

The Opening Session of the BtSM 2009
Speech of
Dr. Mohsen Tawfik
The National Coordinator of BtSM 2009

Dear BTSM 2009 partners, participants and guests.

First of all I would like to welcome all of you and in particular those who arrived in Cairo from abroad to participate in this event. Let me tell you my fellow colleagues, that, you are now on the land which is the cradle of the most ancient civilizations on the earth; a civilization that is based on both science and wisdom and extended over thousands of years.

Two years ago, when the BTSM 2007 meeting in Vancouver decided that Egypt will be the venue of the next BtSM 2009 meeting I had a mixed feeling. I was proud that Egypt has been chosen as the first place out of Europe and North America. But at the same time I was really anxious, what could happen in two years in this part of the world which used to witness troubles and wars. I was nervous also since I know that I will be the one who is responsible for the organization of this international event at the national level. My dear friend Jan Viseer and I used to share our dreams on better world and I was a common factor in both the Netherlands and Canada's events. The first question was who could be the partner institution or the sponsor in Egypt.

I thought first about my university, Ain Shams University in Cairo to be the partner or one of the sponsors. When Jan came to Cairo last year, we met with the vice-president of the university who welcomed the

idea. But because of the time of the event in May where all university staff and administration are busy at the end of the academic year and some other difficulties, I decided to approach other potential partners in Egypt. The first approached was Dr. Magued Osman, the chairman of the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center. For me, it was a very pleasant surprise to get his immediate and spontaneous positive response. He agreed to sponsor Btism 2009; I think that Jan shared me the same warm feeling when we later met together with Dr. Osman who showed encouraging and sincere support. UNESCO is a natural partner of the Btism, where the two last Btism meetings were organized under its patronage. It was then the right time to get the support from my dear friend Dr. Tarek shawki, the director of UNESCO regional office in Cairo. He did not hesitate to give his full moral and financial support to the event. In one of his visits to Cairo I introduced Jan to a dear friend of mine, Dr. Adly Bishay the chairman of Fedaa, an NGO working for sustainable development in Egypt. Jan was fascinated by the place in old Cairo and Dr. Adly agreed to be a solid partner where he agreed to have Fedaa premises as the venue of the meetings of the Btism 2009 on its last four days.

Dear Friends,

Let me tell you that huge efforts have been exerted to coordinate between the three Egyptian partners of Btism 2009 and to make your stay in Cairo confirmable and enjoyable. Let me, first in your name; thank UNESCO Cairo for its generous financial support, shared by IDSC that enabled both the participation of some of the participants as well as to the coverage of costs of meeting. Let me also thank Fedaa for providing us with its beautiful premises and facilities. Special thanks go to IDSC which dedicated a full team of engineers, technician's administrators, drivers and workers to organize the catering,

transportation and provide the technical support, as well as the equipment. We are lucky to have such wonderful partners; IDSC as a national prestigious Think Tank, UNESCO the intellectual organization of the UN, and Fedra as a reputable NGO. You have been constantly exchanging e-mails with Jan who played also the role of interface between you and local organizations here.

Dear friends

You are here now and it's our pleasure to have you in Cairo. Let us discuss now what we should do here to promote the Btism movement. I say movement and not just an event. Besides participating at the three international events on the Btism I have also organized two national Btism events. While being in India as the director of UNESCO Asia Pacific regional bureau based in New Delhi, I organized a national Btism meeting in August 2005 in corporation with the Indian academy of science. Just last week we had in the IDSC in Cairo the first national meeting on the same subject and the good news that Dr. Magued Osman idsc chairman agreed to turn it to a National action research project. Btism should continue not only as an international event but also as international and national movements. We are in great need for a proper scientific mind to ensure peace and development all over the world. It is my intension to give this event in Cairo a special flavor at this very special part of the world and I hope you will enjoy it.

