CHAPTER 12

Religion, Society, and Culture in Malik Bennabi's Thought

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Introduction

This chapter attempts to provide a condensed account of the philosophical and sociological thought of the twentieth-century eminent Algerian thinker Malik Bennabi (1905–73). It focuses on his views pertaining to religion, society, and culture. The present chapter consists of three main sections that are prefaced with a short biographical sketch outlining the major stages of Bennabi's life and career.

As will become clear in the pages that follow, Bennabi's works in general and his *The Qur'anic Phenomenon* in particular stand out as one of the most well-informed intellectual responses to, and engagement with, modern Western philosophical and scientific thought. A sense of the unity of human history, a critical and profound philosophical bent of mind, and a sharp awareness of the cross-cultural and intellectual currents at work in the West and the Muslim world: these are major traits of his treatment of various theological, moral, social, and cultural issues. These features are consolidated and given full scope by what can be seen as a visionary passion driving toward transcending the prevailing thought categories, not through shallow and haughty ideological attitude, but through a conscious and creative intellectual commitment to analysis and systematic theorizing. This, it seems, is what enabled Bennabi to boldly question some of the fundamental intellectual premises of modern Western culture and civilization and to realize some of their grave epistemological and moral consequences, while at the same time appreciating the achievements and the benefits it has brought to mankind.

Malik Bennabi: A Biographical Sketch

Without indulging in any critical considerations as to the insufficiency or non-verifiability of Bennabi's autobiography,[1] there seems to be a general agreement between those who have written about him on the major events and stages of his life

and career. In this sketch we shall provide those major events and stages without any elaboration.

- 1905: Born in January in Constantine, Malik Bennabi belonged to a family of established religious tradition. He received his primary Qur'anic and French schooling at the small city of Tébessa (on the Tunisian–Algerian border) where his father worked as an officer in the Islamic judiciary.
- 1921–5: Bennabi completed his secondary studies at the madrasah or Lycée Franco-Arabe of Constantine. During this period he came into contact with the nascent reformist current launched by Shaykh 'Abd al-Hamid ibn Bādis.
- 1925: First attempt to pursue his graduate studies in France, unsuccessful due to lack of financial means.
- 1927: Following many attempts to find a job, Bennabi was finally appointed as assistant officer to the *sharī'ah* court of Aflou in the far western province of Oran.
- 1928: He was transferred to the court of Chelghoum Laid (in the eastern region of the country) from which he resigned following a dispute with a French clerk of the civil court of the small town.
- 1929: Bennabi embarked on an unsuccessful business enterprise.
- 1930: The centenary of French occupation of Algeria. With his father's financial support, Bennabi went to Paris to continue his studies. Following a politically motivated rejection of his application to join the Institut des Langues Orientales de Paris, he joined a polytechnic school from which he graduated as an electrical engineer in 1935.
- 1931: He joined the *Association des Jeunes Chrétiens*, a Christian youth society in search of spirituality and pious conduct. On the platform of this society, he gave his first public talk under the title "Pourquoi somes-nous musulmans?" (Why are we Muslims?) In the same year, he became the vice-president of the Muslim Students Association of North Africa. Under the pressure of difficult financial conditions as a result of unemployment and his family's worsening economic situation, Bennabi made unsuccessful attempts to migrate to the Hejaz, Egypt and Albania.
- 1938: An old friend from Tébessa put him in contact with an association of immigrant Algerian workers at the city of Marseille looking for a person who could conduct literacy tuition for them. Bennabi became the director of the Centre Culturel du Congrès Musulman Algérien founded by the Association. The success of the center attracted the attention of the French authorities, which soon closed it down after a few months of intense activity.
- 1940: Following a call for competitive examination by the Japanese embassy in Paris, Bennabi submitted to the latter a study on Islam and Japan.
- Bennabi's life conditions worsened due to World War Two and the total breakdown of relations between Algeria and France after November 1942. He was compelled to accept a job in Germany. There he managed to write his first and seminal book *Le Phénomène Coranique* (*The Qur'anic Phenomenon*) – the manu-

script was subsequently destroyed during an air raid. Rewritten from memory, the book was first published in 1946 in Algiers.

- After the liberation of France and as a result of a cabal mounted by the mayor of Dreus where he was living, Bennabi and his wife, a French convert to Islam, were put under police custody.
- From 1946 Bennabi started his unbroken career as a writer.
- 1947: He published his only novel *Lebbeik* depicting the spiritual and geographical journey of a poor Algerian pilgrim to Mecca and Medina.
- 1948: Publication of his controversial *Les Conditions de la Renaissance* (*The Conditions of Renaissance*).
- 1949–55: Bennabi committed himself to a sustained contribution to the major Muslim press in Algeria, especially *La République Algérienne* (of the Democratic Union led by Ferhat Abbas) and *Le Jeune Musulman* (of the Ulama Association led by Shaykh Muhammad Bashir al-Ibrahimi).
- 1954: His fourth major book *La Vocation de l'Islam* was published in Paris by the renowned Editions du Seuil.
- 1956: Bennabi was invited to India to present his book *L'Afro-Asiatisme* in which he set out the theoretical and cultural foundations of the non-alignment movement whose first seeds were sown during the Bandung Conference in 1955. He left France illegally and ended up in Cairo where he decided to settle down.
- On September 1, 1956 he requested the political leadership of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in Cairo to be employed as military male nurse with the fighting units of the National Liberation Army (ALN) inside Algeria so that he could write the internal history of the revolution. He received no reply to his request.
- June 1957: Bennabi published in Arabic, French, and German a booklet under the title *SOS Algeria* in which he denounced the atrocities and genocide committed by the French army against the Algerian people. He then continued to promote the Algerian cause by his own means.
- 1957–62: Bennabi organized a series of informal seminars of ideological edification for Muslim students in Cairo. The publication of the French and Arabic versions of his book *L'Afro-Asiatisme* was made possible thanks to a sponsorship by the Egyptian government. During this period, he traveled regularly to Syria and Lebanon to deliver public talks and meet with intellectuals and thinkers. Besides the translation into Arabic of his earlier books, Bennabi's intellectual activity at this stage resulted in a number of important books, such as *Milād Mujtama'* (*On the Origins of Human Society*), *Fikrat Commonwealth Islāmi* (*The Idea of an Islamic Commonwealth*) and *al-Sirā' al-Fikri fi'l-Bilād al-Musta'marah* (*The Ideological Struggle in the Colonized Countries*).
- 1963: After Algeria's independence he returned home where he was assigned by President Ahmad Ben Bella to establish a center for cultural orientation. Weary of the bureaucratic routine that delayed the approval of the project, Bennabi launched from his home a regular intellectual forum where he focused on the issues of culture and civilization.

- 1964: Appointed as Director of Higher Education. Meanwhile he continued his intellectual activity and contributed regularly to the local press, especially the French journal *Révolution Africaine* in which he wrote almost weekly.
- 1968–70: After resigning from his official post, Bennabi devoted himself to seminars and conferences both at home and abroad. During this period, he founded the annual Conference on Islamic Thought that lasted up to the 1980s.
- At this stage of his intellectual career, Bennabi published a number of other important books. They include, among others, his two-volume memoirs, *Le Problème des idées dans le monde musulman, al-Muslim Fi ʿAlam al-Iqtiåād, Perspectives Algeriennes, L'Islam et la démocracie, l'Oeuvre des Orientalistes,* etc.
- October 31, 1973: After a tour that took him in 1971 and 1972 to a number of places from Makkah to Damascus and Beirut where he delivered talks about "the Muslim's role in the last third of the twentieth century", Bennabi breathed his last in Algiers where he was buried.

Modernity and Beyond

One major feature of the forces that unleashed the phenomenon of modernity was those forces' antagonism to tradition in all its forms. Tradition was mainly identified with religion. This meant that an utterly uncompromising crusade had to be waged against religion and the church – its formal and institutional embodiment – so that modernity's program to *de-traditionalize* society and culture could be implemented. Regardless of the multiple factors that were in play and that finally shaped the historical destiny and cultural character of Europe from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, reason and science emerged as the crowned twins with whom ultimate authority should rest. The reason that was now claiming universality for its principles and dictates was one whose *bêtes noires* – tradition, authority, emotion, example, etc. – had to be confronted and fiercely combated.[2] As for science, it found its model in physics as philosophically conceptualized by Descartes and mathematically formulated by Newton in terms of his clock-like, self-sufficient universe.

Accordingly, beliefs and values could only be sanctioned if they pass the test of reason and science. Reality and truth are only what can be vindicated by the canons of reason and measured by the yardstick of science. This is all well and fine, but it is not the actual problem. Indeed, throughout its age-long experience mankind has always resorted to reason and science, no matter how both reason and science might have been conceived in different civilizations and by different peoples. Humans throughout their long history have done so in order to vindicate their beliefs and values, to understand their position in the world, to comprehend reality and truth, to regulate the affairs of their life, and to deal with nature and the different realms of existence.

What has really characterized reason and science within the context of Western modernity and constituted their problem at the same time, is their reductionist secular and materialistic orientation. Driven by a desire to free values from the parochialism that allegedly surrounded them in so-called pre-modern societies and cultures, the

process of rationalization resulted in the deconsecration of values and desacralization of life. Due to a strong drive to demystify and control nature and attain certainty in knowing it, science ended up limiting nature to physical phenomena and equating the latter with the quantifiable that can and must ultimately be subsumed under precise mathematical equations.

Thus, reason, with its universal canons and ontological principles as advocated by early philosophical theorists of modernity such as Descartes, was progressively receding in favor of a conception of human rationality in which it was narrowly identified with science. The narrowing of human rationality and reason was based on "the enormous metaphysical assumption that the reality to which science has access is the whole of reality." This means that human beings "have no other source of knowledge nor any other means of reasoning." A doctrine or ideology of scientism thus emerged whose first victim was universal reason itself. Likewise, human rationality had to be "subordinated to contemporary science whatever it may happen to be saying." It followed from this that philosophy and rationality became "the handmaiden of science rather than its rational underpinning." This, indeed, was a major development of modernity towards reductionism in human knowledge and vision of the world. This reductionism sought to bring "everything down to the level of physical explanation."[3] By reducing rationality from a holistic outlook to a physicalist conception of the world and reality and by making reason a mere instrument of science as patterned after physics, modernity left the door wide open to relativism in the various aspects of thought and life.

Perhaps one of the most devastating outcomes of these developments can be seen in the loss of meaning that has pervaded almost all aspects of human life. Even physical objects, which in the beginning constituted the subject of study for the natural sciences, have been torn asunder and no more constitute an objective reality. This has been further consolidated and given more philosophical grounding by revolutionary developments in the physical and natural sciences. Quantum mechanics, in particular, "deprived matter of the solidity it was thought to possess"[4] and destructively affected "the program of modern philosophy."[5] The subject-matter of scientific knowledge itself was now at stake. Actually, "the very notion of an objective nature of the world independent of our knowledge of it came under attack."[6] Thus, "scientific knowledge is no longer knowledge of things as they are 'out there' in an objective world but only in relation to an observer. In a sense, we see what we expect to see in accordance with our own mental patterns."[7] Under these circumstances, it is only natural to speak about the eclipse and end of reason, to bid farewell to it, or to announce the end of science, and, indeed, to herald the end of everything including modernity itself.[8]

This situation, a logical consequence of modernity's own fundamental premises, has been severely aggravated by post-modern trends. In modernity's project reason was assigned the position of authority and was therefore considered the reference for human thought and life, while science taught us that there was some rationality and hence a certain structure in the world. By contrast, post-modernity has almost done away with all that. As it pulled man out of his traditional worldviews and value systems, modernity promised him alternatives that would be based on reason and enlightened by science. It did not thus deprive him totally of a frame of reference and certain absolutes in which to ground himself and his experience. Post-modernism, on the

contrary, is effecting a real dislocation of the human condition and experience. This dislocation is tied up with a number of assumptions about reality that go "far beyond mere relativism." One main feature of post-modernist thought with its new assumptions is that "things and events do not have intrinsic meaning" and that there is "only continuous interpretation of the world."[9] Accordingly, reality, whether natural or social,[10] has always to be invented and reconstructed time and again. Nothing has truth or meaning in itself. Everything is in permanent flux. The only absolute is total "fluidity" and permanent change. For post-modernist thinkers such as Jean François Lyotard, the epistemological mark of "post-modernity is the loss of authoritative conceptual structures to serve as the "foundation" of rational knowledge."[11] Regardless of the various brands of post-modernism that writers have tried to map out, one of them seems to hold sway over the others. It is a kind of post-modernism characterized by absolute relativism according to which "objective truth is intolerable and non-existent." In this brand of post-modernism, "not only is any transcendent center of reality disavowed, but the unrelieved flux that replaces it has no center."[12] As many post-modernist philosophers tell us, humanity is at present experiencing the total collapse of all grand narratives (i.e., religion, philosophical systems, ideologies, etc.), which in the past underpinned and sustained human experience and consciousness.

