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Education and the Wager of Freedom in the Arab Civilizational Project: Toward Structural Alternatives for Education and Culture

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Abstract:

Addressing any concept requires determining its reality as an abstract construction resulting from the exercise of reason; it acquires its scientific significance through its interaction with reality and its representation thereof. Concepts, despite their abstract nature, do not acquire their epistemic value except to the extent that they are connected to the historical and social contexts within which they take shape.

Indeed, the concept of education and freedom is considered among the most important concepts that have occupied human thought, linked as it is to major epistemic transformations and to the projects of the Nahda (Renaissance) and the Enlightenment, and constituting a decisive historical station in the development of modern Arab consciousness. However, discussing freedom within the Arab cultural structure requires invoking its ontological dimensions, particularly its relationship to existence, to the individual and the collective, and to the bonds that organize social relations.

The concept of education and freedom in the Arab context requires an in-depth study tracing its formation and historical significance, especially amid the social changes resulting from technical and technological development. This also necessitates the deployment of specific methodological and scientific tools to define the concept and delimit its intellectual, social, political, and religious domains, away from the superficial conceptions that confine the term freedom to its individual dimension, as Western liberalism has promoted.

The liberal conception of education and individual freedom has weakened the integrative structures within Arab societies and created a state of anomie, which intersects with the views of contemporary critical theses addressing manifestations of value decline. Conversely, although freedom is linked to the principle of the sovereignty of the will in legal thought, it remains bound by moral responsibility as a fundamental constraint on its exercise.

Accordingly, re-situating the concept of education and freedom within the Arab context requires reformulating it according to clear cultural and contextual determinants, grounded in a value-based and religious frame of reference that governs its practice and regulates its meanings, away from imitation and fascination with the Western model. Moreover, the crisis of Arab reason and the weakness of its productivity have contributed to the difficulty of forming a clear, standard-bearing modern cultural identity, which calls for building a critical epistemic awareness that acknowledges difference and cultural specificity and that safeguards the concept of freedom within the framework of autonomy and collective responsibility.

Keywords: Education, educational reality, freedom, the Arab reality, cultural context, cultural identity, epistemic grounding, religious frame of reference.

Introduction:

Addressing any subject must be linked to the reality of the concept related to it, which is, in turn, an abstract idea or a conception resulting from the exercise of reason. The concept thereby acquires the characteristics and determinants associated with it, placing it in a representational relationship with reality.

Although the totality of concepts in human thought bears an abstract character, their acquisition of scientific value is embodied in the state of interaction between them and reality; this interaction endows them with their associated connotations.

The concept of education and freedom, like other concepts that have occupied human thought and constituted an essential axis for it, taking up important philosophical and intellectual space, nevertheless constituted a decisive historical stage owing to its connection to epistemic rupture on the one hand, and to the emergence of Enlightenment and Arab Nahda ideas on the other.

The question of freedom within the Arab cultural structure must not be discussed apart from its ontological dimensions, and the questions built upon them regarding the relationship between freedom and existence, between the individual and the person, between the individual and the collective, and among collectives themselves.

Examining the concept within the Arab cultural structure requires establishing the historical condition of these societies and the stages through which the concept has formed within Arab consciousness, then the set of new meanings it has acquired as a result of the social change produced by immense technical and technological development—especially since it has become necessary to engage with these new concepts using methodological and scientific tools appropriate to defining the concept and identifying the determinants of its context, whether intellectual, social, political, or religious—away from the superficial and marginal conception associated essentially with the abstract individual's right to act and do as he pleases in order to fulfill his individual desires. This is precisely the trend that the West sought, through liberalism, to establish in the imagination of the Arab individual, and which it strove to market and promote as one of the elements of Nahda and progress.

Individual freedom in the liberal sense referred to above has shattered Arab societies and eliminated the foundations of integration, creating a state of partial anomie—what the philosopher Alain Deneault termed, in his book *The System of Mediocrity*, or what the journalist Ross Douthat concluded in his book *The Decadent Society*.

Readings of experiences within human societies spare us the long and profound philosophical debate and enable us to recalibrate many of the loose concepts that have become conflated with an individual desire stripped of any restraint.

Although freedom is linked to the principle of the sovereignty of the will among jurists, as noted by the thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), it nonetheless remains bound to moral responsibility, which constitutes one of the constraints upon freedom.

Dr. Azmi Bishara likewise notes that the concept of freedom needs to be re-rooted so that it may be present, with its constraints and determinants, within Arab reality, rather than being a mere presence derived from Western connotations associated with a state of astonishment and imitation that has dominated Arab societies.

