

The methodology of doubt and scrutiny according to the scholar Ibn Khaldun

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Abstract

The concern of prominent historians before Ibn Khaldun was to transmit reports and narratives, record them accurately, and compile abundant material to faithfully and clearly depict the past, making its reading both useful and instructive. While ancient historians excelled in transmitting and amassing material for their works, Ibn Khaldun added another merit. He distinguished between history as mere recording and the philosophy of history or analytical history. He persistently questioned the causes and reasons behind events and phenomena, seeking logical answers derived from his knowledge of the nature of human civilization. In doing so, he went beyond the prevailing methodology to demonstrate how to avoid historical fallacies and subjective biases as much as possible, despite the relativity inherent in the nature of human sciences.

Keywords: Doubt, scrutiny, Ibn Khaldun.

Introduction:

Those who do not study the past cannot understand their present, as studying the past is not merely about reviving it but rather providing a solid foundation from which to understand the surrounding reality. The past, whose imprints remain present despite their current meanings differing from one society to another, reflects each era's unique social imagination, sources of values, moral incentives, symbols, and meanings that define its world. For primitive man, meaning was centered on origins the mythological beginnings that gave his present world its essence and values while modern man seeks meaning through his conscious effort and hard work. In contrast, the standards of our time are shaped by the social self. As Dumont said: "The ancients believed they inherited myths, while we know that ideology is crafted by this self."¹

Human beings are always keen to understand their environment and the nature of the surrounding phenomena, seeking natural causes for things and matters as long as it is possible. In doing so, they employ a methodology.

There is no doubt that when discussing methodology, we must mention one of its most prominent pioneers building on the hadith and jurisprudential heritage preceding him—the scholar Ibn Khaldun. Through his introduction to a new methodology, he coined terms that are nearly exclusive to his approach, such as the concept of correspondence between causes and reasons, which is the science of human civilization. This concept serves as a criterion for the accuracy and validity of historical narratives and their associated written or oral heritage. Ibn Khaldun's scientific and methodological legacy has made him a subject of extensive academic study, giving rise to a specialized field known as "Khaldunian studies."

The following outlines the most notable methodological principles put forth by Ibn Khaldun in his historical methodology regarding the necessity of doubt and scrutiny for every historical text that comes to us, is narrated to us, or bears similarity to such accounts.

First: The Methodology:

Throughout successive periods, human thought has sought ways and methods to solve dilemmas and reach definitive conclusions through rational and sensory knowledge. Some ideas and approaches emerged that could be described as scientific methods, even if their outcomes were not always accurate. This was evident in the legacy of Greek civilization, especially in its philosophy, such as the Aristotelian syllogism. The Greeks used this approach to counter the Sophists, who denied absolute truths. This method was later adopted by Christians and subsequently by Rome and Constantinople.

With the advent of Islam, new approaches to verification and inquiry appeared, relying on induction and analysis. This is evident in the sciences of terminology, principles, and the Arabic language, where scholars established rules for each field to ensure reliable results within a coherent scientific framework across various disciplines and arts. Even the restitutive method later adopted by the West had its true beginnings

with Muslim scholars, foremost among them Ibn Khaldun. He laid down profound principles in this field based on correspondence after establishing foundational conditions.

Following the Islamic Renaissance, the European Renaissance emerged, and this science flourished in the 17th century CE. Among the first Europeans to use the term "science of methodology" was the German philosopher Kant, who divided logic into two parts:²

- The doctrine of principles, which examines the conditions and correct ways to acquire knowledge.
- The science of methodology, which defines the general structure of each science and determines the way any science is formed.

Preceding Kant were philosophers such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes, who outlined what is now referred to as "methodology." Today, there are many methodologies, though some, such as the experimental, dialectical, historical, and deductive methods, have gained widespread consensus. However, when examining the Islamic methodology for knowledge and its verification, it is evident that it relies on two approaches highlighted in the Qur'an:

The narrative aspect, which cannot be proven without verifying the source of the text and attributing it accurately to its originator. Scholars of hadith terminology excelled in this regard.

The inferential and deductive aspect, where certainty is achieved either through the experimental method if the matter is sensory or through analogy in the case of purely rational issues.

