



Comparative Analysis of the Components of Social Capital in the Modern and Islamic Paradigms

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the concept of social capital within two fundamental epistemic frameworks—modernity and Islamic Transcendent Philosophy. Using a descriptive-analytical method grounded in comparative inquiry; it examines the concept and components of social capital in these two intellectual paradigms. The data were organized across three domains: conceptual analysis, ontology, and anthropology. The conceptual comparison of social capital shows that, in modern thought, social capital is primarily defined as a collective resource or asset that emerges through enduring networks of relations among individuals. By contrast, although no exact conceptual equivalent for the term social capital is employed in Transcendent Philosophy, social relations in this philosophical tradition possess a meaning and value that extend far beyond merely worldly functions. From the perspective of Sadrian philosophy, trust, cohesion, and social participation may be understood as extensions of the existential reality of the human being; in this sense, relations among human beings are not merely conventional arrangements or instruments for the exchange of interests, but rather have their roots in the shared nature and primordial disposition of humanity. The differences between modernity and Transcendent Philosophy at the level of philosophical foundations exert a direct influence on the understanding of social capital. The modern worldview is based on autonomous rationality and the separation of the material sphere from the spiritual realm. Finally, the anthropological comparison—that is, the foundations related to human nature—shows that each of the two approaches' understanding of human nature and the ultimate purpose of life plays a decisive role in the interpretation of social capital. Influenced by humanism and Enlightenment individualism, modern anthropology views the human being as an autonomous and rational agent who forms society as an instrument or contract for securing personal interests.

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Introduction

Social capital is one of the most consequential concepts in contemporary social sciences and plays a pivotal role in explaining the quality of human relations and the dynamics of social development. Yet, the vast majority of the literature on this concept has been articulated within the framework of modern Western theories, with comparatively little attention devoted to its resonance in other intellectual traditions. The central question guiding this study is how the concept of social capital can be examined comparatively within two distinct paradigms—one emerging from Western modernity and the other rooted in Islamic Transcendent Philosophy. More specifically, what points of convergence and divergence can be identified between the theoretical foundations of social capital in modern thought and the philosophical principles of Transcendent Philosophy (the Sadrian school), and how might such a comparison deepen our understanding of the issue? This question is significant because social capital is not merely a sociological construct; rather, it functions as a conceptual bridge between the individual and collective spheres and may provide the groundwork for the formation of other forms of human and cultural capital (Putnam, 2000). Accordingly, the absence of

comparative research between modern and Islamic perspectives in this field constitutes a theoretical gap that the present study seeks to address. The significance of the topic can be understood at both theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, a comparative inquiry into social capital in modernity and Transcendent Philosophy contributes to the expansion of interdisciplinary knowledge. In Western political science and sociology, the concept refers to trust-based ties and networks, along with reciprocal norms that facilitate the attainment of collective goals (Daloiz, 1399). Putnam defines social capital as the connections among individuals, including social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that emerge from them (Putnam, 2000), while Fukuyama likewise emphasizes elements such as trust and cooperation grounded in shared norms (Fukuyama, 1995). By contrast, within the Islamic tradition—and especially in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran—the importance of social capital has been more explicitly foregrounded through a religious framework. In a religious society, collective solidarity and mutual trust are regarded as essential conditions for growth and progress, and the institutionalization of religious values in social governance can reinforce the components of social capital

(Zarei, 1398). A comparative reading of these two perspectives opens up the possibility of formulating alternative, locally grounded theoretical foundations in response to dominant Western theories.

A brief review of the literature shows that the concept of social capital has been formulated by numerous theorists in recent decades. Although the origins of the term can be traced back to the early twentieth century, its theoretical consolidation took place through the works produced in the late twentieth century. Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, emphasizing the resources embedded in relational networks (Bourdieu, 1986). James Coleman highlights the role of social capital in facilitating collective action through norms and trust, while Robert Putnam, through works such as *Bowling Alone*, connects the concept of social capital to civic participation and democracy. Accordingly, in modern thought, social capital is understood as an intangible form of social wealth that, through networks, mutual trust, and norms of cooperation, contributes to the formation of the common good and the development of society (Putnam, 2000;

Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The concept of social capital has acquired such significance that some scholars regard it as a foundational driver of sustainable human and economic development, while its erosion or absence is seen as a major source of various social harms (Fuchs & Offe, 2002). In contrast to the empirical orientation through which social capital is commonly theorized within the modern paradigm, a different and more profound perspective can be found in the Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly in Transcendent Philosophy. This school of thought, developed by Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi (Mullā Şadrā-) during the Safavid era, emerged through the synthesis of several major intellectual currents, including Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophy, Islamic mysticism, and theological principles. Transcendent Philosophy is not merely a philosophical system in the narrow sense; rather, it presents a comprehensive vision of both the human being and the world, one that remains intellectually alive and influential within Iranian thought and the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Although most of Mullā Şadrā's writings are devoted to ontological and theological concerns, the social implications embedded in his thought should not be overlooked.

In Ṣadrā's view, the moral and inward development of the human being lays the groundwork for positive transformation in society. He holds that a healthy society emerges from within individuals who have cultivated themselves. For this reason, he regards individual morality as a foundation for the formation of social trust and cohesion. From this perspective, social capital is something far more than institutions or social contracts; rather, it is a reflection of virtue, religiosity, and moral rationality, which becomes manifest in the everyday conduct of members of society. Accordingly, Transcendent Philosophy helps us understand social capital not merely at the level of external relations, but within the very process of human existential growth (Lekzaei, 1387). Recent studies indicate that the religious concepts related to social capital in Mullā Ṣadrā's thought—such as trust, cohesion, and norms arising from divine teachings—although rooted in individual morality, display a form of social functioning remarkably similar to the components recognized in Western theories of social capital once they enter the social sphere. This resemblance suggests that Islamic philosophy, and Transcendent Philosophy in particular, possesses considerable potential for engaging in dialogue with modern social

theories and may play an important role in deepening our understanding of contemporary concepts.

