

Humanity as Homo Culturus

Mahmoud Dhaouadi

Abstract

This paper claims that human beings are first of all Homo Culturus and only then Homo Politicus, Homo Sociologus, or Homo Oeconomicus. Human beings are distinguished from all other species by what I call human symbols (HS), namely, language, thought, religion, knowledge/science, myths, laws, and cultural values and norms. As such, they are central to the human identity of individuals, groups, and societies and therefore basic keys for understanding and explaining individual as well as collective behaviors in human societies. The theoretical framework/paradigm of Homo Culturus also helps to explain the phenomenon of the human mind in its various forms: the illiterate mind, the educated mind, and the highly intellectual minds of scientists and scholars such as Ibn Khaldun.

Introduction

This article explores the legitimacy of calling *humanity a Homo Culturus*, a term that is hardly ever mentioned in the contemporary social sciences. Economists and those who have a materialist view have described humanity as Homo Oeconomicus, and political scientists and those interested in political issues have labeled humanity as Homo Politicus. Sociologists see the human being as a very social being or Homo Sociologus. Due the increasing use of numbers today, some even call humanity Homo Numericus.¹ Yet despite their great interest in the study of culture, contemporary anthropologists have not used terms related to culture to describe humanity *as Homo Culturus*.² This

Mahmoud Dhaouadi is a sociologist affiliated with the University of Tunis, Tunisia. His main areas of research are Tunisian society, Arab-Islamic thought, Ibn Khaldun's thought, the universe of cultural symbols, the other underdevelopment, and crime and deviance. A professor at numerous universities both in Tunisia and abroad, he has authored 14 books, contributed chapters to 12 others, translated 2, and over written 200 essays, articles, and book reviews in English, Arabic, and French.

marginalization of culture's importance and its central and decisive role in helping one understand and explain human phenomena is likely to damage the credibility of these social sciences. It could be argued that social sciences can hardly secure a theoretically and empirically sound understanding and explanation of human and social phenomena without giving culture a central role. Such a marginalization can be explained by their lack of doing *basic research* on many *forgotten dimensions* and *their intrinsic nature* of what I call *Human Symbols (HS)*: spoken and written language, thought, religion, knowledge/science, myths, laws, and cultural values and norms.

Modern social scientists have not paid a great deal of attention to the most important features of human identity, preferring instead to focus on humanity's less central dimensions, among them sex, economics, politics, and sociability. In other words, their thought may be described as having given a priori attention to what is close to the important, instead of giving their full attention to *the most important dimensions* of humanity: those that are represented by HS.³

Humanity: The Non-Homo Culturus

The special issue of the French review *Science & Avenir*⁴ asked 100 eminent natural and social scientists the following question: Qu'est-ce que l'Homme? (What is humanity?). Not one of them defined humanity as a cultural being. Even Edgar Morin, a French sociologist noted for his great interest in the complexity of phenomena, labeled humanity as Homo Complexus.⁵

Neglecting culture's major importance is hardly new in the western social sciences. Pre-1960 theorists of culture like Max Weber (d. 1920), Emile Durkheim (d. 1917), Karl Marx (d. 1883), Talcott Parsons (d. 1979), and John Stuart Mills (d. 1873), as well as communists, fascists, and others, are known to have assigned a "weak program" for culture's importance in their published works. In other words, *they gave culture minor importance* in their analyses.⁶ Furthermore, the Birmingham School, Pierre Bourdieu (d. 2002), and Michel Foucault (d. 1984), as well as the theory of production and consumption of culture, have not done any better, for they have adopted a weak program in the study of culture. This trend continues to dominate the sociological studies of culture, even though the strong program (giving culture the first importance) of cultural sociology is gaining more attention especially among American sociologists. This is due to the birth of the "cultural turn" in the late twentieth century.⁷ There is wide-ranging consensus that American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (d. 2006) launched a strong program for the study of culture. Its

two axioms are the autonomy of culture and the cultural textuality of social life. In other words, culture is life's internal text.

The weak program that sociologists have adopted for the study of culture may be explained, in part, by what Alain Touraine considers their negligence to focus on *social actors* due to their greater interest in studying systems like those found in industrial and capitalist societies. He argues that contemporary thought has minimized *the subjective side of social actors* as Marx, Sigmund Freud (d. 1939), and Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) had done.⁸ He stresses the importance for the *social sciences to combine the social system and the social actors* in their analysis to understand and explain social action in society, for "it is neither excessive nor paradoxical to say that the idea of society is a major obstacle which bothers the development of social sciences because they are based on the separation and even the opposition between the system and the social actors, while the idea of society implies their direct link."⁹

What Makes Humanity Homo Culturus

In contrast to the marginal place occupied by culture presented above, I would like to emphasize that humanity is, profoundly and first of all, *Homo Culturus* before being *Homo Oeconomicus*, *Homo Politicus*, or *Homo Sociologus*. I base this claim on a set of five observations/concepts of my own:

1. The process of the human body's growth and maturation is very *slow* compared to those of other living beings. For instance, on average human babies begin walking at the age of one year, whereas animal babies can walk immediately after birth, or at least within a few hours or days.
2. In general, humans have a *longer* lifespan than most other animals.
3. The human race has a *dominant role* on this planet.
4. Humans are privileged by the *HS* system outlined above.
5. In their capacity as *Homo Culturus*, human identity has two parts: the body and HS. Religion and philosophy often refer to this fully *dualistic* identity as an identity made up of a body and a soul.

A Potential Explanation of the Homo Culturus Theory

The *human body's slow growth and maturation could be accounted for by the fact that they involve two fronts*: that of the body and that of HS. In short, the growth and maturation of non-human species are *uni-dimensional* (body) because they lack HS in the most complex human sense of the term. In contrast,

the growth and maturation of humans are *bi-dimensional* because they involve the bodily level and the HS level. Based on *logical reasoning*, I hypothesize (1) that this two-level process is behind the human being's slow bodily growth and maturation, and (2) that the uni-dimensional/bodily process of growth and maturation is responsible for the non-human beings' rapid bodily growth and maturation. A human being's slow bodily growth and maturation is due to the fact that he/she goes through *two processes (body and HS)* of growth and maturation. In logical reasoning terms, it takes a longer time to accomplish two processes than just one. In other words, we can say that these two processes are slowed down among humans because the latter are involved in a second process: that of growth and maturation represented by HS.

