



Ibn Khaldun's Guide on How Philosophy Should be Taught to Young Muslims

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Abstract

Teaching philosophy continues to represent a hot issue of debate among Muslim scholars. Many leading Muslim scholars have contributed enormously to this debate including al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). Ibn Khaldūn, another noteworthy scholar, adopted al-Ghazali's criticism of the advocates of the transmission of Greek philosophy. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) did not produce any independent work on philosophy, however, he devoted an entire chapter to its rebuttal "The refutation of Philosophy and the Corruption of its learners (*Ibtāl al-Falsafah wa Fasād Muntaḥilīhā*). Ibn Khaldūn's Magnum Opus the *Muqaddimah* provides a rich source for the building of relevant and well-developed instruction of Muslim philosophy. This study seeks to discuss Ibn Khaldūn's broad educational guidelines on teaching philosophy to Muslim students and draw some comparisons with other Muslim scholars. This research shows that Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy is constructive and yet remains open for discussion. It welcomes reasonable justification for the teaching of philosophy to Muslim students. Ibn Khaldūn's work though indirectly provides instrumental educational guidelines necessary for the filtration of Muslim philosophy from unwanted elements grounded in Greek metaphysics, epistemology, and worldview. The researchers employed textual and contextual analysis methods in interpreting the relevant data of the study.

Keywords: Islamic learning, Ibn Khaldūn Muslim philosophy. *Muqaddimah*

Abstrak

Sarjana Islam telah membahaskan secara lantang mengenai pelbagai isu mengenai pembelajaran falsafah dalam konteks pendidikan. Antaranya ialah, al-Ghazali (w. 1111) dan Ibn Rushd (w. 1198) adalah yang paling ke hadapan membahaskannya di dalam penulisan mereka. Tidak terkecuali, Ibn Khaldun (w. 1406) juga mengadaptasi kritikan al-Ghazali terhadap penyebaran Falsafah Yunani dan membantah di dalam penulisan bertajuk "Penolakan Falsafah dan Kerosakan para pembelajarnya (*Ibtāl al-Falsafah wa Fasād Muntaḥilīhā*) walaupun beliau tidak menghasilkan sebuah karya khusus mengenai falsafah. Namun, karya ulungnya *Muqaddimah* mampu berperanan sebagai sumber yang utama untuk membangunkan dan mengembangkan dengan baik instruksi falsafah Muslim. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meletakkan garis panduan pendidikan Ibn Khaldun dan perbandingannya dengan sarjana Muslim yang lain dalam pembelajaran falsafah khususnya untuk pelajar Muslim. Penyelidikan ini telah membuktikan kritikan membina Ibn Khaldun terhadap falsafah masih lagi luas untuk di bincangkan. Pandangan dari pelajar Muslim untuk mencari justifikasi kebenaran adalah sangat di perlukan dalam pembelajaran falsafah. Oleh itu, penulisan ibn Khaldun telah melakar panduan dan menetapkan instrumen yang di perlukan untuk menyaring unsur-unsur yang

bertentangan berdasarkan metafizik, epistemologi dan pandangan semesta Yunani. Para penyelidik telah guna pakai kaedah analisis tekstual dan kontekstual dalam mentafsir data kajian yang berkaitan.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Islam, Ibn Khaldun, falsafah Muslim, *Muqaddimah*

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Introduction

Defining the place and the importance of philosophy in Muslim scholarship has always been a challenging intellectual issue, and it is an ongoing debate to this today. Muslim scholars hold different and opposing views regarding the relevance of philosophy for Muslims. Some regard philosophy as crucial and necessary knowledge that helps people understand themselves and the existence around them. As an untiring advocate of philosophy, Ibn Rushd in his *Faṣl al-Maḳāl* considers learning philosophy for Muslims as a legal obligation. To him, philosophy is a reliable pathway leading people to the truth and happiness. He argued that philosophy is a branch of rational knowledge that does not contradict revelation and seeks to find the truth and build an argument to support it.¹

Others, on the other hand, believe that philosophy is not a neutral avenue for thinking and reasoning. The reason for this is that it is founded on certain assumptions, concepts, and beliefs rooted in Greek culture and religion. As a renowned intellectual figure, al-Ghazali sought to refute philosophy placing stress on its failure to provide valid arguments for its claims of holding the truth in metaphysics, teaching wisdom, and leading to happiness. Al-Ghazali directed his criticism to famous Muslim philosophers like al-Kindī (d. 873), al-Farābī (d. 950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), and those who came after him like Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) who borrowed Greek philosophers' thoughts in metaphysics, cosmology, and logics. Muslim philosophers champion human thinking ability while giving priority to philosophy over the sacred text of Revelation. The tension among philosophers culminated in al-Ghazali's work "*Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*) and Ibn Rushd's response to it "*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*". The current views on the wane or death of philosophy in the Islamic world following the major works of both Ghazali and Ibn Rushd are not totally right.² This is because erasing such profound knowledge in human experience in this very way is not possible. On the contrary, philosophy continues to live and play key roles across the many enterprises of Islamic knowledge.

As the debate over the role of philosophy continues, the debate among Muslim scholars also continues to exhibit the shaken arguments of metaphysics and the harm of philosophy. At this stage, however, we ought to trace the perspectives of originality in Muslim scholarly criticism. To do that, we find that the works of Ibn Khaldūn and his criticism and refutation of philosophy represent a form of "purging process" taking the debate to a different level of genuineness relevant to the needs of current Muslim scholarship and community. The selection of Ibn Khaldūn for this "leap" is based on the following reasons: himself, being an eminent scholar in the disciplines of the *Sharī'ah*, with exceptional training in rational sciences. His mentor was Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al-Abilī (d.1356) of Tlemcen, an unequalled exponent of the rational sciences and the occult arts, who introduced him to mathematics, logic, and philosophy.³

Ibn Khaldūn's achievement was in the establishment of a new branch of knowledge known as human association/civilization. It is according to the perspective of this branch that he could address philosophy and its utility rather in a new context. Combining all of those factors, one finds Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy open to different interpretations and applications in the light of *Sharī'ah* sciences, methods of reasoning, and human association projections.

