

Ali Al-Wardi and his critique of the human mind.

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Introduction

Anthropologists believe that Man is the only creature capable of rational behaviour because he has a mind with which to think, a language with which to express himself and a hand with which to produce his daily needs. These elements make him a rational human being; different from other living creatures.

In Western philosophy, the word 'reason' is derived from the Latin 'ratio' as a particularly human characteristic that allows Man to think. It is the instrument for generating and controlling thought, as well compelling it to act; it is also the power that allows meanings to be imagined, and propositions and syllogisms to be formed. It is different from sense perception in as far as it separates the form from the matter. The mind is a power capable of understanding universals. It is, according to René Descartes, the capacity to make correct judgments, i.e. to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and evil, and between what is beautiful and what is ugly. All things have reasonable causes, though philosophers here have a disagreement. The rationalists believe that the mind is independent of experience because it tends to be spontaneous and contemplative (Descartes), while the Empiricists (John Locke and David Hume) claim that the mind develops through experience.

Western philosophers believe that there are no limits to the mind except those imposed by the mind itself, and that the *Critique of pure reason* (Kant 1781) is a check on the extent and limit of the mind. They also believe that it is in the mind's nature to critique itself; the mind is the property that helps us acquire the principles of knowledge. Its role is not to expand knowledge but to purify it and cleanse it from illusions.

This Kantian assumption that sees the mind as a second nature to man was criticized by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin, all of whom highlighted the role that motives, desires, reactions and interests play in steering the mind. Hegel replaced 'being' with 'becoming', thus taking the nature of the mind to be contradictory, despite its being the essence and motivator of history. The role of the mind for Marx is to provide a critique for reality in order to change it (Atiyat 2005, 41–43). The mind is not a static essence; it is not a neutral instrument whose role is to think. It is also not a pure, innocent or static tool that

receives data like a computer; it is a mental activity made up of knowledge systems and their actual implementation.

The mind is relative in time and space, and necessarily acquires its particular characteristics in proportion to the amount of knowledge it produces about the world, and in proportion to the amount of knowledge it generates. This is why the rationalists believed that the human mind is limited, and accused it of being inadequate; beset by illusions and swayed by desires (Al-Buleihi2007).

This is not a new idea. The Greek philosophers identified the human mind's failure to discover the nature of complex ignorance, which puts ignorance in control of the mind uncontrollable; with ignorance being passed on from one generation to the next.

This key discovery in the history of philosophical thought rallied all the effective criticisms in order to extricate Man from his ignorance and failure, to make him doubtful and to alert him to the fact that the chronic ignorance that controls his mind had never been analyzed, critiqued or reviewed. This ignorance is not confined to any particular nation; people from all eras and cultures believe beyond doubt that their beliefs and all that they have inherited is the eternal incontrovertible truth (Al-Haidari2012a, 2012b).

The illusion of inherited perfection is obstructive to the human mind. One of the factors that distinguish rationalism is its conviction that the mind is inadequate and capable of making mistakes. This requires a constant review of prevailing cultures, as well as critiques, analyses and reviews, aimed at saving Man's mind from the claws of failure. However, although 'rationalism' recognizes the limits of the mind's abilities, it trusts its disposition towards criticizing itself and discovering its own abilities, and the belief that it can only acquire its abilities through criticism, challenges and confrontation. Rationalism also believes that the self-sufficient mind refrains from criticism, and self-criticism, and will thus not develop, but will remain static, and become an instrument that others take advantage of (Al-Buleihi 2007).

The pioneers of the 'Frankfurt school' were the first to call for a critique of the mind, in an attempt to save it from the dominance of 'positivism' and 'empirical philosophy' that ruined the western mind and turned it into an instrumental mind, making its point of departure the premise that 'critical theory' had made rationalism the object of questioning and doubt. The disasters that plagued the 20th century, including the two world wars, civil wars, colonialism and environmental disasters are but a result of this irrational control over the world.

The thinkers of the Frankfurt critical school see the word 'mind' as meaning the ability to know ideas and to understand them, which is the objective of all human beings. The opposite has

happened, however; the main role and function of the mind has become an attempt to find the means that serve the ends of each individual, at a given moment in time. This was highlighted by Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) who said that the rationalist trend of the ‘Enlightenment Age’ essentially involved a vision of nature as something to be controlled, guided and taken advantage of. This vision necessarily led to a similar view of Man as an object of control in his reciprocal social relationships.

The deterioration of the objective mind and its transformation into an instrumental mind took place after the rise of the industrial world of ‘Taylorism’, ‘Stalinism’ and ‘Nazism’, and the formation of the world of power and tyranny that sought to achieve material interests that destroy the mind, since material interests are the enemy of the mind as an essential vision of existence (Horkheimer and Adorno 1969).

