

Current Challenges for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences Between Crisis and Solutions

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Abstract

Francis Bacon declared that knowledge is power — a power made manifest through the deployment of scientific methods harnessed to exploit human and natural energies, exploited by the societies of that era through a critical and forward-looking reading dictated by an elite that took the reins toward a renewing, revolutionary project against prevailing conditions. This period has been given several names — the Renaissance, the Enlightenment — all of which converge on a rupture with the traditional, that is, Europe's awakening from the obscurantism of the Church and Christianity, particularly alongside the development of the natural sciences and the emergence of inventions and discoveries, in harmony with the development of philosophy and the social and human sciences, which were distinguished by their support for this European modernist project. Indeed, these sciences bore the greater share of that effort despite the difficult beginnings they faced against the prevailing religious intellectual dogmatism. Anyone examining the contemporary history of the social and human sciences finds that, in every case, they tended toward an epistemological rupture against the intellectual vestiges and sediments that had tainted human thought, in an attempt to give impetus to modernization within a civilizational, developmental framework free of doubt. However, the process by which these sciences were embraced in the Arab and Islamic world occurred at a stage when intellectual and social maturity had not yet been achieved — owing to several factors, whether colonialism or internal conflicts — and this amounted to a distortion of the underlying reality: the difficulty of reconciling these sciences with the core of Arab societies, given their manifold particularities, and the intellectual accumulations and obstacles that led the Arab-Islamic mind toward intellectual uniformity and closure within a confined field. Perhaps what these sciences suffer from, especially in the Arab-Islamic world, is scientific output — in the form of studies and research, whether academic, media-related, or reformist — which has always been characterized by a materialistic orientation, caught between qualification, certification, or employment, producing cumulative work far removed from reality, without triggering a social and intellectual revolution against the status quo or offering a sociological diagnosis rooted in a purely Arab mindset. Indeed, a deep gap has emerged between Arab and non-Arab societies in terms of research efficiency on the one hand, and between these social sciences and Arab states on the other. The question we raise at the level of modernist discourse is: why this rupture between the social and human sciences and Arab societies? What accounts for the weakness and shallowness of intellectual contributions in Arab universities? And how can these sciences confront social and human challenges that outweigh technical ones?

Keywords: Current challenges, scientific research, obstacles, solutions

Introduction

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The Middle Ages were marked by monarchical support for the Church, to the point that ecclesiastical authority at times superseded that of kings themselves, imposing a rigid enclosure on the European mind that led to stagnation by the end of the twelfth century. Philosophy could not move beyond these bounds; during this period attempts emerged to merge Aristotelian philosophy with Christianity in what became known as Scholasticism, or the philosophy of religion, championed by Thomas Aquinas and others — leaving humanity, as Francis Bacon put it, trapped in a vicious circle in both science and philosophy, with thought petrified and no new production emerging. This is what led Bacon to contemplate rebuilding and renewing philosophy, arguing that it had followed the same path since Aristotle, and that the old methods were no longer suited to studying the problems of nature; he emphasized practical method over theoretical method in a serious attempt to evaluate and reconstruct traditional education. This scientific method — grounded in observation, doubt, and experimentation — constituted the revolution that distinguished the Enlightenment in the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Kant, and Descartes. Likewise, the development of the physical sciences and scientific inventions and discoveries, which harnessed all human and natural energies to achieve the progress of these European states and other regions of the world, meant that Europe was no longer alone in this endeavor; what became known as the Western world had emerged. This epistemic chronology demonstrates the extent to which the social and human sciences contributed to the epistemological rupture with everything traditional, and to the attempt to renew human thought and harness it in the service of humanity. Indeed, they gave rise to a unique intellectual paradigm still valid everywhere and at all times, because it is:

- **Humanistic** — valid for every human being and harnessed in service of every human being.
- **Explanatory** — it explains all cosmic and human phenomena, predicts them, and makes them comprehensible.
- **Rigorous** — it relies on methods, procedures, and rules that discipline and guide it.

These social and human sciences are but an extension of philosophy, which was the gateway through which these nations reached modernity and distinction — as is evident today in the intellectual heritage and academic output of Western nations. Our Arab countries came to recognize this path only at a later stage, under varying circumstances and factors, attempting to follow the same course as these Western nations. Yet this did not come to pass, for several reasons:

- This scientific-intellectual revolution occurred in non-Arab societies that differ culturally, ideologically, and anthropologically.
- The capacity for change and for bringing about Arab-Islamic intellectual modernization was not easily achieved.
- Timing: while these sciences were at advanced stages elsewhere, the Arab world could not simply turn back and start anew.
- Political conditions: most Arab states were young, marked either by internal conflict among minorities or by the authoritarian nature of their ruling systems and authorities.

It is no secret that the state of the humanities and social sciences in the Arab and Islamic world reflects a backwardness apparent in many and varied respects — nowhere more evident than in the weakness and shallowness of the intellectual output and contributions Arab universities offer to the humanities, despite the undeniable civilizational heritage our nation possesses, extending back to the dawn of Islam. Indeed, many institutes and universities still regard these sciences as second-tier — of little real value — believing them not to be at the forefront of future-oriented projects and visions, on the assumption that they contribute nothing to modernization. All of this has produced catastrophic consequences for Arab intellectual life, manifest in its stagnation regarding the discussion of important issues and topics that no other discipline dared broach except these human and social sciences — a fact that has often unsettled the dominant ideological powers and orientations. Yet this does not absolve us, as researchers in these fields, of our responsibility for this catastrophic intellectual state, whether through:

- Our failure to contribute to the renewal and modernization of the Arab-Islamic heritage on its own Arab-Islamic terms, rather than a Western template.
- Our absence from bringing about an intellectual revolution that would sustain this civilizational project.
- Our neglect of the Arab-Islamic legacy as a foundation for building and rebuilding.
- Lack of self-confidence and pride in what we possess, and in coexisting with others.
- Excessive utopianism and idealism, and detachment from an accurate diagnosis of actual reality.
- Repetition of the same topics, findings, and linear accumulation.
- The absence of a renewed civilizational intellectual project.

The responsibility, then, is heavy; the work required is immense and the effort considerable — yet the goal remains attainable. What remains is first to diagnose the actual state of these social and human sciences in our university and to identify the crisis they face, whether at the level of the nature of scientific research, the level of intellectual production, or the level of contribution to the modernist project for Arab humanity — and then to propose alternatives for emerging from this crisis, so that these sciences may become capable and adequate for addressing the crises of contemporary Arab man.

