

REBALANCING KNOWLEDGE: AN INFORMAL DIALOGUE ON THE CRISIS AND PROMISE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

This is a verbatim (lightly edited for clarity) transcript of an informal interview between Dr. Filip Boicu and Dr. Behrooz Sabet, originally published on YouTube on Sep 29, 2025.

Dear Dr. Sabat, thank you for agreeing to join this informal interview.

I envisage this as an experimental space where we can throw ideas off each other—even wild and crazy ones—precisely because we are simply testing ideas in order to discuss freely.

I propose we reserve the option to, at any time, radically revise any ideas expressed.

This spirit of dialogue is very common within academic spaces, but I think we can easily adopt it here as well.

You have worked on problems of curriculum, particularly from the perspective of the integration of knowledge, since at least the mid-'80s.

Your dissertation from 1987 with the State University of New York at Buffalo was in this area.

You then took this topic further in a paper from 2000 entitled “Integrative Approach to Knowledge and Action: A Bahá’í Perspective,” which has resulted in a larger manuscript that has never been published.

While you were having an academic career in the United States, you were also involved in revising the overall curriculum of at least two Bahá’í or Bahá’í-inspired institutions, translating some of these ideas into practice.

I think one of the ideas you have been working on is that the current challenges of civilization derive from a huge imbalance in our modern system of knowledge.

Such a view implies that the modern system of knowledge could be rebalanced or recalibrated in certain ways to meet the global challenges facing us.

In what follows, I want us to discuss the topic of the social sciences while mindful of this larger perspective of the imbalance in our modern system of knowledge.

Is there a crisis in the social sciences that plays into this? Could we rebalance the modern system of knowledge by addressing that?

So this would be the more general question that I have.

I then also have a more particular question. I am especially curious as to how you have represented the social sciences within the diagram summarizing your conception of the curriculum.

So, I'm going to share this diagram.

Yes. I am particularly curious as to how you have represented the social sciences within this diagram.

In this diagram, the social sciences appear as arrows cutting across four main domains of knowledge: the humanities; natural or physical sciences; technology and applied sciences; and areas relating to the issue of an emerging world order, such as political economy, policy, law, business, and so on.

So the particular question here would be: Why have you represented the social sciences in this way, as this is not something I have seen before?

But you can start anywhere you want, and these are just angles I'm curious about; the discussion of social sciences can start from anywhere. Thank you.

Thank you very much. This is an excellent opportunity, and I'm very glad to talk with you for the classes that we had and all the good experiences and memories that we had in the past. I think this is a very significant topic—the concept of social sciences—or whether social sciences are in crisis. And let me say a few words in the beginning about the significance of this topic and then a brief introduction about what we mean by social sciences and what is the position of social sciences within the broader scheme of knowledge or cognition or basically epistemology.

I think this is a significant topic, even though some people may think in the beginning—or those who are not involved in this discourse—“What is the significance of discussing social sciences while we have so many other problems in the world?” I think this is very important because, as you hinted, what we are trying to discuss is not just the social sciences but whether there is some sort of harmonious understanding of knowledge, or whether there is any unity of cognition, unity of understanding, because perhaps when we say “unity of understanding,” which is obviously lacking in the world today, that unity of understanding could be expanded into some sort of agreement on what are the values and contributions of social sciences and how they can improve the world situation—how they can improve human understanding, world peace, global interactions, and so on. Therefore, as you see, it is a very important topic. It covers, in a sense,

the relationship between science and religion. It also covers the necessary relationships between culture and material life, between values and meanings and the material aspect of existence. So it covers all of these areas.

Now, what do we mean by social sciences? Social sciences. I mean, of course, the study of human behavior, collective action, collective behavior is not a new subject. It goes back to ancient times. Even older philosophers have discussed this: Plato, Aristotle, Eastern philosophers—they all have discussed issues of governance, issues of ethics, which are aspects of social sciences. For instance, Ibn Khaldun was one of the earliest thinkers or philosophers who discussed the evolution of history and the reason for the fall of civilizations and so on. Therefore, it is not a new subject in that sense.

However, until modern times, social sciences were a part or an aspect of philosophy and theology. In other words, they were discussed within the theological and philosophical discourse. However, with the emergence of modern times—with some fundamental developments in Europe, which can be understood under the umbrella of modernity and modern times, and developments and changes that took place in physical and natural sciences or material sciences—that revolutionized human understanding, revolutionized the church-based concept of cosmology, and opened up a new understanding about how to view the world based on testing, measurement, experimentation, and so on.

This scientific revolution, that took place within astronomy, physical sciences, biology, and so on, gradually impacted the development of social sciences later. Basically, by the age of Enlightenment—17th and 18th centuries—and with the contributions of individuals such as Descartes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, and many others, gradually the concept of social sciences started to evolve as independent fields of study, separated from their previous theological and philosophical background.

For instance, Auguste Comte—famous for being the father of sociology, started a new conception, a new understanding, a new approach to the study of society and social behaviors and explanations of that, and he called it the “queen of all sciences,” because it deals with values and meanings and very complex aspects of collective life. This development resulted basically,

in the 20th century, in the complete formation and conceptualization of diverse fields of study or disciplines under sociology, political science, and psychology. In psychology, for instance, the earlier advocates of behaviorism tried to approach a scientific way of studying the human mind and human behavior; then, of course, in psychoanalysis, Freud opened up a new understanding of the human psyche, and so on. Gradually, these new developments formed a new understanding of social sciences.