This study searches within Ibn Khaldūn's critique of philosophy and Muslim philosophy and endeavours to formulate the framework necessary for teaching philosophy to Muslim students. The study first briefly explains the historical background of Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy by way of connecting his efforts to al-Ghazali while highlighting his multi-dimensional criticism embracing metaphysics, epistemology, and spirituality. This study deduced basic broad educational guidelines necessary for an effective class of Muslim philosophy keeping away the possible risks and harms of Greek philosophy.

1. Ibn Khaldūn's Critic of Philosophy

In this section, we relate Ibn Khaldūn's multileveled criticism of philosophy to al-

Ghazali. We also address some of his major arguments against the claims of philosophers on theology, epistemology, and spirituality. We seek to go beyond the interpretations of some contemporary thinkers like Lakhsassi who believed that Ibn Khaldūn's criticism is targeting formal logic and Neoplatonism only.⁴

Unlike the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (the incoherence of philosophers) of al-Ghazali, written four hundred years earlier, Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy did not draw much attention among philosophers and scholars. Instead, it caused some degrees of perplexity for those having difficulty understanding the foundations of his epistemology.⁵ Irrespective of the value of his criticism, however, Ibn Khaldūn's efforts remain significant for rethinking the instruction of philosophy for Muslim students and for reassessing his criticism in light of today's learning experience. Ibn Khaldūn dedicated a ten-page chapter to accentuate the validity of al-Ghazali's criticism while reframing the context of the debate for a fresh perspective of comprehension. The contribution of Ibn Khaldūn should not be isolated from their historical and intellectual context. They should be viewed as a continuation of al-Ghazali's critique of philosophy and others like Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328).⁶

Interestingly both scholars (al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldūn) encountered similar provocative situations leading them to question the accuracy of philosophical knowledge, whether in theology, metaphysics, or epistemology. Most importantly, is the questioning of the relevance of philosophy to Muslim life. Their criticism raised genuine concern about the protection of Muslims' religious beliefs. In the *tahāfut* for example, al-Ghazali justified embarking on work on the basis of observing a group of people who consider themselves intelligent (Muslim philosophers) and yet they reject the rulings of Islam and acts of worship. Ghazali said:

"I have seen a group who, believing themselves in possession of distinctiveness from companion and peer by virtue of superior quick wit

and intelligence, have rejected the Islamic duties regarding acts of worship, disdained religious rites pertaining to the offices of prayer and the avoidance of prohibited things, belittled the devotions and ordinances prescribed by the divine law, not halting in the face of its prohibitions and restrictions. On the contrary, they have entirely cast off the reins of religion through multifarious beliefs, following therein a troop "who repel away from God's way, intending to make it crooked, who are indeed disbelievers in the hereafter" [Qur'an 11:19].⁷

Ibn Khaldūn also justified the intellectual corruption found among students as well as its implication on the understanding of and adhering to the religion of the community as the basis of his criticism. The following statement illustrates the point: "The harm they [philosophy, astrology, and chemistry] can do to religion is great. Therefore, it is necessary that we make it clear what they are about and that we reveal the right attitude concerning them."⁸

Drawing back Ibn Khaldūn to the legacy of Ghazali however does not fully explain his perspective on the instruction of philosophy for he crafted teaching methods and approaches of instruction. Of interest, Ibn Khaldūn situated his criticism in the theoretical frame of the science of human association (*ʿIlm al-ʿUmrān*). According to Ibn Khaldūn, the value of any branch of knowledge is not only generated by its informative content only, but also by the responses it provides to face the challenges that arise in human association (*al-ʿumran al-Bashari*). In the beginning, he highlighted some key concepts, pertaining to learners, the content of philosophy, religion, cities, and human civilization.⁹ Hence, debating the merits of philosophy should not be seen as a mere theoretical discussion of an abstract branch of knowledge, but rather, as a life experience, a set of reasoning skills, and practical knowledge. Likewise, his criticism of philosophy should not be taken superficially as commonly skeptical or

contradicts his line of thinking as some choose to label it. Some like Ahmad fall into this situation. He writes:

“Apparently, we found a contradictory position on the part of Ibn Khaldūn. As pointed out earlier, Ibn Khaldūn obviously deployed philosophical methods in his attempt to understand the nature of human society. On the one hand, he benefited from philosophical approaches and employed philosophical methods in his inquiries, while on the other he severely criticized, refuted, and questioned the role of philosophy.”¹⁰

Another difference was that al-Ghazali adopted the main thinking tools of philosophy, namely, logic, which he considered *the canon* that discerns the right definition and syllogism from the wrong ones.¹¹ Al-Ghazali is not “a man to throw out logical babies along with metaphysical bathwater.”¹² He believes that logics which he gave few names like “*Mi'yār al-'Ilm*” “*Kitāb al-Nnaḍar*” “*Madārik al-'Uqūl*”, is reliable and represents an ideal means which can lead him to victory against philosophers.¹³ Contrary to this, Ibn Khaldūn stressed the limitation of logic and criticized the philosophers' extension of its scope and accuracy to the world of metaphysics. He referred to Revelation, critical thinking, and observations made on real-world experience. To explain the greatness of happiness achieved through the guidance of Revelation in contrast to that which philosophers claim can be obtained by using rational perception, he compared it to the joy of a child having its first corporeal perceptions that come through an intermediary. For Ibn Khaldūn, there is no doubt that the soul finds even greater pleasure in perceptions that come from its essence without an intermediary.¹⁴

In the following, we will present and summarize the focus domains of Ibn Khaldūn's

criticism of philosophy which includes: metaphysics, epistemology and spirituality.

a. Metaphysical Aspects

Ibn Khaldūn stated that metaphysicians consider metaphysics (*Al-'ilāhiyāt*) as a noble discipline and assume it gives them a knowledge of existence as it is, with a high level of certainty required to gain happiness.¹⁵ Metaphysics embraces a broad range of topics forming the essence and meaning of human life. Yet the metaphysical matters are what drew Ibn Khaldūn's criticism and condemnation the most, given that they contradict the divine Islamic law. Ibn Khaldūn defined metaphysics as follows:

“a science that studies existence as such. First, it studies general matters affecting corporeal and spiritual things, such as quiddities, oneness, plurality, necessity, possibility, and so on. Then, it studies the beginnings of existing things and (finds) that they are spiritual things. It goes on to study the way existing things issue from (spiritual things) and also studies their order. Then, it studies the conditions of the soul after its separation from the body and its return to its beginning.”¹⁶

Metaphysics covers various topics beyond human perception and reach. In studying all of those matters, philosophers depend primarily on the human intellect. They have accordingly limited the scope of metaphysics through arranging the intellects which end with “the first intellect.” Ibn Khaldūn rejected this outlook which he saw as failing to address the existence in its entirety. He said:

“It should be known that the (opinion) the (philosophers) hold is wrong in all its aspects. They refer to all existence to the first intellect and are satisfied with (the theory of the first intellect) in their progress toward the Necessary One (the Deity). This means that they disregard all the degrees of divine creation beyond the

(first intellect). Existence, however, is too wide to (be explained by so narrow a view).¹⁷

Ibn Khaldūn also highlighted the influence of philosophy as both method and worldview on some Islamic branches of knowledge like theology (*'ilm al-Kālam*) and mysticism (*Tasawwuf*). He maintained that the blind adoption of that sort of “cross-disciplinary” adopted by theologians has created huge confusion in both disciplines. The emergence of their topics for example did not help much in answering the debating questions and providing a clear explanation for those who need them. This happened because the direction of the argumentation of Islamic theology and philosophy are significantly different.¹⁸

Ibn Khaldūn rejected this sort of interaction with philosophy and he deemed it incorrect on the basis of the big difference that separates metaphysics as a branch of philosophy and the two Islamic sciences (speculative theology and mysticism). The topics of speculative theology are related articles of faith drawn from the religious law transmitted by early Muslims. Unlike philosophers, theologians do not refer to the authority of independent reasoning to establish an unknown topic. In their methodology, “Speculative theologians do not use the (rational) arguments they talk about as do the philosophers, to investigate the truth of the (articles of faith), to prove the truth of what had previously not been known, and to make it known.”¹⁹

In a discussion similar to that of the philosophers, Ibn Khaldūn justified the proper use of rational arguments to serve the religious objectives and to engage in debating with heretics who dealt with the Muslim articles of faith with doubts and speculative innovations. He argued that rational arguments should be used to convince them or at least put to encounter their false beliefs (*iqamatul hujjah*).²⁰ To him, the faculty of human thinking alone is incapable to establish the certainty which is required in the knowledge of those matters. However, philosophers have breached this principle and claimed that not only the knowledge of the

unseen world but also, that “the articles of faith are established as correct through (intellectual) speculation and not through tradition because they belong among the intellectual perceptions.”²¹

b. Epistemological Aspects

The significance of Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy lies not only in the investigations he conducted on aspects of its contents but also with regard to its epistemological assumptions that are mostly related to the nature of knowledge and the reasoning process. Some of the main questions Ibn Khaldūn raised include the following: How do philosophers explain the process of knowing reality? How reliable is the process of knowing used to perceive external phenomena? And what are the limits of the human intellect to attain a conformable perception of existence and external phenomena? Ibn Khaldūn asserts that the philosophical responses to these queries lack substantial justification. For him, the mental speculation the philosophers use to distinguish between truth and falsehood is limited to individual existential (*al-mawjudat al-shakhsiya*) or “primary intelligible” (*al-ma'qulat al-'awa'il*) that cannot be encompassed. And the process of abstracting simple universal ideas (*al-ma'ani al-basitah al-kulliyyah*) is thought to be limited by human ability and experience. The created existence is far greater than the knowledge produced by this abstraction process.²² Ibn Khaldūn refuses the utilization of co-concepts with no conformity with external objects. Consequently, it “avows that the concepts that serve as predicates of being, which together with constituting a theme of logic, is predominantly perused by philosophers within the spectrum of metaphysics, do not contribute providing a basis for practical philosophy.”²³

Ibn Khaldūn also raises concerns about the philosophers' abuse of logic. He “postulates a strong doubt about the very possibility of any correspondence between the sensuously perceived empirical manifold as corporeal particularity, and the concepts to which these should correspond if one were to talk meaningfully of a process of knowledge.”²⁴ Ibn Khaldūn sought to show that the philosophers'

thinking process is poorly connected with the real world and individual facts. The broad generalization of philosophers loses the details of those observed individuals. Ibn Khaldūn stressed that the efficiency of logic has its limits and pitfalls. Although logic does well, especially in laying down the necessary rational and reasoning norms, it is unable to establish certain conformity with the *existentia* of the outside world manifested in the form of individual facts and substances. Philosopher pays more attention to the abstract forms of thinking or universal mental conceptions, however, neglect their content which should lead them to observe the facts of the real world.²⁵ He wrote:

“The insufficiency lies in the fact that conformity between the results of thinking - which, as they assume, are produced by rational norms and reasoning - and the outside world, is not unequivocal. All the judgments of the mind are general ones, whereas the *existentia* of the outside world are individual in their substances.”²⁶

