Malek Bennabi's Concept and Interdisciplinary Approach to Civilization

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1. Introduction: Contextualizing Bennabi:

Since the publication of Samuel Huntington's now famous article *"The Clash of Civilizations"*[1] the concern about civilization has been reintroduced into the debate on the world order in intellectual circles. It has enhanced the previous efforts of philosophers of history and social scientists to establish civilization studies as a distinctive field of research. It paid attention to the importance of the study of civilizations and their importance for an understanding of the global change.

Furthermore, the end of the so-called Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought to the debate the issue of civilization studies and related questions even though the very category of

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[1] Huntington, Samuel P. (1993). *The Clash of Civilizations?*. Foreign Affairs. Vol.72, No. 3. pp. 22-49.

"civilization" and "civilizations" had been avoided by most intellectual and political circles until recently.

In this context, many researchers and scholars called for the review and re-examination of the works of those leading civilizationists[1] among the historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers who explored, at length, issues such as the causes, emergence, rise, interactions, achievements, decline, and fall of civilizations. The list of those leading civilizationists includes among others, Ibn Khaldun, Comte, Spengler, Weber, Durkheim, Toynbee, Sorokin, Kroeber, Braudel, etc[2].

As for the Muslim World, since the early twentieth century there were efforts to view history from a civilizational perspective. Among the leading thinkers and leaders of those efforts, Malek Bennabi (1905-1973) a thinker of profound ideas, and leading Muslim Algerian intellectual, stands as one of the civilizationists who has been considered as the most distinctive Muslim thinker since Ibn Khaldun[3].

From the 1940's until his death in 1973 he wrote numerous books and articles providing penetrating insights into the philosophy of history, sociology, social and historical change and pressing cultural and civilizational issues which have engaged prominent thinkers of all ages as well as different cultural traditions.

However, the central theme of Bennabi's thought was always the study of civilization, in general, and the attempt to provide solutions to the state of the Muslim civilization in particular. In other words, the state of Muslim civilization was the starting point for Bennabi to study civilization and to theorize about this issue.

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[1] Sanderson, Stephen K. (1995). *Civilizational Approaches to World-Historical Change*. In S. K. Sanderson (ed), Civilizations and World Systems. Walnut Creek: Altamira, p. 15.

[2] Huntington, Samuel P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p.40.
[3] Jad'ān, Fahmī. (1988). Usus al-Taqaddum 'Inda Mufakkirī al-Islām Fi al-'Ālam al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth, (Foundations of Progress according to the Muslim Thinkers in the Modern Arab World) (3rd ed.). Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, p.416.

Since his early years, Bennabi was attracted by the stagnation that the Muslims have been suffering from. Therefore, he was involved in many intellectual and activist movements and efforts to reactivate the civilizing process in the Muslim world. However, the various efforts made by various quarters seemed to Bennabi as fruitless because of the lack of clear vision and a methodology to approach the matter.

Bennabi directed his efforts to reactivate the dynamism of Muslim civilization by developing his approach to the study of civilization in general and Muslim civilization, in particular. While many activists and intellectuals tended to resolve the present dilemma of the Muslim world in terms of economics, or politics or ideology, he emphasized the role of ideas as the catalyst behind the growth of civilization. That is because civilization, as Bennabi maintains, is not an accumulation, but rather a construction and architecture[1].

Drawing upon a deep understanding of Islam, a sound assimilation of the insights of the social sciences and a proper grasp of the dynamics of human society and history, Bennabi adopted an etiological approach that allowed him to gain considerable insights into the performance of human societies and the workings and dynamics of culture and civilization seen from a universal perspective[2].