So, basically, if we use Comte's understanding of categorization and organization of knowledge, first we begin with the physical and natural sciences—perhaps with physics, which is the mother of all physical and natural sciences—and then we come up to the level of chemistry, and then to the level of biology, or biological sciences. From moving from biology to psychology, something profound happens: the emergence of consciousness, the emergence of values, ethics, meanings, and so on. That is basically the line that separates social sciences from physical and natural sciences. However, as I said, they interact with each other.

In the 19th century and early 20th century, some scientists, philosophers, and thinkers tried to use methods of natural sciences and experimentation and bring them into the domain of social sciences. Therefore, in research we use those methods to some extent to understand social sciences with further objectivity, because the essence of social sciences is subjectivity, and it is not that open and welcoming to pure experimentation, testing, and measurement. Therefore, they are adding, for instance, some scientific dimension to qualitative research, which is used in the social sciences, and also trying to use quantitative research in order to quantify the results of findings in social sciences—and then, of course, using statistics and other methods to add more scientific dimension to the study of social sciences.

With this background, we realize that there is something that we—humanity, scientists in general—need to resolve, and that is how to approach subjectivity, the value-orientation, and the meanings that are inherent in social sciences. That is the main question, and your reference to a crisis of social sciences, I think, goes back to this fundamental question: how can we approach the subjectivity of social sciences?

My understanding is that modern social sciences have tried to resolve this issue, but they have not been that successful. For instance, in psychology—and before I say further ideas on this, in this discussion we are not trying to belittle social sciences as they are practiced today—this is just objective observation, trying to discuss some of the issues and challenges, not saying that they have no value. Let me be clear about that.

Now, going back to psychology, for instance: psychology is about human behavior—individual behavior—and the human mind, human understanding, and human values. Still, the question of consciousness is a taboo in some schools of psychology. The question is—at best—they say this has nothing to do with psychology. “We are not going to deal with it because it’s complicated; it’s more philosophical; it’s more about religion and theology,” and therefore they set aside the question of what is consciousness, what is the source of consciousness, and so on and so forth. I think this is not really a true answer to this fundamental question. We cannot ignore it. We cannot just transfer it to the older domains of theology and philosophy or to individual preferences, and so on. In so many ways, people try to escape this question. There are some psychologists who have tried to answer this question by means of, again, a scientific approach. Then, of course, we have atheistic philosophies or psychologists who have completely disregarded the question of consciousness and basically its subjectivity; and even if they accepted the subjectivity of human consciousness, they have tried to define it within a materialistic frame of reference.

Now, these are all very profound issues, and we can’t discuss all of these because each particular aspect of this topic requires hours and all sorts of discussions, and so on. But I’m just trying to briefly explain what is happening now—in other words, what is the current approach of modern social sciences to fundamental questions such as subjectivity, consciousness, values, meanings, ethics, and so on—metaphysical issues, and so on. It’s either ignoring them or referring to or using a materialistic philosophical framework.

I have to also mention something which is positive, from my perspective, and that is: with the rise of modern social sciences since the 1940s, ’50s, ’60s, there were newer approaches to this challenge that I just mentioned. Some social scientists—psychologists and sociologists—tried to disassociate themselves from the materialistic perspective of social sciences and offered new

ideas. For instance, in psychology, Carl Jung—who was a student of Freud—came up with a new understanding, or tried to at least explain a new understanding of the field of psychology. Then there were other psychologists like Maslow and many others who tried to come up with the idea of human potential. They did not directly say, for instance, that human beings have a soul or something like that; they said there are potentialities in every human being; the human being is not like a blank tablet, as earlier behaviorists suggested, on which you can write anything and shape it in any way you want. They came up with the idea of human potential and the need for humanity to develop ideas and reach a higher level of understanding and moral values, and so on—which, I think, is another trend in the development of social sciences in the second half of the 20th century.

There are a number of individuals—like Pitirim A. Sorokin in sociology (actually the father of modern sociology in American academic disciplines), who came from Russia to the United States and established the first department of sociology at Harvard—who came up with a sociology profoundly different from earlier materialistic approaches to the field of sociology. Historians and many others came up with different approaches to the study of human society and history. The study of history became a crucial aspect: What are the forces, or the philosophy, of history? Is there a direction in the development of historical evolution? Then, of course, there is the question of materialism—materialistic philosophies that dominated the social sciences in the 20th century. That is another significant idea in the development of these sciences. For instance, Karl Marx and the idea of Marxism—Marxist philosophy to explain social development and historical development—was a complete form of materialistic interpretation of human society and social history. The concept of historical materialism that Marx used was somehow different from mechanistic materialism of earlier times; it was as if Marx gave some life to material existence. It's a very interesting topic to discuss and think about, and it became a powerful force for Marxian interpretation of history and social development.

Then, of course, we had the concept of evolution—Darwinian evolution—which was a very profound development in biology; the way it was used in social sciences, sometimes called social Darwinism, was that people tried to apply principles of natural theory to human behavior and social values, and so on. These are some of the philosophies or purely scientific understandings that influenced the development of social sciences. I'm not putting Darwin and Marx next to

each other in the same category, because Marxism was a philosophy, while Darwin's theory was essentially a scientific development in the field of biology. However, materialistic interpretations of Darwinian theory—and we all know that even Darwin himself considered issues of ethics somehow beyond natural evolution and so on—were used to shape social thought. Again, these are two examples that come to my mind as forces that have influenced the development of social sciences.

Thank you. Thank you.

Okay. Let me try to ask a few questions.

I'm curious: when we speak about the social sciences, on the one hand there is an argument that they've been influenced by the natural sciences; and then there is an argument that they've been influenced by materialistic philosophies.