This study seeks to present a comparative account of social capital from two different perspectives: one grounded in theories of modernity and the other rooted in Transcendent Philosophy. To this end, the conceptualization of social capital in modern thought has been placed alongside the ideas of Mullā Ṣadrā and contemporary commentators on his philosophy, so that, through this comparison, the points of convergence and divergence between these two intellectual paradigms may become clearer. The study addresses the issue from two angles. On the one hand, it seeks to better understand the social capacities of Sadrian philosophy and to derive concepts from it that are aligned with social capital; on the other hand, it offers a critical reading of the dominant theories of social capital in the modern world, revisiting them from the standpoint of Islamic philosophy. It is hoped that this research may take a step toward the indigenization of social capital theory and establish a meaningful connection between the Islamic philosophical tradition and contemporary social concerns.

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundations

In the modern literature, social capital refers to the resources embedded in social networks that are formed through trust, shared norms, and voluntary cooperation among individuals, thereby enhancing social cohesion and institutional effectiveness (Putnam, 2000). From the perspective of theorists such as Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, this concept has multiple dimensions, each of which has been approached from a particular angle—whether power, function, or civic virtue (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). By contrast, Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendent Philosophy, drawing on principles such as the primacy of existence, substantial motion, and the unity of intellect and love, offers a different framework for understanding society and human relations. In this framework, human society is not merely the product of mental conventions or material needs, but possesses an existential foundation and a teleological orientation. Social bonds, in this view, are manifestations of the ontological degrees of human beings and the context of their spiritual journey (Motahhari, 1398; Javadi Amoli, 1388). Within such a context, social capital may be understood as a set of moral virtues, inward religious commitments, and faith-based

cohesion that serves a dual function: on the one hand, it makes social order and cohesion possible; on the other, it creates the conditions for the spiritual growth and individual perfection of members of society (Parsania and Jafarzadeh, 1399).

1. Theoretical Foundations of Social Capital in the Modern Paradigm

James Coleman was among the first thinkers to revisit the conceptualization of social capital and to operationalize it with greater precision in the social sciences. In his analysis of this phenomenon, rather than focusing on its intrinsic nature, essence, or inner content, he emphasizes its functions, uses, and practical effects within the context of social structure. From Coleman's perspective, social capital is part of the social structure that enables social actors to access the resources they need and to secure their desired interests. This dimension of social structure comprises three fundamental and constitutive elements. The first is obligations and expectations, which arise on the basis of trust and the reliability of the social environment. The second is information networks and channels of knowledge transmission, which make the flow of data possible within the social structure and serve as the foundation for social action and

rational decision-making. The third is a normative-sanctioning system that, through effective and efficient mechanisms of enforcement, encourages and reinforces certain forms of desirable social behavior while preventing the emergence of unwanted or deviant conduct. Coleman maintains that social capital is built upon these functions and practical effects, and that it may manifest itself in the three forms outlined above (Coleman, 1377). In Coleman's view, social capital is not a single, unified entity; rather, it encompasses a variety of different phenomena that share two common characteristics: first, all of them constitute aspects of social structure, and second, they facilitate certain actions of individuals within that structure (Abdollahi, 1385, p. 180). He further maintains that, as a component of social structure, social capital is productive in much the same way as other forms of capital, since it enables actors to achieve goals that might otherwise remain unattainable in its absence (Field, 2008).

Social capital is broadly understood as the set of norms, obligations, reciprocal relationships, and forms of trust embedded within social relations, social structures, and the institutional hierarchies of society, through which individuals are enabled to pursue both collective and personal

objectives (Coleman, 1990, p. 134). Coleman identifies several factors that contribute to the formation and expansion of social capital, among which mutual assistance and ideology occupy a central position. The act of seeking and providing assistance among individuals strengthens social ties and consequently increases the stock of social capital. By contrast, conditions such as material abundance, extensive welfare provisions, or excessive dependence on governmental support may reduce individuals' need for one another and thereby weaken social capital. Ideological orientations likewise play a significant role in this process. Beliefs centered on mutual support, altruistic action, and acting for the benefit of others contribute directly to the development of social capital. In this regard, religious beliefs that emphasize the moral necessity of helping others and promoting the common good constitute an important foundation for the formation and reinforcement of social capital.

From Coleman's perspective, information is an important form of social capital, representing a potential capacity that constitutes an intrinsic and inseparable feature of social relations. The significance of information lies in the fact that it provides the foundation for action; however, acquiring it

entails costs. At the very least, obtaining information requires attention, and attention is always limited. One of the means through which information can be acquired is through social relations, and the information obtained in this way facilitates action.

Norms: if there are strong and effective norms within social groups that require individuals to set aside personal interests and act in the interest of the collective, social capital will emerge. Alongside his attention to the benefits of social capital, Coleman also considers its costs. He argues that social capital, while facilitating certain forms of action, also imposes constraints on others. From his perspective, the norms prevailing within one domain may reduce innovation in that domain. Coleman maintains that social capital is defined by its function; in his view, it is not a single entity but rather a variety of different things that share two common characteristics: all of them constitute aspects of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals within that structure. Social capital is productive capital and makes the achievement of specific goals possible (Coleman, 1998).

Wendy Stone

In her approach to measuring social capital, Wendy Stone limits the concept to two dimensions: the structure of relationships and the quality of relationships. The relevant elements include the type of relationships (formal and informal), the size of the relational network (broad or limited), and the internal and external structure of relationships. In the Family project, Social Capital and Citizenship in Australia, one of the most comprehensive conceptual frameworks for measuring social capital was developed (Stone, 2001). Based on this framework, social capital is understood as a multidimensional concept that includes networks, trust, and norms, and places emphasis on both the quality of social relations and the structure of those relations.

Pamela Paxton

From Paxton's perspective, social capital consists of objective and subjective, or affective, bonds among members of society. She considers social capital to comprise two important components that reflect the traditional distinction between structure and content in social theory, as well as the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of social capital. Taking these two components into account, she conceptualizes social capital in terms of mutual connections among

individuals, as well as mutual trust, norms, and positive emotions (Ghaffari, 1389).

