern Europe that the institutions of civil society are most fully developed.

Civil society, moreover, serves to mediate between the individual and the properly political institutions that have to do with the exercise of sovereignty and parliamentary representation. These institutions are the guarantee of freedom that the market cannot on its own supply. Like the market, political institutions are fashioned by men for themselves and cannot endure without their continuous loyalty. The notion of the civil as it occurs in the phrase *civil society*, is, then, much richer than that which is evoked by the contrast either with the uncivil or the military.

Civil society mediates between individual and state, between private and public. This mediation is absent in the polis where the distinction between private and public is unknown. For this reason, it would be utterly suffocating for modern man to live in a polis. The mediation is likewise impossible in what Hegel called the oriental realm where one man alone is free: the ruler who has everyone else in his realm in his control and at his mercy. Hegel's work here may be considered a summing-up and an articulation of the assumptions and organizing ideas relating to a state of affairs that has taken a very long time to appear in its full shape in Western Europe.

If such are the possible meanings of the term *civil*, how may one describe the prospects of civil politics in the Middle East? By Middle East is meant here the core area of the Muslim world, where Islam arose and in which it predominates. Of this Middle East, which is a region of the spirit rather than simply a geographical area, Israel does not form part. Jewish history and Jewish tradition are far too different for this to be possible.

Since in human history things do not emerge fully formed from the waves, if civil politics is to have a future in the Middle East, it must have had some kind of past. If we start with the notion that man, though free in himself, becomes free for himself, or aware of his freedom, only at a particular point in his history, then it has to be said that this awareness of freedom is absent from the political tradition of the Middle East. What does very much exist

is the awareness that there are rulers and there are subjects, and that passive obedience is the only prudent stance of subjects toward rulers. The Middle East is part of the oriental realm where “oriental despotism” is the norm. Here, as Karl Wittfogel has so strikingly put it, the state is stronger than society. Such a state of affairs has many features, a prominent one being that property—which is the indispensable externalization of human freedom—is here precarious. This can be illustrated from numerous countries within the oriental realm, in the past as well as in the present. In the Middle East, in particular, today as yesterday, expropriation and confiscation is a contingency always to be reckoned with. In the Middle East, as elsewhere in the oriental realm, wealth is primarily wealth in land, and in oriental despotism, land is very much the affair of the ruler, who usually claims a right of eminent domain over all land whatsoever. Here, the market, which does, of course, exist since people buy and sell commodities like food and clothes, is therefore very rudimentary.

In the traditional oriental despotism, there is yet a limitation on the ruler’s exercise of power, since there are many aspects of life with which it does not occur to him to interfere. Along with his subjects, he takes for granted, and believes in, a cosmic or divine order that no one is at liberty to meddle with. A very good example is the *shari‘a*, the divinely sanctioned Muslim law that, until modern times, it had never occurred to a Muslim ruler to question. The *shari‘a*, however, had to be supplemented by edicts and rules necessary for the governance of an extensive empire—rules that can be subsumed under the general rubric of the public interest. What the public interest covers can be interpreted either narrowly or widely. On the whole, traditional Muslim rulers tended to the narrow interpretation. They did not, for instance, consider it part of their responsibility to provide for education, and it never occurred to them that they could engage in the political mobilization of their subjects.

Contact with Europe from the nineteenth century onward produced many far-reaching changes in the governance of the Middle East. This contact did not tend to the creation of a civil society. Rather, it introduced a form of government, equally to be found in modern Europe, of enlightened absolutism. This is the form of European government that traditional rulers in the oriental realm, the Middle East included, found most useful, most easy to introduce and operate, when they decided that steps had to be taken to protect themselves against the military and technical superiority of European states that was daily becoming more obvious and threatening.

Enlightened absolutism signifies that the ruler himself decides what is best for the welfare of his subjects and fashions society in a way such as to realize his vision. The vision is a benevolent one. It looks forward to the greater welfare and prosperity of the subject and to greater social harmony. The subjects cannot themselves provide for these desirable ends, nor are they even aware that they can be attained. It is the ruler and his servants, moved by this enlightened vision, who alone can bestow this boon on the society they govern.

With the spread of this ideal among the official and intellectual classes in the Middle East, traditional oriental despotism changed into something much more ambitious. The new style of government is meticulous, centralized, and in the end much more burdensome for the subject. In the last century and a half the scope of Middle Eastern government, and the burdens it has imposed on the subjects, has grown by leaps and bounds, and those groups in Middle Eastern society that, for one reason or another, had enjoyed some autonomous existence, now find themselves under the control of centralizing governments. This has been the fate of nomadic tribes and of non-Muslim communities. These latter had traditionally been allowed communal self-government and their own communal courts. Their status was of course inferior to that of the Muslims, but provided they kept the peace and paid their taxes, the rulers generally left them alone. As for the nomads, their freedom from control owed much to the fact that the writ of traditional rulers was difficult to enforce in the outlying regions where Bedouins and other nomads dwelt. But the logic of centralization required the gradual weakening and eventual emasculation of communal organization, while the much more powerful weapons now at the disposal of government destroyed the freedom of the nomads that nonexistent roads, ramshackle communications, and the tribesman's simple rifle had hitherto defended.

But centralization and enlightenment did not, in the event, produce the greater strength and prosperity that they had promised. Governments have attempted to do much more than they had ever done and have failed. The disappointment of these hopes has led, in the twentieth century, to military coups d'état organized by enlightened, Westernized officers. These had become progressively more disenchanted with the result of European-style reforms, and attributed their failure to greed and corruption. Whether it is the Young Turks in 1908–1909 or Nasser in 1952, the impulse is the same.

It is to apply heroic remedies and sweep away with a forcible gesture all the obstructions standing in the way of a good life. The result of these interventions was paradoxical, since the intent was to progress toward more orderly, more accountable government, while the unavoidable result was a regression toward military caprice and arbitrariness.

Another, related, aspect of politics in the modern Middle East is the prevalence, which follows from the character of military rule, of one-party regimes. The expression is itself paradoxical since the very word assumes and indicates variety and multiplicity. These so-called one-party regimes are associated with the rise of modern military governments. Some of these regimes have emulated European models, like the German National Socialist party, or the Soviet Communist party, and have aspired to penetrate and control all social, economic, and even familial organizations. The Ba'ath Party both in Iraq and in Syria has been fairly successful in this endeavor. If the Ba'ath and similar parties have not been as successful as they had hoped, this was because they were frustrated by indolence, incompetence, and corruption. These fortunately provide small interstices within which privacy and private interests can find refuge and protection.

A comparatively recent development has served to increase greatly in some countries the power and reach of government. Modern Western enterprise has developed the Middle Eastern oil industry, but the consequence in recent years has been to transform the governments benefiting from the prodigious oil revenues into the father and mother of the populations over whom they hold sway. Such a development is in the logic of oriental despotism, but one which, in the absence of sufficient resources at the rulers' disposal, could not hitherto be realized.

If a civil polity is one that is rule-governed, and if it is asked whether a polity of this kind has a future in the Middle East, then we have to say that it hardly has a present, and that it certainly did not have a past. The slight qualification has to be made because of the record of two states, namely Lebanon and Turkey. Lebanon did in fact become a polity endowed with a civil society, but with the removal of Western power and influence from the Middle East, the polity proved too weak to withstand the assault of more powerful neighbors, and it is now well-nigh destroyed.

As for Turkey, until 1918, it was the center of the Ottoman Empire, a great oriental despotism. It was also in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries the theater of all these experiments in enlightened absolutism, whether by the sultans or by the Young Turks. After the destruction of the empire, the experiments were continued by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic who culminated in his own person the Young Turk ideals and attitudes. The regime that he established survived until the late 1940s.

With the elections of 1950—which were genuine elections—a constitutional, representative, and parliamentary regime came into being. But this regime has experienced a military coup d'état in 1960 and 1980, and a semi-coup in 1971. It has survived these incidents, but that they happened indicates how precarious civil politics remains in Turkey. Thus, with all kinds of caveats and hesitations one may conclude that here are indications of a new, as yet frail, kind of Middle Eastern polity that may approximate to what Hegel had in mind when he was describing civil society and the state that goes with it and in which it can thrive.



Politics in the Middle East (1992, excerpt)

The Legacy

Whether it is defined in geographical or cultural terms, and whatever its exact boundaries are held to be, there can be no disputing the fact that the Middle East is predominantly Muslim. The beliefs, norms, and attitudes of Islam, the experiences, triumphs, and vicissitudes that Muslims have encountered over the centuries have combined to bring about a society of a highly distinctive character, with its own unmistakable patina. Muslims, but equally non-Muslims dwelling in the Muslim domain, are strongly marked by the Muslim tradition, and what may be called the Muslim civilization, the more so that until very recent times, the Muslim world had little contact with, little curiosity about, and little respect for what went on outside its boundaries. Even today, when the Western world is the source of industrial techniques and military weapons, and is seen as providing intellectual and political norms, Islam as a religion is very far from being defeated or silenced. And its influence as a culture, whether acknowledged or not, obstinately persists in permeating and shaping institutions, attitudes, and

modes of discourse. This is nowhere more true than in government and politics, and in the mutual responses of the rulers and the ruled.

In the version of Islamic history traditionally accepted by Muslims, Islam, as the Prophet Muhammad left it at his death in the year 632 of the Christian era (CE), was not only a religion, but also a government, and a fast-rising international power. Tribes and tribal chieftains were converted to the new religion and made their submission to the Prophet, who was at once the Messenger of God, and the political head of the new Muslim community a political head who was also leader in war and justiciar. The vast territories conquered, from very soon after the Prophet's death, were conquered and administered in the name of Islam, and became a part of the Islamic domain. What Western Christianity from very early times distinguished as temporal and spiritual were *ab initio* inextricably intermixed in Islam. Islam made the Muslims one community where all concerns, spiritual and temporal, were attended to and codified in the Divine Law as revealed in the Koran and in the Prophetic Traditions. This community, the jurists taught, constituted the Muslim *umma*, i.e. a body of people who were the object of the divine plan of salvation and who therefore were the proper unit of political organization. The *umma* is unlike a Greek *polis* or a modern nation-state. Its basis is not kinship or the occupation of a well-defined national territory. Wherever the *umma* is, there is *dar al-islam*, the abode of Islam; all the rest is *dar al-harb*, the abode of war, where infidels rule. *Dar al-islam*, therefore, knows no permanent territorial frontier, and whatever comes under Islamic authority becomes part of *dar al-islam*. Nor is the *umma* like the Roman empire, a city-state which eventually developed into an extensive dominion, where citizenship became a legal, but not a religious bond. The nearest analogy to the *umma*, but a very imperfect one, is the idea of a *respublica Christiana*. But this *respublica* never achieved even the most transient political reality, and from early on it was supposed to be governed by two distinct, albeit related, authorities, the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium*.

The *umma*, then, is a community dedicated to the service of God according to His commandments, and to spreading the true faith. The religion, therefore, is necessarily inseparable from politics. This may be seen from the fact that a perpetual duty which Islam enjoins on the community as a whole is the duty of *jihad*, that is, of taking arms against the enemy at the behest of the rulers. On the border, in battle areas, and whenever the ruler so orders, the collective duty, however, becomes incumbent on each

individual Muslim. The Prophet, as has been said, was considered to be the first ruler, justiciar, and leader in prayer of the religious polity which he had established at Medina. He took the political decisions, received emissaries from the tribes, appointed tax-collectors, and decided on military expeditions. At his death, these functions are said to have devolved on one of his earliest followers, his father-in-law Abu Bakr, who, in the traditional account, came to be known as the successor, the *khalifah*, of the Messenger of God. Whether this was the original significance of the title, or whether, as has been cogently argued, the *khalifah* was originally understood to be God's deputy rather than the Prophet's successor (the word *khalifah* signifying both successor and deputy), those who assumed the office of caliph united all these powers in their own person. Caliphs also had other titles which emphasize various aspects of the office. The caliph is *amir al-mu'minin*, commander of the faithful. This title emphasizes the Muslim ruler's authority as military leader. The immense and astonishing conquests made by the Muslims soon after the appearance of Islam gave this title a particular weight and resonance. Another title given to the Muslim ruler is that of *imam*, which emphasizes the religious character of his office. The *imam* in Muslim worship leads the worshippers at the daily prayers, and is followed by them in performing the prescribed ritual movements of bowing, kneeling, and prostration. During his lifetime the Prophet acted as *imam* for the Muslim community, but in his last illness he is said to have ordered Abu Bakr to act as *imam*. This is believed to have facilitated Abu Bakr's choice as caliph, since in Muhammad's lifetime leadership in prayer undoubtedly signified leadership of the community. While the prophetic office was naturally peculiar to Muhammad, the maintenance of the Divine Law was a responsibility which devolved upon his successors, along with all the other functions which he is held to have exercised at Medina.

The caliphate or imamate, then, is, as laid down by the jurists, the highest public office in Islam, indeed the only one in which authority, subject of course to Divine Law, is original. The office combines executive and judicial authority in the widest possible sense. At any one time it inheres in one person alone, and the Muslim world did not find it possible to set up any institution or device whereby the members of the *umma* could articulate their varying opinions and interests, and whereby the power of the caliph could be checked, counterbalanced, or in any way contained. This may not have seemed necessary at the beginning, for the caliph could be considered as bound by the ordinances of Divine Law, charged with maintaining it, and with attending to the common concerns of the Muslims.

In any case, the office was, at the start, elective, and the election was held to be conditional. In accepting the *bay'a*, the formal act of homage signifying the recognition of his authority, the caliph, as the jurists taught, bound himself to exercise his office within the limits set by Divine Law, and to defend, secure, and generally tend the interests of Islam. This was a legally binding contract of government whereby obedience was due so long as the caliph did not order the Muslims to do what is contrary to God's Law.

The duty to obey the caliph was not simply the outcome or concomitant of a civil contract between ruler and ruled: it was grounded in religion. The Koran declares; 'O believers! Obey God and obey the Prophet and those who are in authority over you.' And many *hadiths*, i.e. traditions attributed to the Prophet and having the same binding force as Koranic revelation, also enjoin this duty. Thus, one *hadith* declares: 'The Apostle of God said: "Whoso obeys me, obeys God, and whoso rebels against me, rebels against God. Whoso obeys the ruler, obeys me, and whoso rebels against the ruler, rebels against me."' The reason for such injunctions is clear: a godly life is a life lived according to the *shari'a*, the Divine Law. But the law is not maintained by itself, it requires someone to uphold and enforce it. As one jurist was to put it:

At the head of the Muslims there must necessarily stand someone who sees to it that their laws are carried out, their statutes maintained, their borders defended, and their armies equipped, who makes sure that their obligatory taxes are collected, that men of violence, thieves and highwaymen are suppressed, that services are held on Fridays and feast-days, that minors (in need of a guardian) can be married, that the spoils of war are justly divided, and that similar legal obligations, which no single member of the community can take care of, are performed.

The vicissitudes of Muslim history, the divisions and schisms which marked its earliest history, the heresies, the civil wars, the insubordinate soldiery, and the disorders they continually generated made the necessity of a ruler who would protect the community and keep it together an ever more insistent and prominent leitmotiv in Muslim political thought. Some five centuries after the appearance of Islam, the great theologian Ghazali (who died in 1111 CE) eloquently set out in a classic passage the reasons why an *imam* has to be instituted, and why obedience to him is not only a rational, but also a religious obligation:

We maintain that the right ordering of religion was certainly the purpose of the Agent of revelation. This is an absolute premise on which there can be no disagreement. We will add to it another premise, to the effect that the right ordering of religion can only obtain where there is an *imam* to whom obedience is given. It follows from these two premises, that the contention that an *imam* must be set up is correct. If it be said however that the second premise is not granted, to wit, that the right ordering of a religion can only obtain through an *imam* to whom obedience is given, therefore prove it, then we will say: The proof is that the right ordering of religion can only obtain where there is right ordering of the world, and the right ordering of the world can only be obtained through an *imam* to whom obedience is given. Here are two premises. Where does the disagreement lie?