Arab reason remains a reason in crisis, unproductive, leaving the condition of Arab thought stalled at temporal and spatial boundaries, lacking the normative framework needed to shape a modern identity on the one hand, and lacking a state of creative thinking engaging with an epistemic charge of contextual or systemic significance that establishes the collective cultural dimension, acknowledges difference and cultural specificity, and preserves the concept of freedom within what autonomy requires, on the other.

First: Education and Freedom — Constraints of the Concept and Determinants of Context

Education and Freedom in Arab Thought:

Through the concept of education in Arab thought, Arab and Muslim thinkers have, through their intellectual projects, attempted to view education as a process for building the human being, shaping his narratives, reforming society and its troubled reality, and achieving balance in constructing the Arab personality according to Arab and Islamic frames of reference and constants—such as the Muslims' awakening (*ṣaḥwa*), the revival of their former glory, and the overcoming of backwardness, decline, and the factors of decadence. The concept of education in contemporary Arab thought has since expanded to encompass central issues such as Nahda, identity, and freedom, becoming a fundamental gateway for rebuilding the human being and society and for confronting the challenges of the age.

Understanding the concept of education in Arab thought as a civilizational project for forming the human being, producing consciousness, and rebuilding society links it to broader issues such as freedom, identity, and Nahda. Freedom, in its broadest sense, requires an education that establishes awareness of it and its practice. Likewise, the concept of education in Arab thought can be understood as an integrated civilizational project for forming the human being, producing consciousness, and rebuilding society; it is not reducible to the mere transmission of knowledge and information or the inculcation of a set of rules and behaviors, but extends beyond that to contribute to shaping human personality, building the capacity for thought, understanding, critique, and choice, and preparing the individual to assume his role in social and cultural life. From this perspective, education is closely linked to major issues—foremost among them freedom, identity, and Nahda—because it constitutes the domain in which the human being's relationship with himself, with the other, with society, and with the world takes shape.

The concept of freedom did not attain this importance until after the West achieved its Nahda; for this reason, its linguistic and terminological definitions have always been limited and diminished in their intrinsic value. Linguistically, freedom (*ḥurriyya*) derives from the verb *ḥarrara* (to liberate). Ibn Manẓūr states in *Lisān al-ʿArab* that *al-ḥurr* is the opposite of *al-ʿabd* (the slave), and *al-ḥurra* is the opposite of *al-ama* (the female slave). From this, freedom's opposite is servitude: the free person (*al-ḥurr*) is the human being who enjoys absolute will, subject to no pressure or coercion, whereas the slave (*al-ʿabd*) is stripped of will, taking no decision except by direction and incapable of decision-making. In this sense, freedom, being by nature unbounded, must continually be delimited by constraints and boundaries, while taking into account the intellectual and social change that may, from time to time, alter the concept of freedom.

In another context, the term may carry moral connotations, as when one says: "So-and-so is free," meaning free of corruption and deviance. In this sense, freedom may be understood as bearing a moral meaning: the free person is one who is not a slave, and is the noble one, pure and far removed from immoral suspicions and the impurities that corrupt sound human nature (fiṭra).

Terminologically, however, the meaning of freedom is among the most cross-disciplinary of concepts, and among the most distinctive and expansive in terms of the scope of thought it has occupied in the human mind.

According to the contemporary Arab philosophical conception, freedom has been shaped by a set of questions arising from the condition of despotism entrenched for decades in Arab reality and imagination; concepts of freedom were thus founded in this context as an essential antithesis to despotism. Yet the question that emerges from this trend is: what freedom suits contemporary Arab political, cultural, and social reality? Some trends hold that the freedom required in Arab reality is freedom coupled with equality and justice—the dominant slogans of Arab movements and revolutions—so that all the problems associated with identity formation may be addressed within the duality of pluralism and recognition on the one hand, and the establishment of national sentiment culminating in genuine and effective citizenship—not a fickle citizenship tainted by factionalism and individual interests—on the other, ultimately consolidating good governance oriented toward sustainable development.

It must be affirmed that, in engaging with the concept of freedom within this context, this must be done with awareness and responsibility, and its construction must lie outside the scope of individualism and within what the relationship between the individual and the collective whole requires, as a governing standard for the movement of change and against the dominance of epistemic colonialism, whose extensions have begun to infiltrate the epistemic structure of Arab societies, particularly at the level of concepts and the relationship with history—heritage (turāth).