So already from the very beginning we see this double direction: they can be influenced by the natural sciences, or they can be influenced by the domain of philosophy.

I'm wondering how the picture changes after the 1960s and 1970s, because I can think, for example, of a number of "turns" like the linguistic turn and the cultural turn in the '60s and '70s (and maybe the '80s).

In more recent times, there's discussion of a number of turns—although it is not very clear which ones will be significant long-term—such as the affective turn, the ontological turn, the neurological turn, and computational turns.

In some of those dimensions, you can argue, for example, that in the cultural turn the humanities (and mostly philosophy) really started shaping the social sciences.

In more recent times, you can argue that life sciences and biology are, on the one hand, approaching the humanities (e.g., sub-disciplines like bioethics), but, on the other hand, they are also generating or implicating social science through things like Earth-system science.

So there are arguments attempting to put forward the idea that there is a convergence between the social sciences and science, and between the humanities and science, and it is dispelling, in a sense, some foundational principles of the humanities—such as, for example, that the human being has a special status because of reason and agency.

Why do they do that? Because they uncover the human species as coexisting with other

species, all implicating each other; so the progress of the human species depends on how we interact with the other species.

In the field of cognitive biology, there is a discussion of how cognition applies not only to species that have a nervous system but even beyond—to plants and microorganisms—and not only to living things but also to technical systems.

So, even when we talk about AI, that would be one example of a technical system that displays cognition that, in some aspects, is more powerful than human cognition.

All of those things de-center this idea that there's something uniquely special about human beings, which was kind of a faith-related idea—that we are the center of the universe and consciousness, reasoning, and values are what make us special.

On the other hand, there are other complications coming into the picture.

What I'm trying to say is: How does the picture and the story that you've told us look in the present?

Are we saying, for example, that cognitive biology—looking at cognition across all these domains—still doesn't touch the discussion of consciousness and therefore is outside of it, or are we seeing some really significant shift in there?

I appreciate everything is very complex, and the discussion requires an insight that I do not claim to have in any measure. Thank you.

As you mentioned, the examples you mention—the developments you discussed—are aspects of this evolving and changing discourse, and, in a sense, it is very positive because we are not advocating a particular orthodoxy. We are not saying that social sciences should be superimposed by some universal orthodoxy. These evolutions and these changes are good and necessary.

Just a few items crossed my mind as you were speaking. One was that, going back to that organization of sciences, first we have natural and physical sciences that start with physics and the way that physics looks at the entire universe. Because of that, in my understanding, physics has a very unique capacity to unravel, to disclose the mysteries of the universe. Therefore, what has happened in the field of physics—particularly with two significant theories: Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics—truly revolutionized human understanding of the environment and, not only that, the nature of reality.

I can add something here: it has impacted philosophical ideas that subsequently emerged as a result of these scientific developments in physics, perhaps much further than what happened in the field of biology. In other words, biology—even though there has been very interesting progress—has not shifted our metaphysics as drastically. Actually, I recently wrote a brief paper, and if anybody's interested, it's on Academia.edu. It's basically a summary of what has happened to the concept of natural selection and, because of my Bahá'í background, I have tried to give a perspective on that too. Anyway, there have been profound changes in biology and the idea of evolution, but I really want to emphasize what has happened in the field of physics. I think, based on a good many—though not all—physicists and scientists, the traditional, crude materialistic perspective of the 19th century is gone, based on the findings of these scientific developments. We are not dealing with a mechanical cosmology anymore. We are dealing with a cosmology that is unpredictable, constantly evolving, and, in fact, opens room for the role of human consciousness and the way that the human mind can influence the course of natural or physical events. That is very profound and really needs further discussion, investigation, and research.

Another thing that crossed my mind was that after we have social sciences and natural and physical sciences, in between we have to open a space, and that space is sometimes given different names. I use the traditional concept of applied sciences—that is, engineering, medicine, and basically the entire technology—the technology that has evolved humanity from living in caves to AI and traveling to space. This technology and this applied domain—which is like a sandwich between social sciences and physical sciences—is very significant because it receives impact, data, and information from both. It uses mother disciplines such as biology and physical sciences, but at the same time it requires values and meanings to give shape to the direction of this technology—to give a purpose to why an engineer makes something or why we have this advanced modern life. It needs some direction from above—from the domain of values and meanings—to determine the course of history and avoid catastrophic consequences, as in the case of nuclear bombs. What comes from natural and physical sciences is essential for making technology and technological improvement—discoveries and inventions—but at the same time we need contributions from social sciences to provide the ethical and value-oriented framework for this. You see how these two domains—natural sciences and social sciences—come together,

or essentially must come together, to determine the outcome of technology and technological progress. The late Edward O. Wilson—a famous biologist who was not necessarily a spiritualist or religious person—strongly emphasized the need for this coming together for the sake of humanity, for the sake of our future. That’s my understanding about that.

I’d like to continue that discussion about technology and talk about computation, because I think we can almost say that, at least to some extent, the domain of technology is reshaping and reinterpreting parts of the social sciences and the humanities.

It does so by running statistical inference and computation on data from those domains of knowledge, and even kind of forcing that method to be adopted in those spaces and disciplines.

Some examples: when you create AI models, they need to predict or understand human choices; they need to be able to see—how do you create something that sees like a human, hears like a human, classifies like a human, or decides like a human?

So the question of what decision-making in humans is becomes the question of what knowledge is; suddenly you need to have a model for what knowledge is from the AI/computational technology perspective.

Then you start working on problems of philosophy with direct application, and to some extent this starts displacing philosophy and creates an unusual tension.