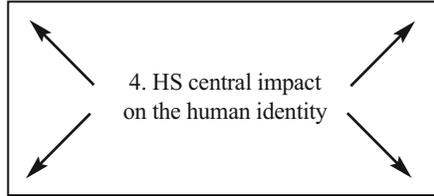
A person's bodily growth and maturation peak in the twenties, which helps to explain *two features of human life*: (1) athletes often retire after they reach the age of twenty-five or so, and (2) humans can hardly manifest mature thinking before their twenties. This could be explained as follows: once humans have finished their bodily growth and maturation, they can concentrate more, so to speak, on the development and maturation of their HS. This should explain as well why mature, high-level scientific theories and intellectual, complex thought are not very common before the age of forty.

On the next page, figure 1 illustrates the *centrality of HS* to human identity. It also legitimizes this article's cultural perspective/theory: Human beings are by nature cultural symbolic beings, or humanity is a *Homo Culturus*. In other words, HS are at the core of humanity's identity, because they strongly influence/determine the remaining four distinctive human features (*viz.*, 1, 2, 3, and 5). Thus this theory is a very *strong program culture-oriented theory*. Since HS/culture are central to its epistemology, its explanatory perspective and theorizing about the behaviors of human individuals and the social dynamics of human societies and civilizations are likely to be credible. The theory may, thus, qualify to be an *avant-garde theory* for today emerging cultural sociology.¹⁰

HS's central position in the human entity leads to the emergence of a new concept that is rather opposite to socio-biology.¹¹ I call it *culturo-biology*, which I define as HS's implicit determinant impact on the given human body design that is made to be slow in growth and maturation. It is assumed here that the slow bodily processes in question are designed as such in order to meet HS's need for a longer human lifespan to ensure their full development, growth, and maturation. This is consistent with the idea of the mind's assumed influence over matter or that of the psychological over the organic in human beings.¹²

1. The human being's
slow bodily growth

5. The human being's
dual identity



2. The human being's
longer lifespan

3. Humanity's dominant
role on this planet

Figure 1: The centrality of HS to human identity.

The Homo Culturus Theory's Insights

The Homo Culturus theory, also known herein as the *cultural theory*, may be considered a fair contribution to making both cultural sociology and the “cultural turn” that started more than fifteen years ago and has seriously challenged the meta-theoretical assumptions of many classical schools of thought.

Without studying the HS/culture as a fundamental dimension of human subjectivity, there can hardly be any strong program of sociological analysis of culture. This theory starts its explorations into the world of human beings and their societies by considering human social actors as strong HS users by nature. This requires a detailed description of the HS system, which can be summarized in *the five new features of HS/culture*, of which sociologists have generally remained silent. As such, this approach to studying culture *differs* from that of most sociologists. I begin this study as a *distinct basic feature of human nature*, whereas most sociologists study *culture as collective patterns* within societies and civilizations. In other words, my approach consists of two steps: (1) The recognition of social actors as strong HS users by nature and the need to understand the inside and outside nature of the HS system. Thus a *detailed description of HS* is in order and (2) My perspective explains the impact of HS on the dynamics of social actors and their societies.

As such, this essay attempts to put forward a *new cultural theory*, one that claims that human beings are, by nature and before anything else, cultural symbolic beings. In my view, this means that their very deep central core comprises a set of HS, a fact that radically distinguishes them from all other living species. My theory strongly states that this HS system occupies the center of human identity, which is seen here as being made of HS and the body dimensions.

Due to their assumed centrality, the HS impact on human beings is expected to be of a *global nature*, for their effects upon human beings are not limited only to their individual or collective behaviors, as emphasized by social scientists, but extend to their bio-physiological make-up as well. In consequence, therefore, any serious scientific analysis of human beings' political, psychological, economic, and cultural affairs must give first priority to the impact of HS. Descriptions of humanity as Homo Politicus, Sociologus, and Oeconomicus can hardly exist and be considered legitimate and correct without the full presence of HS in the identity of humanity. As such, HS should be considered the crucial central basis of human nature itself.¹³ Thus, the cultural theory presented here should qualify as an *interdisciplinary general theory* that offers explanations for several human phenomena.

My theory strongly belongs to cultural sociology, as opposed to the sociology of culture, because it considers *culture* to be *an independent and central variable* in human identity, something "hard" (as opposed to "soft") that plays a very significant role in human individual behaviors and the social dynamics of human societies. Thus, social scientists must give it a strong program in their theoretical and empirical research. In other words, their studies must focus on culture.

The Missing Internal Nature of Culture

Many sociologists consider *Cultural Sociology*, edited by editor Lyn Spillman,¹⁴ to be the best book on the subject. For her, "cultural sociology is about meaning-making. Cultural sociologists investigate how meaning-making happens."¹⁵ This reader consists of papers and essays by major sociologists and anthropologists who wrote about culture. Her introduction and notes, however, do not mention the contributors' interest in studying the *internal/hidden nature* of cultural elements/HS. The identical situation is also found in *The Sociology of Culture*, edited by Diana Crane.¹⁶ This is hardly surprising, given the marginal interest in culture displayed by the founders of sociology and the prominent sociologists of the twentieth century. And so the sociologists' general silence toward the studying the internal nature of culture (INC) is expected and predicted.

The following questions illustrate what I mean by INC: Is culture a material or a spiritual part of humanity? Does it have metaphysical/transcendental features? Do cultural elements have a long lifespan and a very strong moving force on the behaviors of individuals and the dynamics of human societies and civilizations? The answers to these questions will be analyzed shortly in order to underline a profile of the HS system/culture's internal anatomy.

