

Scientist and Truth

Distinguished guests and scholars, welcome to Iran and to the Workshop. Hopefully, your discussions will have fruitful results.

Apparently, you have chosen a critical topic for discussion in the Workshop since scientists who are lovers of truth can be relied more than others for the improvement and expediency of the world affairs. Yet a historical glance at the relation between knowledge and understanding could be justifiable.

Maybe for the first time in the history of mankind, Plato has referred to the possibility of creating a scientific or intellectual republic. This Platonic idea was not forgotten and, for instance in the world of Islam, Farabi renewed it, but it was not expanded very much until the modern time when Francis Bacon wrote his *New Atlantis*. In his work, he illustrates a city which is governed by scientists. The city was devoid of happiness and joy-and those who look at it from outside, can call it a mechanical city. Whatever it was, it could be a peaceful and tranquil city.

Although the history is not that of tranquility, peace and understanding, the *New Atlantis* remained as the city of hope and expectation at the time when world was not tranquil. But there have always been concerns about its destiny. For instance, Kant, who always thought about the republic of reason and peace, knew that such a republic would lead to nowhere unless wisdom directed it; and perhaps it would face great dangers.

However until the mid 20th century, science remained the haven and stable pillar for hope in the modern society and the agitations that the world of modernity experienced would not be so powerful as to shake its huge structure. Yet the events of the initial four decades of the 20th century in Europe dashed hope and hopefulness. At the time, regardless of certain doubts and sense of hopelessness among some scholars, the principle of holding hope of science was firmly established.

The advancement of science, the emergence of its numerous benefits and the

consequent improvement of life, and particularly the objectivity of science, which causes disparity of minds and consensus, were the prerequisites for optimism and trust to the future. This question was rarely posed that in the course of history of the development of science, how much has man approached peace, and understanding?

The advent of Stalinism in the USSR and National Socialism in Germany and the World War II were not experiences that could be ignored. These events were the signs of the emergence of another age. After the War, although there was a general consensus that science brings agreement among people and that scientists are in agreement with each other in scientific issues and their differences can be resolved easily, but such agreement does not extend to other domains including that of culture, beliefs and politics.

The politics of our epoch knows to what extent it depends on science but it cannot follow the model of universal consensus. Up to now, along with being hopeful about science, there has also been hope that the new culture will disseminate worldwide and will replace other cultures. We have seen that European and American thinkers and scholars have forgotten about having a unique culture. No longer, they believe that science will show the way to the future of the world. Those who have set forth the idea of the diversity of civilizations and cultures have gone so far as to consider the power of challenging and fighting for such cultures. Even those who have taken the fall of the USSR as the sign of the victory of liberal democracy have not hidden their despair about the establishments of peace, consensus and understanding in the globe.

Now science is more advanced than ever and its dissemination in the form of consumption technology has resulted in uniformity all over the world. But the differences, wars and misunderstandings have increased. The constitution of the modernity, namely the Bill of Human Rights has been ignored worldwide. In such circumstances, how is it possible to remain hopeful about science? Science is the domain of truth and scientists are its children and followers. They are committed to keep alive the spirit of loyalty to truth, goodness and beauty, and to induce it to the ruling powers as much as they can. In this way, science may become the gateway to understanding again. If we lose this hope and ignore the part that truth plays in life and become hopeless, and if we accept that science should be at the service of politics and a means for imposing enmity and power, we should know that man is doomed to be in danger. It is still possible to rely on truth and be hopeful, and this hope should be preserved.

The present workshop signifies that there still exists some hope. I hope that this meeting and its discussions would be a small step towards understanding.