The same goes for other dimensions.

The question of what values or meanings are embedded through this process is a matter of intense discussion.

There are really positive things and negative things that come through it.

On the positive side, there are advances in understanding human behavior and maybe even levels of the unconscious.

On the negative side—especially when applied to education—there’s a tendency toward assuming the mind is a blank slate, a tendency toward a new kind of behaviorism.

Some, like Achille Mbembe, have raised the point that there are two big dangers: first, these new technologies and media forms serve as an infrastructure for the unconscious; while before, the unconscious was not really mined by our forms of knowledge and was relatively taboo, now it has become a domain being mined with technologies that we don’t fully

understand in terms of capacity to produce results.

This lifts all the taboos about the unconscious, and it does so in the context of the market—knowledge has to produce gain for agents in the market—and also in a context in which the division of knowledge shifts from the public domain of higher education, for example, to the private domain of big corporations and companies, because of the funds and energy needed to run huge computational modeling.

So there are both pros and cons.

But there is also some kind of overlapping between different domains of knowledge that we usually discuss as separate.

AI ethics is a huge field in development (relation with the humanities).

There are all sorts of applications to social sciences, and the social sciences themselves are being reconfigured in terms of computational methods—maybe too much so.

So the question I want to turn back to is: Where is the realm of values and meanings situated? Where should it be situated in all this discussion?

To push further: Suppose we see religion as part of the humanities—which I think is a correct view, at least for me. Could we say that maybe the humanities are a counterbalancing point for the computational age and the problems I've mentioned with the infrastructures of the unconscious, because the humanities themselves deal with creative imagination and the unconscious?

Therefore, maybe that particular domain should be given more support because it counterbalances and aids whatever happens in the computational field.

You see, this issue of artificial intelligence and the surrounding discussion is very fascinating, and of course I'm not really an expert in that area. We have to realize it is a rapidly evolving—exponentially evolving—process, with unpredictable outcomes. That's for sure. There are people who warn us about potential negative or even tragic consequences if artificial intelligence grows and dominates the human mind and human control—which, again, could be a possibility.

I'll share my own understanding: we have to put this in the context of the evolution of technology—in other words, look at it with a historical perspective. I think artificial intelligence is nothing but the evolution that started with the creation of fire or the first human beings who used stones or wood or heavier materials to defend themselves and to go hunting—in other

words, tool-making. It is the evolution of tool-making. Throughout history we created and discovered agriculture, printing, and all of these developments in the history of technological life. They first posed significant challenges, perhaps, but overall they improved human life. In that sense, I'm very pro-technology. My understanding is that we have to welcome technology; it's part of life. I don't believe in the idea that technology has ruined our lives or that we have to go back to a very basic pre-technological existence to find peace of mind. I don't think so. Technology has brought civilization. We have established the foundation of some sort of global understanding of our needs for each other and realized the potential that integration of people and cultures and nations—their collaboration and cooperation—can result in profound changes in life and our understanding of the purpose of life and why we are here. Technology has been significant in doing that.

Let's put it this way: in history and literature we have had ideas in most cultures about humanity—rather than about a particular nation, region, culture, or race. You can see references to the totality of human life, to the idea that all human beings are part of one family, and so on. But we never had a chance to experience this as we do today, when borders and all these artificial differences are, in a sense, disappearing. Through communication, transportation, and all these means, we now can touch the concept of the oneness of humanity—we can literally touch it. This would not have been possible without technological development and progress.

Within this broader context—this historical background—we can be positive. I have a positive outlook about artificial intelligence while acknowledging the potential consequences and difficulties we may experience at different levels, but overall it is a very positive development. My understanding is that, in the past, technological developments helped us, in a sense, to strengthen our inner qualities; but artificial intelligence is unique in that it is helping us in terms of our mind, our reasoning, and our consciousness, which is very unique—and the danger also exists in that uniqueness.

Therefore, we need—going back to the concept of social sciences—to develop values and meanings and ethical frameworks and a higher, transcendental purpose for human life in order to deal with the challenges of artificial intelligence and use its contributions for the advancement of humanity. In other words, artificial intelligence reflects who we are. It is like a mirror in front of

us. In that mirror we can see good and evil. If that is the case, then artificial intelligence reflects that too; it comes back to us with good and evil. But if we try to look at it and shape it and frame it within a transcendental framework that is about human dignity and all those things, then in return artificial intelligence will enhance that human dignity and integrity and transcendental understanding. It helps us—like in medicine, for instance, where physicians are doing things they couldn't do; the accuracy of artificial intelligence in determining certain tests (blood tests, X-rays, and so on) can be more precise than a combined group of physicians. I think this will enhance and improve medicine, and perhaps in the future some people are afraid that we are going to lose jobs—that is definitely the case—but we should not see that as only a challenge within our current economic framework. We have to think about an emerging economic framework in light of the challenges that artificial intelligence is bringing to us. It requires constant evolutionary thinking—not just in one area, but the totality of collective life must be re-evaluated and reframed in light of the challenges we are going to face with artificial intelligence (and other forces).

If we maintain that evolutionary perspective—readiness to change and adapt to the new environment—I think we can use artificial intelligence well. One more idea: artificial intelligence can help and enhance our mind, thinking, testing, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing—but ultimately no machine can replace human subjectivity. That is my understanding, and that is the essence of our discussion today. We need social sciences that acknowledge and explore that subjectivity—which, from a purely religious perspective, I would call acknowledgment of the human soul—that is not just physical or composed of elements; it is a transcendental concept.

