

Bias in Western Schools of Social Thought: Our Heritage as the Starting Point for Development

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THIS WORK, in its three parts, is based on previous papers composed on different occasions several years ago. Heba Izaat Raouf has exerted substantial efforts to compile such writings into an integrated whole. May God reward her richly for accomplishing this challenging task.

I make no claim to have improved on Heba's work. However, I assume that there is a unified, structured and interrelated theme that binds together the notions treated in previous papers despite the fact that their occasions and presentations were seemingly unrelated. I have always wished to synthesize a new product that encompasses the notions and arguments which I have presented in past studies in light of my personal development coupled with changes in the world. Yet, despite the persistent urging of my dear friend Elmessiri and my own sincere desire, I have not yet accomplished such a task.

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE PROBLEM OF BIAS

It seems that we in the Arab and Muslim world have entered a phase of critical revision of our traditional concepts and positions on both the intellectual and theoretical levels. It also seems that the momentousness of the transformations that have taken place in our part of the world in the last few decades have been a major incentive for such a revision. On the other hand, the social sciences themselves (as a domain of knowledge) have relied for a long time on stock theories in a way that has prevented our scholars from formulating their own critical observations through

practice. This moment, in our experience, coincides with a parallel moment of crisis and revision in Western thought itself. We must not, however, overwhelm ourselves investigating the various fads of Western thought as it attempts to overcome its own intellectual and existential crises. Instead, we should be conscious of the fact that we have specific reasons for our own crisis which emerge from our own experience and reality.

Most of my contribution is based on results which, due to certain limitations, cannot be fully expounded, corroborated or documented. It is not my aim here to present a comprehensive theory. Rather, the best I can hope for is to deepen our awareness and appreciation of the dangers of dependency in the domain of “social sciences,” for the concepts and foundations of such a domain teem with biases. I also aim to stress the legitimacy of theoretical independence in this respect. Some points, therefore, merit explanation:

I. Social Sciences are Different from Physical Sciences

Our concern with what is known as “the social sciences” does not stem from the mere joy of constructing mathematical and non-mathematical models. Rather, our interest is based on the importance of comprehending the society/nation in the best possible way so as to improve its management. Such improvement is manifested, in the final analysis, through the increased balance and satisfaction experienced by the members of the society/nation, and through the integration of relations within this whole. This, in turn, implies a certain model and a certain degree of conflict.¹ All our research methods, concepts, and theoretical constructs are devoted to this aim; therefore, we should always modify and reform such methods and concepts so as to attain sound and effective knowledge. Human societies have been ceaselessly trying to perform this task, employing scientific methodology (implicitly or explicitly) to extract results from various historical experiences. Some theoretical concepts and notions are then formulated based on these experiences. This heritage has been scantily recorded (e.g., Plato’s treatise, *The Republic*); most of it has not been preserved since it was orally transmitted as secrets for governing society to be handed down to the elite (a principle which, one way or another, is still maintained to date). The fact remains, however, that the practical consequences of the earlier theoretical works are unmistakably evident. Otherwise, how shall we explain the establishment and develop-

ment of institutions with their well-defined interrelations? How did civilizations that embraced and utilized creativity emerge? How was stability achieved and how were conflicts and wars managed? It was the social knowledge acquired by human societies that enabled them to gain their accumulated achievements. However, the rational social concept is always interactive with some doctrine (faith). Hence, European thought (especially since the Enlightenment era in the 18th century) claimed that such a tremendous epistemological heritage was inconsistent with science; therefore, it was deemed “non-scientific,” representing nothing but early attempts (fossils) of primitive peoples.

In the epistemological realm, the predominance of Enlightenment notions meant the prevalence of “secularism” (with all its variations) in social affairs; hence, the prevalence of the secular notion of progress. In this context, physical sciences occupied a place of undue honor at the expense of philosophy after the latter had been completely secularized and had ceded its lofty position to the natural sciences. Gradually, social sciences were reduced to and leveled with natural sciences. In the domain of social knowledge, this process took different forms: Classic and Neo-classic economics, Positivism in sociology, the ensuing trends in political science, then Marxism, etc. No matter what these schools were, they all aimed at the establishment of academic disciplines similar to the natural sciences. Whenever attempts failed and results remained unattainable, Western scholarship maintained that social sciences were not yet sufficiently advanced, perhaps due to their being “new” disciplines, a pretentious proposition that is clearly spurious.

In spite of recurrent failures, persistent attempts were made to impose the academic framework of natural sciences on social sciences. Being highly influenced by the West, we in the East adopted the same approach. Yet, isn't historical experience enough to prove that the objective at hand is, *ipso facto*, fallacious and impossible to achieve? The proposed methodology had previously been used in Western experimental practices. For example, the method of creating analytical units, such as “class,” “elite,” “institutions,” “patterns,” “value surplus,” etc., is already used in various schools. Yet, despite the fact that a social image of the world was constructed matching the physical image produced via natural sciences, the problem has not been solved, since social sciences remain less exact than physical sciences. This problem can be attributed to the very

nature of the social phenomena in question. Phenomena within a rational living society are different from those that characterize inanimate matter devoid of reason or choice. When assessing the conditions, potentials and directions of the active operators in a real (living) society, they are not subject to standard units or interrelations amongst such units. In a living society there is a great difference between discovering the rules of the game and predicting results or exercising control over it.

Apart from the impracticality of using natural science models to study social phenomena, why should anyone insist that social sciences be like natural sciences? Are we dealing here with a noble or sacred objective? Practically speaking, if we assume that we could achieve this goal, it would mean destroying the vitality of society, turning it into a huge, strictly controlled push-button machine. It would accelerate the establishment of a totalitarian state in its worst form. Would such “scientific” and “rational” achievement, with its imposed success, please us? Could we describe it as a discovery of the objective laws of social motion, or merely an attempt to impose rules and models of our own creation on social movement?

