

Ibn Khaldun – Abu Zayd Abd Al Rahman

A Historian of Logic and Evidences

Introduction:

A fourteenth century historian. Born in Tunis in 732H/1332A.D. and died in Egypt 808H/1406A.D. Lived in a period of decline and disintegration in the Islamic world.

His education included traditional Islamic studies, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Arabic poetry, history, math, logic, and metaphysics. He seems to have been acquainted with the philosophy of Aristotle, Plato and the Islamic philosophers such as Al Razi, Al Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd and others.

Served as chamberlain, secretary, ambassador and advisor to various sultans and princes in Andalusia (Spain) and throughout the Maghrib. From 784/1382 till his death in 808/1406 he was a professor of Islamic law at the Azhar university and the grand judge of the Maliki Sunni school of law. In 802/1401 he met with Timurlang to negotiate the peaceful surrender of Damascus.

I- The Muqaddima: (Science of Human Culture)

-Title:

"كتاب العبر وديوان المبتدأ والخبر في أيام العرب والعجم والبربر ومن عاصرهم من ذوي السلطان الأكبر"

-Meaning and significance of the title

‘Ibra-bridge-to cross from event to nature and cause of the event. Ibra synonym with reasoning (nazar) understanding.

-Divisions of the Muqaddima

Three major parts:

- Historiography.
- Science of human culture ('ilm al 'umran al bashari)- the principles of this science as the basis for historical understanding- basic social formation (e.g. nomadic, sedentary- rise of states and civilizations- the laws- (Sunna) that regulate their interaction)
- Islamic institutions and sciences as they evolved up till the 14th century.

II- Ibn Khaldun the Historian

- Concept of History
- Definition of History
- Methodology
- Introduced a philosophical approach to historical writing based on Greek and Islamic philosophy.
- By developing a philosophical methodology for historical research and in his emphasis on society and civilization, Ibn Khaldun distinguished himself within the Greco Islamic tradition.
- History as a search for truth conducted as a logical enquiry based on axiomatic truths (self evident or universally recognized truths), logic and an understanding of regional and chronological peculiarities.
- Inductive and deductive reasoning informed by personal experience and encyclopedic knowledge of the differences in time and place in world history.
- The particular event is understood against its social context- the individual is subordinate to the universal. The general comes before the particular. . In history the focus is on human association, on the collective, on nations, tribes, on human culture or 'Umran.

- Basic Assumptions: Axioms (an established principle or rule).
Each environment and its diet determine physical, mental and spiritual qualities of the inhabitants.
- The rise of two natural groups:
The Bedouins and the Sedentary people.
Contrasting qualities of the two groups.
Bedouins-Badawa- prior in nature (Aqdam)- nomadic society- tribal- no political institutions- their way of life render them tough and disciplined held together by a social bond(asabiyyah) in the harsh environment of the desert.
Sedentary people- Hadara- dwellers of towns and cities- sophistication- luxury- corruption- less conservative- social bond (asabiyyah) confined to fellow citizens, to family members, then it becomes weaker.
- **Is Ibn Khaldun an advocate of the primitive way of life?**
- Asabiyya (Group Feeling) esprit de corps-solidarity. Derived from ‘asab “to bind”...the key to understand the social and cultural development from Badawa to Hadara.
- Man needs the cooperation of others to satisfy his needs-Man is political by nature.
- Kingship or Royal Authority as natural end of ‘asabiyya’ (necessity of existence) “darurat al wujud”
- Qualities of Leadership.
- **What kind of ‘asabiyyah is Ibn Khaldun advocating?**
- **Is ‘asabiyyah limited to special time and place?**
- **What is the purpose of ‘asabiyyah?**
- **What is the relation between ‘asabiyyah and religion?**
- **How does one society pass into the other?**
- **What stages does this process follow?**

III- Cycles of History

- Primitive society proceeds to sedentary and civilized society. An urge to fulfill, actualize or perfect themselves to grow up. Primitive society is potentially urban.
- Rise and decline of civilization.
Usually -Four generations– sometimes five stages (in a state), each stage may take two or three generations. The main idea:
The founder.
The one who has personal contact with the founder.
The third generation is that of imitation-relying on tradition...
The fourth generation is inferior-loses the qualities that preserved the edifice of glory-the destroyer.
Collapse of states and cities.
- Causes of decline:
- Social- political- economic
Luxury-enforced laws-loss of praise-worthy qualities, taxes and justice etc
- Weakness of 'Asabiyyah

