



Inaugural Lecture for the 2017–2018 Academic Year at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

Azmi Bishara


Introduction

While it may seem strange to emphasize the importance of the social sciences and humanities to an audience that has chosen to study and teach in these fields, I would hope that this can prove useful by me dealing with the subject from a different angle.

On Interdisciplinarity

It goes without saying that the two subjects of the social sciences and humanities are humanity and society. It is possible to be more detailed by breaking this down into social relations and their transformations, institutions, traditions, customs, ideas and their history, culture, the human self, and other topics. In the 15th century, the term *studia humanitatis* meant the study of classical literature. Renaissance thinkers in Italian cities used the term to describe studies related to man and his production and activity, in contrast to theology, which was concerned with divine matters.¹ One after another, the social sciences split away from philosophy and history writing following the transformation to capitalism. The 18th century witnessed intellectual activity that simultaneously dealt with the economy, society, and the structure of the human self. Sociology, as an independent discipline, emerged at the end of the 19th century, preceded by

¹ Azmi Bishara, *Religion and Secularism in Historical Context*, part 2, vol. 2, *Secularism and Theories of Secularization* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), p. 196.

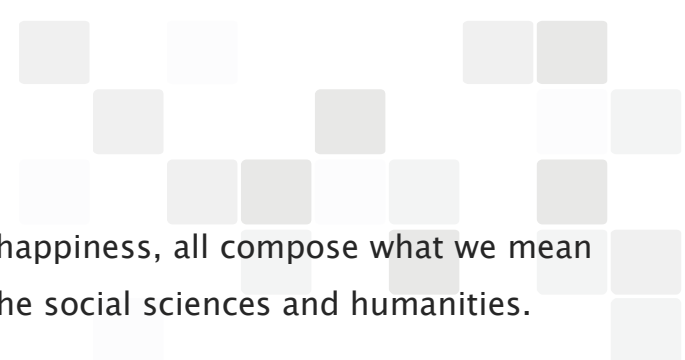


economics and followed by psychology. These sciences have continued to branch off until today.

We have witnessed some one hundred years of differentiation between the social sciences, which, as individual disciplines continued to develop their own self-understanding, and underwent further stages of division into ever-narrower fields. These come with their own journals, conferences, and professorial ranks immersed in self-justification, a struggle for survival, and the inevitable jostling for budgets within universities and academic institutions. There are many signs of crisis pushing towards the renewed reproduction of the space of these sciences through the intersection of the social sciences and humanities. This time, interplay and integration is sought with other disciplines within the same field, which is based on the same specialist knowledge and its exigencies.

When we founded the Doha Institute, we made the conscious decision to bring together the Social Sciences and the Humanities; in the conviction that *the social sciences are humanities and the humanities are social sciences*.

I would add that both the Social Sciences and Humanities are also historical sciences. Not only with respect to their historical origin, but also because man and society are creatures of history. By historical, I do not mean its Darwinian sense that applies to nature including climate, environment, and species, but I mean the history made by rational beings and presupposed thought, action, and consciousness, which makes it warrant the description practice. Labor, prevailing property relations, the emergence of institutions, relations of power and control, the conflict arising from interests and limited resources, the suppression of instincts to enable social life as a condition for civilization, traditions, customs, and culture, motivations like love and hate, contentment and ambition, jealousy

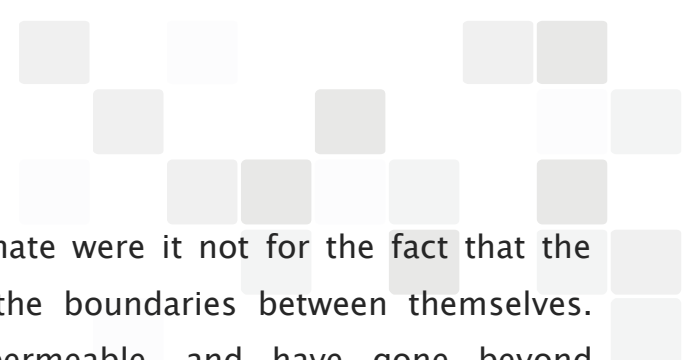


and envy, vice and virtue, and the pursuit of happiness, all compose what we mean by history, just as they form the subjects of the social sciences and humanities.

Ibn Khaldun wrote, “It should be known that history, in matter of fact, is information about human social organization, which itself is identical with world civilization. It deals with such conditions affecting the nature of civilization as, for instance, savagery and sociability, group feelings, and the different ways by which one group of human beings achieves superiority over another [...] it deals with royal authority and the dynasties that result (in this manner) and with the various ranks that exist within them. (It further deals) with the different kinds of gainful occupations and ways of making a living, with the sciences and crafts that human beings pursue as part of their activities and efforts, and with all the other institutions that originate in civilization through its very nature.”²

We also assume that the division of the social sciences and humanities into specialist disciplines is not in itself a mathematical certainty, nor the result of a scientific equation preordaining this division. Economics, sociology, anthropology, comparative literature, political science, international relations, and administration are all historical-cultural products that emerged in a specific cultural context at different historical periods. The boundaries between them are not, in my opinion, sacrosanct. At this point, the relevant question is whether physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, and biology also emerged in a specific cultural context at different historical periods. Are they not also an historical-cultural product? Why then, are we not skeptical about the boundaries between them, but rather we restrict our skepticism to the social sciences and humanities?

² Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, Part one of Ibn Khaldun’s history (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2010), p. 46. [Translation taken from Franz Rosenthal.]

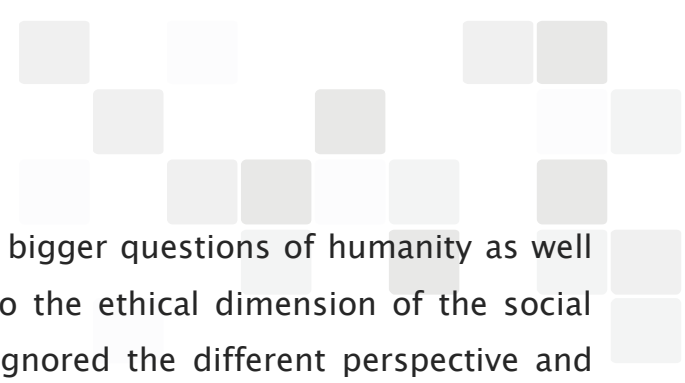


This question would undoubtedly be legitimate were it not for the fact that the natural sciences have already questioned the boundaries between themselves. They view these boundaries as more permeable, and have gone beyond disciplinary barriers, to an extent yet to be achieved in the Social Sciences. The dialogue between physicists, chemists, mathematicians, and biologists is an organized, deliberate, conscious, and institutionalized dialogue, and is itself wider in new disciplines and contributes to the achievements of each science individually. Organized domains have grown up between the sciences. All the latest discoveries in the various kinds of technology and engineering, medicine, neuroscience, nanotechnology, and genetics depend on this.

We are not biased against the social sciences and humanities, nor are we creating new worries and challenges for them with our insistence on interdisciplinarity. This is not only in the case of the liberal arts at first degree level, but specifically in graduate studies, during and after specialization. What is right for the natural sciences ought to be right, to a greater degree, for the social sciences and humanities. The boundaries between them are more arbitrary than those between the natural sciences, given that their subject is man and society, in which it is impossible to separate the economy from social relations, from culture, and from history. These fields are entangled in the life of society, and separating them and studying them in isolation is supposed to be a convention to facilitate understanding and research by investigating the same subject from different angles and casting light on different aspects of it. Such separation is not, however, a goal in itself. The picture must be completed by dialogue between the different disciplines and their research results. Researchers should be aware of this when conducting research so as not to, for example, make hypotheses in sociology based on total ignorance of the history of society or the social phenomena under study, or hypotheses in political science based on ignorance of economics and culture and so on.

What turns the division between disciplines into an aim is the academic establishment and its internal rituals, construct, and rules that are separate from their subject, and becomes an aim and community in themselves. Boundaries are institutionalized and with them border guards. Competition over reputation and fame within a semi-closed sub-culture, and the race for promotion and tenure by publishing in specialist journals, and adherence to the rules of publication all yield academic success and achievement in many cases. They institute a community and sub-culture that cultivates an illusion of self-sustenance. An internal politics operates in its corridors and unpleasant conflicts rage. However, it is important to note that these wars are not fatal. In fact, one of the positive outcomes concomitant to this process in advanced states (rarely in our countries until now) is the emergence of an environment marked by amicability, and an academic community whose prevailing ethos is highly appropriate for a life of dignity, more receptive of individualism, more pluralistic, and less fanatical. In short, this environment is more liberal than the national societies that they live within, to an extent that their liberalism irritates the populist political forces in those societies. These forces consider the social sciences and humanities and their specialists as talkative and ornery parasites living at the taxpayers' expense.

The intended interdisciplinarity and dialogue between disciplines is not a fad or an external diktat, but an interpenetration of the fields in society, thought, and culture. There is not enough space here to give examples of how economists have reached erroneous results by neglecting the prevailing culture in a society. Similarly, sociologists have reached dangerous conclusions by making generalizations in ignorance of the history of the society they are studying, and historians have reduced history to conflicts between states and politicians and their succession over power, marginalizing societies and social and cultural relations. Political scientists and international relations experts have failed to provide us with a deeper understanding than their journalist colleagues can provide because they have neglected economics, history, and culture in their research. All these disciplines have also steered away from dialogue with




philosophers and lost vantage points on the bigger questions of humanity as well as chances to formulate questions related to the ethical dimension of the social sciences in general. As a result they have ignored the different perspective and important skills developed by philosophy over its history to hone concepts and terminology.