In addition to the gap found between the results of logic and the real world, Ibn Khaldūn also indicated that the former contains things that are contradictory to the religious laws and their meanings. Perhaps, Ibn Khaldūn is referring to Aristotle's ten categories that denote the most general or highest types of thought forms or entities needed to help the mind, which is rooted in the Greek worldview. The effects of logic abuse are not limited only to people's way of thinking, but also affects their feeling, spirituality, and beliefs. As such, the philosophers' method of reasoning in the eyes of Ibn Khaldūn looks similar to that of the physicists (*al-tabīyīn*) who restrict themselves to the affirmation of the body yet disregard both the soul and intellect in the belief that there nothing exists beyond the physical body. Al-Ghazali highlighted some of these undesirable effects in his *tahāfut*. He argued that philosophers deny the bodily resurrection and return of spirits to bodies; of the existence of corporeal fire; of the existence of paradise, the wide-eyed houris, and the rest of the things people have been

promised; of their statement that all these things are parables made for the commonality to explain spiritual reward and punishment that are of a higher rank than the corporeal.²⁷

c. Spiritual Aspects

In the domain of spirituality, the theme of happiness and the path leading to it is the focus of the Khaldūnian criticism of the claim made by philosophers. Philosophers believed that happiness is achieved through a perceptual process enabling people to relate to both the *sensibilia* and the (things) beyond sensual perception. Throughout the process, people rely on the help of their speculative experience and argumentation ability. Ibn Khaldūn stated: “...philosophers think that happiness consists in arriving at the perception of all existing things, both the *sensibilia* and the (things) beyond sensual perception, with the help of (rational) speculation and argumentation.”²⁸ Combining these perceptions with the improvement of the soul through virtuous character is expected to lead people to various states of happiness. According to the philosophers knowing and acquiring virtues depend on human intellectual ability. Through the intellect, the ability to speculate, and the natural inclination toward praiseworthy acts, the natural disinclination for blameworthy acts, man can lead a virtuous life. According to philosophers, this is possible even with no revealed religious law.

The pursuit of virtues according to philosophers does not require any relationship with the Transcendent God for virtue and happiness are the fruits of perception of *sensibilia*, speculation through intellect ability, and feeling. This does not leave room for any religious beliefs established through revelation and prophethood. In this regard, Ibn Khaldūn wrote:

The philosophers “assume that happiness consists in the perception of existence with the help of such conclusions (if, at the same time, such perception is) combined with the improvement of the soul and the soul's acceptance of a virtuous character. Even if no religious law had been revealed (to help man to

distinguish between virtue and vice), they think the (acquisition of virtue) possible by man because he is able to distinguish between vice and virtue in (his) actions by means of his intellect, his (ability to) speculate, and his natural inclination toward praiseworthy actions, his natural disinclination for blameworthy actions.”²⁹

It is true that man's intellectual ability helps him perceive and acquires some virtues. For example, when speaking of the concept of *fitrah* or innate human nature, the Qur'an on a few occasions mentions that humans are inspired to distinguish between right and evil in the broader sense (Qur'an, 91: 9; 90: 10). However, the complexity of existence and humans requires a significant amount of knowledge beyond that innate ability for achieving happiness. On this Ibn Khaldūn appears to be realistic when he associated happiness with the context of human association. For him, the claim of happiness would not be sufficient simply based on the general abstract meaning of happiness and limited universal values. The human life and world together rather require divine intervention, guidance, and prophethood. Ibn Khaldūn rejects the possibility of perceiving all the *existentia* or achieving happiness in its true meaning without adhering to the divine commands and worship rituals shown by Prophets. He said: "Away, away with what you [philosophers] are promised." ³⁰ Contrary to the philosopher, as Zaidi noted Ibn Khaldūn is:

“Adamant that while rationality is useful in its own sphere, intuition, faith, and adherence to religious law alone provide inexpressible happiness, because they connect man to the supra-human realm and ultimately to God. Prophets of God have a pure direct vision, and mystics have an intuitive understanding of God. But for the rest of humanity, it is the belief in a transcendent reality and adherence to revealed transcendent laws alone that lead to happiness. Hence, according to Ibn Khaldūn,

social order is possible in any community so long as it stays true to the laws of nature, human nature, and social organization, which God has put in place. But the social order is not enough for happiness and the perfection of the human soul. For that, a community needs to adhere to religious teachings.”³¹

The reliance on human intellect and exclusion of revelation and Prophets in the path of happiness provided Ibn Khaldūn with the rationale necessary to support his refutation of teaching philosophy. Such exclusion cuts the way for philosophy to sustain its claim of attaining the truth about existence and happiness for its followers. For Ibn Khaldūn, both happiness and unhappiness are found beyond corporeal and spiritual perceptions. He stated:

“The improvement (of the soul that the philosophers) have come to know is useful only in that it (produces) great joy, originating from the spiritual perception that takes place according to rational and established norms. But the happiness beyond such (joy), which the Lawgiver (*al-Shari'*) promised us if we would act and behave as he commanded us, is something that cannot be encompassed by anybody's perceptions.”³²

Not only that, but Ibn Khaldūn also levelled his criticisms against the philosophers' political theory. The general principle philosophers favoured is the designing of the image of “the ideal or excellent city” which failed to assimilate the individual situation that reflects real-time human life.³³ “The ideal city” the philosopher promotes as a means to happiness is nothing but a fictive vision. It is something rare and remote. They discuss it as a hypothesis.³⁴ According to Ibn Khaldūn, “scholars are used to mental speculation and to a searching study of ideas which they abstract from the *sensibilia* (*al-mahsusat*) and conceive in their minds as general universals, so that they may apply to some matter

in general but not to any particular matter, individual, race, nation, or group of people.”³⁵ Thus, he did not frame his thinking about the human association and its phenomena along with Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi and others. On the contrary, and on many occasions, he criticized them on various issues including the status of philosophy in Islamic learning.

2. Khaldūnian Approach to Learning Philosophy

In this section, we address questions such as: why do Muslim students need to learn philosophy? what are the primary objectives of learning philosophy? And what are some of the requirements in teaching and learning philosophy as a subject? The growing flow of human knowledge, sciences, technology, and associated phenomenal changes places more need for thinking abilities, skills, and the use of philosophy. The study of philosophy helps nurture people's thinking skills, logical thinking, problem-solving, and analysis of concepts, definitions, systems of thought, and theories. Philosophy also assists with identifying problems, errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while at the same time it supports the better design of solutions and the discovery of the common ground that unites people together for common interest and good.