Robert Putnam

According to Robert Putnam (1983), physical capital refers to tools and equipment, while human capital refers to education and training that enhance an individual's productive capacities. In comparison with these two forms of capital, social capital refers to features of social organization—such as networks, norms, and social trust—that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefit. Putnam likewise conceptualizes social capital in terms of three principal components: networks, norms, and trust. He defines social capital as the networks, norms, and forms of trust that make cooperation and collaboration for mutual advantage more attainable (Fawzul, 2006). Putnam argues that although bonding social capital is useful for preserving existing social arrangements within groups, bridging social capital is more desirable for social advancement and broader development. His principal concern lies in understanding the ways in which social capital influences political regimes and democratic institutions. From Putnam's perspective, social capital consists of concepts such as trust, norms, and networks that foster effective interaction and

participation among members of a community and ultimately secure their mutual interests. He extends the concept of social capital beyond the individual level and is particularly interested in how social capital functions at regional and national levels, as well as in its effects on democratic institutions and, ultimately, economic development. Accordingly, he defines social capital through three core elements—networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust—as fundamental characteristics of social organization (Tavassoli, 1384, p. 14).

Francis Fukuyama

Fukuyama (1999) defines social capital in civil society as the set of norms that permits cooperative behavior among members of a group. He argues that the strength and effectiveness of social capital within a society depend on the extent to which individuals adhere to shared norms and values, as well as on their capacity to set aside personal interests in favor of the common good and collective well-being. From Fukuyama's perspective, social capital consists of a set of informal values and norms shared among members of a group within which cooperation and collaboration are possible. Accordingly, trust, shared values, and common norms constitute the principal

foundations of social capital (Ketabi et al., 1383). In his discussions, Fukuyama also examines the factors that influence the stock of social capital within a society. He maintains that these factors are determined not merely by internal group solidarity, but more importantly by the manner in which groups relate to those outside their own boundaries. Strong moral bonds within a group may, in certain cases, reduce trust toward outsiders and weaken effective cooperation with them. Beyond the role of the state, Fukuyama identifies two additional social factors that significantly shape social capital. The first is religion. Religion continues to be one of the most important sources of culture and is likely to remain so in the future; however, sectarianism may simultaneously exert a particular influence on the accumulation of social capital. The second influential factor in developing societies is globalization (Fukuyama, 1999). Within modernity, social capital is generally understood as a network of social relations, mutual trust, and shared norms that facilitate cooperation and coordination in society (Putnam, 2000). This concept is grounded in instrumental rationality and individualism, where social relations are largely shaped by contracts and individual interests (Giddens, 1991).

2. Theoretical Foundations of Social Capital in the Islamic Paradigm (Transcendent Philosophy)

Transcendent Philosophy, as one of the major schools of Islamic philosophy, approaches society and human relations from a more fundamental and spiritual perspective. Based on the framework, the human being possesses both material and spiritual dimensions, and social life is not defined solely on the basis of worldly interests; rather, it is rooted in divine human nature and oriented toward spiritual perfection (Javadi Amoli, 1388). In Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical system, society is not merely an aggregation of individuals, but a reality endowed with an independent and spiritual identity. From this perspective, society constitutes a context for human perfection and a sphere in which the existential degrees of individuals are manifested through their relations with one another. Based on the framework, social capital is understood not only as a means of establishing social order, but also as a path toward the spiritual elevation and inner refinement of human beings (Motahhari, 1398). According to Martyr Motahhari, society is a real and substantive composite in which individuals, through association and union, acquire a new identity; while retaining their individuality, they become part of a

higher-order whole (Parsania, 1388). This social whole possesses its own distinctive character and culture and can shape the path toward either the felicity or the misery of its members (Motahhari, 1398). According to Martyr Motahhari, society constitutes a real and organic whole in which human beings, through association and social integration, acquire a new identity; while preserving their individuality, they simultaneously become part of a higher and more comprehensive order (Parsania, 1388). This social whole possesses its own distinctive character and cultural identity and is capable of guiding its members toward either human flourishing or decline (Motahhari, 1398). In Transcendent Philosophy, social relations are deeply intertwined with concepts such as compassion, fraternity, benevolent regard toward others, justice, and cooperation. Based on this philosophical perspective, many social concepts are discussed under the category of *i'tibāriyyāt*—that is, conventional and relational constructs that arise from the social and practical dimensions of human existence. From the perspective of Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Mullā Ṣadrā, *i'tibāriyyāt* are matters that have no objective basis in external reality, but are posited by the human practical intellect in order to facilitate social life (Tabataba'i, 1363). For example,

concepts such as ownership, law, justice, and even social covenants are regarded as such constructs, introduced for the purpose of securing order and collective welfare. Within this framework, social capital can be understood as a set of positive *i'tibāriyyāt* governing relations among individuals—such as trust, benevolent regard, fidelity to commitments, self-sacrifice, and cooperation. Although these constructs take shape in the form of mental and customary conventions, they are rooted in fundamental human needs and in the human inclination toward social life (Parsania and Jafarzadeh, 1399). In other words, from the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, the stronger ethical values and human virtues become within a society, the richer and more enduring its social capital will be, since social bonds are formed on the basis of compassion, faith, and fairness rather than merely on utilitarian or interest-based contracts. In addition to these philosophical foundations, Islamic religious teachings—which occupy an important place in Transcendent Philosophy—also play a central role in the formation of social capital. The Qur'an instructs believers to “hold firmly together to the rope of God and do not become divided” (Qur'an 3:103), and likewise emphasizes cooperation in righteousness and piety (“And

cooperate in righteousness and piety” (Qur’an 5:2). These teachings, which have been extensively interpreted by Muslim philosophers and exegetes, indicate that, from an Islamic perspective, social cohesion and mutual trust are not only desirable but even morally imperative, as they preserve the vitality and flourishing of society (Javadi Amoli, 1388). Ayatollah Javadi Amoli further maintains that a society founded upon faith and spirituality acquires an organic unity among its members, enabling moral virtues such as trustworthiness, truthfulness, and mutual care to flourish within it (Javadi Amoli, 1388). In such a society, social capital serves not only material welfare, but also the pursuit of nearness to God and ultimate spiritual fulfillment. For instance, Hamid Parsania (1398) argues that the Islamic principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil may be understood as a mechanism that strengthens mutual responsibility and collective moral oversight, thereby enhancing social trust and cohesion and safeguarding social capital. Accordingly, in the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, social capital is not merely a set of mutually beneficial relations; rather, it represents the manifestation of morality and spirituality within the social sphere. The more deeply human relations are infused with spiritual

insight and religious values, the more profound and enduring the resulting social capital becomes. This perspective offers a critical complement to the modern understanding of social capital. While acknowledging the importance of social structures and civil institutions, it maintains that the animating spirit governing these structures must be grounded in wisdom and virtue if genuine and lasting social capital is to emerge.

