OKCIR (est. 2002) is an independent research and publishing initiative dedicated to exploring, in a simultaneously world-historical and self-reflective framework, the human search for a just global society.

Since the world’s utopian, mystical, and scientific movements have been the primary sources of inspiration, knowledge, and/or practice in this field, OKCIR aims to critically reexamine the shortcomings and contributions of these world-historical traditions—seeking to clearly understand why they have failed to bring about the good society, and what each can integratively contribute toward realizing that end.

The center aims to develop new conceptual (methodological, theoretical, historical), practical, pedagogical, inspirational and disseminative structures of knowledge whereby the individual can radically understand and determine how world-history and her/his selves constitute one another.

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OKCIR pursues innovative editorial, digital, and print publishing practices reflecting its substantive goals, and is the publisher of Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge (ISSN: 1540-5699, est. 2002) which explores issues pertaining to the center’s interests. Human Architecture is a hybrid scholarly journal whose edited and monographed issues are simultaneously published also as individual books in hardcover, softcover, and PDF and/or EPUB ebook formats (with separately assigned ISBNs).

About this Book

In this major new study in the sociology of scientific knowledge, social theorist Mohammad H. Tamdgidi reports having unriddled the so-called ‘quantum enigma.’

This book opens the lid of the Schrödinger’s Cat box of the ‘quantum enigma’ after decades and finds something both odd and familiar: Not only the cat is both alive and dead, it has morphed into an elephant in the room in whose interpretation Einstein, Bohr, Bohm, and others were each both right and wrong because the enigma has acquired both localized and spread-out features whose unriddling requires both physics and sociology amid both transdisciplinary and transcultural contexts. The book offers, in a transdisciplinary and transcultural sociology of self-knowledge framework, a relativistic interpretation to advance a liberating quantum sociology.

Deeper methodological grounding to further advance the sociological imagination requires investigating whether and how relativistic and quantum scientific revolutions can induce a liberating reinvention of sociology in favor of creative research and a just global society. This, however, necessarily leads us to confront an elephant in the room, the ‘quantum enigma.’

In Unriddling the Quantum Enigma, the first volume of the series commonly titled Liberating Sociology: From Newtonian Toward Quantum Imaginations, sociologist Mohammad H. Tamdgidi argues that unriddling the ‘quantum enigma’ depends on whether and how we succeed in dehabituating ourselves in favor of unified relativistic and quantum visions from the historically and ideologically inherited, classical Newtonian modes of imagining reality that have subconsciously persisted in the ways we have gone about posing and interpreting (or not) the enigma itself for more than a century. Once this veil is lifted and the enigma unriddled, he argues, it becomes possible to reinterpret the relativistic and quantum ways of imagining reality (including social reality) in terms of a unified, nonreductive, creative dialectic of part and whole that fosters quantum sociological imaginations, methods, theories, and practices favoring liberating and just social outcomes.

The essays in this volume develop a set of relativistic interpretive solutions to the quantum enigma. Following a survey of relevant studies, and an introduction to the transdisciplinary and transcultural sociology of self-knowledge framing the study, overviews of Newtonianism, relativity and quantum scientific revolutions, the quantum enigma, and its main interpretations to date are offered. They are followed by a study of the notion of the “wave-particle duality of light” and the various experiments associated with the quantum enigma in order to arrive at a relativistic interpretation of the enigma, one that is shown to be capable of critically cohering other offered interpretations. The book concludes with a heuristic presentation of the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of what Tamdgidi calls the creative dialectics of reality. The volume essays involve critical, comparative/integrative reflections on the relevant works of founding and contemporary scientists and scholars in the field.
About the Author

Previous books by Mohammad H. Tamdgidi

*Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism*  
(Routledge/Paradigm, 2007)

*Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study*  
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Mohammad-Hossein (a.k.a. ‘Behrooz’) Tamdgidi (pronounced “tamjidi”) is the founder of OKCIR: Omar Khayyam Center for Integrative Research in Utopia, Mysticism, and Science (Utopystics), and its research and teaching publication, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* (ISSN: 1540-5699) which have served since 2002 to frame his independent research, pedagogical, and publishing initiatives. Formerly an associate professor of sociology specializing in social theory at UMass Boston, he has previously taught sociology at SUNY-Binghamton and SUNY-Oneonta.

Tamdgidi’s areas of scholarly and practical interest are the sociology of self-knowledge, human architecture, and utopystics—three fields of inquiry he invented in his doctoral studies and has since pursued as respectively intertwined theoretical, methodological and applied fields of inquiry altogether contributing to what he calls the quantum sociological imagination. His research, teaching, and publications have been framed by an interest in understanding how world-historical social structures and personal selves constitute one another. This line of inquiry has itself been a result of his longstanding interest in understanding the underlying causes of failures of the world’s utopian, mystical, and scientific movements in bringing about a just global society.

Tamdgidi holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in sociology in conjunction with a graduate certificate in Middle Eastern studies from Binghamton University (SUNY). He received his B.A. in architecture from U.C. Berkeley, following enrollment as an undergraduate student of civil engineering in the Technical College of the University of Tehran, Iran. In Dec. 2013 he retired early from his tenured and promoted position at UMass Boston in order to pursue his independent scholarship in quantum sociological imagination and its application in Khayyami studies through the conduit of his research center, OKCIR.
Liberating Sociology
From Newtonian Toward Quantum Imaginations
Volume 1
Unriddling the Quantum Enigma

Mohammad H. Tamdgidi

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Liberating Sociology: From Newtonian Toward Quantum Imaginations

Volume 1: Unriddling the Quantum Enigma

Author: Mohammad H. Tamdgidi

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(including all English verse translations of the poetry of Khayyam, Sa’di, and Hafez from Persian originals as appearing in this book)

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For

Albert Einstein, *whose humble genius still unriddles his blunders*

“*With fame I become more and more stupid, which of course is a very common phenomenon*” (Dec. 24, 1919) — Albert Einstein

---

Happy at heart is he who was never renowned,
Did not himself with frocks, wool cloaks, or drapes surround,
Phoenix-like flew to the peak empyrean sphere,
Unlike owl flew not in this world’s ruins aground.

— Omar Khayyam (Tamdgidi translation)

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In celebration of the imminent millennium of the birth of
Omar Khayyam, the author of the *Robaiyat*
In seeking an integrated theory, the intellect cannot rest contentedly with the assumption that there are two distinct fields, totally independent of each other by their nature.

— Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Everything we call real is made of things that cannot be regarded as real.

— Niels Bohr (1885-1962)

... atoms or elementary particles themselves are not real; they form a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than one of things or facts.

— Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976)

I don’t like it, and I’m sorry I ever had anything to do with it.

— Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961)

I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics.

— Richard Feynman (1918-1988)

If you are not completely confused by quantum mechanics, you do not understand it.

— John A. Wheeler (1911-2008)

Quantum mechanics makes absolutely no sense.

— Roger Penrose (1931-)

Niels Bohr brainwashed a whole generation of theorists into thinking that the job of interpreting quantum theory was done 50 years ago.

— Murray Gell-Mann (1929-2019)

One is amazed to see how different the world looks when it is no longer viewed through Cartesian spectacles.

— Wolfgang Smith (1930-)

Indeed, the attempt to live according to the notion that the fragments are really separate is, in essence, what has led to the growing series of extremely urgent crises that is confronting us today.

— David Bohm (1917-1992)

Transdisciplinarity, as a scientific approach, examines the interaction between exact sciences, social sciences, and sciences of the Hidden Third. ... In addition to the four physical interactions you would have to add a multitude of others, including poetic interaction. Only then could you start to dream of a unified vision of the world.

— Basarab Nicolescu (1942-)

That precious ruby is from a different mine.
And this pearl, so unique, has a different shine.
It’s you and I who think ‘this’ is apart from ‘that.’
The lore of Love expresses a different twine.

— Omar Khayyam (Tamdgidi translation)
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Acknowledgments

With Ruby Wine in Jug, a versed book to inspire,
A half a loaf of bread, and some strength to retire
To an old garden with you sitting by my side—
How happier it is than a king’s new empire!

— Omar Khayyam (Tamdgidi translation)

Adam’s descendants are in frame from one strand,
While in their creation aim as one soul stand.
If a member is in stress from his time’s scar
Others become restless, nearby and afar.
If you’re about others’ griefs and pains carefree
You don’t deserve the name of humanity.

— Sa’di Shirazi (Tamdgidi translation)

My dearest friend and spouse, Anna Diane Beckwith (Anastasia “Mina” Famelou), has shared her beautiful life with me at home, school, and work for more than thirty-five years during which my studies, of which this book tells a part, were undertaken. If there is any value in what I have found, it is also a fruit of her contributions of caring, patience, love, and understanding to our shared life.
I am happy that Anna and I bonded amid student solidarity activism on campus, brought together through a graduate sociology program founded at SUNY-Binghamton by Terence K. Hopkins (d. 1997) in collaboration with Immanuel M. Wallerstein (who sadly passed away recently in August 2019). We have cherished and continue the “odd solidarity” they encouraged us to build, embraced by a community of loving, lifelong friends such as Yoshie Hayashi and Satoshi Ikeda. It may not be visible on the surface, but this and much of my work continue to be the fruit of the alternative, flexible, transdisciplinary, transcultural, socially engaged, and utopystic graduate sociology program in which we were trained. I had also the great fortune of being mentored by artist and painter Jesse Reichek during my undergraduate studies in architecture at U.C. Berkeley, in whose wonderful social “design” seminars the basic notion of “social architecture” (later modified to “human architecture”) guiding my future work was born. I am happy that with Anna we had a chance to visit Jesse and his wife Laure before his passing in 2005.

Anna, thank you for the ‘sweet’ and ‘pretty’ petals of your lovely flowers, vegetables, gardens, walks, and smiles. As said before, meeting you and living with you have been the best things that ever happened to me. Einstein once answered lightheartedly a question about what relativity means by saying that while sitting on a hot stove time passes like an hour, sitting next to a pretty girl in the park goes like a flash. Well, even there Einstein blundered by imaginally ignoring the spatial aspect in his “thought experiment”; he had become a Swiss citizen, after all, imaginally preoccupied more with clocks than measuring sticks. I have basically argued in this book that, by analogy (as far as social space is concerned), a local kiss on the cheek can be not “just a kiss,” but as spread-out as a whole universe of love. It was revealed to me once during meditation that the universe was created just for a tiny kiss to become possible. So, here is one more on your cheek!

Every breath I take and any passion I have for learning are owed to my beloved parents, Tayyebeh Tamjidi (1928-) and the late Mohammed (Ahad) Tamjidi (1930-2007), whose love for one another gave me the most precious gift, of life, that one can ever receive.

My mother, afflicted with Alzheimer’s illness today in Iran, continues to be for me an open book of new and profoundly enigmatic learnings. I thank particularly the very kind and dedicated nurse and her always supportive husband, Mrs. and Mr. Rahimi. They have helped me, year-long and during my regular trips to Iran twice a year, to maintain the needed focus and peace of mind while taking care of my mother during the research and writing of
this book and the series of which it is a part.

I thank Ramón Grosfoguel for his interest in my work in general and more specifically on Omar Khayyam, resulting in his co-editing various issues of Human Architecture and his kindly inviting me to give a talk on Khayyam in March 2011 at U.C. Berkeley. I hope this and my forthcoming series will offer further food for thought along those lines. I also wish to thank Lewis R. Gordon for his interest in my notion of quantum sociology, when reviewing a previous paper on Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gloria Anzaldúa (Tamdgidi 2007, 2010). He was among few who, at the time, sincerely paid serious attention to the importance of the topic; I hope this can meet his further interest and in turn contribute to his good work.

Other than those noted previously, I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the following for their interest, support and/or collaborations in the past: Lillia I. Bartolomé, Hatem Bazian, Anders Burman, Melanie E. L. Bush, the late Roderick Bush, Elora Halim Chowdhury, J. Walter Driscoll, Leila Farsakh, Gloria González-López, Avery F. Gordon, Panagiota Gounari, Jemadari Kamara, AnaLouise Keating, Winston Langley, Donaldo Macedo, Lisa Suhair Majaj, Steve Martinot, Peter McLaren, Melanie Maxham, Tony Van Der Meer, Askold Melnyczuk, Eric Mielants, Keith Motley, Dorothy Shubow Nelson, Kavazeua Festus Ngaruka, Basarab Nicolescu, Donald A. Nielsen, Kathleen Pithouse, Thomas Ehrlich Reifer, Khaldoun Samman, Rajini Srikanth, Paul Beekman Taylor, and Gregory Thomas. Of course, the responsibility for any views expressed in this book are mine alone.

The last chapter of this book on method is a newly introduced and further annotated version of a methodological appendix to my Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism that was published by Paradigm Publishers (now a part of Routledge) in 2007. I appreciate Dean Birkenkamp, previously the head of Paradigm Publishers and now a senior editor at Routledge, a member of Taylor & Francis Group, for his support of my work in the past and his understanding of the need for republishing the appendix per my need to further update, revise, and disseminate my work.

Other than the quotes credited in this book’s front matter for Albert Einstein and Basarab Nicolescu (already stated on the copyright page), the quote by Wolfgang Smith is from The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key (Angelico Press, 2011). The quote from David Bohm is from Wholeness and the Implicate Order (Routledge, 1980). And the quote from Murray Gell-Mann is from The Nature of the Physical Universe: 1976 Nobel Conference (Wiley, edited by D. Huff and O. Prewett, 1979). Other quotes are readily
available online as statements attributed to those noted: Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger, Richard Feynman, John A. Wheeler, and Roger Penrose. Where else in this book I have quoted from the above or others, citations are included in the references.

Fair use of quotations in this book are relevant as standard practice in scholarly research, aiming to acknowledge, appreciate, and promote the works of those quoted. Acknowledgments for longer passages quoted in the last chapter on method are offered at its end. Quoting directly when needed provides a substantive opportunity for the reader to judge directly the accuracy of an argument being made based on the passage to which it refers.

If the reader wishes to know the deepest reason why this book and the broader series of which it is a part came about (including another companion series of mine forthcoming in Khayyami studies), I can say without hesitation that its roots go back to my mother’s lifelong search for happiness, despite the enormous obstacles she faced growing up.

This is the work of a girl born in Tabriz, Iran, who was deprived of formal education simply because she was deemed (at the time she grew up), as a girl and future mother, to be not in need of going to school—although she was practically very intelligent and learned her Quran diligently and knew many Azeri Shi’ite mourning songs by heart, including also many folklore Azeri love poems that only became known to me for the first time as she receded amid her Alzheimer’s to her youth living in Tabriz. Enigmatically, as her Alzheimer’s progressed, for a period of several years she became a poetess of love beyond reciting the religious ones (which also speak of spiritual love) I had heard her sing all her life. She began singing old Azeri love quatrains, ones which I had never heard her sing before. And she did so with great enthusiasm and drama, dancing at times, like a traveling bard or Ashegh (in Persian and Azeri, meaning “lover”) trying to pass on an important old story.

This series and all my research, really, is an expression of her search for happiness, for true love, and for finding ways to cope with the long, long, periods, year after year, decade after decade, of loneliness—ones she endured because of emotional and physical separation from her beloved husband and cousin brought on by the cultural conflicts of East and West, as he traveled West in search of work and business, while I, her only son, did the same also, leaving Iran for education in the U.S. when I was eighteen, to try to fulfill as best as I could her dream of raising me well.

This is despite my doing my best to keep in touch, to visit her and stay
with her often, to bring her to the U.S. for visits, to make her happy, to keep her company, and now to manage her round-the-clock nursing in old-age (increasingly, mine too), with best nurses taking care of her, giving her full love and attention, past her husband’s passing. I was always overjoyed to witness the happiness with which she greeted me each time at her door in Iran, and shared with her the sorrow she felt each time I departed back to the U.S. Those who live in the same community for generations can never feel the experience migrants go through, especially those who leave loved ones behind, living an inner life at once fragmented and spread-out worldwide. But, then, the same experience has also provided me with new insights to appreciate her and Iran more.

Now, my mother does not mentally recognize me as her son; but, when holding hands and hugging me, I know she does in her kind heart. Alzheimer’s can make the expression of one’s love and longing for another quite enigmatic. At times, she told me in person (while sitting next to her by her bedside in Iran) how much she misses her dear son back in the U.S., wondering when he would be coming back next to visit her again. Her nurse recently sent me a video clip, where my mother is hugging and kissing her pillow repeatedly, whom she calls Behrooz (my nick name), talking to him sincerely, begging it to understand how much she loves and misses him, and asking for reassurance that he loves her too. In the clip, other than talking with her pillow, she speaks with a clear mind and in full sentences, as if she has no Alzheimer’s at all. She is in her usual, kind, self. For a while, until recently, I found myself enigmatically overjoyed and laughing in sadness, when I found myself superposed (in quite quantum ways I must call it now), being addressed by her, depending on the time of the day, as one of her three (late) brothers, as her son, and at times her (late) husband. Sometimes, she addressed me as her mother and father (or uncle, Adash, my father’s dad). Even Alzheimer’s is quantum; like all sticks, it also has two ends, an entanglement of both sadness and happiness at once.

Our Copenhagen physicists may say, “well, such superposed states, even if you call them that, happen exceptionally because of Alzheimer’s,” since in their view macroscopic things are supposed to follow either/or logical rules. Here is the mother, there is the son, brother, mother, or husband, like billiard balls. I say, no, you are wrong. Your enigmatic reactions are brought on by your own disciplinary habits of thinking. We, in sociology, at least those of us more attuned to George Herbert Mead’s notion of self and society being twin-born, have long understood that you cannot have a
social relation without its being at once a self relation. My mother, or any of us, relate to others as son, brother, or husband, because we have internalized selves in us through socialization that represent others symbolically. I cannot relate to you without at once relating to a self in me that represents you. So, always, and not just amid Alzheimer’s, we have a twin-bornness of self and society going on, provided that we have the eye to see and observe it as such. If we do not, it is a defect in our own observational lens that sees things as chunky. All Alzheimer’s does is to make such superposed states evident and more directly visible in exaggerated form. I am and have always been a part of her. Now she speaks more directly to that self in her, in this case represented by a pillow nearby, than the one being signified by it.