Sources of Ali Al-Wardi's critique of the human mind Al-Wardi was influenced by ideas and opinions critical of the assumption that the mind is static by nature. He believed that the human mind, due to the environment, values, traditions, beliefs and interests that Man grows up with, is rather biased by nature, and these factors influence his thinking. He drew his ideas from three major sources:

- Ibn Khaldoun's critique of the Aristotelian logic.
- Freud and the importance of the unconscious
- Karl Mannheim and the relativism of social knowledge.

These ideas are discussed briefly below:

Ibn Khaldoun's critique of Aristotelian logic

Al-Wardi used Ibn Khaldoun's theory of the science of civilization and sociology as a main reference for his social ideas. Ibn Khaldoun studied human history realistically, isolated from the preaching style that had dominated social thought over several centuries. He started from the premise that the old formal logic founded by Aristotle does not conform to reality. This allowed him to free himself of Aristotelian shackles, and to embark on a new path that helped him understand social life as it really was. This is how Ibn Khaldoun managed to bring Arab Islamic philosophy down from its lofty perch to the level of life's struggles, knowing full well that

for real life to be properly understood it needed to be viewed within the framework of a different logic and perspective.

Al-Wardi discovered that Ibn Khaldoun was the only thinker to rebel against this idealistic way of thinking prevalent in Islam. Although his peers did not understand him at the time, he tried to dismantle Aristotelian logic and build a new one, based on changing social realities. He was also one of the first thinkers to criticize Aristotelian logic and justify its shortcomings in understanding social life, based on the premise of the 'refutation of philosophy and the corruption of its imposters'. The logic pursued by the old philosophers was deficient in two ways: the first was its view of theology, and the second was its view of physical beings which the philosophers call natural science. With regards the deficiencies of logic, they neither are present in the intellectual conclusions reached within the confines of the logic's terms and syllogisms, since they are neither certain nor conform to what exists beyond them. In doing so, he was clearly distinguishing between pure mental images and external material facts (Al-Wardi 1962, 80).

Ibn Khaldoun believed that the problematic of the formal method was linked to the way of thinking which says that there are fixed intuitive bases in thought, or that there are constants on which formal logic is based, i.e. Aristotelian logic is linked to the old traditional methods of thought and demonstration. The old logic relied on the absolute truth in all things because it believed that truth was static, self sustaining and separate from objective circumstances and social relations. Formal logic is deductive; it starts with the general and ends with the specific, in exact opposition to the modern inductive logic that starts with the specific and ends with the general. The problem with the formal logic is that its syllogism usually relies on axiomatic prerequisites deemed beyond doubt, and therefore needs no proof.

Ibn Khaldoun and the truth

Ibn Khaldoun believed that truth was not constant but that it changed in line with changes in the condition of human civilization. Truth was not given in its final form but was amenable to change, unlike the Aristotelian logic that saw truth as constant and absolute and does not change in time or space. He insisted that Man was the product of his environment and habits, and derived his morality from his society, because he is subject to social and economic conditions that are not constant but relative to time and space.

Al-Wardi said that Ibn Khaldoun saw human nature as inconstant and changeable in tandem with the social circumstances in which the human being lives, and this also applies to human

society. Man derives his morality from society and, in turn, society is subject to its own social, economic and political circumstances. In other words, Man's behaviour is also subject to environmental and social circumstances. He underlined the fact that the logic followed by Ibn Khaldoun had an influence on his theory, as did the intellectual and non-intellectual factors that helped him formulate his theory on human civilization and sociology. This 'realist theory' departs from the preaching style that influenced thought for several centuries, and it is based on the assumption that Aristotelian logic does not conform to real life. Al-Wardi therefore saw Ibn Khaldoun's theory as a 'huge intellectual leap' forward in social studies (Al-Haidary 2006, 99–100).

The aim of Ibn Khaldoun's criticism of Aristotelian logic was to highlight its inadequate understanding of social life, and to refute it through refuting its laws, particularly the Laws of Identity and Non-Contradiction.

Ibn Khaldoun listed three bases for his criticism of Aristotelian logic:

- The *Rationality Principle* was one of the main principles on which Aristotle based his formal logic, believing in the theoretical presence of universals in the mind, i.e. regardless of experience, that provide absolute trust in the mind and its ability to uncover the truth. According to this logic, knowledge could be acquired in two ways only: sense or intellect. While sense could be wrong, intellect is the path towards the right kind of knowledge that emanates from the mind itself.
- The *Causality Principle*, which means that all that takes place in the universe is subject to a strict law, based on an alternation between cause and effect. The reason is that there is a necessary connection between the event and its cause, and the causality principle looks for the cause in the object; if it is not found people will reject the subject of study. An example is that burning occurs when the fire touches a flammable object.
- The *Essentialism Principle*, based on the premise that everything has a static essence that does not change or contradict itself. There are three essentialism laws; first the *Law of Identity* which says that an object is what it is, i.e. it does not change with the passage of time. If we see something as being good, it will remain so forever. The second is the *Law of Non-Contradiction* which says that two contradictory premises cannot coexist in the same object; something is either good or bad, but cannot be both good and bad at the same time. The third is the *Law of the Excluded Middle* which says that there is no middle

ground between two contradictory premises; something is either right or wrong and there is no third option (Al-Wardi 1962, 12–13, 40–47, 655, 1996, 80).