Thus, if modernity advocated a reductionist, materialist and secular view of the world, post-modernity is advocating a completely fragmented world in which there is no anchoring point for human consciousness and experience. Not only has the object fallen apart, but the subject himself has also vanished. Instead of modernity's subject, who of course implies the existence of an object, invention is being made of "a floating individual with no distinct reference points or parameters."[13]

In the wake of modernity's struggle against tradition and religion, man was left without heart and soul, but at least it was said that reason and its time-honored ally, science, would take care of him. Now post-modernity is cutting up his head and stripping him of his mind. What is then left is a soulless and mindless body that is being pampered by a sweeping culture of consumerism and nihilism. With the post-modern turn of mind, the problem has assumed alarmingly more dangerous dimensions. The evil-guided, power-thirsty, and business-oriented manipulations of genetic engineering are indeed precipitating humanity not only into the unknown, but also into the assuredly destructive.[14] Thus, it is no more a question of increasing dehumanization as René Dubos, for example, long ago complained.[15] The problem now is not that we are facing the end of man in the philosophical and sociological sense that had appeared to Michel Foucault in his archeological critique of modern social sciences.[16] In what seems to be a reconsideration of his thesis on the end of history, Francis Fukuyama has actually warned against what he considers the most significant threat from biotechnology consisting in the possibility of altering human nature and thereby moving the world into a "post-human" stage of history. Thus, we are informed that we are ushering towards man's end in a psychological, biological, and physical sense.[17]

It is, in my opinion, against this intellectual and historical background that Bennabi's severe criticism of Cartesian rationalism and his strong rejection of scientism in his book *The Qur'anic Phenomenon* can better be appreciated. With the foresight of a visionary, he was able to discern to what consequences Descartes' rationalism and

the scientism whose philosophical foundations he was laying down could ultimately lead. In criticizing the Cartesian rationalist doctrine, Bennabi's concern was not in fact with Descartes' belief or disbelief, nor was he having any problem with reason and science as such. What was of the utmost concern for Bennabi was the conception of reason and science as utterly antithetical to religion and revelation. His argument in *The Qur'anic Phenomenon* and in other works too is unmistakably informed by a sharp awareness of what may be called modernity's self-negation, which included almost all its major 'isms, including even its most cherished notions of rationalism, humanism, and scientism.[18]

This self-negation can only be seen as a logical consequence of modernity's fundamental inclination towards magnification. In other words, the magnification, for instance, of reason and science led to an absolutizing of the scientific worldview and to a belief in the absolute capability of human reason and power to control nature and history and to answer all the ultimate questions that have never ceased to be of serious concern for the human mind. Understandably, this magnification and absolutizing could only take place with the price of rejecting all supernatural or extra-human authority and negating all transcendent reality. By rejecting divine authority and negating metaphysical reality as expressed in Nietzsche's infamous announcement of the death of God, modernity, to put it in Bennabi's terms, had to fall into a process of deifying other entities, thereby absolutizing other authorities. But once it is realized that those absolutized authorities and deified entities cannot provide the promised panacea, the only alternative is to lose faith in them and to usher in the post-modern age with its absolute fluidity and continuous flux.

Man, Religion and Science in Bennabi's Thought

That is why Bennabi strongly insists that modernity's antagonism towards religion should not be understood merely as a conflict between religion and science or reason. For him, it is question of a conflict between two basically different philosophical systems and visions of the world. It is a conflict "between theism and materialism, between the religion that has God as a basis and that which postulates matter as an absolute."[19] It is, in the final analysis, a battle for the ultimate meaning of life, the nature of man and the origin and destiny of the world, with all that this involves and necessitates at the psychological, sociological, philosophical, and cosmological levels.[20] As mentioned previously, the particular significance of Bennabi's work on the Qur'an can be fully realized in the light of the far-reaching developments that have occurred in that context. It is a self-aware intellectual engagement with the secular premises and materialistic scientistic worldview of modernity.

In developing his argument, Bennabi adopted an interdisciplinary approach, which can be said to be unprecedented in Qur'anic and Islamic studies in general. Insights from various disciplines and branches of knowledge have been intelligently cast together to develop a new method to the study of religion in general and the Qur'an in particular. This approach drew on philosophy, archeology, history, astronomy, sociology, philosophical anthropology, comparative religion, and psychology. Its purpose was

to examine religion and prophethood as objective phenomena that transcend all historical contexts and socio-cultural configurations. Bennabi's objective was to overcome the inadequacies and shortcomings of the reductionist and subjectivist theories that have dominated modern studies of religion and religious phenomena across the different disciplines of social science. He starts from a basic observation agreed upon by so many scholars and thinkers of different backgrounds. It concerns the fact that religion "has been the condition for human life in all ages and climes."[21] However, unlike so many modern thinkers, he does not explain this fact away by relying on historicist, subjectivist or positivist interpretations.[22] Instead, he sees in the different manifestations of religion throughout human history, from "the simple dolmen to the most imposing temple," the clearest evidence as to the deep-rootedness of the religious and metaphysical preoccupation in human life and history. Although the presence of religion has been so manifest and permanent that it compelled sociologists to describe man as "a fundamentally religious animal," the real problem, according to Bennabi, does not lie at the level of this factual and true observation, nor can it be resolved by it. It rather lies at a more fundamental plane, that of the interpretation and understanding of the ultimate source and true significance of the religious phenomenon confirmed by such an observation. Thus, the question pertains to whether man is "a religious animal" in an innate way by virtue of an original disposition of his nature, or whether he has acquired this quality due to some initial cultural accident that has reverberated throughout human history.[23]

In dealing with this issue, Bennabi points out that modern Western thought has been misguided by a scientistic and positivist bent of mind that looks at all phenomena in physical terms, while being totally oblivious to the very fundamental principles underlying positive science itself. Driven by a Cartesian reflex, this thought "reduces everything to the earthly level" of existence.[24] In his view, the ideological thrust and passion for scientism and positivism are responsible for the blindness and failure of the dominant modern Western mind in realizing the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the various systems and theories it has evolved for the interpretation of the different phenomena, notably religion. For Bennabi, being inextricably linked to the realm of human thought and consciousness that cannot be understood in mere physical terms, religion can only find its true explanation at another level of reality that does not turn its back on scientific thought or ignore its discoveries, but realizes its limitations in relation to the vast phenomena standing beyond the material and phenomenological world. It is a level of reality where human understanding acknowledges science not as a goddess pitted against religion, but as a humble servant of human progress, while it still conforms to the philosophical and logical requirements of the human mind. It is a question of thought in which the "metaphysical truth transcends but does not exclude the temporal truth."[25]

Accordingly, religion can only be properly understood by linking it to the imperative order of the *willful*, *conscious*, and *creative* power that has given existence to all things, including man who embodies thinking matter *par excellence*. It is thus not a mere psychic and mental activity of the human being that can simply be reduced to some physical and biological factors. Rather, it is something inscribed in the order of the universe as a law characteristic of the human spirit. In other words, religion springs from

the primordial command of the Creator who has endowed the human species with a specific nature distinguishing it from all animal species no matter how close a physical affinity man might have with some of them. It is likewise a cosmic fact and perennial reality that cannot be reduced to a mere cultural category acquired by human beings over history or relative to the early and primitive stages of human socio-cultural development,[26] as evolutionary theories have been relentlessly teaching.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that this psycho-cosmological view of religion was expressed, albeit sometimes in indecisive terms, by a number of Western philosophers and scholars who seem to have attempted to emancipate themselves from the yoke of materialism and positivism. As a leading figure in psychoanalysis who established his own brand of it (i.e. analytical psychology), Carl Jung's views (often referred to by Bennabi) deserve special attention here. In an attempt to avoid the inaccuracies of the materialist conception of the psyche, Jung developed his famous "theory of archetypes" according to which the proper understanding of religion can be achieved by relating it to a *collective unconscious* that constitutes a "*psychic reality* shared by all humans."[27] In Jung's view, this "collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution born anew in the brain structure of the individual."[28] However, despite the importance of this notion of a common and universal "spiritual heritage" of mankind, the renowned scholar fell short of addressing the compelling question as to the origin of the said "universal collective spiritual heritage." On the contrary, he explained it away by simply relating it to the evolution of mankind. A possible explanation of this is that, being philosophically inspired by the Kantian tradition[29] and imbued with the spirit of the dominating positivistic and scientistic mind of his age, Jung eschewed "from any metaphysical or philosophical considerations."[30]

Be that as it may, in considering religion's different expressions (such as totemism, polytheism, and monotheism), Bennabi's aim was to achieve two main objectives. The first objective was to establish the perennial nature of the religious phenomenon as a characteristic of human nature. Hence, man is described as a *religious animal* or *homo religiosus*.[31] The second objective was to establish the veracity of the Qur'anic revelation and authenticity of Muhammad's prophetic call. This objective was pursued through an examination of both the Qur'an and the Prophet's personality within the wider historical context of the monotheistic tradition and prophetic movement, which have characterized three major living religious traditions of the world, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For this, he proposed a method in which both phenomenology and psychological analysis should play a prominent role. Likewise, the particular case of Islam is linked to the religious phenomenon in general, while its messenger is regarded as the final link in the chain of the prophetic movement. Similarly, the Qur'anic revelation is considered as the culmination of the stream of monotheistic thought. On the other hand, a comparative historical and psychological analysis is necessary to grasp the relationship between the prophets (messengers) and their messages and detect the common characteristics determining their personality and behavior.

To address the latter issue, Bennabi looked into the life and career of the Israelite Prophet Jeremiah whose book and historical authenticity have been spared by modern Biblical criticism.[32] In contradistinction with his counterpart, the pseudo-prophet

Hanania, the examination of the specific case of Jeremiah revealed to him the following features as distinctive characteristics of genuine prophethood.

1. An absolute power eliminating the prophet's personal will and determining his final and permanent behavior with respect to his missionary career.
2. A unique and categorical judgment on the future course of events transcending all logic of history reasoned out by ordinary human beings.
3. The comparison between Jeremiah and other Biblical prophets such as Amos and the Second Isaiah revealed a third feature that consists of the similarity and continuity in the manifestation of the previous two features in all prophets.

Equally manifested in the case of Prophet Muhammad, these features, according to Bennabi, can neither be explained as mere subjective traits of the prophet nor as a result of a disturbed mental state and unbalanced personality, as modern critics would have us believe. On the contrary, they indicate the impersonal character and external provenance of the prophetic call. This call is such that it imposes itself on the person of the prophet and subdues his will in an absolute way. The prophets' resistance to the prophetic call furnishes further evidence as to the impersonal and external character of prophethood. They all wished and, in practice, positively tried to avoid it altogether. This resistance is a clear indication of the opposition between their free will and the determinism that subordinates their will and subjugates their self.

After establishing the phenomenological characteristics of the prophetic movement, which spans so many centuries of human history since the Patriarch Abraham up to the last Qur'anic revelations vouchsafed unto Muhammad, Bennabi then turned to examining the Qur'an from both a phenomenological and a psychoanalytic perspective. As he puts it, besides its thematic continuity with earlier Scriptures manifested in its essential message to mankind, especially its spiritual and moral teachings grounded on monotheism, the Qur'an itself provides a very important clue underlining its belonging to the phenomenon of revelation which intimately accompanied the prophetic movement. Thus, the Qur'an taught Muhammad, its recipient and conveyor, that he was "no innovator among the apostles" (Qur'an, 46: 9). This means that he was not "preaching anything that was not already preached by all God's apostles" before him.[33] In other words, Muhammad was only a link, the last one as proclaimed by the Qur'an itself (Qur'an, 33: 40), in the long chain of prophets unto whom God had vouchsafed his messages. Accordingly, he was, like them, subject to the same laws. Hence, the characteristics of prophethood mentioned above were equally manifested in him.

But apart from its phenomenological characteristic as belonging to the phenomenon of revelation and as being the culmination of religious monotheism, there is another important aspect by virtue of which the Qur'an constitutes a phenomenon in itself. Its revelation over almost 23 years makes it more than just an "event" as Bishop Cragg once wrote.[34] If a phenomenon can be defined as an event that repeatedly occurs under the same conditions, then the sequence of the Qur'anic revelations over more than two decades falls clearly under this definition. One aspect of the phenomenological manifestation of the Qur'an concerns its recipient and carrier, the Prophet himself,

while the other concerns the mode of revelation. At the Prophet's level, the Qur'anic revelations were always accompanied by certain psycho-physiological changes that could easily be seen by those present with him. As for the revelations themselves, they occurred according to definite measures and in varying time intervals in such a way that was clearly indifferent to the personal state of the person who was receiving them. In other words, those revelations were taking place irrespective of the Prophet's grief and sufferings or wishes and aspirations.

For Bennabi, these phenomenological characteristics of the Qur'an vividly indicate its impersonality and externality with regard to the Prophet's self. This implies that the ideas and knowledge content of the Qur'an supersede the Prophet's personal knowledge and transcend his consciousness. We might express this point in Cragg's beautiful words. The Qur'an, said the Anglican bishop, "was never a personal ambition, an anticipated dignity, a private honour. Except as a divine mercy, it could not have been."[35] However, an objection can be raised here. Admitting the impersonal and external character of the Qur'an *vis-à-vis* Muhammad's self, there is still room for supposing that it mirrored the knowledge and ideas – religious, literary, historical, and scientific – that were available in his environment and age. To this hypothesis, on which many Western scholars built their studies of Islam and its Prophet, Bennabi has devoted a great deal of analysis that actually runs throughout all the chapters of his book *The Qur'anic Phenomenon*. A psychological and intellectual portrait of the Prophet, before and after the prophetic call, has been carefully drawn to first establish the demarcation line between the Prophet's personal knowledge and ideas, on the one hand, and the content of the Qur'an, on the other. Then, a comparative and historical examination of a wide range of Qur'anic themes has been carried out to demonstrate that the true reality of the source of the Qur'an can only be conceived on a transcendent, metaphysical plane, a *metapsychism*, far above the psychic reality of its recipient and the mentality and knowledge of his milieu and age.

