Views of Ibn Khaldun and Aristotle on State

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Abstract

In my paper, I'll attempt to compare Ibn Khaldun's (d. 1406) political theory and Aristotle's (384-322 BC) thinking on state. Ibn Khaldun definitely had benefited from learning ancient legacy. Nevertheless, this benefit was of little importance in shaping his views on human life. Ibn Khaldun disagreed with Aristotle on important matters of state. The philosophical difference between Aristotle and Ibn Khaldun to be mentioned is a fundamental one. First, Aristotle considers that the sole purpose of the polis (state) is to prevent anyone from doing injustice to another within its jurisdiction. Second, he, still under Plato's influence, argues that the polis (state) exists for the sake not merely of life, but of the good life. On the contrary, Ibn Khaldun says that the state comes into existence through the tribal force and 'asabiyya (group feeling or solidarity). He asserts that royal authority (power) is a natural quality of man which is absolutely necessary to mankind. Religion too has its effects on reinforcement the state, but it cannot also be upheld without 'asabiyya. Ibn Khaldun doesn't agree with the philosophers (falasifa) thesis stated that prophecy (nubuwwa) is a natural quality of man. Existence and human life can be realized without the existence of prophecy. He says that there are people (Pagans or Magians) who have no divinely revealed book, but they too possess states. Hence for Ibn Khaldun, royal authority means superiority and the power to rule by force (qahr). Aristotle, on the other hand, insists that the existence of force is for a sign not of the state but of the state's failure. In conclusion, it must be said that Ibn Khaldun and Aristotle sought their own ways to solve theoretical problems of the state and power. The political philosophy of Aristotle had little influence on the formation of Ibn Khaldun's views. The Arab historian and thinker wanted to give birth to original political theory, which did not appear in Aristotle, and to create from history a social philosophy.

When Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) created his own philosophical system, he became the founder of the science of history. For him it was an attempt to understand history as a natural process. He created the theory of cyclical development of civilizations. The unique aspects of his theory are: 1) adherence to the critical and the causal methods

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in the field of historical studies, recognition of economic and geographic factors in the historical process, recognition of the human being as a socially and culturally dependent entity, refusal to recognize the state as a system based solely on religion, and 2) factors of natural origin play an important role in the formation and development of the state and civilization[1]. The new science established by Ibn Khaldun for the understanding and teaching of history is highly unique. One can say that before him no such socio-economic doctrine had ever existed in Muslim legacy[2]. No such science existed in ancient thought either, except for socio-political theories of some ancient philosophers (Plato and Aristotle) about human society and the state.

Ibn Khaldun's famous work "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*) describes his history philosophy best. According to Ibn Khaldun, his teaching is a science to distinguish truth from falsehood in the description of historical events[3]. He believes that the real purpose of historical research is to identify the causes of any historical event (*ta'lil li-l-ka'inat*)[4]. The historian is obliged to leave out false and fictitious information using the scientific method. Therefore, the cognition of the true course of historical events is the purpose of the new science of Ibn Khaldun. Human civilization (*'umran*) existence laws and modes are the subject of his science. The cognition of objective laws of civilization development should provide a differentiation of the real from the farfetched, the true from the false in the historical data. In his work "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*), he tries to develop a normative method (*qanun*) to distinguish the true from the false in the course of analysis of human society. To do this, one should separate the states that a civilization (*'umran*) experiences "owing to itself" (*li-dhati-hi*) from the accidental states (*'arid*) and from something that could not have taken place at all[5]. Thus, finding a method of historical criticism, a tool which serves as a normative method (*qanun*) is the primary objective of the first part of the "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*).

Ibn Khaldun says that a merit of his new science is development of a new method of historical criticism. This new science (*'ilm*) is distinctive and belongs neither to the rhetoric (*'ilm al-khitaba*), nor to politics (*'im al-siyasa al-madaniyya*)[6]. He assures that nothing like his new science has reached his epoch from the ancient sages (*hukama'*).

[1] Zeki Velidi Togan. Tarihte usul (4 üncü Baski). Istanbul, 1985. S. 163.