II. *Western Schools of Thought Are Not Universal Sciences*

Having criticized the Western approach which aims to merge social and natural sciences, we now move to the assessment of Western social sciences from another perspective by posing the following question: What are the geographical realms and historical dimensions which form the basis of this process (of merging natural and social sciences) and its generalizations or theoretical structure? To acquire academic legitimacy and recognition for social sciences as an objective account of human social knowledge and in order for their conclusions to be universal, reliable and scientific, they must be founded on a solid knowledge base covering all human societies and their respective histories. In reality, what are now known as “social sciences” are based solely on Western peoples’ knowledge of their own societies in the modern era. Hence, the spotlight is brought to bear on a very limited sphere, historically and geographically, and all theoretical constructs are formulated according to the questions raised within this limited (Western) scope.

Though the early responses to these questions during the age of the Enlightenment were mostly simple, they grew more complex, taking the

form of theoretical models in the second half of the 19th Century. There were two main trends in this respect:

(1) a trend that stressed conflict between labor and capital and aimed to precipitate radical revolutionary change.

(2) an institution-oriented trend aiming to create the institutions deemed necessary to stabilize relations between labor and capital, achieve improvement and stability, and consolidate the balance necessary for such stability.

It is noteworthy that questions and answers posed by both trends are determined by secular concepts and ideas of materialistic progress (secularism being the dominant doctrine of the modern West). Even when scientific research discovered the importance of religion to society, forms of worldly (secular) religions were – explicitly or implicitly – introduced to perform its function.

The strife between the two poles of social conflict in Europe (Capitalism and Socialism) seemed, in the past, to be a kind of a zero-sum game, i.e., a gain for one side entailed a corresponding loss for the other. At this stage, the “scientific” social theories turned into sacred symbols and doctrines (though these doctrines were only secondary in status since secularism was the fundamental religion). Nevertheless, the 1970s witnessed a rapprochement between Socialism and Capitalism; the conflict grew less tense and the ideological halo of the conflict, with its past fanaticism and its absolutes whose validity had never been academically proven, nearly vanished. Many writings proclaiming the “end of ideology” were published. This period thus witnessed the publication of many economic and social studies analyzing the gradual convergence of the existing structures of Capitalism and Socialism in the industrial countries. In this atmosphere, implicit and explicit dialog among the different theoretical schools became both a possibility and a reality. Attempts to reach common ground or synthesized formulas of theoretical paradigms were no longer disparaged.²

The rapprochement was reflected in a plethora of Western futuristic studies that dealt with the problems expected to arise from the scientific and technological revolution. One way or another, such studies implied that this revolution would lead to the unification of social and economic systems or to ‘the Post-Industrial Society’ which is (from my point of view) actually the very peak of the crisis. Western thought used to preach

(throughout its internal [intellectual] crusades) that it sought to realize an earthly paradise. This false religion or ideological mirage stemmed from secular ideas. Different schools were more or less different approaches to this earthly paradise. But, if we have now reached the stage of affluence, and if the different parties have reached a similar notion of the affluent society in terms of production and distribution yet without attaining the promised paradise, what is next?

Noble values are increasingly waning. Pragmatism and individualism have reached a level where people have lost their natural desire to have children who might share their earnings or spoil their pleasures in life. There is an increasing sense of suffocation and alienation coupled with a terrible sense of insecurity. The horizons of the scientific and technological revolution not only promise prosperity, but herald mass destruction and environmental devastation. There is no theoretical notion in the Western arsenal that can solve this dilemma. Yet, this is a specific dilemma related to their own history, and their social sciences.

The problems and challenges faced by Western civilization in this contemporary era can no longer find solutions on the social and economic levels (especially after what has already been achieved on such levels), since such problems and challenges are rooted in a deeper ideological phenomenon (the predominance of secularism), i.e., in the very foundations of modern Western civilization which have yet to be seriously studied and analyzed. Here, then, is the pinnacle of the academic and theoretical crisis.

Why should we care about all this? All the above questions and answers have emerged from the various phases of Western society and experience. Based on our own historical context and our economic dependency and backwardness, we face questions (and challenges) which differ from those generated by the Western experience and which, therefore, require the development of schools of thought (methodologies and approaches) which differ from Western ones. We should understand our society, including its past and future developments, in light of Islamic principles and experience.

III. Western Schools of Thought Are Hostile To Us

If the first aspect of the influence of the dominant Western doctrine on Western social thought is manifested in its submission to secularism, then

the second aspect of this influence is the acceptance of the axiom of Western superiority and the legitimacy of Western global hegemony over all, including our part of the world. These two aspects are closely inter-related, i.e., they are two faces of the same coin. If the West is the superior master and if the totality of its theories derived from secularism is “science,” then it follows that these theories should prevail and everything else may rightly be stigmatized as backward and non-scientific and consigned to oblivion. The second aspect of the doctrinal influence, i.e., superiority and predominance, permeates all fields of Western “scientific” social thought. In studies of general history, facts are distorted to show, explicitly or implicitly (coincidentally, or for ethnic or anthropological reasons) that progress is the historical mission of the West. This trend reveals itself not only in studies of general history, but also in historically based theories and philosophies, the works of Orientalists, and the history of philosophy and science.

Throughout the last two centuries, the standard thesis has been that classical science is originally European, emanating directly from Greek philosophy and science. There may have been recognition of a certain degree of philosophical achievement or the emergence of certain sciences in other civilizations; however, this recognition was limited by the belief that they were only secondary contributions that derived their value from the “mother arsenal.” All social sciences study modern Western society from this historical perspective, the outcomes of which are being felt in the present. Many economic development studies, based on the assumptions of Classical and Neoclassical Western economic schools, have been exported to dependent countries (the so-called developing countries). The discourse of competition, international trade, liberalization and development models implies (or justifies) the imposition of the superior power (the West) over the world order which is, in turn, economically dependent on a certain international division of labor. The same pattern recurs in the social and political “sciences”. All forms of social organization or political management outside the West (i.e., forms other than political liberalism) are considered inferior and incapable of renewal and development. The very existence of this concept at the core of political and social schools of thought turns them into a dogma justifying imperialism and the imposition of Western hegemony in its worst forms. Moreover, the problem of these “sciences” is how to develop social and political

structures in a way that enables the West more efficiently to carry out its “historical mission” of “modernizing and civilizing the world.” All international (political) relations studies (as well as international economic studies) are currently based on treating problems arising from maintenance of the status quo, i.e., the reproduction of Western hegemony.