Components of Social Capital in the Islamic Paradigm (Transcendent Philosophy)

1. The Theory of Substantial Motion

In Mullā Ṣadrā’s thought, being is in a constant state of motion. This motion is neither superficial nor merely external; rather, it proceeds from within the very substance of things. In other words, it is not only the color or form of things that changes, but the things themselves that undergo continuous transformation. This doctrine, known as the theory of Substantial Motion, teaches that permanence is not a characteristic of the material world; what truly exists is perpetual becoming (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirazi, 1380). The human being likewise exists within this universal flow of being; however, through consciousness, free

will, and intentional choice, human beings possess the capacity to determine the direction of their own becoming. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the human soul is material and bodily in its origin, yet throughout the course of life—and through experience, knowledge, and spiritual wayfaring—it can gradually attain an immaterial and spiritual mode of existence. This is the principle expressed in his well-known formulation, “corporeal in origination and spiritual in subsistence” (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa rūḥāniyyat al-baqāʾ*), which he emphasizes in *al-Asfār*. From this perspective, the human being is not a closed or fixed entity, but rather an open and dynamic project capable of self-formation (Motahhari, 1384). From the Sadrian perspective, the human being, through the process of Substantial Motion, moves closer to higher degrees of perfection with every stage of spiritual development. Yet this perfection is not merely individual or inward in nature; it also carries profound social consequences. A spiritually developed human being is characterized by existential expansiveness, moral refinement, and a readiness to live harmoniously with others. Such a person, while striving for individual transcendence, simultaneously contributes to the improvement of social relations. It is at this point that the concept of social capital

emerges as a sphere in which the outcomes of Substantial Motion become manifest. Each time an individual advances along the path of perfection and acquires virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, and altruism, the quality of human relations is correspondingly elevated. In the Sadrian tradition, individual perfection therefore leads directly to the strengthening of social capital. Put differently, if each individual is imagined as a node within the social network, Substantial Motion enables that node to become more enlightened, more effective, and more ethically grounded. The cumulative result of this individual transformation appears collectively in the form of greater trust, stronger social cohesion, and broader participation. In this sense, the theory of Substantial Motion may be understood as a philosophical foundation for the cultivation of social capital in contemporary Islamic society. One of the key dimensions of Substantial Motion is its teleological orientation. Mullā Ṣadrā explicitly maintains that the movement of the human being within the order of existence is neither aimless nor accidental; rather, it is directed toward a transcendent end—namely, nearness to God. For this reason, Substantial Motion requires guidance, and within the Sadrian system this guidance is provided through religion and

ethics (Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi, 1380). Within this perspective, the Sharia is understood not as a rigid body of legal injunctions, but as a comprehensive order that regulates the existential movement of the human being and provides an appropriate ground for the emergence of moral virtues. When the Sharia governs social life, the conditions for the spiritual and ethical growth of individuals become more conducive, and as a consequence, social capital is able to flourish within that framework (Javadi Amoli, 1393). Accordingly, on the basis of the theory of Substantial Motion in Transcendent Philosophy, no human or social condition is regarded as final or immutable. In light of this perspective, the Muslim human being is understood as a dynamic and transformative being, constantly moving toward perfection while simultaneously influencing the surrounding social world. From this standpoint, social capital in an Islamic society is not merely the outcome of social policies or institutional planning; rather, it emerges from the cultivation of individuals who have embarked upon the path of self-development and spiritual refinement. The relationship between these two concepts reveals that social capital in a religious society can only be realized through the moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth of its

members. Transcendent Philosophy, therefore, may provide an indigenous and value-oriented foundation for the analysis and strengthening of social capital in the Islamic world. A society whose members are engaged in the process of Substantial Motion will be characterized by trust, social cohesion, participation, and solidarity—and this is precisely the kind of society envisioned in the Islamic ideal of the virtuous community.

2. Rationality and Social Capital in Transcendent Philosophy

In Sadrian philosophy, reason (‘aql) occupies a station beyond the realms of matter and imagination; it is a level of being that exerts influence upon lower ontological planes while remaining unaffected by them. In other words, although reason acts as the governing and directing principle of the lower realms, it retains its independence and stability in the face of their influences (Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi, 1981). In Islamic philosophy—particularly in the thought of Mullā Şadrā—reason must be understood in relation to the broader hierarchy of human existence. Within this intellectual framework, the human being is not merely a material body, but a multi-layered reality. The first level is the material dimension, which includes the physical body

and corporeal faculties. The second is the imaginal realm, encompassing the faculty of imagination and the capacity for mental representation. Beyond these, however, lies the higher faculty of reason, through which the human being is able to apprehend universal concepts and the fundamental truths of existence. In this sense, reason is not merely an instrument of thought; rather, it represents the elevated and perfected dimension of human existence itself (Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi, 1981). In Transcendent Philosophy, there exists a fundamental principle known as “corporeal in origination and spiritual in subsistence” (jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa rūḥāniyyat al-baqā’), which clearly explains the developmental trajectory of the human being. According to this principle, human existence begins at the material level and gradually advances, through the intermediate stages of imagination and the imaginal realm, toward a higher mode of being—namely, the intellect. As long as the individual has not attained this rational stage, his or her character remains largely influenced by the body, environmental conditions, and external factors such as culture, history, and geography. In other words, changes in bodily or environmental circumstances may alter one’s beliefs, moral dispositions, and even