And if it be asked: Why do you say that the right ordering of religion can only result from the right ordering of the world, when, in fact, it can only result from the ruin of the world, for are not the spiritual and the temporal opposites, and does not the prosperity of the one entail the ruin of the other? Our answer is: This is the speech of him who does not understand what we mean by ‘the world’ in this context. It is an ambiguous word which may, on the one hand, refer to excessive self-enjoyment and pleasure beyond need and necessity, and, on the other, it may refer to all the necessities in the life before death. In one sense, it is indeed against religion, but in the other, it is the very condition of religion... We say therefore that the right ordering of religion comes through knowledge and worship, and these can only be attained with a healthy body, with the preservation of life and with the satisfaction of the necessities of cold, hunger, exposure, and insecurity, the ultimate evil. On my life, for him who is secure in his freedom, healthy in body, able to obtain his daily bread, it is as if the world has been fulfilled in all its aspects!... Religion cannot be rightly ordered except through the fulfilment of these essential needs; otherwise, how can a man who spends all his time defending himself against the sword of the oppressors, and seeking his food in the face of those who overreach him, how can such a man find time to devote himself to learning and [religious] endeavour, for these are the means to a blessed afterlife? Therefore, the right ordering of the world, that is, according to its necessity, is a condition for the right ordering of religion.

The reader will sense in Ghazali's argument a clear-eyed, sceptical pessimism, or even desperation, about what the ruled can at best expect from their rulers. But in the passage just quoted there is no explicit indication of the fundamental change in the nature of government which had overtaken Muslim society long before Ghazali's time. As has been seen, the relation between ruler and ruled was supposed to be governed by a contract whereby the subject promised to obey the elected ruler so long as the *shari'a* was maintained. Very shortly after the Prophet's death the Muslim domain expanded enormously. Within a few decades it came to include Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia — areas of high civilization with political traditions far removed from those of the Arab tribesmen who came to replace Byzantine and Sassanid rule. The new rulers were themselves riven by bitter and bloody disputes about the character of legitimate rule in the Muslim polity. In the circumstances, the principle of election had no practical significance, nor was there any way by which the ruled could ensure that the ruler's actions conformed to the *shari'a*. Of the first four caliphs, the Well-Guided Ones, as they are known to Muslim tradition, the last three were assassinated, and the Muslim polity fell under the control of the Umayyad dynasty, established in Damascus in 661 CE. They in turn were forcibly overthrown some ninety years later by the Abbasids, who founded Baghdad and made it their capital. The hereditary rulers of this extensive empire (whether Umayyad or Abbasid) were attracted to notions of kingship by divine right. On such a theory, as it had been developed by the Byzantines and Sassanids long before Islam, the state is a divine ordinance which is personified by the king. The king is directly chosen by, and responsible to, God alone. He stands between God and the people, and ensures stability by maintaining both in their proper places. He is, to use a title which came to be officially given to Muslim rulers, the Shadow of God on Earth. Between this theory and the jurists' view of government the gap is immense. How early in Muslim history this gap appeared may be appreciated, for example, from the political testament of al-Mansur, the second Abbasid caliph, to his son, in which he identified the authority of the caliph with God's authority. And Mansur was merely continuing the tradition of the Umayyads. If the contrast had remained as absolute as it was at the outset, the jurists' theory might have remained as a foil to the other theory, and might have served as a challenge and as a rebuke to the successive despotisms which the world of Islam had to endure. But in fact, the jurists themselves came to modify their position significantly, in order to come to terms with reality, limit the damage to religious values, perhaps tame somewhat the violence of despotic rule, and

make it bearable to the faithful. How the Muslim divines came to approach politics may be seen from the argument in the continuation of the passage from Ghazali quoted above:

that the world and the security of life and possessions cannot be organized except by having a ruler to whom obedience is given, this is confirmed when we observe the civil wars which break out at the death of rulers and *imams*, especially when there is a lapse of time before another ruler has been nominated. Disorder, violence, and scarcity rule, cattle perish, and manufactures die out. Might seizes what it can; no one devotes himself to worship or to learning, even if he remains alive, while the majority perish by the sword. This is why religion and rule have been called twins. It is said that religion is a foundation and rule a guardian; what has no foundation is destroyed, and what has no guardian is lost. On the whole, no sensible man will doubt that human beings, with all their classes and varieties of desires and opinions, if they were left to their condition, and if there had been no one opinion to command obedience and to unify them, would have perished altogether. This is a disease which has only one cure: a strong ruler to command obedience and unify the diversity of opinions.

Here is a sober, indeed a bleak, account of the predicament of Muslim society and of what, at best, can be expected from a ruler. The prospect of disorder and anarchy is so dismaying that it has to be banished at all costs, and stability becomes the supreme political value. As Ghazali also wrote: 'The tyranny of a sultan for a hundred years causes less damage than one year's tyranny exerted by the subjects against each other.' Here then is a point of contact and affinity between Muslim political thought and earlier theories of kingship by divine right. In one case, of course, stability meant a hierarchically ordered society, which was maintained and guaranteed by the divinely appointed ruler, while in the other, stability was a boon devoutly wished for by a society subject to lawlessness, rapine, and violent death. This intellectual affinity is demonstrated in the passage from Ghazali just quoted. Religion and rule, Ghazali writes, have been called twins: this maxim is of Sassanid origin; but however it was meant or understood by its originators, it is echoed and re-echoed in Muslim writings in order to emphasize that a strong ruler, whatever the origin of his power, whoever he is, whether he is bad or mad, is necessary to safeguard the *umma*. Again, if the preservation of the *umma* is the highest political value, then the

expression of individual opinion which might lead to dissension and the disruption of communal solidarity is a crime to be put down with the utmost severity.

In attempting to deal with the vicissitudes of Muslim politics, the jurists made passive obedience to the holder of effective power a religious duty. They were perfectly well aware that this was a far cry from what the Law required, namely that a caliph, properly speaking, had to be a member of Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, that he had to be physically and morally sane, to have knowledge of the sharia, and exercise his authority in accordance with it. Thus Ghazali, discussing the circumstances in which an *imam* may be deposed, lays down the condition that deposition must not lead to dissension or violent commotion: 'If this is impossible, his imamate must be accepted.' And Ghazali justifies his conclusion thus:

The concessions made by us are not spontaneous, but necessity makes lawful what is forbidden. We know it is not allowed to feed on a dead animal [i.e. one which has not been ritually slaughtered]: still it would be worse to die of hunger. Of those who contend that the caliphate is dead for ever and irreplaceable, we should like to ask: which is to be preferred, anarchy and the stoppage of social life for lack of a properly constituted authority, or acknowledgement of the existing power, whatever it be? Of these two alternatives, the jurist cannot but choose the latter.

Thus, starting from a position where all politics was religious politics, the jurists, in order to secure a modicum of protection for the religious life, paradoxically reached a view of politics in which any arbitrary power, provided it was successful, became legitimately entitled to the obedience of the subjects. As a maxim formulated by Moroccan jurists succinctly put: 'To him who holds power obedience is due.' This view, inculcated over the centuries by religious teaching and bitter practical experience alike, sums up the dominant attitude to politics in the world of Islam. Encapsulated in it, though never fully worked out, is a view of politics as an autonomous activity, and also a (necessary) distinction between politics as a public activity on the one hand, and the personal character and behaviour of the holder of public office. The distinction is to be seen in the jurists' injunction that *jihad* was to be pursued alongside all *imams*, whatever their conduct, that *imams* were entitled to levy the taxes legally due whatever the use to which they put them, that Friday prayers and other public religious rites ought to be performed with those who exercised rule, whatever their

conduct or reputation. The sixteenth-century jurist, Sheikh Ibrahim al-Halabi, whose views were officially considered as authoritative in the Ottoman Empire, sums up this teaching as it was received at the threshold of modern times. 'The dignity of the imamate', he wrote, 'does not absolutely demand that the *imam* be just, virtuous, or irreproachable, or that he be the most eminent and the most excellent of the human beings of his time'; and again: 'Vices or tyranny in an *imam* do not demand his deposition'.

This sober, realistic, and conservative view of politics as a broken-backed but necessary activity, and of *raison d'état* as inescapably intermixed with it, is one to be found equally among all groups in Islam.... Shiite jurists inculcated in their followers the same doctrine and attitude of passive obedience which obtained among Sunnis. As a dissident group dwelling among hostile Sunnis the Shiites were taught by their jurists to practise *taqiyya*, i.e. to dissimulate their true belief for self-preservation. The Imam was not expected to revolt against the existing government, illegal as it was, and rebellion without his authority was unlawful. This was laid down by Hisham ibn al-Hakam who formulated the basic doctrines of the Shiites and who died in 795–6, i.e. before the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. The same teaching is repeated thereafter. Al-Sheikh al-Mufid, who died in 1022, taught that only the Twelfth Imam on his reappearance could lead a revolt; his predecessors had disapproved of any incitement to revolt, and enjoined 'dissimulation, restraining the hand, guarding the tongue, carrying out the prescribed worship, and serving God exclusively by good works'.

The achievement of the jurists, then, was to discern with a clear-sighted shrewdness the grim political condition under which Muslims had to live; and to fashion, and inculcate, a reasoned, coherent attitude to this lamentable state of affairs. Religion, they hoped, would thus be shielded to the utmost, and a society would survive in which Islam remained a public profession protected by the state, its rites regularly performed, and its teachings transmitted from generation to generation.

The final shape which Islamic political doctrine took and it—has remained the same to the present day—was a far cry from the simple and straightforward views of the early Muslims. These constituted a small religious polity highly coloured by the tribal ethics and customs of the Arabs who were Muhammad's first followers. But tribal political institutions, and the simple arrangements for choosing heads for the

Muslim community in Medina and elsewhere, could not possibly cope with the administration of the newly conquered lands, which were extensive and closely settled by a non-Muslim population far removed in habits, beliefs, and sophistication from the new masters primitive tribesmen garrisoning the land and living off its fat. The inadequacy of early Arab Muslim political institutions is not surprising, for tribal government is primitive government. Such a description is not meant pejoratively, but simply to indicate that tribal government is not an intricate or a tough kind of organization. As has been seen again and again, it cannot withstand contact with more solidly organized, and more sophisticated, political and legal structures.

But whereas tribal or primitive government is generally destroyed or emasculated by a foreign conqueror, the original features of the Arab Muslim polity were utterly changed and emptied of significance by the Arab Muslim rulers themselves. These rulers very speedily transformed an unsophisticated tribal polity into one of the most sophisticated and most durable kinds of rule, that of oriental despotism, the methods and traditions of which have survived in the Muslim world to the present day. What the Muslim jurists did was to articulate and theorize the conditions of political life in oriental despotism, and to teach that it was compatible with a Muslim way of life.

In Karl Wittfogel's classic formulation, oriental despotism is a political arrangement in which the state is stronger than society. The political sociology despotism is of oriental extremely simple: only two social groups can be identified, namely those who rule, and those who are ruled. There is a population which works, produces, and pays taxes; and there is what the historian A. H. Lybyer, writing about Ottoman government in the sixteenth century at the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, has called the ruling institution. This is quite separate from the population at large. Its main occupation is warfare. To this end it ensures law and order among its subjects, and extracts the largest possible proportion of the wealth they produce in order to maintain an opulent court and an efficient army which can be used for territorial expansion. The Damascus *qadi*, Ibn Jama'a (1241-1333) echoing a famous analogy which Muslim writers on politics had made—an analogy which may be much older than Islam theorized this state of affairs by writing:

The world is a garden, the fence of which is the dynasty. The dynasty is authority supported by the army. The army are soldiers who are assembled by money. Money is sustenance brought together by the subjects. The subjects are servants who are reared by justice.

Marx's view of the relation between economic and political power is here diametrically reversed. In oriental despotism, it is not ownership of the means of production that determines who will rule; rather, possession of military and political power determines who will enjoy the fruits of labour. In oriental despotism, then, economic power, properly speaking, is nonexistent, riches are precarious, and property has no security. The story told of a Chinese general could never have been told of a West European magnate. The general was accused of plotting against the emperor. In order to exculpate himself and prove that he had absolutely no interest in politics, he claimed that his one consuming passion was to accumulate property in land. The insignificance and precariousness of private property under oriental despotism, where wealth can be confiscated or bestowed at the caprice of the ruler, and where to be suspected of being wealthy can invite sudden and utter ruin, may also be illustrated by an instructive and moving story told by Ibn Khaldun. The philosopher Ibn Baja happened to recite at an Andalusian court a poem which made the ruler so enthusiastic that he vowed that Ibn Baja should go home walking on gold. Ibn Baja found himself in a predicament: to refuse or to accept the gift was equally dangerous. To refuse would offend and anger, while to accept would make Ibn Baja so rich that his life might henceforth be at risk. Ibn Baja resolved the dilemma by begging for two pieces of gold which he proceeded to insert one in each shoe, and so walked home literally on gold, thus making the ruler's vow come true, and yet preserving himself from the perils of great wealth.

The absolute dominance of the ruling institution in oriental despotism, and the amalgamation in the ruler's person of both political and religious authority, is greatly in contrast with the manner in which political and religious authority came to be disposed in Western Europe in the centuries immediately following the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. During this period, *regnum* and *sacerdotium* were progressively distinguished one from the other. Feudal institutions also took shape then which led to the dispersal of military power and political authority among territorial magnates. These magnates, and the king who stood at the apex of the feudal order, were bound to one another and to their followers and dependants by an intricate and enduring web of rights and obligations which may be seen

to be at the origin of the checks and balances which characterize modern constitutional government.

By contrast, in oriental despotism, no interest in society can resist the demands of the ruling institution or withstand its power. It is in this sense that in oriental despotism the state is stronger than society. Various attempts have been made to explain how this kind of rule came to take root and endure. But whatever the cogency and persuasiveness of these attempts, what is not in doubt is that extensive areas in Asia have remained for centuries under its sway, and that the caliphate became the legatee of oriental despotism. That it did absorb the methods of oriental despotism, and successfully adopt its way of controlling the subject, is not simply a matter of primitive conquerors being attracted and dazzled by a sophisticated and powerful foreign political tradition—of Persia, so to speak, making Arabia captive. It is rather that the very success of the Arab assault on the Byzantines and the Sassanids; the rule over large numbers of non-Muslims which was its consequence; the jealousies, the internecine struggles, and the vast cupidities which this unheard-of triumph conjured up, all served to render inefficacious and unworkable the political arrangements of the early Muslims, and led inevitably to the adoption of a system such as oriental despotism.

This development is seen fully manifest as early as the Umayyads. The caliph is the deputy of God Himself. He is the Shadow of God on earth. He sits in his palace quarters in formidable and solitary eminence, hidden from the gaze of his subjects, the capricious author of their good fortune, or their misfortunes. In the twinkling of an eye, he can raise the beggar to become his vizier and confidant, and he can suddenly and for no apparent reason humble and destroy the most powerful of his favourites. This is what the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al- Rashid, did to his viziers the Barmecides. The emblem of this terrible power is the black executioner who, in *The Thousand and One Nights*, is shown to be in constant attendance on Harun al-Rashid. Nearness to the supreme power is perilous. The constant care of the ordinary subject is to avoid the attention of authority. A story in *The Arabian Nights* concerns a householder who, coming back from work in the evening, finds a corpse near his door. He is terrified to report his discovery to the police, lest they accuse him of murder. He therefore carries the corpse and puts it over the wall into a neighbour's garden. The neighbour in his turn discovers the body and is likewise terrified. He in turn transfers it to his neighbour's property where the same story is repeated, and so on until

the body has gone round the whole town without anybody daring to make its existence public. A saying attributed to the Caliph al-Ma'mun, Harun al-Rashid's son, declares that 'the best life has he who has an ample house, a beautiful wife, and sufficient means, and who does not know us and whom we do not know'.

Mutual mistrust thus isolates government and subjects from one another. But mutual mistrust and fear are at their height in relations between the ruler and his immediate servants. Mirrors of Princes and similar writings abound in advice to rulers and to those in their proximity about the best means of protecting themselves from the dangers they are likely to meet. Rulers are advised to take precautions against poisoning, to set spies on their ministers, to beware of close friends, wives, brothers, and progeny. Viziers are warned to mistrust fair words when uttered by their masters, since they are usually meant to produce false security, and to be a prelude to the minister's downfall.