In this sense, philosophy is not simply an abstract body of knowledge, but rather a set of thinking skills that contribute to the well-being of people and communities irrespective of their backgrounds or cultural affiliations. Philosophy is indispensable for the understanding of other branches of knowledge, their foundations, assumptions, laws, methodologies, and field application. There are many fundamental questions related to the establishment and development of philosophy. Likewise, philosophy includes different aspects of simple life experiences. Thus, the word “philosophy” is interconnected in one way or another with all human activities no matter how complex or simple. This is because philosophy has been growing alongside human consciousness and experience for thousands of years, and thus evolved to a rooted ability ready to add to the

human consciousness and experience, reflecting varying degrees of reasoning, sophistication, organization, and meanings.

Ibn Khaldūn was aware of the hidden power of philosophy and its practical utility. His criticism was not selective and relative. He agreeably acknowledges the merits of philosophy and the relevance of logic. He sees that the logic of the philosophers has at least one single advantage in this regard. According to him: “it sharpens the mind in the orderly presentation of proofs and arguments so that the habit of excellent and correct arguing is obtained. This is because the orderly process and the solid and exact method of reasoning are as the philosophers have prescribed them in their science of logic.” Why then do Muslims today need philosophy? That need for such knowledge is justified as follows: Like any other human intellectual and experience of consciousness, philosophy provides the roadmap necessary to understand the history of human thought and its various stations and dominant currents. The content of philosophy is made of a mixture of thinking, reasoning skills, and abilities that are crucial to people's understanding and expression of their thoughts, and communication. Philosophy is to be considered one source of those skills. The great impact of philosophy on today's human life and their worldviews requires Muslims to get the knowledge necessary for understanding and communicating with different communities of different worldviews. Philosophy represents an ideal tool and shortcuts to access that domain in the life of other communities.

Ibn Khaldūn did not make any attempt to offer a specific curriculum on how to teach philosophy according to Islamic learning principles and objectives. Perhaps, at his time the quick solution that suggests suspension of philosophy and preventing students from being exposed to it is prevalent. However, by looking at his refutation of philosophy, we find that his thoughts are based on constructive and selective criticism that can be dealt with to provide an opportunity for Muslim students to apply philosophy and get its benefits. Ibn Khaldūn was not adamant to deprive philosophy of any relevance to Muslims, his flexible stand is prone

to changes to accommodate other evidence that may lead to the flavour of instructing philosophy to Muslim students. For some, Ibn Khaldūn has chosen a middle course rather than an extreme position to place his view.³⁶ Thus, his criticism should be taken as a form of early warning for safety from the pernicious aspects of philosophy. Other details on the status and relevance of philosophy can be seen in some other parts of the *Muqaddimah*, especially in those chapters discussing methods of instruction, theory of knowledge, and history of sciences. To place the instruction of teaching philosophy in a much more relevant context, this section explained some of Ibn Khaldūn's teaching guidelines such as the implication of the Islamic worldview, the concept of *al-fiṭrah* in defining human nature, skill-based learning, and philosophy and social life.

2.1. The Islamic worldview (*Tawḥīd*)

The nature and destiny of human associations and civilizations vary based on their worldviews. Ibn Khaldūn drew special attention to the position and function of the Islamic worldview across his many theses. In his treatment of existence (being), human nature, human association, social dynamics, change, and order, Ibn Khaldūn dismissed the possibility of human knowledge outside the framework of this defined worldview. He delineated his departing premises as centred around the oneness of God.³⁷ He demonstrated consistent faithfulness to the worldview of *Tawḥīd* and its associated components such as the divine existence and attributes, meaning and purpose of life, human nature and society, creation, and the order of life and the universe. Ibn Khaldūn's analysis is grounded in the Islamic worldview. Almost all of his interpretations, judgments, evaluations, or conclusions exhibit in one way or the other the worldview of *tawḥīd*. At the very outset, Ibn Khaldūn announced that what matters is only the divine rewards. His worldview manifested in various thesis and presuppositions on human nature, human organization, and associations, scientific concepts, epistemological theories of knowledge, theories on the *Umrān*, rise and fall of civilization, pedagogy, governance, politics, and so forth.

Ibn Khaldūn applied the Islamic worldview to the exploration of human association. And for effective instruction of philosophy, the Islamic worldview should also be used as the highest value frame with Revelation at the source of all branches of human knowledge. This implies that the approach of Ibn Rushd to promote philosophy using the principle of "Parallel Truths" is to be rejected as it creates unnecessary false competition between religion and philosophy in the pursuit of truth and establishes unfounded harmony justifying the supremacy of philosophy over Revelation. In his *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Ibn Rushd describes the purpose of his work in defending the relevance of philosophy as follows: "is to examine, from the standpoint of the study of the Law, whether the study of philosophy and logic is allowed by the Law, or prohibited, or commanded, either by way of recommendation or as obligatory."³⁸ Yet for him, Revelation should be subjected to interpretation or allegorical understanding to eliminate all possible contradictions between religion and philosophy. Following the footsteps of al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldūn rejects the Rushdian sort of hypothesis regarding the relationship between Revelation and philosophy. His thesis is that Revelation should reign over all other sources of knowledge. According to him, we should not abuse the human rational faculty by stretching its scope and capacity. If this occurs, we should not believe the suggestions of the human mind or his claims of being able to comprehend and know all the details of existence. He stated:

"should not trust the suggestion his [philosopher] mind makes, that it is able to comprehend all existing things and their causes, and to know all the details of existence. Such a suggestion of the mind should be dismissed as stupid. Every person with perception has the superficial impression that the (whole of) existence is comprised by his perceptions, and that it does not extend beyond them."³⁹

To mitigate the potential damage of philosophy to Muslim minds, the Islamic worldview needs to be used as a criterion in the discussion and judgment of the claims of philosophy as well as the answers it provides for the fundamental questions about the existence, origin of life, creation of man, human nature, the meaning of life, happiness, virtues, morality, etc. The Islamic worldview is expected to provide knowledge with certainty and less doubt on many core issues the philosophical inquiry never ceases to generate. Nevertheless, the reliable philosophical contents should be acknowledged and classified as an inference of sound human nature (*al-fiṭrah al-salīmah*) and the fruit of mental abilities that Allah has granted man.