patterns of behavior (Hasanzadeh Amoli, 1371). However, once the individual reaches the stage of intellectual maturity—where reason, as the highest ontological faculty, becomes fully actualized within the human being—personal characteristics acquire stability and coherence. The reason for this is that, unlike the body and the faculty of imagination, the intellect is not subject to external fluctuations and transformations. Consequently, a person whose rational faculty has attained actuality remains inwardly stable in the face of external change, and his or her character reaches a degree of firmness that is no longer disrupted by every shifting condition of the surrounding environment (Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi, *al-Asfār al-Arba‘a*, vol. 3, p.461). In contrast to the conception of reason advanced in many modern theories—where it is primarily understood as an instrument for calculation and utility-based decision-making—reason in Transcendent Philosophy occupies a far deeper and more comprehensive position. Within the Sadrian intellectual framework, reason is not employed merely for the organization of everyday material affairs; rather, it serves as the principal guide directing the existential journey of the human being toward perfection. From this perspective, reason is not simply a

managerial or instrumental faculty, but a transformative power that guides human beings toward meaning, ethical coexistence, and authentic participation in social life. With such an understanding of rationality, social capital in the Sadrian perspective acquires a significance that extends far beyond contractual ties or interest-driven relations. Here, social capital emerges from within the very process of the soul's growth and perfection, while concepts such as trust, participation, and social cohesion are understood as fruits arising from practical reason. In Sadrian philosophy, practical reason is the faculty through which good is distinguished from evil and human relations are ordered on the basis of morality and justice (Motahhari, 1398). Accordingly, every social action within this framework carries not only an ethical dimension, but also an ontological significance. For example, when an individual participates in charitable or benevolent activities, such an act is not motivated merely by self-interest or utility; rather, it represents the manifestation of a particular stage of inner growth and spiritual wayfaring. In some respects, this perspective may be compared to Habermas's theory of communicative rationality; yet the fundamental difference lies in its deeper metaphysical foundations. In Transcendent

Philosophy, rationality is not concerned solely with establishing communication, but with the existential becoming of the human being itself—the movement from mere being toward becoming within the horizon of existential perfection. In Transcendent Philosophy, rationality occupies a foundational and multi-layered position. Through an integrative approach that brings together reason, mystical unveiling, and revelation, Mullā Ṣadrā understands reason not merely as an instrument of conceptual analysis, but as a path toward the apprehension of different degrees of being. Within this philosophical system, reason unfolds through four stages: the material intellect (al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī), the potential intellect (al-ʿaql bi'l-malaka), the actual intellect (al-ʿaql bi'l-fi'l), and the acquired intellect (al-ʿaql al-mustafād). These stages reflect a substantial movement from the potentiality of intellect to its actuality within the human soul. Unlike the instrumental conception of reason found in many modern theories, reason in Sadrian philosophy is concerned not only with inference and decision-making, but also with guiding the existential journey of the soul toward perfection. From this perspective, rationality in Transcendent Philosophy is not merely a faculty for managing worldly affairs; rather,

it is an existential and elevating force that leads the human being toward authentic participation, ethical coexistence, and cooperation within the broader horizon of meaning and being.

Substantial Being (*Asālat al-Wujūd*) and Social Capital in Transcendent Philosophy On the basis of the ontological and anthropological principles of Sadrian philosophy, whenever a group of individuals engaged in social interaction share common beliefs, interests, attachments, and values, this condition may indicate a form of unity at the inner level of their existence. Consequently, such a society can no longer be regarded as a merely conventional or nominal aggregation; rather, it possesses a collective “spirit” that constitutes the very source of its ontological reality (Parsania, 1391). Transcendent Philosophy emphasizes that human beings, in addition to their material and bodily dimension—which differentiates them from one another—possess a non-material dimension governed by the laws of the immaterial realm. According to this perspective, in non-material worlds—whether at the level of the imaginal realm (*‘ālam al-mithāl* or *barzakh*) or at the level of pure

intellects—human souls are capable of attaining a kind of existential unity. Such unity, from the standpoint of reason, is not only possible but is also fully demonstrable and coherent within the Sadrian philosophical system (Parsania, 1388). Mullā Ṣadrā, particularly in *al-Asfār al-Arba‘a*, offers a meticulous analysis of this issue and formulates it as a fundamental principle. Critiquing earlier Peripatetic philosophers—most notably Ibn Sīnā—who denied the unity of the knower and the known (*ittiḥād al-‘āqil wa’l-ma‘qūl*) in the realm of cognition, he argues that any genuine act of knowledge necessarily entails the existential presence of the known within the knower. In the process of cognition, the human soul encounters the immaterial form of the known within itself and, in a sense, becomes identical with it. In this way, the knower and the known-in-as-much-as-it-is-known become united in existence, and the duality between them is removed. Mullā Ṣadrā extends this principle beyond intellectual cognition to the levels of imaginative and sensory perception as well, since, in his view, even sensible and imaginal forms are immaterial in nature. Accordingly, through every act of perception, the

human soul undergoes an inner existential elevation toward a higher ontological level (Kalantari, 1386). On this basis, the principle of the unity of knower and known becomes one of the central pillars of epistemology in Transcendent Philosophy, according to which the levels of knowledge correspond to nothing other than the degrees of the soul's existential expansion (Shajari, 1391). The more a human being learns, reflects, or engages in imaginative contemplation of a subject, the more their existential reality is, in effect, expanded, and the more intimately they become united with the truth of that object in the imaginal and intellectual realms. According to Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in the process of cognition the soul attains a new degree of existential expansion and actualizes the reality of the known within its own being. Accordingly, sensory, imaginal, and intellectual perception differ only in the intensity of abstraction, not in the fundamental existential unity between the soul and the object of perception (Kalantari, 1386). From this perspective, all domains of human consciousness—from particular sensory perceptions to intellectual and intuitive apprehensions—are

manifestations of the soul's existential connection with a single immaterial reality. One of the profound implications of this foundation is that both love and genuine knowledge bring about a similar form of ontological unity. When a person comes to know something or develops love toward it, an existential unity is, in fact, established between the soul and the imaginal or intellectual dimension of the object. Mullā Ṣadrā traces the origin of love to the longing for unity, arguing that true union is only fully realized in the realm of immaterial beings, where two existents may genuinely become one. Loving a beloved, therefore, signifies encountering its perfected form within the mirror of the lover's soul. Since the true beloved cannot be a corporeal entity—because matter itself constitutes a veil that prevents real union—the lover's soul is compelled to ascend toward the imaginal and intellectual realms in order to attain union with the beloved. It is at this level that the unity between lover and beloved is actualized, and the lover's soul is transformed into an imaginal form of the beloved. In this way, the more a human being's knowledge and love of a given reality increase, the more their existence becomes united with that