Section One: The Nature of the Human and Social Sciences

Bertrand Russell said: "Science is what we know, and philosophy is what we do not know." Discussion of science has always been bound up with philosophy, for it is no secret to any researcher that philosophy is the wellspring from which all the human sciences branched — even the mathematical ones. Having passed through diverse and varied stages, philosophy carried within it conflicts and dialectics that accompanied human thought through most of its periods, culminating in numerous schools, theories, and orientations that arrived at this contemporary model — indeed, one that has gone beyond modernity itself in pursuit of a single intellectual pattern for all societies and cultures, as an attempt to humanize these sciences. Although this project embodied a great intellectual achievement and a major civilizational leap, it did not deliver the promised paradise on earth. In truth, this project — through its Enlightenment propositions concerning reason, methods of thought, and politics — enabled Western thought to put an end to metaphysics and free itself from medieval theology; yet this theological impulse merely shifted from the realm of metaphysics to the realm of the tangible, leaving contemporary man stripped of his selfhood and a captive of the wheel of production and consumption, in an unbalanced materialism that exposed the modernist project and the happiness and security it promised — never realized in practice. So what, then, are these human and social sciences?

First Subsection: Defining the Human and Social Sciences

The term consists of two parts:

1. "*Ilm* [science/knowledge], the singular of '*ulum*, is the opposite of ignorance; one says '*alimtu* al-shay' meaning 'I knew it,' and '*alima*' meaning 'he understood,' and we say 'from knowing comes knowledge,' meaning grasping the true nature of a thing" (Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, 1881, p. 3082). It is "the complete body of knowledge, principles, and general categories pertaining to the reality of a specific phenomenon, grounded in observation and experimentation rather than individual inclinations or personal opinions" (Ahmed Zaki Badawi, 1978, p. 368).
2. *Social* or *Human*: "Social" derives from the verb "to gather" (*jama'a*), meaning to bring together, to unite what is scattered. "Social" (singular of "social matters") refers to the space in which individuals gather in groups, and the relationships and forms of communication that result from this. Sociology is thus the science that examines the emergence, growth, nature, laws, and systems of human groups (Ahmed Mokhtar Omar, 2008, p. 393). "Human," from "human being," is a branch of knowledge commonly paired with "social," since both share the human being and the society in which he lives as their object of study — particularly as this field has branched into numerous overlapping specializations. We

may therefore offer a single working definition of the human and social sciences: "the body of studies that employ the scientific method to examine the various manifestations of activity emanating from human beings, whether as individuals, groups, or societies, encompassing several branches — sociology, anthropology, psychology, history..." (Ahmed Zaki Badawi, 1978, p. 368). While these concepts have been fixed within general frameworks of meaning, they cannot be captured by a single precise technical definition, given their complexity and the branching they have undergone across historical stages, shaped by the discourses of their respective eras.

Second Subsection: The Intellectual History of the Human and Social Sciences

Plato said: "We are mad if we cannot think, fanatics if we will not think, and slaves if we dare not think." Among God's blessings upon humanity is the gift of a reasoning mind — one that has continually advanced through stages of knowledge in search of truth, or at least of understanding. To speak of the history of social thought is to speak of the development of these sciences, whose origins in human thought are tied to ancient civilizations, particularly the Egyptian and Greek.

Social thought among the Egyptians: Ancient Egyptian social thought was marked by religious ideas centered on the worship of the forces and phenomena of nature, inanimate objects included — "what they inherited from their ancestors and what they sensed of the power of these things, or out of fear of them. The Egyptians' veneration of the gods stemmed from one of three motives: hope of benefit, warding off harm, or admiration of an incomprehensible grandeur. There was no love of the deity for its own sake" (Nabil Abdel Hamid, 2009, p. 21). Hence the state took on a religious character. The Egyptians excelled in several scientific fields (jewelry-making, pottery, disease diagnosis and treatment, mummification, agriculture) and came into contact with other civilizations in the early third century BCE, especially after the rise of the Library of Alexandria alongside Greek scholars such as Archimedes and Euclid, who played a major role in the maturation of human thought — for "they did not merely establish and use science, but advanced far along the same path — the path of the scientific method — that we still follow today" (George Sarton, 2010, p. 120). Egyptian society was structured into three classes (Pharaoh and the priesthood, the nobility, and the common people), with the priesthood enjoying great cultural privilege and attention, since their authority rested on the principle of the king's divinity.

Social thought among the Greeks: The journeys of Solon, Plato, and Herodotus to Egypt were among the contacts with Eastern civilizations from which Greek thought emerged, freed from religious constraints, and through which the Greeks fashioned a science and philosophy considered the first truly organized reflection on human affairs — rich, profound, and original thought that remained influential in human society for centuries, aided by the beauty of Greece, the diversity of its natural landscape, and its position among varied civilizations. Greek civilization passed through three principal stages:

1. **The formative stage**, extending from the twelfth to the sixth century BCE, known as the archaic period — in truth the infancy of Greek thought, embodied in Homer's famous epics (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*).
2. **The flourishing stage**, extending from the sixth century BCE to the last third of the fourth century BCE. This classical period represents the maturation of Greek thought and the emergence of major thinkers in philosophy, art, and history, with Athens at the forefront. It was marked by three phases: the pre-Socratic period, characterized by a close union between natural science and philosophy and an attempt to explain the cosmos and its origin; the period of the Sophists and Socrates, marked by a shift in focus from the cosmos and nature toward the human being and human problems — knowledge, ethics, art, education, politics, and so on (Youssef Karam, 2014, p. 18); and the period of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy, in which social thought generally, and philosophy particularly, reached its peak with these two philosophers, whose engagement with thought and its foundations culminated in the establishment of numerous sciences, most notably logic,

political science, ethics, and cosmology — enriching scientific knowledge down to the present day.

3. **The decline stage**, known as the Hellenistic period, beginning after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE. This era was defined above all by the fusion and blending of the ancient spirit of the East with Hellenic thought and civilization — a hybrid civilization known as Hellenistic civilization, in which religion intermingled with philosophy, giving rise to Stoicism and Epicureanism, and ending with the rise of the Roman Empire.

Social thought among the Romans: Cicero said: "Through doubt we arrive at truth." Roman intellectual life was largely an extension of Greek thought, particularly the ethical philosophies of the Stoic and Epicurean schools, while Roman thought itself was distinguished by its practical, applied character — "an emphasis on practical, applied dimensions rather than abstract theoretical ones, whether contemplative, idealist, or realist-analytical; accordingly, this thought's concerns centered on social relations and behavioral patterns" (Abdel Hadi Mohamed, 2005, p. 126). A constellation of thinkers and philosophers emerged, most notably Cicero (106–43 BCE), author of *The Republic* and *The Laws*, followed by Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), who was influenced by religious currents, "calling for ethics and for compassion, fraternity, and cooperation in all matters of life, and addressing the problem of slavery" (Abdel Hadi Mohamed, 2005, p. 129). Roman thought overall was characterized by:

- Great diversity and richness, owing to the vastness of the Roman state and the multiplicity of peoples with differing religious, social, and cultural systems.
- A practical, applied, utilitarian orientation, with philosophical reflection closely tied to reality — the Romans excelled in establishing laws governing political life within the state, as well as in devising precise military systems adapted from Greek civilization, and in valuing scientific facts for their practical utility.