[2] A.V. Smirnov. Ibn Haldun i ego novaya nauka // History of Philosophy. Yearbook 2007 (Istoriko-filosofskiy ezhegodnik), Institute of Philosophy (Russian Academy of sciences), Moscow, 2008, str. 163.

[3] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. Beyrouth-Sayda: Al-Maktaba al-asriyya, 1996. S. 42.

[4] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S.10.

[5] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 42.

[6] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 42.

Ibn Khaldun suggests that either it has not existed before or it has existed once, but then it was buried in oblivion[7]. However one must recognize that many bold ideas of Ibn Khaldun were to some extent cultivated by his predecessors. His doctrine did not emerge from scratch.

We may ask what tradition has had a stronger influence on him, the Muslim tradition, or the ancient philosophical legacy? Here are the names of some Ibn Khaldun's predecessors: Ibn Said al-Magribi (d. 1274), Rashid al-Din Tabib (d. 1318), al-Subki (d. 1370)[8], al-Farabi (d. 950), the authors of encyclopedic philosophical writings "Brethren of Purity" (*Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Sawa*), al-Mawardi (d. 1058), al-Turtushi (d. 1126) and some others[9]. The appearance of the method of critical analysis of Muslim traditions (*Sunna*) encouraged the birth of the method of systematic description of historical events, like al-Tabari used, but this phenomenon receives no further development, except for Ibn Khaldun himself, al-Biruni (d. 1050) and some other Muslim scholars. In the field of history, al-Biruni attached great importance to archeology, geology and economics, although in general he remained committed to the idealistic approach to understanding the causes of historical development. He believed that in human history the decisive role is played by moral values, physical and spiritual harmony[10]. Ibn Khaldun's predecessors among Muslim historians are characterized by their idealist view on history (recognition of a decisive role of the religious factor in history). Ibn Khaldun himself criticized the Muslim historians for their narrative approach to the presentation of historical events, inability to distinguish between real and imaginary events[11].

In the "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*) Ibn Khaldun assesses the impact of ancient political philosophy on his historical beliefs as a lowly one. On the one hand, he, like many Muslim intellectuals, positively appreciates the work of ancient Greek thinkers and scientists as a whole. In the 6th part of his book devoted to the rational sciences, he underlines the influence of ancient thought on the formation of scientific and philosophical thought among the Muslims, mentions the honorable nickname of Aristotle – the "First Teacher" (*mu'allim awwal*)[12]. On the other hand, he denies that he has adopted his new science from Aristotle: "We became aware of these things (i.e. royal authority and dynasties) with God's help and without the instruction of

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[7]   Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 42-43.
[8]   Zeki Velidi Togan. Tarihte usul. S.163.
[9]   Enan M.A. Ibn Khaldun: His life and works. New Delhi, 1997. PP. 123-128.
[10] Zeki Velidi Togan. Tarihte usul. S. 152.
[11] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 11-12.
[12] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 462.

Aristotle or the teaching of the Mobedhan"[13]. Nevertheless, one can see something common in the teaching of these two thinkers, find implicit polemics of Ibn Khaldun and his great predecessor in the field of science about the society and state.

It seems that Ibn Khaldun was really influenced by some ideas from philosophical heritage of the ancient world. This follows from his reference to the essay "Politics" by pseudo-Aristotle: "In the *Book on Politics* that is ascribed to Aristotle[14] and has wide circulation, we find a good deal about our subject"[15].

Confirmation of our thesis can be found in his words that nothing remained from sciences of past peoples (Persians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Babylonians, or Copts), except for the knowledge of the ancient Greeks (*yunan*)[16]. "Of the sciences of others, nothing has come to our attention"[17]. His words about the knowledge of ancient Greeks and the hidden reference to Aristotle in the mentioning of rhetoric (*'ilm al-khitaba*) and politics (*'ilm al-siyasa al-madaniyya*)[18] are extremely important. It seems that Muslim historians have had much less influence on Ibn Khaldun's teaching on history and society, as compared with the influence of ancient Greek thinkers, particularly Aristotle[19].