He had directed all his efforts to resolve the societal problems within the framework of civilization. In other words, he considered civilization as the intelligible unit with which to study the sociohistorical phenomena. In this regard, he viewed civilization as the core of any study of human conditions in their short term or long-term scales. He said:

"The problem of every people, in its essence, is that of its civilization. And it is not possible for any people to comprehend and resolve its problem, if it does not elevate its thought and capacities to the level of the great human affairs and speculate deeply in order to understand the

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[1] Ibrahim, Anwar. (1991). *"Keynote Address"*, The International Seminar on Malek Bennabi, Safar 22-25, 1412/ September 1-4, 1991. Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya.
[2] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). *Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization.* Petaling Jaya: Budaya Ilmu Sdn. Bhd, p. ix.

factors which construct and deconstruct the civilizations"[1].

The main question is: What is Bennabi's concept of civilization and its equation? This paper tries to answer this question by looking at the various conceptualizations put forth by Bennabi about civilization, its structural ingredients, and the interdisciplinary approach to civilization as developed by Bennabi to tackle the various aspects of civilization as multidimensional phenomenon.

This article argues also that any reader who becomes acquainted with Bennabi's treatise on civilization will find that the vocabulary and ideas of his thought are a mixture of and a result of the examination of the works of many leading thinkers and may not be totally new if taken from a partial perspective. This does not mean, however, that his ideas are drawn from the existing sources and put side by side as heterogeneous elements. Bennabi's thought is, indeed, an organized totality, or a system into which all concepts, terms and ideas, whatever their origin, have been integrated with an entirely systematic interpretation.

Compared to other thinkers and civilizationists, Bennabi's approach to civilization still needs to be analyzed and deeply understood. It is still not fully uncovered and implemented. He has, especially, developed his approach to civilization to present a diagnosis of the phenomena that dominate the contemporary Muslim world and explain their origins and how to get rid of them as phenomena of backwardness[2]. The latter suggests that Bennabi's approach to the different issues related to the study of civilization and its course in history has a great importance in the intellectual milieu for the diagnosis of the Muslim civilizational crisis.

Although Bennabi's work has been available in French and Arabic since the late 1950s, his ideas or methodological approach to the study of the various problems of Muslim civilization, seldom

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 19.

[2] Talbi, Ammar. (September 1991). *The Implication of Malek Bennabi's View On Contemporary Muslim Society*. Paper presented at the International Seminar On Malek Bennabi, University Malaya, Malaysia, p. 1.

received serious scholarly attention before the 1980s[1]. In many instances, he was rather misunderstood and even sometimes misrepresented by different and conflicting ideological quarters[2].

A few of those who are interested in his thought consider him as a writer, thinker, and probably the first social philosopher and social scientist the Muslim world has seen since the time of Ibn Khaldun[3]. Others consider him a "philosopher-visionary for the entire *Ummah*" (Muslim Community) whose concern about the decadence of the Muslim civilization led him to analyze the causes of the decay and to provide solutions[4].

Mesawi[5] and Hassan[6] asserted that the significance of Bennabi's thought derives from his scientific training combined with a historical, sociological, and philosophical outlook which enabled him to fathom the depths of European civilization and gain a deep understanding of its culture as well as from his original thinking and analysis of the *Ummah*'s strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, Hassan asserted that Bennabi's scope ranged over social, political, economic, moral and theological speculations[7].

The above mentioned arguments by the scholars of Bennabi's thought suggest a conceptual analysis of his very basic ideas concerning civilization and its related fundamental ingredients and approach.

2. Bennabi's Quest of an Intelligible Unit:

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[1] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). *Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization*. Petaling Jaya: Budaya Ilmu Sdn. Bhd, p. 252 .

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1998). *On the Origins of Human Society*. Trans: Al- Mesawi. M.T. Kuala Lumpur: The open press, pp. 9-10 from the introduction by the translator.

[3] Rachid, Asma. (1978). *Iqbal and Malek Bennabi*. Hamdard Islamicus, Vol.1,No.2, p. 12.

[4] Bariun, Ibid.