IV. *The Concept of Independent Theoretical Practice*

Practitioners of social sciences in our Eastern societies have grown increasingly cautious about the possibility of importing intellectual dependency implicit in Western social theories. This critical view has been reinforced by the detection of the bias and prejudice of Western studies (literature) against whatever concerns our history and heritage. It has to be admitted that the skepticism regarding the validity of the results of social science stems from a sense of belonging to our nation and an established confidence in its achievements. This skepticism has turned into certainty as many empirical studies conducted by our researchers have demonstrated the real value of our achievements and identified some of the specific characteristics of the course of our own history. The same thing has happened in the fields of economics, sociology, and politics (and development in general). Empirical studies have proven the deficiency in Western theoretical constructs as corroborated by the practical results of putting such theories into effect. These theories have not achieved their aims from a national perspective; they have not led to the type of knowledge that would support our decision-making. However, the critical outlook should not stop at the empirical level, thereby limiting its role to presenting the partial results of this or that experiment. Rather, it is time to use these results as the basis for challenging the totality of the Western theoretical construct. To stop at the empirical level (while keeping the theoretical construct intact) may give the impression that our empirical discoveries are mere deviations from the “norm.” Consequently, we might try on and on, despite the fact that the comprehensive outlook would reveal that there is no such thing as a “norm.” There is always the possibility of a different and more appropriate approach. Hence, we are facing unusual difficulties on our way to adopting the Western model; therefore, we should seek to arrive at a different (independent) model.

I believe that the increasing recognition of the notion of cultural pluralism, of a plurality of cultural centers and cultural independence is a

positive development. I also believe that the terms “authenticated modernization” or “authenticity and modernity” are becoming increasingly acceptable. But, I prefer the term “self-renewal” to refer to the concept of independent theoretical practice. The increasing acceptance of this term (which is still ambiguous) indicates the growing need to start an independent theoretical practice which relies (at the minimum) on empirical results and which is supported by a general critical approach.

Independent theoretical practice³ is an intricate task that requires ingenious and talented people; however, this should not restrain us from breaking into this field. What is not permissible in this practice is to deceive ourselves or resort to falsification. By “self deception,” I mean the use of the same Western concepts while changing only the terminology, or stubbornly attempting to prove that these concepts have originated in our heritage in a way that justifies their adoption. This methodology will naturally lead us back to the “square one” of using Western models in which nothing is changed but terms, names or reasons. Dangerous falsification can take the form of adding to Western thought models and concepts related to faith in God, family or other values, for instance. We might then imagine that we have solved a nagging problem while ignoring the fact that secular Western thought models generate secondary concepts in all aspects of social knowledge, concepts which contradict the secondary notions generated by the ones that we have introduced (particularly faith in God, the Exalted). The outcome of this falsification lacks any realistic and logical consistency; thus it lacks the legitimate claim of having developed an effective theoretical construct.

In the process of constructing a theoretical basis that would inform our self-renewal, we assert that we do not reject the use of some Western theoretical constructs. Yet, this requires the sorting out of the contents of the Western arsenal to separate what is specific to the West from what can be treated as universal. The process also requires the examination of concepts so as to discover their explicit and implicit relationship to the prevailing Western doctrine, and how consistent they would be with our own prevailing doctrine. For example, concepts such as the “economic man” and “value-labor” are related to secularism as they lead to analyses and economic theoretical constructs regulated by this doctrinal bias. “Economic man” is the underlying pivotal concept in Classical and Neo-classical Western economic thought. All market mechanisms, as well as

its checks and balances, would be to no avail if “economic man” were not in control of demand and supply. According to our Islamic criteria, this concept, whose characteristics are organically related to secularism, represents a distorted image of humankind. Moreover, the assumption that the value (or the exchange value) of a commodity is determined by the quantity of social labor necessary to produce it is the starting point in Ricardo’s model. Marx also took this assumption as the starting point for his economic model of Capitalism. Reliance on the assumption of labor-value (according to the concept of labor used in the analysis) resulted in confusions and paradoxes in both Ricardo’s and Marx’s economic analyses. However, we are concerned here with the relation between this assumption (which we believe to be flawed and unrealistic) and secularism. Assessing value only through human labor with no regard to land (or nature) reflects an overstatement of humankind’s status in secularism; i.e., human beings are seen here as the “creators,” “doers of whatever they want,” and the “conquerors of nature.” It is no coincidence, then, that Ibn Khaldūn arrived at a different notion of value based on what both human labor and nature offer, which, in turn, reflects the concepts of Islamic doctrine. Based on such a doctrine, Islamic thinkers believe that human beings cultivate and enrich nature within a framework of integration. In this pursuit, which may involve conflict with nature, human beings are to avoid the destruction of the environment and seek to maintain its natural balance. Indeed, this is encouraged by Islam, which does not sanction indifference toward the destruction of the environment. The potentials and role of humankind are respected; however, such potentials and role should be seen in the overall context of subjection to God the Exalted.

In the light of these reservations, we may accept concepts and analytical units (models) such as class, elite, social hierarchy, nation, social balance, planning, etc. Such concepts or components, if used as universal ones (i.e., at a high level of abstraction), will have contents suitable to us according to our independent theoretical paradigm informed by objective social reality. This is quite natural, since our usage of such concepts in relation to a certain nation/society is at a lower level of abstraction. Consequently, the content, relative significance, and interrelations among these concepts within our theoretical paradigm are more or less different from their position in the Western theoretical paradigm. Nation and the

central state in our society, for instance, attain a special connotation in accordance with the nature of their historical formation. For us, the nation-state is not a modern achievement realized by the bourgeoisie and largely related to its interests in unifying the domestic market and participating in the external dominance enterprise (as has happened in the modern West). Rather, the nation and central state were formed in our societies long ago, i.e., centuries before the emergence of the European bourgeoisie. The influence of the unifying doctrine (Islam) has accumulated to inculcate a stronger sense of unity and affinity than what is achieved, for instance, by market unification in the United States. Moreover, our social classes have imports different from those determined by the concepts of the European context. Our *multazims*, i.e., holders of commercial or agricultural concessions or monopolies, were not the same as European feudal lords, nor have our past and current “businessmen” played the same role as that played by the Western bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the conflict between our “proletariat” and our “capitalists” has not played the same major role as that performed by their counterparts in the European social and conceptual context. The role of different classes in our societies has been determined according to the logic of their unique historical development within the framework of the social continuum represented by the nation-state.