IV- Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History

- History as an evolution that unfolds logically and orderly.
 - History contains within itself cyclical movements as manifested in Ibn Khaldun's social history.
 - History as a science.
 - Laws of history are immanent in history and belong to its nature.
 - History does not have a definite end or a place in a universal plan or a move towards perfection.
 - The facts are observed, correlated and explained without any effort to fit them into a theistic interpretation. Things, however, are what they are by the will of Allah- by their constitution.
 - Religion functions as a form of 'asabiyyh and is part of the growth cycle. The activity of God coincides with the natural process. God "permits" (ya'dhan) certain states to decline and others to arise.
- How does Ibn khaldun separate the natural from the supernatural?**

V- Ibn Khaldun's conception of power

- Divinely religious laws and rational politics (Letter of Tahir Ibnal Hussein(d.822) to his son Abdallah)
- An epistle of political - administrative nature= "Mirror for Princes"genre.
- Power and virtue.
- "Virtues of judiciousness and moderation; warning against the vices of the arbitrary exercise of power; & of stinginess; how to choose governors; consult with jurists and 'ulama; wealth is sterile if it is merely stored up; less taxation; care for the kadi's-office, impartial administration of justice; regular payment of salaries; attendance to the military"(Dr Maher Jarrar's handout, Dec.12, 2006)
- Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli (Machiavelli-(16th century thinker), "Mirror for (Princes": (*the Prince*)

Conclusion:

Ibn Khaldun: A historian of logic and evidences

- Used logic in analyzing observations, that led him to induction
- Philosophic concepts and logical procedures including Burhan and Istiqrā-
- Ideas about the intellect, the physical world and human society for his methodology applicable to the nature of man in all periods.
- Very accurate observation can give a theory
- History as a tool for analysis
- Logic of history can be used in getting further results
- Modern approach to the study of history and society.
- Emphasis on society and civilization and comparative cultures.
- "Secularism".
- The mover of history are the laws of society and civilization.
- Things are, however, what they are by the will of Allah..

Selected Quotations from:

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to History*, Trans. By Franz Rosenthal, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

1. It should be known that history, in matter of fact, is information about human social organization, which itself is identical with world civilization. It deals with such conditions affecting the nature of civilization as, for instance, savagery and sociability, group feelings, and the different ways by which one group of human beings achieves superiority over another. It deals with royal authority and the dynasties that result in this manner and with the various ranks that exist with them. Also with the different kinds of gainful occupations and ways of making a living, with the sciences and crafts that human beings pursue as part of their activities and efforts, and with all the other institutions that originate in civilization through its very nature. (p.35)
2. When moisture with its evil vapors ascends to the brain, the mind and the ability to think are dulled. The result is stupidity, carelessness and a general intemperance” (p.p. 65-66).
3. Bedouins, thus, are the basis of, and prior to, cities and sedentary people. Man seeks first the bare necessities. Only after he has obtained the bare necessities does he get to comfort and luxuries. The toughness of desert life precedes the softness of sedentary life, Therefore, urbanization is found to be the goal to which the Bedouins aspire (p.93).
4. It should be known that differences of condition among people are the result of the different ways in which they make their living. Social organization enables them to co-operate toward that end and to start with the simple necessities of life, before they get to conveniences and luxuries (p.91).
5. Group feeling produces the ability to defend one’s self, to offer opposition, to protect oneself, and to press one’s claims. Whoever loses it is too weak to do any of these things (p.111).
6. Evidences for the fact that Bedouins are the basis of, and prior to, sedentary people is furnished by investigating the inhabitants of any given city. We shall find that most of its inhabitants originated among Bedouins dwelling in the country and villages of the vicinity. Such Bedouins became wealthy, settled in the city, and adopted a life of ease and luxury, such as exists in the sedentary environment. (p.93)
7. I have discussed desert civilization first because it is prior to every thing else...the discussion of royal authority was placed before that of countries and cities for the same reason. The discussion of ways of making a living was placed before that of sciences, because making a living is necessary and natural, whereas the study of science is a luxury or convenience. Any thing natural has precedence over luxury (p.43).
8. It is thus evident that royal authority is the goal of group feeling. When it attains that goal, the tribe (representing that particular group feeling) obtains royal authority, either by seizing actual control or by giving assistance (to the ruling dynasty) according to the circumstances prevailing. If the group feeling encounters obstacles on its way to the goal, it stops where it is, until God decides its fate (p.109).
9. The existence of group feeling without the practice of praiseworthy qualities would be a defect among people who possess a 'house' and prestige. All the more so would it be a defect in men who are invested with royal authority, the greatest possible kind of glory and prestige. Furthermore, political and royal authority are God's guarantee to mankind and serve as representation of God among men with respect to His laws. Now, divine laws affecting men are all of their good and envisage their interest. This is attested by the religious law. Bad laws, on the other hand, all result from stupidity and from Satan, in opposition to the predestination and power of God. He makes both good and evil and predetermines them, for there is no maker except Him (p.112).