[5] Mesawi, M. T. (1991). *Malek Bennabi's contribution to the Islamic Social Theory*. Paper presented at the International Seminar On Malek Bennabi, University Malaya, Malaysia.

[6] Ĥassan, M. Kamal. (September, 1991). *Reflections on Some of the Ideas and Thoughts of Malek Bennabi*. Paper presented at the International Seminar On Malek Bennabi, University Malaya, Malaysia.

[7] Ĥassan, Ibid.

As early as the third decade of the twentieth century, Bennabi realized that the crisis of the Muslim world could not be diagnosed by means of a superficial analysis. Thus, he criticized the two trends in the modern Muslim world; the reformist and modernist, for not going beyond the symptoms of the crisis, as well as not being able to determine its real causes. He also criticized those who put the blame upon external factors but ignored internal ones[1].

Although he acknowledged the efforts of both of the trends mentioned previously to overcome the crisis, he drew attention to their lack of a clear approach to the problem of the renaissance in the Muslim world. More specifically, in those efforts, according to Bennabi, "there was no methodological analysis of the crisis. That is, a diagnostic and pathological study of the Muslim society"[2].

He asserts also that the efforts to bring about a renaissance in the Muslim world did not develop a systematic approach to the crisis in order to provide solutions for the Muslim society. In this regard, he undertook a critical review of the various trends and ideas in the modern Muslim world, not only to understand what was at fault, but also to develop his own ideas and suggestions for regeneration[3].

Furthermore, he criticized those who related the crisis to the lack of means and instruments. He was of the opinion that the problem was rooted in the Muslim culture of the post-al-Muwahhid era. It was in their minds, souls, and behaviour. That is why Bennabi says, "The matter is not a matter of means and instruments. Rather, it is matter of methods and ideas"[4].

To understand and tackle the crisis of the Muslim world, Bennabi was of the opinion that it is important to take into consideration the historical process of that crisis in order to cope with its essence rather than its manifestations, which did not start with the colonial era but

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 31, 40.
[2] Bennabi, Ibid.
[3] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). *Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization*, p.147

[4] Bennabi, Malek. (1988). *Islam in History and Society*. Trans by: Asma Rashid. Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, p. 113.

with the post-al-Muwahhid era that paved the way for the spirit of colonizability[1].

Consequently, colonization is not the main reason for the present situation of the Muslim world, but it is one of the many secondary factors. The primary factor is colonizability, that is, our vulnerability to be colonized[2]. In other words, the present state of the Muslim world requires a deeper analysis which goes beyond partial appearances and symptoms and undertakes a systematic examination of the historical process of backwardness in order to find out its starting points and its pivotal factors. It needs the examination of the status of man and his culture so much so that any change that does not take man and his culture into consideration will not be important.

It is, then, according to Bennabi, a problem of a comprehensive theory for the renaissance in the Muslim world. Therefore, he attempted to discover the roots of the crisis by proposing a systematic orientation towards the efforts and activities of that movement, which should be based on the diagnosis of the different stages of the Muslim society throughout history[3].

The next step, which Bennabi undertook after his critical review of the previous efforts in the Muslim World, was to look for a central theme or unit that could be used to tackle the various manifestations of the crisis.

In this context, he was of the view that the central unit, that includes all other partial diagnoses, is missing in the efforts of renaissance because the movement lacks methodological and scientific thinking[4]. Therefore, it is important to note that the Muslim world is suffering from various crises which he summed up in one expression, "Civilizational crisis"[5].

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1991). *Qaḍāyā Kubrā (Grand Matters)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, pp. 52-53.

[2] (Bennabi, 1981b: 31, 152-153)

[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1990). Fikrat commonwealth Islāmī (The Idea of An Islamic commonwealth). Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 26.

[4] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). *Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization,* p.150 .

[5] Bennabi, Malek. (1978a). Dawr al-Muslim Wa Risālatuh Fī al-Thuluth al-Akhīr Min al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn (The role and Message of The Muslim in The last third of the twentieth Century). Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 46.