Al-Wardi criticizes and highlights the shortcomings of rationalism in all his writings, which he believed did not conform to modern scientific theories. He believed that the rationalists were wrong to conclude that human nature is an outcome of the mind, and that the mind is akin to a lofty gift, the role of which is to ascertain the truth. They also thought that they could reform people by preaching, delivering speeches and giving advice; that they lived in ivory towers and had an idealistic view of society. This heritage is drawn from the old Greek philosophy that once had absolute trust in the human mind, and ascribed to it every social corruption. This means that social problems are essentially mental problems, and, therefore, neither the environment nor social values had any role in them, for 'if minds are mended, people's morals will be mended as well, and their situation will be made right'.

One of the negative aspects of rationalism is that it is also a product of the prevailing social culture in which human beings are reared, and through which their mental abilities develop. It says that if we see people practicing bad habits and traditions, it would not be enough to urge them to think in the right way for them to amend their ways, since generally people do not like others to disagree with them because they are convinced that their habits are good, and what the others believe is wrong (Al-Haidari 2006, 83).

Sigmund Freud and the importance of the unconscious

Freud (1856–1939) was the first in the modern era to develop a psychoanalytical theory that stresses the importance of instincts – the sexual instinct in particular – in shaping culture and personality. His theory contradicted the rationalist philosophers' opinion that Man's nature is rational, and that he is a rational animal whose mind distinguishes him from other beings. He underlines the fact that human behaviour is not steered by the mind, as some philosophers believe, but by a stronger and more effective force; one made up of irrational instincts that affect our social life and human civilization (Al-Haidari 2006, 96).

If human behaviour is to be understood, it is necessary to understand what motivates it. The fact that motives behind human behaviour are often obscure is one of the main focal points of Freud's theory. If motives are internal mental states that regulate behaviour and give it

meaning, then the rationality of a certain act could be ascertained in light of the motive that lies behind it, and offers an explanation for it. Often, however, the explanation is incomplete and does not account for all the ensuing actions; the reason is the involvement of an unconscious process driven by the motives that work unconsciously within us, without us being aware of them. Separating motives from self-consciousness, in particular, allows for the radical expansion of the scope of explanations based on motives. Freud's idea, regarding the unconscious, signifies the presence of a large reservoir of motives that explain actions and give them meaning.

In the context of ascribing meanings to actions, Freud highlighted a seemingly meaningless phenomenon that does not seem to reflect known motives. For example, when we explain a dream or make a slip of the tongue, we usually fail to understand the motive or motives behind it. Freud said that this was not just a superficial phenomenon. There are, in fact, motives that reveal the complete meaning behind these seemingly random occurrences, although the person who commits them is not aware of them.

Freud believed that all the motives behind a person's actions could be ascribed to two basic instincts; life and love (Eros) – the sexual instinct that protects the self and the species, and death (Thanatos) – the instinct of aggression and destruction. These two basic instincts both repel and attract each other simultaneously, and human behaviour is the outcome of either the struggle or cooperation between them. While the instinct of life leans towards love and construction, and the instinct of death leans towards destruction, society's role is to overcome the destructive behaviour and promote that which builds and rectifies (Freud 1994, 300).

According to Al-Wardi, Freud was able to remove Man's artificial mask and lay him bare. He believed that the thinkers that preceded Freud believed that Man had one mind that controlled his actions and guided his behaviour, and if he deviated they blamed that mind and called on him to see reason and to learn his lesson, and if he failed, he deserved punishment. Freud, however, discovered that Man has a second mind besides his conscious one, which he called the 'unconscious mind'; a fact he considered essential to understanding human nature. This is why he saw Man as neither purely good nor purely bad, but good and bad at the same time. This theory demolished the logical principle that classified people into two opposing types; one good with no inherent evil, and the other bad with no inherent good. He considered the 'unconscious' as one of the most important elements in the formation of Man's personality and in uncovering what is hidden in the human soul, and as the only basis for Man's behaviour. The reason is that, in his daily life, Man does not behave according to what his mind and will

dictate, but according to unknown motives, hidden deep in the human soul, that compel him to act without his awareness (Al-Haidari 2006, 180–182).

However, despite the shortcomings in Freud's 'Theory of the Unconsciousness', Al-Wardi considered it to be revolutionary in the history of human thought, since Freud had done a great service to humanity by discovering the unconscious. Thinkers before him were influenced by the old philosophy that deeply believed in the mind, and never realized that a 'deeper mind' lurked in an unconscious area of the human soul, which affects Man's behaviour without him being aware. This is why they presented logical explanations for all human behaviour, based on consciousness and thought and its logical justification.