We need to discover this, discuss this, and explore this, and see how this can be redefined in terms of various disciplines in social sciences. What does it mean in economic life? What does it mean in political life? That acknowledgment of transcendence, that acknowledgment of the subjectivity of human life—the principle that there is a purpose—and then human will. This is another unique capacity that emanates from that consciousness, from that subjectivity. We have to work on these powers and qualities when we are dealing with artificial intelligence.

I always use an example. There was a movie by Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It's about a mission—a group of scientists go to discover what's happening in some part of the universe. There is something unknown—there is a subjectivity in the universe—and they aim to discover that. Interestingly, the movie starts with earlier human life—ape-human types—trying to hunt and live the basic life, and then one of them throws one of these earlier tools into the sky, and it becomes a shuttle moving into space. To me, that is an excellent example of how technology—how the basic tool-making—has helped us throughout history. Of course, there is an interesting point in that movie too: there is a computer in that journey that tries to betray the way it was programmed and kill the occupants of that spaceship. Anyway, I always like this example for seeing the role of artificial intelligence.

Can I turn to a specific question that relates to what you've just said?

Talking about values and meanings and ethical frameworks and a higher transcendental purpose: Where do the social sciences—or the sciences—get this from, and how?

I can throw a few things that I might have heard you say, or that I might ask about.

One is: I have heard you say you can start with a philosophy that is not materialistic, with different assumptions.

I am concerned because when I think of the domain of values and a higher transcendental purpose, I think of the humanities; but the humanities are neither the sciences nor the social sciences, and they function on a different criterion, which is an aesthetic criterion that is not quite the same as how science works.

Creative imagination and intuition and aesthetic power are really important, but they don't prove that a certain set of values should be dominant or accepted by others; they make things appealing, which may have a huge role to play.

But it's difficult, when I look at it that way, to say that social science should take some of those things from the humanities, because then by what criterion do you adopt any such things?

So that's part of the discussion that is complex for me.

Where do those values come into the system?

You could also say the values might come into the system from outside the scheme of knowledge. Usually, you create a technology, the technology has bad effects, people

complain, there is a social movement for or against aspects of it, and then it gets recalibrated; now you're in the domain of policy—you're almost in that domain of what you call sciences for an emerging world order.

So it goes into government and policy. You could say values come from that dimension—in a democratic system, they come in a democratic way—but they don't come directly from social science or from the humanities.

So the question I have with the whole structure of knowledge and the four clusters of the curriculum is: we know where the values come in (the humanities), but how do the values go anywhere else from there in a meaningful way?

It is complicated by a subset of questions within social science: Is social science paradigmatic (functioning through unifying paradigms, as Thomas Kuhn would say), or is it functioning through schools of thought (which Popper would probably emphasize)?

If you have different schools of thought, you're going to have different sets of values, and there will be a diversity that cannot be imposed over the social sciences—not to mention over technology or other domains.

When we ask this question—because you're talking about the humanities and science—we're also asking about the relationship between religion and science in the background, but I don't want to directly focus on that yet.

Yeah. It's a very important question, and I'll try to be straightforward in expressing my own understanding. The way we have learned about values can, in a smaller sense, be explained even in early human life. When human beings were living in caves, with the most basic lifestyle, they realized some values based purely on material needs. For instance, they realized that those who were more physically powerful were better fit for hunting and hard work; some people needed to be aware of what was happening in the environment; some people needed to prepare food, and so on. That division of labor perhaps defined some of the earliest values. People learned: "Okay, this person is bringing food; therefore we have to respect him," and so on. As humanity's social development became more complex, these values evolved and became more advanced and complex. That's one way of looking at how values come into life—initially from survival instinct and basic human needs.

But I would also like to introduce another idea for the role or initiation of values in social sciences. I think religions—in their universal sense: religions of the West and East; Abrahamic religions; indigenous religions; Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism; Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam—have been, at least as far back as the earliest materials and evidence we have about the formation of human civilization (maybe 6,000 years ago), the initiators and main sources of values for human cultures, societies, and lifestyles. That’s my understanding. Perhaps later, if we continue this discussion, we can discuss in more detail how religions have shaped civilizations and how almost every civilization has had a spiritual foundation behind it: a core system of values. When that system of core values disintegrated, we saw the fall of civilization. It’s a very profound and sometimes controversial concept, depending on different philosophical frameworks; and it is controversial because of the role of religion in contemporary society and some of the negative experiences people have had because of the superimposition of totalitarian theocracies in history, or the wars that religious differences have produced, and so on. There is this negative side to religion.

But let’s put it this way: religion has a source, a spirit, a soul, and a physical, social, historical existence. In other words, a religion has a spirit and then a sociopolitical construct. The sociopolitical construct—whether you are religious or not—goes through history and results sometimes in positive, sometimes in negative aspects. Religions have fought each other; at the same time, churches established universities. We have to distinguish between the source—the initial impulse of religion, sometimes called revelation (metaphysical revelation)—and the sociopolitical forms. I’m referring to that universality of religion. That universality of religion, I think, is the source of values and meanings, and that has been combined with human experience—the survival instinct, human will, and capacity to discover. As a result, throughout history, these values and meanings, and purposes come together to shape values.

Some people say people can live an ethical life without religion—which is true in a sense—but that may be a limited lens. When we say “ethical life,” we have to go back throughout history and the development of ethical ideas and frameworks in history; within that framework, we discuss the role of religion and then discuss how the ethical framework spread throughout history—sometimes with a stronger impulse, sometimes with less, but always present. At least, a residue of ethics remains in culture even when religion is completely corrupted. Therefore, when

people say, “we are following ethical principles,” in my judgment, they are referencing that remaining residue of ethics left in culture.