As pointed out earlier, Bennabi's book was a mature and well-thought effort to respond to the intellectual challenges of modern Western scientific thought and engage with its philosophical premises. In fact, it can be seen as an inauguration of a new kind of Islamic theological and philosophical thinking to explore Qur'anic eternal truths and principles in new lights and from wider perspectives than was possible for classical Muslim scholars. Indeed, the approach Bennabi suggested and the methodology he applied in his study of the Qur'an are challenging and worthy of serious consideration by those who seek to open new avenues for the revival of Islamic thought and reconstruction of Muslim society and civilization. His reformulation of the issue of *i'jāz*, or the inimitability and "matchlessness" of the Qur'an, is worthy of special attention. Instead of the linguistic and literary considerations that constituted the main focus of most classical Muslim scholars and many authors in the modern era, he attempted to address the question of *i'jāz* within the wider philosophical and historical context of the religious phenomenon and prophetic movement by examining it in relation to the miracles of both Moses and Jesus and in relation to the themes reflecting the development of human religious consciousness. In doing so, Bennabi wanted to invite his readers to a different reading of human religious history and a different understanding of the human condition that goes far beyond the mere concerns of Muslims. This

is because the Qur'an, once again we borrow Cragg's words, "relates to the larger world on the outer side of [Muslim] experience wherever man, either in his religions or his secularity, is found."[36]

Likewise, in developing his analytic and phenomenological approach to the Qur'an, Bennabi's target is not simply the Muslim who is in need of a sound appreciation and understanding of the Qur'an on which his personal faith and conviction should be based. He is also as much concerned about those who want to deal with the Islamic Scripture merely as a subject of academic inquiry. In other words, this approach is deemed to enable the non-Muslim to reach an equally adequate and just appreciation of the Qur'an whose bearing is not restricted to the Muslim who has possessed it by faith and personal experience. Perhaps we can say, using the words of Kenneth Cragg, Bennabi's method in dealing with the Qur'anic phenomenon "will allow the Qur'an to be possessed from without – possessed, that is, not by the propagandist who wishes to decry or the dilettante who wills to sentimentalize – but by the seriously concerned who has at once both yearning and reservation, both attraction and misgiving."[37]

As mentioned above, modernity's positivistic conception of reason and its scientistic ideology have had detrimental consequences for the meaning of reality that have been seriously aggravated by post-modernist thought. In the wake of the unfolding processes of globalization in almost all the spheres of human life, those consequences need not be overemphasized here. Bennabi's reflections and insights can rightly be seen as a consolidation of the efforts by many thinkers and scholars all over the world. Such thinkers and scholars are actually involved in a struggle not only against the reductionist and nihilist trends that have pushed humanity into the abyss of secularization and the post-religious era, but also against the forces that are pushing her onto the precipice of a menacingly post-human age.

Bennabi's *The Qur'anic Phenomenon* was not simply the beginning of his intellectual career as a visionary thinker and writer. When he ended it with the statement that religion "appears to be inscribed in the order of the universe as a law characteristic of the human spirit,"[38] he did not make an empty statement or play on words. In this book, he has in fact laid down the philosophical and methodological foundations of his subsequent works. It can safely be ascertained that those works were, literally speaking, an elaboration and substantiation of the central thesis developed here about man and religion in terms of social and cultural theorizing.[39] In other words, Bennabi's intellectual concern about religion and its place in human existence and life was not confined to the general philosophical level discussed above, as will be made clear in the course of the following pages.

Society and Culture: Towards a New Paradigm

One fundamental question arises whenever we attempt to study and understand scientifically human social life and try to understand the nature of society. Why do human beings associate and form groups and communities? Is it because of a biological necessity inherent in the species? In other words, are human beings driven by their instincts to associate with one another and identify themselves with a certain form of collective

life? Is it the inexorable external circumstances that objectively compel them to live in a community? Or, does that reason lie in a subjective will whereby human individuals deliberately choose to live collectively and form a society?[40]

Since very early in human history, it has been observed that man is a social or political (from the word *polis* meaning city) being. Likewise, he has formed different kinds of association, such as the family, the kinship group, the tribe and the nation.[41] However, the statement that "man is a social being or animal" does not, by itself, provide any explanation that would account for the question of how and why humans live collectively. It simply pinpoints a fact. Such a question has been one of the everlasting central issues of human thought over which scholars and thinkers of all ages and cultures have not ceased to ponder and formulate different views and theories. According to some scholars, the reason for man's social character stems from the inherent weakness of his biological structure that makes it beyond each individual's capacity to fulfill his basic needs of food and security on his own. Human beings were therefore compelled to cooperate with each other in order to satisfy those needs, and this gave rise to the social organization of human life.[42] In his now classic work on social psychology, McDougall expressed the view that the inclination of humans to group and communal life has its origin both in their instinctive and their biological make-up.[43] Since it is not our aim to review the literature available on the subject, what has been mentioned would be sufficient to pave the way for our discussion of Bennabi's point of view on the issue at hand.

Bennabi has devoted one of his most important works, *On the Origins of Human Society*,[44] to this question. However, he has not limited his discussion thereof to this book alone. To begin with, he unequivocally states that the natural and instinctual drive of human beings to live together or, to use his own expression, *the group instinct*, is not the real cause or reason for the formation of society. It is simply a means, rather. For him, society is an organism that involves more than the mere aggregate of individuals whose function is to satisfy the natural needs mentioned above. That is to say, society consists of what he considers "constant fundamentals to which it owes its continuity more or less independently of its individual members".[45] To explain the above statement, Bennabi argues that it might happen that under some historical circumstances a society disintegrates and subsequently disappears as an entity and order without, however, this affecting its individual members as such. On the contrary, they would still preserve the natural instinct and disposition to live as a group. In his view, this shows that the instinctive drive is only a factor that contributes in determining, but does not, on its own, determine man's quality as a social being. The fundamentals to which human society owes its existence and continuity consist of the following three things: (i) the historical source of the process of change; (ii) the elements susceptible to be transformed, through that process, from a pre-social to a social state; and (iii) the universal laws and norms governing that process.

To develop his solution to the fundamental question raised above, Bennabi starts by making a basic anthropological classification between different forms of human association. According to that classification, there are two types of human communities or groups: the "ahistorical natural static groups" and the "historical dynamic groups." While the life of the first type has not undergone any serious transformation either in

its content or its form, that of the second has undergone a deep and total transformation in terms of its pattern, motives, and content. The first type is not, in Bennabi's view, of real interest to the enterprise of social science, especially sociology, since the human groups belonging to it are not different from some animal species living in conglomerations, in that they are subject to the laws of mere biological and instinctual life. The human groups belonging to this type do not carry out any historical mission (in terms of generating culture and building civilization), except the biological preservation of the species.[46] Therefore, they can be seen as merely representing "ethnographic material" that may be used by creative societies to build civilization.[47] On the contrary, it is the historical type that is of special interest to Bennabi. This is because it represents the dynamic society that has been subject to the laws of social and historical change, thus undergoing profound transformation both in its character and features according to a specific historical finality.

The natural biological and instinctual structure of the human species provides what Bennabi calls "the vital energy" necessary for the society to carry out its collective concerted action and fulfill its function in history. Nevertheless, the process whereby history borrows from nature this "vital energy" is not as simple as it might at first appear. The reason for this can be expounded as follows. If it does not undergo a process of conditioning and adaptation by being subordinated to a specific order inspired by a sublime ideal, this vital energy may destroy society itself. It is the ideal that actually brings about the reorganization and reorientation of the vital energy and transforms it in such a way that it will not simply function for maintaining the survival of the species. Rather, it also functions in compliance with the social functions of the human being as a moral agent in the concerted civilizational action of society. Thus conceiving a complementary relationship between history (= society) and nature (= species), Bennabi admits that it is a natural fact that the human being must drink, eat, procreate, possess, and struggle for the preservation of the species. However, these primordial natural activities, he insists, have to be controlled and oriented in line with the goals conforming to the progress and development of the species. Hence, if we were to consider that human individuals associate and live in communities and groups for the purpose of satisfying their biological and instinctive needs in order to guarantee the survival of their species, this would not make any real difference between mankind and other animal species enjoying certain forms of collective life. Therefore, it is not simply for the preservation of the species that humans associate and form societies, he strongly emphasized. Rather, the reason why human beings conglomerate lies at another level, that of the cultural development and moral advancement of the species. This is, as he emphatically puts it, "the essential truth about human society."[48] In other words, human beings engage in social life as psycho-temporal factors. Likewise, they act not only in terms of their temporality, of their material needs, but also in terms of their psychism, of their spirituality. As he insists, it is here that the complete reality of man lies, "which must be taken into account for seizing it in its totality."[49]

To illustrate this point, he refers to marriage and the formation of the family as an elementary form of social life. If this activity is urged by the mere preservation of the species, free sexual intercourse between the male and female would be sufficient to satisfy that need. It would, on the one hand, accord with the biological laws governing

the species and, on the other, increase the number of its individuals. Nevertheless, we find that the conjugal relationship has always taken place, in all societies, according to "a symbolic religious ceremony." Such a ceremony is usually meant to confer a special meaning and significance upon the union of the male and female as a contract that complies not only with the biological needs of the species but also with the moral objectives of society. Looking at this issue from an Islamic point of view, it can be stated that by sanctifying one particular form of sexual relationship, marriage "involves a vow, a public acknowledgement, and therefore cannot be reduced simply to legitimation of the sexual bond." Indeed, marriage constitutes "the act that gives a concrete form to the order of existence and gives sexuality a new significance" by surrounding "the sexual relationship with the maximum publicity."[50] It thus appears clearly that Bennabi understands the concept of progress as the historical vocation of human society in a comprehensive sense encompassing the spiritual, moral, mental, and material levels. Even if "need" is accepted as being the reason underlying the association of human beings into communities and societies, it cannot, in Bennabi's view, account for human society's cultural dynamics and historical development, nor is it enough to explain the phenomenon of the civilization which is characteristic of historical societies. To him, this interpretation of the birth of human society may conform to what he considers as the *amoebic stage* of consciousness in human social and historical evolution.[51]

Now that we turn to the interpretation of the birth of human society based on external factors, the main line of Bennabi's argument concerning the biological instinctual thesis outlined previously needs to be brought into more prominence. Stated in specific terms, his formulation of the relationship between nature and history or species and society has to be retained in mind for it is of great significance for the following discussion, especially as regards the analysis of the constitution and dynamics of society. It has to be acknowledged in this connection that Bennabi has not addressed the question whether or not the origin of human society resides in the external circumstances separately. However, his position in this respect can be inferred from his discussion of the dialectical and historical materialist thesis expounded by Karl Marx and his followers and the challenge–response thesis advocated by Arnold Toynbee.[52]

In Marx's opinion, the relations into which the human beings engage in their social life are determined by the prevailing "material productive forces" and, hence, are "indispensable and independent of their [i.e. humans'] will". As he further argues, "[t]he mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general. [And] it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[53] Despite the fact that in the previous statement Marx is primarily concerned with the process of social change and the historical forces underlying it, we can deduce his position concerning the issue at hand from another passage in which he satirically criticized a group of eighteenth-century thinkers who had addressed this issue. For him, those thinkers had erred and therefore were worthy of scorn and contempt because they had tried to explain the origin of human social relations by a "so-called universal consent of mankind" or "a conventional origin."[54] As can be seen from these statements, Marx clearly adheres to an objectivist interpretation according to which the external factors stand at the root of the genesis of society and social phenomena.

As for Toynbee's challenge–response thesis, its author has summarized as follows. "Our formula for the growth-progression would be", says Toynbee, "a challenge evoking a successful response generating a fresh challenge evoking another successful response and so on, pending a breakdown; our formula for the disintegration-progression would be a challenge evoking an unsuccessful response, generating another attempt, resulting in another failure and so on, pending dissolution."[55]

To avoid talking in general theoretical terms, Bennabi points out that, under close scrutiny, the previous two interpretations of the rise of society and civilization are unable to account for innumerable cases in history. Taking the rise of Islamic society and civilization as a concrete example testifying to the profound spiritual and socio-historical transformation brought about by Islam, he observes the following. For so many centuries, the pre-Islamic Arabs had lived in the Arabian Peninsula and faced different challenges of natural and historical character. However, history has not recorded any response on their part to those challenges resulting in any transformation of their life. Similarly, when we look at the economic conditions and the forces and relations of economic production, we find that they did not undergo any real change that would make us expect the rise of a new mode of life and a different type of social organization. Yet, with the advent of the Qur'anic revelation and the inculcation of spiritual and moral values it brought, a different type of society and a new civilization came into being that cannot in any way be interpreted in terms of the conceptual categories suggested by Marx and Toynbee. Therefore, a different explanation is needed.

A Spiritual Interpretation of the Genesis of Human Society

Before delving into an exposition of Bennabi's views in this regard, a few words are in order to shed more light on the notion of "historical societies" due to its conceptual importance in his sociological analysis. This can be further illustrated by the observation that the function of the natural static type does not, according to him, transcend the mere preservation of the species through the satisfaction of the basic biological needs of its individuals. Such a function would accord with the biology-instinct based interpretation of human group formation. But since the function of the historical type is not confined to merely securing the survival of the species, this interpretation is not sufficient. Accordingly, the historical type rather consists in consciously transforming the human and natural environment by generating new forms of life and organization through thought and labor. Likewise, he maintains, if it is nature that provides the species, it is history that creates society. Put differently, the purpose of nature is to preserve the existence (and survival) of the species, whereas the purpose of history is to lead the course of evolution towards a higher form of life that we call civilization.

In line with his main thesis according to which social life denotes historical change and the rise of culture and civilization, the meaning Bennabi assigns to the term "historical societies" clearly transcends the racial and geopolitical boundaries to embrace the cultural and spiritual foundations of human association. Thus, his concern is essentially focused on large human entities which enjoy relatively long historical durations, span over relatively vast geographical areas and espouse a certain ideal and set of moral

values on the basis of which a specific pattern of conduct and a particular mode of life emerge. This clarification does not, it should be admitted here, flow immediately from the literal level of Bennabi's work. However, it is solidly supported by the fact that nowhere in his books does he speak of small human entities as societies, be that on racial or geopolitical grounds. Whenever such entities are treated in specific contexts, they are rather referred to as peoples such as the Algerian, the Egyptian, or the French people. Accordingly, we would frequently encounter the reference to such large cultural and civilizational entities as the Islamic, the Christian European (or Western), the Chinese (Buddhist and subsequently communist), or the Hindu society. Even when he mentions, for example, the Arab society, it is always qualified as Islamic, either explicitly or tacitly depending on the context.