What Al-Wardi wished to highlight was that Man's acts are initially inspired by the unconscious, then the mind steps in to justify his actions in a manner that makes them acceptable to society. Not only does society limit the way Man's mind sees the truth, it also surrounds him with a specific framework of which he remains unaware, until he moves to another society and realizes that there are other ideas and concepts different from those he is used to. It is at this point that he might realize that he had been shackled by mental restrictions and social illusions (Al-Haidari 2006, 20).

Karl Mannheim and the relativism of social knowledge

In his *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim (1863–1947) proposed a theory of the sociology of knowledge, as an extension of the theory of knowledge in philosophy that looks at the mutual influences of thought and social reality, and the mind and society, to understand the nature of the human mind and social relationships (Mannheim 1968). The theory refutes the ancient philosophers' opinion that sees the mind as an instrument created to seek the truth and to get to know it, as it is. Mannheim underlines the idea that different groups see the truth from one side only, and that different interests, beliefs and values inevitably lead each group to see the truth from a different perspective. This, in turn, makes each of these groups irrevocably believe that it is right and its adversaries are wrong, which is exactly from where disagreements among people arise.

Social scientists in the field of social theory of knowledge pointed out to the objective truth and its susceptibility to the influences of social, economic and psychological conditions, and concluded that the human mind is not an instrument fashioned to search for the truth, since it is most probably encapsulated within frameworks moulded by society. This is why it is not easy for people to see the objective truth in a similar manner if their circumstances, interests and

social methods are different. According to Karl Mannheim, knowledge is a reflection of the social hierarchy; he sees truth as both subjective and objective at the same time, i.e. it creates thought and is created by it at the same time, and each is both the *raison d'être* and outcome of the other (Al-Taher 1978). Mannheim also believes that the truth exists beyond the human mind and has several facets, which is why the mind does not have a complete picture of it. The mind absorbs only part of the external reality, then adds to itself another part to complete the picture in accordance with how the mind imagines that picture to be. This is what Al-Wardi summarizes as 'each one of us carries with him his own personal truth' (Al-Haidari 2006, 53, 80–81, and *Social Briefs*, 332).

Al-Wardi was influenced by Karl Mannheim's theory on 'social relativism', which he thought was more in line with reality, and reformulated it to suit Iraqi society – a closed, traditional and agrarian society; one incapable of transcending this relative knowledge because it can only see one facet of the truth, based on its tribal agrarian background. In this, Iraqi society is the exact opposite of the advanced industrial society that sees the truth from several angles because of its dynamism, openness and constant evolution due to its scientific and technical progress, widespread means of communication and well-developed media.

This does not mean that Al-Wardi did not believe, however, in the existence of facts. Although he recognized that there are irrevocable facts relative to morality and human values, he believed that each one of us sees them through one's own intellectual framework; for example, it is impossible for the thief and the righteous one to see things the same way (Abdul-Hamid 1998, 175).

Without denying the splendour of the human mind and its ability to invent and create, Al-Wardi believed that this does not prevent it from being biased in thinking (Al-Wardi 1992, 308).

Human nature

Al-Wardi's top priority was to understand and research human nature to the fullest. It was a subject he addressed in most of his books, with a view to understanding historical and social development, and the personality of the Iraqi individual. The key question uppermost on his mind was whether Man was 'determined' or 'undetermined'. He studied what the *Mu'tazilah*, *Jahmiyah*, *Qadariyah*, *Ash'ariyah*¹ and others wrote on the subject in an attempt to answer this question. Much had been written on the subject, including some contradictory statements. The *Al-Mu'tazilah* believed that Man creates his own work inspired by a power endowed to him by God. The Shia agreed with them on that aspect. On the other

hand, while the *Ash'ariyah* believed that the creation of the action is the work of God and the actions of Man are acquired, the *Murja'ah* and *Jahmiyah* believed that God is the real creator of the actions of Man, and that Man is obliged to do carry them out.

Al-Wardi tended to believe that in most of his actions Man, instead of being free is determined by a metaphysical power rather than an unconscious power. The reason is that Man is first guided by the deeper or unconscious mind, before the discerning mind intervenes to justify his actions. Al-Wardi stressed the fact that human norms are different from natural laws that operate in a similar unchanging pattern, and human norms differ to varying degrees from one person to another, depending on the environment and culture of each person (Al-Haidari 2006, 165–167).

As far as Al-Wardi is concerned, personality is the centre–point of human nature; a mystery that the world has so far failed to unravel. Human nature is an organized collection of ideas, temperaments, tendencies and habits that distinguish one person from another and an outcome of the interaction between nature and nurture, or natural instincts and social norms.