OUR HERITAGE IS THE STARTING POINT FOR DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned earlier, in order to form our own outlook for the future we must have independent theoretical practice. A prerequisite of such practice is a profound perception of our heritage with Islam at its core. This heritage is not just history; it is the conveyor of a living message and the basis of the revival to which we aspire. By “heritage” I mean our civilization’s entire history in its material and moral aspects; this includes what has been written and/or published by those belonging to our culture, and what underlies or is implied in our behavior as values and traditions. The focus on Islam does not negate the influence of pre-Islamic culture in Egypt or in other areas. Rather, it means that the essential influence and ultimate point of reference stem mainly from Islam. As for modern Western civilization, it has a major impact on limited social sectors that represent a departure from the general social structure of the Ummah,

since they lack a cultural link with the rest of the sectors (a fact which at times has caused severe tension in social relations). As for the majority of people (regardless of social positions), their acceptance or rejection of what comes from the West is determined by its consistency or lack thereof with Islamic principles.

Affinity with the heritage of Islamic civilization is not confined to Muslims, since this heritage has been created and lived by the entire Arab Ummah with all its various affiliations. The heritage of Islamic civilization in Egypt, for example, is a legacy shared by both Muslims and Copts (Christian Egyptians). If our secular thinkers have their own genuine thought and are not a mere echo of Western secularism, then their strong secular tendencies should reflect reverence and compassion for the culture and history of the country's national identity, i.e., the Islamic heritage.

Formulation of the future under the influence of Islam and its cultural heritage is the responsibility of independent theorization or contemporary fiqh and ijihad. As for myself, I do not claim to have arrived at a comprehensive theoretical paradigm. There is still a wide gap between what I have reached and what I aspire to arrive at. Accordingly, I will confine myself to shedding light on a particular issue which I believe to be pivotal to the subject in question.

I. Western Complex Development is Economic-Social

The term "complex" development (as the literal meaning of the term "complex" suggests) emphasizes the practical impossibility of separating social from political components. Even if this were theoretically possible, it would have to be implemented carefully and as only one step of the analysis. At this point, we only seek to determine whether the economic and social aspects are dominant and constitute a determinant of the whole process of complex development. What would further delineate the issue is to review how Western practice has handled this issue. It must be noted, though, that by economic aspects we mean the rational use of natural resources in order to meet the society's needs for goods and services; however, by social aspects we mean whatever is concerned with various human relationships amongst members of any particular society. According to this general procedural definition, political and cultural practices are considered part of the social aspect.

With the Renaissance there emerged a system of beliefs known as “humanism” (we can also call it secularism or materialism). This system of beliefs spread and reached its climax in the 18th century during the Enlightenment. Humanism advocated the right of human beings to freely develop according to their “innate quintessence.” This meant the recovery of the true nature of human beings as it was before their vision was blurred by Medieval ecclesiastical beliefs. The European attempt to recover what is called “innate human nature” was the basis of the targeted renaissance and the cornerstone of progress towards a rational social system. The term “innate human nature” has now been widely employed in philosophical schools and different spheres of Western social sciences ranging from psychiatry to anthropology, including economics and its “economic man” (which is a special version of the innate natural human being).

Until recently, it was a common belief that there are fixed characteristics of human instinct. After the triumph of Enlightenment ideas, schools differed in outlining such characteristics, particularly in determining the rational social system which accords with the needs of “innate human nature.” Competing and conflicting paradigms emerged, each claiming to be more consistent with “innate human nature.” Yet, the general framework of Europe’s modern notion of human nature and instincts has governed all such differences since the 18th Century to date. After marginalizing religion or isolating it from the life of society, all Western schools of thought confirmed that human beings are by nature worldly (secular) creatures who place physical self-interest above any other consideration. However, what they claimed to be “innate human nature” is not a scientific discovery; rather, it is a manifestation of materialistic secularism. History has proven that this European concept of human nature creates devils and monsters that easily slaughter and exterminate others (individuals, groups, peoples, and civilizations).

On the level of the socio-economic system, this concept generated unanimous agreement that technical (industrial) progress was to be treated as sacred. Various notions of human development and civilization emphasize the economic dimension over other dimensions, regarding this aspect of development as the one that squares most fully with human nature and tendencies. Technological and industrial development is what gratifies the material needs of human beings; thus, through this type

of development, their natural disposition can be elevated and their behavior refined.

This notion might be deemed plausible if its aim is to provide human beings with their minimum material requirements before asking them to follow certain codes of behavior. This, however, is a foregone conclusion and is not subject to debate; hence, any attempt to define innate human nature must start after, not before, this point. For unless their minimal material requirements are provided for, human beings will not continue to exist. The situation here is the same whether we deal with human beings, plants or animals. We can talk about human nature as the natural code of behavior according to which the individual is judged by God and others within an appropriate framework of social organization, which is itself founded on the assumption that humankind is alive, i.e., supplied with the minimum material requirements for life.

The fact remains, however, that this is not what is meant by Western social scientists, who believe that human nature is inclined toward emphasizing self-interest regardless of the material level people have achieved in life. This explains the fact that their answers to complaints about decadent morals and manners and the deterioration of human relations and compassion is reduced, in the final analysis, to a call for an increase in growth rates. When President Ronald Reagan proposed his economic program, "Reaganomics," based on "supply-side economics," the Soviets continued to repeat slogans of raising economic growth rates as a basis for solving all problems. However, the Soviet Union collapsed while talking about the aforementioned growth rate. And the United States is doing the same thing now: insisting that economic growth is what is required by "innate human nature" despite the fact that in recent decades, it has been observed that there is an inverse relationship between economic growth rates and moral and spiritual improvement.