Alzheimer’s progress can also be, sadly, wonderful. She has forgotten much of the pains of loneliness and longing for her son, ones she had felt for decades, her phone calls reaching out to others being the main ways she let others know how much she wished to enjoy their company. With her Alzheimer’s progress, she also remembered her youth more vividly. An old cousin of mine, whose ill mother (my mother’s sister) died young while at our house, once came to visit us in Tehran a few years ago. My mother was still conversant then, imagined living in Tabriz, and telling minute details even of specific neighborhood addresses and folks’ names in her neighborhood, Sheshgilan, of Tabriz, in Iran’s Azerbaijan, where she grew up. She spoke of such and such a store in the neighborhood, the bathhouse, the bakery, this or that person, as if she visited or met them yesterday. I asked my cousin, who also grew up in Tabriz and knows it well, to judge how accurate the addresses and people’s names and identities as reported by my mother were. He was astonished. They were accurate to the T.

I was so happy and fortunate, “thanks” to her Alzheimer’s, to experience, in my own later years, my mother’s youth so vividly, witnessing her happily sing her love songs. Perhaps she still sang them in solitude throughout her life, without any of us even knowing it; for, how else could she remember them, singing them so well? Many of these poems are of the “bayati” style, quatrains sung in Azeri dialect. At some point, I wondered where they all came from. Did she compose these herself, or did she pick them from her culture? Thanks to the internet these days, I searched and there they were. I found them actually among a long list of old Azeri love songs. But, she seemed to have given her own twists to the lines depending on her age as she continued singing them. Her choices of poems themselves were meaningful.

As I listened to them, ones I had never heard her sing before, they at first
seemed to be a scattered, random set. However, in making her selections, at times revising them, she seemed to have stamped on them her own authorship. As I tried to learn and sing the poems along with her, it became apparent that they were not disjointed chunks and pieces, but in fact pieces of a longer single poem she had stitched together to tell her life’s story.

My mother, having been deprived of proper formal education in childhood, always wished to write her own life’s story. But this did not happen in the way one would “predictably” expect. Enigmatically, I became her pen of life. I began to realize as I listened to the songs she was repeatedly singing that these were it—her long-wished-for book, now being delivered spoken in poetic nutshell, just before her memory faded away forever. Amid her Alzheimer’s she had finally ‘published’ her book in the most succinct way. Oddly, I noticed an order among the poems I was hearing her sing. Translated superposed in her son’s pen of mind and heart and tears, the book of songs she selected and stitched together went like this:

As the head of a tree desires fruit,
My heart desires a pomegranate.
I used to be a child before;
Now, I desire a lover.

They pick a rose made of gold,
And adorn it with a velvet cloth.
How fortunate is the girl
Who is wed to a man she herself loves.

I am a golden rose! Pick me.
Adorn a velvet cloth with me.
For God’s sake, look, be kind!
I am still young, wed me.¹

Aras² is surrounded with forests.
Bring a handkerchief and spread it,
So I can set roses in its middle,
All surrounded by violets.

¹. Sometimes she recited this as: “I am Muslim, wed me.”
². The river “Aras” or “Arax,” in northwestern Iran, separates the Iranian Azerbaijan and the previously Soviet, now independent, Azerbaijan. I interpret this poem about spreading roses in the middle of her handkerchief as an expression also for bearing children.
In this very long valley,\(^3\)
O shepherd, bring back my lamb,
It's been a long while since I've seen
The face of my playful beloved.

I'm a rose, but no more with rosewater.
I'm a velvet cloth, but no longer with plush.
For all this life's troubles endured,\(^4\)
My body no longer has much tolerance.

I went to the top of the mountain.
And wrote on its stones what's to be written,
So all those who come and go can read
What troubles befell me in life.

I wandered all mountains, and returned.
I set all their stones straight, and returned.
I found my lover not committed,
So, I washed my hands from it all, and returned.

Leave the window\(^5\) wide open,
So, my eye can see who will come
And how they'll lay the gravestone
On the one who died in search of love.\(^6\)

Go, go, for I am coming with you.
I'm still picking roses to gather in my cloth.
Open your arms and make room for me.
Since it's cold here and I am dying.

I will leave, but I will return again.
Even a non-believer will return a believer.
Even if I live a hundred year's jail,
When it ends, I will return again.

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3. Sometimes: “In this very long night.” I read this poem as a longing for one’s child, sent far away.
4. Sometimes: “I’ve been lonely for so long” or “I’ve not seen people for so long.”
5. In the Iranian/Islamic tradition, when you visit a loved one’s grave, you put your hand on the grave, making a “window” for the loved one beneath to see you and hear your words.
6. Sometimes: “On the one whose house is the grave.”
My mother is now 92. As I am telling her story, which is also mine, at times I pause when it comes to my verbs. Is she an “is” or is she a “was”? She is not singing the poems most of the times now, but her voice is still melodic at times, as if she is singing them in tune, but without decipherable words. But then, some days she suddenly remembers and sings one or another poem. Is her singing a “was,” or is it still an “is”? Is my mother still alive, or has she “passed”? Schrödinger, looking for his “normal” “dead or alive cat,” would never understand such quantum states of being and loving in their and/both states, for he regards such states in the macroscopic world “absurd” and belonging only to the quantum world. They are not “absurd.” All it takes is to tune in to, to observe, what goes on around us, and inside us. We think we are this or that, but that is only in our minds, and even there it is not, when we consider it more carefully. My mother is, and is not, with me now. She sings her love songs, and not. She lives, but has also passed.

This is she, writing this book. I would not be writing this book, if it was and is not for her, and for the troubles she went through raising me and sending her lamb away for further nourishment. She and I are not, as Newtonian physics would have it, separate chunks of reality. I am her, and she is me, in a quantum way, where things, selves, can be at once in different places and times. She may be forgetting herself, but I am not. I am now, more than ever, her mind, heart, and senses. This series is, superposing me and her, deep down, a fruit of her soul. Her mind, now afflicted with Alzheimer’s, going fainter and fainter like a candle every time I visit her in person or online, refuses to forget who she was/is through me; this is she, still trying to understand herself through the mind, heart, and sensibilities of her son, the sense and meaning of existence, and the whereabouts of happiness, in the best way she can. Her search is transcontinuing, through me. The “discontinuity” is an illusion, really, for we are inseparable. The continuity just takes a different form; that is all. This work is her soul’s trying to link her personal troubles to the world-historical public issue of human alienation and its enigmas. And doing so, I am sure, it tells of a search in any human soul, yours included, for why we are here, where we come from, and where to we are going—as our beloved Omar Khayyam put it.

I recall once on a bus with Tayyebeh (meaning “pure” in Arabic), we were heading for Neyshabour from Mashhad, the latter being where she had bought a “sorrow’s nest” apartment of her own to come closer to her God and to the shrine of Imam Reza, a descendent of the prophet. I found her staring at her hand for a long time, deep in thought. I asked her why she was doing
that. She turned to me and said, “I am just in awe of this wonder, my hand, how could this be? What a wonder God has created?” That was her enigma, one that we should all be (also) enigmatized about—but often are not; our Copenhagen Interpreters tell us that, supposedly, only what goes on in the subatomic world “below” is enigmatic, not what we find “above.” Nowadays we find online clips of the robots we have engineered doing amazing things, enigmatically. Yet we click away, unimpressed, from a gymnast doing even more amazing things. What we find enigmatic, or not, has also a lot to do with who is observing and how we make our observations. With the same hand she gave me, I held hers then and hold her hands now imaginally, and with the same hand and mind she gave me, I am writing these lines. Can anything be more enigmatic?

Despite my familiarity with her deep sense of faith and wonder about the miraculous, I was often struck by the depth of her feelings of wonder and puzzlement about existence. Over the years and decades, the more I reflected on her unique sense of devotion to God in search of happiness, the more I appreciated the fundamental ways in which she taught me as my first and best teacher about the meaning of life, about maintaining a deep sense of wonder, as well as a genuine moral sense of empathy with those wronged in life. This was best expressed in her deeply heartfelt sense of love for the faith of Islam, for the prophet and his family, and especially the tragic story of the murder of his grandson, Imam Hussein, and the massacre and imprisonment of many in his household and relatives, and the murders of the prophet’s descendents as told and remembered in the collective memory of the Shi’ites.

There was obviously a religious side to her feelings, as expressed in her deeply felt and beautifully recited mourning songs in Azeri dialect, reciting the stories of how Imam Hussein and his relatives resisted oppression to safeguard their faith and principles, and were brutally massacred. For those versed in the Shi’ite belief system and tradition, my mother’s feelings may appear routine and standard. But they were not so as I observed and experienced them, sitting by her side often and listening to her stories of what happened more than fourteen hundred years before, as if they happened yesterday. These were my first classes and schooling in life, offered by my first teacher, whose tears for people she had not even met flooded my soul.

Set aside the religious aspect for a moment. Can you see how enigmatic it is that someone, fourteen hundred and plus years later, cares for, cries for, folks who suffered as if they were her own folks, folks she never met?

Shi’ism is not just a religious faith. It is an expression of a way of living
that cares for the oppressed. With the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the entire region, and in time the world, underwent a change that could not be ignored by anyone, whether or not subjected directly to the Islamic expansion. Pre-Islamic Iran was not an exception. Shi’ism is a specific way those living in the Iranian region absorbed the shock. As it happened often, Iranians (those living in the region we now call Iran) absorbed over the course of centuries what was worthwhile, while resisting and discarding the rest. Some may say Iranians discarded an earlier Persian culture for an invading one. But that is a chunky, Newtonian way, of looking at it. The reality was more complex, involving a transcontinuity amid apparent discontinuity. In the process, not only Iran became Islamized, but also Islam became Iranized. Shi’ism is an expression of this hybridization of a regional spiritual identity. Iran could not be the same anymore, nor was Islam the same; Iran had to adapt to new realities, and it did so, in my view, in a very intelligent and humane way. My mother’s caring for Imam Hussein and his household is an expression of such an essentially Iranian spirit of adaptation to Islam.

I invite those in the West not familiar with the Shi’ite views and tradition to consider this “thought experiment.” Imagine Jesus had a daughter married to his cousin, bearing grandchildren, and descendants across twelve generations, who were one way or another, in groups or individually, one after another, at varying points in their lives, abused, beheaded, poisoned, killed, and imprisoned. Shi’ites believe the original humanist message of Islam was represented best by the lives and examples of such direct descendants of the prophet, distinguishing their legacy from the often expansionist and colonialist legacy of the leaders of the more extremely conservative and literalist branches of Islam, some of whose worst examples we have witnessed recently in the Middle East with the rise of Al-Qaeda, Daesh (ISIS), and the Wahabi sects in Islam, often aided covertly (or not) by those Arab rulers in the region who have traditionally been local allies of the West, especially of the UK and the US (and now being courted by, and courting, Israel).

Westerners suffering from extremist Islam would never be able to understand the phenomenon without appreciating the extent to which the West, especially the US and the UK, for their imperial and economic interests deeply embedded in a Newtonian way of thinking that divides the world to rule it in chunky ways, have supported and overdeveloped the most conservative and literalist interpretations of Islam in recent decades, whose brain-children, now armed with Western weapons and resources, have roamed the Middle East in recent times committing untold atrocities against
innocents. In other words, the West and its regional allies have ideologically, politically, and militarily fed or helped maintain (thanks to oil interests), directly or by proxy, the terrorist tendencies in Islam (tendencies that can also be found in any faith, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on); yet, they accuse other progressive Islamic forces who actually suffer more directly from such onslaught and are fighting them, as being terrorist.

The way I experienced Islam through stories told by my mother was different. She inculcated in me a moral sense of search for justice, for fairness, and an enduring sense of caring for those wronged and oppressed in life. Those critical of religion, of Islam, particularly in the context of Iran’s post-1979 revolutionary turmoil, may judge such sentiments in terms of a dualism of ancient Persian and Arab/Islamic cultures. But, such a dualism is not how my mother, and I, learning from her by example, experienced being Islamic, Shi’ite, and Iranian/Persian/Azeri. Being Muslim or Shi’ite for us was not just about a religious faith, but about being human, about being empathetic, being in awe of existence, being always, always, on the side of the oppressed and the deprived and those who suffer, since all humankind are supposed to be equal in the eye of the Creator. That, in essence, was and is for my mother and me the heart of Islam.

Iran as a multi-ethnic society has had a great opportunity and gift to learn and practice a sense of tranethnic empathy, even though there is still much to be learned and practiced to realize that end, especially in the context of broader imperial policies and interests who have sought in recent centuries to fuel animosities among Iranian ethnic groups through Newtonian-modeled, “divide and rule” policies advanced for colonial gains. Unfortunately, some in opposition today still see Iran in a very narrow and outdated nationalistic lens. Iran cannot be understood and managed in isolation from a world-system of which it is an intricate part. It is pure ideological falsehood to assume Iran can survive on its own without paying close attention to the realities of the region and the world. Ignoring that is what led to past failures. There is scientifically good reason for Iran to care for its fate and security as much within as outside its borders, regionally and globally.

I am ethnically Azeri, but grew up Persian, and never ever saw them as separate identities. They were superposed aspects of my experience and identity as an Iranian. Newtonian mentalities feeding imperial interests seek to tear us apart into pieces, as if we can separate these aspects of our identities like billiard balls. But such identities were always superposed sentiments and values for my mother, and through her, for me. Caring about those massacred
among Arabs more than fourteen hundred years ago may seem irrelevant to what those like my mother, as Iranians of Azeri or Persian descent (or of other ethnic backgrounds populating Iran), should feel. But the way I see it, having such equal empathy toward non-Persians, toward Arabs wronged by other Arabs, is precisely what makes people like my mother not only human, but also genuinely Azeri, Persian, and Iranian. Iranians, among them a multiplicity of ethnic and religious identities—Persians, Azeris, Arabs, Kurds, Baluchis, Turkomans, Lurs, Bakhtiaris, Gilakis, Mazandaranis, Armenians, Assyrians, Jewish, and so on—have learned to be both this and the other, to be both and all at once Iranians. Some wish to separate us into separate chunks, and some have legitimate grievances because of historical conditions domestically born or imposed on Iran from without; but, ultimately, it would be a grave mistake to not cherish an opportunity and a test Iran’s history has offered its people to experiment with living united in peace while respecting and celebrating their diversities. Iran provides its people with a microcosm of regional community learning to live together in unity amid diversity; and this will not come about automatically and blindly. It takes conscious effort.

Iranians genuinely feel empathy for the other, and their deep sense of hospitality, putting the best and all they have for their guests, is simply a recreative expression of that deep sentiment. It is no wonder that the walls of Persepolis were adorned by depictions of celebratory gift-giving and-receiving, and not violence-and-conquering. It is the same living spirit in Cyrus the Great (in Persian mythology, Jamsheed) caring for the captive Jews in Babylon that today cares for the oppressed Arabs, especially in Palestine, today. There is no dualism here, but a transcontinuity of feeling empathy deeply for the other. Those who wish to invoke a dualism are only obfuscating their own ideological interests, trying to ahistorically contrast a past that is completely at odds with the present. If you name a street in Quds (or Jerusalem) after Cyrus because he liberated your ancestors from captivity, you should not forget that the street you have built is on an occupied land, around which you keep its historical inhabitants captive. You are doing, in other words, the exact opposite of what you cherish in the legacy of Cyrus the Great, and since he is mentioned in your holy book, you are disrespecting that holy legacy as celebrated therein. To be respectful of the legacy of Cyrus, to celebrate it, you are supposed to liberate Palestinians from your captivity, not continue holding them captive in your apartheid state. To be true to the spirit of Cyrus, you should be freeing your captives, and do so not as an act of benevolence, but one of necessity—since this is also, at once, about
liberating your own soul. Keeping them captive, you are enslaving your soul to an oppressive identity that is alien to your own biblical tradition.

Iran’s sense of caring deeply for the plight of Palestinians today is exactly the same sense of caring Cyrus displayed for the Jews living in captivity millennia ago. When the poet Sa’di wrote in the thirteenth century that all humankind are from one strand, sharing a single soul, such that the pain in one part is experienced as the pain of all, he obviously did not mean to include only Persians, or Iranians, excluding people of other ethnic or cultural backgrounds. I wonder, those who complain about why Iranians care so deeply for the people of Palestine, those suffering in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Syria, in Yemen, for the Yazidis, and so on, truly believe in the teaching of Sa’di, whose poem they recite often as an expression of their ‘Persian’ identity. They ask why Iranians chant for the plight of Palestinians in Tehran, while reminding us of the glorious times of Cyrus the Great. But, has not the memory and the good name of Cyrus endured because he cared for the plight of the oppressed and the captive in other lands as well, respecting their human right to self-determination?

What I witnessed over the decades in my mother’s deep sense of empathy for what the prophet’s household endured represented to me not only what being truly a Muslim, a Shi’ite, means, but also what being a Persian, an Azeri, or any Iranian genuinely means. She sincerely, deeply, felt a sense of empathy for those who perished in the massacres of the prophet’s household and his descendents. She cried for them, for folks she had never met, Arab folks wronged by other Arab folks, more than fourteen hundred years before, as if she cried for her own brother and sister, for her own child, mother, and father. She felt their misery, like her own; she grieved for them, like her own. I am not sure how else one can be more genuinely a Persian, an Azeri, an Iranian, in the true Sa’dian sense of the words, than the way she felt the pain of Arabs being wronged by Arabs centuries ago. Being Persian, being of the region called Iran, meant being caring, living in peace, with one’s neighbors. When a member has pain, other members suffer and become restless, Sa’di said. That is exactly how Tayyebeh genuinely was (and is)—a living Sa’di poem. That to me represents a quantum, a superposed, way of experiencing the Iranian identity, rather than still holding on to an outdated, Newtonian, chunky way of being this or that.