In general, methodology, in its simplest definition, is: "The means by which a researcher can find convincing answers to the questions of their study and test its hypotheses. It is a systematic set of procedures aimed at achieving a specific goal."³

Among the major methodologies, as mentioned earlier, is the historical methodology. While history cannot be repeated, the historical methodology can retrieve past events to study them and attempt to find interpretations for them in the present, aiming to identify laws or results that may govern future phenomena. Through the writings of Émile Durkheim, we learn that sociology will either be historical or not exist at all, considering the inherent challenges of dealing with such events due to the difficulty of the methodology itself.

The historical methodology is methodologically defined as: "Understanding the present by studying its historical background and the role past events played, attempting to find relationships between past events and similar present occurrences, with the goal of arriving at generalizations that explain past events and apply to the present."⁴

Secondly: The Art of Historical Writing in Ibn Khaldun's Perspective

Ibn Khaldun paid great attention to studying the opinions and writings of preceding philosophers, scientists, historians, and jurists—both Arab and non-Arab—whose manuscripts were available to him. He believed that for history to be accurate and properly understood, it was necessary to establish a reliable method for verifying historical facts and to clearly present the laws governing social systems. Ibn Khaldun emphasized the need to critically evaluate the news and events he transmitted and rejected presenting or reporting historical narratives without objective intellectual critique.⁵

From his perspective, as expressed in his introduction, history is more than mere accounts of events and states:

"...The art of history is among the disciplines that nations and generations exchange and pursue. Caravans and travelers embark upon journeys to learn it. Both commoners and the unlearned aspire to know it, and kings and nobles compete for its mastery. In its apparent form, history seems to be nothing more than reports about days and states, and accounts of past generations. It embellishes sayings, provides proverbial lessons, and entertains gatherings during moments of festivity. But in its essence, history involves investigation and scrutiny, a profound analysis of the origins of events, and a deep understanding of the nature of occurrences and their causes. It thus deserves a place in wisdom's domain and qualifies as one of its sciences.

Islamic historians have comprehensively compiled the events of bygone days, recorded them in documents, and preserved them in registers. Yet, their work has been mixed with falsehoods, either through errors or deliberate fabrications. They have adorned these records with dubious tales and unreliable narratives. Successors followed their traces, transmitted their accounts as they received them, and failed to examine the causes and circumstances of events. They neither rejected fabricated tales nor dismissed absurd reports. Thus, critical investigation has been rare, and careful refinement often inadequate. Errors and illusions abound in historical accounts, as blind imitation dominates human endeavors. Superficiality extends far and wide in disciplines, and ignorance prevails among humankind. Truth lacks firm dominion, while falsehood

casts its shadow with fiery vehemence. The transmitter merely conveys and narrates, but discernment must judge what is true when flattery is tempting. Knowledge clarifies the pages of truth and polishes them.”⁶

Ibn Khaldun frequently highlighted that historians, commentators, and prominent narrators often made errors in recounting tales and events due to relying solely on transmission whether accurate or flawed without cross-referencing them with their foundations, comparing them with similar cases, or subjecting them to the scrutiny of wisdom and the nature of phenomena. This led to deviations from the truth and wandering in the deserts of illusion and error, particularly in numerical accounts of wealth and armies. He emphasized the necessity of returning to foundational principles and subjecting such accounts to established rules.⁷

In general, Ibn Khaldun held that a historian must possess knowledge of the principles of politics, the nature of beings, the variations among nations, regions, and eras regarding conduct, morals, customs, beliefs, doctrines, and various conditions. They must understand the present, compare it with the past to discern agreements and differences, and explain the reasons behind similarities and divergences. Furthermore, a historian should grasp the foundations of states and sects, the origins of their emergence, the reasons for their formation, the motives behind their existence, the conditions of their leaders, and their histories. This comprehensive understanding enables the historian to identify the causes of each event. If the historian aligns with these principles, their work is accurate; otherwise, it becomes flawed and dispensable. Ibn Khaldun articulated this clearly, stating:

“The art of history is a noble discipline, rich in benefits and lofty in purpose. It acquaints us with the conditions of past nations their morals, the lives of prophets, and the politics of kings and their governance. It serves as a source of guidance for those who seek to emulate them in religious and worldly matters. Thus, it requires diverse sources, varied knowledge, and keen observation coupled with deliberation. These lead the historian to truth and steer them away from pitfalls and errors. For when accounts rely solely on transmission, without applying the principles of custom, political rules, the nature of civilization, or the conditions of human society, and without comparing the unseen with the seen and the past with the present, they risk falling into error, slipping from the path of truth, and straying from accuracy.”⁸

Thirdly: The Concise Causes of Falsehood in Narratives According to Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun conducted extensive investigations and identified the causes of falsehood in transmitted narratives and accounts. In doing so, he adhered to his principles, especially as he was establishing a new and unfamiliar science for scholars and the general educated public—one in which they were as novices, akin to children. His aim was to bring this discipline closer to their minds and make it comprehensible and acceptable to their understanding.