Rather than a natural gift, personality is an acquired, particularly human characteristic, which Man inherits from his fathers and forefathers. It stems from and develops within the confines of society, whereby the initial group among which a child is reared, plays an important part in shaping his personality. Therefore, personality 'is not only a creation of the society and culture within which it develops, but is also miniature of society'. At the same time, it is 'an unstable complex phenomenon easy to dismantle and capable of dividing and multiplying'. At the centre of the personality is self–consciousness or, what is often called, the soul; the soul is different from the spirit; it is the mirror of society (Al-Wardi 1951).

Studying human nature, and delving deeply into it, has allowed Al-Wardi to crystallize the 'egoism' concept that lies at the heart of his theory on human nature. It is the concept that explains why Man, even when he entered 'paradise', never achieved a state of contentment. It is his constant yearning for that 'paradise lost' that has allowed him to develop, and culture to progress; it is also the reason for his dissatisfaction, greed and misery.

For Al-Wardi, although the ancient philosophers saw Man as a rational animal, we have now come to realize that Man is not, in fact, as rational as rationalist Greek philosophy portrayed him to be. Man is fixated on 'egoism', i.e. he loves his ego and dislikes the truth. Man calls for the truth only when he is in harmony with his ego, which is what Al-Wardi believed people should keep in mind when dealing with others.

- ‘Egoism’ occupies a prominent place in Al-Wardi’s thinking and opinions on human nature, and became one of the focal points of his social philosophy.
- ‘Egoism’ is a self-conscious attitude towards the others that compels Man to constantly seek to raise his social status in the eyes of others, and win their friendship, acceptance and admiration. It is a feeling associated with how others see and react to him, because he lives in a society that imposes on him specific social relationships. There is a clear distinction between ‘egoism’ and ‘selfishness’ here; the difference being that ‘egoism’ is a social sentiment while selfishness is an individualistic selfish sentiment that prompts Man to advance his own personal interests only (Al-Haidari 2006, 169).

Nature of the human mind

Al-Wardi paid a great deal of attention to understanding the nature of the human mind and its abilities, by looking at the absolute and relative truths in trying to discover the reasons behind Man’s failure to seize the absolute truth. He blames this failure on an innate deficiency in the makeup of the human mind and its limited ability. Although, he does not deny its importance, or the fact that it is the main factor that distinguishes human beings from other living creatures, he insists that it would be wrong to blindly trust the mind, because it is ‘a creation of society’.

He also criticized the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufail, who believed that the human mind is akin to a primitive instrument that grows and develops spontaneously, and therefore needs no teaching or training. He used the story of Hai Ibn Yaqdhan² to illustrate how the mind develops in isolation from the falsehoods and superstitions that prevail in society; far from other people’s preoccupations, it rises above the falsehoods. In other words, Al-Wardi is calling on the intellectuals ‘to step up to the ivory towers’.

According to Al-Wardi, Ibn Tufail did not offer anything new about the mind. The strange thing, for him, however, was that many writers and thinkers were still influenced by Ibn Tufail’s ideas, and believed that the human mind was a natural gift that grows naturally, whether Man lives in a forest or society. Modern scientific research has, however, disproved this opinion; the mind only grows and matures in society. If a human being is born and raised among the animals he becomes an animal like them. For Al-Wardi Hai Ibn Yaqdhan’s story was nothing but superstition (Al-Wardi 1994, 132–135).

Al-Wardi said that Man is an animal before being a human being, and was endowed by a number of distinguishing factors chief among which is the mind. Moreover, human nature has

not changed despite the considerable change in values, habits and social beliefs, whereby Man has remained the same prejudiced animal since time immemorial. Furthermore, although philosophers agree that the mind is what distinguishes Man from the animals, they disagree about its identification and limitations. The mind's motives are biased, selfish, prejudiced, subjective and erratic in its motives, and it has the extraordinary ability to devise all kinds of tricks and schemes. Not only does it invent the weapons with which to kill its enemies, it provides the excuses and rationales that justify killing them.

Al-Wardi also thought that the human mind 'has devised a scheme worse than that of right and truth, because the mind's objective is not to discover the truth or distinguish between good and evil, like the ancient thinkers used to believe, but to discover all that is useful for life and for hurting the enemy. Al-Wardi also said that Man is not civil by nature, as Aristotle says, but both savage by nature and civil by nurture; he quotes the pragmatist philosopher William James who said that the mind is nothing but an organ created by God to help Man in his struggle to survive, just like the elephant's trunk, lion's claws, gazelle's legs and scorpion's venom. Man uses his brain to find whatever helps him succeed and defeat the enemy; it is like what John Dewey said, that the mind 'is like the elephant's trunk that he uses to fight the enemy, win the female and find food' (Al-Wardi 1996, 54).

He believed that the human mind is distinctive by nature. It is surrounded by a thick layer of emotions, values, beliefs and interests that guides Man's thoughts, a layer that Al-Wardi calls the 'mental framework' which determines the way the individual views the universe and social life. Certain people believe that they can think freely when, in fact, they are unconsciously constrained, without being aware of it (Al-Haidari 2006, 71-72).