The lack of any studies of INC is true of Spillman's comments on some very famous scholars of culture like Ruth Benedict (d. 1948), Edwards Shils (d. 1995), Geertz, and Bourdieu. None of them or the other cited authors in the book gave first priority to studying INC. *Rather, they focused on culture's external side.* The same is also true of Crane's book. Of course this is consistent with the spirit as well as the methodology of Positivism, the school strongly advocated by August Comte (d. 1857), the founder of western sociology.

Other basic books – *The Concept of Culture*,¹⁷ *Culture*,¹⁸ *La notion de culture dans les sciences sociales*¹⁹ – hardly speak about INC let alone analyze and discuss it. This is no surprise, given that some anthropologists have often a *vague idea* about *what culture is*. Ralph Linton (d. 1953) asked “Is culture real?” and “Does it exist?”²⁰ For Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (d. 1955), culture is a word that designates no concrete reality but only *an abstraction*, and a very vague abstraction at that. Melford E. Spiro holds a similar position.²¹

The Epistemological Origin of the Shortcomings

The *legitimate question* now is: How could sociologists and social scientists in general study culture in a meaningful way in society and produce sound interpretations of cultures or solid insights on the meaning-making process without first having a strong understanding of INC per se and its impact on social actors' actions?

The domination of the Positivist perspective and of Behaviorism should help explain the social scientists' great reservations and skepticism as regards the internal essence of culture and, subsequently, its deep inside nature. On the one hand, the significant impact of excluding or marginalizing the recognition of, and thus the study and understanding of, INC has led to a *later coming* of both a sociology of culture and cultural sociology. On the other hand, it has also led to a rather *wide weakness* in many of the predictions, theories, and paradigms of contemporary social scientists. The increasing interest, especially by American sociologists, in these two types of sociology should promote the credibility of contemporary sociology in the West and, consequently, in the East.

Is Theory Building Possible?

The above references to *cultural theory* make it appropriate for us to look at the possibility of theory building in the social sciences. There are many definitions of theory in these sciences, among them a set of concepts and propositions that seek to *explain* a given phenomenon²² and any attempt to explain the various facets of social life.²³ According to the hard sciences, “a theory is

a general principle supported by a substantial body of scientific evidence which explains observed facts ... a theory offers an intellectual framework for future discussion, investigation and refinement.”²⁴

As regards the scientific stand of sociological theories, Turner noted an increasing cynicism about the possible emergence of scientific sociological theories during the last decade of the twentieth century. This was not the case around sixty years ago, when there was a real and great deal of optimism that sociologists would sit at the table with scientists. Today a far smaller number of sociological theorists hold such a position.²⁵ This attitude on the part of some sociologists is *an anti-science attitude*.

The spirit of real and serious science cannot ethically *deny* the potential progress of science in one field and *advocate* its progress in another. To do so would be a clear discrimination against science by the so-called objective, unbiased scientists. Based on this legitimate criticism of some hard-core scientists, practitioners of sociology and other social scientists can fully join the ranks of their fellow hard-core scientists only if they improve their scientific research kit for studying the phenomena in their fields. Doing so would allow them to build *credible theories* that can explain individual behaviors as well as the social dynamics of human societies and civilizations.

Sociologists are not the only ones who hold this negative view of their discipline's scientific stand. Hard-core scientists have a more negative perception of the scientific stand of social sciences at large. In 2000 the journal *New Scientist* published an editorial on creationism and evolution that *ruled out any hope for the social sciences* to have credible scientific knowledge of the phenomena they study. Its author asked: “Will it [science] tell us how to behave towards our fellow humans?” The answer given was squarely negative. According to the author, science is simply the wrong tool to answer this and similar questions. Such an attitude clearly *dehumanizes science*. In this time of globalization, identity crises, environmental concerns, and worldwide fears of the destructive products produced by modern science's hardware and software, how much respect should be accorded to those scientists who *still* do not believe, based on their *false view of things*, that human beings can establish reliable scientific understandings and explanations of human phenomena?

Such a position on the part of hard-core scientists and soft (social) scientists displays an extremely *narrow view of science*. This view is totally unacceptable in our time, which has been witnessing a growing trend among scientists, researchers, and scholars in favor of interdisciplinary cooperation and dialogue in order to study phenomena as complex entities via new scientific paradigms that advocate being open-minded to all types of insights that will help them establish credible and coherent scientifically reliable knowledge.²⁶

The Compelling Legitimacy of Cultural Sociology

Having established that HS are central to human identity and distinctive of the human race as *Homo Culturus*, HS should consequently be considered as a *first-class source/reference for social scientists*, since their studies attempt to understand and explain the behavior of individuals as well as the social dynamics of human societies and civilizations. As such, there is a strong reason for sociologists to establish, expand, and defend cultural sociology, as this particular branch of sociology plunges deeply into HS. Unlike other branches that often deal with peripheral issues in the making of human beings and their societies, cultural sociology addresses and focuses its attention upon those most fundamental elements – HS – without which neither human beings nor their societies could come into existence as we have known them: as distinct and leading features in this world. Based on this, cultural sociology is fully qualified to be seen as *the supreme discipline* not only in sociology, but also in all other social science fields.

HS's Transcendental Dimensions

My attempt to deepen the understanding of the profound nature (INC) of HS has led me to *discover other dimensions* that are hardly outlined, let alone analyzed and discussed, in the contemporary social science literature. These new features are expected to enrich and enhance the outlook of cultural sociology. I present their basic features below.

As HS have *neither weight nor volume* in the material sense of these words, they have a non-material/transcendental/spiritual nature as opposed to a material nature. Positivist social scientists are very likely to find it strange that weight and volume are used when speaking about HS. Nonetheless, a neutral objectivity naturally permits this and, furthermore, will give them a great deal of meaning. It is sufficient to mention a few examples to make the point.

