

## PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN ISLAM: THE ATTITUDE OF IBN KHALDŪN

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### **Khulasah**

Ibn Khaldūn (m. 1406) merupakan seorang tokoh Islam terkenal yang membicarakan kedudukan falsafah dalam Islam selepas polemik yang berlaku di antara Ibn Rushd (m. 1198) dan al-Ghazālī (m. 1111) berkenaan isu ini. Beliau menyoroti sejarah ilmu falsafah yang pada asalnya mencakupi semua ilmu sains seperti ilmu-ilmu fizik dan matematik dengan pecahan masing-masing. Dalam konteks pemikiran falsafah dalam Islam, beliau mengkritik keberkesanan ilmu mantiq dan metafizik dalam mencapai kebenaran. Dalam hal ini beliau sebagaimana al-Ghazālī menolak aplikasi rasional semata-mata kepada isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan ketuhanan seperti yang dilakukan oleh para *mutakallimīn*. Ibn Khaldūn juga turut menghargai sumbangan ahli falsafah Greek dan Islam dalam menyemarakkan ilmu-ilmu sains dan kemanusiaan yang telah menyumbang kepada sejarah tamadun sejagat. Ini adalah selaras dengan Islam sebagai suatu agama yang cukup dinamik, maju dan sentiasa terbuka kepada proses modenisasi yang menjadi komitmen ummah sepanjang masa.

**Kata kunci:** Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī, pemikiran falsafah, mantiq, metafizik.

### **Abstract**

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) was one of the Muslim prominent scholars who discussed the position of philosophy in Islam especially after the polemics that

took place between Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) on the matter. He referred to the history of philosophical sciences that originally covered all branches of knowledge such as physics and mathematics with their divisions. In the context of philosophy in Islam, he questioned the effectiveness of the sciences of logics and metaphysics to achieve the absolute truth. In this case as al-Ghazālī, he refused rational application solely on issues related to divinity as does the *mutakallimīn*. Ibn Khaldūn also appreciated the contribution of the Greek and Muslim philosophers in fanning sciences and humanities that have contributed to the history of universal civilization. And this surely stands in line with the religion of Islam which is very dynamic, progressive and open to any process of modernization that *al-ummah* should be committed with consistently.

**Keywords:** Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī, philosophical ideas, logic, metaphysics.

## Introduction

The philosophical ideas become controversial issues among the Muslim scholars. This is due to the fact that the ideas originated from Greek philosophy are not Islamic in accordance to some Muslim scholars on the basis that the ideas are totally intellect and based on human mind or reason alone. However, some Muslim scholars argued that in Islamic point of view, it is nothing wrong with philosophy which is encouraged under '*al-hikmah*' (wisdom) mentioned in both the Qur'ān and prophetic tradition as well as Islam itself is the religion of intellect. Even the philosophy and religion are seeking for the truth and reality knowing that a lot of the Qur'ānic verses summoned people to think and stimulate their intellectual curiosity and desire to acquire knowledge.

Unfortunately, there were polemics between the scholars about the position of philosophy in Islam to the

extent that it was blamed with infidelity by al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and the others, even though he himself was a philosopher besides a theologian and Sufi. The philosophy was said to come back in the Muslim world with the role of Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), an Andalusian Muslim philosopher who countered all al-Ghazālī's allegations in defending philosophy and philosophers.

Since that critical issue facing the philosophy in Islam, this article tries to examine the idea of one of the prominent Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldūn whose attention on philosophical is great especially in the light of that polemics about the philosophy in Islam. Through his book *al-Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), Ibn Khaldūn explained his attitude on this matter and how he viewed the philosophy and the sciences inherited from the Greek. In this article al-Ghazālī's ideas are mainly referred to due to the fact that al-Ghazālī seemed to be the only one who organized systematically arguments on the philosophical ideas that paved the way for Ibn Khaldūn to deal with them with more realistic and practical.

In fact, Ibn Khaldūn in his book had mentioned many great philosophers such as Socrates (d. 399 B.C), Plato (d. 347 B.C), Aristotle (d.322 B.C), Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and Ibn Bajjah (d. 1138). It seems here that he appreciated the legacy of Greek and its contribution to flourishing human sciences even until today. He also discussed the backgrounds of philosophical thoughts in Arab world and highlighted the attentions given by Muslim rulers such as Abū Jaʿfār al-Manṣūr (754-775) and al-Ma'mun ( 813 - 833) who played a decisive role in the development of philosophy during their ruling times under which philosophy had enjoyed its glorious periods. Ibn Khaldūn also described how philosophical sciences and other knowledge from Greek had moved to the hands of Arab and Muslim historically.