A usual concomitant of this separation between the concerns of the rulers and those of the ruled is the prevalence of what is called corruption. Officials are servants of the ruler who, at his will, appoints them to exercise power over the subjects, and at his pleasure deprives them of this power. So long as they continue to enjoy the ruler's countenance, officials must be propitiated by the subjects who have to seek their favour or avert their ill will. In this atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and caprice, officials in turn have to propitiate their superiors, and these superiors in their turn their own superiors. The ruler himself who bestows offices, but sometimes also sells them, thus came to be enmeshed in a vast network of bribery, along with his servants and subjects. We may even say that oriental despotism and bribery are inseparable, that bribery is a necessity in this kind of regime. It is a necessity for the official who desires to enjoy to the utmost his tenure while it lasts, to compensate himself for the sum he would often have had to expend for the purchase of his office, and to make provision against sudden fall from favour. It is a necessity likewise for the subject, since only bribery (or personal favour) can secure him a lodgement, more or less precarious, in the interstices of power.

The separation between the ruling institution and its subjects is seen at its most perfect in the Mameluke regime which controlled Egypt and the Levant from 1230, and in the Ottoman Empire which destroyed this regime in 1517. The Mamelukes were white slaves, usually Turkish or Circassian,

whom Muslim rulers bought for use as soldiers. The Ayyubid sultans in Egypt were among the rulers who made use of these slave-soldiers. But the soldiers supplanted the dynasty and themselves became the rulers. Perpetually replenished by recruits of the same kind, isolated by language, avocation, and status from the populations they controlled, the Mamelukes disposed of the fate of Egypt and other territories under their sway solely through the internecine intrigues and armed clashes in which their various factions were perpetually engaged. The ruling institution of the Ottoman Empire was likewise utterly cut off from the population at large. Here the sultan was not himself a slave-soldier but a descendant of the Ottoman dynasty. He, however, controlled an official establishment the members of which were slaves acquired through the *devshirme*, that is the periodical collection of male children from his Christian subjects—children to be subsequently trained for either a military or a civil career. The character of this establishment is well described in a fifteenth-century work by a close European observer when the Ottoman system was still in its vigour, whom Lybyer quotes in his seminal work, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire at the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*. Out of the slaves acquired by the *devshirme*, this report declared,

promotions are made to the offices of the kingdom according to the virtues found in them. Whence it comes about that all the magnates and princes of the whole kingdom are as it were officials made by the king, and not lords or possessors; and as a consequence he is the sole lord and possessor, and the lawful dispenser, distributor and governor of the whole kingdom; the others are only executors, officials, and administrators according to his will and command... Whence it follows that in his kingdom, although there is an innumerable multitude, no contradiction or opposition can arise; but united as one man in all respects and for all purposes, they look to his command alone, they obey, and serve unwearingly.

It thus follows that in this kind of rule no institutions or regular arrangements exist whereby the ruled can convey their views or wishes to the rulers, let alone ensure that such views are taken into consideration. Not only is the idea of representation, or of elections, unknown to Muslim political thought or practice, but Muslim rulers looked with suspicion on any autonomous tendencies evinced by the subjects in setting up bodies like trade guilds, and tried systematically to control their activities. It is also significant that municipal institutions and corporate bodies in general are unknown in Islamic polities. Figures like the *'omda* or the *mukhtar*, the

headman of a village or a city quarter, are by no means representatives; rather, they are appointed or approved by the government and responsible to it alone for the good order of their districts.

Besides the fundamental cleavage between rulers and ruled, other cleavages characterize traditional Muslim society. A significant one is that between town and country. From the start Islam has looked down on the countryside, on the *fellah*'s way of life and his pursuits. The Prophet is reported in a *hadith* as remarking of a plough that 'This thing does not go into a house without making it lowly'. The *fellah* is lowly for another reason: unlike the bedouins who constituted the first armies of Islam, and whose ethos took on all the prestige which accrues to conquerors, *fellahin* are attached to a specific locality and identified with a particular piece of land; they have no record of their lineage and preserve no account of the valiant deeds of their ancestors. In the world of Islam, the town is the centre of power, where the ruler, his court, and his officials live, while the countryside exists in order to be milked for the benefit of the ruling institution and its hangers-on. Hence, the absence generally in the Muslim world of a landed gentry who in Western countries have developed hereditary local influence and a local patriotism and who, taking their due place in an ordered polity, yet have a feeling of sturdy independence, do not form part of an official, salaried hierarchy, or have to curry favour with a royal court, or feel beholden to it. In the Muslim world, it is only of nomadic tribes that some of these attributes can be postulated. But these tribes, unlike the landed gentry of the West, were not incorporated in the Muslim polity. Rather, they remained outside, a disturbing and destructive element, and, in a process vividly described by Ibn Khaldun, occasionally succeeded in overwhelming an established dynasty, but then took over from their victims the very same old centralizing and despotic traditions.

From the start, Muslim society incorporated non-Muslim communities. As the Koran shows, the Prophet himself was acquainted with Judaism and Christianity and the Muslim claim is indeed that he is the seal of the prophets, i.e. that Islam completes and perfects the two earlier divine revelations. When Muhammad and the small band of his original followers retired from Mecca in order to escape opposition and persecution, they went to Yathrib, which came to be known thereafter as *madinat al-nabi*, The Prophet's city (Medina in English usage), whose three Jewish tribes had long been established. Though relations between them and the Muslims began by being cordial, Muhammad soon clashed with the Jews, who were

defeated in battle, and of whom two tribes were expelled, while the menfolk of the third were decimated and their women and children sold into slavery. Subsequently, other Jewish and Christian settlements in Arabia entered into pacts with Muhammad whereby they offered submission and paid tribute. The Koran sets out the manner in which followers of Scriptural religions were to be treated:

Fight against those who do not believe in Allah nor in the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and His Apostle have forbidden, nor practise the true religion, among those who have been given the Book, until they pay the *jizya* from their hand, they being humbled.

Jizya is the tribute, later understood to be a poll tax, which Christians and Jews had to pay in humility and in token of submission to the Muslim ruler. In return they received protection for good behaviour. In the Muslim polity these non-Muslims were allowed by the ruler to organize their own communal affairs under their own leaders who enjoyed wide judicial and administrative powers in respect of their communities, each of which was left free to follow its own (religious) law in matters of personal status and of inheritance. This is the well-known *millet* system (from the Arabic *milla*, community) which was maintained by successive Muslim rulers in the Middle East, and which survived albeit in an attenuated form into the twentieth century. Non-Muslims in the Muslim polity do not therefore form part of the Muslim *umma*. To use a European distinction, they do not belong to the *pays politique*, but only to the *pays legal*. So long as they accept their inferior status, and do not pose a threat to the security of the *umma*, they are entitled to protection and are allowed a degree of what might be called communal autonomy. This state of affairs is strikingly different from that obtaining in medieval or early-modern Europe. Here, the pressure for religious uniformity was constant and unremitting. The Jews were practically the only non-Christian element in Europe, and Jewish communities by no means enjoyed the recognized status which was vouchsafed to them and to Christians under Islam. The existence of these non-Muslim communities, each inhabiting its own quarter, and like the Muslims moved, not by local patriotism or identification with a particular territory, but exclusively by communal solidarity, enhances yet further the impression of a segmented society, all gaps and separations: separation between ruler and ruled, between town and country, between the nomad and the settled population, between religious communities.

This segmentation meant that the reach of the oriental despotism which controlled Muslim society did not go as far as one might think. Traditional Middle Eastern rulers simply took no interest in a vast range of issues in which modern governments of all colours assume it their right and duty to intervene. Middle Eastern governments, for instance, did not feel obliged to make provision for the education or welfare of their subjects. Again, it did not occur to them that they could mobilize their subjects, and canalize their energies in support of their aims and policies. In any case, they did not have the technical means to indoctrinate and control large masses of people. In the absence of modern means of communication, and of an abundant supply of paper or of computers it was also impossible to maintain detailed supervision over the activity of office-holders and their dealings with subjects. Also, just as non-Muslims were left a large measure of freedom in their communal affairs, so the ruler took it for granted that certain affairs relating to the *umma* were the subject of divine prescription with which no one could tamper and were to be regulated by *qadis*, or religious judges, according to the sharia. All these, then, were built-in limitations on the activities of government under oriental despotism. These limitations left a great deal of elbowroom—no doubt—politically insignificant to the subject, and meant that there was a boundary, implicitly recognized on all sides, which divided the public realm from the private, which latter comprised a large variety of social activities.



Democracy and Arab Political Culture (1992, excerpt)

Introduction: Democracy and the Middle Eastern Political Tradition

In May 1991, the Cairo newspaper *al-Ahram* conducted an opinion poll which was said to cover a cross-section of the Arab world. The poll was designed to discover what kind of political arrangements Arabs preferred to see in their countries. We, of course, do not know to what extent the 4,997 who were polled are an accurate mirror of public opinion. At any rate, the results, for what they are worth, showed that 56% favored the introduction of Western-style democracy, while 52.3% demanded the application of the *Sharia* which would involve a ban on alcohol and gambling, and the introduction of Islamic punishments!

While the preference for rule according to the *Sharia* and what it would involve is intelligible both to outside observers and to the respondents themselves, it is by no means clear what the parallel preference for democracy can mean to them, or how we ourselves may understand the significance of this preference. Nor is it easy for us to understand how so many of the respondents could reconcile preference for democracy with preference for a *Sharia*-governed polity.

To hold simultaneously ideas which are not easily reconcilable argues, then, a deep confusion in the Arab public mind, at least about the meaning of democracy. The confusion is, however, understandable since the idea of democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam. Democracy is, in any case, today, itself by no means a clear or precise notion.

Classical Muslim philosophers would have had no difficulty in supplying a meaning for the word democracy—a meaning with which they would have become familiar from their study of the Greek philosophers, and particularly Aristotle. For it is the Greek political experience, the experience of the *polis*, which was theorized by these Greek thinkers. Plato and Aristotle notably assigned a place for this concept in their political typology and described the characteristics of this kind of rule. Democracy, for them, was a low and degraded regime in which the masses, moved by their passions and appetites, sought to exercise unrestrained power. For the Greek thinkers, as for their Muslim disciples, democracy signified despotism—a hydra-headed despotism, certainly no better, and perhaps worse, than the despotism of one man. In the scheme sketched out in Plato's *Republic*, the rule of the philosopher-king degenerates into a timocracy, then into an oligarchy and finally into a democracy—a regime which sets the scene and prepares the way for the advent of a tyrant who puts a stop to democratic lawlessness and arbitrariness.

That democracy was an undesirable and abhorrent regime remained a commonplace both in the Muslim world and in the Christian West, and this continued to be the case until the downfall of the old regime in Europe and the great wave of populist and radical political ideas which accompanied revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic.

“Democracy” began then to lose somewhat its pejorative connotations and to be used increasingly to describe a polity in which sovereignty was

unambiguously located in the citizen body. It is such a state of affairs which people have in mind when they praise democracy and recommend it to those parts of the world which are now deprived of its blessings. Nevertheless, as has been said, democracy remains an ambiguous and imprecise word with which to describe political arrangements which now generally obtain in the Western world, and which are recommended to, say, Africa or the Middle East. Until very recently there was a class of states which called themselves peoples' democracies. Apart from the pleonasm of which the expression is guilty, it is also the case that the democratic regime here in question is worlds away from what is understood when the United States is called a democracy. It is this kind of ambiguity attached to the term which makes one wonder what the respondents to the poll conducted by *al-Ahram* could have understood by the democracy for which they expressed so decisive a preference.

Democracy, when used to describe a polity like the United States, has implicit in it a whole complex of ideas which must be made explicit if we are fully to appreciate the gulf which separates modern and ancient democracies, and if we are to judge whether the concepts and practices of modern democracies can be acclimatized and can take root in countries where other political traditions have predominated.

The modern idea of democracy is inseparable from the idea of the state. The idea of the state began to acquire its present meaning during the early modern period of European history. It connotes a particular piece of territory which is under sovereign power. Sovereignty has come to be understood as an impersonal public rule from which is derived the title of a government to govern, regardless of its character. Sovereignty, then, is the source of all political authority. As it was gradually worked out in Europe, through various disputes and conflicts, the impersonal idea of sovereignty came to be seen to rule out two ideas hitherto widely prevalent. First, that force or conquest gives title to rule, and second, that rulers are by God appointed. It came to be realized that to ground rule on force makes neither for stability nor for legitimacy, while divine appointment can be indifferently claimed by those in power as by those who may succeed in supplanting them, since the only sign of divine approval is that the ruler does have—so long as he has it—the power to rule. Sovereignty, then, comes to be distinguished from mere force, as from divine prescription. It is seen as the impersonal and invariable foundation of public authority which

gives legitimacy to a government. How, then, does it arise? The inescapable answer is that it arises from popular consent.

The ideas which are thus associated with the modern notion of the state remain, however, mere abstractions unless they are embodied in manners of behavior, in procedures, laws and institutions. The consent from which sovereignty derives has to have a way, in other words, of expressing itself in order to confer legitimacy on the government in a manner which is both public and rule-governed. In large and complex modern societies this consent can be conferred only through parliamentary institutions which represent the people and give public assent in recognized, proper and regular forms to laws and to the acts of government. The idea of popular sovereignty would otherwise have remained quite empty of content. That it has not done so in the Western world is due to the device of representation—a device invented for other purposes in the medieval West, and which is one of a handful of original devices in the history of government to have been invented and perfected.

Representation implies elections and elections imply voting. In the modern West, it has become accepted and established that every citizen shall have one, and no more than one, vote. “One man, one vote,” however, by no means implies that the citizens are a mass of undifferentiated units. If they were simply that, then “one man, one vote” would indeed be the sinister emblem of tyranny which it manifestly is in so many parts of the world. In a modern civilized state, the citizens are not a homogeneous mass of undifferentiated units—so many abstract statistics figuring in election returns. On the contrary, citizens organize themselves according to their various social, economic and political activities, in a multiplicity of groups and associations. It is the existence of these self-activated groups which gives vitality and power to the political institutions on which rests the legitimacy of government.

The idea that political legitimacy rests on popular sovereignty has had one consequence of particular importance. The sovereign people comprises the totality of the citizens. Citizens hold an immense variety of opinions and beliefs. Through long and bitter experience, from the onset of the Protestant Reformation onwards, it has come to be recognized that belief and opinion cannot serve as a criterion of citizenship, which must therefore be solely a matter of birth or choice. Thus, implicit in popular sovereignty is the idea of

the secularity of the state—an idea now indispensable to good government and a free society.

These concepts and practices, taken as a whole, are what is understood by democracy in the West today. However, democracy is an ambiguous and equivocal word which can easily be exploited in double-talk, and which, taken on its own, is incapable of giving one an appreciation of the complex of ideas and institutions which serve as a specific against despotism and a safeguard for political freedom. It is safer, more exact, and more intelligible to speak rather of constitutional and representative government. Indeed, for our present purposes, this expression is preferred since if we look at the Arab world in modern times, its quest for democracy has in effect been a quest for constitutional and representative government.

This quest has a long history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What is remarkable about it is that there is nothing in the political traditions of the Arab world—which are the political traditions of Islam—which might make familiar, or indeed intelligible, the organizing ideas of constitutional and representative government. The notion of a state as a specific territorial entity which is endowed with sovereignty, the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, of elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the secularity of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating, autonomous groups and associations—all these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition.

What, in brief, is this tradition? It is one which begins with the small community presided over by the Prophet Mohammed at Medina. This community, the *umma* of Muslims, has its *raison d'être* in Islam itself, in the revelation sent to the believers through the Prophet. What this revelation reveals is a divine plan for the salvation of those who hearken to the message, and who thus constitute the *umma*.

Wherever the Muslim *umma* is, there is the polity of Islam. Elsewhere is the abode of war. This, in a nutshell, is the Islamic theory of international relations. The abode of Islam, *dar-al-islam*, is not defined by permanent territorial frontiers. It is wherever Muslims exercise (or have exercised) dominion. Dar-al-islam is not like the Roman Empire, a city-state

developing into an extensive Empire; it is unlike the Greek *polis*, or the state as it has developed in Europe. Its basis is neither kinship, nor the occupation of a defined territory, and the bond between its members is not legal, as in the Roman Empire, but religious: the members of the *umma* are such because they acknowledge the divine revelation as vouchsafed in the Koran, and obey its injunctions. The nearest analogy to the *umma* in Western terms is the *respublica christiana*. This *respublica*, however, never became a political reality.