In truth, what the Romans contributed to social thought is quite modest compared to the Greek contribution, though they made a substantial contribution to the emergence of numerous legal and political systems across various societies, for "the Roman era's contribution to the development of social thought appears weaker than that of other eras; no Roman thinker rose to the level attained by Plato and Aristotle, yet this did not prevent Roman thinkers from undertaking the task of absorbing, interpreting, and disseminating Greek social thought throughout the world" (Nabil Abdel Hamid, 2009, p. 71).

Social thought among Christians: A fundamental shift occurred within Christianity after the death of Jesus, peace be upon him, as a new Christian thought began to develop, centered on the person of Christ, the nature of his mission, and the miracles and extraordinary events surrounding his birth, life, death, and ascension — extending into several doctrines owing to the inability of early Christian reason to comprehend these divine miracles. One faction believed in his divinity, another in the union of the human and divine natures within his person (the union of humanity with divinity), while yet another believed in his humanity while acknowledging his prophethood. A new era began in which the religion expanded across its various denominations, becoming, by the third century, the official religion of the Roman Empire. Numerous Christian thinkers emerged who offered social ideas cast in religious terms, representing three distinct historical stages:

1. **Saint Augustine** (354–430 CE), representing early Christian philosophy through his work *The City of God*, in which he addressed divine right and natural right, the legitimacy of political and religious authority, and the role of doctrine in ethics and humanism.
2. **Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274 CE), a contemporary of Islamic civilization at the height of its flourishing, by which he was profoundly influenced, as he was also profoundly influenced by Aristotle — indeed he may be considered a devoted disciple of his, employing Aristotelian logic in defense of Christianity and attempting to reconcile philosophy and religion. He was the first to introduce rational philosophy into the Catholic tradition, under the influence of Islamic philosophy — particularly Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd — and of

Aristotle, through what became known as the reconciliatory principles between philosophy and religion: "his philosophy amounted to an experiment aimed at achieving a general unification and a comprehensive system whose key was harmony and coordination" (Nabil Abdel Hamid, 2009, p. 90).

3. **John Calvin** (1509–1564 CE), representing the era of religious reform and emerging as a social reformer whose influence extended to social and political institutions.

Thus the emergence of Christianity contributed to changing many values, beliefs, and ideas, generating a cumulative intellectual structure and serving as a catalyst for the emergence of numerous thinkers, philosophers, and theologians who propagated its new principles and doctrines, giving rise to diverse visions, ideas, and new theories.

Social thought among Muslims: The great historical legacy that followed the Prophet's mission — peace be upon him — and his call to the message of Islam, along with the principles proclaimed in the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, cannot be concealed; these contributed significantly to the earliest seeds of social thought and its emergence on the scene, particularly given the fertile ground in which this religion arose — whether in terms of language, climatic conditions, or the anthropological characteristics of the Arab people. Arab-Islamic social thought may be traced to:

- The social heritage and Arab culture that preceded Islam.
- The teachings of the pure Islamic religion regarding social matters.
- The development of the sciences of doctrine, exegesis, jurisprudence, hadith, and language.
- The Islamic conquests of Persian and Berber lands and contact with non-Arab cultures and peoples.
- The translation into Arabic of foreign philosophical heritage, particularly Greek, during the second and third centuries AH / eighth and ninth centuries CE.

The distinctive advantages afforded to this social thought — the breadth of its geographic reach and the diversity of its environmental circumstances and factors — led to the maturation of Arab thought at various points in history; indeed, it achieved a distinction enviable both East and West, manifest through a scientific legacy, in all its branches, that shaped intellectual, social, and political structures and truly clothed them in a civilization capable of exerting powerful influence. In truth, the earliest seeds were marked by two traits — knowledge and action — which drove the rise of an Islamic civilization punctuated by periods of strength and weakness. As the scholar Franz Rosenthal observed: "The flourishing of Islamic civilization is among the subjects most deserving of reflection and study in history, for the astonishing speed with which this civilization took shape merits profound contemplation; it is a truly remarkable phenomenon in the history of civilizational emergence, one that might be called a miraculous civilization, for it was founded, formed, and took its final shape with extraordinary speed, in a very short time" (Emad Ajwa, pp. 51–53).

Muslims did not turn their attention to philosophy until centuries after Islam's earliest era, owing to contact with Greek civilization through translation on the one hand, and the emergence of theological schools engaged in religious and doctrinal questions with a distinctly philosophical bent on the other. Muslims made remarkable contributions across several scientific fields, particularly the human and social sciences, spread across the Islamic East and West — figures such as al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Biruni, Imam al-Ghazali, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khaldun, among others:

1. **Al-Farabi** (870–950 CE), known as "the Second Teacher" for his indebtedness to Aristotle and Greek philosophy, attempted through his concept of the Virtuous City to idealistically recover the glory and dignity the Islamic nation once possessed, at a time when it had, in his era, fragmented into warring petty states — thereby formulating a philosophical vision of the principles of politics and society.
2. **Ibn Miskawayh** (932–1030 CE), deeply devoted to anthropology and the study of the customs, civilizations, proverbs, and wisdom of peoples, and a notable contributor to linguistic, literary, and classical scholarship. Through his two works, *The Refinement of*

Character and *The Lesser Attainment*, he offered numerous social insights no less significant than those of modern scholars, including: ethics, which he considered to spring from the soul rather than the body, as the source of good deeds, acquired through upbringing and education; and society, which he regarded as a human gathering and social necessity grounded in ethics — an organic entity whose members work in solidarity to achieve goodness and happiness, relying on religion and justice, and which fragments when justice is absent and God's commands go unheeded.