For example, it might seem that in the first part of his work "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*) he acts only as a transmitter of information, derived from the writings of Muslim historians. But in fact Ibn Khaldun reproduces the ancient geography guideline assimilated by medieval Muslim thought that people only live in the habitable quarter of the world. Offering the reader his understanding of "human civi-

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[13] Ibn Khaldun. The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History. Trans. from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal. Abridged and edited by N. J. Dawood. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. P. 41.

[14] «Ibn Khaldun himself doubted its authenticity and did not mention it as a work on political philosophy (*siyasa madaniyya*)" (Mahdi, Muhsin. Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history. The University of Chicago Press, 1957. p. 158).

[15] Ibn Khaldun. The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History. Trans. from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal. P. 41.

[16] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 43.

[17] Ibn Khaldun. The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History. Trans. from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal. P. 39.

[18] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 42.

[19] «The main characteristic of the new science is that it concentrates on the study and explanation of actual events. Whether this is possible at all, whether there can be a science of the actual and the imperfect, is of course a crucial problem, especially within the Platonic tradition of political philosophy. Ibn Khaldun thought that is was possible, and in this he was more of an Aristotelian than his Muslim predecessors» (Mahdi, Muhsin. Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history. P. 291). See also Enan M.A. Ibn Khaldun: His life and works. PP. 132-133.

lization" (*'umran bashari*)[20] in the first chapter Ibn Khaldun wants to give an overall picture of the world in which the man is fighting for existence, and then to formulate the general laws of human society (*ijtima'*). As we know, Aristotle disputed with the Sophists and also advocated his thesis that the laws of human society and the state are natural laws, rather than products of a convention or an agreement[21].

At the beginning of his work "Prolegomena" (*Al-Muqaddima*) Ibn Khaldun describes the basic premises of his socio-philosophical doctrine: first of all, a human society (*ijtima 'insani*) is necessary (*zaruri*)[22]. People can get their own food and protect themselves from wild animals only through joint efforts; otherwise the human race would have simply disappeared. Ibn Khaldun distinguishes two ways of people lifestyle – extra-urban (*badavi*) and urban (*hadari*), different from each other in ways of economic activities and different types of relationships between society members. Thus, according to Ibn Khaldun, social evolution is rooted in motives of natural origin. The extra-urban lifestyle is characterized by poverty, tribalism and simple manners. The urban lifestyle, on the contrary, is rather luxurious due to an advanced level of production, weakening and disaappearance of tribal solidarity and cohesion (*'asabiyya*), hedonism, sole power of the emperor, deterioration of morals, etc.

Prerequisites of the State origin arise outside the city, among the warlike and savage tribes. This process is driven by group solidarity and cohesion (*'asabiyya*), based on kinship through the male line among the clan or tribe members. The victory of the strongest and most cohesive kinship group over the other clans and tribes provide its leader dominion (*riyasa*) and possession (*mulk*)[23]. Possession (*mulk*)[24] and power for the protection of tribesmen and appropriation of property of the weaker clans, tribes and nations is the purpose of group solidarity and cohesion (*'asabiyya*). Having captured a city, a tribe with a strong sense of group solidarity and cohesion provides itself with a right to possession (*mulk*) and power. Power is naturally inherent in human society and is inextricably linked with the state: the state is an expression of power, but the state is not possible without power. Ibn Khaldun emphasizes the crucial role of the sense of group solidarity and cohesion (*'asabiyya*) in the emergence of a religious movement (it does not occur without group cohesion). He writes that the Quraysh, the tribesmen of Prophet Muhammad, gained power thanks to a strong

[20] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 46.
[21] Miller Fred D. The State and the Community in Aristotle's Politics. Reason Papers (USA), No. 1, 1974. PP. 61-62.
[22] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 46.
[23] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun* . S. 175.
[24] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 131.

group solidarity and cohesion (*'asabiyya*) and then lost it due to the weakening of *'asabiyya* [25]. The Religious Laws are rarely at odds with the demands of reality[26]. Therefore, he actually establishes the primacy of natural (geographic) and economic factors over the religious factor in the development of society and the emergence of the state.