Some hold that the concepts of freedom must not be formulated apart from the principle of equality but must rather be linked to it in order to achieve justice in all its forms; the implicit threat that may accompany this trend is the erosion of freedom's constraints within Arab consciousness, given the specificity of its structure and history—for the absence or erosion of these constraints means the loss of the positive concept of freedom, and with its loss, equality too is lost.

What must be affirmed through this treatment is that the West succeeded in constructing its own particular epistemic system, through which it produced a conceptual epistēmē essentially devoid of a moral dimension, making it one of the foundations of liberalism linked to the absolute—that is, it dismantled the boundaries of concepts and set them in motion in their absolute form. This is what causes the epistemic and cultural structure of Arab societies to engage in this wager: the necessity of updating absolute Western concepts and dealing with them through constraints and standards. This, conversely, is what has caused failure in managing diversity—that is, the West stripped concepts of their religious dimension, linked to boundaries and normativity, in favor of the absolute, grounded in the freedom of will, choice, and practice.

The troubled Arab reality is the result of the absence of intellectual immunity and the absolute surrender to Western formulation, and the attempt to impose it upon the distinct Arab condition—with its history, heritage, frames of reference, and spiritual and juristic formation. This orientation has been one of the causes of failed debates waged by Arab reason, whose conflict with the productions of the Western intellectual system has not yet been resolved; reason, still acting under the effect of shock, continues to reproduce this conflict and controversy, oblivious to the reality of the conflict that the West is directing.

Freedom, according to the philosophical conception in the distant past, was understood as a will preceded by a vision accompanied by discernment—meaning the capacity to realize action, i.e., freedom of choice, which is the indeterminism that contradicts determinism—or as the characteristic of pure existence, free of constraints, acting by its own will or nature.

As for freedom in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), it came to affirm the dignity and humanity of the human being, linked to the higher objectives (maqāṣid) of Islamic law and to realizing the principle of public interest (maṣlaḥa). Freedom, in its essence within Islamic law, came to preserve human dignity and to frame one's relationship with the other. The divine laws, while agreeing on monotheism—meaning the laws in their original form, not those subject to distortion, such as Christianity and Judaism—differed in legislation and obligation. Islamic law came, within this context, to lift the fetters and shackles placed upon earlier peoples; freedom is thus an original concept in Islam, upon which authentic juristic rules were built, such that freedom is understood on the basis of the rule that "the default state of things is permissibility (ibāḥa)," and as understanding broadened, it became linked to the rule of pardon ('afw) and to that which the Lawgiver remained silent about. In this regard, the author of *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr* states that freedom in a person's conduct of his private affairs falls within the scope of every permissible act, since permissibility is the widest field for the exercise of freedom of action—no one may forbid another what is permissible, for none is more considerate of people than God Almighty; furthermore, the sharia imposes obligations that constrain the freedom of conduct, for the believer's own benefit, in the present or the future.

Freedom among the Mu'tazilites, meanwhile, arose from the idea of justice ('adl), one of the foundations of their Five Principles, following the second principle, monotheism (tawḥīd), owing to its connection to divine will and human will. They held that jabr (predestination) is an attribute leading to the ascription of injustice to God, which cannot be countenanced, since God is exalted above such attributes, being just, merciful, and gentle to His servants. Although freedom has existed since ancient times, the Mu'tazilites made it a foundational and essential idea within their doctrine; accordingly, their scholars

agreed that God is not the creator of His servants' acts and has no role in creating or determining their acquired (muktasab) acts, and that human beings are the true originators of these acts.

The Sufis, for their part, hold that freedom proceeds from the linguistic meaning associated with the opposite of servitude; they engage with freedom as a self-standing concept, defining it as "departure from bondage to all else but God." Reflecting on this definition indicates that the Sufis are free from everything except servitude to God, and complete submission to Him, such that the desires of the self become subordinate to God's command; freedom, for them, is thus reality, path, and fruits. Freedom is action, as it appears in the definition given by al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378 AH), who described it as a reference to the culmination of the realization of servitude to God, such that the human being possesses nothing of the created things—so one becomes free when one is a servant of God. Others define freedom as emancipation from bondage to all else, and annihilation in the manifestation of the Light of lights. Sufism thus offers a meaning imbued with logical paradox: emancipation from servitude, and annihilation into servitude to the One, Unique, Eternal, Self-Sufficient Creator.

From the foregoing, we affirm that the concept of freedom carries a broad significance and is a site of plurality and diversity among thinkers and schools; nevertheless, it has become necessary to continually delimit the boundaries of this concept, and for this delimitation to remain bound to the set of changes affecting social structure, to be commensurate with social forms, responsive to specificity, and attuned to the boundaries of politics in terms of vision, action, and purpose.