He identified several reasons that render descriptions inaccurate and allow falsehood to infiltrate the transmitted accounts of states and social phenomena. The key concise causes of falsehood in narratives can be summarized as follows:⁹

- Partisanship towards opinions and doctrines.
- People's tendency to curry favor with dignitaries and elites through praise, flattery, and exaggeration of their virtues and accomplishments.
- Blind trust in transmitters.
- Neglecting the intended purposes of the narratives.
- A fascination with the unusual and extraordinary, coupled with the ease of careless speech, lack of self-accountability for errors, and failure to demand moderation and truthfulness in reporting.
- Analogical reasoning and imitation.
- Ignorance in aligning events with their true circumstances due to inherent deception and artificiality in the reports, where the narrator conveys the events as influenced by artificial impressions rather than their genuine nature.
- Lack of understanding of the natural characteristics of social conditions.

As for accounts of events, their accuracy and truthfulness depend on their conformity with reality. Thus, it is essential to examine the feasibility of their occurrence, which becomes more significant than the integrity of the narrator. The value of creation lies solely in its internal coherence, while the value of reports lies both in their internal coherence and their external conformity with reality.

Therefore, the guiding principle for distinguishing truth from falsehood in narratives lies in assessing possibility and impossibility. This requires analyzing human society (civilization) and distinguishing between the conditions inherent to it by nature, those that are accidental and negligible, and those that cannot occur within it.

By applying this approach, we establish a reliable criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood in narratives a criterion that leaves no room for doubt. Consequently, when we hear about certain events in civilization, we can judge what to accept as credible and what to dismiss as fabricated. This method provides historians with an accurate standard to follow in seeking truth and correctness in their accounts.¹⁰

Fourthly: The Foundations and Characteristics of Ibn Khaldun's Methodology

Due to Ibn Khaldun's central importance as a figure, evaluations of his methodology and its unique characteristics have diverged into various directions. Among the most notable contributors to outlining these characteristics is Abdel-Razzaq Qassoum, who provided an excellent summary of the writings on this subject by scholars from both the Mashreq and Maghreb.

In the Mashreq, notable figures include Ali Abdulwahid Wafi, Sati' Al-Husri, Nasif Nassar, and Ali Al-Wardi, while from the Maghreb, his school includes figures like Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri and Ali Oumlil. Abdel-Razzaq Qassoum identifies the most distinctive features of Ibn Khaldun's methodology as revolving around three key elements:

- The **religious factor**.
- The **laws of history and the laws of human society** ("human civilization").
- The **philosophical approach**, which he also regarded as the foundational sources of Ibn Khaldun's methodology.

Before Addressing These Characteristics: Ibn Khaldun's Classification of Sciences

Ibn Khaldun divided sciences into two main categories:

1. The First Section: Natural Sciences

This category includes sciences that humans attain through their intellect and reasoning. Examples include the practical and philosophical sciences, such as medicine and philosophy, which can be grasped through human thought and intellectual faculties. These sciences allow individuals to discern their subjects, issues, and methods of proof, enabling them to distinguish between truth and error.

2. The Second Section: Transmitted Sciences

These are conventional and scriptural sciences entirely based on transmitted knowledge derived from divine revelation and legal traditions, leaving no room for independent reasoning. They are rooted in religious transmission, whose foundations are the Qur'an and Sunnah, where Ibn Khaldun stated:

"The types of these transmitted sciences are numerous because it is obligatory for the believer to learn the divine rulings imposed upon them and upon their fellow human beings. These rulings are derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah whether by explicit texts, consensus, or analogy."

The Foundations of Ibn Khaldun's Approach to Creed

From this classification, the foundations of Ibn Khaldun's methodology in addressing matters of creed become evident. He distinguished between transmitted sciences and rational sciences, considering transmitted sciences as the cornerstone of the Sharia. These foundations align with the principles upheld by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah and form the basis of the distinct characteristics of his methodology.