Using his words, Bennabi says:

"The problem of every people, in its essence, is that of its civilization. And it is not possible for any people to comprehend and resolve its problem; if it does not elevate its thought and capacities to the level of the great human events and speculate deeply in order to understand the factors which construct and deconstruct civilizations"[1].

In other words, the political, economic, social and educational crises in the Muslim society are mere manifestations of the real crisis. Accordingly, any solution given to resolve those symptoms will not change the situation of the Muslim man and Muslim society. On the contrary, it will exacerbate it and create an even worse situation[2].

Moreover, Bennabi emphasized the need to consider the different problems as aspects of one issue, which are interrelated with each other to form one set, which is the problem of civilization. Therefore, for those problems to be resolved we need to analyze them within the framework of civilization. In other words, it is a problem of civilization in either its rise or fall, and each stage has its own problems and solutions as well.

The previous paragraph quoted from Bennabi's *The Conditions of Renaissance* suggests also a central unit that integrates the very critical aspects of the present state of Muslim civilization. This unit is "civilization" or as Toynbee called it "the intelligible unit of analysis"[3].

Consequently, the study of the present state of Muslim civilization was the starting point of Bennabi's intellectual career and his concern in studying civilization. Subsequently, he concentrated all his efforts on formulating and developing an approach to study civilization. In fact, Bennabi explicitly asserted that his main concern is the study of civilization, and the focal problem in the human condition to be taken as the unit of analysis and study is "civilization"

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 19.
[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 41.
[3] Toynbee, J. Arnold. (1974). *A Study of History*. Abridgement by: D. C. Somervell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, v1-6/pp. 3-11.

because "The problem of every people, in its essence, is that of its civilization"[1].

Moreover, he was of the view that the study needs an integrated approach which facilitates a comprehensive understanding of such a phenomenon[2]. In this regard, he called for the use of an interdisciplinary approach which derives its general rules from various sciences such as history, sociology, psychology and metaphysics[3].

Scholars of Bennabi's scholarship also emphasized and agreed on Bennabi's field of research and approach. They consider that the study of civilization was the internal field of study of Bennabi and his focal concern. They also agreed that he had presented an approach distinctive from the other approaches of the leading thinkers with respect to his terms, definitions, concepts, the units of analysis, the scope of the analysis and the perspective he adopted[4].

Furthermore, there is agreement also that as every thinker with a new and deep message to convey introduces his own terms, concepts and definitions, Bennabi, in this respect, is no exception. Although he has many borrowings from the stock of already known ideas from

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 19.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 61.

[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1998). *On the Origins of Human Society*. Trans: Al- Mesawi. M.T. Kuala Lumpur: The open press, p. 89; Bennabi, Malek. (1986b). *Mīlād Mujtama' (Birth of Society)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 75.

[4] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization ; Mesawi, M. T. (1998). A Muslim Theory of Human Society. An Investigation into the Sociological Thought of Malek Bennabi. Batu Caves: Thinker's Library Sdn. Bhd; 'Ubāda, 'Abd al-Laṭīf. (1984). *Ṣafaḥāt Mushriqa Min Fikr Malek Bennabi (Some Shiny Aspects of Malek Bennabi's Thought)*. Batna: Dār al-Shihāb; 'Ukāsha, Shāyaf. (1986). a*l-Ṣirā' al-Haḍārī Fī al-'Ālam al-Islāmī (The Civilizational Conflict In The Muslim World)* (1st ed.). Damascus: Dār al Fikr; Saḥmarānī, As'ad. (1986). *Malek Bennabi Mufakkiran Iṣlāḥiyyan* (Malek Bennabi: A Reformer Thinker) (2nd ed.). Beirut: Dār al- Nafā'is; Khatīb, S. (1993). *Falsafat al-Haḍāra 'Inda Malek Bennabi (Malek Bennabi's Philosophy of Civilization)* (1st ed.). Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought; Mīlād, Zaki. Aḥmad. (1992). *Malek Bennabi Wa Mushkilāt al- Haḍāra (Malek Bennabi and The Problems of Civilization)* (1st ed.). Beirut: Dār al-Ṣafwa.

various paradigms, schools of thought, approaches and thinkers, he was novel and original in his synthesis of various ideas and in putting forth a new system of tackling the issues of civilization[1].