reality. This unity does not, however, imply the negation of individual identities in the empirical world; rather, it signifies the sharing and convergence of souls within higher ontological horizons. For instance, two individuals who come to know a single truth or who direct their devotion toward one sacred reality are, at the level of intellect and imagination, united in relation to that shared truth, and a form of existential unity is established between their souls. At the apex of this developmental journey, the human being may become united with the Active Intellect (the governing angel of the cosmos), thereby witnessing the totality of existence within the mirror of their own being. In such a station, as Sadrian philosophers express, the Perfect Human functions as the spirit of the world, while all multiplicities become like the body of that universal soul (Shajari, 1391). Although this highest station is reserved for saints and perfected human beings, the very possibility of the union of souls within the imaginal and intellectual realms applies to all human beings. In other words, within the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, human identities become interconnected at supra-material levels of existence, giving

rise to a form of quasi-mystical unity among souls. Knowledge and affection constitute the two principal forces underlying this existential bond, enabling the boundaries of isolated individuality to be transcended within the intelligible and imaginal worlds. Accordingly, the existential union of souls in immaterial realms is not an unfamiliar or irrational notion, but rather a reality that can be understood through philosophical principles such as the unity of the knower and the known. This truth may be clearly demonstrated through the teachings of Mullā Ṣadrā in *al-Asfār*, as well as through the interpretations and elaborations of thinkers such as Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Martyr Motahhari. In harmony with these philosophers of Transcendent Wisdom, it may be said that whenever the human soul ascends beyond the material realm and, through true knowledge or divine love, comes into contact with an immaterial reality, an existential union between the human being and that reality is brought into being. As a consequence of such union, human souls converge within the realm of unity and transcend the multiplicities of outward appearance. This profound philosophical perspective clearly

illustrates why, in Islamic philosophy, genuine knowledge and sincere affection serve to connect human beings both to one another and to the higher realms of existence, thereby establishing among them a deep spiritual unity (Şadr al-Dīn Shirazi, 1981).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive–analytical approach. Comparative research is recognized as a methodological approach within the social sciences and is widely employed in cross-cultural and comparative studies aimed at examining similarities and differences across societies, cultures, or intellectual traditions (Latifnejad, 2022; Esser, 2017). In its simplest form, comparative research involves examining a subject, phenomenon, or case from multiple perspectives and dimensions in order to gain deeper insight into one or all of the cases under comparison (Tim, 2012). One of the most influential frameworks employed in comparative analysis is the model proposed by George F. Bereday, which consists of four stages: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. The Bereday model proceeds as follows: Description Stage: gathering and organizing relevant elements on the basis of available evidence

and data, taking systematic notes, and preparing sufficient findings concerning the subject under investigation. Interpretation Stage: examining and analyzing the descriptive data collected during the first stage in order to uncover their underlying meanings and implications. Juxtaposition Stage: arranging and organizing the findings of the previous stage for comparative analysis, with the aim of constructing a coherent framework through which similarities and differences may be placed alongside one another. Comparison Stage: analyzing and comparing the research problem in light of the identified similarities and differences, and ultimately providing answers to the research questions on that basis (Bereday, 1996).

Comparative Analysis of Modernity and Transcendent Philosophy

This section undertakes a comparative examination of the concept of social capital within two distinct intellectual frameworks: the paradigm of modernity and Transcendent Philosophy. In modern social sciences, social capital generally refers to networks of social relations, mutual trust, and norms of cooperation that facilitate collective action (Putnam, 2000). In Transcendent Philosophy,

however, social relations are understood through a deeper and more ontological perspective rooted in a theologically grounded conception of the human being. Within this philosophical framework, the bonds that connect individuals are not regarded merely as material instruments for the pursuit of worldly interests; rather, they are understood as real and substantial dimensions of human nature itself. In other words, modernity and Transcendent Philosophy approach the concept of social capital on the basis of distinct conceptual, philosophical, and anthropological presuppositions. These foundational differences have led to divergent understandings of both the nature and the function of social capital within each worldview. The following discussion therefore analyzes these differences across three interrelated domains: the conceptual, the philosophical, and the anthropological.

Conceptual Comparison of Social Capital:

In modern thought, social capital is primarily understood as a collective resource or asset that emerges through enduring networks of social relations among individuals. For instance, Bourdieu defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” linked to membership in a durable

network of relationships (Bourdieu, 1986:248). Coleman likewise regards it as a factor that enables social actors to achieve their goals within the social structure (Coleman, 1988). Putnam, in turn, defines social capital as “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000). These definitions indicate that, within the modern framework, social capital possesses a largely functional and instrumental character; that is, it is conceived as a set of relationships and norms that facilitate access to resources—whether material or immaterial—and enable cooperation (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). By contrast, although no exact conceptual equivalent to the term “social capital” appears in Transcendent Philosophy, social relations, on the basis of Sadrian metaphysics, possess a meaning and value that transcend merely worldly or utilitarian functions. From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, trust, social cohesion, and participation may be understood as extensions of the existential reality of the human being. In this sense, relationships among individuals are not viewed merely as conventional constructs or instruments for the exchange of interests; rather, they are rooted in the shared nature and primordial disposition (*fiṭra*) of humanity

itself. Accordingly, within the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, one may speak of a concept analogous to social capital that points toward the spiritual and ethical values governing social relations. Although such values may be expressed in modern discourse through notions such as trust and cooperation, in the Sadrian worldview these norms are understood as manifestations of an existential and perfection-seeking reality within the human being (Khani, 1395).