3. **Ibn Rushd (Averroes)** (1126–1198 CE)¹, whose influence on the West was considerable, as Western philosophers took great interest in his commentaries on major philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. He held that philosophy and religion were two different paths to the same end.
4. **Ibn Khaldun** (1332–1406 CE) — this Islamic thinker's contributions cannot be confined to a few lines; his ideas and views gave rise to schools of thought and academic traditions that endure to this day. Still, we may note the key pillars of his intellectual and epistemological achievement, which advanced both Islamic thought and the human and social sciences:
 - He laid the first scientific foundations for sociology through historical-anthropological studies of Islamic societies, embodied in his science of *'umran* (social organization/civilization).
 - He concluded that social phenomena and events are governed by fixed laws, which he enumerated and classified so that they might be subjected to careful scrutiny and verification.
 - He made history a social science, aimed at investigating past events through an organized method, giving the historical method new vitality.
 - In his *Muqaddimah*, he outlined the methodological rules of scientific research, namely:
 1. The pursuit of knowledge: diversifying one's fields of scientific learning.
 2. Understanding the nature of human civilization: description and immersion in the environment under study.
 3. Doubt as a prelude to certainty: review and scrutiny to distinguish error from falsehood.
 4. Rational analysis: reliance on reason.
 5. Sensory verification: observation and empirical perception.
 6. Comparative logic: to uncover similarities and differences.
 7. Experimental logic: "The emphasis on experimentation was among the contributions that moved sociology out of the domain of social philosophy and into the domain of science" (Abdel Hadi Mohamed, 2005, p. 180).
 - He formulated a law of change governing the stages of society and the state, addressing all matters — religious, social, economic, political, and ethical. In sum, it may be said that Ibn Khaldun was the one who secularized/scientized the human and social sciences by establishing scientific foundations and rules, moving them from the page into the field of reality — a genuine revolution and a historic intellectual leap.

Social thought in Renaissance Europe: The pressures the Church exerted on European knowledge and thought gave rise to several passionate revolts against the conditions to which Europe had been reduced, particularly as this theological worldview always served one faction at the expense of a broad segment of society. This transformed into a cultural and intellectual movement that emerged in Italy at the start of the fourteenth century before spreading throughout Europe. It must be acknowledged that Renaissance thinkers harbored resentment toward the clerical Middle Ages, which had always opposed Greek philosophy on the grounds that it was pagan and irreligious. These thinkers felt they were being reborn by escaping the darkness of Christian

clergy after rediscovering the literature and philosophy of the Greeks and Romans — in a process of humanizing human thought that proceeded along two paths:

1. **The realist-scientific orientation:** "distinguished by its aspiration to achieve reform at the social level — reforming the conditions of human society — by identifying the characteristics and natures of human beings, defining the ends and goals they seek to achieve, identifying the obstacles that impede or hinder that achievement, and then seeking the methods and means capable of overcoming those obstacles" (Nabil Abdel Hamid, 2009, p. 149). Its foremost pioneers included Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Vico, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Malthus.
2. **The positivist-scientific orientation:** a process of renewing and modernizing social thought within a methodical scientific framework grounded in reason and experience — that is, scientizing the social sciences through scientific methods and moving beyond the purely theoretical into the empirical field. Its foremost pioneers included Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, and Karl Marx.

Third Subsection: Fields and Branches of the Human and Social Sciences

The fields and branches of the human and social sciences are interconnected and wide-ranging, and even the division between "human" and "social" varies from one university and country to another. This does not, however, diminish the diversity and richness of these fields and specializations, the most important of which are:

1. **Sociology:** the science that studies social phenomena related to human groups — "a descriptive, explanatory study of human societies as they appear across time and place, aimed at arriving at the laws of development governing these societies in their progress and change" (Ahmed Zaki Badawi, 1978, p. 402).
2. **Philosophy:** defined as the attempt to answer the fundamental questions posed by existence and the cosmos. It has been said: "Crafts are of two kinds: one aimed at attaining beauty, the other at attaining utility; the craft aimed solely at attaining beauty is what is called philosophy and wisdom" (Samih Dughaim, 1998, p. 813).
3. **Psychology:** encompasses the scientific study of the functions of the human mind and human behavior, employing scientific method — "it studies the aspects of an individual's activity as a living being who desires, feels, perceives, is affected emotionally, remembers, learns, imagines, expresses, wills, and reasons, and who is influenced by, and draws upon, the society in which he lives" (Ahmed Zaki Badawi, 1978, p. 336).
4. **Anthropology:** concerned with a holistic, comprehensive understanding of the human being — the study of humankind everywhere and at all times — branching into fields such as ethnography or ethnology.
5. **History:** defined as the science concerned with studying temporal events and the changes affecting all aspects of human society — political, social, economic, scientific, technological, medical, cultural, intellectual, religious, and military — that have influenced a given nation, and with offering explanations for the causes of these events.
6. **Political science:** one of the social sciences concerned with studying politics and its applications, and with describing and analyzing political systems, political behavior, and their impact on society.
7. **Demography:** the science of population statistics — the quantitative study of human groups.
8. **Communication science:** the field concerned with studying social phenomena related to media, and with interpreting messages and the exchange of symbols that facilitate communication through the media that support it.

Section Two: Scientific Research in the Social and Human Sciences

Katz said: "Whatever the subject of research, the value of the findings depends on the value of the methods employed" (Maurice Angers, 2010, p. 97). These sciences cannot achieve their scientific purpose without adopting scientific methods and tools, employing techniques of scrutiny and

analysis while respecting research ethics and literature through rigorous, objective scholarship. The research methodologies of these sciences have diversified, drawing on the historical and human legacy of social thought discussed above, which contributed at every stage — and across its various doctrines — to the development and unique distinction of the social and human sciences.

First Subsection: Research Methodologies in the Social and Human Sciences

Research methodologies in the social and human sciences refer to the approaches and steps a researcher follows to discover and study human problems; they differ from those used in the physical sciences in terms of method, tools, and outcomes. Method is thus the path toward producing research, and its importance lies in the fact that it:

- Helps the researcher practice organized, orderly thinking, enabling him to reach the desired objectives of his research so that it appears substantive and fulfills its aims.
- Allows the researcher to expand the scope of prior studies and draw on them in his own research, continuing from where earlier researchers and scholars left off.
- Allows the researcher to economize on effort and time while working on research problems or phenomena.
- Serves as the essential support and foundation for bringing about change toward modernity and progress.

These methodologies have diversified across the social and human sciences owing to the branching of fields and specializations, lending these sciences a scientific character as they moved from books and writings into social reality across its various subjects and dimensions. Several classifications have emerged, of which we take, by way of brevity, three (Aicha Arichi, 17/08/2017, Shams):

1. **Marquis's classification:** classified research methods as follows: the anthropological method, the case-study method, the philosophical method, the historical method, the survey method, and the experimental method.
2. **Whitney's classification:** divided methods into seven: historical, experimental, descriptive, philosophical, predictive, social, and creative.
3. **Good and Scates's classification:** divided methods into five: historical, experimental, descriptive, case study, and growth-and-development study.

