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Abstract Only – Work in Progress

“Multiple Modernities and the Discourse
of Developmental Islamic Revivalism”

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This paper explores a developmental reading of Islamic revivalism – a movement which seeks to reestablish Islam in the socio-political life of Muslim societies, as it is a developmental program, encompassing political, economic, and social arenas. Its goal is to provide a developmental alternative for the Muslim world, one that is significantly different than the dominant liberal democratic paradigm and its socialist-communist counterparts. Not long ago, Fukuyama proclaimed the end of history and declared liberal democracy as the only exit on the modernity highway. History, ever since, has not been too kind to Fukuyama. Since the publication of his book *The End of History*, we have witnessed the rise of illiberal democracies which fuse electoral democracy with non-liberal practices, the emergence of hybrid regimes that combine elements of both democracy and authoritarianism, as well as the relentless march of various ethno-religious movements. Islamic revivalism, as a representative of this last category, is often described as an irrational and anti-modern movement. In contrast, this paper examines how Islamic revivalism is a modern movement, aimed at engaging modernity in ways congruent with Islamic tradition. Since Islamic movements are the best representatives of Islamic revivalism, the vocabulary of contemporary Islamic revivalists is predominantly modern. Their discourse contains the polemics about modern concepts, i.e., the state, politics, economy, social justice, and social change. The implications of reading Islamic revivalism this way are multidimensional. They point to various possibilities with regard to where modernity is headed and how it unfolds. Could there be variations in the way different groups of people envisage their social, political, and economic lives? Is liberal democracy truly an end of modernity or could there be competing socio-political futures – liberal democratic, Islamist, neo-socialist (currently witnessed in Latin America)? What are the knowledge hierarchies and epistemological tools used by Islamists to establish their legitimacy and compete with secular developmental paradigms? Answers to these queries could question the unidirectional and linear meta-historical narrative which Fukuyama proposed. This paper is based on a critical approach which is simultaneously rooted in Islamic epistemological paradigm and calls for a comparative inquiry in political philosophy. It explores writings of selected Islamic revivalists in order to show

how their critiques of Western developmental strategies led to the emergence of the developmental thought rooted in the revivalist experience.