The *umma*, on the other hand, was a reality from its beginnings in Medina, and even more so when the Muslims very quickly conquered the Middle East, Central Asia, parts of India as well as North Africa and large parts of the Iberian peninsula. This empire, as we would call it, was governed by a caliph, who was the successor to Mohammed as ruler, justiciar and military leader. In the political theory of Islam, as it has remained to the present day, the caliph is the sole political and military authority within the *umma*, and all civil officials and military officers are his servants and derive their powers solely from this, the highest public office in Islam. There can be no question of checks and balances, of division of power, of popular sovereignty, of elections or representative assemblies.

In its original form, Islamic political theory took for granted that the ruler would be a godly ruler, upholding the *Sharia*, and that his commitment to God's law gave sanction to his authority and constituted the bond between him and the other believers. However, fairly soon following the establishment of the Muslim empire, it became quite clear that any theoretical restraint which obedience to the *Sharia* might have imposed was of no consequence whatsoever. The ancient traditions of the Oriental despotism which had obtained in the newly conquered territories served immeasurably to magnify the position of the Muslim ruler, and it became more than ever out of the question for the subjects to bring to bear on the conduct of public officers their views and interests, even had there been institutions which might serve to articulate these views and interests.

The duty to obey the ruler, who was the Prophet's apostolic successor, was a religious duty, because the ruler maintained the religion, defended the territory in which it had become established, and enlarged its bounds. The subsequent vicissitudes of Muslim society, the civil wars which broke out periodically, the insubordinate soldiers and the disorders created by the ambitions of the military gave an unexpected (and lasting) twist to the

theory that obedience to the caliph was a religious duty. In view of the perils to which the continuous disorders and the arbitrariness of military usurpers exposed the believers, the divines came to argue that passive obedience to any ruler who had hold of power, however he came by it, and whether he was bad or mad, was a religious duty. The reason for such an injunction is that anarchy is to be feared above all else, since anarchy makes impossible the pursuit of a godly life, and thus endangers eternal salvation which is the ultimate goal of all human endeavor. As the great divine Ghazali (d.1111) declared: "The tyranny of a sultan for a hundred years causes less damage than one year's tyranny exerted by the subjects against each other."

Traditional rule in the Middle East may be characterized as Oriental despotism in which, to use Karl Wittfogel's succinct description of this regime, the state is stronger than society. The reality of rule therefore marched together with the Islamic theory of politics as it came to be inculcated to the faithful, generation after generation. Such rule maintained, perforce, a great distance, not to say an outright separation, between concerns of the ruler and those of the ruled. The ruler's first concern is that there should be no challenge to his power and that as much wealth as possible should be squeezed out of the ruled to pay for his army and his court. Contrariwise, the main preoccupation of the ruled was to keep as low a profile as possible, to find ways of living with the exactions and the caprice of the ruler and his servants. Given this gulf between rulers and ruled, there could be no question of representative bodies being set up to carry on a dialogue between ruler and subject; neither could there be institutions of local self-government in town or countryside; nor could craft or professional associations flourish unhindered, since they would always be suspected of limiting the sway of the government over its subjects. In the nineteenth century, many Ottomans of the educated and official class were becoming increasingly familiar with European institutions and ideas, and eager to introduce them to their society. They sought to find equivalents in Islamic society for these institutions and ideas. One of them, a well-known writer, came up with a curious argument to the effect that in the past the Janissaries had been the equivalent of a popular representative body. As is well-known, the Janissaries were Ottoman slave-soldiers who constituted the most formidable military formation in the service of the sultans. However, from the seventeenth century onwards their discipline began to deteriorate considerably, and they became a kind of praetorian guard, given to periodical tumults and mutinies, and on occasion able to depose a sultan

and set up another in his place. For the nineteenth century Ottoman writer, the disorderly corps of the Janissaries became spokesmen and representatives of the people, able to voice popular grievances and to act as a check on the ruler! This desperately fanciful argument is indication enough of the utter absence of traditions of self-government in the world of Islam.

As it happened, it was not European constitutionalism and representative government which first made an impact on the Middle East. It was rather another, and more recent, European outlook on government with which the Middle East initially became familiar and which Middle Eastern rulers attempted to apply. This outlook was articulated in the complex of ideas and institutions known as enlightened absolutism. This style of government became prevalent during the eighteenth century in many states in continental Europe, notably in Prussia, the Habsburg Empire and other German-speaking states, and in Russia. The style was based on the belief that there was a science of government which rulers could apply to increase the power of the state and the welfare of their subjects. The application of these ideas depended on an increasingly centralized bureaucracy through which the ruler sought to control economic activities as well as educational and social policies. Jeremy Bentham's celebrated panopticon may symbolize the character and ambitions of this new science of government. Bentham's panopticon was a design for a prison on scientific lines, in which the prisoners' cells were grouped around a central building from which the warders could have an uninterrupted view in all directions in order continuously to observe and control the behavior of the inmates, and thus to reform their characters and turn them into useful and virtuous citizens.

After Middle Eastern rulers began to feel the necessity of adopting European weapons and military techniques, it did not take long for them to realize that the European-style army required a European-style administration to back it up. The European-style of government which was most consonant with the traditional Oriental despotism was precisely that of enlightened absolutism. This style benefited, furthermore, from being associated with the military efficiency which Middle Eastern rulers were most anxious to acquire.

The first half of the nineteenth century thus saw in the Middle East a great increase in both bureaucracy and centralization, and an increase

consequently in the readiness, and in the power, of governments to intervene in various social, economic and educational spheres which they had traditionally considered to be outside their purview. Since, again, the methods of the new-style bureaucracy were generally unfamiliar to the officials who now began to proliferate at the center and in the provinces, centralization became even more extreme leading to over-administration. The burden on the subject increased, while the gap widened between the universe of discourse common to traditional society and that of the Westernized functionaries, whereas previously rulers and subjects had shared common assumptions and common values.

Egypt under Mohammed Ali Pasha shows in a more extreme fashion than elsewhere in the Middle East—and thus more clearly—what kind of regime was replacing, under the impetus of modernization, the traditional despotism. Mohammed Ali was an Ottoman officer who came to Egypt with the troops sent to retake and garrison Egypt following Bonaparte's invasion in 1798. By 1805 he had managed to establish himself as the governor of this Ottoman province and set about systematically eliminating any opposition to his rule. With the help of European military officers and civilian advisers he created a formidable army on Westernized lines. To carry out an ambitious military and foreign policy which involved the conquest of the Sudan, expeditions to the Arabian Peninsula and to the Morea—in support of the Ottomans against the Greek rebellion—and the invasion of the Levant which bade fair at one point to lead to a catastrophic defeat of the Ottoman army, and the overthrow of the Ottoman dynasty, Mohammed Ali had to obtain the necessary resources, which could not but be considerable. He therefore laid his hands on practically all agricultural land in Egypt, of which he became the owner. He instituted a monopoly in the purchase and export of agricultural produce, and a monopoly likewise of imports and exports. He also set in train an ambitious industrialization programme in government-owned factories. The burden of his rapacity fell on all classes of the population, and people used to say that Mohammed Ali was jealous of the very fleas which fed on the fellah's blood.



Development and Politics (1984)

THE USE OF the term development and its concomitant term, underdevelopment, is today common in the discussion of political and particularly economic issues. To use either of the two terms immediately sets up in our mind a comparison and an implicit expectation. The comparison is between countries which are said to be developed and other countries which are said to be underdeveloped. And what is implicitly believed—what the terms implicitly assume and convey is that underdevelopment can be changed into development, that countries which are now underdeveloped can attain a state in which they are developed. We may then say that underdeveloped countries aspire to become one day developed, believe that they can take action in order to achieve such a state, that the aspiration is not foolish, and that a strategy exists which can lead them to such a state.

What is the ideal to which these countries aspire? It is that of a prosperous, stable, democratic society, the prosperity of which is usually believed to rest on manufacturing industry, because it is held that the developed world became rich precisely through industrialization.

We may personally believe, or not believe as the case may be, that such an ideal is worth attaining. We have however always to keep in mind that it is only in recent times—in very recent times—that such an ideal has received the suffrages of large numbers of men, that the great religions of the world, whether monotheistic or pantheistic which, until very recently, exclusively divided between themselves men's allegiance—that these religions recommended quite another goal to humanity, whether this goal is personal salvation, or the absorption of the individual in an all-encompassing Godhead.

We may also personally entertain varying estimates, whether optimistic or pessimistic, about the possibility of some or perhaps most of these so-called underdeveloped countries eventually achieving the state of being developed. But whatever our estimate of the likely outcome, there seem to be many reasons to believe that the very attempt to realize a developed state, if seriously undertaken, will bring about numerous and serious political predicaments, escape from which will not be easy. Let us consider some of these predicaments. In the *Politics*, Aristotle discusses two desirable characteristics to look for in a polity. The first is that rule should be for the benefit of the governed, that a polity should not suffer arbitrary and self-interested rule by the one or the few over the many, or of the many over the few. The second characteristic of a desirable polity is stability. Aristotle himself is enormously impressed by the virtue and importance of

political stability, believing—perhaps optimistically, since he did not live to see how pure evil became incarnate in the Nazi regime—that no polity is so devoid of goodness that its preservation is not worth some effort. Stability is indeed universally considered to be a necessary requisite in any political order—whether this order is that associated with constitutional and representative government, or whether it is associated with so-called Oriental despotism.

There are many ways of accounting for the importance of political stability. We may say for instance with St Augustine that man's profoundest aspiration is peace—peace with God, with himself and with the world. But to be at peace, with the world at any rate, requires that the world around man, the world specifically which he has made for himself, should not change too violently and too frequently. If there is violent and frequent change, then the process itself becomes cumulative. Frequent and violent change produces, for some time, at any rate, change even more frequent and violent, or else a lively and overmastering fear of such a change. This cumulative process—and the savage fears which it elicits—is the simplest and most satisfactory explanation why a revolution, however laudable its ends, however crying the grievances it sets out to remedy, can never stop when it has swept away what it had set out to abolish, and why the familiar saying that the revolution devours its children is so terribly true. This saying originated in the Terror which speedily engulfed the high hopes raised by the French Revolution of July 1789, but it has also proved to be true in respect of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, in China, in Cambodia, and in the Middle East both in relation to the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'th, and to the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

If, then, a society comes to look upon itself as underdeveloped, and comes to set up for itself an ideal which it believes is possible of realization through human action, conscious and planned, then we would not be wrong to expect that such a society would be in a continuous state of effervescence and its political stability to be continuously threatened by the expectant state of mind of its members, who have come to believe that change must ensue, and that out of change good will also, infallibly, ensue.

A situation of this kind arose in Europe in the decades preceding the Revolution of 1789. Enlightened thinkers came to believe that they had resolved the enigma of human nature, penetrated the springs of human action, and solved the riddle of history. In their own interest kings and priests had combined to establish the reign of superstition and despotism. Superstition once banished, corrupt and despotic forms of government

would be infallibly reformed and humanity would attain an era of happiness. The Enlightened absolutists who imbibed these ideas came to think that with the help of this new science of human nature, they could now so legislate and administer that their permissions and prohibitions, and their improvement of institutions, would inaugurate a new era in which human happiness would be infallibly assured and human progress become practically limitless. These new hopes created in the minds of the educated and official classes a predisposition to welcome change and to expect to see social and political institutions continually questioned and reformed. This state of mind so widely prevalent in 1789 ensured a wide welcome for the French Revolution at its beginnings and, for instance, gave the poet Wordsworth the feeling that it was bliss to be then alive, and to be young very heaven. Similar, though perhaps not quite as strong and tumultuous, feelings attach to the pursuit of development today, and we must therefore entertain very seriously the thought that political instability is, implicitly, inseparable from the very pursuit of this ideal.

The ideal of an industrial, prosperous, democratic society is not indigenous to the countries of Asia and Africa to which the term underdeveloped principally applies. It originated, on the contrary, in a civilization quite alien to them. Furthermore, in those countries which are supposed to approximate in their social and political development most nearly to this ideal, its practical achievement rests on the enormous technical and scientific resources which alone make an industrial civilization possible, and thus make prosperity and democracy in the modern sense also possible. Again, in Western Europe and North America, the present state of economy and society did not come about as a result of people conceiving an ideal or a plan and setting about to realize it. What exists now came about in unpremeditated fashion, more or less gradually, more or less slowly as the case may be. Its coming about was facilitated by the emergence of a scientific state of mind, and an increasing number of men with scientific curiosity. When these scientists made their discoveries they could have had no idea of the enormous practical significance of these discoveries. That this scientific endeavour came to practical fruition is by no means unrelated to a social structure in which an entrepreneurial and mercantile middle class was not devoid of political power and was increasingly at liberty to pursue its economic aims.

But we must observe that even under such favourable conditions the transformation of West European and North American society into its present state was by no means an easy matter. The so-called industrial

revolution, great as its material benefits proved to be, has created formidable stresses and strains in the body politic. It brought into being an urban industrial proletariat which had migrated from the countryside and suffered in the factories and slums of industrial cities cultural disorientation and spiritual poverty. It is only gradually that municipal facilities, and the housing stock grew and improved so that living in these modern urban conditions became tolerable, and urban neighbourhoods lost their forbidding and alienating character. Again, the Western revolution of industry brought about problems of the trade cycle, of economic crises and depressions quite new in their widespread intensity, in which masses who had come to depend on regular factory employment suddenly—and to them inexplicably—found themselves workless and utterly without resources, the disinherited stepsons, so to speak, of industrial society.

If such was the situation in the Western world, where the industrial process and industrial skills were indigenous, what may we expect when decades of Western experience and experimentation are abridged into a number of slogans or maxims or recipes and abruptly introduced into societies to whom they must be profoundly incomprehensible, and for which they are so little prepared? What are these societies, by and large? They are traditional agricultural societies where for very long periods of time the tempo of change in the conditions of life as well as in the general outlook was so slow as to be imperceptible. For many complex reasons, in the last hundred years or so these areas have found themselves undergoing a tremendous increase in population, the rate of the increase itself becoming greater with the passage of time. The orders of magnitude are eloquent enough. In 1882 the population of Egypt was under 7 million. In 1982 it is about 40 million. The natural rate of increase per thousand of population in Ceylon, for example, in the 1950s was between 25 and 28, in France between 6 and 7, in the U.K. around 4.5, and in the U.S. between 15 and 16. A consequence of these high figures in “underdeveloped” countries is that a high proportion of the population is very young, say 40 per cent under 14 and two-thirds under 30. In other words a very large proportion of the population is not within the productive age range. By contrast in Western industrialized societies earners constitute the majority of the population, and their productivity has served to keep themselves, as well as the older and the younger generation, at an adequate standard of living, and to endow the young with the social capital represented by technical skills, scientific knowledge, and professional know-how to enable them in their turn to provide for themselves and increase the general wealth. An increase in population such as that of the U.S. in the 1950s—15 per 1000—is a

blessing, while the higher increases in Egypt, India or Ceylon or China are a drag on the society and a cause of increasing impoverishment, since even when the young reach the productive age range, there is no opportunity or scope for them to produce. Hence the phenomenon of perpetual unemployment open or disguised which afflicts a very large proportion of the population of these “underdeveloped” countries.

There is one particular aspect of this overpopulation, as we may reasonably call it, which has also to be noticed: the great and growing increase in the size of cities, which is very unlike the increase that cities like London or New York or Manchester or Los Angeles have experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In these cases the increase in population was an index of the increase in industry and in employment opportunities generally. And sooner or later as the case may be, the housing stock and the municipal facilities increased in order to keep pace with the growth of population. Cities in the underdeveloped world are by no means centres of industry which can offer a livelihood to the enormous numbers who flock to them from the countryside. Cairo at the outbreak of the Second World War had less than 1.5 million inhabitants. Today it has ten or twelve million, or perhaps more. No one imagines that opportunities of employment, the housing stock or the facilities have kept pace. What is true of Cairo is also true of Tehran, Istanbul, Bombay, Calcutta and so many others.