Even today, when she does not recognize anyone in the room, not even recognizing the nurse who lives with her night and day, she hugs and thanks the nurse as if she meets a new person each hour. You always, still, find her
offering back in appreciation the first bite of any food offered to her. She is, genuinely, in the deepest roots of her soul, now proven by her Alzheimer’s, a caring person. When she told me many times in person that she loved her son living in the US, putting her hands on her heart when saying it, I told myself that it was one thing to hear your mother say she loves you when she is aware, and another to say it when she is not. Hearing someone amid Alzheimer’s say that she loves another is something quite different. It arises from the depth of her soul, from all her being. How could a feeling of love for another be any more pure and genuine? And, amid her Alzheimer’s, she still continued to sing her religious songs, mourning for Imam Hussein. How deeper can one’s faith and caring for another be?

The faith of Shi’ism in Islam was embraced early on and thereafter by Iranians as an anti-colonial response, having been subjected to the inhuman conservative and oppressive elements imposed on Iran by native despots or outside invaders, including conservative rulers at times under what they regard as the false banner of Islam, and more recently against new Western colonialist and imperial interventions in their lives. In their view, Shi’ites are keeping alive what they regard as the true humanist core values of Islam as shared by their like-minded brothers and sisters. This is perhaps one reason why Iranians are particularly sensitive to the oppression and wrongs committed against their Arab sisters and brothers in Palestine.

A Persian, an Iranian, in the deep Sa’dian sense of being a member of the family of humanity, cannot but feel for the wrongs and pains Palestinians are enduring every day and night, decade after decade, at the hands of those Israeli leaders implementing the last overt Western settler-colonialist project. What is most puzzling for Iranians like me is how Israeli leaders can commit such atrocities in full view given such a violent oppression the Jews themselves, along with others, including gypsies and communists, endured during the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis fueled by such abhorrent anti-Semitic and racist hatred. But, then, Arabs are Semites too, no? How can those having witnessed or endured the horrors of the Holocaust remain indifferent toward, let alone live with, the conditions of occupying a whole people’s land in Palestine, turning their captives’ homeland into a vast concentration camp for them, bit by bit swallowing their lands? How can the soldiers, sitting conveniently at the border, using their high-tech weapons, target youths across the border and behind the fences, so mercilessly killing and maiming them one by one each day, because they rightfully protest against the occupation of their homeland by colonial-settler occupiers? Are they not
the captives, today? You occupy their lands; they resist. And then you label their resistance wrong and punishable by such measures? Such twisted logic is something that should shock any conscience, let alone those of the Jewish faith to whom both the Christian and Islamic faiths trace their values.

My concerns with the public issues of the Middle East while recalling the personal troubles of my mother may seem disjointed to some. But understanding how they interrelate is exactly what a sociological imagination invites us to do. You may think what goes on in the Middle East is just a local issue. But, it is not. It is a global issue, and it is also personal for everyone. The Israeli-Palestinian problem is Iran’s problem, and is a problem for the US, and for practically anyone living today. It is based on a Newtonian, chunky way of separating regions on the map, an absurd legacy of economic imperialism we still suffer from today, making us feel what goes on elsewhere is not our problem. What goes on in the Middle East involves a disaster surviving from the horrors of the WWII. The world we live in today would have been very different had the problem been solved in a just and egalitarian way. It was not, due mainly to the intransigence of the Israeli leaders who wish not to give an inch but to take everything. Implanting a settler-colonialist state in the region served both imperial and local colonial interests. But it has not gone well, since it essentially denies the basic human rights of people living in their homeland, including their right to self-determination. Iran’s contemporary history has been intricately shaped by the regional crises and interests left over from WWII. The 1953 coup in Iran, bringing back the Shah to power to serve the West’s economic and geo-political interests resulting in cultural conflicts, were undertaken to safeguard Western imperial interests aided by their local allies. The so-called “modernization” was a cloak for increasing semi-colonial and neo-colonial subjugation of Iran to the economic, political, and cultural interests of the West as led by the US and the UK.

I recall that my mother, who in his youth wore the veil and later a scarf, at some point when I was young discontinued wearing even the scarf to follow the Western norms and to please her husband, who, among his friends, felt my mother should appear more “modern.” This was an expression of the East-West conflicts translating into personal tensions and troubles in our household. It may appear minor, but it was not so for my mother. I think, over time, she realized how artificial and empty such symbolic prescriptions of “modernity” were, diminishing her marital happiness, and her sense of spiritual self-worth. Not wearing the scarf did not bring her happiness,
wearing it again did. She went back to wearing it as she grew more senior, and became more independent and outspoken in expressing her views.

She kept on her living room shelf a picture of a young girl wearing a scarf representing to her Ruqayyah, the four-year-old daughter of Imam Hussein—who died weeping over her father’s severed head after the battle of Karbala, in today’s Iraq. Looking back, one of the first signs of her Alzheimer’s was that of thinking the face of Ruqayyah in the photo was speaking to her. Amid her Alzheimer’s, I also found her still reaching out immediately for her scarf when a man’s face appeared on television screen, especially one she found attractive! She had from early on amid her illness begun being unable to distinguish reality from what was on TV. This was both bad and good. Television kept her company, as if people visited her. She said hello and goodbye to them. We used to joke, after she reached out for her scarf, about which gentleman on the screen she would accept as a suitor. She was quite picky, laughing often with a bitter, but still sweet, smile. I see I am using verbs in past tense again.

My mother’s resistance to Western cultural symbols she found empty and foreign to her was expressive of a trait in her personality I found inspiring. She was remarkable in insisting on her principles. She lived true to her faith and her sense of right and wrong, in both social as well as personal matters.

People living in the greater Iranian region were attracted to the original message of Islam, because they found in it echoes of human values different from what they were experiencing under their own kings at the time. Shi’ism was historically embraced as an Iranian resistance movement, one that sought to keep alive the empathy for what the prophet’s household and descendents endured as an expression of their own resistance against injustice perpetrated by native despots or outsiders, be they oppressive Arab rulers, Mongols, and Turkic invaders. Being Shi’ite is being Iranian, feeling a deep sense of empathy for the humanist message at the genuine core of Islam. Shi’ism was an intelligent Persian and more broadly Iranian response to colonial invasions wielding false banners of Islam. Being Iranian, Muslim, and Shi’ite, are not separable identity chunks, but superposed identities resulting from a long historical tradition of living superposed with others in the Middle East.

As I noted earlier, some today contrast the post-Islamic Revolution Iran with earlier times, going back to pre-Islamic period of Iran’s history, constructing a dualism that, amid historical amnesia caused by the passing of time, offers a false sense of discontinuity in Iran’s history. But, in my view, and the way I experienced it being embraced by my mother’s genuine feelings
of empathy for Islam’s prophet and his descendants, there is no discontinuity, perhaps a transcontinuity, in Iran’s history. The spirit in Cyrus that cared for other oppressed people in the region, including the captive Jews, is the same spirit that deeply cares about the Palestinians being oppressed today. Israeli rulers pursuing the occupation of Palestine, by their actions, in my view, are betraying Jewish values, violating the humanist sentiments the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions have espoused. “What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbor.” This is a simple, yet profound message, coming from the Torah. Those wishing to build a Jewish homeland should be the first to respect it for their neighbors and do it in a just way, not to initiate and continue occupying and oppressing them as instruments of Western imperial powers and interests.

So, unfortunately, when those aggrieved today in Iran—amid socio-economic and political conditions brought on by decades of imperial economic sanctions and imposed direct or proxy wars to install another puppet regime in Iran to pursue the imperial interests of the US, UK, and the West and their regional allies—complain about Iranians’ caring about the oppressed in the region while nostalgically reminding us of Iran’s pre-Islamic history going back to Cyrus, they should remember instead that in fact it was precisely the caring for the oppressed in the region that distinguished Cyrus. To celebrate Cyrus today is to seek after the Palestinians’ and all peoples’, including Iranian’s own, rights to self-determination. If Cyrus was alive today, to do a sociological thought experiment, would he also not be pro-Palestinian, because they are the ones kept imperially captive today?

What is the use of referring us back to Cyrus’s Cylinder as the earliest symbol and expression of human rights and respect for others people’s self-determination when, amid the politics of the Middle-East today you do not care about a people deprived of their lands, statehood, and dignity—or, even worse, invite foreign powers to solve Iran’s problems that only they, as a self-determined people, are entitled to confront and solve on their own? Do you seriously think foreign powers are caring about your human rights, imposing the harshest sanctions on Iran? If the U.S. does not appreciate being intervened, through elections, political interference, let alone militarily, in its own domestic affairs in choosing its own path, why does it find it legitimate to do the same to those in other regions of the world, including Iran?

To those in the U.S. administration who invite U.S. citizens of Iranian descent to voice their views about their policies about Iran, here I offer mine. Iranians will never forget the past, how the US and UK administered
a coup in Iran in 1953 to topple the legitimate government of Mohammad Mossadegh, using the most deceitful and degrading motives and machinations. Iranians are aware and on-guard today so that the same will never happen again. When you instruct your cadets that it is common practice to “lie, cheat, steal”—you are not representing the best of what American people are and desire. You cannot impose democracy on another people and nation, by lying, cheating, and stealing. You show it by example, by respecting their right for self-determination. You are supporting those in the region who are at the roots of what the world, including people in the region and those living in the West, are suffering from. You are funding, arming, and supporting the sources of literalist and most conservative sects and branches of Islam whose ideology has engendered terrorism in the region and beyond.

What you say and act do not represent the views and interests of all U.S. citizens. America is not just what you say it is; America has many voices, including mine. Iranians have learned the lessons, and made a revolution to choose their own independent path against the forces that brought on such designs for Iran. You were bothered by the take-over of the U.S. embassy in Iran and taking of its personnel hostage. That should not happen amid normal diplomatic relations based on mutual respect and trust. But, by your coup in Iran, already admitted to in your own officially disclosed secret documents as well, you had broken the norms, pursued illegal interference in another nation’s affairs, and had toppled the legitimate government of another nation. You violated the rights of a people to their self-determination, holding them as a nation hostage to your own imperial interests for decades, far, far, beyond 444 days. Ever since 1979, the West and the US in particular have imposed conditions of war and most restrictive sanctions on Iran to reverse the gains made by an independent nation. Iran has been in a state of war ever since the 1979 revolution, and those who judge any political, economic, and cultural shortcomings Iranians still face in the post-revolutionary period should not ignore the exceptionally harsh conditions imposed by the West on Iran.

Iran as a nation has the right to choose its own path, to gain its political independence to safeguard its national interests, to advance in economic, political, cultural, and spiritual ways arising from its own history, rather than becoming another Western clone and appendage at the heart of Middle East. Iran has a right to learn from its own mistakes, to fight its own corruptions, to resolve its own interethnic discrepancies, to experiment with its own models of democracy, to develop its own ideas, theories, and institutions of government—which can never happen and become perfect overnight. The
forty years since the Iranian revolution of 1979, one of the major revolutions of the twentieth century, are still nothing compared to the longer times it has taken for other nations in the West to build their institutions, on the ashes of two world wars and many regional wars they often themselves caused due to their imperial interests.

Iran had been a monarchy for eons. It needs its own generational time and space to find itself based on its own history, legacy, culture, art, and human values. You cannot judge a nation’s progress in the timeline of a few decades, especially when it has been subjected to relentless military, economic, and political threats and sanctions for decades. Iran has a right to its self-determination to grow through its own trials and errors. No revolution and war situation has been ideal and fair for all parties involved. There are always innocents on both sides. The U.S. grew out of its Civil War, the world has grown out of two devastating world wars, and Iran has a right to experience its own shortcomings and struggles as well.

To those who invite concerned Iranians or citizens of Iranian descent to voice their views about their policies about Iran, I say this.

Leave Iran alone to find its own path. Apologize for the debacle of the 1953 coup in Iran. Stop pursuing the same in new forms today. End the sanctions, now. Instead of sending your naval forces and planes and radar-evading planes to undemocratically impose your will on another nation, take a bouquet of flower on a civilian plane to Iran, with a sincere letter of apology to all Iranians. Apologize, for instance, for having downed a civilian airplane in the past in the Persian Gulf, killing all the passengers on board in the waters your most advanced radar-evading drone went down recently, the same waters in which your ally’s, UK’s, piracy in the high seas was locally answered. Take a bouquet of flowers to Iran with the letter of sincere apology. Iranians are generous and forgiving; they will receive you with respect, but they are smart enough to know when a gesture is genuine, and when not.

If you are concerned about human rights in Iran, first clean your own historical and regional backyards. See what your policies are doing to your own nation, dividing them, with innocents dying as a result of your guns and racist policies domestically. You think you are saving Afghanistan from wars? See how your own streets have become war-torn. What is the use of your Harvards and MITs if you cannot solve basic problems you face in your domestic and international relations? Acknowledge more fully and directly the suffering you caused for the native Americans long past and continuing; help heal their scars, now. You think you won over them, but in spirit, they
have been the winners, and the judgment day for more has not yet arrived. Acknowledge the horrors of slavery and how your ancestors shipped black slaves like cattle from Africa to generate your wealth and profits. That does not make you great. It is shameful. Heal it. If you are so much observant of human rights, take the perpetrators of Jamal Khashoggi to the court of international law and to jail. Stop arming and befriending the killers instead. Stop allying yourself with the most conservative and extremist sects in the Middle East who, in the name of Islam or Judaism, are perpetrating exactly the same policies of terrorism for which you blame others in the region.

Be fair in your judgments. You accuse Iran of not respecting women’s rights, when Iranian women are among the most educated in Iran and the Middle East, if not the world. The literacy in Iran has far, far, exceeded that during the reign of your installed Shah. In your allies’ lands in the region, women could not even drive a car until recently. In Iran’s post-revolutionary schools the likes of Maryam Mirzakhani, the first and only woman mathematician winner of the Fields Medal was trained. Iranian education and universities are advanced today, and becoming more so each day, despite (and especially because of) your sanctions. Iran has acquired nuclear technology and has a right to its use for its national development. It is the only nation who has announced, for spiritual and religious reasons, that nuclear weapons are illegal and inhuman. Remember what you did to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The impact was not different from the horrors in concentration camps other Westerners committed in Auschwitz. So, ban your ally Israel from holding and threatening with nuclear arms. Instruct her to reveal and destroy its nuclear weapons, developed in secret over many decades principally with the help of Western governments.

Do not fund Israel’s expansionist policies in the region in violation of the rights of Palestinians and of the airspace and lives of its neighbors. If you wish peace for Israel, wish peace for its neighbors equally, in real terms and not just in words. Stop funding and supporting the continuation of a policy of occupation that is illegal according to the charters of the United Nations. Stop supporting Israel’s apartheid policy of separating the Jews from the Arabs. You wish for peace in the Middle East? Solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem by accepting fair borders as already designated in the UN charter. You will never be able to solve the problem by bullying. See the bigger picture than your immediate interests. This conflict is the source of all conflicts in the region, predates the Iranian revolution by decades, and is at the root of much of the problems in the world today, and not just those
living in the region. It is a legacy, at its roots, of a long outdated, Newtonian vision of the world, one in which human interests are chunked up into pieces where one assumes that by imposing one’s “greater” will on another, one can mechanically solve the problem. As Sa’di said, you can never have peace if others are in pain, especially from your acts. Humankind, human history, human life, is quantum in nature. Interests are superposed. You cannot separate one from another, thinking that you can be happy and another sad. Human peace will never come about that way. You wish to celebrate Cyrus? Liberate your captives, and therefore your own soul, today.

You can never have peace within if you mistreat others without. Do not try imposing yourself on others. You cannot bully your way to true human (let alone American) greatness. You can never have justice without the same for others. Self and society are twin-born. You can relate to others because, as a social being, as a human, you can relate to yourself. Self and society are superposed. Your relation to others is a relation to yourself. You can never abuse others without abusing yourself. Learn from your soldiers and veterans. There is a reason they suffer and commit suicide when they come home from the supposedly patriotic missions for which they are sent. They are scarred for life for a reason. They can never pull that trigger without pulling the trigger to their own soul and dignity. You can never impose coups on other nations without suffering the consequences. Democracy and freedom cannot be imposed on another, without depriving your own nation of them.

Your peace with Iran can begin by taking that bouquet of flowers, and the sincere letter of apology, to Iran, to start a new chapter of friendship with Iran. But such a friendship gesture will never succeed if you duplicitously continue with not bringing a just resolution to the Middle East conflicts, at the heart of which is the Israeli-Palestinian problem. Iranians are justified in believing that a simple gesture of peace short of resolution of longstanding regional solutions would not work. Stop expecting that Iran not partake in assuring that its interests are served in its own neighborhood and region. For Iran, local peace cannot be achieved short of regional peace, and ultimately global peace. Nationalists still live a pipe-dream of modernization perspective, thinking each nation can go through its life in isolation from the region and the world. It cannot. It is a part of a world-system; it has to consider regional and global problems also as her own. Iran has every right to live in peace with its neighbors and be able to defend itself against foreign threats. Resolve regional problems at its root. Solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by defunding Israel’s illegal settlement expansion policies to reverse
them, bringing her to the negotiating table, one that is fair and just to the Palestinians, and meets their rights as stipulated in the UN resolutions.