Second Subsection: Some Scientific Methods Used in the Social Sciences

Topics in the social and human sciences vary in method according to the nature and form of the study, though some methods have been more commonly used, such as:

1. **The descriptive method:** regarded by many researchers as the method best suited to the social sciences. It is defined as "one form of organized scientific analysis and interpretation aimed at describing a specific phenomenon or problem and depicting it quantitatively, through the collection of particular data and information about that phenomenon or problem, its classification, analysis, and rigorous examination" (Ali Maamar, 2008, p. 287). This method aims to describe phenomena and is concerned with identifying the conditions and relationships between reality and phenomena.
2. **The experimental method:** a means of studying a research subject by subjecting it to experimentation, treating it as a study grounded in causality, and aiming to establish the relationship linking cause to effect between phenomena or variables — the experiment being conducted precisely to establish this causal relationship.
3. **The historical method:** based on studying past events, interpreting and analyzing them with a view to formulating general laws that help analyze present conditions and predict the future — describing historical events objectively within their temporal and spatial context, using an inductive approach that is predominantly critical and analytical, and uncovering the causal relationships of past events. Ibn Khaldun is regarded as a pioneer of this method.
4. **The comparative method:** focuses on comparing similarities and differences between social phenomena in order to discover the conditions and factors accompanying the

occurrence of these phenomena, whether within the same historical period or across two different periods.

Third Subsection: The New Scientific Thought

In Bachelard's view: "Ignorance is a fabric of stubborn, mutually reinforcing positive errors; it fails to recognize that intellectual darkness has its own structure, and every genuinely objective experiment must involve the correction of a self-originating error" (Khalil Ahmad Khalil, 1985) — contrary to the notion that knowledge springs from ignorance as light springs from darkness. This means that the historical trajectory of human thought, since humanity's appearance on earth, has in fact been a formative process spanning ages; even in the darkest eras this process never ceased, punctuated throughout by epistemological inquiries seeking the origin and roots of knowledge in the excavations of the human mind. This is what led us, in our present study, to delve into this human thought and its historical trajectory, and into the points of divergence and convergence along its long journey — shaped by deep debates over essence versus existence, universality versus relativity, and other intellectual questions and issues from which civilizations and schools of thought took root, influencing every domain and every aspect of human life.

It is hardly surprising, when discussing this social thought, to note the shifts and transformations that occurred across its historical stages, extending from Greek philosophy to the positivist orientation that embraced the idea of modernity as a process of humanizing all cognitive and scientific activity, on the grounds that:

- This being is exalted for possessing a reason that distinguishes it from other creatures, through which it can observe, experiment, and formulate laws.
- Human beings, by their very constitution, are capable of understanding this universe and harnessing it in their service, relying on scientific reason through research and discovery.
- Human phenomena and problems cannot be addressed outside knowledge, whose gateway is science, and whose path is inquiry and research.
- This reason is independent of any space or domain that would impose upon it references or prior judgments without review, situating it instead between rational logic and scientific method, in a process privileging human existence above all other considerations.

From this vantage point emerged this new scientific thought, which became the reference point on which the social and human sciences rest, through the definition of their specializations, concepts, terminology, and methods. In other words, what we have discussed above constitutes a necessary methodological groundwork for our subject, from which we now move on to studying the actual state of these social and human sciences as they have reached us through their intellectual and scientific trajectory in the Arab world generally, and in Algeria specifically.

Section Three: The Human and Social Sciences in the Arab World

Mohammed Abed al-Jabri said: "Without a new reason, no new independent reasoning [ijtihad] can arise." This is perhaps precisely what the Arab individual has struggled with in bringing about intellectual renewal and the capacity for reflection, as at least an attempt to understand this tangible world, and thereafter to reconstruct concepts and terminology as a documentary process bridging the past — with its great legacy — and the present, in a projection suited to current developments, and thereby to bring about an epistemological rupture whose task would be to protect Arab-Islamic culture through a process of recovery and intellectual reconstruction from which renewal and modernization could proceed. This was not possible, particularly given that the Arab-Islamic world, in some of its periods, suffered politically more than economically, which affected the development of the natural and social sciences alike.

First Subsection: The Human and Social Sciences Between Origins and Establishment

The decline experienced by the Islamic world since the Renaissance era led, at every stage, to intense conflicts and confrontations revolving around principalities and kingship — the last of which was the Ottoman state, marking the end of the Islamic empire and the beginning of an era of petty states, which in turn became vulnerable to every form of colonialism owing to the abundance of conflict and weakness, and because they were always a target for Western powers

seeking new wealth and markets. This, in turn, affected the social life of these Islamic countries, which shifted from leadership to subjugation in every domain.

This state of affairs persisted until the early twentieth century, when most Arab countries gained their independence and had no choice but to press forward and attempt to keep pace with Western nations, which were reaping the benefits of their scientific and intellectual revolutions — benefits reflected across every domain. The political elites newly formed in these Arab states hastened to establish national states along the European model, entrusting them with the mission of development and modernization, under motivating slogans such as "I care not where or when I die, so long as the homeland endures," as a driving force for progress, development, and renaissance. Factories and companies were built, and colleges, institutes, and universities were established as scientific and educational institutions tasked with enlightenment, the dissemination of contemporary civic values, the preparation of future cadres, and the training of a qualified workforce. This does not mean, however, that the sciences — social sciences included — were entirely absent during the colonial period; universities existed in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and other Arab countries where these sciences were taught. In fact, we can trace the stages of these social sciences along the following chronological sequence:

1. **The colonial-heritage stage:** studies and research undertaken during the colonial period of these countries — a hybrid of knowledge combining the historical trajectory of human thought and the positivist scientific orientation adopted by Western nations. A significant elite of Arab thinkers participated in this stage, exerting considerable influence on the trajectory of these sciences after independence.
2. **The stage of slogans and nationalisms**, which resulted from an attempt to build and modernize these states, placing them on the European track as the sole way out, while also carrying within it the effort to erase every trace of colonialism, both intellectual and practical.
3. **The post-1970s stage** (for the most part), during which these states undertook reforms — economic, social, cultural, and academic — particularly affecting universities and institutes, notably through the process of Arabization; the presence of the human sciences became confined to 48% of universities in the Arab world.

Arab thinkers held great hope for the academic establishment of the social sciences across various universities, as a means of overcoming the backwardness of Arab societies in the educational and scientific domains — particularly given that this elite was distinguished, and rightly so, by an enormous body of Arab researchers and thinkers, such as Mohammed Arkoun, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Ali al-Wardi, Zaki Naguib, and Mohammed Emara, among others. Yet this did not come to fruition, for several reasons embodied in a set of obstacles.