Philosophical Comparison (Ontological Foundations):

The differences between modernity and Transcendent Philosophy at the level of philosophical foundations exert a direct influence on their respective understandings of social capital. The modern worldview is grounded in autonomous rationality and in the separation of the material sphere from the spiritual realm; consequently, concepts such as social capital are generally interpreted within a secular and empirical framework. In other words, within modern thought, society and social phenomena are treated as autonomous realities that can be understood without reference to metaphysics or the sacred (Khani, 1395). Whether within positivist or interpretive approaches, many modern social theories explain trust and

social cohesion through empirical mechanisms—such as social contracts, mutual interests, or the historical evolution of institutions—while minimizing the role of overarching worldviews or transcendent ends. By contrast, Transcendent Philosophy, through its affirmation of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and its integration of all levels of reality within this foundational principle, advances a unified and ontological understanding of society and human relations. From Mullā Ṣadrā's perspective, reality is not confined to sensible and material beings; rather, it encompasses spiritual dimensions and multiple degrees of existence that, despite their distinctions, remain united through an ontological interconnectedness. By the same logic, human society and interpersonal relations are not regarded merely as mental constructs or purely social conventions, but as modes of existence grounded in the very reality of the human being (Parsania, 1391). As Khani (1395) explains, the relationship between real beings—namely human individuals endowed with both spiritual and bodily identity—and conventional entities, such as social structures and institutions created by human beings, resembles the relationship between the soul and the body (Khani, 1395). This implies that society and its institutions,

although constructed by human beings and therefore conventional in nature, nevertheless possess an existential rootedness through their union with the reality of the human being—that is, with the collective soul or shared human *fiṭra*. Consequently, they constitute realities that remain inherently connected to and dependent upon human existence itself. From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, therefore, social capital—understood as trust, solidarity, and positive interpersonal norms—is not merely an instrument for maintaining social order, but rather a manifestation of the existential reality of the human being within the social sphere. Such a philosophical approach implies that strengthening social capital cannot be reduced simply to reinforcing civil institutions or legal frameworks; rather, it must be understood as the cultivation of the existential dimension of the human being in communal life. By contrast, modern social and political philosophy frequently frames the relationship between the individual and society—or between structure and agency—in oppositional terms, often reducing the reality of society to one side of the dichotomy. Transcendent Philosophy, however, affirms a unity-in-multiplicity between the individual and society, while avoiding the reduction of either to the other

(Parsania, 1391). This fundamental ontological distinction demonstrates that, within the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, social capital is interpreted on the basis of objective existential realities and ultimate ends, whereas in modernity it is generally regarded as a human construct designed to facilitate collective life.

Anthropological Comparison (Foundations Concerning Human Nature):

The understanding each framework offers of human nature and the ultimate purpose of life plays a decisive role in shaping its conception of social capital. Modern anthropology, influenced by the humanism and individualism of the Enlightenment era, views the human being as an autonomous and rational agent who forms society as an instrument or contractual arrangement for securing personal interests. For example, within the modern liberal tradition, individuals are assumed to pursue their own self-interest by nature, and social cooperation emerges only insofar as it serves mutual benefit. Within this framework, social trust is likewise understood either as the outcome of rational calculations concerning the costs and benefits of participation with others or as the result of the institutionalization of beneficial

behavioral habits (Coleman, 1988). Even within more collectivist modern approaches—such as Durkheimian theory—although society is regarded as a reality in its own right, human beings are still fundamentally conceived as worldly entities lacking an end beyond material life, and social solidarity is interpreted primarily as a functional mechanism for maintaining social cohesion rather than as part of humanity's spiritual perfection. By contrast, the anthropology of Transcendent Philosophy is founded upon the dual-dimensional nature of the human being—corporeal in origination yet spiritual in subsistence (jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa rūḥāniyyat al-baqā')—as well as upon the soul's substantial movement toward perfection (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1386). On this basis, the human being is understood as a creature endowed with a divine primordial nature (fiṭra) and the capacity for perfection. Human beings are not only dependent upon social relations at the material level for survival—reflecting the notion of the human as naturally social (madanī bi'l-ṭab') emphasized by both Islamic philosophers and Aristotle—but also require social interaction for spiritual growth and the actualization of their human potentialities (Jawadi Amoli, 1393). In other words, within Sadrian anthropology, the social dimension of the

human being is an extension of the spiritual dimension. Trust in others and social cooperation are therefore not merely functional behaviors; rather, they are rooted in the divine nature of the human being, which inclines the person toward goodwill, justice, and benevolence in relation to others. Such a perspective leads to an understanding of phenomena such as social capital that extends beyond their observable social functions and includes spiritual and identity-forming dimensions as well. In this framework, social trust and cohesion ultimately contribute to the actualization of the spiritual perfections of both individuals and communities. For example, when values such as altruism, honesty, and trustworthiness prevail within a society, a high level of social capital—manifested in trust and solidarity emerges. This not only contributes to the material development of society but also strengthens among its members a shared sense of meaning and common destiny (Parsania, 1391). Such a condition may be understood as the manifestation of a collective unity grounded in fiṭra—a unity in which both the individual and society move together along a shared path of perfection. By contrast, if anthropology is reduced solely to the material dimension—as has occurred in certain modern schools of thought—social

capital likewise becomes merely contractual in nature and reducible to utilitarian interactions. Under such conditions, in the absence of external supervision or immediate self-interest, it may rapidly disintegrate. From this perspective, one of the principal strengths of the approach offered by Transcendent Philosophy lies in its recognition of enduring inner ethical foundations for trust and cooperation—foundations capable of sustaining social capital even under difficult circumstances, because individuals regard virtuous conduct and trustworthiness as inherently valuable through the dictates of conscience and primordial human nature, rather than merely as instruments of temporary advantage. Ultimately, the foregoing discussion demonstrates how the paradigms of modernity and Transcendent Philosophy lead to fundamentally different conceptions of social capital. Within the modern paradigm, social capital is treated as a measurable social variable, the growth of which is associated with improvements in civic participation, public trust, and the efficiency of governance (Putnam, 2000). In other words, within the modern paradigm, social capital is understood as a product of the particular historical conditions of modern societies and is therefore regarded as something that can be