In this context, in the following sections, the attempt is to discuss Bennabi's concept and elements of civilization

3. Bennabi's Concept of Civilization:

3. 1. Definition of Civilization:

In searching for Bennabi's definition of civilization, many definitions confront any reader of Bennabi's works. This implies that Bennabi defined civilization from different perspectives and that civilization itself is a multidimensional phenomenon. Therefore, in order to ascertain Bennabi's understanding of the meaning of civilization, I classified the definitions into six categories.

First, he said that "Civilization can be defined as being the sum total of the moral as well as material conditions which allow a given society to provide each one of its members with all the social guarantees necessary for his development"[2]. The term civilization, here, is used to indicate the balance between the moral and material aspects in human life. In this regard, Bennabi did not determine civilization either by moral and spiritual conditions alone, or by material conditions alone as generally defined by anthropologists. Rather, he was aware of the importance of the sum total of all conditions.

Second, he defines civilization as a "self-force that refines the primitive features within the individual and societal context"[3]. It is but "the ability to carry out a specific mission and accomplish a distinct

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[1] Gassūm, Adb al-Razzāq. (1994). Ishkaliyat al-Ḥaḍārah Fī Fikr Malek Bennabi (Te Problem of Civilization in Malek Bennabi's Thought). Al-Muwāfaqāt. Vol 3, pp. 290-298.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1994). *The Problem of Ideas in The Muslim World*. Trans by: Mohamed T. Mesawi. Petaling Jaya: Budaya Ilmu Sdn. Bhd, p. 26.

[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1991). *Qaḍāyā Kubrā (Grand Matters)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 91.

function"[1]. In other words, it is a kind of a psychological and mental force that organizes human capacities and human vital energy to respond to the needs of development and progress. In this context, civilization becomes a self- character and a self-potency that helps man to control his behaviour and energy and directs it towards the benefit of his society.

Third, Bennabi was of the view that civilization is, in its essence, an idea and a project for systematic work. It is aspiring toward activating the social capacities in order to face the crucial problems of a society[2]. In other words, civilization is "a result of a living dynamic idea, which mobilizes a pre-civilized society to enter history and construct a system of ideas according to its archetypes. So the society thereafter, develops an authentic cultural milieu, which in return, controls all the characteristics which distinguish that society from other cultures and civilizations"[3].

Fourth, Bennabi defines civilization functionally as; "The total result of the moral and material conditions which grant a given society the possibility to offer each one of its members, in every stage of his existence from childhood till afterlife, with necessary social assistance requested for his growth in this stage or in the other[4].

Bennabi's functional definition of civilization denotes that civilization is a social force that plays an important role in the development of the individual and society as well. It is a sum total of the moral and material conditions. Nevertheless, the individual does not provide those aspects for himself, rather; they are offered by society. Society generates civilization and helps the individual to play his role in history as a civilizational force. In this context, we can underline that Bennabi gives precedence to society over the human in his definition. For him, the human as an individual cannot construct a civilization, but it is the society or the group that can initiates the

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1994). *The Problem of Ideas in The Muslim World*. Trans by: Mohamed T. Mesawi. Petaling Jaya: Budaya Ilmu Sdn. Bhd, p. 26.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1986a). *Ta'ammulāt (contemplations)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 116.

[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1994). *The Problem of Ideas in The Muslim World*, p. 25.