1. Why do letters and documents sent by fax and e-mail reach their destination much faster than if they are mailed by regular or even overnight mail? The explanation, when taking the concepts of weightless and no volume into consideration, could be put this way: the process of sending letters and documents via e-mail and fax *eliminates* the factors of *weight and volume* and thereby liberates the sent items from their material parameters, namely, weight and volume. In the same way, it returns the HS, so to speak, to their *first initial natural state* of having neither weight nor volume.

Given this intrinsic absence of weight and volume, it becomes easy to understand why HS can move with rapid and unbelievable speed through time and space. This lack of material weight and volume may also help explain how a few small electronic flash disks can contain such vast amounts of written and graphic material despite their insignificant weight and volume. This is possible because HS, in this case the recorded words and images, have by their very intrinsic nature no volume or weight and thus *hardly need a huge material space* to contain them. In the philosophical and religious senses, HS belong to the human being's spiritual and non-material world. Therefore they abide by their own special characteristics and laws, which ultimately make them different from *the material world* that has both weight and volume.

2. The extremely *rapid speed of sound* is another frequently cited example. The Concorde's incredible speed was often compared to that of sound. This could be explained by the fact in its natural state the spoken word, transmitted over a short distance (actually talking to each other via voice-sounds) or over a long distance (talking on the phone), has neither weight nor volume. Consequently, according to the HS perspective being developed and elaborated in this essay, the voiced-sent word is naturally predisposed to move at great speed.
3. Because of their non-material/transcendental nature, HS are not affected by the reduction factor that occurs when they are given to others. For instance, giving USD 50 from our capital to others reduces our capital. But the situation is *quite different* if we give others some of our thoughts/ideas, knowledge/science, as well as teach them our language or spread our religious beliefs and cultural symbols among them.
4. HS have a longer lifespan, for ideas, religious beliefs, cultural values and norms can, at least potentially, survive almost forever. *Written and spoken languages* play a fundamental role in both making HS and enabling their longer lifespan, because my cultural theory considers language to be the *mother of all HS*. In short, HS/culture can hardly exist if there is no (at least) spoken human language. As such, one can argue that human language has the potential to eternally mark/seal that which impacts all HS and therefore qualify to be *spiritual/transcendental*: that is to say, non-material in their very deep essence.

The present outlook on the long lifespan of HS helps explain the phenomena of the *eternal human thought* of which philosophers, scientists, scholars, and religious thinkers have been aware of since time immemorial and regardless of the level of civilization. Their thought of potential eternity can be accounted for, first of all, by the use of the spoken and

written languages that have the eternalizing seal and, second, by the fact that *human thought belongs to the transcendental universe of HS*.

5. HS can charge humans with fantastically strong energy potentials that enable them to meet and overcome the great challenges of human life. In humanity's long history, cultural values like freedom, equality, and justice have managed to charge human individuals, groups, and larger communities with such a great deal of power that they can ultimately defeat their adversary's enormous material power. One example of this is the successful attempts of many colonized peoples during the twentieth century to rid themselves of European colonial occupation. This is a valid illustration of HS's imposing role, for these colonized peoples were far weaker in both military and material terms than their occupiers.

Modern social sciences hardly bring up what I call here the transcendental dimensions of HS/culture. As a result there is a continuing widespread silence on these very important dimensions despite contemporary sociologists' increasing interest in cultural sociology.

Language and the Emergence of Human Culture

Based on the Homo Culturus theory, it is quite legitimate to look for the *origin of human culture*, the element that distinguishes humanity from all other living species. *Spoken and written language* appears to be the most likely human factor behind the emergence of HS/culture, for it is hard to imagine the existence of the remaining elements of the HS system (e.g., religion, science, and thought) without the presence of a spoken language. This is why I consider *language to be the mother of all HS* in my Homo Culturus perspective of analysis of culture. Given the central role of its spoken and written forms in both the birth and the making of the HS system/culture as defined particularly by anthropologists and sociologists, it is appropriate to endorse the widely cited description made by philosophers and social thinkers that "*Man*" is a *speaking animal*. As such, human language is not only the source on which the emergence of human culture depends, but it is also at the origin of humanity's domination over all other living species through its sophisticated and complex cultural system.

In spite of language's centrality to human identity and, consequently, to the culture/HS system's emergence, the most famous anthropological definition of culture makes *no explicit mention of language* as a central and basic element of culture, let alone as the major cause for the emergence of human culture and its subsequent development. The debate over culture's origin re-

mains ongoing among social scientists. Despite the existence of small differences, there is a consensus that *language is the first determining factor* for the emergence of human culture.²⁷

In 1871, British anthropologist Edward Bernard Tylor defined culture as follows: “Culture or civilization ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” His classic definition remains implicitly *silent* on language, despite the fact that it is the constituting and founding element/force of culture itself, as just stated. In other words, the *relationship between language and culture is of an organic nature*. It is fair to say that this particular definition is not fully adequate because it neglects to include language as simultaneously both a part and founding component for the initial emergence of the culture/HS system phenomenon.²⁸

HS and the Making of the Human Mind

The Homo Culturus theory has helped me devise *new explanations* for various human phenomena that researchers hardly ever raise, let alone analyze and explain. For instance, I have found a strong relationship between HS and a human being’s relatively long lifespan, the difference in how long it takes human babies as opposed to animal babies to learn how to walk, and the long or semi-eternal presence of human thought after its author’s death. In short, the Homo Culturus theory/HS is able to offer genuine explanations for these distinct human phenomena.²⁹

Likewise, I attempt to shed light on the firm relations that link *HS to the making of the human mind*, the best feature that distinguishes humans from all living species. This undertaking reinforces our ability to better understand and explain HS’s centrality (Homo Culturus) to human identity. Consequently, this helps us acquire progress and maturation in *theorizing* about single and collective human phenomena based on HS, humanity’s most distinguishing factors.