10. Whenever we observe people who possess group feeling and who have gained control over many lands and nations, we find in them an eager desire for goodness and good qualities, such as generosity, the forgiveness of error, tolerance toward weak, hospitality toward guests, the support of dependants, maintenance of the indigent, patience in adverse circumstances, faithful fulfillment of obligations, liberality with money for the preservation of honour, respect for the religious law and for the scholars who are learned in it, observation of the things to be done or not to be done that those scholars prescribe for them, thinking highly of religious scholarship, belief in and veneration for men of religion and a desire to receive their prayers, great respect for old men and teachers, acceptance of the truth in response to those who call to it, fairness to and care for those who are too weak to take care of themselves, humility toward poor, attentiveness to the complaints of supplicants, fulfillment of the duties of the religious law and divine worship in all details, avoidance of fraud, cunning, deceit, and shrinking of obligations, and similar things. Thus, we know that these are the qualities of leadership, which (persons qualified for royal authority) have obtained and which have made them deserving of being the leaders of the people under their control, or to be leaders in general. It is something good that God has given them, corresponding to their group feeling and superiority (p.113).
11. Vice versa, when God wants a nation to be deprived of royal authority, He causes (its members) to commit blameworthy deeds and to practice all sorts of vices. This will lead to the complete loss of their political virtues, which will continue to be destroyed until they no longer exercise royal authority. Someone else will exercise it in their stead. This is to constitute an insult to them, in that the royal authority God has given them and good things He has placed at their disposal are taken away from them. Upon close investigation, many such instances will be found among the nations of the past (p.113).
12. When people have acquired royal authority, they no longer do the tiresome chores they had been used to undertake while still in search of it. They prefer rest and quiet and tranquility. Now they seek to enjoy the fruits of royal authority, such as buildings, dwellings, and clothing. They build castles and install running water. They plant gardens and enjoy life. They take pride in clothing, food, household goods, and furnishings, as much as possible. They get used to this attitude and pass it on to later generations. It continues to grow in their midst, until God permits His command to be executed (p.133).
13. Furthermore, luxury corrupts the character, through luxury the soul acquiring diverse kinds of evil and sophisticated customs, as will be mentioned in the section on sedentary culture. People lose the good qualities that were a sign of royal authority. They adopt the contrary bad qualities. This points toward retrogression and ruin, according to the way God (has planned) for His creatures in this connection. The dynasty shows symptoms of dissolution and disintegration. It becomes affected by the chronic disease of senility and finally dies (p.135).
14. The fifth stage is one of waste and squandering. In this stage, the ruler wastes on pleasures and amusements (the treasures) accumulated by his ancestors, through (excessive) generosity to his inner circle. Also, he acquires bad low-class followers to whom he entrusts the most important matters (of state), which they are not qualified to handle by themselves, not knowing which of them they should tackle and which they should leave alone. The ruler seeks to destroy the great clients of his people and followers of his predecessors. Thus they come to hate him and conspire to refuse support to him. He loses a number of soldiers by spending their allowances on his pleasures (instead of paying them) and by refusing them access to his person and not supervising them properly). Thus, he ruins the foundations his ancestors had laid and tears down what they had built up. In this stage, the dynasty is seized by senility and the chronic disease from which it can hardly ever rid itself, for which it can find no cure, and, it is destroyed (p.142).
15. Injustice should not be understood to imply only the confiscation of money or other property from the owners, without compensation and without cause. It is commonly understood in that way, but it is something more general than that. Whoever takes someone's property, or uses him for forced labour, or presses an unjustified claim against him, or imposes upon him a duty not required by the religious law, does an injustice to that particular person. People who collect unjustified taxes commit an injustice. Those who infringe upon property commit an injustice. Those who take away property commit an injustice. Those who deny people their rights commit an injustice. Those who, in general, take property by force, commit an injustice. It is the dynasty that

suffers from all these acts, inasmuch as civilization, which is the substance of the dynasty, is ruined when people have lost all incentive (p. 240).

16. The philosophers say that happiness consists in coming to perceive existence as it is, by means of logical arguments. This is a fraudulent statement that must be rejected. The matter is as follows. Man is composed of two parts. One is corporeal. The other is spiritual, and mixed with the former. Each one of these parts has its own perceptions, though the part that perceives is the same in both cases, namely, the spiritual part. At times, it perceives spiritual perceptions. At other times, it perceives corporeal perceptions. However, it perceives the spiritual perceptions through its own essence without any intermediary, while it perceives the corporeal perceptions through the intermediary of organs of the body, such as the brain and senses (p. 402).

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