The Sciences as Tools and Thinking about Ends

I shall now return to the importance of the social sciences and humanities. Here I should answer why these fields irritate politicians, technocrats, and bureaucrats, who are quick to turn popular culture against these disciplines with the claim that their actual returns are unclear. There are ongoing attempts to render societies ignorant, even in spite of the instrumental need for these sciences in administration, policy planning, budget planning, and treating the social and psychological problems arising from modern development.

In response to the skepticism of these bureaucrats in their own “practical” language, it should suffice to note that the majority of politicians, civil servants, and administrators, including in those in the policy, production, and service sectors, are graduates of the social sciences and humanities.

It is impossible to imagine the apparatus of the state, production facilities, and the institutions of society in our times without graduates of the social sciences and humanities, as well as the administrative sciences. This is for a simple reason – graduates in these fields can read and analyze facts and think critically about them, and perhaps (or so one hopes) write research on them. This is exactly what



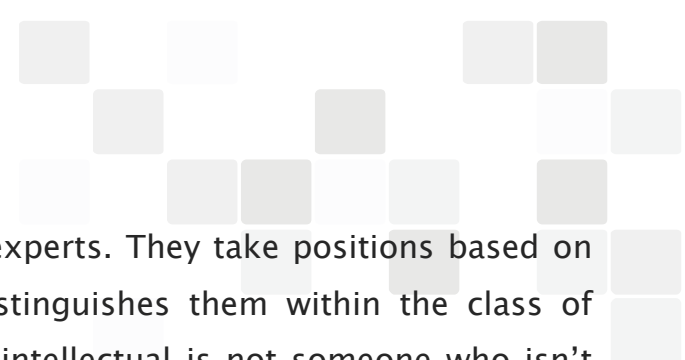
any leader at all levels requires from its employees in any field, from journalism to policy making.

The rumor that graduates in sociology, anthropology, history, journalism, media, and politics struggle to find work is based on untruth. These graduates in fact find employment quickly, not because of their specialization itself, but because of their acquired skills (*techne*) in reading, analysis, and posing apposite questions. They also find work in the academic field because of their capacity for critical theoretical thought (*episteme*) and producing research.

In the lofty positions that we aspire to in our disciplines, the specialist in one of these sciences can combine instrumental skill and theoretical thinking to move into phronesis³—practical wisdom or prudence (according to the Aristotelian typology)—which combines skills and theoretical knowledge, and thought about means and ends. This in itself is not an exclusive qualification for working in one of the institutions mentioned above, but does represent one of the most important elements of the formation of the intellectual. This goes beyond expertise in using the tools to encompass thinking about the ends for which expertise and its tools are employed. Such thinking about the social and political ends for which expertise and skills are harnessed, and raising questions about these ends, is the bridge linking the specialist in the social sciences and humanities with the public sphere and its issues.

Society is in dire need for the active presence of a class of intellectuals who take positions on public affairs based on a comprehensive view of society and its

³ See the chapters on rational virtues in Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed, part 2 (Cairo: GEBO, 2008), pp. 122-154. Please note that the translator uses other terms in his translation. See also: John W. Well, “Phronesis and the End of Liberal Arts”, <http://4humanities.org/2014/12/phronesis-and-the-end-of-the-liberal-arts/>



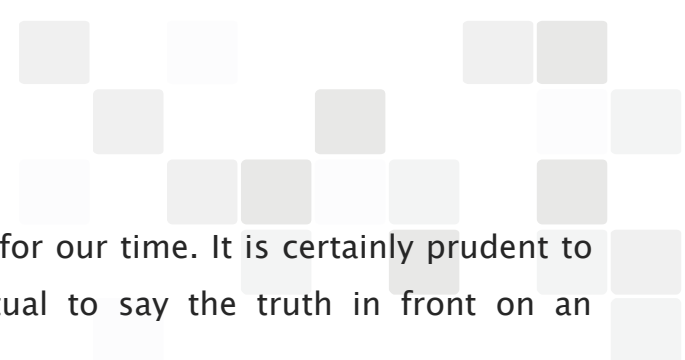
issues, distinguishing them from specialist experts. They take positions based on expertise and specialization, which also distinguishes them within the class of advocates. As I have written elsewhere, the intellectual is not someone who isn't specialized or who knows a little about everything without knowing much about anything. Such a description might be valid in the populist definition of the intellectual (with all the contradictions such a phrase bears).

There is a real need for public intellectuals with specialist expertise in societal issues, who can progress from skills to theory, and in turn, to ends. They should take positions on issues concerned with the public sphere. This is irrespective of whether politicians and experts working in their service are aware of this need or not. In general, they tend to deny it.