II. Our Complex Development is Socio-Economic

If we talk about dependent development in Western terms, we are talking about a modernization process which is already taking place. The degree of distortion in our part of the world may now be higher than in other dependent countries; yet, by definition, dependent development implies a degree of distortion or lopsided growth of different sectors from a national perspective.

Thus, one or two more degrees in the level of distortion may be regarded as a minor problem which can be handled so long as we are conceding our dependency on an external center.

If, on the other hand, we adopt the perspective of independent development, we will be facing a real challenge. If we deal with the matter while realizing that it requires considerable calculations, our first question will be: can we generate sufficient momentum and energy for such an undertaking? And in what way? We should also take into consideration that such an understanding entails an ongoing confrontation, i.e., the possibility of “cold war” or outright hostilities.

To start with, our view of human history does not deem independent development imperative for each nation, nor does it enjoin a unified, universal pattern for independent development. What suits us is more or less different from what is suitable for others. We have to determine what suits us in terms of ends and means. At any rate, we differ from the contemporary (Western) models, especially in terms of objectives since we assign greater weight to the social rather than the economic aspect.

It is the notion of “innate human nature,” *fiṭrah*, which sets us apart from the Western outlook. The two notions of *fiṭrah* are as different as secularism and Islam. According to Islam (surrender to the will of God), all wealth belongs to God, while earthly life is a path to the hereafter. We are commanded not to neglect our share in this world; however, we are to fulfill our worldly duties within the regulations according to which we will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment, when neither wealth nor offspring will be of any use to us. This Islamic notion does not accept the predominance of physical or worldly tendencies in “innate human nature.” Yet, although Islam insists on the preponderance of spiritual and moral tendencies, it does not underestimate the importance of material factors. Preponderance simply means the right to guide and regulate one’s behavior. The realization of such preponderance is attained through tiring struggle on the part of the individual as well as society so as to defeat, or at least neutralize, the tendencies that contradict what Islam regards as the sound and natural human *fiṭrah*.

This Islamic notion of *fiṭrah* and the objective of raising a Muslim according to the above standards is the focus of most Muslim scholars and jurists. Moreover, the fundamentals of Islam which are directly linked to civilizational studies may be regarded as an extension of the

notion of Muslim character. Such fundamentals seek to make the whole social system conducive to the propagation of this human model, actualizing people's potentials and enabling them to guide the system. Whereas the secular notion of human *fiṭrah* in European civilization gave prominence to the economic side over the social one, the Islamic notion of *fiṭrah* led, by contrast, to the predominance of the social side over the economic.⁴ But how? And to what extent? I believe that the theoretical expression of this ultimate objective and the means to realize it will vary from one school of thought to another, as was the case in the course of our history and still is. This is normal and, in fact, desirable since what we do not want is an institution issuing arbitrary judgments about what is permitted or prohibited. The warrants for tolerable differences are numerous, and the scholars or thinkers who put forward a certain theoretical construct are required to observe the social, regional, and international conditions at hand. They should also understand the historical developments that led to the current situation on the domestic, regional, and international levels. Undoubtedly, the evaluation of all such factors and the future perspective based thereon will be conditioned by the position of the thinker him/herself. Do his/her interests identify with stability or with struggle? And to what extent? What is his/her estimate of the potentials of the situation that have yet to be revealed? Is he/she of the type that tends to take risks or not? All such questions may generate others, and all, in turn, can create various opinions.

However, we should not overlook the fact that the principle of independent development which is predicated on the prevalence of the social side minimizes differences and views different parties as members of one team. From the perspective of independent development, it is not possible, for instance, to dispute the necessity of being cautious while dealing with the superpowers dominating the world order in all fields. A nation which believes that it has a divine message to convey to the world and that it is "the best nation that has ever been brought forth for the good of humankind" should be acutely conscious of its dignity and liberty; i.e., it should not give foreigners the opportunity to dominate its economy or security. Moreover, a course of development which gives prominence to social aspects will not treat growth rates as a sacred objective whose importance surpasses that of morals, justice or values.

Islam (the religion of *fiṭrah*), as it addresses humankind on the social

and individual levels, rejects oppression, exploitation and genocide (as the white settlers exterminated millions of native Americans and Canadians in North America) under the pretext of colonization, development, and the “white man’s burden.” Even if this was really necessary, it is utterly rejected by all Muslims who study the various models of socio-economic development. I will now elaborate on some types of developmental common ground which can help guide human social objectives and values.

CONCLUSIONS AND EXTENSIONS OF THE NOTION OF INDEPENDENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I. Criticizing the Notion of Modernization

The West seeks to propagate its concepts of economic-social development in the Third World under the mantle of modernization. The notion of modernization itself implies that everything modern and advanced belongs to European civilization. Accordingly, the modernization process is simply the attempt of dependent countries to become “part of the West” or “part of Europe” as Khedive Ismail is reputed to have put it. So many of us have swallowed the bait that nearly anyone who would disagree is considered to be ignorant or reactionary. We find, for instance, that in Myrdal’s study, he assumes that modernization is the natural and inspiring target in the “Asian Drama.” Theoretically and logically, he maps out the steps required to realize the values of modernization. He then concludes his major work by observing that “the ideals of nationalism are the easiest to spread in under-developed countries in comparison to the other ideals of modernization.” Unfortunately, however, he does not give much thought to this important observation, which might have made a major difference in his analytical and theoretical constructs. Careful consideration of this observation would, first, relate the restructuring of a nation to a deeply-rooted national spirit which is consistent with the complex content of the independent model and which may, in turn, repel external hegemony. Such a process would add and even transform what are known as modernization values. Myrdal’s – and, naturally, others’ – explanations of modernization values are confined to rationalism, development planning, higher productivity, institutions, proper policies, etc. Yet, the list of values does not include the most important

one necessary for development, which is self-confidence in dealing with the dominant nations. This value is, in fact, the most important according to the notion of independent development given that the masses only respond fully within a genuine national revival in the face of strong foreign challenges.