The Human Mind and HS

When we ask the average person what distinguishes human beings from other living beings, the usual expected answer is *the human mind*. This answer has a high credibility. Yet scientific curiosity can hardly be satisfied with this simple answer, for it requires knowledge about those factors that have led to the presence of the mind only among human beings. In order to access the necessary

knowledge to explain the human mind, researchers can adopt a transparent *three-step* systematic methodology: (1) the search for the possible presence of *other distinct traits* that, like the mind, are found only among human beings; (2) if such distinct traits exist, a plausible hypothesis needs to be developed, such as the possibility of a relationship between HS and the mind; and (3) solid proof of such a relationship will help us understand and explain the original roots of the mind's birth as a very special and exclusive human feature.

My continuing research since the 1990s on humanity as a Homo Culturus has repeatedly shown that the HS distinguishes human beings from all other living species.³⁰ As such, *HS* is a remarkably *distinct unique human quality* that satisfies the requirements of step 1 above. As for the likelihood of a relationship between the mind and HS (step 2), this is a plausible hypothesis because *both are unique features of human beings*. This allows us to say that there is either a strong correlation between the two or at least a causality relationship between them (step 3). The situation at hand resembles that of the egg and the chicken: which comes first?

To elaborate more on the HS-mind relationship issue, we can raise another feature unique to human beings: *Humanity is the sole master of this world*. While people attribute this reality to *the human mind*, my research indicates that *HS is behind this mastery*, as demonstrated in figure 1 (see p. 81).

Based on what has already been outlined, human beings appear to be HS beings by nature because HS occupies the core of their identity. The nature of the strong link between HS and the human mind could be clearly identified as a *cause-effect link*. The logic of the assembled observations, facts, and analyses of the intricate relations between them allow us to say that humanity's possession of the HS set should constitute the *first distinct principal cause* for human beings to qualify for possessing the talents of the human mind. Two arguments stand in favor of this: (1) no other living species possess the HS set and thus are deprived of the quality of the human mind, and (2) this set's impact on making the human mind can be illustrated by the *three types of human minds*: illiterate, educated, and highly intellectual minds, as we will see below.

The HS-Mind Relationship's Indicators

To advance the process of revealing the nature of the HS-human mind relationship, we need to make some observations that may help us dissipate the vagueness surrounding it. Therefore, at this point a few examples of some indicators are in order:

1. The skills of reading and learning, whether in school or independently, offer the human mind knowledge and science by which it can better understand and grasp many things in life. In other words, a formal school education enables the mind of a literate (as opposed to an illiterate) person to acquire a better understanding and explanation of many things. Therefore, we can say that the use of certain HS elements (e.g., reading and writing, as well as learning some scientific facts and thoughts, religious and cultural values) *improve the human mind's ability* to understand and explain various phenomena encountered in one's immediate environment.
2. The human brain's anatomy shows that the frontal cortex hosts such HS elements as language and thought as well as their development and maturation. Thus the human mind and HS are *two distinct human features*, a reality that could suggest the presence of a possible strong relationship between the two. This hypothetical link is epistemologically fit to consider HS the first source for making the human mind. As such, the *absence of HS* among all other living species deprives them of possessing the characteristics of the human mind. As such, it is rather difficult to speak of the human mind's existence without the presence of HS. In other words the human being, in his/her capacity as a mind-being, makes wide use of HS, which explains the phenomenon of the *three types of human mind* listed above. I focus now on the roots and nature of the last kind: the highly intellectual mind.

The Determinants of Highly Intellectual Minds

A sociology of knowledge is needed to explore and identify the basic factors behind the making of highly intellectual minds in the domain of human knowledge.³¹ *Three fundamental factors* appear to correlate strongly with the presence of such minds: a wide-ranging knowledge, a stimulating external milieu, and special human personality traits.

I focus here on the first factor by presenting *Ibn Khaldun* (1332-1406) as a case study. The second factor's impact on his new creative social thought has already been over-studied and discussed by those who have attempted to understand and explain the roots of his new social science thought (*'ilm al-'umrān al-basharī*). The third factor, that of special personality traits, seems to be the least studied, although it may be the most important element of human creativity.³² Given this essay's limited space, I cannot deal with it here in any meaningful way. However, colleagues and

readers may like to consult my modest work (in both English and Arabic) on the role of Ibn Khaldun's personality traits in formulating his pioneering social thought.³³ As researchers and scholars have reached no consensus on a real science of creativity,³⁴ the most reasonable way is to look at it is to consider it the result of a mutual interaction among these three factors, an interaction in which the input of each one is not necessarily equal to that of the other two.

The main focus of this section is *twofold*: (1) to shed light, via analysis and discussion, on how Ibn Khaldun's wide-ranging Islamic knowledge shaped his cognitive worldview and, consequently, his imposing intellectual social science mind, and (2) to assess and evaluate the credibility in the field of knowledge-making of "*the 'aql-naql mind*" (hereinafter "the Muslim mind"). Islamic culture defines this combining of revealed knowledge with knowledge gained through human reasoning via knowledge acquisition and creation. Both wide-ranging knowledge and Islamic knowledge are ultimately the result of the *HS repertoire*, in which knowledge/science and thought are important HS components. This double focus is in order, because this essay assumes that *wide-ranging knowledge is basic*, on the one hand, for the emergence of a highly intellectual mind and that the factors of a stimulating external milieu and special personality traits are considered essential helping forces to the materialization of highly intellectual minds. On the other hand, contemporary learned western culture does not accept the Muslim mind as a means of establishing credible knowledge in the *two cultures*. The discussion of this issue is relevant now, given the serious questioning as to the credibility of the social and natural sciences, because there is no *epistemological reunification of the two cultures*.³⁵ The Muslim mind not only strongly advocates the epistemological unity of the two cultures, but also recommends the unity of human-made and revealed knowledge.

There is, therefore, a pressing need to become familiar with *Ibn Khaldun's wide-ranging knowledge* as well as his *Muslim mind*, both of which helped prepare him to be a true pioneer who, during the fourteenth century, intelligently and skillfully invented the science of human social organization; in other words, sociology.