Another idea: with the emergence of modernity, people say that humanity finally liberated itself from the domain of theology, philosophy, and orthodoxies, and that resulted in progress, which is, in a sense, correct. Yes, that liberation from orthodoxies that dominated the Middle Ages was important. When these were challenged—theologically and scientifically—it resulted in an explosion of information and knowledge, the age of Enlightenment and reason, and the technological outcomes that followed. But if we approach this from a limited perspective, we may forget some fundamental facts: even though sociopolitically, modernity separated itself from its predecessors and forefathers and liberated itself, the same universal values we discussed were the forces behind the profound changes that took place even in the age of Enlightenment.

Let me give one example: Adam Smith, the father of capitalism—one of the greatest thinkers and philosophers—when you read how he discusses economic issues, principles, and progress, it’s always on a foundation of religion and ethics, as if he assumes that people take for granted a fear of God, a concept of good and evil, a tendency to help others, and so on. He assumes that the core foundation exists and will continue to survive; based on that, he tries to establish a capitalist system of economic framework. My understanding is that even though the modern age separated itself from the sociopolitical influence of the church—which was very progressive and essential—we should never forget that many developments in the West are the result of philosophical progress that emerged from Athens (science), the civilizational construct from Rome (law, institutions), and the values that emerged from Jerusalem (spiritual tradition). I disagree with the idea that modernity completely separated itself from religion and transcendence and that this separation was the reason for its progress. Postmodern nihilism or the alienation that we now witness is also a testimony to the fact that total separation from values could not create a good, positive environment.

That brings us to social values. If I were to briefly itemize the challenges of modern social sciences:

- Over-dependence on materialism or a materialistic framework (philosophies that go back to the 19th century and Newtonian cosmology).

- Lack of a unifying framework—proliferation of fragmented theories without an overarching synthesis. Fragmentation was necessary, but it created intellectual incoherence.
- Disregard of spiritual values and the spiritual foundation of human life (that subjectivity we discussed).

All of this, in my judgment, has resulted in an inability to properly respond to global challenges in social, political, and cultural life. You mentioned paradigms; I think social sciences have relied on reductionist models or paradigms—even ignoring advances in natural sciences—and have attached themselves to a mechanistic worldview. Clinging to outdated assumptions has created the potential for stagnation and crisis in the social sciences. In that sense, these are the challenges of ignoring the dimension of values.

But you have also discussed before that some of these future changes that are needed will likely have to come from the domain of physical science. Could you elaborate more on that?

Yes. As I mentioned, a new paradigm of knowledge, understanding, or consciousness—a new emerging epistemology—requires coherent interactions between different levels of existence: between physical, natural, mental, emotional, social, political, and ethical. We need a framework that connects and integrates these aspects of existence. I’m not trying to advance a particular political ideology or theological orthodoxy that would run the entire show. What I’m saying is that there must be integration between these different levels of existence to create synthesis under certain foundational values and a spirit of inquiry.

Thank you for that. Can we then talk about how religion actually comes to feature in this scheme of knowledge?

This is one concern that I have. Prior to the scientific revolution, religion was a major social and cultural force—and political force—and, as you said, it was very influential in social-political constructions and lifestyle.

But there was also something to do with knowledge—what we would call revelation or sacred scriptures—and the interpretation of sacred scriptures itself was rooted in philosophy (I don’t need to say “secular”).

There is a constant interaction between philosophy and religious texts that produces religious understandings, which then filter through, or become part of (to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the time and period), different social-political constructions. This dialogue between philosophy and religion seems, from our vantage point now, much simpler, because most of what we would discuss as the social sciences were within philosophy.

So it was a simpler discussion where philosophy and theology could interact and reach conclusions that were not in need of modern scientific measurement, testing, and validation.

I have a lot of questions about how it worked in that period (as you've mentioned).

The other question is: whatever that model is, how could that still work now, considering that modern science, in a way, changes the rules of interaction completely?

You can't have one intellectual like Thomas Aquinas combine Greek philosophy with Christian thought and create a kind of scriptural philosophy based on philosophy as a mode of interpretation of scripture.

You can't have that today. There are many religions and many disciplines and fields with many schools, and, as you mentioned, even within social sciences there is a lack of consensus or integration.

It's the same even within philosophy—there is no dominant philosophical school that everybody sees as the most significant; there is huge divergence.

So those are the two questions: How did it work in the past, and how would that look in the present, given the explosion of knowledge and other dimensions?

Also, the idea that religion would constitute the main social-political construction and therefore influence the knowledge process is unlikely to happen, in my view. So that way of arguing is not on the map for me.

It's a very profound question and has many dimensions. I agree that we are living in a totally different world. The challenges from science and technology are overwhelming, and, as you mentioned, there are different religions that are sometimes antagonistic toward each other; in fact, religious intolerance is increasing, and resorting to violence can be justified based on

religious value systems or belief systems. You name it. So the future seems bleak and difficult if we try to combine all these things.

I think what we have today leads me to become more particular. Even though we try to discuss this issue from a universal perspective, I have no other choice but to be more specific. In that sense, I think what the world needs in terms of spiritual energy—in the same way that Christianity impacted the Roman Empire and its consequences, and the way Christianity moved the Roman world forward and then spread throughout the Western world and later throughout the world—is a new unifying impulse. I’m not referring to specific doctrinal positions (e.g., the way Catholics define the station of Christ, or later institutional corruptions like selling indulgences, or the challenges of the Protestant movement and Orthodoxies). I’m talking about the primary impulse and unifying, peaceful message of Christ that prevailed throughout the world and shaped civilizations. As I mentioned earlier, even when modernity separated itself from the Middle Ages and theological domination, the values remained—the value that any human life must be valued. These principles became the foundation of human rights (in a much more sophisticated, current form).