Regarding the relationship with politics and politicians, we hope that graduates of the social sciences and humanities and public administration at the Doha Institute will understand politics as the intensification of public affairs, and will lean towards Socrates rather than Thrasymachus⁴ in their approach to ruling politicians⁵. That is to say, they will reject the idea that might makes right and that justice is in the interests of the strong. In that ancient dialogue on justice, we note that arriving at the concept of government precedes practice, practice being what is held to account by virtue of the concept. That is, the extent to which it conforms to the concept. Irrespective of the nature of government, it should be held to account according to a single criterion, namely whether it operates in people's interest or not, and not whether it operates in the interest of the strong. And although we do not know the accuracy of the *Hadith* "The greatest jihad is a word

⁴ John W. Well, "Phronesis and the End of Liberal Arts", <http://4humanities.org/2014/12/phronesis-and-the-end-of-the-liberal-arts/>

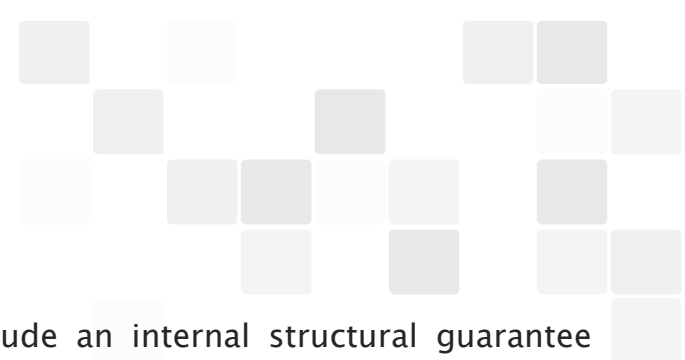
⁵ Plato's Republic, Book 1, Part 3, translated by Fouad Zakaria (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi lil-Tiba'ah al-Azhar, n. d.), pp. 17-24.



of justice in front of a tyrant”, it is a maxim for our time. It is certainly prudent to add that it is incumbent upon an intellectual to say the truth in front on an ignorant crowd too.

According to the Platonic method, justice, which is “what ought to be the basis of government”, is not included in a value system external to the concepts, that is in a moral judgment of the ruler, but resides in the concept of government itself, once it is correctly and precisely formulated. According to this hypothesis there is a critical potential in the concept itself, that is, in the theory, since the ruler is held to account according to the concept of government. It has been shown that dispensing in practice with moral government and including “what ought to be” in the same concepts when they are in the ideal state of “perfection” is an important critical weapon, but it is also at risk of being easily turned into a dangerous ideological weapon. Pure rationalism, in attested cases, has formed a theoretical structure for totalitarian regimes and an intellectual justification for great crimes. During a process of forcing reality to fit the concept adopted by the ideology, “What ought to be” has been imposed on society by force because the ruling regime possesses the absolute truth in its ideology.

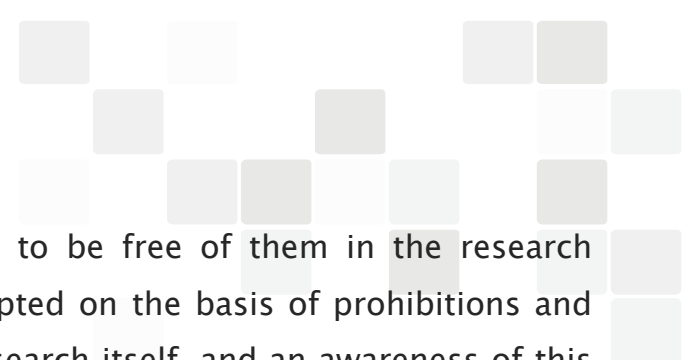
From another angle, the separation of ethical government and thinking about ends from science led to other dilemmas. The scandalous use of science in general, solely as a tool of control and the exploitation of skills acquired in the social sciences and humanities to serve unjust ends and sometimes to directly contradict itself, is spreading ignorance rather than knowledge. In our times, the means to publicize ignorance are in competition with the means to publicize knowledge. There is no need to list examples of this; these days the matter has become well known and routine.



Do the social sciences and humanities include an internal structural guarantee against such use of the skills they provide? Are workshops on professional ethics enough to confront this? Have some of the ethics of academic research and its perils in themselves not become rules and skills necessary to avoid involvement in the ethical mistakes of academic activity? This is despite engagement being the aim of ethics, including professional ethics, and I mean engagement in the interest of society and humanity.

The answer is categorically no. The guarantee, in my opinion, is that morality resides in the person not the discipline. With the foundation of the social sciences as professional specialisms from the 19th century onwards, and the shift to capitalist societies and the resulting shocks, in addition to the growth of the educated class and the various professions that resulted, their founding fathers, along with their natural scientist colleagues, affirmed the need to separate science from normative values, be they ethical or aesthetic. Science is value free, or *werturteilfrei*, according to Max Weber. One of the sources for this intellectual separation goes back to Kantian philosophy separating the judgement of pure reason and the judgement of practical reason, and between the judgements of science and the judgements of morality in a kind of rupture with the method mentioned above from Plato's *Republic*.