### **Ibn Khaldūn Life and Scholarly Personality**

Ibn Khaldūn's full name is `Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Zayd Walī al-Dīn Ibn Khaldūn (733/1332 - 808/1406). He is a famous Muslim historian, philosopher, economist, politician and pedagogue. Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis from a family of Arab Yemenite descent who settled in Muslim Spain. His family then migrated to Tunis and lived there where Ibn Khaldūn first received his education in Islamic studies (the Qur'ān, ḥadīth and *fiqh*), Arabic language and literature and philosophy (logic, natural sciences and mathematics). He was reportedly travelled to Morocco, Spain and Algeria and finally went to perform a pilgrimage in Mecca. From there he headed to Egypt and died there after serving as Malikite judge and an outstanding Muslim scholar teaching at al-Azhar mosque.<sup>1</sup>

During his intellectual life, Ibn Khaldūn had experienced living in difficult times of the troubled North Africa and the crumbling of the Arab Muslim civilization.<sup>2</sup> However, the circumstances he faced did not seemingly disturb him to be growing as a great scholar and known Muslim historian par excellence. His well-known book is *al-Muqaddimah* meaning *The Introduction* which is a writing about history and science of civilization (*ilm al-umrān*). It was said that *al-Muqaddimah* was written in five months by his own admission.

This book was in fact introduction to his famous historical book namely *al-Ibar* which was written when he and his family were in Algeria for five years as they enjoyed living in tranquillity and stability. In appreciating the book of *al-Muqaddimah* he was regarded to be "the

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Azhar is presently a prestigious university in Egypt known as *al-Azhar Jamī'an wa Jamī'ah*. It was founded in Ramaḍān 359/970 by Fatimid empire for teaching Shi'ite doctrine. In the Ayyubi period al-Azhar had changed to be the highest Islamic Sunni institute for religious studies until today.

<sup>2</sup> Mahmud Dhaoudi, *New Explorations into Making of Ibn Khaldun's Umran Mind* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Nordeen, 1997), 4-5.

greatest historian that Islam ever produced and one of the greatest of all times".<sup>3</sup> However he occupies a unique place in the annals of Islamic philosophical thought.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in many books or articles on Islamic or Arabic philosophy or Muslim philosophers, his contribution on this matter was always appreciated.

### **The Domain of Philosophy**

Philosophy is originally a Greek word means loving wisdom (in Arabic *al-ḥikmah*) and accordingly a philosopher is someone who loves wisdom which is worth of knowledge. In the al-Qur'ān, Allah tells that He has sent the prophet "...to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom" (al-Jumū'ah 62: 20). In the Qur'ān also, "He grants wisdom to whom He pleased and to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing" (al-Baqarah 11: 269). Ibn Sīnā briefly defined philosopher by saying: "You say to someone your knowledge is much" is equivalent to say that 'You are a philosopher'. On that basis the scholars in all fields of knowledge entirely are philosophers whether they agree or not, even who opposes the philosophy he or she is a philosopher too because he or she should be a knowledgeable one to do so scholarly.

Therefore, the ideas of Ibn Khaldūn in this context attracted our attention and shall be examined as he divided the sciences into rational, traditional and linguistic. He classified philosophical sciences to include logic, physics, mathematics and metaphysics and also astronomy and music<sup>5</sup> with their subdivision such as arithmetic and geometry were to be under mathematics. In his book, *al-*

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<sup>3</sup> See Haidar Bammate, *Muslim Contribution to Civilization* (Maryland: American Trust Publications, J.C. Reisler, *La Civilisation Arabe*, Paris, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edition (London: Long Man, 1983), 323.

<sup>5</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford: One World, 2000), 108.

*Muqaddimah* he talked about philosophy firstly by explaining its nature, followed by his own comments and analysis as a Muslim scholar.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn divided what he named the sciences of philosophy and wisdom into several subdivisions. Under the topic of 'the various kinds of intellectual sciences' he mentioned that there are four sciences of philosophy and wisdom, and every science can be divided into its subdivision. Therefore it is necessary to explain each of them.