a. The Necessity of Prophethood

In philosophy, the theme of prophethood is severely marginalized. In a few cases, Prophets are portrayed as sages, or compared to the philosopher. Unlike Prophets who depend on divine revelation, philosophers are assigned higher positions based on their abilities to discover the truth. Al-Ghazali in his treatment of the claims of philosophers on prophethood, sought to prove it using the argumentation method (*tarīqat al-burhān*) philosophers themselves use while stressing the distinct status it holds.⁴⁰ Muslim philosophers have produced strong rational arguments to prove that prophethood is a necessity for humankind. However, the influence of philosophy on them was so deep to the extent that it failed them to hold on to the pure essence and meanings of prophethood.⁴¹ Their interest in the harmony of religion with the teaching of philosophy through syncretism and merging different elements led them far away from the central meanings of the Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. The instructor of philosophy needs to address the misleading comparisons made by Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina under the pretext of harmonizing religion with philosophy.

Following al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldūn gave due attention to prophethood. He emphasized the divine source of prophethood. This does not entertain comparison with spiritual or intellectual experiences, whether of laymen or learned people

like philosophers. Prophethood occupies a higher position in the hierarchy of human consciousness, not attainable through means of instruction or acquisition. The role of Prophethood in the making of the human association is unquestionable although some forms of restraining influence, leadership, and political systems do exist and are managed the worldly affairs of human beings. For him, "The restraining influence comes into being as the result of the impetus of royal authority and the forcefulness of the mighty, even if there is no religious law."⁴²

It is critical to remember that Ibn Khaldūn introduced the topic of prophethood in the discussion of human thinking and various kinds of sciences and methods of instruction (Chapter six). The theory of human knowledge is not limited to the worldly experience alone, but also extends to the realm of the unseen where the knowledge of Angels and Prophets represent an essential part of it. To explain the relevance of Prophethood, Ibn Khaldūn explained the character of Prophets and the power of their perception in comparison to ordinary people. For Prophets, the trend toward the divine is found to be more powerful than their followers. Prophets keep away from things humans used to acquire, except inasmuch as they are necessary for life. They turn toward the divine in worship and remembrance of God, as their knowledge of Him requires. They shared information about God and (transmitted) the revelation for the guidance of the believers which they received in (their divine) condition. They do that according to one particular method and in a manner known to be peculiar to them. It undergoes no change in them and is like a natural disposition which God has given them."⁴³ Following this brief outline, the instructor of philosophy should make a clear distinction between "wisdom" as in philosophy and *hikmah* of Prophets. The wisdom of Prophets is divine and infallible, in contrast to the limited and relative human knowledge and experience prone to errors.

b. The Concept of Human Nature

Philosophers speculate about human nature, proposing various assumptions, conceptualizations, and theories. Thus, it is very

important to keep the focus of the learners of philosophy open on the Islamic concept of human nature known as *al-fiṭrah* (Qur'an, 30: 30). Ibn Khaldūn was aware of the significance of *al-fiṭrah* in the construction of knowledge of human association phenomena. He used it as a “yardstick by which he measured the quality of human individuals, groups, societies, and civilizations.”⁴⁴

The instructor of philosophy needs to address certain aspects of human nature such as the creation of human beings as explained in the Qur'an and Sunnah. While philosophers held many views on the origins of human beings, the instructor of Muslim philosophy need to draw on Revelation as a primary source of knowledge to advance a clear yet definitive story on the topic of the origin of creation, human honourability, multi-dimensionality, faculty of reasoning and its limitations, and purpose of human life in the worshipping of God alone.

Following Ibn Khaldūn's thesis on the ability of human thinking, students of Muslim philosophy should be provided with several pathways and styles of thinking. Greek logic should not be adopted as the only viable way for sound reasoning. Ibn Khaldūn, himself, under the pretext of considering the nature of the human association and its ever-changing conditions, use native thinking (*tafkīr tabī'ī*) for its flexibility and conformity with reality. For him, the latter retains even a better ability able to accommodate a wide spectrum of phenomena and build a more flexible yet reliable conclusion for the description of the many layers and details of the changing reality.

2.2 Skills-Based Learning Approach

Learning skills represent one of the main elements of Ibn Khaldūn's educational theory. Ibn Khaldūn argues that an effective learning experience develops authentic, valid, and accurate knowledge while shaping the mastery of life skills. Learning skills not only affect students' performance but also provide hope and motivation to continue learning.⁴⁵ Focus on skills building in philosophy classes helps students become active instead of passive recipients of the information. This requires instructors to give attention to the question of ‘how’ rather than simply those related to ‘when’, ‘what’, ‘who’, or ‘where’. This would lead students to familiarise

themselves with the skills philosophers use to generate thoughts. Critical thinking represents one of the most important skills to learn and master in the field of philosophy because it helps students identify views and arguments, weigh evidence, read between the lines to identify false assumptions, synthesize and connect ideas, draw conclusions, present points of view in a structured, coherent, well-reasoned way that can persuade listeners, and lead to the right and wise decisions. As there is an urgent need to encourage our students to be more active in this direction, inquisitive thinking skills will be another focus in the philosophy classroom. Students should not only be trained to understand and earn philosophical knowledge but be taught to generate it through the gradual yet systematic exercise of “questioning”. The job of philosophy “is to turn every answer into a question”.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, an effective teaching setting requires the use of the method of approximation (*tadarruj*) that best suits students' capabilities of understanding. This method is constructed on a set of assumptions related to students' capacity for assimilation, the habit of preparedness, the function of sensual perception, curriculum, detection of the subject's errors and contentions, with an overall overview of the subject and its objectives, and time allocation. Ibn Khaldūn argued that the development of subject skills needs threefold repetitions and periods. In the first stage, students should be exposed to the general issues, foundations, and topics of the subject, with an overall view of the content. In the second stage, the instructor should lead students to advanced levels of discussion and argumentation by way of engagement in much deeper explanations supported with full commentaries and exposure to different opinions and debates. Once the higher level of learning is reached, Ibn Khaldūn noted, the instructor should leave nothing “...that is complicated, vague, or obscure, unexplained. He bears all the secrets of the discipline to him. As a result, the student, when he finishes with the discipline, has acquired the habit [skill] of it.”⁴⁶