Economic independence cannot be earned without self-confidence, liberation from the fear of the “demi-gods” of the dominant countries, encouraging the creativity of the nation, and bold rejection or criticism of foreign advice. This boldness needs to cover not only decisions regarding suitable technologies or projects, but also the whole theory of economic development and its ultimate goal. Undoubtedly, this will be reflected in determining the most suitable independent consumption patterns.

The strategy of gratifying basic needs is a strategy of independent, or self-centric, economic development. Development in general is indeed a complex process, comprising cultural, political, economic, and social components. This type of complex development is self-centric, i.e., a complete revival generated from within the nation. Obviously, this concept is not consistent with the prevailing notion of modernization. Hence, some thinkers (such as Anwar Abdul-Malik) have used the term “authenticated modernization;” however, it would be preferable to use the term “self-renewal,” i.e. renewal from within the nation and its own values. Self-renewal in this sense does not overlook the broad surrounding environment, but rather interacts with it and decides what form development should take. Such self-renewal, conscious of its surroundings, is the spirit of complex independent development: the very spirit of national cultural renaissance. In fact, all we are proposing here is a rediscovery of what our own pioneers have proposed. Al-Afghānī criticized his contemporary Ottomans for the same things for which we criticize our governments today. The Ottomans established a number of schools in the new style and sent their youths to Western countries to bring back with them science, knowledge, literature and all that they call “civilization.” Yet, such “civilization” is tied directly to its country of origin in accordance with its nature and social structure. In other words, civilization should emanate from within the nation itself and from the natural development of its society. Self-renewal that generates original “civilization” will lead to the formulation (revival) of various cultural centers. Such centers put forward a worldview, a self-image, and a view of others different from

that offered by Western civilization. Relating the national enterprise to cultural independence is precisely what impels us to reject “modernization” as a notion and as a term.

II. *The Notion of Cultural Independence*

The issue of cultural independence requires further elaboration. Considering the treatments and approaches of al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ʿAbduh, the question of cultural independence is not a novelty in our modern intellectual literature. However, most of our political and intellectual elites are products of Western civilization. Accordingly, the objective of Arab cultural independence has been replaced by “modernization,” by which its advocates mean the emulation of Western experience so as to attain what the West has realized. Thus, they construe modern civilization as a single, indivisible, global civilization, i.e., Western civilization. The notion of cultural uniqueness or independence was not on our intellectual agenda at the climax of the nationalist tide in the 1950s and 1960s. Recently, the idea has become increasingly acceptable; nevertheless, the concept is still vague for many Arabs despite their initial acceptance of it. Therefore, there is a need for more intensive theoretical efforts in order to reach a precise definition of this concept and related notions.

It may be best to term the notion in question “cultural independence,” since references to the “Arab cultural enterprise” may be mistakenly understood to be Arabs’ attempt to catch up with modern Western civilization, namely, a Western civilizational project carried out by Arabic speaking people. This confusion should be eliminated. I would like to emphasize that my notion of civilization comprises all that humankind has created and practiced in the past and the present to meet people’s material, intellectual and spiritual needs; hence, such a notion is not confined to intellectual and spiritual creation. Naturally, as time passes, the total creative endeavor in all fields is realized through a society. At a lower level of abstraction and generalization, we can say that this process was – and is – historically realized within specific societies, their peculiar creative experiences and their environmental conditions.

Communities that preserved their common bonds until they were crystallized at some stage into a coherent pattern are called nations. That is because all their cultural achievements (of all types and forms) were original, not from the Other. In other words, the achievements of such a nation

developed into a pattern of variables and interrelations that realized cohesion and unity for the society.

Accordingly, the recognition of a nation is inseparable from the recognition of the historical and cultural achievements without which the term “nation” could not be applied to it. The term “cultural independence” is an expression of this notion. This, however, does not run counter to ongoing interaction among cultures, nor does it negate the fact that there are common characteristics of a number of nations close to each other as a result of special ties and interactions. We do not believe that there is any necessary or real connection between Western economic development and the possibility of achieving the required modification in this or that nation’s cultural pattern. Accordingly, we cannot conclude that attaining such changes is an imperative (as Marx did). A wide-ranging transformation might not be possible or timely in any Western country for a number of reasons. The required change, however, is a tough struggle that Western communities should undergo even though it is tied up with the need to bring about transformation in all social spheres. Failure may result in the collapse of the whole pattern, together with its social and scientific achievements. The fact remains that whether Western societies succeed or fail in regaining what was lost during the bourgeois industrial revolution, we should adopt a different approach for revival in the East. Our success in preserving the positive core of our cultural heritage, which is based on a balance between material and moral aspects, and in establishing an economically developed society within this framework will be a real contribution toward reforming the Western cultural pattern itself, since in so doing, we will be positing an alternative cultural model and thereby contributing to human development in general.

If given careful thought, the aforementioned propositions will be seen not to be mere rhetoric. Independent economic development and cultural independence are interrelated; hence, talk about cultural independence is nonsensical without a strong economic basis, while attempts to realize genuine independent economic development will likewise be futile without cultural independence.

III. Growth Rate and Average Income

Our ultimate aim is cultural independence; however, the serious adoption and implementation of this aim will mean a radical revolution in all

aspects of life. That is, all development policies will have to be structured so as to cope with this process, and economic development will likewise occupy an important position. Implementing an independent cultural enterprise is impossible without substantial economic support, and sustaining high growth rates (of development) is part and parcel of the very structure of our ultimate long-term goal. However, a comprehensive notion requires reconsideration of the criterion of average income per capita or its likes (such as average quantitative shares in certain goods or services per capita). This criterion is still widely used to measure development or progress, which gives the growth rate great importance as a means by which to move from a lower to a higher average per capita income. This underlies the ability to achieve a growth that would narrow, then remove, the gap in income and living standards between “developing” countries on the one hand, and those of the “developed” countries on the other.