### **i. Logic**

This science known as *al-Mantiq* (in Arabic) is functioning to protect the mind from error in the process of concluding unknown facts from the available known facts. The aim of this science is to distinguish right from wrong. Ibn Khaldūn acknowledged that the logic was the first philosophical discipline and the introduction to philosophy. This definition in fact was originally given by Aristotle of Greek and adopted by Muslim philosophers, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (870 - 950 C.E.) and Ibn Sīnā (980 - 1037 C.E.). Ibn Khaldūn later adopted the same definition and model of logic that he based on *Organon* of Aristotle. Like his predecessors, Ibn Khaldun also explained and elucidated Aristotle's conception of logic as he recognized Aristotle as the 'First Teacher' (*al-Mu'allim al-Awwal*) who systematized the norms of logic and dealt with all its problems and gave a good and extensive treatment of it.<sup>7</sup>

He also noted that many works of Aristotle were commented and edited by Muslim philosophers like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd and others. This shows that Ibn Khaldūn realized the existence of this science in which Muslims inherited it from Greek heritage knowing

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<sup>6</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, vol. 1 (n.p.: Dar al-Bayan, n.d.), 489-492.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

that it was supported by those Muslim philosophers. Ibn Khaldūn however dealt with this science irrespective of that of its originality and in this case he seemingly agreed with al-Ghazālī's attitude towards the logic (*al-manṭiq*) on the basis that it has nothing to relate it with the religion of Islam. Al- Ghazālī says that: "Nothing in logic is relevant to religion by way of denial or affirmation. Logic is the study of the methods of demonstration and of forming syllogisms, of the conditions for the premises of proofs, of the manner of combining the premises, of the conditions for sound definition and of the manner of ordering it."<sup>8</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn's idea on the logic seems to agree with al- Ghazālī's idea as said on the ground that this science is only to sharpen the mind in the orderly presentation of proofs and arguments, so that the habit of excellent and correct arguing is obtained.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Ibn Khaldūn in his book *al-Muqaddimah* had highlighted the work of Aristotle on logic which is known as the eight books of logic:<sup>10</sup>

a. *Kitāb al-Maqūlāt* (Categories):

This first book deals with the highest genera (*al-ajnās al-`āliyah*) that abstraction among the sensibilia may attain in the mind and that admit no (more universal) genera above them.

b. *Kitāb al-`Ibārah* (Hermeneutics):

This book deals with various kinds of apperceptive propositions.

c. *Kitāb al-Qiyās* (Analytics):

This book deals with analogical reasoning (the syllogism) and the form in which it is produced in general.

d. *Kitāb al-Burhān* (Apodeictica):

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<sup>8</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, 519,

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 490-491.

This book consists of the studies of analogical reasoning (the syllogism) that produces certain knowledge. It also studies the problems of why its premises must be certain ones. This book is also called as 'the second analytics', while *kitāb al-Qiyās* above is called as 'the first analytics'.<sup>11</sup>

e. *Kitāb al-Jadl* (Topics):

This book deals with the places from which the syllogism is evolved by using them to clarify the so-called middle term that brings together the two ends of desired information. It also deals with the conversion of terms. Debate was a very important activity among the scholars across the periods of time in the Greek era. They always tended to arrange their arguments in order to win in debate against their opponents.

For Muslims, the Qur'ān itself is also the book of debate and dialogue that a lot of its verses ask people to argue or debate as Allah says: "Debate with them in ways that are best" (al-Naḥl 14: 125) and "Bring forth your argument if you are telling the truth" (al-Naml 27:64). But the message of the Qur'ān is to find the truth and reject the false accordingly and no any force in religion to accept any doctrine or idea without logically accepted. Historically, in the Greek era, the debate was mastered by a group known as Sophists (*sufas-safa`iyyūn*) which was active around the fifth century B.C especially among the young people of Athens.

This group was popularly believed only to win against others without considering the truth or false as stated. It was said that they had educated the youth of Athens during the time with skills of debating others. The famous philosophers of the group were Pythagorean (480-410 B.C) and Georgian (480-375 B.C) who taught the skills of argument and debates not to obtain the truth but

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<sup>11</sup> Hijazi wa Naem, *Fī Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Yunāniyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā`ah al-Muḥammadiyyah bi al-Azhar, n.d.), 146.



rather to defeat opponents irrespective right or false as mentioned.