Iran has to be reckoned with. It will never allow again the humiliation of the 1953 coup, now being plotted in new ways and with new social media and satellite TV news anchors and game players. No one can deny the problems Iran faces domestically, but it would be a grave mistake to ignore the world-systemic context in which Iran’s domestic problems have come about. The world should respect Iran’s choosing its own path on the basis of its own philosophies, spiritualities, and the economic, political, cultural, and artistic resources, models, and talents unique to its own history.

The imperial policies of the West, led by the US and the UK, in the region are at the root of much of the suffering of the region’s peoples’ lives. It is the most shameful and disastrous, Newtonian-inspired, “divide and rule,” imperial project from which both Arabs and Jews, as well as Iranians, not to mention others in the region, and in other parts of the world, including those in the US and the UK, are suffering everyday. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict predates the Iranian Islamic revolution by decades, and in part is a cause of it. It is not just a local, regional problem. It is a problem for the world to solve, urgently. It is the most urgent social problem left over from the last world war. A solution where both sides can live in peace as neighbors can only be brought about by supporting the efforts and aspirations of those in solidarity across the isles among both peace and justice loving Arabs and Jews, and all those supporting them world over, while exposing the problem’s root ideological and epistemological foundations.

My family’s personal troubles, the separations between my beloved parents, were never separate from the public issues caused amid a polarizing dualism of East and West in Iran’s contemporary history. The contrasting dualism of tradition and modernity did not have to be solved the way it did under the Shah, had Iran been respected to choose its own path as a new nation. Anyone who may say what I have expressed above has no place in an “objective” scientific study is being deceptive. Such personal sentiments can never be separated from what we study. They exist, whether others like them or not. Some may duplicitously pretend to be “objective” by hiding them. I choose to share my views openly in the interest of objective transparency.

Expressing such views, I wish to say that in this study I have no intention of sweeping my own values under the rug of a false principle of subjectless objectivity that is itself a Newtonian ideological artifact serving the interests of imperially—of those who marginalize and stigmatize critical and humanist
voices using a supposedly ‘neutral’ science, while pursuing a variety of subtle or overt Islamophobic and Islamophilic strategies for similar ends.

What I hope to have learned as shared in this volume is not simply a ‘physics’ nor a ‘sociology’ finding, but one that transcends their chunkiness in favor of a liberating, unified vision that would expose imperial and colonial ‘divide and rule’ policies dualizing East and West—ones that are also at the root of what separates parents and children across and inside any household or individual—as not only an inhuman, but also an unreasonable, proposition.

_Tender, let Wine’s Light brighten our Cup’s physicality!_  
_Singer, our wish was fulfilled! Sing its musicality!_  

_We’ve seen the image of our Beloved’s Face in the Cup,_  
_O clueless of our Drinking’s joyful eternality!_  

_Will never die be whose heart was resurrected to Love;_  
_Inked on the world’s chronicles is our immortality!_  

_The flirtatious winkings of star highs have been so much that_  
_Even the spruce charms with its cypress commonality!_  

_O wind, if you breeze right through the rose gardens of our friend_  
_Remember to tell her this, with congeniality:_  

_“O dear, why don’t you recall my name intentionally?_  
_Does not remembering names signal hospitality?”_  

_Drinking Wine is pleasant in the eye of our Tender;_  
_That’s why Wine was given reign of spirituality!_  

_I fear the day I won’t be able to use the excuse of_  
_The legal bread of mentor for Wine’s illegality!_  

_Hafez! Shed a seed of tear from the corner of your eye;_  
_May Love Bird’s choosing us be its eventuality!_  

— Hafez Shirazi (Tamdgidi translation)
Common Preface to the Series

One crowd are searching in religion for a way.
One crowd pursue the way of science, so they say.
I’m afraid, one morning a voice will cry out loud:
“The way is neither this, nor that, O gone astray!”
— Omar Khayyam (Tamdgidi translation)

In 2002, I deposited a doctoral dissertation at Binghamton University (SUNY), titled “Mysticism and Utopia: Towards the Sociology of Self-Knowledge and Human Architecture (A Study in Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim).” It was framed as a trilogy of works to be published as such, with necessary updates—one focusing on the utopianism of Karl Marx, another on the mysticism of George I. Gurdjieff, and the third on Karl Mannheim’s sociology of (scientific) knowledge.

The third leg of the trilogy was intended to serve a two-fold purpose. One was that of offering a reconstructive critique of Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge as introduced in his *Ideology and Utopia* (1936). Another was to propose a new theoretical subfield of inquiry called “the sociology of self-knowledge” for which “human architecture” and “utopystics” were to serve respectively as new methodological and world-historically framed empirical-practical fields. “Utopystics” (with a ‘y’) was being proposed as
an integrative East-West reinvention of Immanuel Wallerstein’s “utopistics” (1998), involving transcultural conversations across not just utopianism and science, but also mysticism—hence, “utop-yst-ics.”

The first two legs of the trilogy were subsequently updated and published under the titles *Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism* (in 2007 by Paradigm Publishers, now a part of Routledge) and *Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study* (in 2009 by Palgrave Macmillan). However, the publication of the originally intended third leg of the trilogy focusing on Karl Mannheim and the alternative formulations at which I had arrived in terms of a sociology of self-knowledge and its methodological and applied components (human architecture and utopystics) was to meet a more protracted and experimental fate than being published in a single volume.

This coincided with my joining the faculties of SUNY-Oneonta (as a visiting full-time lecturer during the 2001-2 and 2002-3 academic years) and the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston (as a tenure-track assistant professor from 2003 onwards until 2013 when I decided to retire early as a tenured associate professor). During this period, several parts of the original dissertation manuscript pertaining to the third leg were presented at conferences and/or revised and published as peer reviewed articles in various academic journals or as working papers in *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, an academic journal of an online research center—OKCIR: Omar Khayyam Center for Integrative Research in Utopia, Mysticism, and Science (Utopysts)—I had launched in 2002 as a practical fruit of my dissertation research (www.okcir.com). In the meantime, new materials pertaining to the subject of the third leg of the trilogy were also researched, written, presented, and published as various working papers in *Human Architecture* and as articles or chapters in other journals or edited books (for a list of such works, see References at the end of this book).

The reasons for the differing strategy for sharing the third leg of the trilogy in a more protracted way were more substantive than formal. My formulations had been originally presented as integral parts of a synthesis focusing on a critique of Karl Mannheim within, still, the framework of an academic project. The protracted strategy allowed me to explore the sociology of self-knowledge further in applied university settings while continually evaluating aspects of my earlier considerations regarding the suitability of an academic context for advancing my alternative intellectual projects.

The fact that the third leg of the trilogy expanded over the years from an intended single volume to series of writings, however, was a result of important
new substantive considerations resulting from the further deepening of my research, teaching, and professional service as a tenure-tracked/tenured university faculty. I will further elaborate on these considerations in this preface and in later writings, but it may suffice to note here that the end result was that my study of Mannheim’s contribution became sublated within a broader study that engaged with the sociological imagination of C. Wright Mills (1959) in the context of an exploration that no longer took for granted the liberating potential of the university as an academic institution as it is structured today. It called instead for advancing pluriversal models of scholarly organization that absorb but are not limited to the contributions of the outdated academic organizational forms still prevalent in the university world-system today. To elaborate further on this change in direction, let me briefly offer a substantive background for my intellectual project.

The overall purpose of my sociological research has been to explore the human search for a just global society. Since the world’s utopian, mystical, and scientific movements—as, for instance, represented in the works of Karl Marx, G. I. Gurdjieff, and Karl Mannheim respectively, whom I studied in my doctoral research—have been the primary sources of inspiration, knowledge, and/or practice in this field, I have aimed at critically reexamining the limits and contributions of these world-historical traditions, seeking to clearly understand why they have failed to bring about the good society, and what each can integratively contribute toward realizing that end.

My studies led me to the conclusion that human failures at building a just global society stem from a spatiotemporal distanciation between the “self” and the “social” foci of efforts at world-historical change in favor of the good society. This distanciation, deepened through the disintegrating clashes of settled vs. nomadic lifestyles during long eras of political, cultural, and economic imperialism ever since the fall of ancient civilizations, has itself been a result of the polarization of ideologies of change into religious and scientific modalities rooted in a common, philosophically perpetuated, idealist vs. materialist dualism. The combined perpetuation of this dualism in methods, theories, and praxes of change has become manifested in the world-historical fragmentation of the creative humanist paradigm into its predominantly Western utopian and Eastern mystical variants, both eschewed today by a globally hegemonic academic scientific movement.

I argued that a fundamental explanation for the above is to be sought in the problem of habituation, i.e., the human propensity to become
subconsciously attached to sensations, ideas, feelings, things, relations, and processes. It is from this that the dualisms of mind/matter, self/society, and theory/practice—byproducts of dualistic oppositions of materialist and idealist world outlooks lasting for millennia and still fragmenting the methods, theories, and praxes of change—fundamentally emanate. These dualisms are responsible for the world-historical fragmentation of the essentially creative human search for the good life into mutually alienated and thereby failing paradigms of philosophy, religion, and science—giving rise to equally fragmented and mutually alienated Western utopian, Eastern mystical, and global academic scientific movements.

I further argued that the splitting of the inherently artistic and creative human spirit into its ideological components more or less corresponds to the world-historical transitions of ancient civilizations to classical political, medieval cultural, and modern economic empires—for which the dialectics of nomadic vs. settled modes of life paved the way in the course of an increasingly synchronous global historical development. The so-called ‘postmodern’ condition today expresses the general crisis of all fragmented paradigmatic structures, modern and/or traditional.

It follows, then, that the good life will not be the gift of a wise few, of supernatural forces beyond, or of an ‘objectively’ preordained natural or historical progress. Human de-alienation can only be an artistic endeavor by each and all—only within a creative humanist framework can the habituated dualisms and fragmentations of philosophy, religion, and science be overcome while preserving their true meanings and contributions. The good life can only become a reality for all, in other words, if we creatively build it in social life beginning from our personal selves in the here and now. We will have to make it happen, creatively, ourselves and to the extent we succeed at it beginning in our everyday lives, here-and-now, to that extent we make such a just global society real. So, art, broadly considered, will have to become our central focus in finding a creative humanist way out, but not in a way that would prevent us from integrating and sublating in our liberating acts the valuable contributions of philosophy, religion, and science (and all the best art has itself historically contributed) while discarding their respective shortcomings.

I argued that the diverse projections of human creative powers onto ‘objective’ laws of motion of nature or history, supernatural agencies, or a wise few, represent the degree to which the very agencies of human liberation have themselves grown alienated from one another. The failed
conscious and intentional shocks of the two major humanist renaissances of the 6th–4th centuries B.C. and of the 13th-15th centuries A.D. in bringing about a lasting synthesis of the three polarized and failing fragments of the humanist endeavor have given rise in the modern period to the “antisystemic” mode of seeking social change which by its very nature of spatiotemporally distanciating the actual means from the promised ends of change has also been an exercise in failure. I proposed that the way out of this world-historical impasse is that of creatively inventing a new humanist renaissance involving self-critical conversations across utopian, mystical, and scientific traditions.

I posited further that all dualisms can be effectively transcended through their conscious and intentional re-articulation as diverse manifestations of part-whole dialectics. I argued that the habituated commonsense definition of society as multiple ethnonational or civilizational systems of relations among “individuals”—based on ahistorical presumptions of human “individuality”—need to be rejected in favor of its definition as a singular world-historical ensemble of multiple intra-, inter-, and extrapersonal self relations (expressing, respectively, human relations within, to others, and to their built/natural environments). I argued that human life can be harmonious only when it is a world-system of self-determining individualities. Contributions of Western utopianism, Eastern mysticism, and academic science to an otherwise singular movement in humanist utopystics—a hybrid, simultaneous interest in utopianism, mysticism, and science—should therefore be critically explored within an integrative framework. Consequently, I introduced ‘human architecture’ as the spatiotemporal art of design and construction of part-whole dialectics in everyday life—of building alternative, othersystemic, world-historical realities beginning from the personal here and now.

To pursue further the research as outlined above, I concluded my doctoral studies while wondering seriously at the time whether the academic institution as it stands today, and as I was about to seek employment in at the time, would provide a fertile ground for bringing about a critically integrative conversation and reconciliation across the three major world-historical traditions in transdisciplinary and transcultural ways. I therefore pointed—at the very time I was hesitantly contemplating joining academia as a university faculty member—to the need for an alternative, independent organizational spacetime for such a journey.

Establishing an independent research center publishing an autonomous scholarly journal, I thought then, would provide an integrative and creative
spacetime for knowledge production as an alternative to the fragmented and disciplined landscapes of philosophy, religion, and science. I therefore established OKCIR: Omar Khayyam Center for Integrative Research in Utopia, Mysticism, and Science (Utopystics) and its associated scholarly journal, Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge in 2002 to represent the seed for a utopystic university, a virtual research center existing simultaneously in personal and world-historical spacetimes—a makeshift ‘campus,’ at once personal and global. It was built on the premise that the search for alternative realities cannot advance without alternative research, educational, and disseminative landscapes. The ends and the means of the search, in other words, must coincide. I believed at the time, and do more so today, that utopystics cannot advance without utopystic universities.

I regarded OKCIR as utopystic in the sense that it must continually seek new personal and world-historical realities that did not previously exist; therefore, it must be by nature self-critical and self-transcending against its own habituating inertia. I regarded it as a movement in the arts—more specifically, a movement in *human architecture, the spatiotemporal art of becoming human*. Temporally, it is not projected onto a distant future or past, but is undertaken beginning from the here-and-nows of the everyday life. Spatially, it is situated not in retreat from but in the midst of the mainstream culture. It is concerned with the spatiotemporal dialectics of world-historical and personal self-knowledge and change.

As for the research agenda of OKCIR, I proposed the following questions and issues in its three component fields to be explored.

*Research on utopianism*: How can we go beyond ideological rhetoric—philosophical, religious, or scientific—to assess the real contributions and shortcomings of the utopian tradition? How does the utopian mode of challenging the status quo differ from the “antisystemic” variants? Many utopian experiments (such as that of the so-called “utopian socialists”) were much more real and concrete undertakings to explore alternative social arrangements than many contemporary party manifestos and platforms. Can one in fact find evidence that utopianism, i.e., building the alternative social order in the here and now (imaginatively and/or experimentally, by example), has been not an exception but the norm in previous, relatively more successful, transitions in historical modes of production?

Can we develop new, more appreciative, research agenda in world-historical explorations of utopian movements? Can we go beyond ideological rhetoric of “antisystemicity” and develop our notions and criteria of what
is really antisystemic or not using historically inductive, rather than only
and merely deductive, methods of reasoning and research? Can we develop
new world-historical typologies of utopian movements based on the ways in
which they have emerged from various philosophical, religious, scientific,
and humanist paradigms of social change?

Research on mysticism: What explains the dismissive attitudes of both
Western utopianism and academic science toward Eastern mysticism? How
can the rational contributions of mystical teachings to self-knowledge and
change be interpreted in liberating utopian and scientific sociological terms,
particularly in terms of multiplicities of selves and roles in contemporary society?
How can we constructively engage with and learn from the substantively
rational elements in the world’s mystical teachings and movements without
legitimizing and reproducing long-ingrained asymmetrical and dependent
modalities governing their teacher-student relationships?

What shapes and forms have mystical teachings and their student-teacher
modalities taken across time and space in world-history? Have there been, or
are there emerging, alternative approaches and experimentations in mystical
traditions which avoid such asymmetrical interpersonal structures in the
search for transcendent self and divine knowledge and experience? What
impacts have new textual, audiovisual, and electronic/internet technologies
had on further rigidification and/or transformation of substantive contents
and organizational forms of mysticism? How have globalization and the age
of information affected the secretive, isolationist, and ‘mystifying’ tendencies
found within various mystical schools?

Research on science: Why do we give/receive ‘credit’ for learning about
everything in the universe in our universities and classrooms, except for
the study of our own individual selves? How can we critically assimilate the
rational contributions of mystical and utopian traditions into the confines of
our formal and informal, on and off campus, ‘classrooms’ while discarding
their irrational elements? How can we engage students and ourselves in new,
21st century, discourses on ‘know thy selves and world’?

The study of theories of ‘self and society’ still cannot replace engaged
undertakings by students to critically examine their own selves in everyday
life. How can we build encouraging and supportive educational and curricular
environments in schools and programs for such undertakings? How can we
engage students in creative intellectual and experimental explorations and
constructions of egalitarian social arrangements beginning in the ‘classrooms’
of their schools, universities, homes, and peer groups, here and now?
What ontological, epistemological, methodological, theoretical, and historical-interpretive impediments are preventing us from realizing that the alternative self and social arrangements also need to be “socially constructed” here and now—rather than merely promised in political platforms for a future society? How can rapidly developing technologies of internet and media communications contribute to the bridging of the self-globe divide, and their knowledges, in contemporary society? What challenges do these new technologies pose for student lives and education in terms of new forms of habituation, automation, and mental and physical illness?

What new methods, techniques, and styles of teaching can we create to accomplish globally more responsible engagements with self-knowledge and change in undergraduate and graduate educational and curricular landscapes? How can new advances in science and technology contribute to transforming long-habituated academic publishing structures of knowledge production and dissemination in favor of more creative and liberating scholarly pursuits in favor of a just global society?

It so happened that my work as a university professor during the twelve years (2001-2013) following my doctoral studies introduced me in a practical manner to structural constraints that I had not personally experienced as a faculty member. The nature of this experience will also be a subject of my future writings, whether explicated or not—as it had been the case in my study of Marx and Gurdjieff in the first two legs of the trilogy.