Al-Wardi compares the unconscious power that constrains the mind to the atmospheric pressure whose considerable weight we bear, without our being aware of it, except if we move to a location with a different atmospheric pressure. This also applies to the human mind; it does not feel the weight of the mental framework constraining it, except if it moves to another society and culture. This is when it realizes that there are ideas, values and concepts different to those it invented. This mental framework is drawn from society that imposes on the human being a specific set of social and cultural rules and values; if anyone violates these rules and values, feelings of aggression are generated because of the deeply embedded believe that truth and justice is on its side.

Al-Wardi said that this mental framework is not understood, and the reason why there is resistance to any new trend; there is initial resistance, but then ultimately this gives way to submission. He illustrated this pattern by many of the sultans' preachers who banned the

removal of the veil, yet their own daughters removed their veils; they forbade enrolment in modern schools, yet they enrolled their own daughters in them, and they forbade listening to the radio, yet they equipped their own homes with radios. Al-Wardi quotes Imam Ali as saying, 'Do not inculcate your habits in your children, they were born for a different era than yours' (Al-Wardi 1956, 16).

Al-Wardi's *The Sultans' Preachers* (published 1954) contains provocative and candid opinions on human nature and the human mind. It sharply criticizes the sultans' preachers who intentionally use, in their books and sermons, the old platonic logic of preaching and guidance – the logic of the affluent and the tyrannical.

Al-Wardi's concepts can be summarized as follows: human nature cannot be reformed just through preaching; Man cannot be influenced without first understanding his inherent attributes and behaviour. The ancient philosophers believed that Man was rational and free-thinking and followed the path of his choice, through relying on the old logic and on pure thought. This explains why the preachers resorted to exaggerated amounts of preaching and guidance in the belief that they could change human nature and improve Man's morality. Throughout Islamic history, the sultans' preachers have persistently showered the people with advice and blustery sermons, to no avail. Their aim was to change the nature and hearts of people through sermons; but they have failed to realize that they were asking for the impossible, since their sermons fell on deaf ears. They preached to the oppressed and overlooked the oppressor, allowing the tyrants to use the preachers as tools to warn the people about suffering in the afterlife, and to distract them from earthly suffering (Al-Wardi 1995, 8–11). Moreover, socially changing such attributes would be possible only if the social conditions that motivated them changed too. Instead of following this method, and before attempting to reform people, modern scientists need to learn all they can about the social conditions of the people, and uncover the hidden factors and motives behind them, specifically those factors that influence people's thinking, behaviour and attitudes towards others.

Al-Wardi wrote that the sultans' preachers were like the sultans' poets and extollers. He supported this claim with a number of examples, including how some preachers ask the people to cleanse themselves of hatred, envy, egotism and hypocrisy, yet they themselves are more selfish, envious and hypocritical.

It is from this perspective that Al-Wardi severely criticized the religious figures who used the old formal logic to justify their opinions. In doing so, he was also criticizing the tripartite alliance between the tyrants, the affluent and the sultans' preachers, because they were of the same

ilk; this notion is best summarized in the quotation, ‘while some oppress the people with their actions, others oppress them with their words’ (Al-Haidari 2006, 22).

Al-Wardi's other reproachful commentaries include the religious figures who blamed the dissolution of ethics and society on bad morality, and who saw social reform as an easy undertaking. People who preached that the sooner Man amended his ways that his heart would be cleansed of its hatred and selfishness, and overnight he would become a happy contented individual. Al-Wardi pointed out that the problem with this point of view was the belief that the human soul could be washed clean with soap and water to remove the dirt that had stuck to it. He criticized the preachers for their failure to realize that no matter how high they raised their voices in the effort to reform people's ways; their logic will remain ineffective, since human nature could not be reformed by sermons and guidance alone, without first looking at what Man was made of and the conditions that have influenced him. This, he said, equally applied to the educated and uneducated alike. People had become so used to ‘hearing the sermons’ that they were no longer paying attention to them (Al-Wardi 1995, 6).

It is clear that Al-Wardi does not criticize religion *per se* in his writings. Rather, he castigates the religious clergy who, through dressing up in religious garb, instrumentalize religion as a tool for their own ends. He also levelled criticism at the upper classes. His aim was to draw attention to the danger associated with people like the sultans' preachers, who, reared in the laps of tyrants, become used to ‘eating their leftovers’. He also indicates that the most ominous results from the preachers' sermons was the psychological struggle between what the person hears and the reality he sees, when he wrote that the problem with the preachers is that they seek to reform people's behaviour through simple prescriptive commands of ‘do’ and ‘don't do’. He reproached them for believing that the human being was made of clay that they could mould and shape as they pleased (Haidari 2006, 227–228).