In his reflection on the origins of human society, Bennabi introduces two important concepts. In his view, the personality of the human individual in historical societies consists of two fundamental identities, which he expresses by the term "equations." On the one hand, there is an inborn natural identity which is the outcome of the act of creation of God Who has fashioned "man in the best conformation" (Qur'an 95: 4) and "conferred dignity upon the children of Adam" (Qur'an, 17: 70). On the basis of this identity, the human being is endowed with all the positive qualities, physical as well as mental and spiritual, corresponding to the functions that this particular creature is meant to perform. The fact that this created identity or dimension of the individual's personality is common to all the human species does not imply, Bennabi cautions, that all the individuals have the *same* "best conformation"[56] in respect of their physical and mental endowments. Rather, it simply means that irrespective of his natural advantages or disadvantages, each human being is endowed with the ability to make the best possible use of his inborn qualities and faculties and of the environment to which he is exposed.[57] The human being's given identity, Bennabi insists, is not subject to any kind of alteration or corruption under whatever circumstances, for it carries the original dignity conferred by God on mankind.[58]

On the other hand, we have an acquired social dimension or identity that is the result of socio-cultural and historical processes. Unlike the first one, this identity varies from one society to another and, within one and the same society, from one generation to another according to the level of cultural and civilizational development. Thus, the personality of the human individual is a complex entity composed of two identities: one that represents his essence and value as a human being created by God in the best conformation, and one that represents his value as a social being molded by society. Only by taking these two identities into consideration can we achieve a sound understanding of the human social reality, he strongly insists.[59]

The question that arises here is the following: how do these two identities relate to the issue at hand, namely the origin of, or the reason underlying, human association and the genesis of society?

Since the birth of society in the sense specified by Bennabi is concomitant with the rise of culture and civilization, its advent is due to a fundamental idea that imparts to a static natural human group "the thrust that drives it onto the stage of history."[60] In other words, the transformation of a human group from a stagnant, pre-civilizational and ahistorical status of life into a social, civilized and historical one, takes place when

its members perceive a new meaning for their existence in the universe. This means that the forces lying at the origin of any historical movement of cultural and social change are essentially of a spiritual and psychological nature. This understanding stems from the fact that the inborn natural dimension mentioned above is fashioned in such a manner that man "would look beyond his earthly horizon so as to discover in his own self the genius of earth as well as the sublime and transcendental value of things."[61] Thus it is the mental equipment and spiritual and moral disposition of the human beings that underlie their association in societies in a continuous pursuit of "an ideal of moral perfection towards which civilization has never ceased to move as its ultimate end."[62] Conformably, Bennabi argues, a human group starts moving on the path of civilization as a society when a moral ideal enters the scene. This ideal attaches the individuals to a specific historical finality endowing their lives with meaning and value and orienting their vital energies towards the achievement of certain goals and the actualization of certain values. This brings into strong relief the reason why Bennabi repeatedly insists on considering human social organization as a stage in which human beings transcend "the inferior [needs] and laws inherited from the animal order",[63] that is, the biological and instinctive impulses mankind shared with other animal species.

Thus, Bennabi's sociological thought proceeds from his fundamental thesis according to which man's religiosity is an inborn quality that emanates from human spiritual and mental constitution and conforms to the laws of the cosmic order. Accordingly, he considers that religion lies at the origin of all historical societies and that it has thus been the most inexhaustible source of moral ideals and values for human life. He maintains that the "extraordinary circumstance" to which thinkers and social scientists have always attempted to trace back the birth of human society is neither the mere challenge posed by the environment, nor the means and forces of material production. Nor does it lie in the mere biological-instinctual constitution of the human species. Rather, it is the advent of religion the seeds of which are sown very deep in the life and history of humankind. Religion thus provides the basis for an ethos that is developed and consolidated hand in hand with the social evolution and cultural development of the human group. It also functions as the main catalyst facilitating the essential synthesis of human society and civilization; that is to say, it brings about the bio-historical synthesis of man, soil, and time. Likewise, Bennabi further argues, the spiritual relationship between God and man that is regulated by religion is at the origin of the social relationship linking human beings with one another. By linking the social relations to spiritual religious roots, he perceives human social existence as ontologically grounded in the metaphysical order of things. Such perception derives, in our opinion, from the Qur'anic account of the advent of mankind on earth. According to this account, God had informed the angels that He was "about to establish on earth one who shall inherit it" (Qur'an, 1: 30). This notion of the human species entitled to the "inheritance" of the earth is expressed by such suggestive and all-encompassing terms like *khilāfah* (vicegerency) and *amānah* (trust) (Qur'an, 1: 30; 6: 165; 33: 72). As Ibn Khaldun expressed it, it was "God's desire to settle the world with human beings and leave them as His representatives on earth." For the author of *The Muaqaddimah*,

this "is the meaning of civilization" which constitutes the subject-matter of the "new science" he set out to establish.[64]

Likewise, religion, in Bennabi's opinion, is the ultimate source that gives birth to the social relationship in the form of a moral ideal and thus it "naturally inscribes itself in the origin of all human transformations."[65] Furthermore, he contends that while the social and religious relationships represent, from the historical perspective, two concomitant events, they mark, from the "cosmo-genetic" point of view, the advent of one and the same process of social change in which the social relationship stands as the effect of the religious one. In other words, the social relationship linking the individual to society constitutes the temporal manifestation of the spiritual relationship with God. In all accounts, he further argues, human beings organize themselves as a society that generates culture and establishes civilization. In both cases, he remarks, human beings either transcend their worldly life towards a metaphysical "ideal" specified by revelation or they, at least, transcend their present situation towards a future ideal that takes the form of a social project for which successive generations strive. Given its cosmic nature, religion, in Bennabi's view, is the only source that can provide the necessary and most efficient and enduring catalyst that brings about the essential synthesis of human civilization by integrating into a coherent, dynamic whole its primary factors, namely man, soil, and time. It thus imparts to everyone the *will* of civilization through transforming the human being's soul and endowing his/her existence with meaning and direction.[66]

We have already seen that human social organization, for Bennabi, is as a stage in which human beings do not associate with each other according to the mere requirements of nature, but according to some historical finality in terms of which they would produce culture and establish civilization. In his understanding, human social organization is that stage in which the elementary activities and vital energies of the individuals are oriented in such a manner that they would function not simply in conformity with the survival of the species, but also, and more importantly, with its moral advancement and cultural progress, thus transcending the natural level of animal life.

Relating this formulation of the relationship between nature and history (or species and society) to his central thesis that religion is at the origin of human social association once again brings to the fore the fundamental Islamic concepts of *khilāfah* and *amānah* mentioned previously. Being one of the essential concepts constitutive of the Islamic worldview, this idea of mankind being assigned the position of *khilāfah* or vicegerency to God has been formulated by Bennabi in quite a unique fashion. As he puts it, by controlling and orienting his primordial activities in conformity with the advancement of the species, the human being actually participates in the divine scheme of action; and his participation is ultimately governed by his religious obligation and accountability (*taklif*) in that he is subject to the law of moral progress. This means that the spiritual relationship between God and man creates and determines the social bonds that link every individual with his fellow humans. In other words, human beings' religious obligation and accountability is the determinant factor of the internal structure of the twofold power of the human being that makes the integrated activities of the individual's instincts and vital energy function in accordance with his

social and historical vocation as a moral being. Accordingly, religion is at the basis of man's vertical bond with God and his horizontal relationship with fellow human beings.

Accordingly, Bennabi looks at human society within the framework of the Islamic worldview and in terms of the ethical function that human beings are supposed to fulfill in the temporal world. The spiritual forces, which, as we have seen, underlie human social action and historical existence, are, therefore, ethically motivated. As a *homo religiosus* and moral agent, the efficacy of the human being's action in the socio-historical realm is situated, according to Bennabi, between two limits: *wa'id* (warning) and *wa'd* (promise) as expounded by the Qur'an. In his view, warning represents the lowest level beneath which there is no room for any effective effort, while promise constitutes the highest level beyond which all human effort is impossible, for in such a situation the severity of the challenge overpowers the spiritual and moral strength with which man is endowed. Accordingly, human consciousness is placed under the most favorable conditions enabling it to respond to all challenges that are, in the final analysis, spiritual in nature. Within the two limits of warning and promise, he maintains, the spiritual strength of the individual is proportionate to the efficacious effort furnished by society as it acts according to the dictates of a mission, that is to say, according to the requirements of its historical goals.

It is quite obvious that the aforementioned argument concerning the dynamics and efficacy of the spiritual forces underlying human social and historical action is a reformulation of Toynbee's challenge–response thesis. In fact, Bennabi is quite clear regarding the necessity of such a reformulation as the said thesis cannot, in its initial form, lead us to a sound understanding of the origin and finality of the historical movement which gave rise, for example, to the Islamic society.

Constitution of Human Society

To start with, it would be both appropriate and helpful to put Bennabi's sociology in perspective and bring his methodology into focus. Taking the latter point first, it can be said that, stated in general terms, Bennabi's methodology works at two different, yet closely interrelated, levels. While the first level is that of analysis consisting in the dissection of the phenomena at issue into their basic constituents with a view to discovering their structure, the second one is that of synthesis and consists in looking at the phenomena under consideration in the course of their movement and interaction so as to grasp their dynamics.

These are necessary and complementary methodological steps without which any sound and comprehensive understanding of human social phenomena will remain beyond reach. It thus appears that Bennabi's methodological approach to the study of social phenomena aims at integrating the synchronic (or cross-sectional) and diachronic (or sequential) perspectives, with a clear emphasis placed, however, on the latter perspective. As seen earlier, he lays stronger stress on the dynamic aspects of human social existence as an ongoing multidimensional process of socio-historical and cultural change or, to put the same point differently, as a process of becoming.[67] Accord-

ingly, his methodology "is both analytic and constructive".[68] It is in relation to this methodological awareness that Bennabi's early insistence upon the necessity of a "different" or "new sociology" for the Third World in general and the Muslim world in particular can be properly appreciated. The role of such sociology, he believed, should be both a liberating and a constructive one. As he understood it, the liberating dimension of that sociology should, in the main part, be critical. That is, it has to analyze and detect the social pathologies in Muslim lands that represent the burdening legacy of the post-Almohad[69] age of civilizational decadence coupled with the distorting legacy of the colonial era. Thus, in its critical aspect this "new sociology" is perceived in terms of a socio-cultural science whose main task is to purge the Muslim life and environment of the long-seated germs of *colonizability*.[70] Its constructive role should consist of edifying a fundamental culture aimed at the radical transformation of Muslim "social being" and restoring and reconstructing the "social relations network" in the Muslim *ummah.* The ultimate purpose of this new sociology should be to realize anew the essential synthesis of the primary factors of civilization, namely man, soil and time.[71]

Let us now turn to the other point; that is, to put Bennabi's sociology in perspective. When dissected into its primary components, human society is revealed, according to Bennabi, as a compound of three essential categories, or realms, consisting of persons, ideas, and objects.[72] To him, history as the cumulative human social action is basically the outcome of the interplay between these three realms impressed in the space–time continuum. It is thus woven out of the activities and ideas of the human beings as well as of the input and influences of material things and objects. Not operating in isolation from one another, these social categories rather represent what Bennabi calls the *parameters* of the "concerted action" of human society in history. According to him, the pattern of this concerted action is determined by ideological models originating in the *realm of ideas* and applied through means that are derived from the *realm of objects* in order to achieve ends and objectives set up by the *realm of persons*. As indicated by Bennabi, the idea of a concerted action carried out by the three social categories constituting human society necessarily implies the existence of a set of bonds whose function is to link together the components of each one of the three realms as well as the latter to one another such that they become an integrated harmonic whole. Consisting of the totality of the necessary social relations or what he calls the social relations network, this set of bonds constitutes a fourth, yet latent, realm in itself.

Thus, the *social relations network* stands for the structural patterns both within and between the realms of persons, ideas, and objects. In Bennabi's view, it is through such structure that the impact and activities of the three realms of persons, ideas and objects is connected and synthesized. Both in its direction and scope, this synthesis brings about the *transformation* of the features of human life or, to express it more accurately, unleashes the historical movement and development of society. For Bennabi, this relational structure is so vital for the concerted action of human society that the first task a society would undertake at the very moment of its birth would be to establish its social relations network even before its three constituent realms reach maturity and take full shape. Indeed, he strongly argues, any subsequent development of a society after its

birth depends fundamentally on that network. This is because human society, for him, is not a mere collection or juxtaposition of persons, ideas, and objects; it is rather the synthesis of these three realms into a coherent and dynamic whole. That is, broadly speaking, the analytic and conceptual framework of Bennabi's sociology. In fact, the greater part of his work can be seen as a reflection on, and elaboration of, two major issues in this framework, namely:

1. How are the above-mentioned realms of persons, ideas, and objects structured, and how do they interact with one another?
2. What are the sociocultural and historical manifestations of that structuring and interaction?

By comprising the social actors, both as individual and collective agents, it is quite obvious that the realm of persons should occupy a more prominent place within the relational structure and network of society. This explains Bennabi's extensive treatment of this realm from a variety of perspectives in an attempt to understand and define both the factors and conditions that contribute to the shaping and determination of human social action. Since a more detailed account of the realm of persons is to be made later in this chapter, it will be both convenient and illuminating now to have an overview of the other two realms.

As we have already seen, in Bennabi's sociological analysis, society is a specific and dynamic form of human collective life and organization that comes into existence as the humans beings espouse a specific ideal and set of moral values. This understanding justifies his giving priority to the realm of ideas over that of objects. However, this does not mean that he overlooks or underestimates the latter realm. On the contrary, he strongly maintains that the realm of objects plays so vital a part that human social existence and action is inconceivable without it. Yet, compared to his extensive analysis of the place of the realms of both persons and ideas in the constitution and dynamics of human society, Bennabi's treatment of the realm of objects is markedly limited. This in fact presents us with a situation that stands in need of clarification lest his stand be erroneously understood.