Second Subsection: The Principal Obstacles Facing the Human and Social Sciences

Mohammed Arkoun said: "It must be noted, conversely, that neither the reformists, nor the liberal intellectuals, nor the traditional bourgeoisie, nor the technocrats have yet succeeded in achieving the process of social and cultural integration and cohesion that the Western bourgeoisie managed to achieve during the industrialization period" (Mohammed Arkoun, 1996, p. 181). This owes to several obstacles:

1. **The philosophical character and epistemic accumulation** these sciences have carried since their inception — as discussed above regarding the historical trajectory of human thought — and their boldness in engaging with matters of knowledge and doctrine, which often took on an irreligious cast in the eyes of critics, brought them into collision with conservative currents that stripped them of their scientific character, branding them as speculative discourses corrupting the nation and its people. Yet if this nation is described in the Qur'an as the best nation brought forth for humanity — "You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah..." (Qur'an 3:110) — and given that our call is addressed to all peoples of the earth, this obliges us to:

- Excel in knowledge, which is itself an excellence in human thought — that is, to be people of our age. In reality, this has not occurred, owing to the epistemic rupture within the Arab mind, which has led it to live between two worlds: an idealized world carrying that historical legacy and glory it imagines it still inhabits, though the reality is otherwise; and a real world — that state of Arab paralysis from which it flees, out of the bitterness of failing to preserve this historical legacy and to harness it in a modernizing process serving the nation, proving its validity for every time and place.
 - Bearing this burden as "the best nation brought forth for humanity" requires, alongside intellectual excellence, an acceptance of the Other — meaning that we must understand the knowledge and thought surrounding us, so that we may then engage it in dialogue, debate, and persuasion, following the correct method; rejecting this human knowledge, from the Greeks to the Enlightenment, is in truth an abdication of our mission as bearers of the banner of knowledge.
 - These sciences are, in truth, not the extension of a single intellectual current, but rather the distillation of a vast period of human history — that is, they belong to all humanity, containing both benefit and harm, and it falls to the Arab mind to scrutinize and verify.
 - These human sciences have, in many instances, been directly or indirectly intertwined with numerous other scientific disciplines, in many respects.
2. **The first generation of educated elites** under colonial rule, who worked diligently to establish these human sciences, believing them a path out of the cycle of backwardness, was largely marked by cultural duality (secular/religious), in that:
- They fell into the trap of time — caught between the stages Western civilization had already traversed and their own uncertainty about where to begin.
 - Their absorption in the legitimacy of Western thought, in terms of scientific method and practical approach to achieving modernity, often led them to neglect Arab authenticity and cultural heritage, to the point of disavowal.
 - Applying Western scientific methods and approaches wholesale to Arab-Islamic societies constituted a considerable gamble, given the distinctive character and social nature of Arab thought.
 - The belief that the modernist project could only be realized through the elite meant that this insular thinking neglected numerous segments and currents of Arab societies, creating a rupture between a class that saw itself as enlightened and viewed others through the lens of backwardness — leaving it intellectually isolated or socially alienated.
 - This divide in orientation between intellectuals drawn to Western culture and conservatives was, in many Arab countries, exploited by political regimes — particularly given that many of these regimes were dictatorial or military in character — helping them secure their own interests by attempting to preserve the status quo, out of fear of the change that might threaten them. A UNESCO report published in 1999, titled *Social Sciences in the Middle East and North Africa*, stated that two of the most prominent factors shaping the trajectory and current state of the social sciences in the Middle East and North Africa are money and politics (Mohamed Zouaoui, 2010, pp. 191–192).

These obstacles — cultural, social, political, religious, and economic in nature — have had a substantial impact on the social sciences, reflected negatively in scientific output through research and studies.

Third Subsection: The Crisis of Research in the Human and Social Sciences

"One cannot attain knowledge except by learning how to think" — Confucius.

Authentic knowledge can only be attained through authentic scientific research. Despite the variation and diversity in the characteristics of authentic scientific research, its most widely agreed-upon features may be summarized as follows:

1. **Objectivity:** the genuine researcher is characterized by rationality, the suppression of all that is personal, intellectual impartiality, and commitment to scientific standards, avoiding judgments that stem from values and beliefs unsupported by evidence.
2. **Testability and precision:** the phenomenon or problem under study must be susceptible to testing or examination.
3. **Reproducibility of findings:** meaning that roughly the same results can be obtained if the same scientific methodology and research steps are followed again — since obtaining the same results deepens confidence in the accuracy of the procedures used to define the research problem and its objectives, and in the methodological foundations and stages applied.
4. **Simplification and concision:** one of the methods for achieving the pinnacle of innovation and renewal in a scientific field is logical simplification in treatment and approach, avoiding padding and tedious repetition.
5. **Purpose or objective:** scientific research must have a purpose, whether in terms of human heritage, new scientific contribution, or benefit to society.
6. **Prediction:** research findings need not be confined to addressing an immediate problem but may extend to predicting numerous conditions and phenomena before they occur (Obeidat, 1997, p. 10).

This brief treatment of the characteristics of scientific research aimed to recall the global scientific standards that research ought to meet. Given that these characteristics are no secret to any researcher in the human and social sciences, the challenge remains how research in these fields can rise to meet, or even transcend and surpass, these qualities. Through our review of numerous studies, reports, and papers, we have been able to classify the obstacles facing scientific research in the human and social sciences into three categories:

[Comprehensive diagram of obstacles to scientific research]

1. Scientific Obstacles

No high-quality scientific research can exist without a creative thinker or researcher — a causal relationship governed by several quality criteria and standards, which may be hindered by various obstacles, divided between:

1.1 Obstacles related to the researcher:

1.1.1 — Intellectual capital. As Ali (may God be pleased with him) said: "Every vessel is constrained by what is placed in it, save the vessel of knowledge, which expands." This is how one might always characterize the Arab-Islamic mind — strong in memorization and analysis — for a researcher cannot attain creativity without the faculty of retention, which requires broad familiarity and knowledge across all fields and specializations, rather than confining oneself to a single specialization and limited knowledge; one must instead possess wide and rich exposure. This intellectual capital is what determines the quality of research, or its shallowness and triviality, and opens the way for the researcher to be creative and outstanding in analysis and in enriching the subject at hand, since an abundance of information and facts is conducive to this.

1.1.2 — Subjectivity and objectivity. Objectivity may be achieved to varying degrees, given the difficulty inherent in human nature in shedding these constraints, especially since they have been part of the individual since childhood — which affects scientific research in that the researcher:

- Is influenced by the subject he studies, being part of it, which makes impartiality and neutrality difficult.
- Influences the phenomenon or research problem through his own particular understanding, thereby altering its nature.
- Renders research findings non-generalizable, varying from one researcher to another.
- Imbues his research with ideological, doctrinal, or partisan overtones and rigidity.