My understanding is that a new spiritual revolution has begun in the world with the advent of the Bahá’í Faith and the claim of Bahá’u’lláh as the figure inaugurating a new era—defining religion in universal terms. The universal principles of the Bahá’í Faith will perhaps play a role analogous to Christianity’s role in the evolution of human civilization. At this juncture of human history, we need a universal message such as that of Bahá’u’lláh to give that unifying impulse. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, one of the central figures of the Bahá’í Faith, wrote a letter to those gathered for peace in Europe, emphasizing the importance of universal peace. He said what we need is not simply the statement “war is bad, peace is good”—everyone agrees on that—but a spiritual sentiment, a unifying power, a magnetic power that can bring hearts together.

These words may sound impractical, but if you look at the world and the tensions that exist, we realize the need for that magnifying force that can bring hearts together. Of course, this can be challenged: Christians may say they already do that, Muslims may say the same, and so on. But I think the universal message of Bahá’u’lláh somehow transcends these differences while acknowledging all traditions—this is a basic principle of the Faith—and gives a progressive

dimension to the evolution of these spiritual perspectives. It is not intended to subvert or replace any religion, but to reawaken the same spirit (for instance, of Christianity). Time is limited and we have entered into a new discourse, but this is my understanding: this new spiritual awakening may come from this source.

Another perspective I have is that these spiritual changes require some sort of sociopolitical, material, social, political, economic framework—so that the “flow” of spirituality may enter into this framework and move it forward toward progress rather than regress, toward peace rather than war. With modern scientific and technological developments and modern social progress in terms of values and institutions established in the past three or four hundred years—like the American Constitution, the legal traditions that emerged in the United Kingdom, and the great thinkers who shaped modern civilization, social and political institutions, and economic institutions (which we must acknowledge are due to the revolution of science, technology, and ideas in the West)—these institutions and systems have spread in various forms throughout the world.

My understanding is that this global order, even with many shortcomings (which are now being challenged—positively, I think), provides a material foundation for the flow of new spiritual energy. In other words, we already have an emerging world order with challenges that needs profound changes—even catharsis if needed—but the structure is there, and the structure needs a spirit. That is how I can respond to your question.

Going back to the social sciences—they need to re-evaluate some of their thinking. For instance, let me give you a simple example: the concept of “critical thinking,” which is very dominant now in social sciences (regardless of discipline). In a basic definition, critical thinking is a skillful process of analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating what’s happening, and disseminating information, and so on. It’s about thinking and questioning and having doubts about certain principles and ideas and then moving forward. In a sense, it’s a very important development that we now see in every social discipline. When you take a course, they emphasize critical thinking—which I have no problem with. But I think social sciences need to also question critical thinking—in other words, approach critical thinking critically.

For example, if critical thinking goes to extremes, it may create perpetual skepticism and perpetual relativism. Constantly questioning and doubting may ultimately lead to cynicism, nihilism, and paralysis of the mind. That's one example of how that can go wrong. The elevation of critical thinking into a comprehensive methodological stance helped give rise to "critical theory," rooted in Marxian analysis and centrally concerned with power and oppression. After the Second World War, some social scientists such as Marcuse and Adorno applied it to Western contexts (race, gender, and so on). My understanding is that extreme attachment to these models may, in the domain of social sciences, do a disservice to the social sciences.

How should this change? In social thinking and social theory, we need balance—combining critique with ethical and moral commitment (honesty, compassion, broad-mindedness, etc.). We also need to integrate critical analysis with a constructive vision—with positive alternatives. Often this is ignored in social discourse. When we say a paradigm or policy has failed in certain domains, do we have enough vision and positive constructs to say, "Yes, it has failed in certain areas, but it has also made progress in these areas—let's build on the progress," instead of constantly reframing the negative?

Another point: we need to understand that there are objective realities. It's not all subjective in terms of moral values. Many ideas under postmodernism hold that everything is imagination, each individual is a universe in themselves, etc., but we need to acknowledge objective realities (with degrees): scientific facts, historical events, and some moral norms can be objectively grounded.

You mentioned creative imagination. Do social sciences, in addition to critical thinking, consider creative imagination and spiritual insight? These should not be taboos; we need to discuss, investigate, and research them.

Another very important point—going back to the influence of religion and spirituality—is the essence of creating or reawakening a sense of humility in every individual, in every dialogue, in every consultation. As long as we have, as today, social media functioning like a Roman coliseum—seeking elimination of opposing views, promoting show-offs, fame, material benefits—there is so much materialism in our environment. Those fundamental questions of humanity—life is not worth all this hating and violence; fame and progress are easily forgotten; in one generation, nobody remembers who was an "influencer"—call for profound internal