2.3. Practical and Instrumental Orientation

Philosophy is not simply a purely theoretical and sophisticated knowledge with little to no role to play in people's real life. Stanley Fish noted that

the academic discipline of philosophy “is a special, insular form of thought and its propositions have weight and value only in the precincts of its game.”⁴⁷ However, when the role of philosophy in people’s life is addressed with objectivity and insightfulness our understanding would then be different. Philosophy can still offer wisdom to many in solving life problems. In a complex and globalized world there exists a significantly deep conflict of ideas, beliefs, ideologies, and thoughts, shaping core institutions and people’s cultures. In the case of Muslims, there needs to be a learning of philosophical thinking to deal with current issues and challenges and also safeguard and enrich Islamic thought and practice.

In pursuit of that wisdom, Muslim instructors of philosophy need to practice meta-level reflection on philosophy to be able to determine which of its elements are beneficial to students. They also need to use a comparative and contrasting approach to better present the works of philosophers and schools of philosophy. Such a balanced stand helps students learn and nurture their critical thinking skills within the boundaries of Revelation. In this exercise, philosophy is used as an auxiliary instrumental subject with fewer chances of becoming an independent domain of research, methodology of thinking, and the right and “ideal” way of life in the mind of the learner. Instruction of philosophy to Muslim students must be introduced in relation to other teaching modules such as “Introduction to Philosophy” for students of Islamic studies. Philosophy helps provide students with decent yet reliable insights on various ideologies, worldviews, and religions, for better inter-faith dialogue, argumentation, and debate. If this is the case that determines the role of philosophy, Ibn Khaldūn suggests that the study of the auxiliary sciences should not be prolonged, and their problems should not be treated in detail.”⁴⁸ Instrumental sciences, including the subject of philosophy, should be studied only in so far as they are supporting other sciences. At this level, we should maintain that the descriptive method should be adopted to deliver the information needed, however, with some sort of pragmatic discussion in relation to the auxiliary subject to create a convenient interactive learning

environment that suits the study of philosophy. On this occasion, Ibn Khaldūn stated the following:

“Discussion of them should not be prolonged, and the problems should not be treated in detail, as this would lead away from their purpose, and their purpose is (to facilitate understanding of) the sciences to which they are auxiliary, nothing else. Whenever the (auxiliary sciences) cease to be auxiliary to other sciences, they abandon their purpose, and occupation with them becomes an idle pastime.”⁴⁹

To maintain this specific function, each philosophical conclusion should be turned into an open question for further scrutiny and analysis especially related to real-life problems and challenges. Probably, with simplified content and issues, philosophy would highly address real-life problems. Ibn Khaldūn strongly criticizes the complicated styles of teaching, mode of delivery and textbooks with extensive commentaries. He instead, emphasizes the importance of thinking and reasoning skills. Some see Ibn Khaldūn’s criticism of textbooks as follows: “... and his conviction that learning should be a positive and happy experience could well contribute to contemporary curriculum ideas about developing cognitive skills and critical thinking, and ensuring that learning contributes to the student’s sense of well-being.”⁵⁰

Bringing philosophy down to the earth is also the choice of today’s Muslim scholars. For example, Sheddadi describes philosophical knowledge as an artefact (*sina’a*).⁵¹ Knowing the doing of things that contribute to “the means of existence” represents one of the practical dimensions of acquired knowledge. The objective of learning will stay focused on the acquisition of different philosophical skills required in ideation, argumentation, criticality, and creativity.

3. The Pre-requisites of *Sharī’ah* Sciences

Ibn Khaldūn remained open to learning philosophy, however with some measures and guidelines to better mitigate its risks and harms.

For him, the pernicious effects of philosophy could be avoided by taking into consideration the learners' background, the design of the curriculum, and the teaching method. Students interested in philosophy should be equipped with adequate fundamental religious knowledge (the science of the Law) and with the discipline to act according to its demands. He wrote:

"Whoever studies it should do so only after he is saturated with the religious law and has studied the interpretation of the Qur'ān and jurisprudence. No one who has no knowledge of the Muslim religious sciences should apply himself to it. Without that knowledge, he can hardly remain safe from its pernicious aspects."⁵²

According to Lakhsassi, this requirement by Ibn Khaldūn is his very particular way through which he tried to extend the juridical thought to embrace domains other than the traditional space hitherto reserved for Islamic jurisprudence."⁵³

One wonder however whether Ibn Khaldūn's proposed prerequisites guarantee students' immunity against the deception of philosophy. The course of Islamic thought shows that leading philosophers like al-Ghazali or Ibn Rushd were well trained in religious knowledge. Some philosophers also use juristic methods to justify the Muslim obligation of learning philosophy.⁵⁴ The perspective of Ibn Khaldūn on the learning of philosophy then needs to be explained to help students of philosophy attain a self-grounded intellectual immunity and better exploration and use of philosophical knowledge within the frame of Islamic wisdom. The prerequisite of Islamic theology encompasses both descriptive and dialectic works.

The base of *Sharī'ah* sciences is not meant only for its knowledge but also for its epistemological impact manifested in the influence of knowledge on emotions, thought, and action. Learned knowledge, including philosophy, should bear some religious significance and role that should result in the

guidance of learners to God. Thus, the pursuit of knowledge is viewed as a form of worship. The educational consequences of this are clear: religion must be at the heart of all education, acting as the glue which holds together the entire curriculum into an integrated whole."⁵⁵

4. Applying *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

Maqāṣid refers to "the deeper meanings and inner wisdom considered by the Lawgiver in all or most of the situations and circumstances of legislation (*ahwāl al-tashrī'*) and are not confined to a particular type of *shariah* ordinances"⁵⁶. With regards to the instruction of philosophy, the *Maqāṣid* is expected to help identify the public welfare that can support it.