This inordinate growth of cities, this over-urbanization as it has been called, has all kinds of repercussions on the social and private lives of the inhabitants and on their governance—consequences which cut across, thwart and hamstring efforts to realize the ideal of development. In the cities of the underdeveloped world, the structure of the extended or patriarchal family which was traditional to these areas has been disrupted, and with it the traditional religions which served to give meaning and coherence to life, and bind the generations together. With the disruption of the traditional family and the loss in prestige and credibility which traditional beliefs have suffered, a wide gap has opened between the young and the old, with the old uncomprehending and ridiculed, and the young disoriented, dissatisfied, open to the lure of slogans and eager to follow whatever path promises to provide a way out of the blind alley in which they find themselves caught. Abd al-Nasser’s *Philosophy of the Revolution*, Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr’s Islamic economics, Sadeq Hedayat’s fiction, Nirad Chaudhuri’s *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, V. S. Naipaul’s two works *An Area of Darkness* and *Among the Believers* are so many reports,

direct and indirect, witting and unwitting on the moral and intellectual condition of the underdeveloped world. And we have to ask if the state of mind of a young man dabbling in terrorism like Jamal abd al- Nasir or Bani-Sadr's Pol Potian ideals, or the Calcutta students seduced by Gandhian demagoguery, or the systematic de-schooling advocated and practised by Muslim fundamentalists in Indonesia can possibly help to further the ideal of development.

The ideal of development, we have said, aspires to a society which is not only prosperous but also democratic. This democratic ideal implies in the first place a state of affairs in which there is personal freedom regulated by impersonal law. It implies further governments responsive to the desires and opinions of the governed, and responsible to them. A government regulated by law and responsible to the body politic is a constitutional government, and constitutionalism is a more adequate and a more precise appellation for this kind of government than the term democracy—a word which is now a victim of verbicide. Constitutionalism, as is well known, derives its reality and vitality not simply from the suffrage and parliamentary arrangements. It is given reality and is underpinned by a social structure which contains a multitude of interests none of which is able to overrule or to ride roughshod over one another. This mutual checking and balancing of divergent interests is that which gives reality to the checks and balances of a constitutional manner of governing. Thus, the mediaeval theory of the English constitution distinguished between *gubernaculum* and *jurisdictio*, or as we might say executive and legislative power. The first inhered in the king, and the second was exercised by the king by and with the consent of the estates of the realm. In this traditional framework it proved possible to accommodate various emergent interests, the latest of which is the new proletariat conjured up by the revolution in industry. All this is implied by the ideal which the underdeveloped countries deem themselves to be pursuing. How does this ideal fit in with their own political inheritance?

By and large these countries share one or other of two political traditions. China, India, the Islamic Middle East belong to the tradition of Oriental despotism, while in black Africa the tradition is that of tribal rule in which an immemorial and divinely sanctioned custom is deemed to regulate the behaviour of the members of the tribe, and to guide the actions of the tribal chiefs and the elders who assist and advise them. Tribal rule can be described as primitive government. Primitive is not to be understood in a pejorative sense, but only to indicate that here is a kind of government

which is not intricate in its arrangements and which has shown that it does not possess any great powers of resistance when it is faced with more sophisticated kinds of political and military organizations.

The case is far otherwise with Oriental despotism which the record shows to be one of the most intricate, most efficient and most lasting of political organizations. In Oriental despotism, to adopt Karl Wittfogel's classic formulation, the state is stronger than society. How such a political organization came to be is a matter of speculation which for our present concerns is quite immaterial. What remains the case is that where Oriental despotism obtains, political sociology is extremely simple: there are two social groups, those who are ruled and those who rule, there is a population which works, produces and pays taxes, and there is a ruling institution quite separate from it, which extracts the taxes, imposes law and order and engages in warfare. Marx's dictum about the relation between economic and political power is here diametrically reversed. You do not seek to find out who owns the means of production in order to find out who is the government. On the contrary, you ascertain where political and military power lies, and it will then become apparent that economic power is non-existent, that riches are vanity, and that property has no security. It is in this sense that in Oriental despotism the state is stronger than society, that there is no interest in society which can withstand the demands of the ruling institution.

Hence, the significance of the fact that feudalism as a political arrangement is here absent. As is well known, control of land in the feudal age in Western Europe meant that a state of affairs arose in which the king as a feudal monarch was bound to seek counsel and consent from the vassals, that feudalism became an intricate network of rights and obligations. This network of interests mutually checking one another is fundamental to the rise of constitutionalism in Western Europe, and constitutionalism, we have said, is inherently a matter of checks and balances. The story told of a Chinese general could never have been told of a Western magnate. This general was accused of plotting against the Emperor. In order to exculpate himself and to prove that he had absolutely no interest in political matters, the general pointed to the fact that his one consuming passion was the accumulation of property in land. Hence also the precariousness of private property in Oriental despotism, where wealth can be confiscated or bestowed at the caprice of the ruler, and where to be known to be a man of substance can invite sudden and utter ruin. Ibn Khaldun recounts the instructive and moving story of the philosopher Ibn Baja who happened to

recite in the presence of the ruler at an Andalusian court a poem which made the ruler so enthusiastic that he vowed that he would send Ibn Baja home walking on gold. Ibn Baja was in a predicament: to accept or to refuse the gift was equally dangerous. To refuse would offend and anger, while to accept would make Ibn Baja so rich that his life might henceforth be at risk. Ibn Baja resolved the dilemma by begging for two pieces of gold which he proceeded to insert one in each shoe and so walked home literally on gold, thus both making the ruler's vow come true, and yet preserving his own life from the perils of great wealth.

Again, in contrast with the Western situation, there is in Oriental despotism an utter absence of free municipal institutions, and in general of autonomous associations devoted to promoting within the law the interests of their members. Trade guilds have existed of course in Oriental despotism but they always were mistrusted and closely controlled by the ruler. When Oriental despotisms were rejuvenated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the methods and precepts of European Enlightened Absolutism, and subsequently of Leninism, the traditional guilds wilted and died in the scorching blaze of centralizing power. Municipalities, municipal institutions and organs of village self-government are then prominent by their absence in the world of Oriental despotism. *Omdas* in Egypt or *mukhtars* in the Ottoman empire or village elders elsewhere do not represent villages in which they reside, but rather act as the agents of authority. They are responsible not to the villagers but to the ruler. They are there to ensure the good behaviour of those whom they oversee. Village assemblies are also known in India and China, but such organisms were politically irrelevant in that no mechanism existed whereby the wishes and views of such assemblies could regularly, and as a matter of course, be conveyed to the central authorities, let alone be taken into account or acted upon. British officials in India thought to build on the presumed tradition of Indian village assemblies in order to prepare Indians for parliamentary self-government. But institutions of local government in India proved a dismal failure and in no way engaged the interest or the enthusiasm of those whom they were intended to benefit.

In Oriental despotism, then, there is a great barrier fixed between those in the official class, and those not in the official class. Power sits in formidable and solitary eminence, and all that the ordinary subject may aspire to is to escape the attentions of authority. A story in *The Thousand and One Nights* concerns a man who coming back from work in the evening finds a corpse near his door. He is terrified to report his discovery

to the police lest they accuse him of murder. He carries the corpse and puts it over the wall into a neighbour's garden. The neighbour in his turn discovers the body and is likewise terrified; he in turn transfers it to his neighbour's property where the same story is repeated and so on and the body ends by perambulating through the whole town without anybody daring to make public its existence. A saying attributed to the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun declares that the best life has he who has an ample house, a beautiful wife, and sufficient means, who does not know us and whom we do not know.

If power sits on an eminence cut off from the rest of the population, the supreme power is likewise isolated from its servants by a wall of reciprocal mistrust and fear. Mirrors of Princes and similar writings abound in advice to rulers and those near them about the best means of protecting their lives and safeguarding their positions. The Indian Kautilya in the latter part of the first millennium B.C.E., advises the ruler on how to take precautions against poisoning, and tells him that the king should spy on his prime minister, that he should beware of his close friends, his wives, his brothers, his heir apparent, and his progeny in general. "Princes like crabs", says Kautilya, "have a notorious tendency of eating up their begetter." A Persian mirror of princes advises the vizir that "should the ruler at any time pretend to you that you are completely secure with him, begin from that moment to feel insecure; if you are being fattened by someone you may expect very quickly to be slaughtered by him."

This is clearly not the world of Mrs. Thatcher or President Reagan; nor is it something utterly remote, dead and gone. We recognize this world as a world which exists here and now, the world in fact in which the greater part of humanity finds itself, Stalins world, Maos world, Nassers world, a world from which escape is a vain and delusive hope. Oriental despotism has in fact been given a new lease of life, and endowed with enhanced powers by all the new technology of communications, indoctrination, and mass control which are the offshoots of Western scientific innovation, and which have spread to the whole world.

For the world of Oriental despotism then, the political ideal which forms part of the notion of development is not to be realized. And in so far as economic development and constitutionalism seem to go hand in hand, we may perhaps also conclude that the modernized and rejuvenated system of Oriental despotism must also stand in the way of economic development itself, that the economic modernization in which all these regimes are

feverishly and ostensibly involved amounts (to adopt the eloquent title of Galal Amin's book) to no more than the modernization of poverty.

But it may be said that, as indicated earlier, there is another political tradition to be met with in the underdeveloped world, namely that of tribal rule. Here there is no state apparatus which is stronger than society. Here are warrior chiefs assisted and counselled by elders, rudimentary political arrangements, an openness of relations between leader and led such that the poorest tribesman could address King Ibn Sa'ud as "Ya 'Abd al-'Aziz!" The record, however shows, in the first place, that it is not true, as used to be argued by romantic historians, that constitutional representative government has its origins in the forests of Germany, or among the Beduins of the Arabian Peninsula. Tribal self-government is primitive government and cannot sustain the sophisticated legal structure without which constitutional representative government cannot exist. In the second place, the record also shows that tribal self-government, as I have said earlier, cannot withstand assault by more solidly and intricately organized political structures. Owing to the fact that their military means were limited and their empires far-flung, Oriental despotisms were not always able to submit to their authority nomadic tribes within their territories. But once modern weapons and communications became available, nomads were hardly in a position to resist, and their tribal institutions have been superseded. And even when administrators like Lyautey in Morocco or Lugard in Nigeria strive to preserve indigenous institutions by instituting what is called indirect rule, these very attempts at conservation drain life and significance out of what had been—within its limits—a viable political system. Indirect rule transforms tribal institutions into museum pieces.

Again, tribal rule itself may change into more complex and more powerful political organizations. But these more complex organizations have evinced no tendency to become constitutional representative governments. On the contrary: the Glaoui in Morocco, the Hausa in northern Nigeria, the Bantu kingdoms in Southern Africa, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—all of them having their origin in tribal confederacies and tribal warfare—became despotisms more or less ruthless, more or less arbitrary, haunted by insecurity and suspicion, and schooled in those arts to which rulers have to resort when they do not enjoy the boon of governing with the consent of the citizens and under the aegis of the laws.

Whatever the political tradition to which they belong, rulers of these "underdeveloped" countries are quite well aware of the gulf which yawns between them and their subjects. Such a state of affairs offers solid

advantages to the rulers who can sleep easy in the confidence that their subjects' fear of government is such that passivity is their only political stance. But development is not compatible with passivity. Development requires that passive subjects should be mobilized into activity. Here, too, the example of Europe seems to provide the answer. Ideology and an ideological style of politics constitute a distinctive and powerful feature of the European political tradition. Mobilization of subjects, their integration into the enterprise of development—so rulers increasingly came to believe—would be effected by the indoctrination of subjects in some ideology or another, whether nationalism or socialism, or ujamaa or négritude. Thus passivity would be changed into activism, into enthusiasm for the common weal. But such ideologies are, on the one hand, alien to the experience and cast of mind of the inhabitants of “underdeveloped” countries. And, on the other, they cannot produce initiative, inventiveness, or enterprise—cannot, in other words, make lively and energize these societies. To the burden of passive obedience which the subject owes to the ruler, they only add the obligation of active and demonstrative assent to official slogans and licensed doctrines.

The political inheritance of the underdeveloped countries is thus not propitious to development as this ideal is understood by them. Their economic situation is likewise not auspicious, and—what is perhaps even more serious—the planned and deliberate pursuit of development by a central authority is likely to set up powerful stresses in the body social and the body politic, and thus to put obstacles in the way of that prosperity and democracy which is declared to be the goal of development.



“I would use the term despotism . . .”

An interview with Elie Kedourie (1992)

This is the text of an interview with Elie Kedourie which took place on 8 June 1992, shortly before his untimely death on 29 June. The interviewer, Frits Bolkestein, was the leader of the Dutch Liberal Party as well as a noted writer and journalist.

FB. In the Muslim world one sees few democracies. The countries that look most like democracies are Turkey, Indonesia after a fashion, and Tunisia. They are far away from the center of the Muslim world. The question is

legitimate: does the lack of democracy in the Islamic world have something to do with Islam itself? Is it rooted in Islam? In your book, *Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford, 1992) you go back to the fact that in its origin the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual power did not exist. That may be part of the explanation. On the other hand, there is the intrusion of outsiders. Baghdad was sacked by the Mongols in the 13th century. Surely the violent disruption of the Islamic civilization of the time must have had something to do with its relative decline thereafter, and therefore with its lack of capacity to regenerate itself into some kind of political democracy?

EK. I am not sure that one can establish a link between the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols and the political tradition of Islam. Before as well as after the Mongols we see the same political tradition. It is a tradition in which there is no question of representation. Representation is a European invention unknown to the Muslim world. There is no question of a balance of power, of checks and balances. All functions of government are concentrated in one man, who is the ruler, and everybody else is his servant or indeed his slave. That existed before the Mongols and continued to exist. So, in that sense, there was no catastrophic break that would account for the decline of Islamic civilization in a political sense. It did not decline; the political traditions continued. And if you are talking about trade, industry, and the arts, one should not exaggerate the effects of the Mongol invasion. Egypt was not touched by the Mongol invasion. It was a very flourishing place under the Mamluks. In the 16th century, Persia under the Safavids was one of the high points of civilization.

It is perfectly true that Islamic civilization declined in relation to Europe in modern times. Europe became much more dynamic. But that is a recent phenomenon. There was no science or industry to speak of in medieval Europe. It became a dynamic society after the discovery of the Americas, and it is then that the decline set in in the Muslim world. The trade routes became diverted from the Middle East to the Atlantic. Thus began a period of stagnation across the Middle East.

FB. Would you then say that the relative decline of the Muslim world is a consequence of the rise of Europe after 1492?

EK. I would not say one is the cause of the other. One can say that these things happened in Europe but not elsewhere. What one notices in relation to the Muslim world, and the Middle East in particular, is the lack of

curiosity about developments in European civilization, even in European military power, until they were brought very forcibly to Muslim attention.

FB. Professor Mohammed Arkoun speaks time and again of the “medieval mental space” in which Islamic thought has been confined since the death of Averroes at the end of the 12th century. Do you have an explanation for this medieval mental space in which Islamic thought has been confined?

EK. It is exactly the same mental space as that of medieval Europe. The question is not about Islam but about Europe. Why did Europe take off? Why did it burst the bounds of this mental space, whereas the others did not? There is a very good book by G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago, 1953). One of the points made in that book is that medieval Islam was, in many ways, a mirror image of medieval Europe. There were many more points of contact, if one cares to find them, between medieval Islam and medieval Europe than between modern Islam and modern Europe. So it really is a question addressed to Europe rather than to Islam.

One can say one thing about Islam, however. Islam, when it came on the scene, became a very great military power in a comparatively short time. There came to be a belief among Muslims that the truth of their religion was proven by the fact that they continuously favored them over the non-Muslims. They did not believe that all these multitudes over whom they had triumphed were a match for them. Therefore, they did not trouble to find out what was going on in their world, which was so inferior to their own. That became an ingrained habit. I think this may explain a lot.

FB. The same Mohammed Arkoun is very critical of the governments of Middle Eastern countries. In fact, he calls them totalitarian. One can quarrel about the use of that word. But when I asked him what the cause of this totalitarian form of government was, he said it was a result of the Islamic countries importing the Jacobin centralizing state. Now, Arkoun is by origin Algerian, and of course he looks towards France. I replied that there were two other models. One was the model of the Ottoman state and the second was that of oriental despotism. But he said those models were forgotten. They played no role in the thinking of modern Muslims. They looked towards Europe and what they saw was the Jacobin centralizing state.

EK. I would agree with him, except that I would not use the term totalitarianism. I would use the term “despotism” or “absolutism”. And I would not talk so much about Jacobinism, which really is a doctrine. Certainly, centralization was a feature of the European state. There were exceptions like the Netherlands and Great Britain, where centralization was not practiced until recently, and where there was a tremendous diffusion of power. But on the whole, in France, in the German-speaking world and in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from the 18th century on, there flourished what was known as enlightened absolutism. This was the first European tradition to become known to rulers of the Middle East, including the Ottomans. There was the native tradition of despotism, but superimposed on that were the traditions of enlightened absolutism, which were centralizing traditions.