At the outset, there is a need to elucidate what the realm of objects represents in Bennabi's sociological thought. Upon closer examination of his usage of this term on different occasions, what appears most compatible with his analytic and conceptual framework is that the realm of objects refers to whatever material things (both natural or man-made) are used or may be used by the human beings to sustain their life. It thus concerns all the material aspects of human social life and existence. It can be argued from this that, since the human species is imbedded in the material realm of nature, the human beings would not therefore fail to pursue their material needs and evolve the proper means for their satisfaction as the long and accumulated experience of mankind has shown. Accordingly, his major concern is not to argue for the obvious importance of the realm of objects for human social existence on the biological and material plane. What matters most for him is to examine and comprehend its psychosociological and cultural significance and impact within the dynamic relational structure of society throughout the different stages of its development. In other words, he is

more preoccupied both with the analysis and conceptualization of the dialectical relationship and interplay of the realms of persons and objects as it is, or should be, mediated through the realm of ideas. Moreover, Bennabi's sociological and cultural analysis is unmistakably informed by the Islamic view that nature, from which the realm of objects is derived either directly or indirectly through different manufacturing processes, stands in a position of subservience *vis-à-vis* the realm of persons. Hence, the latter realm is in a position of mastery over the realm of objects specifically by virtue of a Divine will to appoint mankind as God's vicegerent on earth, as we have already seen.

Thus, for Bennabi, there is no question of whether or not human beings as members of a society deal with the realm of material things and phenomena to extract the bounties of nature in order to satisfy their material needs and sustain their existence. This is something already guaranteed by what he considers the inferior laws of the animal order.[73] Rather, what needs to be investigated pertains to the psycho-sociological and cultural conditions under which the realm of persons would interact with, and be involved in, the realm of objects. It is in the light of these considerations that one can appreciate Bennabi's view concerning the ultimate or real wealth of human society. As he puts it, the real wealth of a society does not actually consist of the objects it uses but rather of the ideas it possesses. Consequently, if for any adversities (e.g. wars, natural catastrophes) a society is partly or entirely deprived of its realm of objects, the harm affecting it because of that will not be so devastating. But the disaster will be much more harmful if such a society at the same time fails to maintain its realm of ideas. By the same token, when it succeeds in salvaging its ideas, it would actually have saved everything, since it would be able to reconstruct its realm of objects based on it. As will be seen in the next pages, Bennabi's analysis and conceptualization of human society and its dynamics is further deepened and elaborated in his treatment of the question of culture as one of the main themes of his thought.

Culture and Sociological Analysis[74]

Culture was a central and recurrent theme in Bennabi's thought, for it never ceased to occupy his mind throughout his intellectual career. There is not one of his works in which he does not deal with this topic in one way or another, or at least refer to its importance. Yet, despite the growing interest in Bennabi's works during the last three decades of the twentieth century, his conceptualization and theorization of culture have not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Bennabi's aim was not to discover new data or to provide hair-splitting descriptions of what might constitute culture. He also had no interest in merely reproducing what Clifford Geerts justly called the "conceptual morass" that had been developed around the subject of culture, as was the case with most Arab thinkers and academicians who wrote about it in his time. Bennabi's approach was totally different. He was in search of what constitutes the essence of culture,[75] that essence which enables us to visualize it as a mode of living and a program of action, equipping human beings with the skill of living together meaningfully and in harmony with their environment.

Chronologically speaking, Bennabi first expressed his views on culture in a chapter of his book *Les Conditions de la Renaissance* that was first published in 1948. In this book, he discussed what he called the idea of "cultural orientation" defined as soundness of foundations, harmony and resolution of movement and unity of purpose. In that context, he defined culture as the mode of being and becoming of a people. This mode of being and becoming has an esthetic, ethical, pragmatic, and technical content. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, these preliminary views were on various occasions subjected to further reflection, elaboration, and deepening until they crystallized in what can be considered a truly Bennabic theory of culture. This theory took its final shape in his book *The Question of Culture*.

A major concern motivating much of Bennabi's thought about culture is the quest for a way out of the impasse in which mankind has been stuck by the desire for power that is overwhelmingly prevalent in modern Western culture. The world, he insists, is in pressing need of an ecumenical humanism that will safeguard the human species from imminent destruction. The notion of humanism has been one of the foremost ideals preached by modern Western civilization. Nevertheless, Bennabi considers that this humanism has been plagued by formalism and shallowness and lacks any solid moral foundation owing to its origins within a culture that derived its roots from the Greco-Roman humanities. Modern Western humanism has found its most resounding formulation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Bennabi argued, this humanism has amounted to no more than a mere artistic and literary work, as it is deprived of the metaphysical and transcendent basis of the original dignity invested in the humankind by its Creator.[76]

According to Bennabi, every social reality is in its essence and origin an actualized cultural value that conditions both man's being and environment in a specific manner. It follows from this that the problem of culture in Muslim and Third World countries arises at a very fundamental level relating to the frame of reference according to which any civilizational change and transformation of society should take place. At this level, its function for civilization is similar to the function of blood for living organisms.[77] This means that we need to look at culture as a process of becoming that is inextricably linked to the question of social reconstruction. From this perspective of socio-historical becoming, culture should have, according to Bennabi, a twofold definition that takes into consideration the problems of the present and the aspirations of the future. Accordingly, he argues that culture, far from being merely a simple close entity, has a rather complex and dynamic nature that can be thought of at two important levels. In his own words, "culture is first and foremost a certain *ambience* within which the human being moves; it [thus] nourishes his inspiration and conditions the efficacy of his [social] interactions. It is an atmosphere made up of colors, tunes, customs, shapes, rhythms, and motions which [all] impart to his life an orientation and [provides him with] a particular model that stimulates his imagination, inspires his genius and incites his creative faculties."[78]

Two concepts figuring in the above statement need to be underlined here: *orientation* and *model*. In fact, almost throughout all his works, Bennabi's major concern has been to answer two fundamentally interrelated questions. First, what is the historical vocation of the Muslim both at the individual and collective levels, and how can the Muslim

world regain its place in the world scene as an active participant in the affairs of humankind? Second, according to what model should the Muslim conduct and activities be patterned in order to fulfill the requirements of that vocation? Bennabi is of the view that culture has an important role to play in this regard. His severe criticism of both reformist and modernist movements in Muslim countries can best be appreciated in this light. In his opinion, those movements were so deficient that they conceived social and civilizational reconstruction as mere accumulation of objects or, at best, a syncretism of disparate elements that are heaped up haphazardly. Thus, they failed to comprehend it as a harmonious and integrated edifice of *things* and *ideas* that hold together in a logical and organic manner and fulfill definite functions for the sake of realizing a specific ideal of life.[79]

Bennabi's conception of culture as "becoming" implies that it has to be understood as a relationship between the individual and society. This relationship involves a process of interaction and mutual commitment between the two poles whereby the conduct of the individual contributes to the shaping of the general mode of life of society and is shaped by it. In this connection, he argues that all the differences pertaining to the definition of culture basically depend on how one understands the nature of this relationship. Thus, if primacy is given to individual actors, emphasis will be placed on the psychological and ideational aspects of culture. If, on the contrary, primacy is given to society as a total entity, emphasis will rather be laid on the objective and structural aspects. To him, both stands are seriously flawed, for it is not a question of mutual exclusion between the two poles of human social life and, hence, between the two dimensions of culture. It is a matter of complementary duality rather than (mutually) exclusive dualism.

Accordingly, the complex and dynamic nature of culture and its embodiment of the reciprocal relationship and mutual commitment between the individual and society require that any attempt at defining it should adopt the methodology used in the study of complex phenomena. This can be done by determining both its subjective psychological and objective sociological components and establishing the necessary links between them within the framework of that mutual commitment in order to formulate a definition of culture in terms of a realizable educational program functional with the task of reconstruction.

As a step in that direction, Bennabi advances the view that culture is "the environment in which the individual psychic being is shaped just as the organic make-up of a person is conditioned by the [natural] physical environment surrounding him."[80] In his opinion, this way of looking at the question of culture allows us to conceive its impact on human society by drawing an analogy between culture and blood. It is a scientific fact that blood consists of the red and white corpuscles (or the erythrocytes and leukocytes) floating in the plasma and maintaining the vitality and equilibrium of the living organism as well as constituting its self-defense mechanism. So too, culture can be conceived as a special kind of plasma that carries the popular ideas of the masses as well as the esoteric and scientific ideas of the elite. These two categories of ideas nourish the society's creative genius and civilizing élan and constitute its self-defense mechanism. As such, culture supplies both the elite and the lay people with unified orientations, common tastes, and shared dispositions.[81]

Furthermore, this conception of culture involves an unconscious dimension since not all the members of a society assimilate culture and become integrated to it through conscious discursive processes, nor do they, at a certain age, consciously choose the way to that integration. Thus, it follows that there is no room for reducing culture to science or even equating it with knowledge in general. Confounding culture and science is, Bennabi insists, pernicious to any proper understanding of the import and function of either of them. Therefore, a clear line of demarcation has to be drawn between the two concepts in order to avoid the grave error of using them interchangeably. As he avers, "culture always generates science, but science does not always generate culture."[82] Hence, culture is more general and encompassing than science.

In his understanding, science tends to be impersonal in the sense that the man of science always stands as a subject observing things with a view to dominating and manipulating them. As he puts it, in science it is a question of the positivist mind "turned to the realm of phenomena." In contrast, culture, being something more comprehensive than science, creates the observer himself and provides him with the mirror for observing those things and phenomena as well as for observing his own self.[83] Thus, while science enables human beings to exert their influence on the realm of material things and phenomena within their reach, culture is their way to achieve harmony between that realm and their inner selves as well as to establish their relations with one another. In other words, culture is the source that provides human beings with the means of self-control and mastery over both nature and the products of their own genius. Put differently, science consists of those procedures and methods by means of which the human intellect applies itself to the realm of things and natural phenomena. By contrast, culture consists of the intersubjective wealth of symbols, values, ideas, traditions, and tastes that allows human beings to regulate and harmonize their relationships and interaction with one another, with their environment and with the universe at large. As such, culture provides the individual, through various psychological processes of assimilation, with the *personal criteria* by means of which he/she judges his/her conduct and action and accommodates them to the society's mode of life.[84]

This point can be expressed differently as follows. While culture embraces the inner dimensions of the human self's relationship with the different levels of existence thus giving primacy to subjectivity and transcendence in human life, science rather tends to concern itself with the external dimensions of things and phenomena of the natural world, including human beings themselves. It thus accords primacy to objectivity and externality in the human relationship with the different realms of existence. Yet, Bennabi is far from the subject–object dichotomy plaguing many a school of thought. His emphasis on the fact that science itself both as theories and procedures cannot be dissociated from the cultural universe within which it takes shape gives warrant to this understanding of his position.

In addition to these clarifications made so as to trace the distinctive lines between culture and science with regard to both the nature and function of each, there is yet another kind of confusion against which Bennabi warns us. This time, we are summoned not to confuse culture with "culture products and by-products." The reason is that any confusion in this regard will dangerously misguide us on both the mechanisms

and function of culture in the same way the confusion between industry and the manufactured products will terribly mislead us on the nature of the former. As Bennabi further maintains, human social life is fundamentally dependent upon two inevitably necessary spheres. On the one hand, there is the *biosphere* without which the physical and biological development of the human beings is inconceivable in this world. On the other hand, there is what he calls the *noosphere*[85] that makes the spiritual and mental development of the human species possible. Culture, in the last analysis, is but the manifest expression of this second sphere. One important idea that emerges from the foregoing discussion and that is emphasized throughout Bennabi's works is that culture is the source by means of which the members of a society construct their worldview and establish their relations with reality and with one another.[86]

Not only human beings depend on culture for their social life and historical existence. This too applies to material things and objects; they would remain obsolete, inanimate and valueless outside the framework of culture. To bring this point home, Bennabi invites us to imagine a man-made satellite landing in the midst of a supposedly "culture-less" group or one that has no communication at all with the culture in which the satellite has been produced. Such a device will have no meaning or value for such people except that it is a mass of matter. This is because it will be lacking the language and code by means of which it can convey its specific message. This means that not only does culture provide human beings with the means of communication and exchange with one another, but it also does so with respect to material things and objects, both natural and man-made. Moreover, according to Bennabi, even ideas and concepts are subject to the same inexorable law. This latter point will be examined in more detail later.

Dynamics of Culture and Human Social Action

In accordance with his view about the cultural essence of social reality, Bennabi maintains that whatever substance exists in the one, necessarily exists in the other. "If we analyze a social reality, that is to say, a concrete social activity, we will discern in it, both in its instantaneous state and progressive course, four basic elements which we can express in pedagogic terms as an ethics, an esthetics, a technique and a practical logic."[87] These basic components of social action determine, in his view, the characteristics and orientation of culture in accordance with their interconnectedness within the framework of that action. At any rate, no social action, he declares, can be imagined without certain ethical and social motivations, without (a) definite pattern(s) according to which it takes place, and without fulfilling some aesthetic criteria. All these elements, he carries on, represent *sine qua non* conditions for the efficacy of social action.[88] Thus, if the ethical component determines the ethos of culture and if culture is, as seen above, a specific *ambience*, it is then evident that the esthetic component plays an equally significant role in it. For Bennabi, creativity is inextricably linked to the esthetic sensibility of the social actor, that is to say, the latter's efficacy is also subject to esthetic criteria.