Many scholars in the human and social sciences — Durkheim foremost among them — have emphasized the necessity of treating the phenomenon as external to and independent of the researcher, since objectivity in scientific research renders the subject rich, humane, and a scientific contribution that can be relied upon and referenced. Should a researcher find it difficult to achieve this, he may at least mitigate it by regarding it as a matter of scholarly integrity and ethical commitment that binds him.

1.1.3 — Language. A report published by the Arab Observatory for Social Sciences in December 2015 detailed the rate of scientific publication by language. A researcher proficient in several languages benefits first from access to important references and ease of obtaining information; second, from the ability to publish, given that most international journals are published in English; and third, from enriching the Arabic language through new or revived terminology and concepts. All of this contributes to producing publications and scholarly work of high academic quality, even in Arabic, since multilingualism enriches Arab-Islamic thought and broadens access to knowledge.

1.1.4 — The crisis of intellectual ossification. Among the principles of Islam is the exhortation toward effective engagement with the outside world and the continuous development of human thought in pursuit of freedom, conviction, creativity, and progress. Yet Arab thought has lost these progressive, evolving characteristics, becoming instead frozen in time, entrenched within itself, living in the past, resistant to change, refusing dialogue, and sanctifying only its own ideas.

1.1.5 — The crisis of Westernization. A crisis of lost identity, in which one finds nothing but the ideas of the dominant Other, in which to dissolve entirely, disavowing one's own history and past and melting into a disconnected, rootless present — on the pretext that Western civilization is the dominant civilization in the world. We do not deny that the West is indeed the more advanced civilization, but a distinction must be drawn between modernization and Westernization; our goal should be modernization, so as not to erase our ancient heritage and culture — "Samuel Huntington responds to the claim that Western civilization ought to become the civilization of the world by drawing a firm distinction between modernization and Westernization" (Samuel Huntington, 1999, p. 12).

1.1.6 — The crisis of inferiority and imitation. A feeling of lost confidence that leads to a sense of inferiority and weakness before the Other, causing us to fall into the trap of literal, wholesale imitation, whereby our intellectual faculties for creativity, critique, and innovation begin to atrophy and disappear — particularly as we have attended more closely to Western heritage than to our own cultural legacy, and to the effort of reformulating, renewing, and modernizing it.

1.1.7 — The crisis of duality. A crisis that drives thought toward duality, holding contradictory ideas, so that our psychological engagement becomes impulsive and interest-driven, and we become incapable of free, courageous expression.

1.2 Obstacles related to the research itself:

Scientific research in the human and social sciences has characteristics that distinguish it from other sciences, demanding great precision and heightened sensory and intellectual alertness. Several difficulties arise from this in practice, including:

1.2.1 — The absence of sound objectives and motivations for research. This is the foremost characteristic of research in our Arab social sciences. What generally predominates in this research is not the sound explanation of Arab social problems and issues, nor the accurate prediction of their consequences for the future of Arab development, but rather the pursuit of career advancement on the academic ladder. This could have been leveraged toward developing scientific research output, but in reality the circumstances surrounding promotion procedures and the criteria governing them work against this.

1.2.2 — The nature of scientific research in the human and social sciences, characterized by:

- **The complexity of social and human phenomena:** social and human phenomena change from one state to another and are not fixed in place or time; they resemble one another and are difficult to subject to laboratory conditions, unlike the natural sciences — which sometimes makes them difficult to define, control, or classify, and their findings may

be negative and non-generalizable, requiring the researcher to have broad familiarity and comprehensive awareness through extensive reading and exploration.

- **Imprecision of concepts and terminology**, one of the difficulties facing researchers in the social sciences, who must always be scrupulous in verification and rely on the most credible references.
- **The relative nature of social and human theories**, in contrast to the natural sciences, characterized by rigor and precision, as they deal with inert matter subject to laboratory conditions, whereas the social and human sciences deal with human beings and societies characterized by complexity and instability.
- **Falling into formulaic patterns and failing to use varied methods**: this directs research toward rigid, predetermined paths, affecting the results. Researchers are called upon to take scientific risks, to explore, and to free themselves from prior constraints and preconceptions; research employing diverse methods and varied approaches inevitably leads to distinction and departure from the conventional, from uniformity, and from monolithic thinking. Durkheim, in his study of suicide, found that the prevailing hypotheses centered on standard of living, yet he arrived at new hypotheses centered on religious conviction.
- **Defining the social problem**: Wolsley Peter defines a social problem as "a component of social behavior that produces particular or general unhappiness or suffering, and thereby requires collective action to address it" — meaning that the first characteristic of a problem or issue is the stimulation of curiosity that arouses the researcher's creative faculties for observation and analysis, provided it is humane, studiable, and capable of contributing a scientific addition — it is the question from which further questions branch, enriching the subject from every angle and direction.
- **Weak links between the theoretical and applied dimensions**, or theoretical approach — resulting from several factors, whether a lack of training and field practice, or the failure to firmly establish key theories through precise and analytical understanding, enabling the researcher to apply them, extract points of coherence and dissolution relative to Arab reality, and then evaluate and formulate general laws.

2. Material Obstacles

These encompass everything related to the conditions of research — financial resources, scientific facilities, and academic centers — among the most important factors and causes of quality in scientific research:

2.1 — Obstacles related to funding. "A 2010 UNESCO science report indicated that Arab countries spend the least on scientific research and development in the world." There is no comparison to be drawn with the proportions achieved in developed nations: on average, "the world spends about 2.1% of its total national income on scientific research, equivalent to \$536 billion, of which \$417 billion is spent by developed nations — while the combined budgets of all universities and higher institutes across the entire Arab world have not exceeded \$800 million! Their spending on scientific research has not exceeded 0.5% of their gross national product" (Adnan Badran and Mounif Zoubi, 2010, pp. 251–277). Moreover, the social and human sciences receive only crumbs of this budget, given the priority accorded to the natural sciences — compounded by the irrational allocation of these budgets, whether in universities or research centers, marked by extravagance, entertainment, or travel expenditures, owing to the absence of genuine scientific oversight based on standards of quality and selectivity. Compounding this is the prevailing culture in Arab societies of relying on everything imported from abroad, and the failure to support local research capable of contributing to development and modernization within economic or social institutions — largely owing to considerations of self-interested privilege.

