

Home > What do You Know about Islamic Economics? > Science of Economics and Doctrine: History and Ethics > Difference is in Function, not Label

Science of Economics and Doctrine: History and Ethics

The difference which we have scrutinized between the science of economics and the economic doctrine, that is, between researching what already is and what ought to be, is similar to that between the science of history and the ethical researches. In its general policy, the science of history agrees with the science of economics. In the process of evaluation and assessment, the policy of ethical researches is similar to the economic doctrine.

People generally agree on making a distinction between the science of history and the ethical researches. They know that historians tell them, for example, the reasons which led to the downfall of the Roman Empire at the hands of the Germanic people, and the reasons which caused the crusades to erupt against Palestine and the failure of all of those crusades, the circumstances which contributed to the assassination of Julius Caesar while enjoying the zenith of his victory and glory, or those that led to the murder of and revolution against Othman ibn Affan, etc.

History studies all of these events, discovering their causes and interrelations to each other, the results they brought forth and the developments in various fields. As a science, it confines itself to scientifically discovering such causes, interrelations and results; it does not evaluate events ethically.

Within its scientific scope, history does not judge Caesar's or Othman's assassination to be ethically "right" or to be deviated from lofty moral ethics of conduct. Nor is it its job to evaluate the crusades or the invasion of Rome by the Germanics as being "just" or "unjust".

The evaluation of all of these events is linked to ethical researches. In the light of the ethical criteria of deeds can we judge, from the ethical viewpoint, that this deed is just or unjust, or that a certain norm of behavior is straight or crooked, deviated..., or whatever.

Just as the science of history describes a conduct or an event as it took place, the ethical researcher comes later on with his general criteria to evaluate; so does the scientist of economics describe the

events of the economic life, and the promoter of the economic doctrine comes later on to evaluate such events, defining the method on whose bases the economic life has to be regulated, all in accordance to the general concepts of justice and equality each one of these upholds.

Economics is Similar to any other Science

What we have said, while discussing the function of the science of economics—indicating that it is confined to discovery alone, rather than to evaluation and assessment—is not restricted only to the science of economics. The basic function of all sciences is discovery.

There is no difference between the economists and physicists, nuclear scientists, astronomers, psychologists, etc. except that the first perform their function in man's economic field while the others perform this one: the discovering of facts, the latter's interrelations and the laws governing their various fields of external physical nature, or of the human nature.

The scientist researches natural physics, for e.g., studying various speeds of light, sound and other such matters, discovering their precise equations. The scientist deals with the atom, that is to say, the nuclear scientist studies the atom's structure, the number of its electrons and neutrons, and the laws governing its movement. The astronomer studies the large planets in the cosmos and the laws that regulate their orbiting. The psychologist studies mental vision, its psychological implications and the elements which affect it.

From his own particular angle, the economist discovers the laws of economic phenomena, whether or not they are natural, such as the phenomenon of crop underproduction, or social, such as the phenomenon of the rise or fall of prices in the free market according to the degree of demand. All of these, scientifically speaking, are discoveries, not evaluations.

Difference is in Function, not Label

In the light of what has passed, you have come to know the fact that the difference between the science of economics and the economic doctrine stems from their difference in function. The function of the science of economics is to discover the economic phenomena and their interrelations, while the function of the economic doctrine is to find a way to regulate the economic life as it should be according to its own concepts of equity.

Upon such a basis, we realize the error of the attempts that aim at subjectively differentiating between the science of economics and the economic doctrine by simply saying that the science of economics deals with production and its laws and the elements which help its growth, while the economic doctrine deals with distribution, its regulations and the interrelations which rise among the society's individuals on its basis.

Such attempts are wrong because we have already seen from the previous examples—which we provided in order to differentiate between the science and the doctrine—that the economic doctrine deals with both production and distribution (refer to the third example above), whereas the science of economics deals with both distribution and production (refer to the first and second examples above).

The “iron law of wages,” as the second example explained, is a scientific law in spite of its relevance to distribution and the regulation of production. Based on economic freedom, or the basis of a central state supervision, it is considered as one of the issues of the doctrine in spite of its being a research in production.

It is wrong, therefore, to judge a research that deals with production as being “scientific,” while labeling it as “doctrinal” if it deals with distribution. The distinguishing mark between the scientific research and the doctrinal one is the relationship such a research has with either the world of reality or with that of justice and equity.

If the research deals with the economic life as it is in the world of reality, then it is “scientific,” but if it searches for justice and for means to affect such justice, then it is “doctrinal.” In other words, the link between the concept and the “injustice” is the general mark of the doctrine which differentiates it from the scientific researches contained in the science of economics.

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