The narrowing and removal of that gap is viewed in Western (Capitalist and Socialist) literature as the result of the process of “modernization” and development in its quintessential sense. However, we reject the use of average income per capita and growth rates in order to assess development, since they are incompatible with our notion of independent development and its implied strategy of gratifying basic needs.

According to our ultimate long-term goal, average per capita income is not the main criterion of development (progress) or underdevelopment. The main criterion is cultural, political, and economic independence or dependence. This complex qualitative criterion is certainly not as simple and elegant as the quantitative expression represented in the criterion of average income per capita. However, if our goal is to reach a more indicative criterion, our qualitative criterion will be more effective in determining the real difference between dependent and independent or dominant countries. It is also more effective in identifying the dynamic potentials underlying various economies.

With regard to the gap between our average income per capita and that of the dominant countries, such criteria gain importance – given the conditions of independent development – to guarantee the continuous implementation of the gratifying basic needs strategy. We drop the quantitative significance of the gap that separates the underdeveloped, dependent countries from countries of the North due to the technical

disadvantages involved in the calculation of average income per capita. However, we do care about the general significance (indication) of the gap insofar as it reflects a major difference in economic abilities. That is, we benefit from such criteria as an indicator of a critical qualitative state of affairs; thus, the issue is not to try to eliminate the gap at any price, nor is it to achieve the pattern of consumption and lifestyle of the North. At the same time, we are concerned about the significance of the vast gap caused by the overwhelming technological and scientific supremacy of the North. That is why the enthusiasm to have an independent lifestyle or cultural enterprise does not undermine the drive to possess modern scientific knowledge and eliminate the gap in this particular field as soon as possible. Independent economic development can never be realized without tireless efforts to break the Western monopoly on scientific knowledge. However, our economic development objectives differ from those of the North, as do our priorities and our production capabilities. All this requires an independent outlook regarding the innovation and utilization of appropriate technology. In general, we seek to attain technological capabilities that enable us to do whatever we need to meet our growing independent needs or to defend (perhaps militarily) our cultural enterprise against potential foreign assaults. This is a fierce battle, not only against the giants monopolizing this field, but also against the dangers of surrender to the temptation to be lazy and import every available technology from abroad.

IV. The Strategy of Gratifying Basic Needs

Development research by dependent countries has recently contributed to formulating a "production mode" suitable to the independent development model. This model is represented by the strategy of gratifying basic needs. The writings of prominent Eastern economists have explained the various aspects of this strategy. However, suffice it here to quote a general and synoptic definition offered by Ismail Sabri Abdullah: "The essence of the issue is the establishment of a domestically integrated industrial skeleton. This skeleton shall be integrated with the other national economic sectors, at the top of which is the agricultural sector. It should be consistent with the cultural and social objectives of society. Such a skeleton, which is based on reliance on a huge domestic market furnished by the gratifying basic needs strategy, will minimize dependence on unbalanced

trade with the capitalist countries. Thus, it can escape the hold of multinational corporations. Development cannot be independent and self-centric unless it is directed towards the domestic market. In the meantime, it is the type of development which can sustain itself and has the autonomous ability to proceed without begging for foreign aid." The basic value of this definition is that it understands the gratifying basic needs strategy in such a way that economic development may be employed to reach the ultimate goal, namely, the elimination of dependency and the realization of comprehensive independent development. This concept might not be as clear for some other advocates of the independence model and the gratifying basic needs strategy.

I believe that if this strategy is informed and directed by the ultimate long-term goal of independence, then its internal logic, which reflects practical needs, will lead to the integration of the following six principles in a consistent synthesis which may be briefly explained as follows:

(1) THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

This strategy seems to be quite compatible with the aim of independence. Economically, it leads to reduced reliance on the outside world both quantitatively (by reducing imports and loans) and qualitatively (by doing without the help of the outside world in meeting most local basic needs). The logic of this strategy leads to independence through the proposed change in patterns of consumption and production.

(2) SELF-RELIANCE

This principle is naturally implied in the basic reliance on mobilizing the economic surplus and directing development to meet basic needs through labor and the use of local resources (potentials). In a broader and more dynamic sense, self-reliance is implied in what we call the spirit of self-renewal and the encounter with external challenges.

(3) THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The role of the state in the Western experience is crucial for opening the world to its enterprise. At the same time, the role of the state in the dependent countries is essential to protect their development experience from the outside world. Unlike the Western countries, dependent countries face the outside world from a position of weakness rather than

strength. Such dependent countries are in the position of strategic defense rather than offense, which requires the state to act as a centralized institution making optimal use of scarce human expertise in the scientific, technical, economic, and administrative spheres; in this way, it exemplifies the same logic of concentrating military talents in one institution. The gratifying basic needs strategy requires a highly efficient management of international relations (politically and economically), minimizing the risks and losses of probable external conflicts and making the best use of conflicts among dominant countries and blocs. This strategy cannot be implemented without war-economy institutions. This means that the very rationale of the strategy necessarily leads to control by the central authority over the national economy through explicit direction and management. Therefore, there should be central financial and resource planning to determine the directions and growth rates that are likely to support independence and that are consistent with the targeted pattern of consumption within the framework of maintaining readiness to encounter external pressures. This strategy is by no means compatible with the illusion of relying on what is known as market mechanisms to allocate resources or the illusion of depending on the initiative of the domestic (not to mention the foreign) private sector as a decisive partner. This, however, should not be construed as a call to liquidate or undercut the private sector; we would rather call for the opposite view within the specific determinants of our situation.

(4) THE GIANT LEAP

This principle, which is guaranteed by the logic of the proposed strategy, entails maximization of the planned economic surplus (using Baran's term), its investment in accordance with the strategic objective, and the launching of a large-scale attack on all fronts (i.e. not only the economic front alone) at a particular historical moment.