1. Legal Knowledge:

There is no doubt that Ibn Khaldun's approach is rooted, first and foremost, in his background as a Maliki jurist. As Mohammed Ayat Hamo states, "He addresses all issues based on his adherence to his Maliki theological creed and his Ash'ari Sunni inclinations." What distinguishes him is not merely his expertise in Islamic jurisprudence—a trait he shared with many of his contemporaries but his ability to employ this knowledge to address issues outside the realm of religious specialization. Abdel-Razzaq Qassoum aptly concludes: "No matter what ideological cloaks are draped upon Ibn Khaldun, the religious cloak he dons remains the most significant. The philosophical reading of Ibn Khaldun's social methodology reveals that religion, and particularly the Qur'an, serves as the primary foundation upon which he formulates his concepts."¹¹

2. The Laws of History and Society ("Human Civilization"):

The science of "human civilization" (‘ilm al-‘umrān al-basharī) was Ibn Khaldun's most notable innovation, distinguishing him from his peers. He pioneered this science, delving into the depths of human history and striving to uncover the laws and principles governing its course. He rejected the mere recounting of events without analysis or explanation. Much of what he discusses in his *Muqaddimah* revolves around this methodology. The Khaldunian method is primarily characterized by its application of these laws and principles, which he established under the framework of "human civilization." He described it as an

independent science unprecedented in earlier scholarship and made it the core purpose of authoring his historical work, *Kitab al- Ibar*.¹²

Thus, the law of human civilization is what sets Ibn Khaldun apart, as a theory primarily based on the study of history and its phenomena, transforming them into principles that can be applied universally while avoiding pure historical narration that often lacks scrutiny. Such narration may carry inherent contradictions, as exemplified by what some historians reported about the large number of Israelites during their time in the wilderness, highlighting the illusion they fell into, as mentioned earlier. He applied his famous principle in the science of history closely related to the emergence of sects—the principle of comparing the unseen to the seen and the present to the past.

The science of human civilization is a tool for verifying the accuracy of reports by using the characteristics of things, such as differences in nature, diversity among nations, and disparities in geographical locations and time periods. All this is supplemented by the condition that it does not contradict scriptural transmissions or religious sciences. According to Ibn Khaldun, its role parallels that of modern criticism, examining narratives and determining their applicability based on an understanding of the era in which they occurred, alongside evidence that affirms or denies the event's occurrence.¹³

Ibn Khaldun advocated moving beyond the surface of history to its depth, elevating history from the level of narration to that of reasoning and explanation—what he termed the "inner meaning of history." Thus, the subject of history becomes human civilization or human society. This shift highlights that the historian's task encompasses all "social phenomena" of human activity, including political, economic, and cultural events, as well as the structures, psychological states, and social conditions of groups.

Ibn Khaldun's motivation for creating this science was methodological; he sought to rid historical research of false reports and to create a tool by which historians could scrutinize historical narratives and discern what is likely true from what is not. He asserts:

“When we hear about events in human civilization, we learn what to accept as credible and what to reject as fabricated, providing us with a reliable standard that historians can use to pursue truth and accuracy in their accounts.”

Although Ibn Khaldun stated that the purpose of his first book, which encompasses the science of human civilization, was to critique historical reports, a fundamental reason drove him to establish this science: he aimed to study its issues intrinsically, to understand the conditions of society and the laws governing it. This is the nature of all sciences, as the direct and intrinsic purpose of each science is to explore the nature of a particular set of phenomena and grasp its laws. In addition to this primary purpose, every science achieves numerous indirect objectives.

Ibn Khaldun expresses this idea, saying:

“Since every natural truth merits an inquiry into the accidents that pertain to it by its nature—namely, an inquiry into its laws there must be, for every concept and truth, a distinct science. The fruit of this science [the science of human civilization] lies only in historical reports, as you have seen, although its subjects in themselves and their distinctness are noble.”

Whether the primary aim of the science of human civilization is to critique reports and distinguish truth from falsehood, or whether this is an indirect goal, the fact remains that Ibn Khaldun's methodological concerns are evident to anyone who reads the *Muqaddimah*. His methodological preoccupations are the most pressing and enduring of his various interests.¹⁴

3. The Philosophical Method:

It is essential to begin this section with what Abdel-Razzaq Qassoum states:

“Ibn Khaldun does not draw from the fountain of religion or the laws of history alone; he also draws inspiration from the rational philosophical source. You will sometimes find him using Aristotelian terminology, as is the case with ‘civilization,’ and Averroist concepts, as is the case with ‘asabiyyah’ (social cohesion) and political terminology.”