[4] Bennabi, Malek. (1991). *Qaḍāyā Kubrā (Grand Matters)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 43.

civilizing process and makes the first step on the way of its historical progress. The society gives the real meaning for the human activities in the realm of history. It constitutes the progressive milieu that helps the individual to carry out his responsibilities in the form of a mission and a function.

Consequently, society, in Bennabi's conception, is the core force in any civilizing process. It allows the individual to possess the necessary guarantees he needs in his progress and development. However, the individual is important and he contributes to the development of his society as an integrated member in the social movement.

In other words, if society is very important in the civilizing process, then, the individual also plays a vital role in this regard. However, his role depends on the level of his sociability and societal interaction that limits his position and role in the entire movement of human development. The latter is the role of civilization from the functional perspective. It builds a dialectical relationship between society and the individual and links the integrated individual to its society as part of one single unit that undergoes the civilizing process towards a state of stability, growth and prosperity.

Moreover, from the fourth definition, Bennabi asserts that the moral and material factors are crucial in creating balance and liveliness in the human society on the one hand, and generating solidarity and unity among the members of society, on the other. Furthermore, the sum total of moral and material conditions aim at providing the social services for the members of society. That is why Bennabi does not concentrate only on the products and objects of a civilization, but primarily he focuses on the moral aspects that come first in the civilizing values. Therefore, if civilization does not provide these two kinds of assistance, particularly the moral one, it will not be able to create the civilizing milieu.

Fifth, Bennabi defines civilization, this time, by focusing on the structure and the social essence of civilization. Thus, civilization means; "the human being learns how to live within a group and perceives at the same time the essential importance of the network of

social relations in organizing human life in order to perform its historical function and responsibilities[1].

This definition, in fact, reflects the importance of the network of social relations among the members of society. In this respect, civilization helps in formulating the network of social relations that makes social interaction and education among the members of society possible and beneficial.

Sixth, Bennabi gives, another definition which emphasizes the socio-intellectual dimension of civilization. In this regard he says a civilization is:

> "The product of a substantial idea that inspires to a pre-civilized society the vital drive that penetrates it onto the historical movement. Thus, the society constructs its intellectual system in conformity with the original pattern of its civilization. It is rooted in an original cultural ambiance which will decide all its characteristics viz. a viz. other cultures and civilizations"[2].

Here, the ideas are the very significant social force that gives to the society its intellectual characteristics, cultural originality and social vitality. Indeed, the idea is the prime force which drives society to enter into history in order to accomplish its mission and to carry out its responsibilities in a given historical moment.

A summary of the previous definitions provides the essential elements of civilization in Bennabi's approach; first, from the first definition we could underline that civilization needs to achieve a balance between the moral and material aspects. From the second definition, civilization appears to be in need of systematization, orientation, and planning. Moreover, the third definition explains the essence of civilization as a result of an idea and a project to carry out a certain mission and fulfil a definite function in a given time and place.

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1986b). *Mīlād Mujtama' (Birth of Society)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, P.88.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1988). *Islam in History and Society*. Trans by: Asma Rashid. Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, p. 41.

Furthermore, the fourth definition emphasized the conceptualization of civilization from its functional aspect. In other words, he presented a definition of civilizati n starting from an analysis of its function.

The fifth definition emphasized the conceptualization of civilization based on its structure and essence. Finally, the sixth definition provided the socio-intellectual dimension of civilization which considers civilization as a cultural system.

From the foregoing discussion of Bennabi's definition of civilization, it can be said that, on the one hand, the analysis of the concept of civilization gives us the different dimensions that were present in Bennabi's conception of civilization. On the other hand, the raider could recognize the different approaches which Bennabi has used to formulate his unique concept of civilization as being the intelligible unit with which to study the problem of the backwardness in the Muslim world.