What I do know for sure is that insistence on continuing my independent research center and its journal provided a liberating spacetime—despite all the absurd and self-defeating constraints arising from the nature of institutionalized academia as it stands today—to continue my own research and pedagogical agenda in line with the guiding thread I had arrived at (as restated above) in the course of my doctoral studies.

The first two legs of the trilogy were focused on the study of utopianism and mysticism as represented in the life and works of Marx and Gurdjieff. The third leg of the trilogy began as an exploration of the contributions and shortcomings of sociology amid its hosting academic institution, for which I studied Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge. This still remains the central theme of the study being shared in the present series but it will be more broadly framed around and engage with the need for a critical revisitation and reexamination of C. Wright Mills’s sociological imagination.

Following the course of the twelve years of university work involving
my participant observation of what goes on in academia as the home of modern scientific production and dissemination of ideas, I now have a clearer perspective on why it is that modern academia as it stands today will continue to fail in advancing the kind of understanding needed for more effective contribution to the building of a just global society.

It is not that universities do not serve useful purposes in one area or another. They do, but they also instigate harmful, fragmentary, and in fact at times absurdly counter-scientific ways of going about producing and applying knowledge. Their manifest function is the production and advancement of knowledge, but their latent function has increasingly become the perpetuation of still outdated classical Newtonian ways of knowing and seeing the world that are unscientific, serving narrow institutional, ideological, and social interests at the expense of advancing liberating knowledge and practice.

For this reason, they should not be seen as the only way reasonable knowledge production and dissemination should proceed, since how they are run may in fact be obstructive to the development of transcultural and transdisciplinary human scientific understanding—especially if the point is to achieve liberating outcomes. I will argue in future writings (in support of existing studies already underway) how by transitioning from “uni”-versity to “pluriversal” models of knowledge production and dissemination, what is useful in traditional academia can also be fruitfully sublated in more liberating emerging models.

Much of what transpired since 2002 in my scholarship as a university faculty more or less validated and reinforced, in my mind, the line of thinking and research agenda that emerged from my doctoral studies. However, the subsequent research and academic experience during my work as a university professor were also valuable as a latent field-research involving participant observation of academic life, leading me to become increasingly convinced that what I was after in my scholarship could not be effectively accommodated through institutionalized academia since academic structures themselves are deeply implicated in and structurally contributing to the causes of failure of our hitherto efforts toward building a just global society.

While the above notes on academia may sound like distractions from the substantive subject matter of a series on Liberating Sociology dealing with the question of the difference between the Newtonian and quantum ways of imagining reality and society, I hope that I will convince the readers in this and future volumes of my writings that academic structures are significantly contributive to why we have failed in finding answers to important questions
that should matter to us in search of a better world.

When I decided to retire early from academia in 2013 to devote the necessary time and energy for conducting and completing this research, I did so deeply convinced by direct personal experience that there are certain structural constraints in academia that inherently fetter the kinds of transdisciplinary and transcultural research that are actually needed to seriously address and explore the subject matter of what I intended to investigate. My concerns went beyond the matter of having more time for research; it had a lot to do with the kind of mindset and ways of going about research free of the fragmentation the university structure inherently imposes on its members, one that prevents them from seeing the forest for the trees (or the trees for the forest). The dualism that has contributed to our failures in finding a way out of the prison of habitual thinking, feeling, and sensing are not abstract concepts or categories to be studied and discussed in philosophy books. They are lived experiences that hypnotically shape our personal and academic behaviors in our here-and-nows, on and off-campus.

So, I wish to emphasize that this book being written and published independently by a tenured associated professor of sociology who decided to “retire early” is not a coincidence, but is of the essence to what is undertaken in the series whose first volume you are about to read. My decision to proactively retire from the university to conduct this research was not merely to find more time and space, but to provide the necessary structural conditions for the pursuit of a kind of research that is able to appreciatively question science itself as critically as I have tried to do in relation to utopian and mystical traditions. Nor is the publication of this series independently by the research center I founded a coincidence. These conscious and intentional efforts at “retirement” from an institutional and disseminative structure to pursue more actively my own independent scholarship and publishing projects are themselves practical expressions of what I wish to advance in this and other series of my writings in terms of exercises in liberating sociology, beginning from my own personal here-and-now.

A most revealing aspect of my intellectual experience since my doctoral studies has been my increasing and deepening realization that much of what I have argued and understood during my studies as outlined above can be framed in terms of a need to move from Newtonian toward quantum sociological imaginations. Several of my writings since my doctoral studies involved reflections on that topic specifically. But I believe that what I had realized regarding dualism as being a foundational cause of failures of
utopian, mystical, and scientific traditions in bringing about a just global
society—including the problems facing the modern university and academia
today—can now be more clearly understood in terms of a need to advance
from a long-habituated classical Newtonian vision in favor of a creative and
broader quantum vision of reality, including society and ourselves—one
which is quintessentially nonreductive and nondualistic.

The central purpose of this series on *Liberating Sociology* is to retrace
from the start and present in a more coherent way the third leg of my
originally intended trilogy in terms of a need to reimagine sociology from
Newtonian toward quantum visions.

According to C. Wright Mills (1959), “the sociological imagination enables
us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within
society. ... No social study that does not come back to the problems of
biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed
its intellectual journey” (6).

The series *Liberating Sociology*, like the two earlier books of the trilogy
of which it is an integrating fold, can also be best understood as a critical
and applied exercise in cultivating a sociological imagination of my own
life, a simultaneous effort—explicated or not—in understanding myself
amid the utopian, mystical, and scientific (particularly sociological) academic
traditions that have one way or another intersected with my own biography.

Therefore, I conclude this common preface to the series by offering
a personal narrative of the background biographical and historical contexts
which fueled my interest in conducting this research.

Growing up during the 1960s and 1970s as the youngest and only son in
a middle-class family of five in Tehran, Iran, I was often expected to take sides
and mediate the differences between my Westernizing father and Easternizing
mother—which always preoccupied my energy and mind, and pained my
heart. The emotional anguish I endured as a result in the broader context of
wider Eastern and Western cultural structures, norms, and prescriptions for
the conduct of everyday life is impossible to describe here. However, they
have strongly contributed, consciously or not, to the forces motivating my
scholarship to find a way of bringing together these seemingly opposite sides
of my inner life amid family and broader social contexts.

Luckily, I had the spatiotemporal luxury of being able to take refuge in
my own room from the East-West conflicts between my parents in order to
more constructively engage in alternative hobbies such as drawing, painting,
carpentry, assembling amateur electronic kits, or building cardboard models of houses and towns—while also trying to pursue my formal education. At school, however, I confronted a similar unsettled mixture of Western and Eastern subjects and methods. Science and religious courses were often mixed in the curricula in Iran, though at the time (under the Shah) the emphasis was on the former, casting religious and social studies as secondary subjects in elementary and high school education. However, as I recall for example when it came to my participating in and winning a painting art contest organized by and on the national educational television station, the thematic subject to draw was “the mosque.”

At the same time, my constant involvement in home-based crafts or hobbies was perhaps a personal reaction and solution to the lack of an experimental and practice-oriented curriculum at school. Not having any close relatives who had the formal training to act as guides for my education, from the beginning in my childhood I was self-reliant in searching for answers to questions, often seeking my own ways of solving problems.

Having chosen mathematics as a study major in late high school years in Iran, during which I became especially interested in the subject of spatial geometry, in 1977 I entered the Technical College of Tehran University, majoring in what seemed to be a favorite and highly praised career choice of parents for their children in Iran: engineering—especially civil engineering. This, as I later learned, had much to do with the extremely rapid process of “modernization” and urbanization in Iran especially during the 1970s.

The beginning of my undergraduate years at the Technical College, a highly politicized center of student activism in Iran for many decades, coincided with the events leading to the overthrow of the 2500-year-old monarchial political system in Iran. The Easternizing Islamic revolution in Iran against the Westernizing regime of the Shah again reminded me of the age-old conflict. In the meantime, the revolution reinforced the deep and often obsessive desire already present in me, thanks to my family experience, to seek the root causes of things—now, of broader social conflicts.

Universities in Iran being in turmoil and soon closed down, I moved abroad in 1978 to enter U.C. Berkeley for my undergraduate studies, shifting my study major to architecture. In the context of the explosive revolutionary situation in Iran, when squatter-dwellers (“kookh-neshinan”) were rising up against the palace-dwellers (“kakh-neshinan”), as Ayatollah Khomeini’s political rhetoric acknowledged, and in the midst of the political radicalism characterizing the U.C. Berkeley campus for all walks of life, the pursuit of
a mainstream and conventional career in architecture did not prove to be sufficiently attractive for me. When a vast majority of the world’s population suffer from a lack of basic housing and urban facilities such as water and electricity, I thought at the time, a career focused on pleasing the elaborate spatial idiosyncrasies of the rich seemed to be too far out of sync with reality. Besides, as a de facto immigrant to the U.S., the contrasts of subtle cultural differences between the East and the West, even for me who I thought had already been sufficiently Americanized even before entering the U.S., was becoming too real to dismiss.

As a result I experienced a deep identity crisis during the first summer of my stay here in the U.S. in 1978, the likes of which I have not since experienced. Challenging both my Eastern quasi-religious beliefs and Western “petty-bourgeois” or “bourgeois” cultural inclinations, the student movement abroad occupied an important place in my life during almost a decade after my arrival in the U.S. I met and learned from many Marxists—which explains why I exerted considerable efforts in my doctoral studies to critically understand what went wrong in Marxist ‘revolutionary’ theorizing and praxis. Despite many reservations I have about that experience, especially its one-sided emphasis on ‘practice’ at the expense of ‘theory,’ I owe to that movement my deeply ingrained, almost habitual, inclination to pursue social theory and practice relationally—which of course was in other ways already present in me in a technical sense due to my architectural training. However, the impact such a practice-oriented approach to education had on lengthening my graduate studies cannot be underestimated—an experience which I cherish to this day.

During my undergraduate studies in architecture at U.C. Berkeley, when also my early interest in Marxism grew, I became interested in what is referred to as the “housing question” under capitalism. Due to clear directives in the classical Marxist (especially Engelsian) literature to give priority to the “social” question rather than the symptomatic and “secondary” problems of capitalist society such as the “housing question,” I also thought then that the causes of the housing problem lie not in “physical” but in “non-physical,” i.e., social, conditions. In other words, it is not that we cannot technically build adequate and/or affordable housing around the globe, but that this seems to be socially inhibited for one reason or another. For this reason, at the time, and concluding my studies at Berkeley, I expressed the view in my applications to graduate schools that the problem with “low-income housing” resides not in the “housing” but in the “low-income” aspect.
Hence, upon graduation from U.C. Berkeley with a major in architecture, I abandoned the “housing question” altogether and shifted my studies to sociology and entered the graduate program in sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton—known for its world-systems studies long before the “globalization” studies frenzy later began. This was a unique program designed to inculcate the sociological premise that no part of the world today (be it in its center, periphery, or semi-periphery) could be truly understood without studying the whole world-system as a singular unit of analysis. It was meant to be the latest in the evolution of dependency theory that had made a radical break from modernization and stage development theories of various brands, suggesting instead that presumably separate nations do not necessarily follow the same path toward modernization since the ‘late-comer’ trajectories of development are significantly shaped and ‘underdeveloped’ by the imperial interests of the metropole societies located in the center of the world-system. But, world-systems analysis took this idea even further and beyond the notion of dependency of a particular colony on its particular metropole. The modern world-system was now a singular unit, and no part of it could be adequately understood without understanding the system as a whole. The idea of studying the modern world as a single unit of analysis thereby began to have an important impact on my thinking ever since my studies at Binghamton.

It was during my graduate studies in sociology at Binghamton, however, that I began to realize how “low-income” and “housing” conditions may in fact be dialectically interrelated, and that the “housing question” itself can be an important window of research and possible practical involvement toward the realization of concrete social change. I began to think—and as I reflected on the centrality of housing problems and demands in the rapidly modernizing and urbanizing Iran and its ongoing revolution—that I had come across an important explanatory cause of revolution under capitalism. Housing, I thought, is the only primary subsistence commodity under capitalism whose use-value is space itself—and space is a scarce commodity. The materialist conception of history inspiring my Marxist views at the time seemed to point to the significance of space in social and sociological analysis, but this was also leading me to question the classical Marxist analyses of the significance of the housing question as a “secondary” problem, one that tended to succumb to dualistic thinking in search of ever more primary causes.

Without my growing interest in urban and housing issues, for instance, I would not have paid as much attention to urban protest movements such
as those in the Afsariyeh district of Tehran whose strange but artful slogan ("Na Qarbi, Na Sharqi; Na Abi, Na Barqi" meaning “Neither Eastern [Bloc], Nor Western; Neither Water, Nor Electricity”) originally inspired my doctoral research. My academic rediscovery of the significance of the housing question in social revolution, which revealed definite inadequacies in Marxism itself and its lack of adequate attention to spatial analysis in social theorizing, prompted me to reintegrate my original ‘architectural’ interests and skills with my current ‘sociological’ research projects. The origins of my concept of ‘human architecture’ (which was modified from an original ‘social architecture,’ reflecting a new step in my understanding of the significance of human agency and the limits of the ‘social question’ and of ‘sociology’ themselves) can therefore be partly traced to this desire for a synthesis of my formal educational backgrounds.

At a practical level, however, I personally experienced in time how the very inner organizational and social practices of individuals who profess to follow the Marxist project can be totally distant from and alien to the methodological and theoretical formulations and principles of the ‘revolutionary’ paradigm itself. The so-called ‘not practicing what you preach’ syndrome, so to speak, personally hit home particularly as I resigned from an Iranian student association in protest against censorship of my critical views. As if experiencing the failure of Iranian Marxists abroad or in Iran was not enough to convince me of the shortcomings of Marxism, I (along with millions of others) soon had the extraordinary chance in a lifetime of observing under our very own eyes the crumbling of a whole Communist Bloc in a matter of a few years, if not days, during the late 1980s. Witnessing this, but also the failures of other nationalist and religious ‘revolutionary’ models of Western and Eastern extraction in Iran in a global context, I became deeply curious about why all paradigms of social revolution, religious or scientific alike, have hitherto failed—and about the possibility of existence or emergence of alternative paradigms of change.

It was during this period of personal confusion and dissatisfaction with Marxism as a Western doctrine that I learned, by the mere recreative chance of watching a film (Meetings with Remarkable Men, directed by Peter Brook, New York: Remar Productions, Inc., 1978) about the life of an “unknown” man, a certain G. I. Gurdjieff, who in the 1920s “appeared in Europe having had extraordinary experiences in the East” (as told in the film’s opening scene). I was strangely ‘attracted’ to this man’s life and teaching, as I soon discovered I already shared much of his cultural background and intellectual
interests. Although in time I grew dissatisfied with the works by and about Gurdjieff, yet, I felt then that I had discovered the “fragments of a tradition deeply close to what I had been searching in my life,” a statement that I later found and understood for interesting reasons—having to do with Gurdjieff’s “objective art” of literary hypnotism—to be, ironically, often repeated as well by many others who encountered Gurdjieff’s teaching for the first time.

Gurdjieff’s teaching was the spark that opened my mind to the rich (and for many reasons also controversial) accumulation of knowledge in the world’s mystical tradition about self-knowledge and change. He shed a meaningful light on the esoteric nature of all the Persian poetry I had heard or read in my life as part of the cherished heritage of Iranians, but never really understood their intent beyond their superficial, though beautiful, rhymes and images.

Gurdjieff also disturbed in my mind the spatiotemporalities associated with “progress” as advocated by both the mainstream, and the socialist, propaganda apparatuses—for here I found an allegedly “ancient” teaching that was in many ways far more scientific and useful in dealing with questions of everyday life than many others I had encountered in conventional academic literature. Perhaps this was a ‘postmodern’ challenge in my mind to the assumed ‘progressive’ superiority of the West over the East, of the modern over the traditional, and of the present over the past.

Nevertheless, it was through persistent and independent critical study of Gurdjieff’s writings that I gradually understood the reasons for my initial, hypnotic ‘attraction’ to his teaching—which also allowed me to observe in a deeply personal way the underlying structures of most religious and mystical teachings at work. I soon realized that it was simply indispensable for me to try to critically integrate my experience with Gurdjieff’s teaching into my doctoral research undergoing at the time on the underlying paradigmatic causes of failure of past efforts in world-history to bring about the good society. I intentionally remained independent of all Gurdjieffians, orthodox or not—learning from my past experience of involvement in the student organizations associated with Marxism—especially since the very teacher-student relationship was itself implicated in the subject matter of my doubts and questions about Gurdjieff and other mystical teachings.

In my doctoral research at the time, my purpose was to move beyond unfounded prejudices that had been hurled at Gurdjieff from different quarters before then, most of which I found to be based on heresy and a result of superficial acquaintance with his own writings. However, I also aimed at
going beyond habitual readings of Gurdjieff based on others’ opinions of him, seeking to provide an independent critical assessment of the shortcomings and contributions of his life and teaching based on his own primary writings. In this, my intentions were to contribute to our awakenings from all trances in life, including those paved with good intentions by Gurdjieff himself.

My decision about organizational independence from all mystical schools, including those associated with Gurdjieff’s teaching, was irreversibly reinforced later upon my critical participation in late December 1994 and early January 1995 in an intensive, at once extraordinary and troubling, 10-day Buddhist meditation retreat in the U.S. associated with Goenka’s Vipassana practice, followed by my continuing readings on mysticism and new independent experimentations with various techniques of meditation.