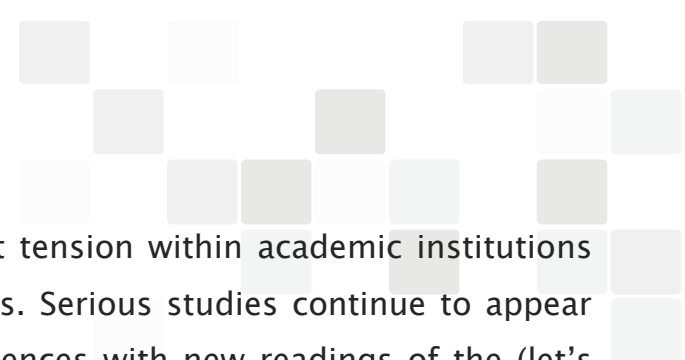
According to these precepts, we must study scientific methods, their usage, and ways to collect and analyze facts, and how to draw conclusions from these facts with the greatest scientific objectivity and impartiality. Whether or not these conclusions are desired and whether or not they confirm prior hypotheses is irrelevant. This is as far as the task of scientific method goes. Normative values, including ethics and the cultural context, can govern how we raise questions and choose subjects, as well as governing how results are used. It is not possible to



easily exclude value judgements there, nor to be free of them in the research process by following formal procedures adopted on the basis of prohibitions and taboos alone. Normative values permeate research itself, and an awareness of this is a condition for ongoing tension about the relationship with them. This is a healthy tension.

Let us assume we are liberated from value judgements by the method– from the collection of data to the conclusion. On the level of the university and research institutions in advanced countries, which serve as a model, the choice of research subject and the way questions about it are framed is linked to the agendas of ministries, funders, and academic research foundations. It is also linked to the prevailing political mood expressed in the media and various means of communication. This also applies to how research results are used and the ends they serve.


In disreputable cases, these factors also govern how conclusions are drawn. Even before that, they determine the selection and interpretation of facts in the practices of those fearful of losing out on funding, and in the use of language and terminology in the formulation of questions, hypotheses, and results. Science uses a vocabulary laden with normative meanings that engender political conclusions. This cannot be completely avoided, and sometimes it is enough to be aware of their presence in one's research and to take their effect into account and alert the reader to them. Recently we have witnessed a debate over the effect of using terms such as coup, terrorism, racism, extremism, stability, revolution, left and right, as well as political Islam, occupation, disputed territories, Indians, indigenous inhabitants or aborigines, settlers, negroes and blacks, African Americans, minorities, and others, even after they have been defined for research purposes.



These familiar occurrences cause permanent tension within academic institutions between researchers, politicians, and funders. Serious studies continue to appear that supplement the record of the social sciences with new readings of the (let's call them) ideological factors which governed the research of their predecessors and with new readings of history. This is an ongoing process in the development of the social sciences, for science can critique itself, and this too is one of the elements that differentiates it from myth. Did Karl Popper not distinguish science as forming its own propositions and laws, that is, as falsifiable generalizations inferred from particular cases?

There is however a structural element provided by the social sciences and humanities that might not, according to Kant and Weber, bridge the vast theoretical gap between scientific judgements and normative values, but make harnessing science as a tool in the service of the dominant ideology difficult. This is the critical dimension of the social sciences and humanities, which is actualized in resorting to the tools used to deconstruct mythology and ideology. Even the existing political and legal structures, official histories, and other things are deconstructed to reveal: 1) the historical origin of social, political, and intellectual phenomena, so as to remove their mask of eternity; 2) relations of power and domination, and the conscious and unconscious interests that these have produced and justify; 3) their social, cultural, psychological, etc. function; and 4) concealed and unspoken facts.

This critical stance, or tendency, is not a defined method, rather it is a patient scientific practice using theoretical tools. It may be available in every methodology in the social sciences and humanities when taken to the analytic extreme in the above four critical tasks without giving up on the theory. Criticism does not relinquish the scientific method, and so remains within the framework of science. It does however play a role that irritates the dominant powers and in opposition to



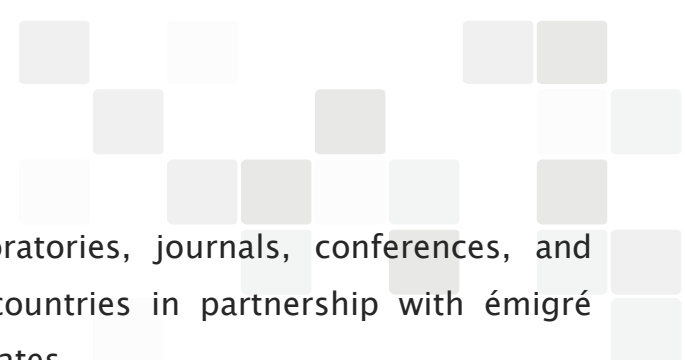
their tools to counterfeit reality, camouflage oppression, fetishize social relations, and mislead people.

There is therefore an irritating, in a positive sense, critical function pursued by the social sciences and humanities, if their students are aware of the critical dimension of theory. In this case, theory becomes a tool to critique the prevailing ideological structures, before and after moral judgement are made.