Furthermore, from these various definitions, we may notice the importance of the integrative approach in dealing with the concept of civilization. Civilization in this respect seems to be like a multidimensional concept that enables us to reconcile its integral parts in order to constitute its entire dynamic structure. The latter led Bennabi to apply and call for an interdisciplinary approach to study such a complex phenomenon as the phenomenon of civilization. In the next section, a discussion of Bennabi's interdisciplinary approach may help in the more systematic understanding of his concept of civilization.

3.2. The Interdisciplinary Approach to Civilization:

The definitions of civilization in Bennabi's thought, presented previously, suggest an integrative way to approach it objectively. Many disciplines are required to analyze civilization as a social phenomenon.

Bennabi was aware of the multidimensionality of the concept of civilization. For that reason, he attempted to examine it from different angles, using various sciences, and taking into consideration the integrative character of the dimensions of civilization as one set. Thus, he drew attention to the importance of the interdisciplinary approach to study civilization.

Furthermore, Bennabi asserted that civilization is a social phenomenon not a physical one. Therefore, to study civilization and its historical movement, one should be aware of the complexity of social phenomena. In this regard, he remarked that the study of social phenomenon is difficult in nature because of certain weaknesses in the methods of social analysis. He says "unlike the natural sciences, human sciences have not yet achieved such a level of maturity as to provide universally applicable definitions for their concepts and terms"[1]. The result was that "the rule in social science is not similar to that in mathematical science... It is a sort of a mere conduct that could assist in avoiding the obscene mistakes"[2].

In other words, dealing with the social phenomena is more complicated than dealing with mathematics or natural phenomena. This is because there is an original difference in their nature and field. Therefore, approaching civilization as a social phenomenon requires a correct understanding of its nature and scope.

For instance, social scientists face certain difficulties in determining the moment of the birth of one civilization and the decline of another one. In addition, they could not explain precisely the direct and indirect reasons for the development of any civilization. In fact, Bennabi asserts that the methods of studying civilization are

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1998). *On the Origins of Human Society*. Trans: Al- Mesawi. M.T. Kuala Lumpur: The open press, p. 5.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 42.

unable to "define exactly the limitations between a civilization which is starting, and a civilization which is eventually existing"[1].

Hence, the method of approaching civilization becomes increasingly difficult, particularly in the study of civilizations composed of a wide range of cultures.

Thus, it appears that civilization, as a social phenomenon, should be analyzed scientifically by using a scientific method. Bennabi "as an engineer, was trained to utilize various scientific avenues of research, such as observation, hypothesis, development, and analysis[2]. In addition, he was aware of the nature of the social phenomenon and its demands.

Consequently, he stressed that this method should be comprehensive and deal with civilization in its whole structure, rather than fragmenting the analysis and limiting it to certain parts undermining the others. The method should be complete and impartial. It should attempt to discover the problem and to study its origin, history and reason[3].

Furthermore, it seems that Bennabi does not rely only on what is given by the historians of civilization whose works are concerned with the gathering and interpreting of the historical events. In addition, he stresses the psychosocial analysis provided by both psychology and social science[4].

These two sciences are very important in Bennabi's approach. He attempted to benefit from the tools they provided. He argues that if civilization is a social phenomenon, logically it is concerned with humans and society as well.

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 43.
[2] Bariun, Fawzia. (1993). Malek Bennabi: His Life and Theory of Civilization, p. 147.
[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1978b). Bayna al-Rashād Wa al-Tayh (Between the Maturity and the Wilderness). Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 37.
[4] (Jafāirī, 1982: 63-64).

In this regard, Bennabi asserts that he will study the problem of civilization by using the information provided by history while taking into account the measures of psychoanalysis.

Bennabi holds the view that he should approach the phenomenon of civilization, not as a series of events narrated by history but as a phenomenon whose analysis guides us to its essence or perhaps leads us to the pattern of God that governs it. This approach can enable us to study this phenomenon[1]. Therefore, studying civilization, according to his approach, demands the integration of the general rules derived from history, sociology and psychology[2].