It can be stated that Ibn Khaldun agrees with Aristotle on a number of very important things:

– the state corresponds to the nature of human society. Aristotle also says: "So every polis exists by nature, since the basis association did, too. For it is their end, and nature is an end"[27]. The state (*polis*) exists by nature and the man is by nature a social creature as well, or a "polis animal" (*politicon zoon*): "Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal"[28];

– the need for submission to the ruler. According to Ibn Khaldun, the human community needs a ruler (*vazi'*) capable to prevent the mutual hostility of people and protect them from self-destruction. His words do not contradict the statement of Aristotle that the family is based on the subordination of the wife to her husband, so the city-state (*polis*) is based on subordination of citizens to rulers.

And yet there is a crucial difference between the socio-political concepts of Aristotle and Ibn Khaldun. We can say that the gap between Aristotle and Ibn Khaldun is fundamental. Aristotle adheres to the opinion that the purpose of the state and the law does not simply mean a requirement to its citizens to act honestly and fairly to one another, but also to make virtuous people out of them. First, Aristotle considers that the sole purpose of the state (*polis*) is to prevent anyone from doing injustice to another within its jurisdiction. Second, he, still under Plato's influence, argues that the state (*polis*) exists for the sake not merely of life, but of the good life.

According to Aristotle, each object in nature has its purpose, goal (*telos*). People get together to live together not only to be happy, but, primarily, to be virtuous. A virtuous life is the ultimate good sought by the state as the highest form of social organization. Aristotle establishes a direct relationship between ethics and politics. The individual and the public good match, but the priority remains for the public good.

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[25] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 182.

[26] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 183.

[27] Aristotle. Politics. Book I (1252b27-34) // Miller Fred D. The State and the Community in Aristotle's Politics. P. 63.

[28] The Politics of Aristotle. Book I. Part II. Trans. into English with introduction, marginal analysis, essays, notes and indices by B. Jowett, M. A. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1885. 2 vol. Vol. 1. P. 4.

In the "Politics" he writes that: "But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good"[29].

On the contrary, according to Ibn Khaldun, the state arises as a result of force of the tribe and a sense of group solidarity and cohesion ('asabiyya). Ibn Khaldun says that power is the natural quality of the human being and is indispensable for human society. Religion has an impact on the state strengthening, but it is also unable to firmly establish itself without the 'asabiyya. Ibn Khaldun does not agree with the thesis of the philosophers (falasifa) that prophecy is a natural property of the human being[30]. Human society can exist without any prophecy. He says that there are nations (Pagans or Magians) who have no divinely-revealed book, but they too possess states. Thus, according to Ibn Khaldun, power means superiority and ability to control through force. Culturally-backward peoples with strong group solidarity and cohesion ('asabiyya) have a much greater ability to establish dominance (tagallub) over other nations. Therefore, the objective of the state is not the good, but power and seizure of other nations' wealth[31]. Meanwhile, Aristotle insists that state violence is not an attribute of the state, but a sign of state's failure.

The main reason for the discrepancy between Ibn Khaldun and Aristotle is in a different philosophical understanding of human nature, society and state. Aristotle shares the ancient idea of perfection. According to this view, things contain differences by their nature, a sort of series of steps or degrees towards their most advanced degree, in which perfection is embodied. As a result, he adheres to the teleological understanding of the state nature – it is the logical completion of development of the primary forms of human community (family and village). For Aristotle, the state is the ultimate goal of human society, the highest form of social organization in the triad of "family-village-state (polis)". Human society, human relationships are fully completed in the city-state (polis): in the polis the individual may lead a virtuous, better life and it corresponds to the very nature of things.

This thesis of Aristotle's political doctrine is the development of Plato's ideas about the need to see everything (including human society) in terms of the Good, the Absolute, the all-pervading reasonability, the higher cosmic order. Such an understanding is characteristic of the original Greek vision of the world: the man is built

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[29] The Politics of Aristotle. Book I. Part I. Trans. into English with introduction, marginal analysis, essays, notes and indices by B. Jowett, M. A. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1885. 2 vol. Vol. 1. P. 1.

[30] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 47.

[31] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 129-130.

into the nature (the universe) as part of the whole. Plato believes that achieving the ideal state for the human being is to harmonize the relationship of the individual with the whole, with the state. And Aristotle similarly says: "Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part"[32].