Distinguished participants,

Science has been extraordinary successful in increasing knowledge. This has been of great benefit to humanity. Meanwhile, new knowledge and technological know-how increase our power to act. But science doesn't tell us how to use this power. Most of the modern global

problems have arisen in this way; global warming, threats posed by modern armaments (conventional, chemical, biological and nuclear). All these distinctively modern crises have been made possible by the imperfection of scientific knowledge where modern science dissociated from the rational pursuit of wisdom. So actually something else is needed as the perfect mind.

Actually, we need a new kind of inquiry, let's call it wisdom-inquiry, of which scientific knowledge forms an integral part, wisdom-inquiry be an instrument of rational learning designed to help the humanity in realizing what is of most value to us as we live.

Wisdom-inquiry could be a solution to the profoundly important, fundamental, but much neglected philosophical problem: what kind of inquiry can best help humanity learn how to make progress towards a civilized world?

In fact, there are two fundamental problems that we have to tackle:

Problem 1: how can we understand our human world, embedded as it is with in the physical universe, in such a way that justice is to be both to the richness of meaning and value of human life on the one hand, and to what modern science tells us about the physical universe on the other hand?

Problem 2: assuming that knowledge and understanding can be of value in themselves and from a part of civilized life and granted that the basic task is to help humanity achieve what is of value for a wiser and more civilized world by cooperatively rational means, so the question is what ought to be the overall aims and methods of science.

Both problems have played a central role in the history of thought. The first problem begins with Democritus; aspects of the problem can be found in the writings of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant and in

more recent times, has been of concern to such diverse thinkers as whitehead, Russell, Stebbing, Popper, Dennett, Nagel and Searle.

The second problem occupies a central place in the thought of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle; it is basic to the work of Francis Bacon, Descartes, Locke; it has a fundamental role to play in the enlightenment thought of the 18th century; and that aspect of the problem that has to do with the pursuit of knowledge has continued to play a central role in philosophy and philosophy of science down to the present.

The first problem includes the mind/body problem, the problem of free will and determinism, and the problem of the relationship between facts and values. It includes also problems concerning the relationship between perceptual and physical properties, and problems concerning the relationship between different branches of the sciences, from physics via biology to psychology. It involves problems concerning the interpretation of the neurosciences, Darwinian Theory; and it involves questions concerning scientific realism, scientific essentialism and instrumentalism.

The second problem includes standard epistemological and methodological problems about scientific progress, the rationality of science, the aims and methods of natural and social science. But it goes beyond these standard issues in embracing the whole of academic inquiry- the humanities, technological research and education in addition to natural and social science- and in raising the question of how inquiry, in this broad sense, can best help people in raising the question of how inquiry, in this broad sense, can best help people realize what is genuinely of value in life. It is very definitely not assumed that the proper intellectual aim inquiry is knowledge.

These two problems are, of course, interconnected in many ways, the first concerns how it is possible for life of value to exist in the physical

universe. The second presumes that the first has been solved and seeks to discover what kind of inquiry can best help; of value to flourish in the physical universe. Taken together, they ought, but are not, to be regarded as the fundamental problems of philosophy of science and metaphysics but also moral and political philosophy.

They may be regarded as two aspects of an even more fundamental problem: how can life of value best flourish in the real world? This is indeed, in my view, the proper basic problem, not just for philosophy, but for all of science and scholarship. It is our fundamental problem in life, practical, theoretical and conceptual, personal, social and global. Typical of the claim that science is deficient if it cannot prescribe ethics is this speech from Michael Crichton's *Jurassic park* (where would these articles be without him?):

"Largely through science, billions of us live in one small world.... But science cannot help us decide what to do with that world, or how to live. Science can make a nuclear reactor, but it cannot tell us not to build it. Science can make pesticides but cannot tell us not to use it... and { the power science gives} will force everyone to ask the same question- what should I do with my power?- which is the very question science says it cannot answer."

Yesterday I remembered something said by Einstein

"Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love"

"How on earth are you ever going to explain in terms of chemistry and physics so important a biological phenomenon as first love?"

Finally, I would act in the same way as advised by my professor 25 years ago

"Seek perfection" and I hope to seek perfection of the scientific mind.

Thank you for you attention.