Al-Wardi saw that the paradox lay in the outcome being precisely the opposite of what the preachers hoped to achieve, i.e. that ‘all that they have taught us and preached to us could lead to the opposite outcome’. For example, he wrote that people were used to hearing the well-known sayings, ‘seek and you will find’ and ‘those who walk the path reach their destination’. He admitted that although such advice urges people to work hard and be diligent and could thus be beneficial in this sense, it could also lead to the opposite result, since ‘the wind does not always blow at your back’. In fact, he continued, many people believed in the ‘luck’ factor to explain their success and failure in achievement. He pointed out that there was no such thing as ‘luck’ in how people fare in life, in general, but rather, that there are unconscious forces that emanate from the depths of the human spirit that have quite an effect

on the individual's chance of success or failure which is why they are perceived as being 'lucky' or 'unlucky'. The course of human society, he believed, was the outcome of an intense competition that compels people to create and excel, and that human development and progress are achieved through the sacrifice of the numerous victims who fail in life but on whose shoulders the success of others is built.

For Al-Wardi, the old misguided logic, based on the premise that Man adopts his beliefs through his own free will, and reaches his decision through thought and vision, is a mistake that often leads to injustice, and it is unfair, for this reason, to punish people for beliefs instilled in them during their social upbringing. In fact, he wrote, Man first believes in the doctrine he inherits from his forefathers, and only later does he begin to rethink it. Most often, his thoughts revolve around endorsing this doctrine, and it is rare that an individual changes his beliefs based on pure thought alone. Other factors no doubt compel him to change (Al-Haidari 2006, 215-216).

Al-Wardi (1994, 45-46) quotes one of Al-Jahiz's grave opinions which said that 'God does not punish the atheists because they do not believe, except those whose atheism is motivated by personal interest'. According to Al-Jahiz, the individual's opinions and beliefs are involuntary, imposed on him by how his mind is configured, and influenced by the opinions he has been exposed to. Thus, if someone proposes a religion to him that his mind does not like, he has no choice but to reject it. He is, therefore, not responsible for his belief since '[...] Allah does not charge a soul except (with that within) its capacity' (Koran 2:286) One cannot blame the colour-blind because they see red as black; the same applies to people's beliefs.

Al-Jahiz believed that the mind is involuntary, like the senses, except within a very narrow margin, which is why the more the person is isolated the more fanatical he becomes. Most wars and conflicts among people are an outcome of the mental framework that restricts the human mind and keeps it captive. According to Al-Wardi, this does not mean that there are no general and comprehensive truths like justice and injustice, since Man claims that justice and truth are so important to him that he would sacrifice himself and his wealth for them. In reality, however, that Man likes the truth when it serves him well, but if it does not, he sees it from a different standpoint, and tries to find reasons to downgrade its importance. His thinking is moulded by his social environment and is subject to the mental framework inherit in it (Al-Wardi 1956, 45-46).

The fanatical human mind of which Al-Wardi speaks is the result of the deeply rooted quality of bias embedded in it; it is not neutral. The mind thinks within the confines of a number of parameters and information that the individual learns in society, which is why Man is unable to

ascertain the major realities of the universe. The mind is limited by the extent of the things it is familiar with, and it is difficult for it to understand another world made up of concepts that fundamentally differ from the world as we perceive it. When Einstein's theory first appeared, scientists were at a loss for what to do; due to modern methods of research, the absolute truths they once believed in were now confined to the limits of the things among which we live. As for the worlds of astronomy, nuclear physics, the spirit and others, they are not among the instruments and standards that we are familiar with in our limited lives; we are entering a new era that has no place for axioms or general parameters. Over a century ago, people believed that the earth was flat until science proved that it is round and revolves around the sun. This means that there is no absolute truth, but relative truths that change according to time and place.

Al-Wardi arrives at the conclusion that the more isolated the person is the more fanatical he becomes, and the weaker his mind becomes, because he only sees one facet of the truth. The old logic therefore applies neither to the past nor to the present era. He said that people should realize that they are at the threshold of an age in which the limited and socially fettered ideas our foolish forefathers were so proud of, are no longer valid (Al-Wardi 1956, 45–50, 135).

Moreover, the fettered and biased mind pushes people towards conflict. Each individual thinks that he is more entitled than others, or better, cleverer, and more able and attractive than everyone else, then tries to find justification for his claims. If he meets with disagreement from someone, he is certain that since he is right, therefore, his opponent must, necessarily, be wrong (Al-Wardi 1956, 88).

Al-Wardi connects the mind with the unconscious, both positively and negatively. The unconscious produces both negative and positive defence mechanisms, and Man always submits to his unconscious that forces him into a social sleep, akin to hypnosis. In forging this link, Al-Wardi bases himself on the words of the psychologist Robert Meyers who said that the unconscious contains both a goldmine and a heap of garbage. He means by 'goldmine' the positive desires, such as the inventions and creativity that have helped science, society and human civilization to develop, and he means by 'garbage' the tendency towards fanaticism, and attachment to habits and traditions that have prevailed in people's lives since infancy (Al-Haidari 2006, 175–176).