Knowledge and Creativity

Throughout humanity's long history and its diverse cultures and civilizations, the emergence of great creative minds has often been associated with a good standard of "learned advanced knowledge." This requires two basic things:

literacy and a *high command of knowledge* in one's field. Although literacy might not be necessary for innovation and creativity in certain fields, it is fundamental for creative and innovative minds in most of the branches of human knowledge. Thus *literacy* is a necessary tool for the unfolding and expansion of the corpus of human science and knowledge as a significant HS feature. Theories in the field of creativity highlight the relationship between it and knowledge³⁶ by stressing the rather straightforward relationship between the two.³⁷ Theorists of creativity assume that "the more one knows, the easier it will be to develop innovative solutions."³⁸ *Wide-ranging knowledge* also initiates intense complex cognitive processes that may often lead to moments of brilliance.³⁹

Although this may be a hasty conclusion because it minimizes the role of the two other factors mentioned above that are involved in the creativity process, the relationship between Ibn Khaldun's wide-ranging HS Islamic knowledge background and his creative new social science remains a testing ground for such theories. The standard definition of *creativity* is "people's ability to go beyond given information and imagine new and exciting ways of reformulating old problems."⁴⁰

Ibn Khaldun's Education and Knowledge

In his youth in Tunis, Ibn Khaldun studied *three main areas*: (1) the Islamic sciences, namely, the science of the Qur'an, the Hadith (the Prophet's sayings and behaviors), and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), especially the Maliki school; (2) the sciences of the Arabic language (e.g., grammar, conjugation, and written/spoken elegance [*balāghah*]), and (3) logic, philosophy, the natural sciences, and mathematics. This shows that he had a solid educational background in the two cultures of his time. In his autobiography *At-Ta'rīf bi Ibn Khaldūn wa Riḥlatuhu Gharbān wa Sharqān* (*Information about Ibn Khaldun and His Travel in the West and the East [of the Arab World]*),⁴¹ he mentions two of his most distinguished teachers: Abu Muhammad ibn Abd al-Muhaymin al-Hathrami and Abu Abdallah Muhammad al-Abilly.⁴² He identifies al-Hathrami as Morocco's leading grammar and hadith scholar. This man taught him the fundamental knowledge related to the *six hadith reference books* and other important books on the subject like *Al-Muwatta'*, a reference book written by the famous Maliki jurist and theologian Malik ibn Anas. From al-Abilly he learned the two fundamental sciences (*al-aṣṭiyāni*): logic and all philosophical and mathematical disciplines. Al-Abilly stated that Ibn Khaldun was *very talented* in these disciplines.⁴³

Ibn Khaldun himself admits that he always had *a strong desire for learning and knowledge*:

Since my very early infancy, the time of my weaning, I have never ceased to seek knowledge and the best virtues, dividing my time between attending the courses and the circles of scholars until the time of the devastating plague that killed dignitaries, notables, and most of my teachers in Tunis. Consequently, most scholars and writers who were not affected by the plague left for Morocco ...⁴⁴

Ibn Khaldun later returned to his studies in Fez, which became the center of scholars and writers who had immigrated from al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) and Tunisia and also boasted the greatest Islamic libraries. His presence in this stimulating intellectual learned milieu expanded and consolidated his scope of knowledge and satisfied his true desire for it: “I took advantage of the situation to reflect and read and meet the great scholars from Morocco and al-Andalus who came as ambassadors of their princes to the Moroccan sultan. I thus fulfilled my desire for the acquisition of knowledge.”⁴⁵

Ibn Khaldun’s Intelligence

Ibn Khaldun’s educational background in various sciences of his era’s *two cultures* (as part of the HS repertoire) had an impact on *shaping his intelligence*. Intellectuals and scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, agree that this man was blessed with a great mind. As British historian Arnold Toynbee states: “He [Ibn Khaldun] has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly *the greatest work of its kind* that has ever been created by any mind in any time and place.”⁴⁶ M. A. al-Jabri, the well-known Moroccan intellectual and author on Ibn Khaldun’s thought, sees the latter’s *Muqaddimah* as “*a pyramidal and unified construct and developed thought* in its content as well as in the organization of its chapters, paragraphs and the harmony which prevails among its various parts.”⁴⁷

The Muslim Mind’s Ethics of Knowledge

In order to understand the specific nature of the wide-ranging Islamic knowledge factors (as part of HS repertoire) that shaped Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual mind, we need to look at the main general characteristics of the Muslim intellectual mind, since it is assumed, at least from a sociological perspective, that he worked out his new science within the *religious cultural framework* and

setting of the Muslim intellectual mind before European colonialization. The classical Muslim intellectual mind was heavily influenced by the *Qur'an's ethics toward knowledge acquisition and creation*, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Priorizing knowledge acquisition and creation. The Qur'an's first revealed verses strongly stress the importance of literacy and continued learning to secure as much knowledge as possible.
2. Asking both Muslims and non-Muslims to seek and develop knowledge by adopting the methodology of continual observation of the universe/nature; the historical events of civilizations, societies, and social actors; and humanity's distinct nature. This appeal certainly serves to develop the sciences of the two cultures. *The epistemological unity* of the latter comes from the Qur'anic idea of *the one God*, the sole creator of all that exists, which the sciences of the two cultures study.
3. Telling all scientists/scholars to allow the authentic knowledge that they uncover to be the most pious and humble people, for "Among His servants are those who have knowledge" (Q. 35:28). From the Islamic perspective, acquiring accurate knowledge is *an act of spiritual salvation*, an attitude that stands in stark contrast to the view of the modern western mind in the two cultures.
4. Reminding human beings that no matter how much knowledge they require, human knowledge will always be very limited when compared with God's unlimited and perfect knowledge.
5. Proclaiming that God's knowledge, which has absolute authenticity and certainty, comprehends all of creation.