These traditions impressed the rulers of the Middle East, particularly Ottoman rulers and Muhammad Ali of Egypt, because the European states seemed to have solved the problem of military power. What one had to do was to borrow from these states. First, one borrowed their military techniques, and then one borrowed their administrative arrangements. In the first half of the 19th century, rulers in the Middle East worked hard to strengthen their states by importing ideas of centralization and enlightened absolutism. But it did not work because the state remained very weak. What it did was increase discontent because all kinds of people became more aware of another European tradition: parliamentary government and political representation. And they said: “This is really the secret of Europe, not what you have been importing from the centralizing absolutists, and it is this that will be our salvation.” I think I have established in my book that this did not work either.

FB. In your book you point to two ideas which have come from Europe. One is millenarianism, and the other one is nationalism. In China and Japan, one sees little influence of millenarianism. There was a millenarian movement in China, the Taiping movement, but a significant inspiration for that movement was Christianity. Why was the Muslim world so particularly susceptible to the idea of millenarianism?

EK. It was not particularly susceptible to millenarianism. We have to distinguish between religious movements which are millenarian and the political millenarianism in Europe from 1789 onwards — a new age, a new world. As Wordsworth said: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.” It was

very heaven, he said. And it was this kind of political millenarianism which took hold of certain political thinkers. Among these, the most important was Jamal al-Din Afghani. He was very influential in spreading the view that it is possible for people and societies to transform themselves entirely and become other than they were through political action. Salvation lay through political action. By the 20th century, that idea had become prevalent among the educated classes, particularly among military officers, in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere. That is the explanation of the current of political millenarianism. In a sense, it originates in Christian religious traditions.

You might also say that there is a millenarian tradition in Islam. But a millenarian tradition was important only in the Shiite branch of Islam. And even in that branch, the millenarian tradition had become very passive. People were taught to expect the coming of the savior who was a descendant of the fourth Caliph. It was only when new forms of political millenarianism emerged after the French Revolution that this new current in the Muslim world arose. I look upon it as entirely derivative of European events and actions.

FB. As a casual observer of the Middle East, having visited most of its countries, I have always been struck by the theatrical quality of Middle Eastern politics and by its ruthlessness. We must never forget that European history has many examples of ruthlessness. But there does not seem to be an end to this tradition in the Middle East. Is there something peculiar to those countries that causes both the theatrical quality and the ruthlessness?

EK. The theatrical quality is a result of the dissemination of modern means of communication and particularly the electronic media. Rulers are not stupid. When they control the printed word, radio and television, they make use of them. They have seen how it was used in Europe by Mussolini, Hitler and the Bolsheviks, and they imitate them. But they are not the only ones. Despots in Africa do exactly the same. This particular phenomenon does not originate in the Middle East.

The ruthlessness results from the total absence of checks and balances and of the idea that the citizen has a right to control the actions of the rulers. There is an absolute absence of such a tradition. The living tradition is one of entire and absolute passive obedience. When that is combined with great ambitions, namely to provide salvation through political action, the stakes

become much higher, and then you witness this continuous parade of ruthlessness. This results from the desire to establish a society according to a particular blueprint. Old-fashioned despots did not want to fashion society. They had traditional ways of looking at things. Here they were: rulers under God. And they meant to keep their power. So long as the subjects recognized them as their rulers, the rulers let them be.

But now there is a succession of blueprints, and blueprints have a way of not coming out right. So one blueprint succeeds another, producing a succession of revolts or revolutions. The holders of the new blueprint blame the holders of power who had an earlier blueprint. Their blueprint had failed, and therefore they had to be swept away — how else can you really reconstruct society? That makes for ruthlessness. Every new ruler or successful coup-maker starts by saying that he will abolish corruption and the excess of power and establish a new heaven and a new earth, yet every one of them fails. If he is not careful and does not have an efficient police and army, then he is bound to fall prey to younger people who have another blueprint and are very dissatisfied with the failure of the earlier blueprint.

FB. Your book is depressing because its central thesis is that Europe undid the Middle East not because of what it did but because of what it was. Your thesis is that the development of the arts and sciences and representative democracy in Europe, Europe's wealth, and the organization of European armies caused Middle Eastern countries to emulate us, thereby implanting the seeds of destruction. Now, of course, the European countries committed many mistakes. Colonialism was a mistake. But even without those mistakes, the example of Europe and its wealth, force, and presence would have been sufficient for the destructive emulation by Middle Eastern governments.

EK. I do not know if that is necessarily depressing. It is what it is. Europe cannot help being what it is. By the very fact of its existence, as you rightly say, it was a destabilizing force for the Middle East. As for European conquests or colonialism, this is the least important factor. The lands of the Middle East had been accustomed to conqueror after conqueror. The fact of conquest was nothing new in their experience. And in a sense, European conquest was like any other conquest. But what was not like any previous experience was the tremendous intellectual and technical power of European civilization. That is what undid them — without the Europeans lifting a finger.

FB. Your book ends on a pessimistic note. The last sentence reads as follows: “The torment does not seem likely to end soon.” I would subscribe to that statement. Mohammed Arkoun reproaches Europe for dealing with corrupt governments. He says: “You exported your ideals to the Middle East, yet the French bombarded Sidi Ben Sakiet in Algeria. You are hypocritical. You deal with corrupt governments. Saddam Hussein is a creature of the West and you leave people of good will in the lurch.”

EK. I do not think the term hypocrisy is in order. Hypocrisy is a moral attribute of individuals. You cannot speak of hypocrisy in relation to whole civilizations or to states. And it was not that Western states exported these ideals into the Middle East. They got imported. Absolutely no one could have prevented it. It is no one’s responsibility.

As far as dealing with “corrupt” governments, states have to deal with all kinds of other states, and there is no reason why they should not deal with this or that state according to their own interest. As far as Algeria is concerned, I have a bit of sympathy with Arkoun when he complains that he and people like him have been left in the lurch. That is very true because Algeria was governed by the French and it was abandoned in the most lamentable and pitiless fashion, from one day to the next. Abandoned without any regard to the interest of those for whom France had taken responsibility for a hundred and thirty years. That much can be said. In Algeria the French had a great responsibility, and they fell down on it.

FB. The Dutch recently ran into a conflict with Indonesia because our government linked Dutch development assistance to an improvement in Indonesian treatment of the people of the island of Timor. Indonesia basically replied that the Dutch could keep their money and that they no longer desired development assistance from the Dutch, who had poked their noses into Indonesian affairs. This little incident shows that it is very difficult for Western governments to promote internal democracy in other countries. What Arkoun asks us to do — to support the democratization of the Middle East — is in practice very difficult. Our governments have to deal with the governments of the day, whatever their persuasion.

EK. Exactly. I do not see how the Dutch government can force the Indonesian government to pursue what it regards as a civilized policy in East Timor. This way of reasoning is encouraged by what might be called

the ideological strain in modern European and American political discourse, this emphasis on human rights. It is taken for granted that there are human rights which are constitutionally guaranteed and which form the assumptions on which modern civilized society works. But when there are no such assumptions, what sense is there in talking about human rights? My point is that talk about human rights in Europe and North America is superfluous and talk about human rights elsewhere is useless. And I cannot see that it is the function of a government to impose its own view of human rights on a foreign government. It cannot do that. And there is no way in which it can do so, short of governing the place itself.

FB. I detect in your writings a certain nostalgia for the millet system of the Ottoman empire and also for the Austro-Hungarian empire. Is that in fact so? Do you regret the passing of the Ottoman Empire? I know, it's an odd question to ask. But if you compare the situation under the millet system of the Ottoman Empire with the present situation, I could well imagine that you would regret its passing. In the same way, if you look at the Balkans today, you might regret the passing of the Austro-Hungarian empire even though it was worm-eaten.

EK. Nostalgia is not a very profitable sentiment, nor is there any sense in regretting something that cannot be revived. All one can say is that these political systems and institutions, contraptions, or call them whatever you will, worked while they were there. They functioned; and considering the societies which the Ottomans and Austro-Hungarians ruled, they did not do a bad job of it. What one can also say is that the successor states have failed lamentably, whether in the Balkans or in central Europe or in the Middle East.

Could you imagine, in 1914 in Mesopotamia, which had been under Ottoman rule for centuries, a phenomenon like Saddam? It was unimaginable then. It has happened now. It has resulted from the destruction of that political order. That is all that one can say.

FB. Mohammed Arkoun says Saddam Hussein is the creature of the West.

EK. I do not understand what he means by that. If he means that it was Western governments which put him in power, then that is not true. If he means that from 1980 to 1990 the American and French governments and German firms did their best to help him, this is perfectly true. But you have

to look at their intentions. The German firms were there to make money. The French had two reasons for supporting Saddam. One was to sell arms in order to recycle petrodollars. And the other was to establish an influence in the Middle East. These are perfectly understandable objectives for any government to pursue.

American policy towards Saddam from 1980 to 1990 was also simple. The Americans believed, mistakenly I think, that if they did not do something in order to stop Khomeini, he would sweep over the whole of the Middle East. I think there was little prospect of that, but they believed it anyway, and therefore chose to support Saddam. Again, within its own terms, it was a rational, if mistaken, calculation. It was a terrible mistake, which lay at the back of the invasion of Kuwait and the war which followed, which I consider an unnecessary war. It was the result of policies which the Americans had followed vis-à-vis Saddam for ten years and which made him think that he could invade Kuwait with impunity.

A calculation went wrong. But I do not think that there was anything else there. Saddam is not a creature of the West. He is not a creature of anybody. He happens to be a very ruthless man who came to the top because of the destruction of the Ottoman political order and its replacement by nothing.

FB. Under the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, the collective right of self-determination was suppressed yet individual rights could be enjoyed to a greater degree than thereafter. Is it fair to say that since Wilson's Fourteen Points the modern world has laid too much emphasis on collective rights at the expense of individual rights?

EK. National self-determination was made very fashionable by the Fourteen Points and enshrined by the League of Nations and in the charter of the United Nations. But it is a visionary idea and there is no way that it can be made into a pillar of international order. It is a pillar of international disorder. As you see in the case of Yugoslavia, you cannot simply determine that a population is entitled to national self-determination, grant it, and that is the end of it. Because it is not the end of it. After 1918, there were those who promoted the idea that all Yugoslavs wanted to be united — that creating Yugoslavia was an expression of national self-determination. Now we see that national self-determination means the self-determination of Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Bosnians and so on. And since, in all these areas,

the various groups are intermixed with one another, this must lead to endless conflict.

FB. If one looks at the Austro-Hungarian empire and also the Ottoman state, yes, they were multiracial or multinational states or empires, but one particular part of those empires held the upper hand. In the case of the Austro-Hungarian empire, it was the Austrians; in the case of the Ottoman Empire, it was the Turks. But under the millet system they left the various peoples alone. That raises the question of whether the world is ripe for multiracial or multinational states or empires. Look at Quebec, Belgium, Ireland, Cyprus, Sri Lanka.

EK. If groups are different in point of religion, race, or language, conflicts will arise. The question is whether these conflicts must inevitably lead to the disruption of the social order. I see nothing inevitable about that. The Austro-Hungarian empire allowed a great deal of latitude to various nationalities. It tried to work with a nearly mathematical sense of equity as between the various groups. After the *Ausgleich*, it was a parliamentary state, and all groups were represented. The government in Vienna took great care to consult and to listen, and there was no despotism on the part of the German element in the last few decades. You say it was bound to disappear. I am not really sure about this inevitability. If there had been no Great War, why should it have?

The Ottoman Empire had nothing like the same parliamentary situation. Nor did it make the same attempt to listen to the various groups, since this kind of self-awareness among its subjects had not progressed much at all. Yet if the Young Turks had not entered the war so foolishly, it is unclear whether things would have collapsed. If you look at the record of the Ottoman Empire, its rulers had a very sensible attitude to the problems raised by large groups of people who were under their control. When it came to insurrection, the Ottomans were quite ruthless. But apart from that, they tried very hard to maneuver, to meander, to try and conciliate. For example, Abdülhamid was sultan from 1876 to 1909. He found himself confronted at various points in his reign by radical officers who believed in ideologies of renewal, national self-determination, and so on. What did he do? He did not kill them. He exiled them and gave them sinecures in the provinces.

FB. You are sometimes critical of the British for leaving the Middle East. You seem to suggest that they could have stayed in Yemen, Aden and Iraq. You also write about the mistakes of Lord Cromer and others in Egypt. Do you think that the British could have hung on?

EK. All one can say is that whatever was done was not inevitable. There was a choice. In the case of Egypt, the breaking point came with the disturbances of 1919, when great mistakes were made by British civil servants, by the government itself, by the high commissioner, Allenby, and by some of his successors. They found themselves in a very volatile situation. They did not deal well with it. They thought that this 1919 uprising was an expression of a national movement. There was once a very talented leader, Sa'd Zaghlul, who tried to speak as the embodiment of the Egyptian national movement. There was a great deal of frustration and discontent, and he was allowed to become its spokesman. There was no reason why he should have been allowed to do so except for a number of mistakes.

As a result, the British came to assume that there was a national movement, that Zaghlul was its spokesman, and that they had to compromise with him. In fact, they handed Egypt over to a very unrepresentative group of people who had no regard for the welfare or the rights of the Egyptian people, as their record shows. They simply enjoyed the sweets of power. And to stay in power, they kept attacking the remnants of the British position, at a time when Egypt was still important to Britain for imperial reasons, because Britain still had India and the Far East to consider. They kept attacking Britain to justify their existence and their position vis-à-vis their rivals in Cairo. In the resulting mess, the main sufferers were the Egyptian people.

Elsewhere, in Iraq, which the British invented, they imported a foreigner and made him king. They gave this country, of which the majority was Shiite and Kurdish, to a handful of ex-Ottoman officers who were Sunnis and who represented nobody. That was a recipe for disaster. In that sense one can criticize their policies.

At a minimum, as we can see from the record of British colonial regimes in places like Africa or Egypt before 1919, there was no representative government, but rather what is called a *Rechtsstaat*, a state in which law and order prevailed. That was a great boon for the ordinary person who really does not meddle in politics. The Middle Easterner is very far from

thinking that he has a right to have a say in politics. All he wants is to be left alone and not to be oppressed. At the minimum, the British colonial regime ensured this for the generality of the population. When the British made a great mess of Egypt and Iraq, the chief sufferers were the local population. But I do not see that the British themselves derived any advantage from this. They thought there would be an advantage, but they were mistaken.

FB. The conclusion must be that the European ideals that resulted in the freedom and affluence of the peoples of Europe, when adopted by rulers in the Middle East, led to the poverty and misery of millions of people there.

EK. I suppose this is true, but these ideals which captured the Middle East were not imposed by Europe. It was something which was infectious. Someone who has influenza is not really responsible for the fact that someone else catches his disease.

Two Sources for Discussion

Adolphus Slade



Sir Adolphus Slade (1804–1877) was a British naval officer, traveler, and writer who became one of the nineteenth century's most knowledgeable European observers of the Ottoman Empire. After extensive travel in the eastern Mediterranean and the publication of works such as *Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece, &c.* (1832), he entered Ottoman service in 1849 as Müşavir Pasha, spending seventeen years helping to reorganize and modernize the Ottoman navy and its defenses; his long residence and unusual access gave his writings on Ottoman society, politics, and military affairs an authority rare among contemporary European travelers. Bernard Lewis wrote of him: "His writings on Turkey may not unworthily be ranked with those of Tocqueville on America."



Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece, &c. (1832, excerpt)

Travellers are apt to laud Mehemet Ali: but let them consider the condition of his subjects—let them recollect, what they must have seen, the multitudes labouring naked in the cotton and rice grounds, goaded on by overseers, the numbers perishing on the banks of the canal, or in the towns,—the only bar between life and death, of those who survive a few years, black bread and the water of the Nile, their only enjoyment—shared with animals, as transitorily and as soullessly—multiplying their wretched species,—they will not wish his doctrines to be extended to Turkey. If the attributes of civilization,—armies, fleets, canals, roads, palaces,—can only be obtained by similar means, humanity would decline them.