The challenge I faced during that 10-day meditation retreat opened my eyes to the elaborate but subtle subconscious conditioning one can undergo not only in mystical schools, but especially in everyday life. I now questioned many things that I otherwise would have taken for granted, including the conceptual and curricular structures of academia itself. In this process, as I had questioned architecture in my undergraduate years, I began to question the very notions of self, society, and also of sociology. In particular, I became especially concerned with the ways in which disciplinary boundaries in academia have perpetuated the dichotomies of self and society, objective and subjective, matter and mind, science and religion, and so on. It is one thing to awaken to an hypnotic situation amid a mystical teaching retreat; it is another to realize later that the ‘normal’ state of living and ‘disciplined’ school learning going on in everyday life ‘outside’ the retreat is not any less, but in fact even more deeply and subtly, hypnotic in nature.

Studying sociology, therefore, I discovered the self, a discovery which soon proved transient as well, for in the course of further research I also discovered beyond the evasive unitary and individual surface appearances of the self its underlying and inner (and not just contextual) multiplicity and “sociality.” The study of the works of Karl Mannheim, proposed to me by my dissertation advisor at the time, provided me with an opportunity to link my interest in utopian and mystical teachings with those in science.

The sociology of knowledge has traditionally been concerned with the study of the relationship between knowledge and society. The study of the underlying causes of failure of various mystical or utopian movements is essentially a study in the sociology of knowledge, since these movements claim to have developed not only knowledges which accurately reflect the
human inner or broader social reality, but also prescriptions and modes of organization and practice that in their view can change that reality toward attainment of desired goals and aspirations. I found much value in Mannheim’s original intentions for constructing the sub-field. Reading him carefully, I felt a sense of unfairness in the way his views had been received and challenged by his contemporaries. But, I also thought at the time that a constructive reading of Mannheim’s legacy necessitates an openness to see both the value and the shortcomings of his project.

My educational experience had thus been a process of increasing awareness of both the ways in which our knowledges are world-historically constructed, and the extent to which we can consciously and intentionally shape and influence such construction processes. My intellectual transitions from the sciences of math and civil engineering to architecture, from urban housing and community development to the study of Iranian revolutions, from world-systems and Middle Eastern studies to the study of methods, space and society, the sociology of knowledge, and finally the study of the self, had not been easy. However, in this “architectural” project, I felt that at last I had found (or I may say, designed and constructed) my own intellectual home. It had been a long process of self-critical challenge to the previously taken-for-granted structures of my own knowledge—structures that, when I thought about them then, as much as I thought about the very personal structures of my own emotional and physical life, were world-historical constructions mediated through the particular Eastern and Western cultures, social institutions, class relations, and idiosyncratic inter- and intrapersonal environments amid which I had intellectually matured.

“There is no royal road to science,” Marx wrote in 1872, “and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.” But, which “science,” or whose “science,” did Marx have in mind? Despite his historical treatment of many philosophical and theoretical categories in his voluminous works, Marx often seemed to take for granted the universality of the spatiotemporally particular, nineteenth-century European mountain of “objective” Newtonian science he was seeking and encouraging his followers to climb. To be sure, the sociology of self-knowledge as it was emerging in my doctoral research may prove to be, I thought at the time, even more difficult to ascend. But, the summits of its illuminating (hopefully dialectical) twin peaks may also turn out to be much more rewarding for the kind of creative and artful task that is necessary for clearing the habituated Augean stables of our inner and broader
social enslavements, mechanicalness, and hypnoses in favor of liberating, humanized, and awakened realities.

My preoccupations with Eastern and Western paradigms of change, therefore, are hardly a result simply of academic curiosity. These concerns are unique forms of articulation, in the biographical dramas of my own and others’ lives, of conflicting paradigms of world-historical change. My research was then, as it is still today, as much a world-historical exploration of three utopystic thought-systems as an effort in seeking personal self-knowledge on my own part—critically revisiting the three utopian, mystical, and scientific thought-systems associated with Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim that had shaped my own intellectual identity in the past. In seeking to know and change myself I needed to critically reexamine and perhaps change these perspectives themselves. There was an identity of part and whole inquiries at work in every page of my dissertation, and for that reason the study as it was later gradually published may be itself also regarded as a work in the sociology of self-knowledge—and human architecture and utopystics as its overlapping methodological and applied components—a study during which the new field of critical applied sociological inquiry I now call “liberating sociology” was itself launched.

In the course of my doctoral research I arrived at the basic outlines of an intellectual hypothesis or “guiding thread” that has shaped the course of my life and scholarship interests and trajectory ever since. Some may regard doctoral work as a passing phase of their intellectual work, moving on to ‘more serious’ academic jobs and careers. I laugh at how institutional academic reviews downplay faculty’s previous doctoral work. The one major study of your lifetime on which specialists in the field most familiar with you as a person and your work as a scholar personally sign, in other words, are routinely disregarded as being of less value than one supposedly and deceptively ‘blind-reviewed’ in the name of ‘objectivity’ in our still deeply Newtonian universities.

I myself had the deepest and most wonderful learning experience researching and writing my doctoral thesis over many years. I therefore advise in turn all students reading these lines to cherish and take full advantage of their deepest and most serious research done during their doctoral study years, while they last. On the day I defended my dissertation my advisers suggested that what you do seriously during your doctoral studies will shape the basic contours of your scholarly work and life in the decades to come. They were right.
Abstract

This essay is a common preface to the series, *Liberating Sociology: From Newtonian to Quantum Imaginations* authored by Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, included in its first volume subtitled *Unriddling the Quantum Enigma*. Tamdgidi offers substantive and autobiographical backgrounds to his writing of the series as referenced in its title. He notes how the series itself represents an expanded third leg of a trilogy of works originating from his 2002 doctoral dissertation, titled “Mysticism and Utopia: Towards the Sociology of Self-Knowledge and Human Architecture (A Study in Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim).” He notes that the first two legs of the series have already been published under the titles *Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism* (Routledge/Paradigm 2007) and *Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009). In the new series *Liberating Sociology* the author intends to retrace, revisit, critically revise, update, and systematically integrate into a coherent whole all his pertinent unpublished or previously published working papers, articles, chapters, and writings relevant to the third leg of the trilogy, now newly framed as an effort in advancing sociology from Newtonian toward quantum imaginations.

Tamdgidi concludes the preface with an autobiographical account, in the spirit of advancing the sociological imagination of his own work, of the interplay of personal troubles and public issues that fueled this intellectual project of researching and writing his trilogy as a whole.

Tamdgidi describes how his educational experience was a process of increasing awareness of both the ways in which our knowledges are world-historically constructed, and the extent to which we can consciously and intentionally influence such construction processes. He argues that his intellectual transitions from the sciences of math and civil engineering to architecture, from urban housing and community development to the study of Iranian revolutions, from world-systems and Middle Eastern studies to the study of methods, space and society, the sociology of knowledge, and finally the study of the self, had not been easy. However, in this “architectural” project, he felt that at last he had found (designed and constructed) his own intellectual home. It had been a long process of self-critical challenge to the previously taken-for-granted structures of his own knowledge—structures that, when he thought about them then, as much as he thought about the very personal structures of his own emotional and physical life, were world-historical constructions mediated through the particular Eastern and Western cultures, social institutions, class relations, and idiosyncratic inter- and intrapersonal environments amid which he had intellectually matured.

Tamdgidi states that his preoccupations with Eastern and Western paradigms of change have hardly been a result simply of academic curiosity. These concerns are unique forms of articulation, in the biographical dramas of his and others’ lives, of conflicting paradigms of world-historical change. His research was then, as it is still today, as much a world-historical exploration of three utopystic thought-systems as an effort in seeking personal self-knowledge on his part—critically revisiting the three utopian, mystical, and scientific thought-systems that had shaped his own intellectual identity in the past. In seeking to know and change himself he needed to critically reexamine and perhaps change these perspectives themselves. There was an identity of part and whole inquiries at work in his dissertation, and for that reason the study as it was later gradually published may be itself also regarded as a work in the sociology of self-knowledge—and human architecture and utopistics as its overlapping methodological and applied components—a study during which the new field of critical applied sociological inquiry he now calls “liberating sociology” was itself launched.
Introduction: An Elephant in the Room of Physics and the Sociological Imagination

No one reached a Rosy-Cheeked in this ancient world
Who was not at heart struck by thorns his times unfurled.
See the comb—how it endures a hundred-tooth split
Before it can groom a Beloved’s Hair uncurled.
— Omar Khayyam (Tamdgidi translation)

In every intellectual age some one style of reflection tends to become a common denominator of cultural life. Nowadays, it is true, many intellectual fads are widely taken up before they are dropped for new ones in the course of a year or two. Such enthusiasms may add spice to cultural play, but leave little or no intellectual trace. That is not true of such ways of thinking as ‘Newtonian physics’ or ‘Darwinian biology.’ Each of these intellectual universes became an influence that reached far beyond any special sphere of idea and imagery. In terms of them, or in terms derived from them, unknown scholars as well as fashionable commentators came to re-focus their observations and re-formulate their concerns.

I. Opening: C. Wright Mills, the Sociological Imagination, and the “Improperly Felt to Be Wonderfully Mysterious”

Six decades ago, in his widely influential work, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), C. Wright Mills advocated a mode of inquiry in sociology centering on the idea that social life and its problems can best be understood by exploring how personal troubles and public issues afflicting individuals and societies relate to one another.

Critiquing in his book various approaches to sociological analysis, trends that had become fashionable in the academia of his time, Mills was alternatively proposing what he called “the sociological imagination” in order to encourage his readers to critically draw inspiration again from what he variously called the “classic tradition,” “classic works of social science,” or “classic social analysis.” He intended such a sociological imagination linking the individual biography to the historical process—evidence of which he considered to be emerging then in the works of the more serious journalists, political analysts, editors, and “critics and novelists, dramatists and poets” (p. 18), but still lacking in the academic sociology of his time—to become a “new common denominator” of the ways of thinking in his own time.

By the expression “new common denominator” Mills meant a way of thinking that underlies all ways of thinking of an era, such that no study could be considered complete without having fulfilled the requirements of such a common denominator. This means that not only in the humanities and the social sciences, but also even in the physical sciences one would maintain a sociologically imaginative interest and frame of mind. Not only in specialized fields, but also in private reflections and public discourses one would always wonder how a given inquiry could be enriched by and contribute to the understanding of how personal troubles and public issues interrelate in one’s particular society in a world-history context. It was in this sense and context that Mills drew parallels, as evident from his passage epigraphed above, to a distinction between transient fashions of thinking that come and go, on one hand, and, on the other, the deeper and more enduring structures of intellectual life such as the Newtonian (or Darwinian) way of thinking.

Mills’s proposed “sociological imagination” was therefore meant to be not just another transient subfield of sociology, as one among many disciplines. It was meant to be a new way of thinking for his time in par with what the Newtonian way was for its time. It was meant to be a transdisciplinary way of thinking about the relation of the personal and the public, self and society,
individual and social structure, biography and history—the microscopic and the macroscopic spheres of human life.

Reading the epigraph from Mills opening this introduction while applying a sociological imagination to his own text, however, one may ask in turn whether Mills’s own proposed sociological imagination was itself influenced by the classical Newtonian intellectual universe to which he was referring—one that he himself acknowledged to have deeply shaped the cultural and scholarly discourses from which Mills’s time was still emerging.

It is true that at the time Mills’s book was published in 1959 several decades had passed since Einstein’s discovery of the special (1905) and general (1915) theories of relativity and the rise of quantum science especially from 1920s onward, both of which had radically challenged human (or, at least some leading physicists’) ways of thinking about the deepest structures of reality. However, this does not mean that all ways of thinking, including those in sociology, had broken away from Newtonianism overnight, at least to the extent one can claim had happened in the physical sciences. After all, Mills himself was advocating in his book for a return to the “classic tradition,” which presumably coincided with a time Newtonianism still held sway. So, it is fair to ask where Mills stood regarding the significance of the new findings of the physical sciences for advancing the social sciences and especially his own proposed “sociological imagination.”

On one hand, Mills’s account gives the impression that his explicit reference to Newtonianism (or Darwinism) was meant mainly to offer an example of the distinction one should make between the more enduring and the more transient ways of thinking in any era, not necessarily implying that Mills thought his own proposed “sociological imagination” was still Newtonian. However, on the other hand, his nostalgic appeal to the “classics” in sociology seemed to be at odds with moving away from the Newtonian way of thinking, to the extent that most of the scholars to whom he explicitly referred as more or less exemplifying the “classic tradition” lived and thought at a time when Newtonianism still prevailed. In fact, many such scholars aimed at making the study of society “scientific” by belatedly following—with varying degrees of expressed attention to the difference between natural and social worlds—the lead of the physical sciences of their time that had been dominated by the Newtonian way of thinking.

Several of the thinkers Mills cited in his book as representing the classic tradition—Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), E. A. Ross (1866-1951), August Comte (1798-1857), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Karl Mannheim (1893-
1947), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950), W. E. H. Lecky (1838-1903), and Max Weber (1864-1920), for instance—had lived and worked before the era of relativity and quantum revolution, and the few younger and more contemporary ones in the list had more or less still followed the classics’ footsteps, as Mills acknowledged and himself seemingly exemplified.

Just think about the enormity of the question we are asking here. This is not just about Mills and his proposed sociological imagination, but also about Western sociological tradition in general. Even today, when educating new generations in sociology, we routinely teach the “classics” of sociology, measuring the success or failure of the more contemporary ones against the more or less esteemed “classical tradition” that by and large came about at a time when, even Mills would admit, the Newtonian way of thinking still held sway. If we suppose that such classics in one way or another borrowed from a Newtonian way of thinking, are we in every new generation habitually educating ourselves back to such a way of thinking?

There are passages in Mills’s text that offer a sense of what he felt about the Newtonian way of thinking and the new advances in the physical sciences of his time and what they meant for sociology.

Mills basically acknowledged finding himself living at a time the Newtonian way of thinking was increasingly undermined. He noted that “two centuries of hope” had passed and “older ways of feeling and thinking collapsed” such that previous ways of thinking had become inadequate, the “older common denominator” (with which Mills clearly associated, by example, Newtonianism) having become increasingly doubtful (p. 4).

However, Mills also skeptically felt that the new findings of the physical sciences, “improperly felt to be wonderfully mysterious” (p. 15), had offered only ambiguity and confusion regarding the nature of reality. For him, the new sciences had resulted in the “H-bomb” (p. 15) along with its associated political, economic, and cultural public issues and psychological troubles. We should not forget, in the spirit of applying his own sociological imagination, that Mills lived amid a Cold War era in chronic fear of a WWIII, and the new sciences of the subatomic world resulting in the bomb and a nuclear age had made human survival not only an internationally spread-out public issue, but also a locally and personally felt everyday trouble. If even today we find the so-called quantum enigma still unresolved and fueling persistent “confusion” and “ambiguity” about the nature of reality, we can understand how even less certain the meaning of the new relativistic and quantum sciences were to a
Mills trying to find a “new common denominator” for his own era’s ways of thinking at a time the older way was being irreversibly undermined.

In fact, it is in the context of such a period of physical scientific and philosophical uncertainty transitioning from a Newtonian way of thinking to an ambiguous one that we can better understand why Mills was proposing his “sociological imagination” as a “new common denominator” to the ways of thinking of his time, one that was meant to be not just a new passing fashion, but one that was to be enduring throughout the new era.

Admitting to be ambivalent about and thus reluctantly using disciplinary labels such as social “sciences” and “sociology,” Mills called for advancing a kind of social analysis that does in the realm of sociology what he witnessed already emerging in the more serious works of journalism, political analysis, literature, drama, and poetry—relating the biography and history in the same study. Finding the other existing variants as listed above not as in-depth and rigorous as what sociological analysis can offer, he wished to further fuel via his proposed “sociological imagination” in his own time what he found to be emerging as a new common denominator, one that needed to replace what the Newtonian way of thinking had offered in a prior era.

Despite its name or label “sociological imagination”—which Mills noted in a footnote was a pragmatic way of distinguishing his alternative from other “sociological” trends of his time while acknowledging “sociology” to be his own vocation and an approach more open than other disciplines to house his proposed new way of thinking—Mills’s sociological imagination was in essence a transdisciplinary effort in fostering a humanistic method of social analysis applied in any study—one that, like what he found in the “classics” of sociology, confronted the problem of “man and society” forthwith, rather than following other trends in sociology favoring overly bureaucratic and technical, overly abstract and grand theorizing, and overly trivial and “leftover”-issues oriented, research projects.

There is for sure a tension between Mills’s aspiring to replace the old Newtonian way of thinking with his own proposed “sociological imagination” as a new common denominator, on one hand, and, on the other, his nostalgic call to return to the “classic tradition.” Even Mills’s pairing of the Newtonian and Darwinian structures of thinking may be interpreted as signifying his regarding both to some extent as equally valid still and enduring when making his call for a return to “classical” sociology. Why should we then not consider his nostalgic appeal to the ‘classic tradition’ admiring the classic works to signify a deeply-seated Newtonianism in his own way of thinking,
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whether he was aware of it or not?

I think it would be still premature for us to jump into conclusions at this early stage of our exploration about whether Mills in fact used a classical Newtonian way of thinking to frame his proposed sociological imagination.

Mills found himself historically between a rock and a hard place, so to speak, neither happy with the old Newtonian way of thinking that had resulted in “engineering imaginations” and “Science Machines, operated by technicians and controlled by economic and military men who neither embody nor understand science as ethos and orientation” (p. 16), nor finding in the new physical sciences—still provisional, “improperly felt to be wonderfully mysterious,” “confusing” and themselves critically “self-reappraising”—a basis to which he could anchor his newly proposed model. So, he was proposing his own anchor, as a responsible and caring, critically-minded, and highly creative sociologist that he was would do. Mills was a maverick sociologist who did not take academic status quo for granted; he was in but not of it. He was a radical sociologist who transgressed conventional boundaries. Unfortunately, Mills (1916–1962) died young at the age of 46, so despite a highly productive writing career did not have a chance to elaborate more on the relation of his work to the new advances in physics.