The Arab cultural structure, amid the challenges it faces, must possess the capacity and means to understand the totality of social interactions and to internalize them, in order to achieve a level of awareness that allows for regulating the relationship between individual freedom—expressed in the individual's right to express his capability and inner self and to exercise his personal freedoms, beginning with the choice of his lifestyle, which must align with the system of values and norms shaping society's identity—and what the law prescribes in terms of boundaries and responsibilities.

Education and Freedom in Western Thought:

Education in Western thought, from the era of Greek philosophy through to the modern schools, has represented the cornerstone for building the human being and society; its historical trajectory shifted from mere blind inculcation to a comprehensive liberatory project. Chronologically, from the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, education was linked to forming the virtuous citizen and developing reason; it then evolved in modern thought with Rousseau, Kant, and Dewey, and the philosophy of the Enlightenment, toward a concern with freedom and linking the individual being educated to his experience and social reality. The concept of education in Western thought then shifted from a focus on transmitting knowledge to a concern with liberating reason, developing critical thinking, and preparing the individual for active participation in constructing his reality by considering his present and future and developing society.

The West came to dominate and control the world, imposing upon it, in one way or another, its entire system with all its structures—evaluative, cultural, intellectual, and otherwise. This dominance was, for the most part, achieved not through material force but through marketing itself as representative of civilization and of the universal and humane values by which humanity is set aright, societies improved, states built, and development and civilization achieved. This marketing of Western civilization and values is itself a form of the display of power and material dominance, for had the West not possessed the power it does, it could not have imposed its values, patterns, and standards. In this vein, the German philosopher Nietzsche pointed out that it is the powerful who possess the capacity to name things, formulate terms, and impose their meanings. It is within this context that the concept of freedom emerged according to the specific content assigned to it by the West. To be sure, the concept in antiquity underwent many fluctuations and transformations, whether in context or in determination, for the West did not hold to a single content of freedom; rather, the prevailing conceptions differed considerably from one another and varied according to system, school, and philosophy. The ancient philosophical schools—the Greeks—held that the concept of freedom is linked to reason and capacity, affirming that it is "the choice of an action after deliberation, meaning the capacity not to choose it, or to choose its opposite."

The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach defined freedom as "the faculty of doing everything for the sake of individual happiness, without this harming the happiness of others," while Thomas Hobbes defined it as "the absence of external impediments that stand between a man and doing what his reason and wisdom dictate to him."

The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre offered a conception of freedom within a different context, stating: "Man is not human except through his freedom ... and in wishing to make our freedom our goal, we cannot but consider the freedom of others as a goal we likewise pursue." John Locke, meanwhile, defined freedom as "the right to do anything permitted by law."

Within this conception, many other definitions emerged, such as that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who linked the concept of freedom to the requirements of the social contract, based on individuals' relinquishment of certain rights for the purpose of building a strong society and state; and Immanuel Kant, who made the concept of freedom contingent upon commitment to the moral law. Others hold that freedom is an act exercised freely within the public sphere, taking on a systemic character—political, cultural, or social—distinguishing between civil freedom and political freedom.

The liberals, for their part, stripped the concept of its evaluative and humane force, confining it to civil practice, which must liberate the individual from all restrictions, constraints, and norms; in this sense, they brought the concept to a state of value-based collapse within societies. This is what the social theorist Isaiah Berlin pointed to when he rejected negative freedom and called for the individual to be left free of interference from the state or society, so long as he does not infringe on the freedom of others—a model that is prevalent in Western societies and that remains, to this day, among the set of

entrenched concepts that cannot be relinquished; rather, the West has made it a vehicle for intervening in other world societies.

What remains constant within this trend is that liberals sanctify the individual and privilege him over the collective; indeed, they consider the free individual to be the foundation for the spread of freedom and its constitutive element within the collective entity.

It is commonly held that liberals do not call for absolute freedom, but rather set restrictions and constraints for it; however, this has remained at the intellectual and philosophical level, whereas in practice liberalism has moved while saturated and burdened with individualistic conceptions, making individual freedom a sanctified acquisition, non-negotiable in terms of its scope and determinants, and not subject to concession, amendment, or negotiation.