Civilization, forced, is as inimical to a people's happiness as is a constitution abruptly presented. That deprives them of their liberties; this of their judgment: the shackles of the former are felt, before the

corresponding silken bands are fitted to disguise the iron; the condescension of the latter is abused before its beauty is respected: the one sharpens the sword of state; the other puts clubs in the hands of the mob. For the former hypothesis look at Russia; for the latter observe France.

When a nation, comparatively barbarous, copies the finished experience of a highly civilized state, without going through the intermediate stages of advancement, the few are strengthened against the many, the powerful armed against the weak. The sovereign, who before found his power (despotic in name) circumscribed, because with all the will, he had not the real art of oppressing, by the aid of science finds himself a giant—his mace exchanged for a sword. In scanning over the riches of civilization, spread out before him for acceptance, he contemptuously rejects those calculated to benefit his people, and chooses the modern scientific governing machine, result of ages of experiments, with its patent screws for extracting blood and treasure,—conscription and taxation. He hires foreign engineers to work it, and waits the promised result—absolute power. His subjects, who before had a thousand modes of avoiding his tyranny, have not now a loop-hole to escape by: the operations of the uncorroding engine meet them at every turn, and, to increase their despair, its movement accelerates with use, and winds closer their chains.

A people thus taken by surprise, and thrown off their guard, will be centuries before they acquire sufficient knowledge—every beam of which is carefully hid from them by the clouds of despotism—to compare their situation with that of their neighbours—(who, although ruled by the same means, have advantages to counterbalance its weight)—to assert human rights, and to dare to say “we are men.” In the mean time, they are dispersed, or collected, or worked, as cattle; suffered to perish of disease, or starve, as things of no import; compelled to march like puppets from zone to zone, for the caprice of one man—to slaughter and be slaughtered for his pleasure; and if any one, using his reason, pronounce such proceedings against the eternal fitness of things, he is denounced as revolutionary, an enemy of order, little short of mad, and unfit to live.

Such are the fruits which civilization, so called, has produced in one country. Newspapers act as oil to the engine, are, under such auspices, the direst enemies of freedom and rational reform, simply because they dare only espouse one side of a question, the side which suits the powers that

are. Even supposing, which is not probable, the editors to have any thing dearer at heart than their own profits, they dare not expose corruption in the heads of departments, and therefore, as a *juste milieu* is seldom the part of a newspaper, they applaud their measures, however tyrannical, the more particularly if they receive money for so doing. It is a long time in any state before the press acquires sufficient respectability, as well as independence, to expose abuses; until that time it only serves to abet them....

It is curious to observe the similarity of advantages which are enjoyed by nations in opposite spheres of knowledge, and separated by perfectly distinct manners and religion. Hitherto the Osmanley has enjoyed by custom some of the dearest privileges of freemen, for which Christian nations have so long struggled. He paid nothing to the government beyond a moderate land-tax, although liable, it is true, to extortions, which might be classed with assessed taxes. He paid no tithes, the *vacouf* sufficing for the maintenance of the ministers of Islamism. He travelled where he pleased without passports; no custom-house officer intruded his eyes and dirty fingers among his baggage; no police watched his motions, or listened for his words. His house was sacred. His sons were never taken from his side to be soldiers, unless war called them. His views of ambition were not restricted by the barriers of birth and wealth; from the lowest origin he might aspire without presumption to the rank of pasha; if he could read to that of *grand vizir*; and this consciousness, instilled and supported by numberless precedents, ennobled his mind, and enabled him to enter on the duties of high office without embarrassment. Is not this the advantage so prized by free nations? Did not the exclusion of the people from posts of honour tend to the French revolution? I might infinitely extend the parallel existing between nations removed by ages of knowledge. One more example, rather burlesque, however, than correct. The Janizzaries of Constantinople somewhat resembled a chamber of deputies, for they often compelled their sovereign to change his ministers, and any talented, factious member among them, with the art of inflaming men's passions, was sure to obtain a good employment in order to appease him.

For this freedom, this capability of realizing the wildest wishes, what equivalent does the sultan offer? It may be said none. I do not think that the Osmanleys would have objected to a uniform system of government with the burthen of a standing army, which would have defended their

honour, provided their liberties had been respected. But instead of engrafting his plans on the old system, which—embracing a respected hierarchy, an hereditary noblesse, and a provincial magistracy—offered such facilities, with a studious care not to shock prejudices, idle but sanctified; to make it appear that he aimed at rendering European subservient to Asiatic, rather than Asiatic to European, manners, he rejected all subterfuge, and prematurely disclosed his schemes of self-aggrandizement and appropriation which disgusted his subjects, and changed their respect for him into something less than horror.

Nikolai Petrovsky



Nikolai Fedorovich Petrovsky (1837–1908) was a Russian diplomat, Orientalist, and specialist in Central Asia who served in Russian Turkestan before becoming imperial consul, and later consul-general, in Kashgar from 1882 to 1903. A knowledgeable observer of Central Asian society as well as an agent of Russian expansion, he combined diplomatic service with historical, ethnographic, and archaeological research and became an important Russian authority on the region.



Sketches of the Kokand Khanate (1875)

As for Muslim despotism, supposedly abolished by Russian institutions, it would be difficult for us to guarantee that the natives find those institutions any less arbitrary than the Muslim ones they replaced. Under Muslim rule arbitrariness certainly existed; but that arbitrariness, far from being unlimited, was as characteristic a product of the thousand-year life of the country as all its other institutions, morals, and customs. It was native to the country and intelligible to its people. The Muslim ruler and his officials, brought up in the same milieu and sharing the same outlook as their subjects, might act arbitrarily, but they knew perfectly well where that arbitrariness began and where it ended; they understood its scope and its limits. By virtue of their exclusively religious education, common to the whole mass of the population, and of their similarity to it in way of life,

habits, and morals, Muslim rulers exercised their arbitrary power within familiar and recognized bounds. Indeed, they scarcely regarded it as arbitrariness at all, but as an indispensable attribute of authority, without which authority itself would have been inconceivable.

The people, for their part, viewed this arbitrariness through the eyes of their ruler. They saw in him not a tyrant and oppressor, but a fortunate favorite of destiny who, by that very fact, possessed the right to arbitrary and autocratic rule. Reared amid such ideas, the native of Central Asia knew perfectly well every gradation of this arbitrary power, from the *bek* down to the humblest *aksakal*, for the ground on which it was exercised, and the limits within which it operated, were as familiar to the one as to the other. In short, under Muslim arbitrary rule the native was at home: from time immemorial he had adapted himself to it, endured it, and made his peace with it. From a European point of view, the arbitrariness we encounter in Muslim states may of course appear dreadful; from a Muslim point of view, however, it is entirely natural and perhaps even lawful.

The case of Khudoyar Khan does not disprove this; on the contrary, it confirms what has just been said. Khudoyar Khan lost his khanate precisely because his arbitrariness ceased to be Muslim and became the sheer mad caprice of a personality restrained by no tradition. Had this despot, instead of openly and, so to speak, nakedly plundering his people, brought his conduct into conformity with his own law and with the sharia—as the emir of Bukhara does—he would have gone on as before, and one may safely say that he would never have had to make his way to Orenburg through circumstances beyond his control.

In 1865 we conquered the Turkestan region and began introducing institutions of our own, entirely different from Muslim institutions.... The natives were left to comprehend for themselves this rather complicated machinery of Russian administration and to guess at the relationships among authorities and institutions that were entirely new and scarcely intelligible to them. “Why is it,” an elderly native once asked me, “that in the old days it was easy to get money from the treasury? You went to Chernyaev, he gave you a note, and they paid you at once. But now you go and go and can scarcely get anything at all.” Naturally, one had to answer that in those days the region was poorly organized, that there were no properly constituted authorities, and so forth.

If we add to this that the Turkestan region has very few people who know the native languages and suffers from an acute shortage of interpreters, it becomes clear through what eyes the native must view our institutions, even supposing them to be the most perfect in the world. Naturally, they appear to him far more arbitrary than the Muslim institutions that preceded them—not because they actually are more arbitrary, but because, seeing them repeatedly altered, he is unable to understand either the significance of the changes or the nature of the institutions themselves.

All this—and I say it without hesitation—produces among the natives a general dissatisfaction with the Russians, a dissatisfaction that, far from diminishing, continues to grow. It spreads, moreover, into the neighboring khanates, where it arouses groundless hopes of recovering what has been lost and encourages such ventures as the repeated demands for the return of Samarkand and, at the present moment, the invasion of our frontier.

Explanatory Notes

- **p. 5 — Karl A. Wittfogel** — Karl August Wittfogel (1896–1988), German-born historian and political sociologist, originally a Marxist and later an anti-Communist. His *Oriental Despotism* (1957) argued that large-scale hydraulic societies tended to produce powerful centralized bureaucratic states.
- **p. 6 — hydraulic society** — Wittfogel’s term for a society in which large-scale irrigation, flood control, or water management requires extensive organization by a centralized authority. He associated such arrangements particularly with imperial China and other Asian civilizations.
- **p. 6 — “the State is stronger than society”** — Wittfogel’s shorthand for a political system in which government possesses overwhelming power relative to private property holders, local institutions, associations, or other potentially independent centers of authority.
- **p. 6 — feudalism** — A form of medieval European political and social organization based on relationships among kings, territorial lords, and vassals, involving landholding and reciprocal obligations. Kedourie and Wittfogel emphasize it because it dispersed rather than concentrated political power.
- **p. 6 — The Thousand and One Nights** — The collection of Middle Eastern tales also known as *The Arabian Nights*, whose caliphs, viziers, slaves, executions, and sudden reversals of fortune became a familiar European image of arbitrary Eastern rule.
- **p. 6 — five-year plans** — Centrally determined economic plans specifying production and investment targets for a five-year period, particularly associated with the Soviet Union and other Communist states.
- **p. 6 — State capitalism** — An economic arrangement in which the state owns, directs, or exercises extensive control over productive enterprises while retaining features of a market economy.
- **p. 7 — Point Four** — President Harry Truman’s 1949 program of American technical assistance to economically less-developed countries, named for the fourth point of his inaugural address. Kedourie invokes it dismissively as an example of postwar faith that technical assistance could produce political and economic modernization.

- **p. 7 — Technical Aid** — Post-1945 programs through which Western governments and international organizations supplied expertise, training, and development assistance to poorer countries.
- **p. 7 — pictorial ballots** — Ballots using pictures or symbols to assist voters with limited literacy. Kedourie uses the phrase ironically to evoke Western efforts to transplant electoral institutions into societies lacking a longer representative tradition.
- **p. 7 — “Sisyphean enterprise”** — A task requiring endless repetition without final completion, after Sisyphus of Greek mythology, condemned perpetually to roll a boulder uphill only to see it roll back down.
- **p. 7 — Marx** — Karl Marx (1818–1883), German philosopher and theorist of capitalism and communism. Kedourie objects here to applying Marxist categories indiscriminately to non-European societies.
- **p. 7 — Durkheim** — Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), French sociologist and one of the founders of modern sociology.
- **p. 7 — J. S. Mill** — John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), British philosopher, economist, and advocate of representative government and individual liberty.
- **p. 8 — fiat** — An authoritative command or decree; here, rule based simply upon the personal decision of the military ruler rather than established law.
- **p. 8 — Hegel** — Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), German philosopher whose political thought distinguished the state from “civil society” and presented world history as the progressive realization of human freedom.
- **p. 8 — The Philosophy of Right** — Hegel’s major work of political philosophy, published in 1821, in which he developed his accounts of property, civil society, the state, and freedom.
- **p. 9 — polis** — The ancient Greek city-state, such as Athens or Sparta; a political community in which citizenship and public life were centered upon the city.
- **p. 9 — Hegel’s “oriental realm”** — In Hegel’s philosophy of history, the earliest stage of political development, characterized by the principle that only the ruler is recognized as free, in contrast to the progressively broader conception of freedom he associated with later European history.

- **p. 10 — eminent domain** — The authority of a government to appropriate private property for public purposes, ordinarily subject in modern constitutional systems to legal procedures and compensation.
- **p. 10 — shari‘a** — Islamic religious law, derived principally from the Qur’an, traditions concerning Muhammad, and subsequent jurisprudence.
- **p. 11 — enlightened absolutism** — An eighteenth-century European form of monarchy in which rulers sought to strengthen and rationalize government through administrative, economic, educational, and legal reform without surrendering their own sovereign authority.
- **p. 11 — “the writ of traditional rulers”** — “Writ” here means the effective reach or enforceable authority of government.
- **p. 12 — Young Turks** — Ottoman reformist and revolutionary movement that restored the constitution in 1908 and subsequently became the dominant political force in the empire.
- **p. 12 — Ba‘ath Party** — Arab nationalist and socialist political movement founded in the 1940s. Rival branches ultimately established authoritarian regimes in Syria and Iraq.
- **p. 13 — Mustafa Kemal Atatürk** — Founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey (1923–1938), who abolished the Ottoman sultanate and introduced sweeping secularizing and centralizing reforms.
- **p. 14 — “temporal and spiritual”** — Political or secular authority as distinguished from religious or ecclesiastical authority.
- **p. 14 — ab initio** — Latin: “from the beginning.”
- **p. 14 — umma** — The worldwide community of Muslims, understood as a religious community rather than a nation defined by territory or ethnicity.
- **p. 14 — dar al-Islam** — Literally “abode of Islam”: territories under Muslim political rule.
- **p. 14 — dar al-harb** — Literally “abode of war”: in classical Islamic jurisprudence, territories outside Muslim rule.
- **p. 14 — respublica Christiana** — Latin for “Christian commonwealth”: the medieval conception of European Christendom as a single religious civilization despite its division among numerous political authorities.

- **p. 14 — regnum and sacerdotium** — Latin terms for secular kingship or political authority (*regnum*) and priestly or ecclesiastical authority (*sacerdotium*). Their distinction became fundamental to the medieval Western separation of political and religious power.
- **p. 14 — jihad** — Literally “striving” or “struggle”; in the political-legal context Kedourie discusses, armed struggle undertaken by the Muslim community under legitimate authority.
- **p. 15 — Abu Bakr** — One of Muhammad’s closest companions and his father-in-law; regarded by Sunnis as the first caliph after Muhammad’s death in 632.
- **p. 15 — khalifah / caliph** — Arabic for “successor” or “deputy.” The caliph was the political leader of the Muslim community after Muhammad.
- **p. 15 — amir al-mu’minin** — “Commander of the Faithful,” an important title of the caliph emphasizing his leadership of the Muslim community.
- **p. 15 — imam** — Literally “leader.” It can mean the person who leads Muslim prayer; in political theory it can also designate the legitimate head of the Muslim community.
- **p. 16 — bay‘a** — An oath or pledge of allegiance by which subjects or leading members of the Muslim community formally recognize a ruler’s authority.
- **p. 16 — hadith** — A report concerning the words or deeds of Muhammad. Collections of hadith form a major source of Islamic law and religious teaching.
- **p. 16 — Ghazali** — Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), one of the most influential Muslim theologians, jurists, and religious thinkers. His political writings emphasized the necessity of effective authority to prevent disorder and preserve religious life.
- **p. 18 — Byzantine Empire** — The eastern continuation of the Roman Empire, centered on Constantinople, which controlled much of the eastern Mediterranean before the early Muslim conquests.
- **p. 18 — Sassanids** — The Sassanian Persian dynasty, which ruled Iran and extensive neighboring territories from AD 224 until the Muslim conquests of the seventh century.

- **p. 18 — the Well-Guided Caliphs** — The first four caliphs in Sunni Muslim tradition: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.
- **p. 18 — Umayyads** — The first hereditary Islamic caliphal dynasty, ruling from Damascus from 661 to 750.
- **p. 18 — Abbasids** — Dynasty that overthrew the Umayyads in 750 and established its capital at Baghdad; Abbasid caliphs retained varying degrees of authority until the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258.
- **p. 18 — al-Mansur** — Second Abbasid caliph (r. 754–775) and founder of Baghdad.
- **p. 19 — “religion and rule are twins”** — A political maxim of pre-Islamic Persian origin expressing the idea that religion requires political authority for its protection and political authority requires religion for legitimacy.
- **p. 20 — Quraysh** — Muhammad’s tribe in Mecca. Classical Sunni political theory generally held that the caliph should belong to Quraysh.
- **p. 21 — raison d’état** — French for “reason of state”: the principle that preservation and interests of the state may require actions that ordinary morality might otherwise forbid.
- **p. 21 — taqiyya** — Concealment of religious belief when necessary for protection from persecution, especially important historically in Shiite communities living under hostile rulers.
- **p. 21 — Hisham ibn al-Hakam** — Influential eighth-century Shiite theologian associated with the development of early Imamite Shiism.
- **p. 21 — occultation of the Twelfth Imam** — In Twelver Shiite belief, the twelfth Imam disappeared from ordinary human sight in the ninth century and remains alive in concealment until his eventual return as the Mahdi.
- **p. 21 — al-Sheikh al-Mufid** — Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Mufid (c. 948–1022), a major Twelver Shiite theologian and jurist.
- **p. 22 — A. H. Lybyer** — Albert Howe Lybyer (1876–1949), American historian of the Ottoman Empire whose *Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (1913) described a distinct Ottoman “ruling institution” separated from the subject population.
- **p. 22 — qadi** — A Muslim judge administering Islamic law.