As he further explains, esthetic values contribute to creating a particular human type. Thanks to its esthetic affinities and tastes, this type would endow life with a specific rhythm and gives history a particular orientation. This means that human social action depends, in its motivation, direction, and form, on ethical and esthetic factors. On the other hand, social action cannot yield its results unless it draws upon dynamic factors whose function is to facilitate the material development of human society. In Bennabi's view, it is technique and pragmatic logic that impart dynamism to social action and facilitate the actualization of its ethical and esthetic dimensions. The imperative nature of technique and practical logic is underscored by the fact that the modern experience of mankind has witnessed one of the greatest developments in human social life. That is, the advent of new, indeed unprecedented, scientific and technological forces that have drastically influenced the human condition in terms of greatly controlling and accelerating the course of history.[89] It has to be mentioned here that technique, in Bennabi's usage, seems to refer to science both in its theoretical and applied forms. For him, the role of science or technique is to provide human actors with the means through which they establish their relations with, and deal with, the realm of things and objects.[90]

As for practical logic, its function lies "in conditioning the form, style and rhythm of social action, that is all its dynamic aspects."[91] The difference between technique and practical logic can further be explained in the following way. On the one hand, technique refers to the power by means of which the humans exert their mastery over the material realm. On the other hand, practical logic consists of the "way action is connected with its means and objectives, in order to avoid estimating how easy or difficult things are without depending on criteria derived from the social environment and its potentials." In other words, practical logic means "to attain the utmost benefit from the available means."[92] Likewise, the import of practical logic is to get, from the available means, the maximum results in the minimum span of time. In this respect, Bennabi observes that the root cause of the inefficacy of human social action lies in the absence of the criteria that would link such action to both its means and ends. Practical logic is thus intimately linked with the question of creativeness both at the individual and collective levels of society.[93]

An important aspect of Bennabi's thinking in this respect must be highlighted here. Despite his strong emphasis on the place of technique and practical logic in the shaping of human social action and in the composition and generation of culture, he does not consider these two factors to be the ultimate determinants of the characteristics of a society's culture. In his opinion, it is rather the dialogical relationship between ethics and esthetics that determines in an essential way a culture's characteristics and orientation, depending on whether primacy is given to one or the other factor. Accordingly, he argues that the historical experience of mankind has oscillated between two main types of culture: an ethically centered type and an esthetically oriented one.[94]

When it degenerates, an ethically centered culture, according to Bennabi, would mostly sink into mysticism, escapism, vagueness and mimesis. By contrast, an esthetically centered culture would degenerate into ponderousness, consumerism, materialism and imperialism. Signalizing the wide gap alienating ethics and esthetics from one another in the modern Western culture that has dominated the globe, Bennabi believes

that the modern mind is in great need for a cultural revolution in order to realize the genuine synthesis of the beautiful and the real. The problem, he insists, ought to be addressed from a universal perspective. In this connection, he maintains that Islam provides "essential cultural elements just as it provides geopolitical elements of particular importance" for such an enterprise.[95] More important than this, Islam has provided two fundamental principles in order to protect mankind against all forms of physical or spiritual oppression. The first principle consists of putting in the Muslim conscience an essential limit to the *will to power*. Hence, the Qur'an states without any ambiguity: "As for that [happy] life in the hereafter, We grant it [only] to those who do not seek to exalt themselves, nor yet to spread corruption, for the future belongs to the God-conscious" (Qur'an, 28: 83). The second principle consists of announcing and emphasizing the essential dignity of man that transcends all boundaries of color, race, nationality, and belief. Thus, the Qur'an brings to human dignity and value their solid metaphysical foundation, when it says: "Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam" (Qur'an, 17: 70).[96]

As he has explained, the cultural universe is not a lifeless world. On the contrary, it has "a life and history of its own." It has "a becoming." Its internal dialectic depends upon the interaction of the parameters of social action, namely: "the persons, the objects and the ideas."[97] As seen above, while the category of persons stands for the totality of the members of society, and while that of ideas represents the system of ideas and values espoused by the persons, the category of objects includes both the natural and manufactured objects, that is, the material sources of life.[98] Consequently, social action is exclusively the outcome of the phenomenal interaction between these three categories or realms, and depends, both in form and direction, on the historical relationship linking them together and varying according to the socio-cultural age of society. Looked at from a different perspective, the realms of persons, ideas, and objects constitute the parameters of social action. This is because such action cannot be imagined without the existence of social agents, a material and institutional (i.e. structural) context in which and by means of which such agents would act, and an ideational frame of reference according to which the motivations, purposes and course of action are defined. Pointing out that the human "agential" and the material–structural aspects are the most easily realizable dimensions of social action owing to their concrete and tangible nature, Bennabi notices that the ideational aspect is the least discernible one though no action can actually be accomplished without it. For him, human action has thus to answer two fundamental questions: the "why" and "how," that is, the *motivations* and *operational modalities* determining that action.[99]

From this, Bennabi proceeds to another level in his analysis of human socio-cultural reality. It is a matter of fact that social action is inconceivable without the human actors who carry it out. Hence, it is quite natural that the realm of persons should occupy a central place in the cultural world. However, human beings cannot, Bennabi insists, be efficacious actors in the socio-historical scene susceptible of producing and receiving culture unless they are transformed into an integrated whole or coherent synthesis. Accordingly, the first and foremost condition for the rise of culture is the integration of individuals into a coherent whole. But what is the integrating force that makes human beings efficacious socio-historical agents?

The answer, according to Bennabi, is that this integrating force consists of moral ideals and values. He says, "the role of the moral ideal is precisely to construct the realm of persons without which neither the realm of ideas nor that of objects will have any *raison d'être*."[100] In this connection, he reminds us of the fundamental place and role of religion in human life. As the reader may well recall, Bennabi's view is that moral values are ontologically grounded in the metaphysical order of existence through the spiritual God-man relationship as instituted by religion. In accordance with that argument, he contends that the idea of religion being the source of integrative moral values has been clearly expounded by the Qur'an as in the following Qur'anic verses:

> He it is Who has strengthened you with His succor, and by giving you believing followers (63) whose hearts He has brought together: [for,] if you had expended all that is on earth, you could not have brought their hearts together [by yourself]: but God did bring them together. Verily, He is almighty, wise. (Qur'an, 8: 62–3)

These verses, he observes, underscore the notion of "binding and unifying" signified by the word "religion" in its Latin origins. Thus, he infers, moral ideals and values whose function is to unite human individuals and integrate them into one coherent whole are essentially of a religious nature dawning with Divine revelation. Accordingly, ethics constitute a fundamental component of culture in the absence of which the realm of persons is no more than isolated atoms. As he further explains, the isolated disintegrated human individual is totally unable both to receive and transmit culture, let alone to produce it. In order to appreciate this point, Bennabi invites us to reflect on the actual misfortune of the shipwrecked English sailor whose story inspired Daniel Defoe in his celebrated novel *Robinson Crusoe* as well as the many cases known in anthropological literature as *l'enfant sauvage*, that is the wild infant case.[101]

In addition to its role as a binding force that integrates the members of society, the moral principle determines the historical vocation and orientation of human society by setting up the motivations and ends for human social action. For Bennabi, social action cannot be conceived as a conscious, purposive action unless it draws upon such ethical ends and motivations. The moral factor is both a matter of social and logical necessity. It determines in a great measure the efficacy of human social action. In other words, the efficacy of human societies increases or decreases depending on the strength or weakness of moral principles' impact on them.[102]

As seen previously, esthetic considerations have a prominent place in human social action. Bennabi has formulated their relationship with the ethical considerations as follows. If the ends and motivations of action are determined, as we have just seen, by the moral ideal, its shape and form are to be determined by the esthetic factor, which at once determines another crucial aspect of human social efficacy. In his view, it is the esthetic factor that actually endows ethical and moral values with more acceptability and radiation and thus increases the efficacy of human social conduct and action. As he argues, when deprived of esthetic taste and affinity, the moral action and conduct of the human being may turn into an "arid and repulsive act."[103] Likewise, there is a necessary and fundamental relationship between ethics and esthetics in the fabric of

human social action. Ethics plays an important role in terms of setting up the model for human conduct and determining the motivations and ends of social action. Esthetics plays an equally important role by shaping the general lifestyle of society and giving human moral conduct and social action tasteful and acceptable forms and shape. This crucial link between ethics and esthetics is manifestly underlined in the Islamic framework, Bennabi affirms. In both the ways it inculcated moral values and the modes it prescribed for their implementation and actualization, Islam gave special regard to the esthetic aspect. Its aim is to cultivate a sense of finesse and esthetic sensibility that would endow human social life with beauty and attraction.[104] Beauty, he argues, is a major source of inspiration in human life that cannot be dissociated from the sense of what is ethically good and acceptable. It thus affects both the thought and behavior of the members of human society. Like ethics, Bennabi takes the esthetic factor in its broad sense so as to concern every aspect of human life, both at the individual and collective levels.

Clearly, Bennabi's reflection on the role of ethics in human life and society appears to depart from the common view of ethics as simply a set of rules and principles that govern, or should govern, human behavior. His insistence that the moral ideal or principle, as he preferred to call it, determines both the ends and motivations of social action, seems to derive from a broad conception of ethics as ethos. In addition to the rules human conduct has to comply with, this conception includes the values human beings strive to actualize and the goals they struggle to achieve. Thus, Bennabi's analysis leads to the following important conclusion about human social life. The integration of the realm of persons depends in an essential manner on ethics and esthetics as major components of culture. In other words, human social relations are embedded in, and nurtured by, what may be called, in line with his terminology, ethico–esthetic plasma.

The above statement paves the way to the second constituent of the cultural world, namely the realm of ideas. Emphasizing the central place of this realm in human social existence, Bennabi held that there is a *universal canvas* for human social action according to which the latter cannot be brought about. Simultaneously with the visible elements, this universal canvas encompasses an ideational element representing both its motivations and operational modalities. It should be mentioned at the outset of our examination of this realm that Bennabi's concern is not directed to the ontological and epistemological status of ideas. His foremost interest is rather to investigate the life and dynamics of ideas in human social existence, or what he often calls the *career* of ideas in human history.

The function of ideas in human social existence, for him, is not merely figurative or decorative. They rather assume a fundamental role as integrating forces of human society to the course of history. In this respect, he draws our attention to one important aspect. The efficacy of ideas as forces of socio-historical change does not depend solely on their internal consistency, authenticity, or compatibility with reality. Even false and inconsistent ideas can be so efficacious that they may be at the origin of storming events in the history of mankind. Therefore, their relationships within a given cultural world and the prevailing psycho-sociological circumstances are determinant factors in the social efficacy and historical destiny of ideas.

It should be pointed out here that Bennabi does not provide any further detail concerning the notion of "false and inconsistent ideas." Nevertheless, this notion can be understood in light of two examples used in his work. The first example belongs to the domain of science, whereas the second pertains to the realm of ideologies. As he put it, the "idea of the philosopher's stone" played an influential role in the development of scientific thought during the Middle Ages, although it has no scientific genuine value. Only after Lavoisier had made his discoveries in chemistry did such a false idea disappear from the realm of science. The second example concerns Marxism. In Bennabi's view, Marxist ideology suffered serious philosophical inconsistency and some of its basic assumptions are utterly incompatible with the nature of things. He even went as far as considering it a mere internal crisis of modern Western civilization. However, this did not prevent it from being at the origin of great historical events and socio-political revolutions of far-reaching impact in the twentieth century. According to him, this socio-historical efficacy of Marxism has to be understood from a psychological standpoint. In his opinion, Marxism had derived a great deal of its psychological ingredients and dynamism from the fertile ground provided by the very Christian culture against which it revolted. This endowed Marxism with the appeal of a motivating spiritual creed. What is worth noting here is the fact that, as early as the 1960s, Bennabi predicted that the socio-political order based on the Marxist doctrines would, sooner or later, collapse as the "spiritual drive" supporting it fades away![105]

Accordingly, Bennabi theorizes, ideas have their "Archimedean moment," that is to say the historical moment in which they meet with the psycho-sociological and cultural conditions favorable for them to fulfill their function as forces of socio-historical change. This observation explains the fact why some ideas in human history have to "emigrate" from the place (i.e. the socio-cultural context) in which they first appear or "to remain in abeyance" for some generations until they meet with their Archimedean moment or grace. This "emigration" or "expatriation" of ideas as well as their "remaining in abeyance" occur, according to Bennabi, in two stages of the socio-historical evolution of human society. The first is when the human social environment in which such ideas come into being is so dynamic and developed that no psycho-sociological forces are left idle, thus ready to become carriers of those ideas.[106] The second is when such human social environment has reached a state of senility and weariness corresponding to what Bennabi calls "the post-civilization stage." At this stage, society loses the sense of its vocation as well as genuine and creative rapport with the "matrices" of its original cultural world. As a result, it starts disintegrating in such a manner that its psycho-sociological forces become irresponsive to the call of ideas as forces of socio-historical change.[107]

Thus, we are here presented with one of the fundamental laws in the sociology of ideas. By governing the life and dynamics of ideas in human social existence, this law applies not only to "single" scientific or technological ideas, but it also, more importantly, applies to whole ideational and value systems such as religion and ideological systems.[108] In this respect, another closely related aspect in the sociology of ideas is also signalized. According to Bennabi, to enter history as efficacious forces of change, ideas need always to acquire a sense of sacredness and sanctity in order to acquire legitimacy

and mobilize the psycho-sociological and cultural forces of human society. Likewise, false ideas, he contends, have always been compelled to wear a mask of authenticity just like a burglar entering a house with a false key. Without this sense of sanctity and sacredness that was attached to the notions of science, progress and civilization, Europe, Bennabi argues, would not have been able to lay down "the foundations for the twentieth-century civilization internally and to establish its domination over the world internationally." Therefore, it can be inferred that a cultural order in its formative stage would "always seek support in sacred values" as a means of establishing its legitimacy in the psychology of the people.[109]

These pertinent remarks on the conditions of the integration of ideas to the course of human history pave the way for the examination of the realm of ideas as one of the parameters of cultural life and social action. According to Bennabi, this realm consists of two principal categories of ideas: *les idées imprimées* and *les idées exprimées*, that is, the *impressed* and the *expressed* ideas. Comparing the realm of ideas to a disk, he maintains that every historical society has its own *disk* whose fundamental *notes* are differently imprinted in the subjectivity of its members. These fundamental notes, or impressed ideas, constitute the centers of polarization for the vital energies and psycho-sociological forces of that society, as we have seen above. The centrality and specific character in human social and cultural existence of this category of ideas is emphasized by the use of such suggestive terms as master ideas (*idées maîtresses*), driving ideas (*idées forces*), driving forces, and archetypes.