The Cognitive Muslim Mind

The previous sections show the profoundly *Islamic* nature of Ibn Khaldun's mental make-up. On the one hand he had a wide-ranging and high standard of knowledge of the various Islamic sciences and disciplines (the two cultures) of his time, as shown in the sixth part of his *Muqaddimah*. On the other hand, he had first-hand experience knowledge of numerous Arab Muslim societies, tribes, clans, and groups – all of which he analyzed and wrote about. Given this Islam-inspired social theoretical and fieldwork knowledge, his mind is bound to be heavily Muslim due to the surrounding Islamic HS learned culture and the social realities of Arab Muslim societies. *Gibb's description* of Ibn Khaldun's thought leaves no doubt about his Muslim identity as a great thinker:

Ibn Khaldun was not only a Muslim, but as almost every page of the *Muqaddimah* bears witness, a Muslim jurist and theologian, of the strict Maliki school. For him religion was far and away the most important thing in life. The Sharia is the only true guide.⁴⁸

M. Al-Shaqaa affirms that Ibn Khaldun's *'umrān* theory is Islamic from beginning to the end.⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldun himself appears to be referring to his authentic Islamic and personal thought when he denies any foreign influence on his conceptualization of his new science: "We became aware of these things with God's help and without the instruction of Aristotle or the teachings of the Mobedhan."⁵⁰

The Islamic HS features of his mind are also manifested in the *Muslim mind's cognitive perspective*. Historically speaking, Arab Muslim civilization's earlier scholars and scientists, regardless of the disciplines and sciences (the two cultures) in which they engaged, conducted their work according to the principle of *cooperation* between revealed-sacred knowledge (*naql*) and knowledge acquired through human reason (*'aql*). Ibn Khaldun's well-established interdisciplinary social science thought is *no exception* to this rule, for his entire literary corpus, displays his *cognitive dualist perspective*. As such, the Khaldunian cognitive mind is fully in line with the Qur'anic-inspired five major characteristics of the *ideal* classical intellectual Muslim mind described earlier.

His *extremely curious and motivated mind*, which led him to learn from both perspectives, should help explain the great milestones achieved in many branches of knowledge by Arab Muslim civilization before Europe's Middle Ages. Ibn Khaldun's great intellect is a convincing example of the potentially high intellectual performance of the Muslim mind. As a result, I consider this type of mind as *the dividing line* between "Khaldunian eastern sociology" and "contemporary western sociology."⁵¹ One can expect, for instance, Immanuel Wallerstein to praise the former type of mind for its *epistemological unification of the two cultures*.⁵² But given Wallerstein's western training, it is very difficult for him to take seriously the revealed knowledge part of Ibn Khaldun's Muslim mind, for this violates the *academic social norm* of the western mind's view of knowledge acquisition and creation. From an Islamic epistemological viewpoint, however, no tension and conflict exists between HS's *'aql* and *naql* parts of the Muslim mind because their sole reference is Allah. Given this reality, the *Muslim mind* could rightly be considered a *meeting ground for secular and revealed knowledge*. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), author of *The Prevention of Contra-*

dictions between 'Aql and Naql, strongly defended the legitimacy of such combined knowledge in Islamic culture.

The Two Cultures of the Muslim and Western Minds

The sociological perspective helps us understand and explain the differences between these two minds with regard to the acquisition and creation of knowledge. On the one hand, the educated Muslim's mind is the outcome of *Muslim culture*, which sees no contradictions between *'aql* and *naql* knowledge; rather, emphasizes *their harmony*. Ever since Europe's Renaissance, the western educated mind has witnessed a sweeping liberation from the influence of Christian theological thought. Rational reasoning, experimentation, and the collection of empirical data gradually became the only basis for western contemporary knowledge in the two cultures.

Al-Jabri sees the difference between these two HS-making minds in how each one prioritizes *humanity, nature, and God*. While the Greek-European mind gives more importance to the first two, the Muslim-Arab mind stresses God and humanity. This certainly helps account for the former's refusal, as well as the latter's readiness, to adopt the perspective of the Muslim mind.⁵³ With these HS cultural differences toward knowledge acquisition and creation in perspective, it becomes easy to understand why westerners are simultaneously impressed by the *'aql* side of Ibn Khaldun's mind and criticized him for his use and reference to the *naql* side.⁵⁴

The presence of these two minds in the world of knowledge acquisition and creation ensures *controversy*. The western modern mind looks with suspicion, disbelief, and even hostility at any knowledge colored by religion. In contrast, the classical Muslim mind finds support in the fundamental revealed Islamic texts for human-made knowledge. Furthermore, what may still generate more controversy is that *each mind has contributed to the advancement of human knowledge*. Since the western learned modern mind is now the dominant adopted reference for knowledge creation and acquisition, we need to ask whether there is any ground or justification for the Muslim mind to *stand on its own feet* and compete with it on its own turf.

First, the Muslim learned mind is strongly supportive of acquiring and creating knowledge. The Qur'anic text, the first *naql* source in Islam, is *an open invitation* to Muslims and non-Muslims to think and reflect upon creation's endless phenomena. An estimated one-sixth of the Qur'an's verses speak directly or indirectly about the importance of HS knowledge of the two cultures. Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad, the second *naql* source in Islam and a strong

proponent of becoming educated, is reported to have said that “true scientists and scholars are the inheritors of the prophets,” “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave,” and “seek knowledge even in far-distant China.” Therefore, this knowledge-seeking ethics is deeply rooted in the Muslim mind.

Second, both the Qur’anic text and the Hadith literature contain explicit statements or implicit references to *scientific facts* about various natural phenomena that were discovered only recently by modern science. For example, the over fourteen centuries ago it proclaimed the specific stages of human foetus development in the following terms.

