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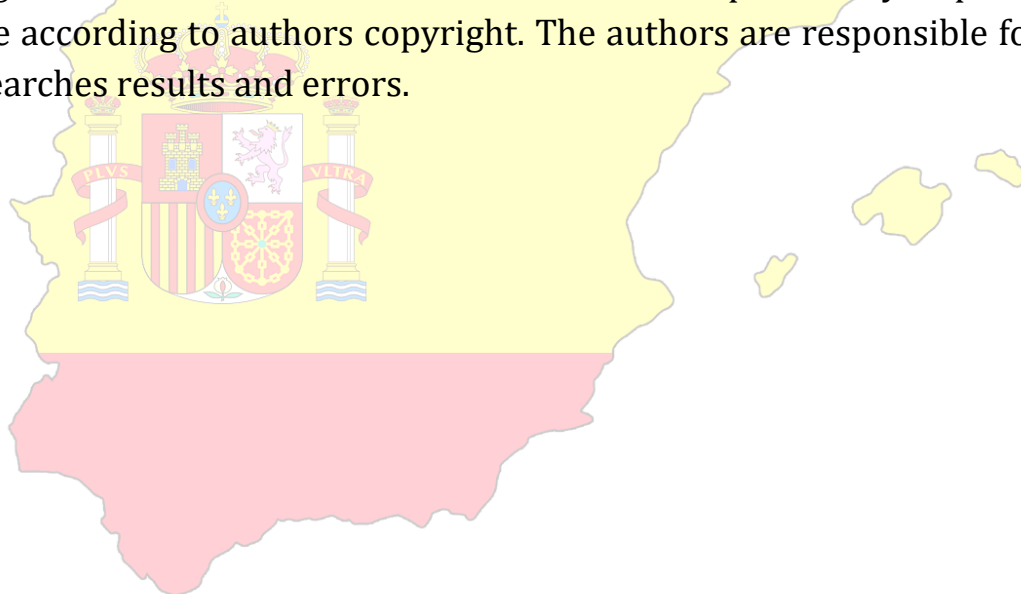


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Economic Thought of Ibn Khaldun: Labor, Wealth, and Social Cohesion in the Muqaddimah.

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Abstract: This article examines Ibn Khaldun's economic thought, particularly the theories presented in his Muqaddimah. Special attention is given to his labor theory of value, concepts of taxation, market price formation, consumption, and surplus production. Ibn Khaldun regarded labor as the foundation of all wealth and development, emphasizing the indispensable role of human effort in production. He analyzed prices in relation to wages, profit, and taxation, and demonstrated how urbanization, population density, and the rise of economic institutions influence economic life. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun criticized excessive taxation and tariffs that weaken trade and economic activity, while stressing the significance of division of labor and professional specialization for social and economic progress. The study highlights that Ibn Khaldun's insights remain relevant in the context of globalization and continue to serve as a valuable methodological framework for contemporary economic analysis.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, economic thought, labor theory of value, taxation, market prices, asabiyya, social development, economic philosophy.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), born in Tunis, was one of the most influential thinkers of the Islamic world and is widely recognized as a pioneer in the fields of history, sociology, political science, and economics.[1.p.538]His monumental work, al-Muqaddimah ("The Introduction"), not only laid the foundations of historiography and social philosophy but also presented significant insights into economic thought. Ibn Khaldun examined the dynamics of labor, production, taxation, trade, and state finances within the broader context of social development and the rise and fall of civilizations. His approach to economics was deeply intertwined with his theory of asabiyya (social cohesion), as he argued that the strength of communal solidarity directly affected political stability and economic prosperity.

Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah, a work that provides a profound theoretical foundation for the study of economics and social development, remains an important source for contemporary researchers in exploring the interconnection between economic factors and processes of societal progress. Ibn Khaldun's contribution to economics lies in his emphasis on analyzing

economic thought within the framework of Islamic principles and moral values. Moreover, he was among the first scholars to subject economic activity to systematic scientific analysis. In his theory of value and labor, Ibn Khaldun regarded labor and productive activity as sacred and worthy of praise. As one of the pioneers of economic theories, he focused on addressing economic issues by linking them with the broader social and historical questions that earlier scholars had often treated in a traditional manner.