Qassoum attributes Ibn Khaldun's interest in the rational method and his formation within it to two significant factors:

- His early study of rational sciences under his teacher, **Muhammad al-Abili**.
- His personal readings of the works of Islamic thinkers such as **al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd**.

Abdel-Razzaq Qassoum continues to elaborate on Ibn Khaldun's philosophical method, explaining how Ibn Khaldun introduced a new modification to the rationalist approach by stating:

"It becomes clear that Ibn Khaldun, in relying on the rational method, introduced a new adjustment to the rationalist doctrine, which he termed the principle of proportionality between the laws of reason and the laws of being, considering that existence is far broader than reason. This adjustment led to:

- **Recognizing the limitations of reason**, aligning him with Kant's assertion that 'reason is tailored to fit nature.' Ibn Khaldun also holds that faith surpasses reason, thus necessitating reliance on a power beyond reason, such as intuition, as advocated by al-Ghazali.
- **Relying on the legitimate domain of reason** to construct certain knowledge. In Ibn Khaldun's words: 'Reason is a sound measure, and its judgments are certain and indisputable.'

This demonstrates that Ibn Khaldun did not rely on a single source in formulating his method. Instead, he blended religious principles with the science of human civilization and rational sciences, although religion ultimately serves as the final arbiter in his overall vision."

4. Doubt and Scrutiny:

Ibn Khaldun imposed this characteristic as a condition for his intellectual production. After identifying the causes that allow falsehood to infiltrate narratives—such as partisanship for opinions and sects, blind trust in transmitters, flattery of those in power, and, most importantly, ignorance of the nature of societal conditions—he stipulated that uncovering the truth requires scrutiny of all aspects of a narrative.

Ibn Khaldun provided practical examples of this method, which set him apart. For instance, he refuted the story of Abbasah, the sister of Harun al-Rashid, being responsible for the downfall of the Barmakids. He rejected this account for reasons of honor, deeming it inappropriate for the granddaughter of Abdullah ibn Abbas, attributing the real cause of their downfall to power struggles. He stated:

"Whoever examines their history and the accounts of the state and its rulers will find that it is firmly rooted in real causes and clear effects."

He also dismissed the claims of weak-minded jurists in the Maghreb, as he described them, who criticized Imam al-Mahdi, the founder of the Almohad state, accusing him of deception and fraud. Ibn Khaldun attributed their rejection to envy over his stature.

He further illustrated the importance of scrutinizing narratives by meticulously examining details. Commenting on what some historians, like al-Mas'udi, narrated about the Israelites, Ibn Khaldun found this account particularly provocative and marshaled evidence and arguments to expose its falsehood.¹⁵

Ibn Khaldun made doubt and scrutiny a foundational principle through which he arrived at scientific certainty. He criticized his predecessors who wrote history and recorded events, stating that they were: "As far as possible from the logic of doubt and scrutiny in what they transmitted."

As a result, their accounts were a mixture of what reason accepts and logic validates, and what is closer to myths and legends. Ibn Khaldun, with his new discipline, took an approach unknown to his predecessors. He was not a skeptic but rather a meticulous researcher and a critical investigator.

For this reason, he resorted to using doubt and scrutiny to verify the subject matter of his new discipline, elucidating its issues and the intrinsic aspects it involves, the changing conditions of nations and generations, and the causes and reasons behind all of this. He worked to refine knowledge, purging it of anything illogical or unacceptable to a sound scientific mind. Moreover, he emphasized to researchers the importance of not accepting knowledge without reflection and insisted on subjecting it to valid laws. Only then could one be confident in its validity and scientific rigor. He stated: "Do not trust what is presented to you, but reflect on the reports and subject them to valid laws; this will allow you to scrutinize them in the best possible manner."¹⁶

It is worth noting that Ibn Khaldun inherited a legacy of intellectual skepticism from two prominent figures in Islamic jurisprudence: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah. Imam al-Ghazali doubted the ability of reason to attain absolute truth, as he considered intellectual perception prone to error, similar to sensory perception, and incapable of comprehending many truths that the universe holds.

As for Ibn Taymiyyah, he questioned the validity of universal intellectual concepts, which logicians before him had regarded as the foundations of their logical arguments and treated as indisputable. He believed that these premises were neither necessary nor self-evident, as claimed, but rather relative matters subject to differing evaluations. Ibn Taymiyyah also held that universal intellectual concepts exist only in the minds of people and lack independent external existence. True knowledge, in his view, derives from specific, concrete realities rather than from abstract intellectual universals. Knowledge can only be achieved by moving from one particular to another (analogy of the unseen to the seen). When this analogy is organized through experience and guided by the principle of causality, it leads to certainty.