To give him the benefit of the doubt, it is possible to consider that one may embark on a new project expressing a new way of thinking, but subconsciously frame it in a way that may also, in part(s), hold on to older ways of reflection, ways that would not serve even the purpose of one’s own newly proposed model. Besides, the difference between the Newtonian and the quantum ways of thinking may prove to be (to follow a presumably quantum, nondualistic, way of thinking) not a binary black or white one, but one characterized by a spectrum of degrees, making it difficult to unambiguously say Mills was a Newtonian or a quantum thinker, but that in some respects he was one and in other respect he was another, and in yet another, something both or entirely different.

Others may in fact argue that Mills was offering, for all practical purposes, an alternative quantum- or relativity-inspired sociological imagination model to replace the Newtonian model as the prevailing “common denominator” of the intellectual and cultural life of his age, without necessarily attributing his alternative perspective to the revolutions undergoing in the physical sciences. He may be thought of as brilliantly insisting (against a fragmentary Newtonian way of thinking and despite even the way the new quantum sciences were separating the microscopic and macroscopic worlds as being
governed by seemingly separate laws) that the micro and macro social worlds are not separate from one another, and that personal troubles can only be understood in the context of larger public issues, both rooted in the social structure amid an inseparable world-history context as a whole.

Mills does at one point use the term “social relativity” (p. 7) (though not in any physical science related context); he does emphasize the role of self-reflexivity in science; he does move away from inevitable and deterministic sociologies of Marx or Weber; he does note the significance of acknowledging one’s own bias as a part of striving for a more subject-included objectivity; he does critique the late nineteenth century’s “zealous search” for “laws” or “mechanical procedures” (p. 20) in scientific method, himself aspiring to approach it as “ethos and orientation.” These in my view are not telling of a Newtonian way of thinking at work, but of a creative and sociological-habits-shattering way of thinking about social reality.

If Mills had taken for granted an inescapable prevalence of a Newtonian “common denominator,” some may ask, why would he then advocate for a “new” common denominator of cultural and intellectual life as expressed in his proposal for the sociological imagination? They may say that Mills’s sociological imagination was a move away from Newtonian and toward ways of thinking more akin to the relativistic and quantum imagination. They may point out that Mills could not have benefitted more fully from the findings of quantum science given the unresolved and confusing formulations received from the physical scientists about the human and philosophical meaning of their new discoveries. Confronting an “improperly felt to be wonderfully mysterious” way of thinking evocative of what we call today “the quantum enigma,” he had little choice but to offer his own proposal for a “new common denominator” drawing on his own sociological specialization.

They may further argue that Mills was unhappy with the new, transient, fashions of thinking he witnessed emerging in the academia of his time precisely because they gravitated toward bureaucratic, mechanical, grandly theorizing and deterministic, pretentiously impersonal and “scientistic” (p. 16), and trivially fragmentary projects. So, he longed for revitalizing an earlier “classical” style of sociology, one that was informed by a type of sociology more directly dealing with the problems of “man and society,” a style that happened to be informed of the philosophical and humanistic tradition that still held sway in the study of society despite the deterministic, impersonally objectivist, Newtonian models being aspired to in the physical sciences.

But, then, others may counterargue that despite Mills’s well-intended
and well-argued critique of the new fashions and trends in sociology resulting from the Newtonian way of thinking in the extreme (discipline bound, impersonally objectivist, deterministic, grand theorizing, technical and bureaucratic, fragmentary, and so on), his call for a return to the “classics” signified at best a lack of attention to the deeper Newtonian ways of thinking informing them, and at worst, contained some assumptions that, advertently or not, perpetuated the Newtonian way of thinking in his proposed “sociological imagination” as well.

So, a serious and in-depth revisitation of Mills’s proposed sociological imagination is in order. We need to understand more appreciatively the contributions he made, while acknowledging and discarding any element that was self-defeating for his worthwhile project. We need to clearly understand to what extent his sociological imagination was Newtonian and in what ways it was not, reflecting newer visions of reality informed by the findings of relativistic and quantum sciences to the extent they can be delineated.

One thing that is certain, however, is that in order for us to fairly and carefully evaluate whether Mills’s proposed sociological imagination was Newtonian or not, it is necessary first to establish as clearly as possible what the Newtonian way of thinking actually is, and how it is different from the quantum way of imagining reality.

And once we raise this (for our purpose) heuristic question, we find ourselves in the deeply enigmatic and still widely debated, murky waters of quantum science and the meanings and implications its findings have, or should have, for our understanding of reality and especially of the world of social and personal experience beyond the realm of fundamental physics.

Sixty years since the publication of Mills’s celebrated work, we can still speak of a “wonderfully mysterious” world of relativity and quantum science, “improperly felt” or not, as far as their meanings and implications for the study of “man and society” is concerned.

How can we judge whether Mills’s sociological imagination model was Newtonian or quantum, when even our quantum scientists are not sure what the quantum imagination is supposed to be and/or imply as far as its meaning for wider human and social scientific investigations are concerned? After all, since about a century ago, many puzzles and enigmas have surrounded the interpretation of basic quantum phenomena and experiments and their meanings for understanding the world beyond subatomic particles, even though quantum theory has proven to be the most tested, verified, and successful in history.
Therefore, while deeper methodological grounding to further advance the sociological imagination requires investigating whether and how relativistic and quantum scientific revolutions can induce a liberating reinvention of sociology in favor of more creative research and a just global society, such an effort necessarily leads us to confront the so-called the ‘quantum enigma.’

In 1959, Mills chose to bypass the findings of the new physical sciences in favor of proposing his “sociological imagination” as a “new common denominator” way of thinking based on a nostalgic return to the “classic tradition” in the study of “man and society.” Sixty years later, in this book, my aim is to adopt the alternative research strategy of confronting precisely what Mills called “improperly felt to be wonderful mysterious” world of quantum enigma, as a precondition for a critical reappraisal of Mills’s project itself and its further deepening and advancement.

Given the enormity of the task at hand, for the above reasons, my central aim in this first volume of the series will not be yet to dwell on C. Wright Mills and the evaluation of his work. Such a task will have to be postponed and taken up in future writings to be published following the present volume, where I will more specifically and extensively explore in applied ways Mills’s sociological imagination model in order to understand whether what he proposed challenged and/or perpetuated the Newtonian way of thinking while critically rejecting the passing academic fashions of his time.

Therefore, having briefly raised the important question whether or not Mills’s proposed sociological imagination was itself, intentionally or not, framed by a Newtonian way of thinking, I will lay it aside for the time being in this first volume, postponing such a reappraisal to future volumes.

In this book, my aim is to understand as clearly as possible how the classical Newtonian way of imagining reality differs (or not) from the relativistic and quantum ways, and what broad implications such an understanding may have for our knowledge of social reality, including our personal lives.

II. The Elephant in the Room that is the ‘Quantum Enigma’

What is the quantum way of imagining reality?

When we ask this question we confront a problem that has been for decades subject to considerable debate and reinterpretation, and remains unresolved to this day: the so-called “quantum enigma.”

Any effort at understanding the quantum way of imagining reality, in other words, is impossible to make without taking into consideration the
fact that there is such a thing as the quantum enigma, or a set of such interrelated enigmas, and that there is still no universally agreed upon way among specialists in the field themselves, as of the present, of interpreting it.

Some may choose to ignore the so-called quantum enigma, or simply take it for granted, adopting a Copenhagen-type “shut up and calculate” attitude, disregarding the quantum way of imagining reality and its enigmas for being irrelevant to the social sciences. Some physicists have tried to go about it that way even in their own disciplinary domain, so, why not social scientists and sociologists do the same?

If we were social scientists and sociologists favoring the Copenhagen Interpretation, in other words, we would simply say that all that quantum science stuff does not concern society and sociology, which are regarded as macroscopic realities, and therefore beyond the scope of quantum science dealing with sub/atomic, microscopic reality. “The social sciences and quantum science are two ‘separate’ matters,” we would hear them say, adding, “for all practical purposes, human society falls within the domain of macroscopic reality and sciences, so just ‘shut up and sociologize.’”

That would make things much easier, indeed; I will not then even have to write this book, nor would you then need to read it. Such an attitude and the general atmosphere created by the official Copenhagen Interpretation perhaps actually explain, intended or not, why there have not been more extensive efforts among sociologists and social scientists to directly relate their work to quantum science over the decades.

But then, the Copenhagen Interpretation is just one of the interpretations circulating around, and there are now many others offered by quantum scientists and theorists who differ from or disagree with the assumptions of that interpretation. But, which one should we choose to understand the quantum way of imagining reality (presumably including our social reality)?

Does Niels Bohr’s Standard Copenhagen Interpretation of the quantum enigma—that says we can never really know the microscopic reality as such, but only what of it we inevitably change in the process of observations and measurements—result in the same way of imagining reality (including social reality) as that of, say, David Bohm’s Pilot-Wave Interpretation (following on earlier footsteps of de Broglie) which seeks to find a way of explaining the existing macroscopic world from a microscopic world of probabilities, both being parts of the same world wave function of an “undivided universe”? Or, would the Many Worlds Interpretation, or its variant, the Many Minds Interpretation, offer us the same quantum way of imagining (social) reality?
than, say, the Extreme Copenhagen Interpretation by the late Aage Bohr, a son of Niels Bohr, who denied the reality of the microscopic world altogether?

Those who take a position other than the Copenhagen approach, in the sense of suggesting that indeed the quantum revolution is relevant and should revolutionize our knowledge of society and practice of sociology, may instead go to the other extreme and argue that we do not need to or cannot (yet) deal with the quantum enigma, since the basic contours of the quantum way of imagining reality have become sufficiently clear by now for the purpose of application to the sciences of self, society, and sociology. They may ask, what if we never resolve the quantum enigma—should we then just sit and wait until our expert physicists give us universally agreed upon answers? Physicists have not been able to do so for decades, they may say; what makes us think the enigma may be resolved in another hundred years? They may even argue that being enigmatic is a defining attribute of the quantum way of imagining reality, so they may instead advise: “Just shut up and quantum sociologize!”

But, where does quantum consensus end and quantum enigma begin? Where can we draw the boundaries between what is an accepted attribute versus a still debatable interpretation in quantum science?

Can one claim with certainty that the presumed attributes of quantum science have themselves little to do with the emergence of the quantum enigma? Could they in fact be themselves implicated in its emergence and/or persistence? Do we have a “chunk” here of definitive quantum consensus, and a “chunk” there of quantum enigma, and not much in between?

Consider the notion “wave-particle duality of light,” with which the so-called “Complementarity Principle” is associated, for instance, and how they have been used in physics. Should they be taken for granted when evaluating various interpretations of the quantum enigma? Even physicists themselves seem to have differences over how to interpret the notions, some saying light is to be always conceived as being both wave and particle at once, and others saying it can manifest only as one or another depending on actual experiment and context. These, in my view, are significantly different interpretations of the same concept and bound to have an impact on how we go about understanding the quantum way of imagining (social) reality.

Or, consider the notion of the wave function. Is the wave function, or how it has been conceived or applied in experiments, to be taken for granted as a means for interpreting what goes on, say, in the double-slit experiment? A wave function expresses the infinite possibilities of a quantum
object. Only when it “collapses” is it said that it is reduced to one specific object considered “real” because it is now locatable in time and space. The notion of “collapse” assumes two different states that do not exist at once. It is a notion that relies on the earlier mentioned notion of “wave-particle duality” of objects when considered from the point of view of the so-called “Complementarity Principle.” If the object is interpreted to be at once both, there would be no need for it to “collapse” or “uncollapse” from one state to another. Accordingly some quantum theorists, such as Bohm, do not believe in the notion of “collapse” in the same way as Bohr or Heisenberg did. So, which interpretation should we choose to envision our “quantum sociology”? Or, is there such a thing as what Einstein called “spooky action at a distance,” or is that conclusion still subject to debate among theories and/or experiments that have been used to test, say, the Bell’s Theorem? Has one actually tested (obviously not) whether observing the polarization of a particle in our end of the Milky Way instantaneously changes its entangled counterpart’s polarization in the other end of the galaxy or the universe? Should confirmed laboratory results be taken for granted as representing fully what the broader hypothesis claims?

Are these legitimate questions to ask in the spirit of scientific inquiry, or should we take the views of experts for granted, since otherwise we would have to face their charge or condescending ridicule that since we do not appear to be sufficiently shocked (as much as, or in ways that, they wish for), that means we must not have understood their quantum science?

I think so long as the quantum enigma has not been adequately resolved, any effort in delineating the quantum way of imagining reality, including social reality, will be subject to more or less provisional speculation and tentativeness. This may seem like a rather pessimistic position to take, especially in a study such as this devoted to understanding the quantum way of imagining reality. But, the alternative is to move on and offer a way of imagining social reality that may end up being flawed one way or another because we simply took either a “shut up and sociologize” or a “shut up and quantum sociologize” attitude on both extremes toward our subject matter at hand. This is so because, for all practical purposes, the broader sense and meanings of what quantum science has discovered and admittedly verified in countless experiments seem to still remain inconclusive.

Of course, we may wish that there was already a universal consensus so that we could then just move on to the task of reporting and applying the quantum way of imagining reality to society and sociology. But, the
challenge we face—aside from pretending that the quantum enigma, or its resolution, is not a problem relevant to our task at hand—is either to choose from among many circulating interpretations, or come up with our own interpretation (of course, more or less building on what other experts have contributed) of the quantum enigma, in order to understand the quantum way of imagining reality before proceeding further. We owe it to ourselves to at least entertain and thus explore the possibility that various quantum interpretations may point to different and/or overlapping quantum ways of imagining reality, including social reality.

In light of the above, I think the more cautious and responsible approach to take, at the very least, is to problematize the so-called quantum enigma also as part of our search for understanding the quantum way of imagining reality. We need to turn it from a given to a variable, from a taken-for-granted to a subject matter of study. This in turn requires that we remain constantly on guard regarding the tentativeness of any conclusions we reach, and offer it being fully aware of the debates still surrounding the enigma. Our approach would thus be best taken by always conditioning what we understand to be the quantum way of imagining reality upon our own critically explored, and not taken for granted, interpretations of the enigma.

Therefore, what I choose not to do in this book is to assume that we can understand the quantum way of imagining reality and thus proceed to offer views on quantum sociology, while ignoring or taking for granted the elephant in the room, that is, the so-called quantum enigma.

Thankfully physicists and physics educators such as Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner (2011) have stated that, in their view, understanding the quantum enigma and its many interpretations is essentially possible without expert knowledge of the technical details behind the interpretations. They say we may even offer interpretations of our own, if we optimistically stretch their encouragement a bit—which seems to be a reason why they have sent calls out to others, including nonspecialists, to help unriddle the enigma. They suggest that much of the so-called quantum enigma can be observed in, and thus (re)interpreted from, a few simple experiments.

The way I also see it, not knowing exactly how, say, a car is engineered does not and should not prevent me from driving it, and such a use should not imply that I accept or reject as a whole what may be found to be defective or useful in the car. Similarly, my lack of specialty in mathematics or physics does not mean that I cannot try to understand the basic thrust of what an interpreter is trying to convey about the subject matter. At least, I hope that
I can do so, and give the effort a try while realizing that I may not most fully represent and use an interpretation to the satisfaction of its manufacturers. The exercise may at least prove to be a helpful brainstorming effort for me and/or my readers to scan and evaluate on our own the various possible ways in which the quantum enigma has been interpreted to date.

Therefore, as ambitious as it may seem given the decades-long failures of experts to resolve the enigma, and despite my own lack of speciality in the field of physical sciences, in this book I choose to confront the elephant in the room. Who knows, perhaps the “observers” having been “experts” may have itself also something to do with the enigma remaining unresolved—causing a tendency not to see the forest for the trees, a contribution that I can perhaps make from a bird eye’s view. Perhaps, driving their cars, I can discover in applied ways defects that I can report back to them for a recall and needed repair.

At least, I hope that we all end up seeing our problem as a whole, unlike how did the fabled three blind-folded men who each, touching a different part of the elephant, said it was a wall, a rope, or a hose.

III. The Approach and Organization of this Study

In earlier drafts of this introduction, I had noted that given my own lack of disciplinary specialty in the fields of quantum science or relativity despite acquainting myself with the fields in earnest for this research, and given the still-unresolved enigmatic nature of the subject matter itself as acknowledged even by the experts themselves in exploring the distinction between Newtonian and quantum ways of imagining reality, in this book I will critically draw on relevant contributions as guideposts from several contemporary authors in the field (Danah Zohar, Alexander Wendt, Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner, Amit Goswami, Jim Al-Khalili, Neil Turok, and Basarab Nicolescu, to be introduced in the first chapter) who represent or report a diversity of viewpoints on the subject.

I then went on to note that the above writers’ works being considered secondary compared to those of the original and main founders, discoverers, or debaters of quantum science (such as Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Louis de Broglie, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, David Bohm, Max Born, Paul M. Dirac, and Richard Feynman, among others) should not be seen as a sign of not giving serious consideration to such primary sources for this research.
I had also noted that, given the vastness of the subject and the literature in the field and the limits of time and space in the context of my wider sociological projects at hand, I have drawn on the more or less recent scholars’ works as a way of ‘reading backward,’ so to speak, into the original history, findings, and debates of quantum science, simultaneously familiarizing myself with both the contemporary and the original reflections of scholars in the field as they themselves reflect back on their own sources. My specific choice of such scholars, I noted, have also to do with the fact that these scholars are among those who have devoted their works to specifically addressing and exploring the so-called quantum enigma and/or to understanding the meaning and implications of quantum science findings for the wider understanding of nature, society, and our selves.