The Universal Dimension of the Concepts of Education and Freedom:

The universal dimension of education can be summarized in achieving a balance between openness to shared civilizational, existential, and human values, and the preservation of cultural and civilizational specificities. The universality of the concept can only be grasped through the charters, treaties, and conventions to which all states are party; none is more universal, in this respect, than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through which the connotations related to freedom—accepted and agreed to by states—may be understood. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

What the declaration of modernity referred to—even though it points, in its outward appearance, to basic rights—nevertheless offered an approach combining "liberty, equality, and fraternity," the slogans raised by the French Revolution in the Age of Enlightenment. These concepts, including the concept of freedom, were transformed by the state of absoluteness that modernity conferred upon the term's meaning, to the point that the West deviated from the law of human nature (fiṭra) and made of it a gateway for the destruction of the rest of the world's peoples—including Arab societies, which have begun to experience a transgression of values and norms under the name of "freedom," through the promotion of the absolute meaning of the concept, using modernity as a justification.

The connection between freedom and equality, and the reconciliation between the two, may be in continual tension; freedom becomes a guarantor of equality only when its boundaries are delimited, for there is no equality without freedom according to its constraints and positive factors.

The National Legislative Dimension of the Concept of Freedom:

The legislative treatment of the concept of freedom through the Algerian Constitution—as the supreme foundational document regulating matters of rights and freedoms and the fundamental frame of reference in the country—addresses freedom in terms of its constraints and manifestations, not in terms of its definition. The legislator has formulated a set of constraints and determinants that must not be transgressed under any pretext, expressing them as national constants in their various religious, cultural, social, and historical dimensions, thereby placing the sharia and its rulings, the homeland and its symbols, and the rights of society among these constants. The Algerian Constitution also addresses the mechanisms and means for protecting freedom of expression: Article 51 of the 2020 constitutional amendment states that "freedom of opinion shall not be infringed," and Article 52 likewise stipulates that "freedom of expression is guaranteed." Article 54 further addresses the right to publish news, images, and opinions, provided the law is respected and the nation's constants and its religious, moral, and cultural values are not infringed. In the same vein, Article 2 of Law No. 12/05 of January 12, 2012, concerning information (al-i' lām), states that "media activity shall be practiced freely and in a manner that respects ... human dignity ... and individual and collective freedoms." National legislation has thus, in its treatment of the concept of freedom, provided forms, constraints, and mechanisms that some view as intended to protect privacy and the rights of society.

The Trajectory of Education and Freedom between the Crisis of the Concept and the Crisis of Context and System (A Reading in the Interpretive Structure of Arab Reason):

There is no doubt that the concept of freedom is experiencing a state of confusion, to which its absolute, unbounded connotation and the narrowing of its discursive field in various domains—particularly the intellectual, political, and social—have contributed, resulting in the inability of Arab reason to reproduce a concept that gathers together all its specificities and determinants and frames it at the level of political, social, evaluative, or symbolic systems. For Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Arab reason remains subject to the dominance of bayān (explicative reason) and 'irfān (gnostic reason); he holds that freedom, within the cultural structure, suffers from the near-absolute dominance of bayān and 'irfān at the expense of burhān (demonstrative reason)—that is, the dominance of transmission and imitation over critical reason. He holds that the historical contexts through which this concept has passed have not allowed for the formation of a free political consciousness, and that freedom must be established as a human value and a moral concept, not as one possessing a political dimension. In this regard, al-Jabri treated Arab reason, in its epistemic structure, according to three epistemic systems—bayān, 'irfān, and burhān—seeking through all of this to establish that freedom is a rational, intellectual act that begins from within, from reason, and culminates in the total order.

Taha Abderrahmane, likewise, holds that freedom is a commitment before it is a liberation, owing to its deep connection to the moral and spiritual dimension; it is thus the freedom of self-cultivation (takhalluq), not the freedom of possession or

domination. In this regard, he states: "Freedom that is not referred back to morality is a false freedom, because it does not develop the human being's humanity but rather develops his egotism."

Mohammed Arkoun, for his part, treated the concept of freedom within multiple contexts, attempting to present his project based on the critique of Islamic reason, through which he sought to liberate reason from the pressures of history and heritage, and to extract it—as he claims—from the state of faith or theology, which he considers the greatest obstacle to the formation of the concept of freedom, and which he regards not as a mere act but as a form of thinking that touches upon the sacred itself. Accordingly, the concept of freedom must, in his view, take shape away from the epistemic dominance of what he considers heritage. Freedom, for Arkoun, is thus an epistemic liberation grounded in the means and tools through which texts may be interrogated, and thus a movement from what is forbidden to think toward what is possible to think.