- **p. 22 — Ibn Jama‘a** — Badr al-Din Ibn Jama‘a (1241–1333), Syrian-Egyptian Muslim jurist and political thinker who wrote on rulership and Islamic government.
- **p. 23 — Ibn Khaldun** — North African historian and political thinker (1332–1406), author of the *Muqaddima*, famous for his analysis of dynasties, social solidarity, nomadic conquest, and political decline.
- **p. 23 — Ibn Baja** — Ibn Bajja, known in Latin Europe as Avempace (d. 1138), Andalusian Muslim philosopher, physician, and courtier.
- **p. 23 — regnum and sacerdotium** — See p. 14 above; Kedourie again invokes the Western distinction between secular and ecclesiastical authority.
- **p. 24 — Harun al-Rashid** — Abbasid caliph (r. 786–809), later immortalized in *The Thousand and One Nights*. His reign became legendary as an age of Abbasid splendor.
- **p. 24 — Barmecides** — The Barmakid family, an influential Persian family of administrators who served the early Abbasid caliphs. Harun al-Rashid abruptly destroyed their political power in 803.
- **p. 25 — al-Ma’mun** — Abbasid caliph (r. 813–833), son of Harun al-Rashid, noted particularly for patronage of scholarship and translation.
- **p. 25 — “Mirrors of Princes”** — A genre of political literature offering rulers and their advisers instruction on the conduct of government, court politics, and the preservation of power.
- **p. 26 — Mamelukes / Mamluks** — Military slaves, predominantly of Turkic and Circassian origin, who eventually established their own sultanate in Egypt and Syria. The Mamluk Sultanate ruled Egypt from 1250 until the Ottoman conquest of 1517.
- **p. 26 — Circassians** — People indigenous to the northwestern Caucasus. Circassian military slaves became especially prominent in the later Mamluk ruling establishment.
- **p. 26 — Ayyubids** — Dynasty founded by Saladin that ruled Egypt and parts of Syria and neighboring regions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
- **p. 26 — devshirme** — Ottoman levy under which Christian boys, principally from the Balkans, were taken into sultanic service, converted to Islam, educated, and trained for military or administrative careers.

- **p. 27 — ‘omda** — Egyptian village headman, usually transliterated *‘umda*.
- **p. 27 — mukhtar** — A village or neighborhood headman in the Ottoman Empire and its successor states.
- **p. 27 — fellah / fellahin** — Arabic for peasant or agricultural cultivator; *fellahin* is the plural.
- **p. 27 — Yathrib** — The pre-Islamic name of the Arabian oasis settlement later known as Medina.
- **p. 27 — madinat al-nabi** — Arabic for “City of the Prophet,” from which the name Medina derives.
- **p. 28 — “People of the Book” / “those who have been given the Book”** — Qur’anic designation principally for Jews and Christians, understood as recipients of earlier divine revelation.
- **p. 28 — jizya** — A poll tax historically imposed upon certain non-Muslim subjects of Muslim states, associated with their protected but subordinate legal status.
- **p. 28 — millet system** — Ottoman arrangements under which recognized religious communities, particularly Christians and Jews, enjoyed substantial autonomy in religious, educational, charitable, and personal-status affairs under their own communal leadership.
- **p. 28 — pays politique / pays légal** — French political expressions distinguishing the population that actually participates in political life from the broader population legally subject to the state. Kedourie uses the distinction analogically.
- **p. 29 — al-Ahram** — Major Cairo daily newspaper, founded in 1875 and long one of the Arab world’s most influential newspapers.
- **p. 30 — timocracy** — In Plato’s political classification, a regime dominated by honor and the military spirit, situated between aristocracy and oligarchy in his sequence of declining constitutions.
- **p. 30 — oligarchy** — Rule by a small group, particularly a wealthy elite.
- **p. 30 — “old regime”** — The traditional monarchical and aristocratic order of Europe before the French Revolution; from the French *ancien régime*.

- **p. 31 — “people’s democracies”** — Official designation adopted by several Soviet-aligned Communist regimes after World War II, especially in Eastern Europe. Kedourie invokes the term to illustrate the ambiguity of the word “democracy.”
- **p. 31 — pleonasm** — Redundant expression in which the same idea is unnecessarily stated twice; Kedourie regards “people’s democracy” as redundant because *demos* already means “people.”
- **p. 35 — divines** — An older term for theologians or religious scholars.
- **p. 35 — Janissaries** — Elite Ottoman infantry originally recruited largely through the *devshirme*. By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they had become a powerful political corporation, periodically resisting reforms and intervening in succession struggles.
- **p. 35 — praetorian guard** — Originally the Roman emperors’ elite bodyguard, notorious for intervening in imperial succession. By extension, a military force capable of making or unmaking governments.
- **p. 36 — Prussia** — Powerful German kingdom centered on Berlin that became known in the eighteenth century for its disciplined army, centralized bureaucracy, and “enlightened” monarch Frederick the Great.
- **p. 36 — Jeremy Bentham** — British philosopher and legal reformer (1748–1832), a founder of utilitarianism.
- **p. 36 — panopticon** — Bentham’s proposed prison design in which a central observer could potentially see every prisoner without prisoners knowing when they were being watched. It later became a metaphor for intensive surveillance and administrative control.
- **p. 37 — Mohammed Ali Pasha** — Muhammad Ali (c. 1769–1849), Ottoman governor of Egypt from 1805 and founder of the dynasty that ruled Egypt until 1952. He created a highly centralized state, modern army, monopolized economy, and extensive bureaucracy.
- **p. 37 — Morea** — Historical name for the Peloponnese peninsula in southern Greece. Muhammad Ali sent Egyptian troops there to help the Ottoman government suppress the Greek War of Independence.
- **p. 38 — suffrages** — Here, approval or support, not simply electoral votes.

- **p. 39 — St. Augustine** — Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Christian theologian and philosopher whose *City of God* profoundly influenced Western thinking about politics, order, peace, and human nature.
- **p. 39 — “the revolution devours its children”** — Proverbial description of revolutions turning against their own original supporters. It became associated with the radicalization and Terror of the French Revolution.
- **p. 39 — the Terror** — The Reign of Terror, 1793–94, the radical phase of the French Revolution marked by political repression and thousands of executions.
- **p. 40 — Wordsworth** — William Wordsworth (1770–1850), English Romantic poet who initially greeted the French Revolution enthusiastically. Kedourie alludes to his famous recollection: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.”
- **p. 41 — proletariat** — Wage-earning working class, especially industrial workers; a central category in Marxist theory.
- **p. 41 — Ceylon** — Former name of Sri Lanka, officially changed in 1972.
- **p. 42 — over-urbanization** — Urban population growth occurring more rapidly than industrialization, employment, housing, and municipal services can absorb.
- **p. 42 — Abd al-Nasser’s Philosophy of the Revolution** — Gamal Abdel Nasser’s 1954 political tract explaining his conception of Egypt’s revolution and regional role.
- **p. 42 — Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr** — Iranian economist and Islamist political activist who became the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1980; impeached and driven into exile in 1981.
- **p. 42 — Sadeq Hedayat** — Iranian writer (1903–1951), best known for the novel *The Blind Owl*, whose work often portrayed alienation and cultural dislocation.
- **p. 42 — Nirad Chaudhuri** — Indian writer and intellectual (1897–1999), best known for *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951).
- **p. 42 — V. S. Naipaul** — Trinidad-born British writer (1932–2018), later Nobel laureate, whose travel books included *An Area of Darkness* on India and *Among the Believers* on Muslim societies.

- **p. 43 — “Pol Potian”** — Resembling the radical social engineering of Cambodian Communist leader Pol Pot, whose Khmer Rouge regime caused mass death between 1975 and 1979.
- **p. 43 — Gandhian** — Relating to Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), leader of the Indian independence movement and advocate of nonviolent political action.
- **p. 43 — verbicide** — The destruction or debasement of a word’s useful meaning through excessive or misleading use.
- **p. 43 — gubernaculum and jurisdictio** — Medieval constitutional terms roughly distinguishing the king’s discretionary executive authority (*gubernaculum*) from the legal jurisdiction in which he was constrained by law (*jurisdictio*).
- **p. 43 — estates of the realm** — Legally recognized orders of medieval and early-modern society, typically clergy, nobility, and commoners, whose representatives might be summoned to approve taxation or legislation.
- **p. 46 — Kautilya** — Ancient Indian political thinker traditionally identified with Chanakya, adviser to Chandragupta Maurya, and associated with the *Arthashastra*, a treatise on statecraft, intelligence, diplomacy, and war.
- **p. 46 — Mrs. Thatcher** — Margaret Thatcher, Conservative prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.
- **p. 46 — Mao** — Mao Zedong (1893–1976), leader of the Chinese Communist Revolution and dominant ruler of the People’s Republic of China from 1949 until his death.
- **p. 47 — Galal Amin** — Egyptian economist and social critic (1935–2018), author of *The Modernization of Poverty*, whose title Kedourie borrows here.
- **p. 47 — Ibn Sa‘ud** — Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud (c. 1875–1953), founder and first king of Saudi Arabia.
- **p. 47 — Lyautey** — Hubert Lyautey (1854–1934), French soldier and colonial administrator who served as the first resident-general of the French protectorate in Morocco.

- **p. 47 — Lugard** — Frederick Lugard (1858–1945), British colonial administrator in Africa closely associated with the doctrine of “indirect rule.”
- **p. 47 — indirect rule** — Colonial system in which European authorities governed through existing local rulers, chiefs, and institutions rather than replacing them entirely with direct colonial administration.
- **p. 47 — Glaoui** — Thami El Glaoui (c. 1879–1956), powerful pasha of Marrakesh and tribal-political notable under the French protectorate in Morocco.
- **p. 47 — Hausa** — A major West African people concentrated especially in northern Nigeria and Niger, with a long history of organized Muslim states.
- **p. 48 — ujamaa** — Swahili for “familyhood,” the African socialist ideology associated with Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere.
- **p. 48 — négritude** — Francophone intellectual and cultural movement celebrating Black African identity and culture, associated particularly with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire.
- **p. 50 — Mohammed Arkoun** — Algerian-born French scholar of Islam (1928–2010), known for applying modern critical and social-scientific methods to Islamic intellectual history.
- **p. 50 — Averroes** — Latin name of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), Andalusian Muslim philosopher and commentator on Aristotle whose works profoundly influenced medieval European philosophy.
- **p. 50 — G. E. von Grunebaum** — Gustave E. von Grunebaum (1909–1972), Austrian-born American scholar of Islamic history and civilization.
- **p. 50 — Jacobin** — Originally a member of the radical Jacobin political movement during the French Revolution; more broadly, “Jacobinism” denotes a strongly centralized, ideological conception of the state.
- **p. 51 — millenarianism** — Belief in an approaching transformative age in which the existing social order will be swept away and replaced by a radically better one. Kedourie distinguishes religious millenarianism from modern political visions of revolutionary transformation.
- **p. 51 — Taiping movement** — Massive mid-nineteenth-century Chinese rebellion led by Hong Xiuquan, whose teachings incorporated an

idiosyncratic form of Christianity; the resulting civil war caused tens of millions of deaths.

- **p. 52 — Jamal al-Din Afghani** — Muslim political activist and intellectual (1838/39–1897) who promoted Islamic solidarity, political activism, and resistance to European domination and exercised wide influence across the Muslim world.
- **p. 52 — “descendant of the fourth Caliph”** — Reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, fourth caliph in Sunni reckoning and first Imam in Shiite belief.
- **p. 54 — Sidi Ben Sakiet** — Reference to Sakiet Sidi Youssef, a Tunisian village bombed by French forces in 1958 during the Algerian War because Algerian nationalist fighters were operating from the area.
- **p. 54 — East Timor** — Former Portuguese colony occupied and annexed by Indonesia in 1975–76. International criticism of Indonesian repression there became a major human-rights issue; East Timor became independent in 2002.
- **p. 56 — petrodollars** — Revenues earned by petroleum-exporting countries from oil sales, especially the enormous surpluses generated after the oil-price increases of the 1970s.
- **p. 56 — Wilson’s Fourteen Points** — Principles for the post-World War I settlement announced by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson in January 1918. They became closely associated, though often imprecisely, with the principle of national self-determination.
- **p. 57 — Ausgleich** — German for “compromise”; specifically the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which created the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.
- **p. 57 — Abdülhamid** — Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), who suspended the Ottoman constitution in 1878, ruled autocratically for three decades, and was deposed after the Young Turk Revolution.
- **p. 57 — sinecure** — A salaried office or position requiring little or no actual work, often used as a way of rewarding or neutralizing a political figure.
- **p. 58 — Aden** — Strategic port at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, under British control from 1839 until 1967.

- **p. 58 — Lord Cromer** — Evelyn Baring, Earl of Cromer (1841–1917), dominant British administrator in occupied Egypt from 1883 to 1907.
- **p. 58 — Allenby** — General Edmund Allenby (1861–1936), British commander in the Middle East during World War I and British high commissioner in Egypt from 1919 to 1925.
- **p. 58 — Sa‘d Zaghlul** — Egyptian nationalist politician (1859–1927), leader of the Wafd movement and central figure in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution against British rule.
- **p. 58 — Rechtsstaat** — German for a “state governed by law”: a political order in which public authority operates through established legal rules rather than arbitrary commands.
- **p. 60 — Mehemet Ali** — Older European spelling of Muhammad Ali of Egypt; see note for p. 37.
- **p. 62 — juste milieu** — French for the “middle way” or moderate middle position.
- **p. 62 — Osmanley** — Older European rendering of *Osmanlı*, meaning Ottoman; here, an Ottoman Muslim subject.
- **p. 62 — vacouf** — *Waqf*: a charitable or religious endowment whose revenues support mosques, schools, hospitals, or other designated purposes.
- **p. 62 — tithes** — Taxes or contributions traditionally amounting to one-tenth of agricultural or other income, historically associated especially with support of religious institutions.
- **p. 62 — Janizzaries** — Older spelling of Janissaries; see note for p. 35.
- **p. 63 — Kokand Khanate** — Central Asian state centered in the Fergana Valley, flourishing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before annexation by the Russian Empire in 1876.
- **p. 63 — Kashgar** — Major oasis city in what is now Xinjiang in western China, historically an important center of Central Asian trade and politics.
- **p. 64 — bek** — Turkic title for a local ruler, governor, chief, or notable, also rendered *bey*.
- **p. 64 — aksakal** — Literally “white beard”; a respected elder or local community headman in Central Asian societies.

- **p. 64 — Khudoyar Khan** — Nineteenth-century ruler of the Kokand Khanate, repeatedly deposed and restored, whose final loss of power preceded Russia's annexation of Kokand.
- **p. 64 — emir of Bukhara** — Ruler of the Emirate of Bukhara, a Central Asian Muslim state that became a Russian protectorate in the nineteenth century.
- **p. 64 — Orenburg** — Russian city near the southern Ural region that served as an important administrative and military gateway to Russia's expansion into Central Asia.
- **p. 64 — Turkestan** — Broad historical term for the Turkic-speaking regions of Central Asia; "Russian Turkestan" referred to the Central Asian territories conquered and administered by the Russian Empire.
- **p. 64 — Chernyaev** — Mikhail Chernyaev (1828–1898), Russian general prominent in the conquest of Central Asia, including the capture of Tashkent in 1865.
- **p. 65 — Samarkand** — Ancient Central Asian city in present-day Uzbekistan, conquered by the Russian Empire in 1868 and incorporated into Russian Turkestan.