Plato's doctrine of the soul is the source of his political conception of the state. The being of the man is limited to his soul. Between the three parts of the human soul (appetitive soul, irascible soul and the rational soul) and three classes of the ideal state (craftsmen, warriors and rulers) there is a strict correspondence. The state must be managed by a wise ruler-philosopher, able to contemplate the Good. He who is guided by reason is a happy man.

Aristotle in his book "Politics" actually reproduces this Platonic thought. He says that for the soul rules the body with a despotic rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule.

Aristotle shares Plato's thought that the city-state (*polis*) is the horizon of all moral values and the only possible form of human coexistence. For Aristotle the world is a huge "polis", "a reasonable world" of the Greek city-states. Barbarians living on the periphery of the civilized world are considered as potential slaves. Aristotle shares the prejudice of his epoch that the slaves are unreasonable creatures and by their nature are created to satisfy the physical needs of the free Greek citizens like animals. It is obvious that Aristotle's view of the state largely coincides with the Platonic model of an ideal state. Aristotle's political doctrine is a purely philosophical concept and a kind of social utopia.

Ibn Khaldun does not assume an anti-philosophical position regarding to the ancient philosophical thought, but criticizes the concepts of Neo-Platonist philosophers (*falasifa*) (the common good is the ultimate goal of the state, human happiness is the perception of sensory and supersensory things together with the purification of the soul and its decoration with virtues, etc.)[33]. Being a Muslim, a representative of a monotheistic religion, Ibn Khaldun expresses no doubts about the priority of the supersensible world over the earth, and recognizes religion as a guarantor of human salvation in the next world[34]. But he does not consider the historical science as a method to take some absolute point and to observe how the Idea gradually realizes itself in

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[32] The Politics of Aristotle. Book I. Part I. Trans. into English with introduction, marginal analysis, essays, notes and indices by B. Jowett, M. A. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1885. 2 vol. Vol. 1. P. 4.

[33] Mahdi, Muhsin. Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history. P. 110.

[34] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun*. S. 178.

the world[35]. He denied a straightforward determinism in understanding the society development. In general, his critical attitude toward Greek philosophy testifies to the fact that Islamic thought during his era became wiser and refused the enthusiastic and naive expectation of wonderful recipes from the ancient philosophy.

Ibn Khaldun criticizes Muslim historians from among his predecessors much more vigorously than the ancient thinkers. Muslim historians of the middle ages were dominated by a conception that historical events are caused by God and predestination (qada'). However, they noted that God creates things and governs the world according to his custom (sunna), i.e. not quite voluntarily[36]. But this does not affect the heart of the matter. In his critical attitude to his predecessors from among Islamic historians, Ibn Khaldun comes from the fundamental tenets of his teachings, according to which human society develops according to the laws of nature. Ibn Khaldun believes that feelings of tribal solidarity and cohesion ('asabiyya) are the origin of power and the state. To retain power, only force is sufficient.

This was a manifestation of realism of the Arab historian who had an experience of communication with the famous Central Asian ruler Timur (d. 1405), was familiar with the political culture of the Berbers, the Mongols and especially the Turks who always clearly distinguished the Caliphate from the Sultanate[37]. From his point of view, a prophecy and the sacred book are unnecessary for the state to emerge. He points out that states also exist among the peoples who do not know the divinely-revealed book and live in the "barbaric", as Aristotle would say part of the world. In other words, there is another world, directly opposite to the world of Mediterranean civilization, but existing by its own laws. Such facts have not been reasonably explained in the teachings of both ancient thinkers and Muslim scholars before Ibn Khaldun.

In conclusion, it must be said that Ibn Khaldun and Aristotle sought their own ways to solve theoretical problems of the state and power. Each of them tried to explain the nature of the social order. Each of them sought to explain the main features of the state and power. The political philosophy of Aristotle had little influence on the formation of Ibn Khaldun's views. The Arab historian and thinker wanted to give birth to original political theory, which did not appear in Aristotle, and to create from history a social philosophy.

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[35] Mahdi, Muhsin. Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history. P. 296.
[36] Zeki Velidi Togan. Tarihte usul. S. 145-146.
[37] Ibn Khaldun. *Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun.* S. 206.