(5) DISTRIBUTION

The idea of making initiatives and mobilizing humanpower to confront external as well as internal changes facing independent development requires the reduction of income differences to limits deemed necessary to spur work and creativity and eliminate schisms and conflicts. The distribution issue is not merely a compatible accessory from without

the strategy of gratifying basic needs nor is it merely an internal policy. The distribution issue is an inherent part of the production skeleton itself. Yet, we can state that realizing the importance of social solidarity is a vital element in streamlining the general acceptance of the gratifying basic needs strategy.

(6) DEVELOPMENT IS A COMPLEX PROCESS

Reference to numerous concurrent changes is implied in each of the above principles. Yet, there has to be a comprehensive notion of the requisite changes which is often overlooked by many studies on the gratifying basic needs strategy. Formulating such a comprehensive notion is a formidable task that requires creative interaction between economists, sociologists, and political scientists in addition to the efforts of educators and cultural activists. However, without reaching a comprehensive notion that seems viable and consistent with the above principles, the strategy of gratifying basic needs will be impractical. Mahboub-ul-Haq is totally right when he warns of turning the talk about the new strategy into a worn-out fashion. He stresses the fact that the new strategy of development requires a balance among political, economic and social forces. Hence, unless a decision is taken on the highest political levels, with the whole political structure inside the country mobilized to support it, the planning exercise will remain little more than an academic endeavor. But how can political decisions be taken without what Myrdal terms the "strong government?" In fact, Myrdal takes all governments in dependent countries (even the strictest dictatorships) to be "soft" governments. This means that such governments are unable to enforce the laws and decisions which appear to be necessary because they are dominated by those who have interests entrenched in the status quo and who would benefit from keeping all legislation and procedures as they currently are. Strong governments are thus a prerequisite to implement the strategy of gratifying basic needs.

Moreover, the model of independent development is logically consistent with the principle of equitable distribution. Independent development does not initially assume the possibility of effecting an essential modification of distribution relations while the same international and domestic powers are still dominating production relations inside the model or the system, since the interests of these powers run radically

counter to the principle of income distribution. As mentioned above, the model of independent development acquires real depth only when wedded to the strategy of gratifying basic needs which, by definition, involves a revolution in consumption patterns and a direct attack on the sources of poverty. In other words, equity of distribution is implied and assured by the very structure of the strategy. Yet, in this situation, it is more reasonable to identify the challenge that faces the strategy of gratifying basic needs, not as the re-distribution of outcome, but rather, suitable consumption patterns and the acceptance of such patterns by the different social classes of the nation. Needless to say, the targeted patterns of consumption and the commitment thereto is not merely an economic process; rather, it involves definition, persuasion, and commitment using a variety of tools. This also means that the level of currently available productive capacity cannot alone determine or develop consumption patterns.

Galal Amin criticizes economists for distorting and degrading the idea of equity by turning it into an issue of income redistribution instead of inquiring into the nature of the products themselves and whether they meet humankind's real needs. Thus, economists have been content to note the wishes of individuals to catch up economically with their neighbors regardless of whether they need what their neighbors have. This idea directs research on patterns of consumption in a way that does not allow these patterns to be a rational expression of the potentials of the national economy at a given stage. This notion remains burdened with intellectual dependency which, in turn, means that we have not changed enough to face the challenge.

If we move to the means consistent with our aim, namely, to realize the prominence of the social side of development, we will find that it is simply reliance on mobilization of the masses. This requires theoretical lucidity introduced by induction and reinterpretation of Islamic thought so as to trigger popular initiatives and to insure the legitimacy of wide participation (which implies, but is not limited to, the fundamental concept of *shūrā*, i.e., consultation) in the nation's struggle as well as all levels of decision-making. Our main means of realizing this independent development is absolute reliance on a concept of social action that seeks to mobilize diverse and competing energies within a specific society-nation via appropriate institutions.

Moreover, even if our notion does not obstruct such methods, practical requirements leave us no other choice. For example, we cannot choose reliance on the creative efforts or input of the political elite while excluding or marginalizing the masses from the struggle for independent development. We cannot opt for this choice since, as mentioned earlier, the path to independent development is open to all. Today's struggle is no longer a confrontation between two teams of knights. Modern military technologies have reduced the difference between front and back lines; everyone has literally and directly become involved in battle; besides, military efforts deplete resources with consequent effects on the level of economic development and prosperity overall. Therefore, how can we ensure steadfastness on the way to independent development without the positive, active participation of all the nation? Moreover, how can we convince the nation to participate in the process and to sacrifice on its behalf? Great revolutions and revivals are usually fueled by a solid doctrine; do we have a doctrine that can restore the Arabs' fighting spirit? Undoubtedly, Islam, in particular, embodies such a doctrine.

Lest we deceive ourselves, we have to admit that carrying out the strategy of gratifying basic needs will be very difficult. The independence model implies an unrelenting confrontation with major powers on the cultural, political, and economic fronts, with military self-defence against military invasion only as a last resort. Tough as it may be, this confrontation is considered a minor struggle. It is a struggle against external enemies with tangible dimensions, distinguished institutions and obvious interests that run radically counter to our own interests. The same perspective applies to struggling against the social classes that are associated with external enemies. None of this, however, is very difficult, given that national forces can be mobilized with high morale to confront such challenges.

The real, major jihad is self-struggle, which is becoming more difficult as the enemy has infiltrated our ranks via its consumption and cultural patterns. The record of consumers, particularly those of the middle class (or the modern sector) is not a clean one. Some habits have thus turned into a material reality which cannot be changed, let alone eliminated. As mentioned earlier, it is not enough to have a logically consistent model. Rather, one's model must be applicable to real life; otherwise, endeavors to establish it will be nothing but a sterile intellectual exercise. So, can

people be changed from within? If we answer this question in the negative, we render the model inapplicable. However, I am convinced that this change can be brought about if our estimation is not based merely on ordinary calculations which favor economic or social standards exclusively.

I believe that we can induce change, bearing in mind the fact that supercomputers fail to calculate accurately the potentials of peoples in moments of historical confrontation; no doubt, cultural revival is a moment which is not subject to traditional calculations. Granted this fact, researchers' task is to envisage the major factors that ensure the success of this historical moment and the independent development model, thereby achieving its long-term ultimate goal.