As clearly stated, his approach was an attempt to combine the tools provided by the previous mentioned sciences. Considering this, Bennabi noted that he would apply the method used in dealing with the complicated objects[3]. In other words, he tried to integrate the above-mentioned tools into one single system of analysis. Applying this approach, in his view, might assist in understanding the concept of civilization in its comprehensive sense including the views of the philosophers of history, historians, psychologists, and sociologists.

In addition, Bennabi insisted on the inclusion of religion in his approach to civilization. In this respect, revelation becomes a crucial element in analyzing civilization. In other words, we cannot only focus on the data and facts given by the social and human sciences, but we must necessarily use the factual data provided by religion in this regard. This recognizes the significance of religion in developing an approach to civilization.

In his view, the movement of a civilization could not be explained and understood in a deep and comprehensive way unless it refers to the divine sources of knowledge. The role of religion, in this regard, is crucial in Bennabi's approach. In this respect, he holds the same view about religion as some other historians and philosophers of history, especially Ibn Khaldun and Toynbee.

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 61.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1998). *On the Origins of Human Society*, p. 89

[3] Bennabi, Malek. (1984). *Mushkilat al-Thaqāfa (The Problem of Culture)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, p. 40.

In fact, Bennabi's approach is based on the role of religion, or the religious idea as he called it, in generating a civilizing process in any given human society[1]. He attempted to examine how religion is affecting humans and society, directing and enabling them to play their roles in history.

Moreover, he insisted that the study of civilization should not only focus on the objects as they are in reality. It should also attempt to comprehend them in their purpose[2]. Consequently, one might say that Bennabi, in his efforts to present a clear and integrative conception of what civilization is, used to apply an interdisciplinary approach by implementing four sciences; history, psychology, sociology, and metaphysics.

Bennabi, in his discussion of the importance of those sciences has explained his views. However, it is worth quoting Bennabi's statement even though it is long, because of its importance in examining his conception of civilization. He says:

> "One could consider the historical phenomenon from various points of view: from the point of view of the individual, it is above all a psychology, that is, a study of man regarded as a psycho-temporal factor of a civilization. However, this civilization is the manifestation of a life and collective thought. From this point of view, history is sociology, that is, the study of the conditions of development of a social group, defined not as much by its ethical or political factors as by the complex of ethical, aesthetic and technical affinities corresponding to the air, or space of a civilization. On the other hand, this social group is not isolated, and its evolution is conditioned by certain connections with the human ensemble. From this point of view, history is metaphysics, since its perspective,

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[1] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 71; Bennabi, Malek. (1986b). *Mīlād Mujtama' (Birth of Society)*. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, P.52.

[2] Bennabi, Malek. (1981b). *Shurūt al-Nahḍa (The Conditions of The Renaissance)*, p. 119.

extending beyond the domain of historical causality, embraces the phenomena in their finality"[1].

Those four elements: psychology, sociology, history and metaphysics are integrated into a single system in Bennabi's approach to studying the phenomenon of civilization and building his own conception of civilization.

For Bennabi, the complexity of the phenomenon of civilization gives rise to different approaches to it. Therefore, he called for the implementation of a more adequate approach to its study. As in the previous quotation he asserts that we can see the phenomenon of civilization from different angles and perspectives, the comprehensive way is to use a collaborative approach which provides a comprehensive diagnosis and understanding.

It is clear that the study of civilization and its course in history could not be satisfactorily tackled through the traditionally known approaches in a segregated manner. It can only be done by applying a sort of collaborative approach, the interdisciplinary approach.

To conclude with, Bennabi was concerned about providing a conceptual framework for resolving the present situation of Muslim civilization which led him to formulate his own concept of civilization, which is in its essence multidimensional and, thus, needs an interdisciplinary approach.

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[1] Bennabi Malek. (1991). *Qaḍāyā Kubrā (Grand Matters)*, p. 7.