He further holds that true freedom begins with reason's attempt to deconstruct the "unthought," achievable only through the adoption of an analytical and critical approach to history and to texts, and an attempt to trace the state of transcendence over critique that has characterized the relationship between *fiqh* and *sharia*. The purpose of all this, for Arkoun, is to liberate reason from the sphere of certainties and to break the cycle of rigidity surrounding reason, thereby transcending the formulas and determinants that have become permanent fixtures, halting the movement of history and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and engaging with them according to the requirements of reason-derived *ijtihad* rather than absolute faith-based certainties treated as eternal givens.

That is, the concept of freedom must, in his view, be liberated from the constraints that have prevented its intellectual and political development, through extracting these endeavors from the closed systems within which certain decisive concepts of the intellectual and epistemic system—foremost among them the concept of freedom—have long been founded, and then subjecting heritage to review through the available epistemic sources and methodological tools, treating it as a human product to be drawn upon and returned to, away from sanctification. The concept, for Arkoun, must ultimately combine both the epistemic and the methodological dimensions, achievable only through an epistemological revolution entailing a rupture with what is constrained and sacred, enabling the liberation of the text from previous readings and its re-instatement within social, historical, and human reality—thereby opening the way to readings responsive to the conditions of the age.

Malek Bennabi, for his part, was preoccupied in his consciousness, conscience, and reason with the problem of civilization, this idea dominating all his writings. Among the topics Bennabi raised in constructing his civilizational project was the idea of colonialism, which he considers a result rather than a cause, affirming that it is not the sole cause—even though its aim was to obscure and thwart any serious attempt to bring about a *Nahda*—of the state of weakness, incapacity, and humiliation experienced by the Islamic and Arab nation; he thus called for the necessity of studying colonialism and colonizability (*al-qābiliyya li-l-isti'mār*) as a phenomenon.

Malek Bennabi affirms that breaking rigidity, the relationship of dependency, and the state of fascination that has taken hold of the Arab individual—which has left him with many complexes—requires working to build a new, liberated, conscious, and positive human being, freed from reliance and superstition.

Among the wagers Malek Bennabi discussed in building his civilizational project is the necessity of achieving victory in the intellectual battles dominating the conflict between the colonizer—the West—and the Arab states, in order to produce a strong and liberated society. He affirms that achieving this victory requires giving ideas their scope and role and preparing them for success, for ideas represent, in Bennabi's project, a fundamental force that organizes and directs all the forces of history and thereby protects them from attempts at frustration, whatever their type; the gap in this respect stems from a degree of backwardness in social development, exposing the sphere of ideas to the challenge of colonialism and its conspiracies without being able to offer the necessary response to it.

It thus becomes clear that the intellectual conflict waged by the nation, in Malek Bennabi's conception, does not exclude the cultural and epistemic structures, which must be secure, immunized, and equipped to wage this conflict with tools suited to it.

The production of meanings and concepts is at the very heart of the intellectual battle; freedom, for him, is linked to liberation from all forms of dependency and fascination, and for this reason he made freedom one of the causes of the success of the cycle of civilization in his conception—indeed, one of its governing constraints, without which it is exposed to disruption, failure, and collapse. Freedom, in the sense of liberation that Malek Bennabi addressed, was thus a fundamental starting point for any sought-after *Nahda*; freedom, for him, is part of the moral and intellectual system capable of producing the new human being and building him in a positive and balanced manner that combines the material and spiritual dimensions—in a direct critique of the Western conception of freedom.

From this, it may be inferred that Arab reason engages with the concept of freedom through an approach that is at times overlapping and at times contradictory, causing the concept to intermingle and become conflated with numerous other concepts, with constraints and boundaries becoming entangled through it—such as liberation, emancipation, will, individual right, individual freedom, justice, and equality. Perhaps the nature of this treatment does not allow for delving into freedom's cognate concepts, such as justice and equality, given the nature of the subject and what it requires, at times epistemic and at other times sociological readings.

This condition has been reflected in the relationship between freedom and responsibility, and between freedom as a natural right enjoyed by all human beings—in keeping with what the divine laws have affirmed—and freedom as a system

practiced according to the requirements of collective reason, along with the observation that there is an overlap in the determinants of religious freedom and freedom of belief: religious freedom is generally linked to society's cultural structure, whereas freedom of belief, according to its common conception, began with liberation from social molds and formed for itself a self-enclosed system, unresponsive to other traditional systems.

The difference in the concept of freedom is regarded as a problematic that the American researcher John Dewey addressed as "the problem of freedom" in his book *Freedom and Culture*; some contemporaries, however, hold that the problem of freedom—conceptually and systemically—expresses the existence of freedom and of the correct context for engaging with this concept and for the clarity of its determinants. In this regard, Professor Fouad Zakariyya states: "The mere existence of a problem of freedom is, in itself, evidence of the existence of freedom ... this means that freedom has not yet been attained, but rather that man strives, throughout his history, for liberation and for mastery over his reality and the circumstances surrounding him."