This trend concerned earlier Greek philosophers as they felt as an obligation to face that sophists group spreading their influences through a teaching that everybody had absolute right to define good or bad without any interference from others.<sup>12</sup> This perception surely might arise chaotic situation in the society due to the fact that the law and teaching were not to be respected accordingly.

f. *Kitāb al-Safṣaṭah* (Sophistic Elenchi):

This book is written to explain the false ways of the sophists group and to tell people about them and subsequently to guard against the sophistic reasoning that was nothing but a full of falsehood.

g. *Kitāb al-Khiṭābah* (Rhetoric):

This book teaches how to influence the great mass and get them to do what one wants them to do. In this book there are also the forms of speech to be employed in this connection.

h. *Kitāb al-Shi'ir* (Poetics):

This kind of media is used effectively in encouraging people to listen to persuasive and eloquent presentation. It teaches the invention of parables and similes for that purpose.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> In the Qur'ān we find such approach (using parables and similes) but the prophet himself was not a poet and Allah did not teach him any poetic and it is not appropriate to him (to be a poet) (al-Qur'ān: 36:69). This shows that the parables and similes are important in intriguing people response to the message. In Arab society, before the advent of Islam, the poets were placed on the highest position and they were competed in inventing poems and were very proud of having them. So when Islam came, the Qur'ān challenged them to bring any verse from their own skill similar with one verse of the Qur'ān. Apparently they were unable to respond to that challenge.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, the books of logic should be nine books when Greek philosophers were trying to talk about the 'Five Universals' (*al-Kulliyāt al-Khams*). These are genus, difference, species, property and general accident. These universals are the important subjects in the science of logic.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, interestingly that the coverage of logic of the subjects mentioned such as rhetoric and poetics was something suggested by Aristotle and concerned by Ibn Khaldūn.

This is to say that logic should be applied in very practical way by understanding the related matters and to argue successfully on issues debated. So a philosopher must excel in logic as an intellectual science along with other related knowledge in order to save him from any ignorance and lack of information.

The logic of Aristotle and all the books mentioned are very useful indeed in understanding the logic of Aristotle and its scope including poetics and rhetoric as said. Such skills, of course, enable someone to master his arguing idea with sufficient knowledge and excellent approaches to influence people. Apparently Ibn Khaldūn put great concerned on the positive ways how Aristotle faced the falsehood among his communities by writing the books to counter the fallacies as claimed.

Perhaps logic should be used after well understanding of the argued matters and should be addressed as wisely as possible with nice languages precisely through poetics and attractive speech (rhetoric). All these what logic Aristotle meant knowing that logic was acknowledged as the most important Greek science which stands relevant up to now. Even until now a lot of original Greek's terms are still popularly used such as academy, *qānūn*, ethics and democracy.

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<sup>14</sup> Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 385.

## ii. Physics (*al-Ṭabiʿiyyāt*) or Natural Science

This science discusses the reality of elemental substances perceivable by the senses, namely, the mineral, the plants, and the animals which are created from the elemental substances, the heavenly bodies, natural motions, and the soul from which the motions originate. This science also is to investigate simple bodies like water, air, earth, fire etc.

Therefore, physics as such is a scientific subject and not to be considered under philosophical field presently as philosophy is now under theoretical sciences (literature) and the sciences of humanity. Nevertheless physics may be classified under the 'practical philosophy' (*al-falsafah al-ʿamaliyyah*) which is a natural science that was introduced previously by Ibn Sīnā. So the science of physics tended to be more relevant to human's knowledge regarding material sphere and thus, it was divided into the science of medicine and the science of agriculture.

On that sense, al-Ghazālī conceded the validity and the importance of physics and he did not see it to have any conflict with the faith.<sup>15</sup> However, any finding or information provided by this science should not contradict the teachings of Islam according to the Qurʾān and *Sunnah* knowing that there was nothing scientifically to disagree with Islam and its teaching. The points made al-Ghazālī to remind the philosophers to the facts that nature is in subjection to God and serving as an instrument in the hands of its Creator as well as subject to His Commands. There is none of them (sun, moon, stars and elements) and all the created can proceed from their own essence and without the will of God. There is God most high and powerful and anything does not happen without His Will.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam* (London: Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1961), 158.

<sup>16</sup> Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, 36-37.