Ibn Khaldun's ideas on economics and economically oriented initiatives remain as relevant today, in the context of globalization, as they were in his own time. He emphasized the need to reduce state expenditures on unnecessary force, highlighted the importance of human development, and advocated for the formulation of policies aimed at economic growth. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun opposed excessive taxation and tariffs that hindered trade, promoting instead a freer and more balanced economic environment.[2.p.18]

Ibn Khaldun carefully observed the economic activities taking place in society, and on the basis of these observations and experiences, he developed various economic theories. These theories have been widely studied across different centuries. Among the key theories analyzed by Ibn Khaldun are the theory of taxation, the composition of market prices, the labor theory of value, the general theory of value, as well as theories concerning livelihood (rizq), professions, and surplus production.[3.p.18]

Ibn Khaldun identified the main factors that determine prices, which he classified as wages, profit, and taxation. He argued that labor is the foundation of the production of every good and service, and therefore wages should be regarded as the primary factor in price formation. In his Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun expressed this idea as follows: "The share of labor (profit) is certain. A large or small portion of value derives from labor... the labor expended and the costs incurred indicate it". [4.p.480]

According to Ibn Khaldun, in the life of Bedouins there is little demand for skilled labor, as their production is limited to agriculture and pastoralism, which do not require technical specialization. However, in settled and culturally developed urban societies, with the rise of economic institutions and the demand for skilled labor, people begin to acquire new and previously unknown luxurious and non-essential needs. This demonstrates that economics plays a vital role in interpreting history. Ibn Khaldun emphasized that economics is the only paradigm through which history can be created, and that economic life itself constitutes one of the essential aspects of history. The changing desires of consumers and the growth of demand lead to an increase in labor requirements and wages. As labor becomes more specialized, the division of labor expands, the value of labor rises, and as a result, workers' incomes grow. The rise in wages, in turn, drives up prices.

According to Ibn Khaldun: "If a city is highly developed and densely populated, the prices of essential foodstuffs, necessary goods, luxury items, spices, fruits, and related products will be high. Conversely, when the population of a city is small and its level of civilization is weak, the situation will be the opposite". [4.p.458]

In cities, not only the basic means of subsistence and food but also luxury goods are in demand. All of these, including luxury items, are available in the markets as necessities for people. At the same time, prices are determined, and these prices function according to the laws of supply and demand. With the increase in the urban population, the demand for such goods rises. In major cities, the cost of living for basic necessities is relatively low, because a large portion of the urban population is engaged in the production of foodstuffs. Every household that meets its own need for grain sells the surplus to cover the shortages of other city dwellers. This surplus production usually exceeds the immediate needs of the urban population, which results in inevitably lower prices for essential goods.

As cities expand and develop, tendencies toward luxury and prosperity also increase, and those living in affluence drive demand upward. Ibn Khaldun emphasized that non-essential and luxury consumer goods require skilled labor for their production, involving technical expertise and craftsmanship. As a result, the demand for such goods is high, and consequently, their prices are elevated. By contrast, Ibn Khaldun noted that although demand for foodstuffs that do not require skilled labor in their production remains high, their prices are comparatively low. [5.p.657]

According to Ibn Khaldun, the main productive force of human beings is labor. In his system of thought, it is impossible to meet human needs without labor and without waste, and any income or goods obtained without effort and work cannot be considered legitimate. Nothing in the world is given to humans ready-made; in order to benefit from the blessings of nature, people must interact with it and take possession of it.

Labor is the sole source of all kinds of wealth. Every produced value is the result of the harmony between nature and human labor. According to Ibn Khaldun's theory of the value of labor, labor is the primary reserve and source of production. It is a fact that the value of any produced goods and services is equal to the value of human labor.

Labor is the human capacity to perform work throughout the entire production process. Labor means actual activity — the real effort of muscles, nerves and the brain.[6.p.103]

Conclusion.

Ibn Khaldun was a thinker far ahead of his time in the field of economic philosophy. He viewed economic activity not merely as a material process but as an integral part of political, social, and cultural development. For him, labor

is the true source of wealth, central to production, distribution, and consumption. His reflections on taxation emphasized justice and moderation, warning that excessive taxes disrupt production and trade. Ibn Khaldun's integration of labor, value, and social cohesion (asabiyya) into a unified framework demonstrates the originality of his contribution. His theories provide a timeless perspective, bridging medieval Islamic thought with modern economic analysis, and remain highly relevant for understanding the dynamics of economic growth and social development.

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