It appears from Bennabi's analysis that this category of ideas is limited in number and universal in scope. Due to their place in human society's existence as matrices of its cultural world, these archetypes consist of the core ideas and central values that constitute the fundamental components of the society's worldview. They provide its members with the prism through which they perceive their place in the universe, understand their vocation in history, and establish their relationship with the different realms of existence. Thus, they form the ultimate source of inspiration for the society's cultural genius and intellectual creativity as well as the forces of orientation for its vital and psycho-sociological energies. As indicated by Bennabi, insofar as the members of a society maintain a psychologically genuine and creative rapport with its archetypes, all its activities, including its produced ideas, will be molded accordingly.

Let us, before moving to another level of analysis, make the following clarification regarding Bennabi's use of the term "archetype." Readers who are particularly familiar with Jungian analytic psychology may rightly note unmistakable similarity of terminology between Malik Bennabi and Carl G. Jung. However, a careful examination of the conceptual framework of both thinkers reveals that this apparent similarity does not imply any essential concurrence, neither in the ontological meaning of the concept of "archetypes" nor in their content. However, this does not preclude a great possibility of agreement between them in respect of the function such archetypes are supposed to fulfill in human socio-historical existence.

Thus, Bennabi's archetypes stand for the core ideas and fundamental values around which a society's life revolves. On the other hand, Jung's archetypes are clearly remi-

niscent of Plato's Forms or Ideas and refer to "the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere."[110] In his opinion, these forms are the "primordial images" engraved in the collective unconscious of mankind and have an ever-recurrence in the psychic experiences of the individual.[111]

For Bennabi, these archetypes might derive from a Divine revelation such as the Qur'an, or from a humanly constructed system of ideas that have crystallized and acquired an enduring status. They provide human society with a worldview and a framework guiding its movement and anchoring its existence and providing it with a specific direction and orientation.[112] On the contrary, Jung's archetypes originate from the accumulated psychic experience that constitutes the collective unconscious of the human species. Thus containing "the whole spiritual heritage of mankind," Jung's archetypes "act like maps projected by the psyche onto the world, and out of them arise all the most powerful and perennial ideas in art, religion, philosophy and science."[113] Likewise, it is possible to identify Bennabi's archetypes in terms of both time and space, while such a task remains beyond reach as far as Jung's are concerned.

Since our focus in this section is on the problem of culture dynamics in human social existence, we need to bear in mind Bennabi's argument concerning the role of ideas in terms of conditioning and orienting human society's vital energies in accordance with the requirements of moral and cultural development. Besides man, soil, and time, when society comes into existence, its real and permanent wealth consists of its archetypes or impressed ideas on the basis of which it progressively constructs its system or realm of ideas that, in turn, gradually takes root in distinctive cultural plasma. It is the relation patterns of those archetypes with the other components of the cultural world that ultimately determine the characteristic features of a society's civilization and culture in contrast to other societies.

The following question arises in this respect: How are the relations of a society's archetypes historically manifested within its cultural universe?

We saw at the beginning of our inquiry into the realm of ideas, that it comprises, besides the impressed ideas or archetypes of the society's cultural universe, another category, namely the *expressed ideas*. Now assuming that the foundational status of those archetypes would have become clear in light of the preceding discussion, our examination of the expressed ideas is believed to supply an accurate answer to the question raised above. In Bennabi's conceptual framework, the expressed ideas stand for the entire range of theoretical, scientific, technical and operational ideas produced by a society and by means of which it conceptualizes, expresses, projects, and actualizes its archetypes in the course of its historical experience. This point attracts our attention to one important line of distinction between the two categories. While Bennabi considers that the impressed ideas pass down in an "intact" state from one generation to another, he admits that the expressed ideas have to undergo a process of accumulation, adaptation, and modification that would allow each generation to meet the necessities of its respective historical circumstances. This distinction underlines two crucial aspects of the realm of ideas. First, the archetypes or impressed ideas, owing to their universality and limit in number, seem to assume an absolute and transcendental status. Second, the expressed ideas are, on the contrary, bound with the vicissitudes of time and thus subject to the laws of historical growth and change.

The viability, resiliency, and efficacy of the society's expressed ideas depend, in Bennabi's opinion, upon two essential criteria. First, their reflection of, and faithfulness to, its archetypes constitute the authenticity criterion without which such ideas have no roots and relevance in the society's cultural universe. Deriving from a special rapport stamped with "creative tension" that the members of the society would entertain with those archetypes, this authenticity criterion endows the expressed ideas with "a sacred note", thus increasing their socio-historical efficacy. For Bennabi, the "ethical and aesthetic sensitivity," which would grow out of the society's relationship with its archetypes, provides an important clue to the measurement of the incoherence within the realm of ideas as well as of social deterioration in general. In fact, the authenticity criterion can be understood in such a way that the category of expressed ideas may include whatever ideas and concepts that a society "borrows" from other civilizations and incorporates in its own cultural universe and realm of ideas through different processes of adjustment, adaptation, and assimilation.[114]

The second criterion pertains to the ability of the expressed ideas to provide adequate responses and efficient solutions to the theoretical, cognitive, moral, and practical problems confronting society in its historical evolution. It is worth noting, in this connection, that Bennabi's understanding of culture dynamics does not exclude the possibility for a society to borrow and adopt ideas, concepts and solutions originating in a different cultural universe. For him, there is no weaker position, in human socio-cultural affairs, than rejecting enlightenment by the ideas and experiences of others or benefit from their achievements. Nevertheless, he is quite clear regarding the following point. Such "borrowings" and "adoptions," he insists, will be devoid of any value and may even be counterproductive and harmful if they are not submitted to a process of adjustment and adaptation in order to make them concord with the moral and spiritual foundations of the society borrowing them.[115] Put differently, in order that such borrowings contribute positively to the civilizational development of the borrowing society, they must be such that they would enable it to achieve the goals and ends that actually derive from its original archetypes. Likewise, it is assumed that, through such a process of adjustment and adaptation, the "borrowings" can be incorporated in such a way that they would become an integral part of society's expressed ideas, thus echoing its archetypes and reflecting its spirit. This means that an expressed idea, whether internally produced (home-made) or borrowed from another civilization, would have an artificial existence that makes it historically irrelevant; hence it would lack any social significance or function as it is cut off from the moral and spiritual roots of society.

Now that we proceed to examine the realm of objects constituting the third parameter of the cultural world, it should be mentioned that Bennabi did not conceive the role of objects in cultural processes in isolation from that of ideas. To him, both the idea and the object contribute to the production and dissemination of culture in an irrevocably connected manner. This situation raises, he acknowledges, a serious difficulty regarding the objective differentiation between the respective roles of each, especially when we study culture as an ongoing process in which all the culture components are fully integrated in a continuous dynamic movement. However, and in conformity with

the central place he ascribes to ideas in human social existence, Bennabi suggests the following analogy to remove this difficulty.

The relationship between the role of the idea and the object in cultural processes can be compared to the relationship, in mechanics, between the "arm and the "wheel" in those apparatuses that transform "translational" motion into a "rotational" one. As is established in mechanics, although the "arm" is the mover, it cannot overstep what is known as the "dead center" without the support of the "wheel" thanks to the energy encompassed by the latter. In his view, this analogy at once underlines the mutual dependency between the idea and the object and brings into prominence the primacy of the former by virtue of its "creative power" (*point mort*). Yet Bennabi observes that neither the idea nor the object is able to generate culture in the absence of what can be called a *sense of transcendence* at the level of the human being. Without such a sense of transcendence the realms of both ideas and objects are, historically and sociologically speaking, devoid of any cultural value and social efficacy. This sense of transcendence, he explains, can be understood in terms of a special bond linking the human being to the idea and the object. As that sense of transcendence fades away, this "bond" breaks down and the human being ultimately loses mastery over both ideas and objects. In such a situation, his/her relationship with them is so superficial and ephemeral that "it neither raises a question nor creates a problem"; hence, with such an ephemeral and superficial relationship, man's creative energies would literally remain idle.[116]

Although the point made here by Bennabi allows for further argument, especially in respect of the philosophical connotations that the idea of "transcendence" might imply, it is beyond the immediate concern of this study to embark on such an argument. However, we should not fail to stress the following point. There seems to be an attempt by Bennabi at overcoming the dichotomous conception of culture displayed in the work of some leading Western social scientists, such as the distinction between "adaptive" and "material" culture made by the American anthropologist William Ogbern and Pitirim Sorokin's typology of "ideational" and "sensate".[117]

From the above exposition, the reader could realize how broad and comprehensive Bennabi's conception of culture is. For him, culture is not simply customs that consist of the acquired patterns of behavior and belief transmitted in a society from one generation to another, as professed by Ruth Benedict.[118] Moreover, he does not look at it as merely a subjective aspect of human life that lies exclusively at the level of individual actors. He also does not see it as something that only concerns the objective side of the human experience by considering it as the product of total entities and overwhelming structures of society. More importantly, Bennabi does not conceive culture as an antithesis to, or negation of, nature. On the contrary, human beings, in his view, are always engaged in a dialogical relationship with two worlds. On the one hand, they are engaged in a continuous dialogue and exchange with the human and ideational realms that contribute to the shaping of their being and personality. On the other hand, they are engaged in another equally important dialogue with nature. The latter conveys its messages to them through "the language of colors, sound, smells, movements, shadow and light, forms and images." Human beings assimilate all these messages in the form of cultural elements that become integrated to their moral existence and fundamental being. According to Bennabi, when these cultural elements provided by nature are

absorbed in our psychological and mental being, they grow "in our minds as scientific ideas that are translated into technical models and artistic expressions in the world of fashion and industry." They also might exalt, "thus inspiring the musician with a fascinating composition, the painter a wonderful painting, and the poet a mystical poem."[119] In other words, far from being antithetical to nature, culture is rather regarded by Bennabi as entailing the human involvement in and cooperation with natural phenomena and processes and their reorientation in line with human purposes and concerns.

The Question of Cultural Crisis

In Bennabi's scheme of thought it is the relationship of a society with its archetypes that shapes the phenomenal interplay of its constituent realms of persons, ideas and objects and ultimately determines its fate in history. As a society ceases to have a creative relationship with its original archetypes, it stops generating new efficacious ideas representative of those archetypes and capable of regulating its vital (instinctive) energies and endowing its collective action with meaning and orientation. Then, it naturally and precipitously slides into a state of idolatry and polarization either around the "person" or the "object," that is to say personality cult and *choseisme*. Bennabi explains this situation as follows. When a society reaches the stage of civilization thanks to its archetypes or impressed ideas, cultural equilibrium between the major realms constituting the human society (i.e. persons, ideas and objects) must be preserved if civilization and culture are to grow smoothly and creatively. In his view, a culture crisis starts when incoherence takes place between the society's impressed and expressed ideas. This incoherence is manifested in the fact that the latter category of ideas no longer reflects and represents the former category. Then, the crisis grows and reaches alarming, indeed destructive, scales, as the society's cultural world undergoes an imbalance and breakdown in the relationships of its constitutive elements (i.e. the person, the idea, and the object). This imbalance and breakdown takes the form of what Bennabi calls *despotism* of the person or the thing. This gives rise to the two phenomena of *personification* and *choseisme*. If the equilibrium is not restored and the object or the person continues to supersede the idea, society will ultimately slide into the post-civilization stage. In this connection, Bennabi argues that the present state of the Muslim world is the outcome of its submergence into the post-civilization stage in which it is now facing *choseisme* together with all its psycho-sociological and political consequences.

For Bennabi, the failure of a society to generate creative efficacious ideas that do not betray the original ideal that had given birth to it, is not a mere intellectual problem that concerns only an elite of scholars and specialists. For as soon as this happens, thus giving way to idolatry and polarization around the person or the object, another type of ideas will come into being as a substitute. These *ersatz* ideas, to use Bennabi's own term, will serve to camouflage the society's general apathy, to nurture atomism in the individuals' thinking, to justify sectarianism and egocentrism among its people, thus paving the way for its decline and *colonizability*.

Put differently, this state of affairs comes about as the society's archetypes or impressed ideas "fade away from the disk of its civilization and its generated, or expressed, ideas, become mere whistling and crackles." This situation marks the society's historical betrayal of its origins, its atomization because of the lack of common motivations, the exhaustion of the moral and aesthetic tension at the level of its individual members, the lifelessness of its cultural world, and the general deterioration and apathy of its social fabric. Thus, Bennabi ascertains, ersatz ideas, whether advocated in the name of authenticity or borrowed from the cultural world of another civilization in the name of modernization, are no more than carriers of a specific genre of viruses that ultimately erode the very moral, cultural, and material foundations of a society. With its archetypes or *impressed ideas* betrayed and its *expressed ideas* dead and turned into virus carriers, society has only to undergo the nemesis of history aggravated by the deadly reaction of the borrowed ideas which have left their roots in the original cultural world from which they were borrowed. According to Bennabi's analysis, over no less than two centuries, the Muslim world has become the scene where "a dead idea attracts, indeed invites, a deadly idea." This is because the post-Almohad Muslim mind has been condemned in such a way that it is unable to discern and absorb "anything except what is futile, absurd and even deadly."[120]

As a consequence of this, the Muslim world at present "undergoes the nemesis of the archetypes of its own cultural universe as well as the terrible revenge of the ideas it has been borrowing from Europe without taking into consideration the conditions that would preserve their social value. This results in the depreciation of both the inherited and acquired ideas, thus generating the most pernicious harm to the moral and material development of the Muslim world."[121] This has resulted, according to Bennabi, from the fact that Muslims have, on the one hand, lost true and creative contact with the archetypes of their original cultural universe and, on the other, failed to establish genuine and fruitful contact with the cultural universe of Europe. Therefore, it is only to be expected that Muslim life now suffers from the effects of the implacable twofold revenge of both the inherited and the borrowed ideas.