We created man from the quintessence of mud, thereafter We placed him as a drop of liquid (sperm) in a firm lodging (the womb). Then We fashioned the sperm (*nutfah*) into something that clings (‘*alaqah*) which We fashioned into a chewed like lump (*mudghah*). The chewed like lump is fashioned into bones which are then covered with flesh. Then, We developed it into another act of Creation. Blessed is God, the best Creator. (Q. 23:13)

Embryologist Keith Moore has strongly praised the Qur’an’s precise terms for the phases of the human embryo’s development.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in his comparative analysis of the place of scientific facts in the Bible and the Qur’an, French surgeon Maurice Bucaille concluded:

[T]he Qur’anic statements are in perfect agreement with modern scientific facts [and that it is] unconceivable to consider Mohammad as their author. Thus, modern scientific knowledge permits to understand the meanings of certain Qur’anic verses which were not understood until the present day.⁵⁶

Such scientifically credible evidence strengthens the stand of the *cognitive Muslim mind* in the past and in the present among Muslims. And it may as well solicit some attention on the part of the modern learned western mind in the two cultures to *reconsider its negative attitude* toward the validity of knowledge gained from revelation. This may improve Islam’s image in this time of crisis between the West and Islam.

Third, it could be argued that adopting the Muslim mind can be justified on the grounds that human-made knowledge *always remains problematic* because it is the result of a process of trial and error, a mixture of certainty and doubt. A human being’s use of his/her thoughtful and analytical reasoning powers often involves *probabilities of truth and falsehood* in the corpus of the knowledge attained. Throughout time, thinkers, philosophers, and scientists have been aware of *the problematic nature* of the trial and error process that characterizes human-made knowledge.

Ibn Khaldun's law of *al-muṭābaqah* (the correct matching between historical events and human social realities) in the science of history sought to minimize the pitfalls of historical knowledge in which Muslim historians were involved before and during his time. This law was meant to raise the level of historical knowledge's accuracy and credibility. Something similar could be said about the influence of the ethics of Positivism and Empiricism on modern knowledge. However, modern knowledge will never exhaust all of the causes that lead to errors and pitfalls in human-made knowledge. Being limited in scope (in terms of its facts' correctness and certainty), human-made knowledge *needs the input of divine knowledge* to help people deal with, in particular, controversial ethical and moral issues related to human and social wellbeing that have resisted – and continue to resist – resolution through human reason alone.

The western learned mind, clearly prejudiced against religion due to its own special socio-historical circumstances, and the scientists and western modernizing societies have created *a culture of separation and distrust between science and religion*. Thus, they can hardly understand, let alone accept, any cooperation between religion and science. At present, the Muslim mind may be getting a boost from the growing dialogue in the West between religion and science⁵⁷ as well as new strength and support from the ongoing and future discoveries being made by scientists.

From an Islamic perspective, the Muslim mind is *the ideal mind* for acquiring a more credible and complete solid corpus of knowledge. Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* is an excellent manifestation of the knowledge produced by the Muslim mind. In fact, his *'umrānī* mind may be considered the avant-garde of today's Islamization of Knowledge movement. Not only has this type of mind accomplished a good standard social science handbook (the *Muqaddimah*), but he has, by all objective accounts, also achieved *a real breakthrough in the field of social sciences* in human civilization as a whole. Ibn Khaldun made explicit reference to this: "In a way, it is an entirely original science. In fact I have not come across a discussion along these lines by anyone."⁵⁸

Ibn Khaldun's highly intellectual pioneering *'umrānī* (social science) work raises *serious questions* about the assumptions of the modern western mind's persistent claims that true science and authentic knowledge can be obtained only by separating religion and science. As shown, these claims are based on pre-modern Europe's knowledge/science struggles with the Catholic church. Thus, *this unique history ought not to be generalized to other religions' experiences with knowledge creation and acquisition*. Ibn Khaldun's Muslim mind strongly defies the substance of all such claims and *opens the door* for

scientists and scholars *to follow more than one way* in their attempts to create and establish solid knowledge in the two cultures.

Conclusion

It is now appropriate to ask why the concept of humanity as Homo Culturus is missing in the western social sciences. For example, this article has outlined how the classical founders of western sociology played down the importance of culture, perhaps because of the heavy impact of *quantitative Positivist sociology* on their perspectives and epistemologies. Therefore culture was marginalized because it pertains mainly to qualitative sociology. *This marginalization of culture* in the social sciences may resemble how biologists, physiologists, and neurologists, as well as the natural sciences in general, view the human brain: a bio-physiological neurological organ/phenomenon. They study *the human brain* as if it were completely *empty of HS*. And yet biology, physiology, and neurology claim to be exact sciences despite their refusal to consider how the human brain is influenced by the strong presence of HS. Seen this way, these sciences can *hardly* be described as *exact*.

As such, both the social and natural sciences do not fulfill Ibn Khaldun's law of *al-muṭābaqah*. *Culture/HS* are the *most central factors* in the making of human identity and the human mind, which makes human beings Earth's dominant social actor. This offers legitimacy to the assertion that we should *first* look at humanity as Homo Culturus, as opposed to Homo Oeconomicus, Homo Sociologus, or Homo Politicus. The Homo Culturus underlines *humanity's fundamental nature*, for the other three are only derived from the substance of its quality, as stressed above. In other words, the Homo Culturus paradigm strikes at the very center of human nature, while the three other paradigms only refer to peripheral dimensions of humanity's nature and activities.

This view of humanity as a Homo Culturus sheds *new light* on the making of the human mind. Both HS and the mind, which are uniquely human characteristics, *share a correlation that is positive on two levels*. On the one hand, it is unconceivable to think of a human mind existing without the intrinsic presence of HS within it. It is assumed that no other living species has anything resembling the human mind because they do not possess the HS system. On the other hand, HS's great impact on the making of the human mind is clear when the three types of mind – illiterate, educated, and highly intellectual – are compared. The degree and scope of access to HS's wide-ranging knowledge makes all the difference here. Illiterate people are rather poor in HS, for

their inability to read and write deprives them of knowledge and science in the largest and deepest sense of the word. As such, they are *handicapped* even when they encounter simple things and issues. In contrast, well-educated people have good access to HS's wide-ranging and deep knowledge and therefore can acquire (through reading and writing) the knowledge and science they need to better understand and explain things and phenomena. All of these features predispose them to contribute to producing even more knowledge and science, perhaps even introducing innovations as did Ibn Khaldun, who founded a *new social science* during the fourteenth century.

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