On the marginalization of theory

One of the major predicaments of the social sciences and humanities in states that do not have a nation-building project, is the marginalization of the theoretical sciences in general and lack of financial investment and investment of effort. These states are a project for power i.e. preserving the ruling regime and these mainly authoritarian states and/or economically undeveloped states that do not possess the ability and/or desire to maintain large academic institutions that harbor theoretical sciences . Civil society is also weak and does not support such sciences, because it does not rely on a process of production outside the state sector.

The absence of the political will to develop the social sciences and humanities, or the presence of the political will to suppress them, is accompanied by a culture averse to the theoretical sciences. I do not mean just the social sciences and humanities, but also the theoretical natural sciences. These states are content to import what they require of these sciences for the purposes of teaching professions such as engineering, medicine, law, accountancy, and management, all of which are professions based on theoretical sciences. As for the theoretical

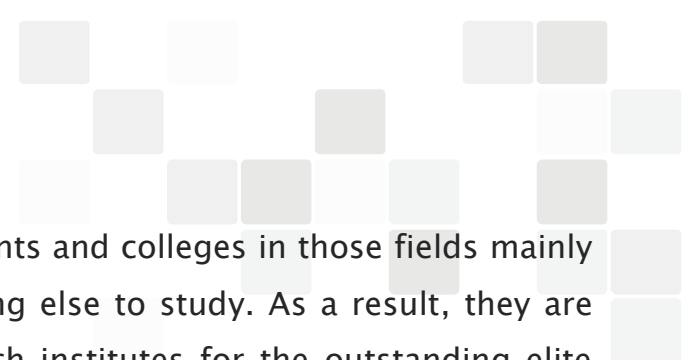


sciences with their research centers, laboratories, journals, conferences, and prizes, these grow and flourish in other countries in partnership with émigré researchers and scientists from the former states.

One should thus be prudent when claiming any special mistreatment when complaining about the absence of the necessary attention for philosophy, sociology, psychology, and comparative literature in the Arab states and many developing countries and the lack of investment in those sciences. Physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics are also of little interest in those states and do not enjoy support or investment. When some specialists in political science and history are encouraged, it is often to prepare selective history for nation states. This task is to prove that history naturally leads to the current ruling regime with the inevitability of water flowing downhill, or to justify the policy of the regime and its conflicts with local and regional opponents. It is for them to enumerate to us the dangers of freedom, justice, and dignity and the threat posed to our health, and to explain to us the calamities waiting to happen to us if we were to think of a life without tyranny, or were bold enough to think of equality before the law.

There are too many examples to provide, not just in a lecture, but also in entire university courses. In contrast, Arab universities do not lack in efforts made by individuals and institutions to row against the tide. One of our tasks in any project for renaissance is to acknowledge the value of these efforts and build upon them. The significant Arab research that has been published and is being published in such circumstances must be dealt with respectfully and those who achieved it granted the appreciation they deserve.

In general, Arab universities are content to teach the theoretical sciences, including the social sciences and humanities, within a limited scope, but they do

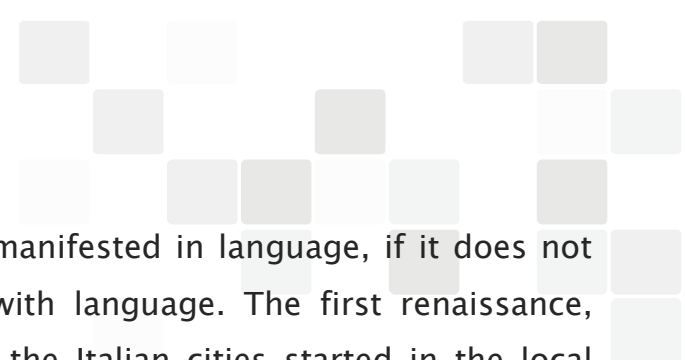


not produce them or add to them. Departments and colleges in those fields mainly attract students who have not found anything else to study. As a result, they are more akin to teaching colleges than research institutes for the outstanding elite that is supposed to specialize in them; of the kind we hope that an institute specializing in graduate studies and whose vision stresses research would incorporate. Even in teaching itself, the research component, critical thinking, helping the student acquire the skill of reading theoretical sources, collecting data, analysis, and the production of research papers should be stressed.

The Doha Institute for the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Public Administration is a historic opportunity to build a different project to those prevailing in the social sciences, humanities, and public administration, by providing opportunities for full-time devotion to reflection and research in an atmosphere of academic freedom, encouragement of critical thought, and fruitful interaction between researchers, professors, and students. I hope I have explained above what we mean by interdisciplinarity, since it would not be right for students specializing in any branch of the social sciences, humanities, and public administration to graduate from the Doha Institute without having some idea about the main issues in the social sciences on a global level, the history of ideas, and the major issues preoccupying Arab societies.

***Al Nahda* (Renaissance) and language**

Our aim is to participate in building an Arab renaissance project at a time when we seem so far from it. The highest ambition for some of us has been limited to waiting to hit rock bottom so that our free fall comes to a stop.