This is to say that the scientists are to believe in God also with the supports of their scientific findings understanding that some of the Qur'ānic verses speak about the wonderful creation of God that are subjected to be understood scientifically. Thus the scientists are also known as scholars or *'ulamā'* and these terms are not only refer to religious scholars as many understand it. Al-Qur'ān in fact defines that *'ulamā'* are who are fearing God.<sup>17</sup>

### iii. Mathematical Sciences

Ibn Khaldūn accounted these sciences under the philosophical sciences. They are:

- a) Geometry
- b) Arithmetic
- c) Music
- d) Astronomy

He explained each of these sciences and mentioned that there are seven basic philosophical sciences: logic, physic, metaphysics and the four sciences mentioned above. Knowing that there were many outstanding Muslim scholars became experts in those areas of knowledge, unlike al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn who studied the conceptions of these sciences and their aims did not say anything about attitude of Islam toward these sciences.<sup>18</sup> In *al-Muqaddimah* he mentioned that one's application to geometry (*handasah*) does to the mind as what soap does to a garment. It washes off stains and cleanses it of grease and dirt. As the geometry can enlighten the intellect and

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<sup>17</sup> See Shakib Arsalan, *Limāzā Ta'akharr al-Muslimūn wa Taqaddam Ghayruhum* (Cairo: Dār al-Bashīr, n.d.), 137. This is in accordance to surah al-Fāṭir 35:27 and 28: "...and among men and crawling creatures and cattle are they of various colours, those truly fear Allah among His servants who have knowledge".

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ghazālī fully recognizes mathematics (*al-Riyāḍiyyāt*) as a science likes astronomy where that is not in conflict with the faith. See: De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 158.

set one's mind right. All its proofs are very clear and in order.

So it is hardly possible for errors to enter into geometrical reasoning, because it is well arranged and well-ordered. In other word, the mind that constantly applies itself to geometry is not likely to fall into error. In this convenient way, the person who knows geometry acquires intelligence and cleverness.<sup>19</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn also placed music and astronomy under mathematical sciences along with arithmetic and geometry. He defined music as 'the knowledge of the proportions of sounds and modes and their numerical measurements. Its fruit is the knowledge of musical melodies'.<sup>20</sup> It means here that Ibn Khaldūn supported the music and this may be proved that Islam did not prohibit it as did by some Muslim scholars especially by those claimed as *salafī* scholars.<sup>21</sup> But now music is not considered to be under mathematics and philosophy as well.

While astronomy for him is to 'fix the shapes of the spheres, determine the position and number of each planet and fixed star'.<sup>22</sup> Contextually there were a number of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 486. He also mentioned that the 'Book of Basic Principles and Pillars' (*Kitāb al-Uṣūl wal uṣūl wa-l-arkān*) was the first Greek work (contained fifteen books) to be translated in Muslim world in the days of Abū Ja`far al-Manṣūr (754-775). Many respective scholars (Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq d. 873, Thābit b. Qurrah d. 901, Ibn Sīnā d. 1037 and others) involved in translating, abridging and commenting the works.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 372.

<sup>21</sup> Some scholars gave *fatwā* that music is *ḥarām* because it entertains people till they forget Allah and religious duties especially prayer. It is quite strange that many Muslim scholars and philosophers had given an attention to the music such al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī. Al-Fārābī had authored a very important book on music namely *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* which was considered the largest book of music written by Muslim scholar. This book in Arabic was ever translated to some languages.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 372.

Muslim astronomers in the Islamic civilization that the world still remembered their contribution to this arena of knowledge. To tell the truth, all these sciences mentioned are very useful and most significantly he categorised them as philosophical sciences meaning that they were in optimum using intellect and mind to show how wonderful God's creation through information provided by the Qur'ān that can make their belief stronger in Him as the Creator.

Thus, many leading Muslim scholars in the early periods of Islam were in advance in scientific knowledge such as Ibn Sīnā in medicine, al-Khwārizmī (d. 850) in algebra, al-Zahrāwī (d. 1013) in surgery and many others. All of them had contributed their scientific works to human civilization in general. No doubt at all that Islam always encourages unlimited searching for the knowledge in all fields for the sake of God and for the good of human kind entirely.

#### **iv. Metaphysics (*Ulūhiyyāt*)**

Ibn Khaldūn began his elucidation by giving definition of this science. He said that this science is a noble discipline as it explains about God and about existence. It studies general matters affecting corporeal and spiritual beings, such as quiddities (*mahiyat*), oneness (*waḥdah*), plurality (*kathrah*), necessity (*wujūb*) and possibility (*imkān*). It then probes into the beginning of existing beings and spiritual beings, and the conditions of the soul after its separation from the body and its return to its beginning.<sup>23</sup> Therefore this science is presenting one of the Islamic doctrine about the reality of God as He is One and nothing else is like Him either. Thus this science of divinity (metaphysics in philosophy) is known as Islamic theology or *uṣūl al-dīn* or *ʿilm al-kalām* that discusses the matters related to the faith or *ʿaqīdah*.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 495.