Over half a century ago, Al-Wardi said:

It is high time for us to stage a coup in the way we think. The time of sultans is long gone and has been replaced by nations. It is ill-befitting of us, in this twentieth century, to think along the same lines as some of our ancestors – the sultans' preachers. (Al-Haidari 2006, 271)

Assessment

A diligent review of Al-Wardi's opinions and thoughts on the nature of the human mind reveals how severely critical he was of how the human mind could be fanatical and excessive; particularly fanaticism motivated by personal interests. He bases his position on his concept of social logic regarding the relativism of social knowledge and the prevailing Aristotelian superficial logic which he submitted to critique and accountability, and its adaptation to the duality and disharmony of the Iraqi individual's personality. He also adapted this logic to the Iraqi mind, in particular, its idealism and contradictions. This compelled him to launch an all-out war on the intellectuals and sultans' preachers who espoused the old logic and who lived in ivory towers.

Al-Wardi's most salient feature, as a sociologist and intellectual critic is, in fact, his innovative and courageous criticism of social realities, since he challenged all that was traditional and commonly known on the nature of the human mind and social behaviour. Despite the many criticisms directed at his enlightening ideas, he managed to obstinately forge ahead and bring about a total break with the old ways of thinking and worn-out social habits, traditions and conventions, in an attempt to develop a new mentality, based on a modern scientific logic in place of the old descriptive one. His ultimate aim was to allow Iraqi citizens access to these ideas with the aim of creating new intellectual spaces capable of accommodating modern scientific and sociological theories and, furthermore, to continue to interact with them and embrace all that is innovative, creative and productive.

Al-Wardi's criticism of the Iraqi mind was tantamount to crying out against the fanatical thinking that dominated and still continues to dominate many people's minds, making them adopt an idealistic, preachy and unrealistic view of reality. The reason is that people have become used to seeing truth through the old Aristotelian prism as a unified whole, and, therefore, opinions, thought and attitudes are also expected to be a unified whole.

Although Al-Wardi lived in a period rife with ideological struggles, whether Islamic, nationalist or socialist, he managed to remain neutral, maintain his intellectual independence and be a courageous and enlightened critic of various social phenomena associated with all that is backward, sacred and taboo, and to all that is familiar to the mind. It was indeed an

uncommon phenomenon that he swam against the traditional current, concentrating his criticism on the traditional mindset influenced by the old logic and the sultans' preachers.

Yet, despite all the rationalists' analyses of issues related to religion, tradition, literature, politics and sociology addressed by Al-Wardi in his invaluable writings, he failed to save himself from the influence of the human mind, which he more than once described as a farce (Al-Wardi 1956). On more than one occasion, he fought in defence of the static truth he believed in, when addressing the 'lost truth in Islam', and in defence of the Koranic methodology as representing the static truth (Abdul-Hamid 1998). Moreover, he did not separate between the productive mind and the instrumental mind, and his opinions and thoughts never rose to the level of a comprehensive scientific theory supported by empirical evidence (Hassan 1998, 4).

If we accept that the fanaticism of the mind changes in step with the changing circumstances and social environment, then Al-Wardi failed to realize that the human mind can change in tandem with social change and development, since society is in flux rather than static in time and space. When he describes the human mind as a farce, on account of people's fanatical adherence to the old beliefs and values that they grew up with, and have since become irrevocable facts, then these irrevocable facts could be refuted by science and social progress, and become themselves superstitions. Moreover, he relied on what had been written about the human mind, and chose from the literature elements that supported or refuted his personal ideas on social issues.

The fundamental changes brought about by modernity, such as freedom, progress and rationalism, which gave rise to freedom of thinking, self-expression and civil society, emanate from the belief that human beings and the human mind – the maker of history and its object at the same time – are the source of its excellence and uniqueness. Therefore, we should, like Jurgen Habermas said, turn our attention to the critical communicative mind that forged human civilization, because the world we live in is not such a sham. There is no alternative to the mind, except the mind itself that can produce a more humane and liberal modernity, as well as producing all that can protect and develop it (Al-Haidari 2012a, 2012b). Furthermore, the productive scientific mind should remain alive and keep on thinking so that humanity can survive, and so human civilizations can advance and prosper.

Notes

1. *Mu'tazilah* is a school of rationalist Islamic theology; *Jahmiyyah* is a term used especially by early Hanbalites to refer to the followers of Jahm ibn Safwan; *Qadariyah* are adherents of the

doctrine of free will: the word *Qadar* is derived from *qadr* (power or rights); and *Ash'ariyah* is an early theological school of Islam founded by Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari.

2. The story of Hai Ibn Yaqdhan is about an imaginary man who was born and grew up on an isolated island. Breastfed by a doe, he grew up alone on the island until he became a grown man. Ibn Tufail believed that the human mind grows in tandem with the body until it matures, just like Ibn Yaqdhan, who managed to think and deduce, through pure thought, the same truths that some great thinkers had deduced before him.

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