Using this principle, Ibn Khaldūn stressed that the objective of the law is to secure and maintain the community's welfare. He used the three levels scale of the fundamentals, the necessary, and embellishment. Teaching philosophy should be highly promoted, especially when serving the first two categories of the *maqāṣid*. Ibn Khaldūn refers to the five major communal interests (*maṣāliḥ 'āmmah*) which embrace the protection of religion, life, intellect, offspring, and wealth. Any corruption that reaches these fundamental needs, the human association will make its way to decline.⁵⁷

Ibn Khaldūn inherited his intellectual familiarity with the *Maqāṣid* from the Maliki School of law. In his *Muqaddimah*, he sought to use the *maqāṣid* for other usage and shifted its attention to the domain of human association. For instance, he used concepts like *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, *maqāṣid al-shar'*, *maqāṣid al-diyānah* to substantiate and support his ideas on the nature and order of human association. He also used the *maqāṣid* in different ways, mostly related to thinking styles and skills such as the worldview, legal frame, value frame, analytical methodology, criterion, and order of human association.

Drawing on the *Maqāṣid* enhances the quality of learning and its relevance to Muslim life and society. By observing the implications of its principles on human thinking, students' philosophy could be provided with the right direction in the discussion of issues and filter thinking from doubts and harm. For example, the

first fundamental on the protection of belief and religion, the student should constantly uphold the belief in the oneness of God thereby rejecting the philosophers' intellect theory in cosmology for the explanation of the order of existence. Learning philosophy in the light of the *Maqāṣid* renders the task of the instructor much easier as it provides him with a value frame for argumentation and directs their focus to extract pearls of wisdom found in the various subjects of philosophy. *Maqāṣid* has the potential to detach the wisdom found in the pagan worldviews.

5. "Forced" Interference of Philosophy

The interference of philosophy in the course of Islamic sciences represents one of the most controversial questions among Muslim scholars. Philosophy's negative effects are mostly detected in theology and mysticism. Ibn Khaldūn tracked this impact using a brief historical survey of science in later development. Being epistemologically subject to the impact of philosophy resulting from blind imitation and adoption of abstract detailed questions, methodological restriction, core concepts, and theories. The most catastrophic damage caused by philosophy is the shift of belief and worldview. However, beyond that, there are proper ways to enrich Muslim students' learning experience in most of its intellectual domains.

Ibn Khaldūn did not abstain from using current philosophical instruments, however, not before their critical examination according to the Islamic worldview, methodology, study of human association, and his intellectual objectives. "As a philosopher", Türker noted the following:

"[Ibn Khaldūn] has made use of the terminology of Ibn Sina's philosophy reworked by Fakhruddin al-Razi, primarily anchored in concepts like being, nature, quiddity, contingency, impossibility, and necessity. Upon the need of scientific research of a certain concept, however, Ibn Khaldūn takes close heed of the nature of the thing, constituting the central subject of the relevant research, in imbuing the concept's content, and exposes

the concepts of contingency, necessity, and impossibility, sporadically appraised by philosophers in logic, though mainly in metaphysics, to a new inspection in the discipline he founded."⁵⁸

The interference of philosophy happens when proper approaches are set by scholars, instructors, and learners. In this case, philosophical elements as they are related to one another will cause a turning point in the concerned discipline that would change its direction and purpose. This is what happened in *tasawwuf* and dialectic theology. The case of *tasawwuf* in the early periods of its development, as Ibn Khaldūn noted, refers to a "...constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God, aversion to the false splendour of the world, abstinence from the pleasure, property, and position to which the great mass aspire, and retirement from the world into solitude for divine worship."⁵⁹ However, under the influence of philosophy, the recent mystics have turned their attention to the pursuit of states of 'veil' removal, ascetic states and experience, and the treatment of topics far beyond the sensual perception. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the mystics have:

"Taught different methods of mortifying the powers of sensual perception and nourishing the reasoning spirit with exercises, so that the soul might fully grow and attain its own essential perception. When this happens, they believe that the whole of existence is encompassed by the perceptions of the soul, that the essences of existence are revealed to them, and that they perceive the reality of all the essences from the (divine) throne to light rain."⁶⁰

The shift in the meditation method has led many recent Sufis who believed that intuitive perceptions to scientific and logical, to the adoption of philosophical concepts such as the unity of existence and eternity of the world... etc. promoted by prominent ancient philosophers,

such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Some “hold the opinion that the Creator is One with His creatures in His identity, His existence, and His attributes”. They assume that this was the opinion of the philosophers before.” This shows how philosophy corrupted and distorted the belief of Oneness among Sufis. Ibn Khaldūn views the oneness assumed by the later Sufis as identical with the incarnation the Christians claim for the Messiah.”⁶¹ This also shows that learning and teaching philosophy projects should deeply consider what philosophy did to other branches of Islamic knowledge and their students. Philosophy should be visualized like a sharp sword, which when handled poorly risks harming and wounding parts of the body. Taking philosophy as auxiliary knowledge is then considered an effective approach leading to the prevention of harmful results to students. Learning philosophy should be given some attention in Muslim higher learning, but not as autonomous wisdom, a chosen way of life, and a prime source of knowledge that addresses the big questions pertaining to human life and existence.

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldūn's criticism of philosophy instruction could best be described as open, of multiple levels, and constructive. It focuses on specific elements of philosophy's assumptions, principles, and methods of inquiry. His criticism goes to the Muslims' attitude and the way they apply philosophy in the affairs of life. However, Ibn Khaldūn's view also carries potential advantages and insights favouring a responsible role for philosophy within the broad body of Islamic scholarship. This study discussed some of Ibn Khaldūn's basic guidelines and views on various sciences, theories of knowledge, and education. The research stressed the importance of exposing Muslim students to the thinking skills used in philosophy as well as some other relevant content. With those skills, Muslim students would engage effectively in reasoning, debate, and dialogue.

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