

Bruno Guiderdoni—Among Sufism, Traditionalism and Science: A Reply to Bigliardi
Francesco Piraino, Scuola Normale Superiore, École des hautes études en sciences sociales

I have met [Bruno Guiderdoni](#) in the context of my research about the development of European [Sufism](#). Guiderdoni is not only a famous astrophysicist, but also the French *khalifa* (local leader) of the Italian Sufi order Ahmadhyya Idrsishiyya Shadiliyya led by Abdel Wahid Pallavicini and Yahya Pallavicini.

Guiderdoni is certainly the most important “Sufi” scientist I have encountered in my research, but he is not the only one. On the contrary, among European Sufi disciples, there are many scientists, engineers, doctors, etc. who do not feel any opposition between science and religion but, of course, they elaborate the relation between science and religion with different solutions. The relation between Sufism and science will certainly be investigated further, overpassing both the modern stereotype of an irrational and obscure mysticism (e.g. King 1999; Christmann 2008) and the New Age “quantum mysticism”.

I have found Bigliardi’s definition of a “[New Generation](#)” (2014a) very interesting. Beyond its possible improvements (by refining the criteria or by adding new authors) it helps us to delineate the shift that occurred over the last years in the debate over Islam and Science. Such shift could actually correspond to a more general nuance of contemporary Islam, but this question is far too wide to be discussed in this short reply. My contribution to the discussion will be to answer some of Bigliardi’s questions about Guiderdoni, Nasr, and Traditionalism.

Guiderdoni has embraced Islam thanks to the work of René Guénon (Bigliardi 2014b; Piraino forthcoming 2015). Moreover, Guiderdoni belongs to Pallavicini’s *Ahmadhyya Idrsishiyya Shadiliyya*, which has been structured around the metaphysical work of René Guénon. Hence, we can certainly define Guiderdoni as a Traditionalist or Guénonian. However, the traditionalism of Nasr is very different from the traditionalism of Guiderdoni; the antimodernist spirit in Guiderdoni’s thought is almost absent; above all Guiderdoni does not condemn western science, and he even dialogues with post-modern philosophers of science and scientists such as Popper, Khun, Lakatos, and Feyerabend. How is it possible to combine Popper and Guénon?

First of all we do not have to reduce Guénon’s complex and wide work to the “antimodernist spirit”, although it is one of the common features among all traditionalists, giving the name to Sedgwick’s pivotal book [Against the Modern World](#) (2004), which reconstructs the history of Guénon and his followers.

I will delineate six main differences between Nasr’s and Guiderdoni’s traditionalism:

1) **Religion and Science.** Guiderdoni perceives that in some contexts the opposition between science and Islam is artificial. He states indeed:

“We see that the positive elements of modern science were already present in the Arab-Muslim scientific approach, which saw no contradictions with spiritual seeking and does not invoke the Qur’an at every moment to solve the problems of nature. [Those scientists] sought to explore the problems of nature through naturalistic methods; it was a glorification of God’s work” (Guiderdoni 2013, my interview).

2) **Modernity vs. Post-modernity.** We cannot understand the difference between Nasr and Guiderdoni without asking ourselves which modernity we are speaking of, or which science are we dealing with. There are no better words than Guiderdoni’s to describe the differences between Guénon’s vision of modernity and his own one:

“Guénon had to face the modernity, modernity [that was] really proud, colonialist, positivist. It had colonized the whole reality. [...] We are in a different situation where the ideological modernity has even declined and we are interacting with postmodernism, which is more open to dialogue” (Guiderdoni 2013, my interview).

The historical context is completely different; the scientific, positivistic arrogance of the 19th and 20th century no longer exists. For Guiderdoni the dialogue between science and religion is now not only possible, but also fruitful and serves a purpose:

“...To deepen the mystery of God, to make it even bigger through the dialogue between science and religion. The purpose of this dialogue for me is to increase our astonishment of God. It is here the spiritual goal” (Guiderdoni 2013, my interview).

3) **Reorientation vs. restoration.** Guiderdoni shares the criticism according to which modernity has lost religious values. However, differently from many Guénonian followers, he does not advocate the *restoration* of a Golden Age but a *reorientation*. This means, in the field of science, maintaining the scientific methodology and at the same time re-orientating the aims of science from a religious and ethical point of view. Indeed Guiderdoni prefers to define himself and his Sufi order as

4) **“Ante-modern” or “post-post modern” rather than “anti-modern”:**

“We are rather “ante-“, that is to say, we try to find the great metaphysical synthesis, which is the Primordial Tradition, which existed in the Christian and Muslim worlds of the Middle Ages. These are al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Arabi. But at the same time, the world in which we live is no longer the world of Aristotelian and Ptolemaic physics and cosmology. And we have to live in today’s world, to try a reorientation from the elements of the current science.

We have no illusions that science will answer to all questions, that science will cure everything. That is an ideological vision that we do not have. So

welcome Popper, welcome Thomas Khun, welcome Feyerabend, welcome Lakatos, etc.

You, like us, are no more in modernity. We denounce the illusion of an atheism *à la* Dawkins. We have a rebuilding project. There is the postmodern deconstruction and we are in a ‘post-post-modern’ or ‘ante-modern’ reconstruction” (Guiderdoni 2013, my interview).

5) **From a theoretical system to a pluralistic discussion.** It is apparent both from what I have explained so far and from the conversation in Bigliardi’s monograph (2014b), that Guiderdoni is not interested in building a new theoretical system in order to describe the relationship between science and religion. On the contrary, Guiderdoni is trying to develop a discussion within the scientific Islamic community in order to develop different perspectives that can avoid scientific or religious simplifications. The book *Science et Islam* which he edited in 2012 is a perfect example of different Islamic voices representing:

“...the third broad way, that is to say neither concordism of saying that everything is equal, that science and religion are the same thing, that science proves religion ... nor Bucaille. On the other hand we cannot accept the rejection of science. But also not Richard Dawkins or militant atheists who claim that science necessarily leads to atheism. Because we are in a dialogue, our mission, our testimony, we must testify in an agora, a forum, we cannot speak only for ourselves” (Guiderdoni 2013, my interview).

Guiderdoni’s harmonizing role can be also read in his social-political engagement. He has conducted the TV programme *Connaître l’Islam*, and he is a reference point for Lyon’s Islamic community and for French institutions as well, which have decorated him with the title of *Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mérite*.

6) Finally, the role of **the spiritual teachings of Ahmadhyya Idrishiyya Shadiliyya** must be emphasised. According to Bisson (2007, 2013), Le Pape (2007), and Piraino (forthcoming), one of the most important characteristics of this Sufi order is the political and social engagement in European life. This engagement concerns the high spheres of society (interfaith dialogue, science, and dialogue with political institutions) and aims at the reorientation of Western society to religious values, according to their interpretation of Guénon’s metaphysical thought.

To conclude, I do not agree with the definition of “soft-traditionalism” which leads us to understand that Guénon is more important for Nasr rather than for Guiderdoni. I would rather say that their comprehension of science is different, probably due to the historical changes; indeed Guiderdoni is one of this “New Generation”. The difference in their respective conceptions of Guénon’s message is probably due to Guiderdoni’s interpretation and Pallavicinis’s teachings.

Contact details: francesco.piraino@sns.it

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