2.2 — Obstacles related to equipment and facilities. A report from the Arab Observatory for Social Sciences, published in December 2015, recorded 793 faculties across 296 universities offering social sciences, and 436 social science research centers across the Arab world — a figure

that bodes well for the future of these sciences. What remains is activation and the cultivation of a genuine scientific spirit through:

- Attention to creative human and technical capacity.
- Equipping and modernizing with the latest technologies, alongside actual training and practice.
- Coordination and cooperation between universities and laboratories.
- Achieving global quality standards through scientific methods.
- The problem is that scientific research budgets in the Arab world are not directed toward raising the quality or quantity of research or educational services, but rather toward manifestations of extravagance and complex administrative arrangements — hence the need to properly direct research funding, which can only be achieved through research ethics and a sense of academic responsibility toward knowledge and the nation.

3. Intellectual Obstacles

Many may not agree with the term "intellectual obstacles," yet in truth what the human and social sciences suffer from centers on the prevailing intellectual conformity in the Arab world, and the remnants of certain intellectual sediments and ossifications dominating the Arab scene, whether through governing regimes or the realities of society — always confined to the following:

3.1 — Obstacles related to the political dimension. The researcher in the human and social sciences finds himself in a state of intellectual and scientific alienation, with only limited choices: either emigration abroad, where he finds his intellectual and scientific aspirations fulfilled; or entry into ideological conflict with these overwhelming currents, living out an exhausting intellectual and moral struggle that leads to isolation and alienation; or resignation to that duality and contradiction, living caught between rejection and complicity with what transpires around him — owing to the absence of strategies and policies supportive of scientific research in Arab countries. Even where such support exists in limited form, the human and social sciences have not always been at the forefront of Arab political priorities, for several arbitrary reasons:

- That these sciences are remnants of colonialism — an illusion exploited by ruling regimes to suppress movements for change and intellectual reform aimed at achieving justice, equality, freedom, and an end to self-interested opportunism and oligarchy.
- That these are merely "sciences of discourse" that cannot be included in the modernist project — a claim that, if it indicates anything, indicates only intellectual deficiency and scientific ignorance; for any student or researcher will find that Europe's Industrial Revolution was itself the fruit of a preceding intellectual revolution, owed to thinkers and writers who called for change and for establishing the project of modernity and development.
- That these sciences carry orientations and ideas opposed to religion and doctrine, and are a source of social discord — a claim made only by those ignorant of Islam or by fanatics confined within their own narrow circle, for reflection, contemplation, and reasoning are precisely what we, as Muslims, are commanded to practice; a reader of the Qur'an will scarcely find a passage devoid of phrases such as "will you not reason," "will you not reflect," "will you not contemplate" — all pertaining to the use of reason. We are thus commanded to learn and to think, and our thinking must not be confined to what we already know; we are obliged to seek out what we do not know. This requires us to engage with everything human thought has produced, to benefit from it, and, at the same time, to renew and modernize our own cultural heritage within a civilizational, modernizing project.

It is regrettable to find this strange, traditionalist thinking persisting among Arab politicians, particularly given the importance and standing the West grants these sciences by comparison — bearing in mind that this intellectual rigidity is the product of methodical fanaticism and intransigence aimed at securing interests and privileges.

3.2 — Obstacles related to the environmental/social dimension. The social environment and composition of Arab society have not always facilitated the development of the human and social

sciences, owing to the ideologies and prevailing ideas discussed above — reflecting, in truth, a state of retreat within a closed intellectual circle that has distanced Arab societies from their lived reality, leaving them instead to inhabit a world of idealism, which has led to deterioration and decline across every domain. Compounding matters, we have failed to find the starting point or gateway toward civilizational advancement and progress, and have come instead to live this civilization only in our imagination — in addition to certain characteristics of Arab nature, both individual and collective, that complicate scientific research, whether in obtaining information or in addressing issues and topics considered intellectually taboo, owing to the dominance of custom and tradition, or to considerations of authority.

Conclusion

In truth, to discuss the state of the human and social sciences in Arab countries is to delve into the excavations of human thought and its manifold, diverse epistemic discourses. This universal human intellectual heritage cannot be ignored or dismissed, given that it has, at every time and in every era, contributed to bringing about ideological and intellectual revolutions from which reason has benefited across all its scientific and exploratory stages. How else are we to explain this Western scientific development and civilizational progress, which readily acknowledges that scholars and thinkers of the human and social sciences were instrumental in bringing about that epistemological rupture, in an attempt to remove the sediments that had clung to human thought across certain periods and impeded its function in research and development? It is no secret to anyone what the Arab world is experiencing in terms of intellectual, cultural, and scientific dependency — one that has killed the creative, innovative, and inventive faculties of the Arab researcher and thinker, for historical, political, ideological, social, and cultural reasons that have together shaped an Arab mind confined within a limited epistemic circle, blocking every path by which a civilizational project might be established. The diagnosis of this affliction besetting the nation has become commonplace, repeated in research, meetings, and conferences alike, without a genuine search for the alternatives and outcomes that might restore this Arab mind to the track of knowledge and research for the sake of change and development. If the Western experience succeeded through its thinkers and luminaries, who suffered under the tyranny of both sultans and religious authorities, why should this Arab mind not likewise succeed, through its thinkers and researchers, in bringing about an intellectual and scientific revolution — beginning where Arab thought left off centuries ago, while drawing on the Western experience, and re-examining and scrutinizing this vast Arab heritage as a historical imperative representing our doctrinal, intellectual, and cultural frame of reference? That is to say: if this Arab nation possesses this vast cultural and historical heritage, and undertakes to harness it in a process of modernization and reconstruction, while also benefiting from this universal heritage, it will inevitably bring about an intellectual revolution extending into every domain. The Arab researcher and thinker genuinely faces numerous obstacles on every front, yet is duty-bound to persevere with patience, without surrender — for Islam began with a single man, the Prophet, peace be upon him, before spreading across the inhabited world, uniting peoples and races, because his call was founded upon knowledge and action. The researcher who wishes to change the conditions around him and elevate his nation toward progress and civilization must possess patience, courage, and steadfastness. The matter, then, rests in the hands of this elite of researchers and thinkers, through the dedication of their efforts and their commitment to scientific knowledge and the benefit of society, and through relinquishing that self-interested, opportunistic tendency exploited by traditional forces and currents to pressure and bargain with this elite as a point of weakness. The researcher within society is like a firmly rooted, silent tree standing before every destructive current and traditional belief, asserting his logic and thought through argument and demonstration — not through intransigence and fanaticism — and this can only be achieved through the scientific method.

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¹ Translator's note: the source text gives Ibn Rushd's dates as 1126–1168; the more commonly cited dates are 1126–1198.