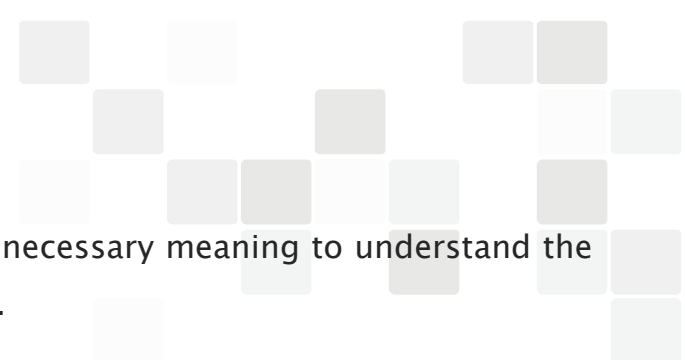


In any cultural context, renaissance is also manifested in language, if it does not start there. A person's awakening begins with language. The first renaissance, from which derives the term *Al Nahda*, in the Italian cities started in the local language, but not without its pioneers knowing other languages, including Arabic in some cases. The same applies to other renaissances such as the French, the English, the German, the Chinese, and the Iranian.

In the case of what is termed the humanities, it is almost impossible to think about renaissance without a linguistic renaissance, because language is an essential element of the humanities in their classical definition. If the social sciences and humanities are not proficient in the language of the society and human beings they study, and are unable to formulate in that language, then they lose a large portion of their research tools. I am not saying that there is some essential difference between societies, and that the main tools of the sciences are not applicable to Arab societies. I am in fact saying the opposite, that it is necessary to study the achievements of the social sciences and humanities everywhere, and be proficient in their main language in our age, which is English. However, is it reasonable for us to have a renaissance in the social sciences and humanities in the Arab nation without the Arabic language?

Translation is undoubtedly essential in its capacity as both a transmitter of texts and a producer of culture and science. But is translation enough?

The terminology of the social sciences was cultivated in cultural contexts like European industrial cities in the second half of the 19th century, or post-industrial societies at the current period (and "post" here subsumes what came before, that is what comes after industrial society subsumes industrial society just as the post-modern subsumes the modern). The literal translation of these terminologies is

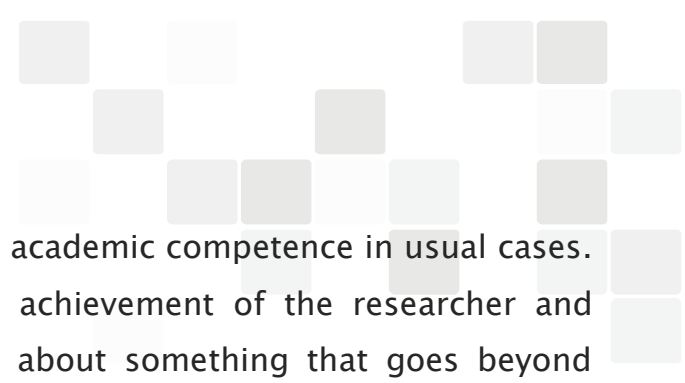


thus not sufficient and does not provide the necessary meaning to understand the social and cultural structures of our societies.

The test for the growth of social sciences in the Arab context—I do not say Arab social sciences—and the challenge of contributing to these sciences on the global scene is related to our ability to cultivate terminology and concepts specific to our reality, and not just adapt concepts from other contexts, despite the importance of that immense effort. Additional concepts and tools of analysis should be derived in the Arab context, used to understand it, and exported to other cultural contexts. Those researchers can then determine whether they can borrow from them for their own reality. In this way, real dialogue emerges, be it asymmetric, and we must admit that currently we are not equal. I am not talking about inequality between individuals, but about equality between the level of social science development in the Arab world, Europe, and North America.

Arabic is also necessary for the social sciences and humanities scholars to be able to engage in dialogue with their society, or at least address the well educated within society. This means going further than a few hundred readers of a specialist journal unavailable to the educated Arab and the insistence on only writing in a language he or she does not read, or in a version of Arabic he or she does not understand. Recently, I have read Arab research papers on ethics that I myself did not understand. I thought about the moderately educated Arab whom we wish to understand what we write. This is especially important in the field of ethics, as the most important result of the crisis we are enduring is the chaos of ethical standards, which has in turn become a main factor in prolonging the crisis.