Moreover, Ibn Khaldun inherited methods for verifying the authenticity of transmitted reports from the field of hadith sciences. He wrote:

"Among the sciences of hadith is the examination of chains of transmission and the identification of which hadiths are actionable by verifying their fulfillment of the required conditions for a complete chain. This is because acting upon hadiths is based on what is predominantly believed to be true among the reports of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Effort is made to determine the methods that establish this presumption, namely through knowing the narrators of hadith in terms of their integrity and precision. This is verified through transmission from the scholars of religion who assessed their integrity and confirmed their absence of flaws or negligence, providing us with evidence for accepting or rejecting them. Additionally, the ranks of these narrators, from the Companions to the Followers, and their varying levels of reliability, are distinguished individually."

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun, as a Maliki scholar, taught the Muwatta' of Imam Malik in Cairo, which he noted contained approximately three hundred hadiths.¹⁷

An example of his skeptical approach is evident in his demographic studies. Ibn Khaldun effectively demonstrated population growth and how it increases from generation to generation. Although he did not discover mathematical demographic laws, such as growth rates, mortality, or birth rates, he uncovered the fundamental principles of population growth. This was achieved by applying doubt and scrutiny to historical accounts, challenging inflated figures by comparing them to the realities of the time, prevailing conditions, and the rules of combat. In doing so, Ibn Khaldun revealed the falsity of such exaggerated statistics.

5. Eliminating Preconceived Judgments:

This approach was evident in many of Ibn Khaldun's conclusions, where he sometimes ventured opinions contrary to the prevailing views in his circles. A clear example of this is his affirmation of the Fatimid lineage to Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), not based on scientific narratives but rather on his theory that the dominance achieved by the Fatimids could only belong to those with *asabiyyah* (social cohesion). He relied on logical and rational evidence rather than scientific facts to establish their lineage. He contrasted this with the case of the Qarmatian leader, whose movement faded because he was a claimant with no legitimate lineage and lacked *asabiyyah*.¹⁸

In general, it is not easy to encapsulate the Khaldunian methodology and its features, especially given the multitude of interpretations of his thought, some of which are even contradictory. However, most who have studied Ibn Khaldun agree that he was a remarkable figure in the history of both Islamic and human thought. His methodology has sparked extensive analysis and interpretation, and he himself outlined its principles when discussing the virtues of the science of history and its methods. He established the framework for this methodology and the qualities required of scholars and researchers in history and narratives. Among the most important characteristics he emphasized for those engaging in this field are:

- Knowledge of the principles of politics and the nature of existing things.
- Understanding the differences among nations in ethics, customs, doctrines, and other conditions.
- Comprehensive awareness of the present or contemporary reality.
- Drawing comparisons between the present and the absent, finding similarities or identifying differences (*correspondence*).
- Explaining the reasons behind agreements and disagreements.
- Understanding the foundations of states and sects, the origins of their emergence, and the causes of their development.
- Knowing each event, its causes, and the roots of each narrative.
- Adhering to principles, foundations, and the laws of human civilization.¹⁹

Fifth: General Principles of Ibn Khaldun's Methodology

Ibn Khaldun established methodological principles to correct historians' errors and objectively address social phenomena, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Similarity (Conformity):

This principle refers to the similarity in patterns of human thought, analysis, and application to reality, with differences usually arising from external influences.²⁰ The essence of this methodological principle is that human societies share similarities in certain aspects while differing in others. The direct cause of this similarity is the shared intellectual nature of the human species, which Ibn Khaldun exemplified through the concept of social imitation.