Thus, tracing the states of the concept within Arab thought, we observe that it has shifted from a conflict linked to concepts into an intellectual conflict shaped by a complex and intricate social structure and context, to which many indicators and causes have contributed—beginning with the authoritarian form of Arab societies, through the persistence and non-resolution of the debate concerning identity, and through the divergence and contradiction of goals and interests—all of which obscures collective conscience and the sense of common interest.

From Intellectual Freedom to Social Education (A Sociological Reading of the Arab Cultural Structure)

Among the problems of the term is its simplification and reduction to one of its dimensions, which renders its deployment within the required contexts an impediment to the intellectual process; the effacement of the normative framework governing the concept limits its production at the symbolic and evaluative level, for the vital value of the concept lies in its being the cradle of intellectual construction and the locus of social responsibility, connected as it is to the dynamism of life. As Abdelrazak Belaakrouz states, what is entrusted with distinctive symbolic production is entrusted with concepts, for concepts enter into the intellectual fabric of reason—particularly when fused with the movement of life and inhabited by the anxiety of questioning and the unease of problematization, not static concepts that freeze the river of life in abstract forms and closed enclosures. The concept is the heading of thought: it defines its problematics, regulates its connotations, situates them within their epistemic frames of reference, and regulates the rules of its use.

The vital, intellectual, and social value of the concepts of freedom and education makes them an essential part of the conceptual apparatus of the intellectual system—of Arab and Western societies alike—through which the dialectical relationship is produced between freedom as an intellectual act possessing its own distinct structure, characterized by its epistemic corpus and as a product of vitality, creativity, and adaptation to the demands of change, and freedom as a social act whose practice is manifest within social structures and systems.

From the foregoing, it may be said that intellectual freedom is the locus for intellectual education and social freedom, since the former provides a network of concepts, conceptions, meanings, and symbols, while the latter constitutes representations of those concepts at the level of practice and behavior, forming the epistemic reservoir that reproduces the symbolic content of the concepts that shape collective or individual identity.

Constructing the concept of freedom according to the requirements of social change—regardless of its causes—and according to the requirements of Arab specificity at the epistemic, intellectual, and cultural level contributes to the revival of Arab societies and propels them toward effective and creative participation in the making of history, restoring their sought-after cohesion and unity through the clarity of the concept, the differentiation of meaning, and the delimitation of its constraints, connotations, and contexts. There would then be no room for deploying this concept in conflicts that continue to cast their shadow over the nation and continue to drain its effort and the effort of its creators and intellectuals, which has reinforced the state of alienation and Western intervention in the production of concepts, meanings, and symbols within the Arab epistemic structure.

This epistemic colonialism has transformed the concepts it produced, according to its own formation and structure, into conditional starting points in any social, political, or intellectual debate, and has shifted the conflict from the level of a conceptual conflict to the level of an ideological conflict, hostage to the Western meaning that seeks to fragment and exhaust what remains of the identity of Arab societies, through replacing the value system with a new system based on triviality, laxity, entitlement, and absolute liberation from the totality of the norms, customs, and values that govern it.

The West has managed to monopolize the production of concepts by establishing its own apparatus for constructing, formulating, and defining concepts, and for presenting, through them, standards specific to itself, without regard for the specificity of local knowledges or for locally adopted epistemic systems; indeed, it has made the production of concepts a means for exercising coercion for the purpose of producing epistemic and intellectual dependency and extracting them from their local epistemic context—evidenced by the fact that the concept of freedom, according to the Western approach to its definition, was detached from its general context and presented as a pure and sacred individual right, not subject to the historical, intellectual, social, and epistemic environment in which it arose, and unconnected to its social reality.

As long as the concept has been stripped of its systemic character and reduced to an individual right, it has been exploited to embody the state of dependency, pushing elites and intellectuals toward constructing orientations and building a discourse based on the Western meaning of concepts, which has widened the gap between elites and societies, rendering the relationship

between the intellectual and his society superficial, ineffectual, and increasingly marginal. As a result, local knowledge constitutive of societal identity has been bypassed, as became clearly evident through Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup and the debates it generated concerning the right of the LGBT community to raise its flag and express itself, after the State of Qatar set conditions relating to the reception of fans, including respect for the customs, traditions, and local frame of reference of the State of Qatar and its local laws, which formed part of the application of FIFA's regulations. This announcement was accompanied by a global media debate through which Western states sought to impose this community under the label of "freedom," bringing us back to the cycle of coercions the West exercises by imposing its values under this guise: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the Qatari measures approved by FIFA—penalizing any player who expressed such matters through gestures—as troubling and as restricting freedom of expression in a matter that supports diversity and inclusion.