strengthened through secular policy-making and institutional design. By contrast, within the paradigm of Transcendent Philosophy, social capital constitutes a dimension of the perfection of both the human being and society. From this perspective, social trust and cohesion are not merely the outcomes of external factors such as political or economic structures—but are rooted in the inner transformation of individuals and communities. The more the members of a society advance along the path of ethical refinement and the cultivation of virtue, the deeper and more enduring the resulting social capital becomes. Accordingly, in Transcendent Philosophy, social capital is not merely a social instrument, but rather the manifestation of transcendent values within the sphere of communal life. This fundamental distinction leads the theories and policies emerging from each paradigm to envision markedly different trajectories for society. In summary, modernity emphasizes the construction of appropriate institutions for generating trust, whereas Transcendent Philosophy insists upon the cultivation of virtuous human beings as the true foundation of lasting trust and social solidarity. A profound understanding of these conceptual and foundational differences can significantly enrich social analysis and open

new horizons for social theorization. Indeed, some contemporary studies have suggested that, by drawing inspiration from Transcendent Philosophy, it may be possible to formulate a new conceptual framework for the social sciences—and particularly for the theory of social capital—within the context of a modern Islamic civilization (Basiti & Ashiri, 1399).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates that the conceptualization of social capital is fundamentally dependent upon the intellectual and philosophical framework within which it is formulated. Within the paradigm of modernity, social capital is primarily conceived as an instrument for the attainment of collective goals: a network of social relations and reciprocal trust that enhances the efficiency of the social system and can therefore be measured, managed, and strategically reinforced. By contrast, within the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, social capital is understood as a spiritual and existential inheritance that reflects the degree to which human virtues have become actualized within society. This perspective emphasizes that the flourishing of genuine social capital depends upon the ethical and spiritual elevation of human beings and

cannot be produced solely through external institutional arrangements. Accordingly, one of the central findings of this study is that social capital is not a one-dimensional concept. On the one hand, it possesses a structural and functional dimension; on the other hand, it contains a value-laden and existential dimension—an aspect that is particularly foregrounded within Transcendent Philosophy. The integration of these two dimensions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of social capital and reveal that preserving and strengthening it within society requires attention not only to the external organization of social life, but equally to the inner development of the human being (Khani, 1395). The final analysis further reveals that both modernity and Transcendent Philosophy possess distinctive strengths and limitations in explaining social capital. The modern approach, through its empirical methods and objective indicators, has successfully demonstrated the practical significance of social networks and trust in political and economic development, while also drawing the attention of policymakers to the importance of social capital. At the same time, however, because of its secular anthropological foundations, this approach has at times proven incapable of adequately

explaining the ethical and spiritual roots of trust. Consequently, the decline of social capital in modern societies—such as the erosion of civic participation, which Putnam famously described through the metaphor of “bowling alone”—has often been attributed merely to external or surface-level causes. By contrast, Transcendent Philosophy, through its holistic vision, elucidates the profound relationship between individual ethics, spirituality, and social life. It explains why social bonds within a faith-based society tend to be more enduring and meaningful: namely because such bonds are understood as extensions of the human being’s relationship with transcendent reality itself (Jawadi Amoli, 1393). Nevertheless, despite its philosophical depth, the approach of Transcendent Philosophy has not yet been developed or operationalized in the domain of social theory to the same extent as the modern paradigm, and therefore remains in need of conceptual translation into the field of applied social sciences (Basiti & Ashiri, 1399).

Practical Recommendations for Cultural Policy-Making

In light of the findings of this study, several policy-oriented recommendations can be proposed for strengthening social capital.

First, the reinforcement of spiritual and ethical values should be regarded as a fundamental infrastructure for the development of social capital. In other words, programs such as civic participation training, life-skills education, or anti-corruption initiatives will be more effective when they are meaningfully integrated with the moral and philosophical teachings of society. For instance, the capacities of religious and educational institutions can be utilized to promote, in a practical and lived manner, concepts such as trust, mutual respect, justice, and altruism—values that are also strongly emphasized in religious texts. Such an approach leads to the formation of culturally grounded social capital, which is far more sustainable than purely bureaucratically engineered forms of social capital. Second, the design of civil institutions and social legislation should be based on indigenous indicators and contextual cultural foundations. Given that social capital is deeply influenced by underlying intellectual and philosophical frameworks, policy-making should avoid uncritical imitation of secular Western models. Instead, institutional design should emerge from the cultural, ethical, and philosophical realities of the society in question, ensuring greater coherence between

social structures and the values that sustain them. For example, institutions such as the extended family structure or the mosque as a focal point of local community life in Islamic culture perform functions that can be mobilized as sources for strengthening social capital. Policies that facilitate family-oriented and community-based interactions around mosques and cultural centers hold a distinctive place within the framework of Transcendent Philosophy, as these settings constitute natural and spiritual networks for the transmission of trust and mutual support. Third, social justice—as a key pillar of social capital, particularly from the ethical standpoint of Transcendent Philosophy—must be placed at the forefront of governance objectives. A review of existing studies indicates that injustice and inequality can weaken public trust and ultimately undermine social cohesion. Conversely, the greater the perception of justice and human dignity within a society, the stronger the tendency of individuals toward cooperation and sincere participation (Putnam, 2000). Accordingly, inspired by Transcendent Philosophy, which grounds justice in ontological truths and in the inherent dignity of the human being, justice must be strengthened across all domains—economic, judicial, and cultural—in order to reinforce

the foundations of social capital. It appears that the strengthening of social capital requires the simultaneous participation of the state, civil institutions, and the public. The comparative analysis of modernity and Transcendent Philosophy in relation to social capital has demonstrated that a profound understanding of social phenomena and the formulation of effective strategies is not possible without attending to their underlying philosophical and anthropological foundations. Every society constructs its social capital within the framework of its own values and belief systems. Therefore, for societies that possess a rich intellectual and religious heritage, relying exclusively on imported models may not yield meaningful or sustainable outcomes (Parsania, 1391; Basiti & Ashiri, 1399). From a broader perspective, it may be hoped that through the continuation of such research and intellectual dialogue, the future of social sciences will offer a more comprehensive account of human and social capital, ultimately contributing to the formation of a new Islamic civilization grounded in Islamic philosophical foundations.

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