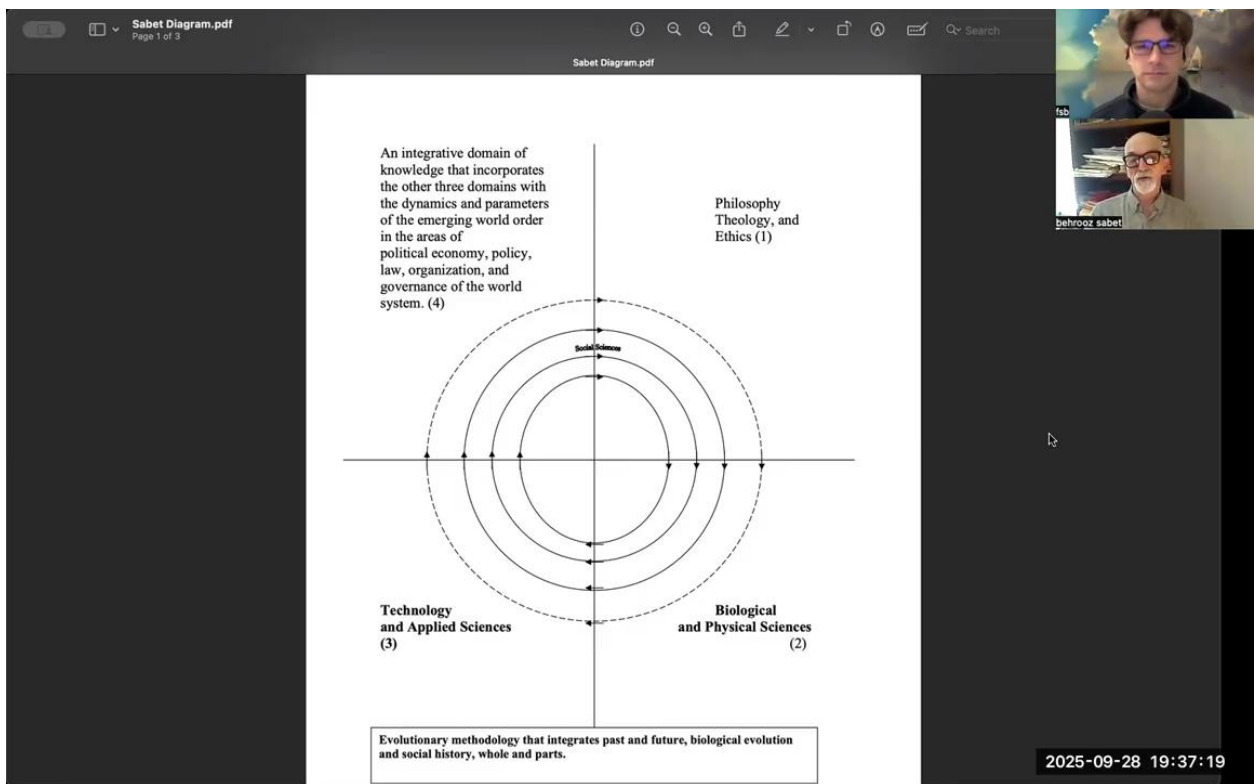
change, which is essential for creating a new world. That is one area social sciences must work on; it is not just a moral principle for religious people to talk about.

As a result, we need to recreate the traditional purpose of education: seek the truth. Seeking truth should be the primary goal of education, learning, and progress—not for anything else. These issues—some of which I’ve mentioned—need to be discussed in social sciences, and the educational system that would come about should reflect these values.

Let me ask one—sorry, go ahead.

Sure.

You mentioned at the beginning a picture of the four domains of knowledge. Maybe this is a good place to discuss that.



Yes. This is basically one way I have worked to bring these ideas together and discuss them in light of what we are talking about. The first domain is the domain of—again, using social-science terminology and disciplines—philosophy, theology, ethics, values. These domains can be expanded; this is just a brief reference. Basically, the first domain is the domain of values and

meanings. As you see, I have intentionally separated these domains, and there is a purpose for that: these domains need to respect the other domains. Their job is not to dictate; their job is to interact and create a dialogue—a discourse—through circles that connect these domains together, carrying ideas from one domain to the next.

The second domain is biological and physical sciences (natural sciences): all the disciplines we referenced, the domain of experimentation, testing, observation—the physical domain. The third domain is technology and applied sciences that come about as a result of integration (not domination). Integration of the first and second domains must result in shaping technology and the material progress of humanity. In other versions of this diagram, I have also incorporated the role of learning—education—in this third domain. In other words, it is a combination of values and meanings enhanced with scientific findings that must come to the third domain and shape the content and process of education, which results in technological outcomes.

Now we go to the fourth domain. I have mentioned it as an integrative domain of knowledge that incorporates the other three domains with the dynamics and parameters of the emerging world order in the areas of political economy, policy, law, organization, governance, world systems, and so on. I have changed that domain to some extent in later research. For instance, I can add that it is the domain in which values, scientific ideas, the educational system, and technological outcomes come together and form actual human civilization in terms of ideas. In other words, this fourth domain, in a sense, is the domain where social sciences emerge, are formalized, and are improved. “Emerging world order” could be “emerging world civilization,” “emerging global policy,” “emerging collective agreements,” and so on. I don’t want to emphasize particular wording that may give the wrong impression. I’m talking about how social sciences result from this process and the dialogue that must happen between the domains.

When it comes to the fourth domain, the idea is that the fourth domain—which is the culmination of the other three domains—must provide feedback to the first domain again and enhance values, philosophy, theology, and ethics. In other words, the content of the first, second, and third domains is not fixed forever; the fourth domain must create a process of dialogue, interaction, exchange of ideas, and consultation—to reinvigorate ideas in the first domain and, in

turn the second and third. This must continue indefinitely. That is another way of explaining what we were talking about.

That's great. Thank you. That was one of the key questions asked at the beginning.

Thank you.

Okay. I think that would be a good way to end for now. Would you have any theme you would like to approach if there was a second opportunity?

Yeah, definitely. Let me look at the list that you sent me, and I'll send it to you.