2. Difference (Variation):

This principle is one of the foundational aspects of Ibn Khaldun's methodology. It signifies that the nature of human civilization necessitates variation. Thus, no phenomenon can be isolated from its spatial and temporal context, nor can a single interpretation be generalized to explain multiple phenomena occurring in different environments and societies.²¹

It is evident here that Ibn Khaldun leaned toward a historical approach grounded in inductive principles rather than mere narrative history, which often includes myths. The principle of variation, in contrast to the principle of similarity, asserts that while human societies may share similarities in some aspects, they differ in others. This is because maintaining the same condition indefinitely is impossible. Ibn Khaldun linked variation to change, as the latter inevitably leads to differences among human societies. He stated:

“The conditions of the world, nations, and their customs and beliefs do not remain on a single course or stable pattern. Instead, they vary over days and times, transitioning from one state to another.”²²

3. Causality (Cause and Effect):

This principle involves connecting events and phenomena to their causes and outcomes.²³ Every researcher aiming to uncover the relationships between events and their causes must grasp this principle before affirming any event or incident. The historian or researcher must ensure the application of the law of cause and effect.²⁴

This principle highlights the differences between Ibn Khaldun and earlier historians, who generally agreed on the following:

- Failing to critique the reports and narratives they received, and neglecting to scrutinize and refine them from innovations, falsehoods, and what reason and logic would reject.
- Lack of attention to investigating the causes and reasons behind the events they recounted, particularly those leading to the rise and fall of states and the beginnings and phenomena of civilization.

In contrast to his predecessors, Ibn Khaldun's *Kitab al-'Ibar* demonstrates a clear intellectual effort to surpass earlier historians. In this work, which covers general history from the beginning of creation to the end of the 8th century, we can clearly discern Ibn Khaldun's attempts to distinguish himself in the following ways:

1. Revising the Book's Structure:

Ibn Khaldun did not adopt the annual chronological approach to organizing events. Instead, he divided his history into numerous chapters, each detailing the complete history of a state or ruling family. This approach allowed him to transcend the conventional methods of historical writing employed by earlier historians.

2. Comprehensive and Accurate Information on the Berbers:

Ibn Khaldun's book stands out for its detailed and reliable information about the Berbers, the inhabitants of North Africa, particularly after their contact with the Arabs. His accounts are considered some of the most accurate written about them, even into modern times. Having lived among these tribes, Ibn Khaldun knew them better than any other Arab historian. This close interaction later became a cornerstone of modern social research methods, emphasizing the importance of studying social phenomena from within rather than relying solely on superficial observation.²⁵

Conclusion

Most studies agree that Ibn Khaldun distinguished himself with a unique methodology that he developed independently and which no one before him had achieved. He managed to combine pure historical narration of events with rational critique, refusing to accept the validity of many accounts without scrutiny. Ibn Khaldun did not merely rely on his predecessors but engaged in verification, interpretation, and reasoning within the framework of the principles of human civilization and society.

In this part of his historical writings, Ibn Khaldun incorporated historical research derived from his observations, personal readings, and sources from his era that have since been lost. This is particularly evident in his discussions of Islamic states in Sicily, the history of the Taifas in Al-Andalus, the Christian kingdoms in Spain, and the history of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada. Many Western scholars in modern times have praised the value and significance of these studies for history.

Ibn Khaldun absorbed the Islamic heritage, encompassing both its purely historical aspects and its intellectual dimensions. His approach was characterized by inductive methodology, depth in inference, and exceptional analytical, intuitive, and comparative skills.

Endnotes

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- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-51.
- ¹⁴ Fayrouz Othman Saleh Othman, *Ibn Khaldun's Methodology and Intellectual Contributions Through His Works*, Islamic Studies Journal, University of Khartoum, Issue 3, 2011, pp. 206-209.
- ¹⁵ Ikrimah Abu Bakr Abdul Qadir Al-Ansari, previously cited reference, pp. 122-124.
- ¹⁶ Samia Hassan Al-Sa'ati, previously cited reference, p. 55.
- ¹⁷ Al-Tayyib Dawoudi, *The Scientific Method in Ibn Khaldun's Economic Analysis*, University of Damascus Journal for Economic and Legal Sciences, Vol. 27, Issue 4, 2011, pp. 56-57.
- ¹⁸ Ikrimah Abu Bakr Abdul Qadir Al-Ansari, previously cited reference, pp. 124-125.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-104.
- ²⁰ Al-Tayyib Dawoudi, previously cited reference, p. 45.
- ²¹ Ikrimah Abu Bakr Abdul Qadir Al-Ansari, previously cited reference, pp. 104-106.
- ²² Al-Tayyib Dawoudi, previously cited reference, p. 45.
- ²³ Ikrimah Abu Bakr Abdul Qadir Al-Ansari, previously cited reference, pp. 106-107.
- ²⁴ Al-Tayyib Dawoudi, previously cited reference, p. 45.
- ²⁵ Ismail Serageldin, previously cited reference, pp. 50-54.