Germany was among the countries most vocal in escalating and imposing the language of this reality, as the German Interior Minister came to the stadium wearing the "One Love" armband, in a clear signal of Western governments' support for departing from human nature (*fiṭra*); members of the German national team likewise took a photograph before the match with their hands over their mouths, in full view of the world. The European Union, within this context, also criticized FIFA's regulations and what the State of Qatar had done in this regard.

The Western concept of freedom has, in this sense, gone beyond its philosophical or humane meaning, freeing itself from the transcendent frame of reference it lost from the outset through its conflict with religion, and drifting after pleasure and desire, causing the concept to shift from a state of determinacy to a state of fluidity.

What the West has arrived at, in terms of the distortion of human nature and departure from its constraints, will bring it down, and it will seek a way out of this predicament without success. It therefore attempts to exercise its coercions and pressures by every means, in order to draw the nation into this state of fluidity—and it has begun to succeed in this through certain voices calling for liberation from heritage and from the constraints of the values and norms upon which Arab societies were founded. Indeed, it has succeeded in changing, at the systemic level, some social institutions, foremost among them "the family," which is, for us, the most secure fortress and the first line of defense against attempts at Westernization, through altering its concept—and it has legitimized the marriage of man to man, woman to woman, and even woman to animal, always under the name of "freedom."

Strengthening social responsibility comes through regulating the concept and moving it from a mere meaning conflated with the West to a condition for action and civilizational revival, in accordance with what the meaning of the concept requires in light of this nation's specificity, history, and heritage.

Conclusion:

Education and freedom are not two separate concepts, but rather represent two complementary paths in the building of the human being; the more education advances from mere inculcation toward a blending of diversity and dialogue, and from compliance toward critical thinking free of constraint, and from memorization toward understanding, critique, and creativity, the more the scope of freedom expands within the individual and society. Freedom, in turn, grants the educational process its existential and humane dimension, for an education built upon the confiscation of the other and the expropriation of ideas cannot produce a human being capable of excellence and creativity, of making his present and future, and of continuing his historical and civilizational mission, free of any condition or restriction whatsoever, whether coercive or subtle in form.

The survival and continuity of any social system depend on the strength of its epistemic structure and the strength of its cultural construction, which is presumed to be fortified and secure against any attempt to penetrate it, whether to change or amend it, because this structure is the frame of reference and framework that regulates the production of meaning and significance, organizes relationships, and reproduces the system that carries and expresses identity. It is, according to Durkheim, the moral force that grants society the depth of cohesion and harmony; hence, any social system that possesses the power to produce meaning commensurate with its specificity in truth possesses a strong immunity capable of protecting it from imbalance and structural or systemic disintegration.

The cultural system that possesses efficacy and immunity thereby also possesses the capacity to provide and produce the values and norms that ensure the balance and integration of other systems at the functional level, achieving states of compliance and discipline while simultaneously adapting to changing circumstances.

The strength of the cultural structure derives from reason's activation of the epistemic apparatus to produce concepts and meanings that combine the authentic, drawn from heritage and cultural specificity, on the one hand, with the contemporary, which reflects social reality, on the other. Among the influential incursions that have struck the cultural structure are the concepts of freedom that have come from Western molds, exceeding and subsuming the locally produced meaning, suggesting imbalances afflicting the cultural system that will require activating the scope for revision, allowing for adaptation to epistemic transformations while preserving identity, rather than collapse or assimilation.

The cultural system that preserves meanings and symbols, or produces them within its epistemic and cultural molds, thereby becomes not merely a symbolic foundation but an active and productive apparatus capable of providing society with the tools necessary to confront challenges and crises.

The concepts and meanings produced by the West arose within a historical context linked to a social reality that cannot be imposed on others, and cannot serve as an absolute reference in engaging with them; indeed, most of the Western concepts

marketed in various forms were the offspring of specific social, political, and economic circumstances. The Arab cultural structure, however, has its own reality, specificities, history, and heritage, which constitute one of the sources of its epistemic derivation; it is thus a structure that renews itself while remaining tied to its origin, not withdrawn from its age, accepting of critique, and capable of absorbing changes without losing its identity and specificities, so that it may withstand attempts at hybridization exerted upon it.

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