I say this in full knowledge of the importance of specialist journals and participation in the global academic community by specialists in a specific subject,

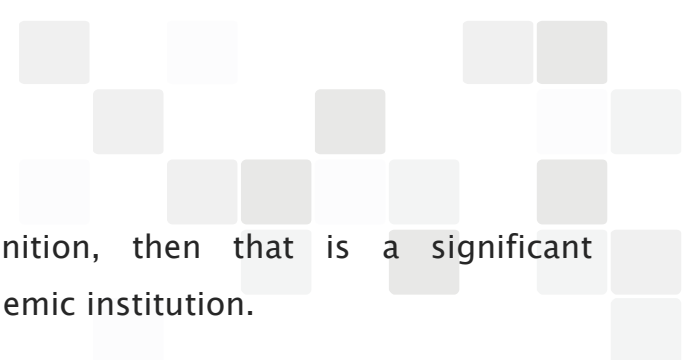


and equally the objectives related to defining academic competence in usual cases. We need agreed standards to evaluate the achievement of the researcher and university professor. However, I am talking about something that goes beyond promotion to deal with the ends that I discussed. That is, the renaissance in the social sciences in the language of our society.

Conclusion: On scientific method and ethical stance

We are in a time of the failure of the Arab dictatorial regimes and the depletion of their sources of legitimacy and the renaissance of the Arab peoples everywhere behind the calls for justice; dignity and freedom. We have witnessed the extremely violent reaction of the old forces against this and the revelation of deadly drawbacks of spontaneity in the setback of the uprisings against tyranny. We are in a time when some societies disintegrated into their primary elements as soon as they clashed with the ruling regimes intertwined with social structures. We discover that their primary elements are not in the main individuals but groups. We are in an environment that marginalizes ethical standards and replaces them with, in the best cases, ideologies, direct opportunistic benefit, or nothing— a vacuum, and in the worst cases, nihilism. Given all of that, we must locate our research agenda by ourselves and stop chasing the footsteps of Western academia that begins there as innovations and reaches us as fashions.

We must listen to the rhythm of the reality we are living, and investigate from every angle the large testing ground surrounding us, which any researcher from the West would hope to enter. This is where our global contribution begins, not in thinking about it (that is in the contribution itself) but in thinking about the specific phenomena that we want to understand. Obtaining American or European recognition is not a goal, but a contribution to understanding our societies. If that

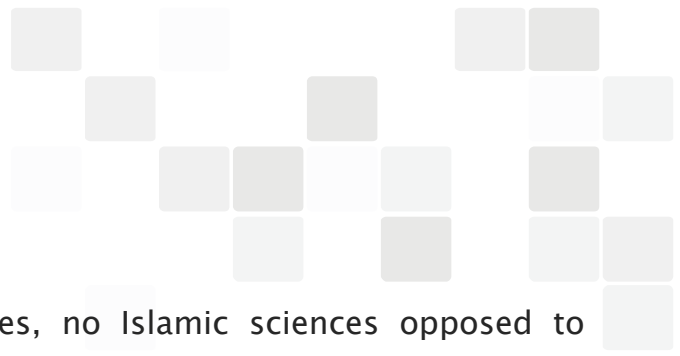


is accompanied with international recognition, then that is a significant achievement on the level of building the academic institution.

If our goal is knowledge production, it is not enough for our societies to be simply case studies, or testbeds for the conceptual apparatus that reaches us, normally belatedly, from Europe and North America. From another perspective, it is not permissible for us to fall into a counter-extremism, of rejecting the universality of science, logic, and rationality as an expression of Western colonial, male chauvinist, or white Eurocentric discourse. We should not begin with the scientific refutation and legitimate critique of the ideology inherent in some theories imported from the West and end up with mystical musings.

Let us always remember that the critique of modernity in societies that experienced modernity has another meaning than criticizing modernity in a premodern society. The implications of the critique of democracy and its predicaments in a democratic state are different to the critique of democracy in a society living in the shadow of tyranny.

Equally, the critique of science can only be undertaken in a scientific discourse, using scientific tools, lest it become an anti-scientific critique. We should, for example, use scientific tools to uncover the colonial structures in our countries alongside ethical criteria when judging colonialism. Sadly, some turn the task into stitching together a post-colonial science opposed to the colonial sciences, and therefore believe they have undertaken revolutionary work that frees them from an ethical position. The result is a lack of knowledge, at the same time justifying to themselves their lack of an ethical stance on oppression, because they imagine that they have done their moral duty for no other reason than having practiced this presumed science.



There are no black sciences and white ones, no Islamic sciences opposed to orientalist sciences, no feminist sciences opposed to masculine ones. The challenge, however, is for us to take an ethical stance against the forces that practice all the kinds of discrimination mentioned above. We must reveal, by means of a rigorous critical scientific method, their ideological influence and the impact of their value judgements on the social sciences and humanities.

In this spirit, we set our agenda based on the needs of Arab societies. We research society and state. We research the end of the tribe and its reproduction by tribalism. We research the end of the Sect and its reproduction by way of sectarianism in the current circumstances. We research class, urbanization, social assimilation, migration, rationalism, metaphysics, Salafism, morality, the roots of authoritarianism, democratic transformation, and the setbacks of democratic transformation, and so on. All the while, we remain aware that we are working for renaissance in a time of decline. Isn't that the definition of renaissance? Hegel wrote in the *Philosophy of Right* when stressing the revival of philosophy at the waning of a historical epochs before the dawn of a new era that "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."