Now that I read the above again having written the chapters to follow, it strikes me to note how the notion of being expert or not in the field is a relative matter. It is relative in the sense that, whether one considers “quantum reality” or “quantum imagination” to be a matter of disciplinary specialty also depends on whether one attributes that reality only to a microscopic world not directly accessible to our senses, or to a macroscopic world as well—one that includes our personal and social lives too, with which we can be more familiar being trained in “other” disciplines.

I will therefore let the exploration in the following chapters to clarify why I raise the above point, since it strikes me as being the case that if we conclude that not just microscopic, but also our macroscopic, world belongs to the same one reality that can be explained and imagined in quantum ways, it should follow that we all, including those of us more specialized in fields such as sociology, may have also something of our own to contribute to the debates and conversations about what the quantum enigma is, and how one can go about unriddling it.

In other words, it remains to be asked whether the physicists’ “specialty” in the field, when exploring what they consider to be “their” cup of tea, so to speak, is one of the factors that have contributed to the fettering of our efforts at understanding the so-called quantum enigma. In fact, this may also explain why we are witnessing some physicists themselves admitting to their inability to unriddle the enigma, and have appealed to all, and not just physicists, to offer their take as to how the dilemma may be tackled.

So, I encourage readers to be open to considering the possibility that unriddling the quantum enigma may not be simply a matter of coming up with new purely “physical” theories, mathematical formulas, or explanations so as
to then contribute, as a precondition, to advancing a liberating sociology, but that sociology and social sciences, themselves, conducted in self-reflective, transdisciplinary and transcultural ways, may also have something to say and contribute on their own to liberating the Schrödinger’s Cat turned “elephant in the room” that has been and become the so-called quantum enigma itself—one that has been precariously caught in a superposed alive-and-dead state for decades, thanks in part to our “shut-up and calculate” Copenhagen regime experts preferring that we do not look inside the box. If they tell us, correctly in my view, that our observations affect the reality we observe, then it should necessarily follow that their own non-observing regime of “shut-up and calculate” must have also contributed to the reasons why the quantum enigma has remained unriddled.

My exploration throughout the chapters of this book will be conceptual in the sense of being theoretical and methodological while considered in their historical context in a sociology of self-knowledge framework. The approach will also be phenomenological, in the critical sociological tradition of this approach, meaning that I will try to continually problematize already familiarized and taken-for-granted notions in the spirit of dehabituating prevailing views about how the subject has been hitherto framed. This does not mean, necessarily, that I will always disagree or agree with existing viewpoints on a subject in a predetermined way, but that I will approach any idea and argument with a critical eye, wondering whether what has been stated, imagined, or thought about on the subject can be rethought, reimagined, or reinterpreted in a new or different way, an approach that may or may not lead to a restoration in part or as a whole of previously existing viewpoints on the subject.

My intention has been to make this book accessible to and readable by the widest possible audiences to the extent possible given its subject matter. Readers may consider this work as that of a sociologist trying to make sense of the most important findings of relativity and quantum science revolutions in order to evaluate whether they can make a difference for advancing the sociological imagination in more liberating ways in favor of a just global society. Through this work, I wish to provide an opportunity for other scholars, especially those of a critical bent who are unsatisfied with their disciplinary and academic status quo, to brainstorm at length about what relativity and quantum sciences offer that can be relevant to their personally and socially emancipatory work through sociology or whatever other academic discipline or culture they come from. For this reason, I have adopted an essayistic style,
trying to find ways of conveying in understandable ways what I have myself
found to be difficult and complex ideas, using examples and illustrations that
could make them more intelligible, to myself and to my readers.

Although mathematical equations and expressions are necessary parts
of relativity and quantum theories, I have found it unnecessary for my
specific purpose in this volume to complicate matters more than necessary
by including them, and have therefore tried instead to convey the sense and
meaning of such mathematical expressions in ways that amplify and clarify the
arguments advanced. In my view, one of the main challenges facing physics,
including relativistic and quantum sciences, has been to communicate their
findings more accessibly to the public at large, because, ultimately, their
findings matter not just to a few experts, but to everyone. Many physics
experts and educators have actively pursued that goal as demonstrated by
their books and documentaries broadcast on television and online.

I have also tried to pursue the same goal of being as accessible as possible
in my writing this book, even at times finding it necessary to repeat some
themes on purpose. One reason for the latter has been to make each chapter—
which I know are unforgivably long at times (something I could not avoid
really given the need to expand on ideas and offer illustrations)—readable on
their own. Another, is that at times I have found it necessary to approach the
same topic from a different angle, as needed for problematizing habitual ways
of thinking and imagining about a subject matter at hand.

The addition of quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyam as book or chapter
epigraphs in my own English verse translations throughout the volume may
seem ornamental, intended to make the reading more interesting. That may
be true to some extent, but my intention in including them goes far beyond
that. Parallel to the series of which this book is the first volume, I have
also been working on a series on Omar Khayyam’s life and works, and as it
will be demonstrated in the future, the two series have been cross-feeding
each other in superposed ways. The effort made in this volume serves to
provide a methodological foundation for my forthcoming series in Khayyami
studies. As odd as it may seem, I found myself at some point in the past
few years of intense research in the unenviable position of having to find a
way of first unriddling the quantum enigma (at least to my own tentative
satisfaction) before tackling some of the even more enduring enigmas about
Omar Khayyam. So, hopefully the readers of these lines will see soon what
I mean here when they read the initial volume(s) of the series on Khayyam
forthcoming immediately after this book.
For those who may care to reflect on the quatrains epigraphing the present volume, they will find a parallel story of learning and discovery in progress across the flow of insights by Khayyam who lived centuries ago, one who was also bewildered by the nature and meaning of existence and sought after a way of understanding the enigmas it posed. An awareness of matter being made of atoms already prevailed among philosophers busy rediscovering what had survived from the ancient Greek sciences. However, while the wondering about the nature of the atoms of dust making and remaking human lives into wine cups and jugs to signify the story of human life and death was there, Khayyam was also particularly enigmatized by what he witnessed in the macroscopic world, both social and cosmic, of his times.

For those who may wonder how any of the quatrains used in the text are attributable to Khayyam or not, given the doubts cast over the past century or more on their authenticity, all I can say at this point is that they will find further answers in my forthcoming Khayyami studies. For now, all that matters is that these quatrains have undeniably been attributed to Omar Khayyam, long before an Edward FitzGerald appeared on the British imperial and orientalist scene, and I have found no credible reasons to doubt their attributability to the historical Omar Khayyam. The selection used as epigraphs throughout the chapters offers a poetic expression of a way of thinking and imagining reality that resonates deeply, for reasons I will explain in future writings, with a quantum way of imagining reality. In a quintessentially Khayyamian way of synoptically containing in a few words the most profound thoughts and imaginations, the brief quatrains I have chosen and newly translated tell the story of this book’s hundreds of pages in just a few lines of poetry.

The basic structure of the chapters will be as follows.

In Chapter 1, I will selectively survey a roundtable of studies done prior to this book by scholars interested in and/or aware of the question of how the findings of relativistic and quantum sciences relate to our social and personal lives.

In Chapter 2, I will offer a framework for the study undertaken in this volume as a whole by revisiting the origins of what I have called the sociology of self-knowledge, a field of study I invented during my doctoral research as reported in its account deposited in 2002, by way of a critique of Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936).
In Chapter 3, I will offer a historical and conceptual survey of the Newtonian perspective with a particular emphasis on outlining and problematizing what has been regarded as its classical, ‘billiards balls game’ way of imagining reality.

In Chapter 4, I will offer an historical and conceptual overview of the theory of relativity and the quantum revolution, paying particular attention to the so-called ‘quantum enigma.’

In Chapter 5, I will further try to understand what more exactly the quantum enigma stands for, and will proceed to survey the different ways in which the quantum enigma has been interpreted.

I will then conduct in Chapters 6 through 7 a detailed exploration of the quantum enigma in its various expressions, starting from the enigma of the so-called ‘wave-particle duality of light’ (Chapter 6), and then proceeding to the study of various enigmas associated with the double-slit experiment, the quantum entanglement, the delayed-choice experiment, the Schrödinger’s Cat paradox, and the “reality escalator” metaphor portraying the differences between the two levels of reality (Chapter 7).

In Chapter 8, I will return to the many interpretations of the quantum enigma selectively introduced in Chapter 5, trying to find a way of critically cohering them into an integrative perspective in light of the findings of the preceding chapters.

In Chapter 9, I will critically revisit an earlier heuristic methodological framework I had constructed previously for what I called the creative dialectics of reality (one that has informed and guided the present study as well), seeking to update it in light of the findings of the present work on relativity, quantum science, and the so-called quantum enigma.

The Conclusion will offer a chapter, narrative, and point-by-point summary of findings, where I engage again with my roundtable scholars.

I include at the end an extensive, transdisciplinary, chronological bibliography of selected sources in English on the quantum enigma and how quantum science findings have increasingly spread-out and influenced other branches of learning in and about society over the past century or more.

To offer a gist of this volume’s findings, this book argues that the so-called ‘quantum enigma’ is an ideological outcome of the classical Newtonian, binary and disciplinary ways we have habitually tried to pose and interpret it (or not). It offers, in a transdisciplinary sociology of self-knowledge framework, a relativistic interpretation to advance a liberating quantum sociology.
I argue that unriddling the so-called ‘quantum enigma’ depends on whether and how we succeed in dehabituating ourselves in favor of unified relativistic and quantum visions from the historically and ideologically inherited, classical Newtonian modes of imagining reality that have subconsciously persisted in the ways we have gone about posing and interpreting (or not) the enigma itself for more than a century. Once this veil is lifted and the enigma unriddled, it becomes possible to reinterpret the relativistic and quantum ways of imagining reality (including social reality) in terms of a unified, nonreductive, creative dialectic of part and whole that fosters quantum sociological imaginations, methods, theories, and practices favoring liberating and just social outcomes.

The essays in this volume develop a set of relativistic interpretive solutions to what should more properly be called the ‘Newtonian enigma.’ Following an overview of prior work done in the field and the transdisciplinary sociology of self-knowledge framing the study, overviews of Newtonianism, the relativity and quantum scientific revolutions, and the quantum enigma and its main interpretations are offered. This is followed by a study of the notion of the “wave-particle duality of light” and the various experiments associated with the quantum enigma in order to arrive at a relativistic interpretation of the enigma that critically coheres most offered interpretations. The book concludes with a heuristic presentation of the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of what I call the creative dialectics of reality. The essays involve critical, East-West comparative/integrative reflections on the works of founding and contemporary scientists and scholars in the field.

IV. Suggestions about Reading this Book

Before we begin, it is important to note here that to understand this rather lengthy study one cannot adopt a corpuscular attitude to it, thinking one can understand what it sets out to offer by simply reading a gist, this or that local paragraph, this or that local chapter, only. The unriddling of the so-called quantum enigma cannot happen in one or more separate “chunky” answers here or there, nor is it spread-out in an abstract expression that one hopes to read in an easy paragraph or two. The answer lies in both corpuscular and spread-out forms at once in the narrative that follows. So, careful attention to each particular argument and the general argument as a whole must be maintained in order to benefit from what this book has to offer.

The reason for the above is that the so-called quantum enigma has itself
morphed over the decades into a more complex form, acquiring many new particular as well as spread-out features at once, one that engages not just physics, but also in a transdisciplinary and transcultural way various forms of knowing (or not), including sociological, historical, psychological, cultural, and so on, ways. The answer cannot be found only in regard to one or another experiment in a chunky way, but in the entire transdisciplinary, historical, and cultural contexts in which each chunk has been able to perpetuate itself for many decades. It is in the very nature of the so-called quantum enigma that it can be understood and unriddled not in a classical Newtonian but also in a quantum way.

So, the unriddling itself cannot be a local unriddling in one or another part or chunk of the so-called quantum enigma alone, nor can it be a generally understood spread-out unriddling as a whole in the abstract, but one in which both local and global interpretive considerations should be woven in a superposed way to produce fruitful results. This partly explains why the enigma has been so difficult to unravel over many decades. The light that needs to be shed on it must itself have attributions of being both localized and spread-out, not in a supposedly “complementary” way, but in terms of simultaneity, of being at once understood in a localized and spread-out way in each instance. Otherwise, we end up not seeing the forest for the trees, nor the trees for the forest, and thereby continue being enigmatized.

Another suggestion I have for readers of this book is to consider that its arguments evolve in the course of the chapters, such that taking any specific viewpoint offered at each chapter’s cross-section may not provide a full and complete picture of the subject matter. This has to do with the method of presentation adopted for this book that involves walking the reader through the same exploratory process in which new answers were found. On one hand, the final conclusions can best be understood on the basis of the process through which they were made; on the other hand, no specific step in the process should be judged as final, until the final conclusions are drawn toward the end. Although summaries or abstracts help guide the way through the reading, I am afraid that not reading the text in the way it is presented may not offer a complete sense of the findings of this study as intended.

This book opens the lid of the Schrödinger’s Cat box of the so-called ‘quantum enigma’ after many decades and finds something both odd and familiar: The cat is not only both alive and dead, it has morphed into an elephant in the room in whose interpretation Einstein, Bohr, Bohm, and others were each both right and wrong because the enigma has acquired both
localized and spread-out features whose unriddling requires both physics and sociology amid both transdisciplinary and transcultural contexts.

Only when we shed light on the elephant in the room as a whole in the right way can we put the cat-turned-elephant enigma finally to rest and show it the door, while discovering something odd (though, not enigmatic), consistent with the best of what relativity and quantum sciences (sublating Newtonianism in them) have offered but one that we did not notice before—a vision that is strangely quite beautiful.

Abstract

This essay is an introduction to the first volume of the series, Liberating Sociology: From Newtonian to Quantum Imaginations, subtitled Unriddling the Quantum Enigma, by Mohammad H. Tamdgidi. He begins by asking whether C. Wright Mills’s proposed “sociological imagination” reflected a Newtonian way of thinking or a departure from it? He suggests that the answer requires a clear understanding of what the Newtonian way of thinking is and how it differs from the relativistic and quantum ways of imagining reality. Understanding such contrasting visions, however, itself requires an exploration of the so-called quantum enigma that has remained unresolved for almost a century. Contrary to both those who may argue that quantum science is not relevant to the social sciences and sociology, on one hand, and those who argue the relevance can be explored without the need to deal with the quantum enigma, on the other hand, Tamdgidi argues that the more cautious and responsible approach to adopt is to problematize the quantum enigma also as a part of our search for understanding the quantum way of imagining reality. Given such a major task at hand, Tamdgidi chooses to postpone exploring the nature of C. Wright Mills’s sociological imagination to later volumes of the series, deciding on devoting the present volume only to exploring the quantum enigma and more broadly how the classical Newtonian, relativistic and quantum ways of imagining reality differ (or not) from one another. He then offers a brief outline of the chapters of the book to follow, and his basic argument that unriddling the so-called ‘quantum enigma’ depends on whether and how we succeed in dehabituating ourselves in favor of unified relativistic and quantum visions from the Newtonian ways of imagining reality that have fueled the enigma for more than a century. In his view, the roots of the enigma surrounding the nature of reality can be traced to the rigidified and habitually Newtonian, binary, partial, and disciplinary modes of imagining reality that have subconsciously persisted in the ways physicists and other observers have gone about interpreting (or not) the enigma itself over the past decades. Once this veil is lifted and the enigma unriddled, it becomes possible to reinterpret the relativistic and quantum ways of imagining reality (including social reality) in terms of the unified, nonreductive dialectics of part and whole in order to develop quantum relativistic sociological imaginations, methods, theories, and practices that favor more creativity and liberating social outcomes. The essays in this volume develop a quantum relativistic solution to the so-called ‘quantum enigma’ in a transdisciplinary sociology of self-knowledge interpretive framework. They involve critical, East-West comparative/integrative reflections on relativity and quantum theory as advanced in others’ relevant works.
In this major new study in the sociology of scientific knowledge, social theorist Mohammad H. Tamdgidi reports having unraveled the so-called ‘quantum enigma.’

His book opens the lid of the Schrödinger’s Cat box of the ‘quantum enigma’ after decades and finds something both odd and familiar: Not only the cat is both alive and dead, it has morphed into an elephant in the room in whose interpretation Einstein, Bohr, Böhm, and others were each both right and wrong because the enigma has acquired both localized and spread-out features whose unriddling requires both physics and sociology amid both transdisciplinary and transcultural contexts.

Deeper methodological grounding to further advance the sociological imagination requires investigating whether and how relativistic and quantum scientific revolutions can induce a liberating reinvention of sociology in favor of more creative research and a just global society. This, however, leads us to confront an elephant in the room, that is, the ‘quantum enigma.’

In Unriddling the Quantum Enigma, the first volume of his series commonly titled Liberating Sociology: From Newtonian Toward Quantum Imaginations, sociologist Mohammad H. Tamdgidi argues that unriddling the ‘quantum enigma’ depends on whether and how we succeed in dehabituating ourselves in favor of unified relativistic and quantum visions from the historically and ideologically inherited, binary, disciplinary, and ethnocentric, classical Newtonian modes of imagining reality that have subconsciously persisted in the ways we have posed and interpreted (or not) the enigma.

Once the veil is lifted and the enigma unriddled in a transdisciplinary and transcultural sociology of self-knowledge framework, he argues, it becomes possible to reinterpret the relativistic quantum ways of imagining reality in terms of a unified, nonreductive, creative part/whole dialectic that fosters quantum sociological imaginations, methods, theories, and practices favoring liberating and just social outcomes.

Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, Ph.D., is the founding director of OKICIR: Omar Khayyam Center for Integrative Research in Utopia, Mysticism, and Science (Utopystics), and a former associate professor of sociology specializing in social theory at UMass Boston. His previous works include Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism (Routledge/Paradigm) and Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study (Palgrave Macmillan).