In line with his argument that culture constitutes the basis for the reciprocal relationship and interdependence between the individual and society, Malik Bennabi is of the view that culture crisis is in essence a breakdown of that interdependence relationship. Correspondingly, culture crisis manifests itself in two interrelated ways: the ceasing or diminution of society's control over the individual's conduct and breakdown of social constraint, on the one hand, and the failure or inability of the individual to practice criticism and to protest against society, on the other. In both instances, Bennabi insists, a culture crisis comes about whose ultimate outcome is the disintegration of civilization. As he indicates, social phenomena are not stagnant, nor do they take place in an enclosed field. It is rather closely connected to the complex processes of social life in a dialectical manner. It is through such dialectical and interactive interconnectedness that social phenomena grow and perpetuate their consequences. Accordingly, culture crisis as a social phenomenon would grow, together with its consequences, right from the stages where it can be easily remedied up to the stage where no remedy is practically possible. Whatever the failures and setbacks befalling

a society might be, they are at bottom the manifest expression of its cultural and civilizational crisis at a specific phase of its historical development, Bennabi strongly argues. As culture crisis reaches the point of no return, the only solution to overcome it is "a comprehensive cultural revolution, which is, in fact, a new start in social life." For Bennabi, the reaction to culture crisis is by no means identical. It varies from one society to another and, in the same society, from one historical stage to another, in accordance with the level of civilizational development.[122]

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, our main concern has been to unravel and explicate what can be deemed as the philosophical and theoretical foundations of Bennabi's thought. Our analysis of his views concerning religion, society, and culture has clearly shown to what extent these three major themes of his work are threaded together through a unified and integrated perspective deriving its underpinnings from the unitarian Qur'anic worldview and Islamic universal vision of the human condition. From the methodological point of view, his treatment of those themes was carried out according to an interdisciplinary perspective. Based on this fundamental philosophical framework and consistently with it, Bennabi attempted his treatment of various practical, political, social, economic, cultural and educational issues that were pressing in his time, whether at the particular level of Muslim countries or at the global level of the world. In fact, Bennabi labored to develop a whole program in which such issues are tackled on various occasions and in numerous articles and speeches that need to be carefully studied in order to bring the components and features of that program into strong relief and assess them in light of his philosophical and theoretical system delineated here. Although we entertain a great desire to embark on such an undertaking, the nature and scope of the present chapter does not allow for it. We only hope that some future opportunity will make this project realizable.

Notes

1. F. Bariun, *Malik Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1993), 69. In 1965, Bennabi published in French part one of his autobiography *Mémoires d'un témoin du siècle* under the title "L'Enfant" (The Child) in Algiers and this was translated into Arabic by Marwān Qanawāti. Originally written in French, part two was translated by the author and published in 1970 in Beirut under the title "al-Tālib" (The Student). The Arabic translation of both parts has been published in one single volume in Damascus by Dār al-Fikr under the title *Mudhakkirāt Shāhid li'l-Qarn* (*Memoirs of a Witness of the Century*). They cover the period from Bennabi's date of birth until September 1939. Some sources close to his family affirm the existence of a sequel to these two parts and that for one reason or another its publication is being purposely halted!
2. Ernest Gellner, *Reason and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 55–110.

3. Roger Trigg, *Rationality and Science: Can Science Explain Everything?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 60 and 81.
4. Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Remembering God: Reflections on Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2000), 30.
5. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 147.
6. Lawrence Sklar, *Philosophy of Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.
7. Eaton, op. cit., 30.
8. See for example, Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974 [1947]); Paul Fayerbend, *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987); Vattimo Gianni, *The End of Modernity*, Jon R. Snyder (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); John Horgan, *The End of Science* (London: Abacus, 1998 [1996]).
9. David Dockery, "The Challenge of Postmodernism", in David Dockery, ed., *The Challege of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 14.
10. I intentionally do not here talk about metaphysical or transcendental reality because it does not constitute part of the scheme of things of modernity and post-modernity.
11. Toulmin, op. cit., 172.
12. Carl F. H. Henry, "Post-modernism: The New Spectre", in David Dockery, op. cit., 38.
13. Pauline Rosenau, *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.
14. See for example Mae-Wan Ho, *Genetic Engineering: Dream or Nightmare, The Brave World of Bad Science and Big Business* (Penang, Malaysia: TWN, 1998). The author is a British biologist and a fellow of the US National Genetics Foundation.
15. René Dubos, *So Human an Animal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 3–9.
16. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1992).
17. Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).
18. Lawrence E. Cahoone, *The Dilemma of Modernity* (New York: The State of University of New York Press, 1988), 17.
19. Malik Bennabi, *The Qur'anic Phenomenon: An Essay of a Theory on the Qur'an*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (trans.), (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), 31. (Unless otherwise indicated, our exposition of Bennabi's views in this section on religion draws mainly on this book.)
20. Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi, *A Muslim Theory of Human Society: An Investigation into the Sociological Thought of Malik Bennabi* (Kuala Lumpur: Thinker's Library, 1998), 11–18.
21. Serge Mascovici: *The Invention of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 33.
22. For detailed expositions of different theories of religion, see the following works: Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1983); Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1995); Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
23. Malik Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 80; *The Qur'anic Phenomenon*, op. cit., 30.
24. M. Bennabi, *The Qur'anic Phenomenon*, 41.
25. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme: Conclusions sur la Conférence de Bandoeng* (Cairo: Imprimerie Misr S.A.E., 1956), 256.
26. Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr, *al-Madrasah al-Qur'aniyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1981), 115–18.

27. Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies in Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 168.
28. J. Campell (ed.), *The Portable Jung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 45–6.
29. J. J. Clarke, *In Search of Jung* (London: Routledge, 1992), 32.
30. Carl Gustave Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2. Cf. Clarke, op. cit., 35.
31. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 80.
32. Edouard Montet, *Histoire de la Bible* (Paris: Payot, 1924), 74.
33. Fakhr al-Dán Muäammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzá, *al-Tafsár al-Kabár* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1411/1990), vol. 14/28, 7; Nāsir al-Din Abu Sa'ad 'Abd Allāh al-Baydāwá, *Anwār al-Tanzil wa Asrār al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1416/1996), vol. 5, 178.
34. Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994 [1971]). Cragg's work is noteworthy in that he tried in it to bring into prominence the phenomenological aspects of the Qur'an. However, his analysis tends to obliterate the concept of *wahy* by trying to explain it in terms of the human genius of the Prophet.
35. Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an*, 38–9.
36. Ibid., 185.
37. Ibid., 186.
38. Bennabi, *The Qur'anic Phenomenon*, 262.
39. El-Mesawi, op. cit., 45–160.
40. Ram Krishna Mukherjee, *Society, Culture and Development* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), 11–12.
41. Mukherjee, op. cit., 12; Ibn Khaldun: *The Muqaddimah*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), vol. 1, 89; Muhammad al-Tāhir Ibn 'Ashur: *Usul al-Nizām al-Ijtimā'i Fi'l -Islām*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (ed.) (Amman: Dār al-Nafais, 2001), 171.
42. Ibn Khaldun, op. cit., vol. 1, 98–101; Ibn 'Àshur, 171; Mukherjee, 13.
43. William McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1994).
44. Malik Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society: The Social Relations Network*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002). (Since our exposition of Bennabi's views on society draws mainly on this book, we will refer to it only in the case of direct quotations. Cross-references to his other works will, however, be made whenever relevant.)
45. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 9.
46. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1991), 157.
47. Piotr Sztompka, *The Sociology of Social Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 146.
48. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 158.
49. M. Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, Asma Rashid (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1991), 90.
50. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, Alan Shridan (trans.) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 15.
51. M. Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, 81.
52. One main reason why Bennabi paid special attention to these two interpretations might be because they had gained quite a wide audience among Arab intellectuals and academicians during the 1950s and 1960s when he was developing his views.
53. Karl Marx, 1859, quoted in Mukherjee, op. cit., 150–1.
54. Karl Marx, *Capital* [1949], vol. 1, 64; quoted in Mukherjee, op. cit., 152.

55. Arnold Toynbee, *Study of History*, quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi: *The Qur'anic Concept of History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1984), 197.
56. M. Bennabi, *al-Muslim Fi 'Alam al-Iqtisād* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1987), 91–2; *Ta'ammulāt*, 135.
57. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 961; Rāzi, op. cit., vol. 11, 13–16; Muhammad al-Tāhir Ibn 'Ashur, *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* (Tunis: Maison Souhnoun, 1997), vol. 15, 420–9; Muäammad Hussain Tabtaba'I, *al-Mizān Fi Tafsir al-Qu'ān* (Beirut: Mua'assat al-A'lmi li'l-Maæbu'at, 1991), vol. 13, 152–7, and vol. 20, 365–6.
58. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 27 and 135.
59. M. Bennabi, *al-Muslim Fi 'Alam al-Iqtisād*, 91.
60. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003), 22.
61. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1987), 24–56.
62. M. Bennabi, *The Qur'anic Phenomenon*, 36.
63. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 80.
64. Ibn Khaldân, op. cit., vol. 1, 91.
65. M. Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, 89.
66. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 56 and 65.
67. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Culture*, Abdul Wahid Lu'lu'a (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust and International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003), 9–40 and 48.
68. Fawzia Bariun, "Malik Bennabi and the Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 9/3 (1992), 329.
69. Almohad (al-Muwahidun) dynasty, founded by Muhammad ibn Tumart in 1133 CE, ruled over the entire Muslim West (i.e. North Africa and part of Muslim Spain) for more than a century and held a prominent, if not the foremost, rank in the contemporary world. To historians, this was an era that flourished in the field of thought and culture with scholars such as Ibn Tofayl, Ibn Rushd, al-Shātibi. With the death of the fifth Almohad ruler in the year 1293, the first symptoms of decline became noticeable. This dynasty finally ended in the year 1269 with the death of its last ruler, 'Ulā Idris al-Wāthiq. According to Malik Bennabi, the end of the Almohad dynasty marked the end of the second phase of the Islamic civilizational cycle. Thereafter, the Muslim world plunged into what he calls the post-Almohad age that coincides with the phase of decadence and disintegration, thus paving the way for colonizability and its corollary, colonialism.
70. *Colonizability* (Fr. colonisabilité), a term coined by Bennabi to denote the state of a society that is susceptible to be colonized and dominated by others. Accordingly, he considers that colonialism was a consequence, rather than a cause, of the internal conditions and structures of Muslim and Third World societies. For more elaboration on this subject and its relationship with its correlate colonialism, see his book *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 149–60.
71. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 44–51; *Pour Changer l'Algérie* (Algiers: S.E.C., 1990), 9–16.
72. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 27; *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003), 13–16 and 20–3; *The Question of Culture*, Abdul Wahid Lu'lu'a (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003), 21–45.
73. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 80.
74. In the remaining part of this chapter dealing with the issue of culture, our discussion will mainly draw on the following two books of Bennabi: (i) *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*; and (ii) *The Question of Culture*. Therefore, only in cases of direct quotation will reference be made to them.

75. Clifford Geerts, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 4.
76. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 293.
77. Ibid., 161 and 165.
78. Ibid., 163–4.
79. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 87; *Islam in History and Society*, 23–40; *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 44–51.
80. M. Bennabi, *al-Qadayā al-Kubrā* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 80.
81. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 166.
82. M. Bennabi, *Pour Changer l'Algérie*, 56–9.
83. M. Bennabi, Ibid., 59–60; *Ta'ammulāt*, 148–9.
84. M. Bennabi, *Pour Changer l'Algérie*, 60; *On the Origins of Human Society*, 115.
85. *The Question of Culture*, 67. It is interesting to point out that this notion of noosphere being the ideational realm for the spiritual and mental development of human beings has constituted a major field of philosophical and sociological investigation by the leading French philosopher Edgar Morin. See volume 4 of his *magnum opus La Méthode* entitled *Les Idées. Leur habitat, leur vie, leur moeurs, leur organisation* (Ideas: Their Habitat, Life, Habits and Organization (Paris: Seuil, 1991).
86. F. Bariun, op. cit., 171.
87. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 166.
88. M. Bennabi, *al-Qadayā al-Kubrā*, 88.
89. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 173–4.
90. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 151.
91. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 174.
92. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Culture*, 60.
93. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 151.
94. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 151–2; *al-Qadayā al-Kubrā*, 85–6.
95. M. Bennabi, *L'Afro-Asiatisme*, 295–7.
96. Ibid., 289–94.
97. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 46.
98. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 51–2 and 73; *The Question of Culture*, 42.
99. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 10–11.
100. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 148.
101. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 11; *The Question of Culture*, 66.
102. M. Bennabi, *Ta'ammulāt*, 148.
103. Ibid., 150–1.
104. Ibid., 149–50.
105. M. Bennabi, *Shurut al-Nahdah*, 60; *al-Muslim Fi 'Alam al-Iqtisād*, 44–5; *The Question of Ideas*, 111–12.
106. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 67.
107. M. Bennabi, *al-Muslim Fi 'Alam al-Iqtisād*, 16.
108. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 67–8; *The Question of Ideas*, 25–6 and 68–9.
109. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 69.
110. Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1991), 42.
111. Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, H. G. Baynes (trans.) (London: Routledge, 1989), 442–46; see also Clarke, op. cit., 116–27.
112. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 34.
113. Carl G. Jung, *Complete Works*, vol. 9, 99, cited by Clarke, op. cit., 117.
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115. M. Bennabi, *On the Origins of Human Society*, 122–3.

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118. Cahoone, op. cit., 246.
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120. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Ideas*, 102–4.
121. Ibid., 109–10.
122. M. Bennabi, *The Question of Culture*, 65.