In fact, al-Ghazālī refuted this metaphysics arguing that any rational arguments used in metaphysics are not to surpass the primacy of the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Therefore, according to al-Ghazālī, the philosophers had fell into the abyss of error when they analysed metaphysical issues with rationality alone as they were greatly influenced by Greek tradition. To tell the truth, Aristotelianism as it has been taught by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā totally used human reason, with as much subservience to authority as has been exhibited by the theologians, seems to him (al-Ghazālī) to be the enemy of Islam.<sup>24</sup> This is coming from the fact that al-Ghazālī hold strongly that any idea should not contradict the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. He has no compromised at all from this aspect.

In this regard, al-Ghazālī said that there were three mistakes had been done by the philosophers who claimed:<sup>25</sup>

- a) That the world is eternal (*qidam al-`ālam*);
- b) That God takes cognizance only of the Universal, and consequently there is no special providence;
- c) That the soul alone is immortal, and therefore a resurrection of the body is not to be looked for.

These three mistakes mentioned are clearly against the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* understanding that Allah alone is One and Who is Eternal (*Qadīm*). Allah is knowing everything and the Resurrection in the day of judgement is involving both soul and body certainly to occur by His will and power. These three philosophical problems became very controversial issues among the

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<sup>24</sup> De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 158.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (Beirut: al-Maṭba`ah al-Kathūlikiyyah, 1962), 12; Also: De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, 159. Al-Ghazālī also mentioned the other seventeen problems as *bid'ah* (innovation in the religion).

Muslim scholars due to the accusation of infidelity made by al-Ghazālī.

The problems were philosophical and were not discussed by Muslim theologians because they were coming from logical thinking of Aristotle about God and His relations with the created beings. A Malay theologian, Shaykh Dawud al-Fatani (d. 1847) for instance, just simply said that (*qidam al-`ālam*) was a misguided philosophical idea and apparently he did not discuss it anymore.

Probably in order to support the legitimacy of Islamic theology namely *al-kalām* or dialectical theology, Ibn Khaldūn tried to differ Muslim dialectical theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) from philosophers noting that: "Speculative theologians do not use the (rational) argument, they talk about as do the philosophers, in order to investigate the correctness of the articles of faith, to prove the truth of what had previously not been known, and to make it known".<sup>26</sup>

Further, he viewed that the philosophers are seeking for the truth by argument which may not be satiable and never achieve its ending. On the contrary, theologians are using rational arguments only to support the articles of faith and to defend the early Muslim generations' views (on the articles of faith) and, at the same time to refute innovators who believed that their perceptions are totally rational. Most probably the innovators he meant here are Mu`tazilite group who rationalized everything precisely with regard to the issues of faith and Islamic law as well.

As known Mu`tazilite was the first Islamic sect founded originally by Wāṣil ibn `Aṭā' in Basrah. Many scholars disagree with their ideas including Ibn Khaldūn himself. Even historically the existing Sunni school of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 495.



thought was established in response to their ideas.<sup>27</sup> Generally speaking, the Muslim theologians argued their ideas with the supports from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* beside reason. This is to say that Ibn Khaldūn supported the Muslim theologians and the importance of *al-kalām* and for him they are not philosophers.

Ibn Khaldūn also prescribed that theology or *kalām* as a weapon to face innovation (*bid'ah*) in religion and when this problem ends it does not need to the *kalām* anymore. Al-Ghazālī ever said that a theologian (*al-mutakallim*) was likely as a medical doctor (*al-ṭabīb*) and is needed to serve in case of people suffering from diseases. When diseases had gone there were no longer in need to doctors. Thus, *al-kalām* studies should be considered important too in Islamic education system in order to prepare qualified theologians to face the issues of *ʿaqīdah* that arise any time in Muslim communities in particular.

Without this, any issue questioning Islamic faith especially in the present time may not be able to deal rationally besides the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* especially to non-Muslims even some Muslims who themselves need to clarify some religious issues logically. This is what *ʿilm al-kalām* concerns in Islamic tradition. In this context, Ibn Khaldūn underlines that something absolute cannot be

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<sup>27</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935) who founded Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaʿah was a Muʿtazilite scholar until he aged forty years. He disagreed with the ideas of his teacher, ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿi and then declared himself independent from his theological group which strongly held the primacy of intellect over the Qur'ān. Instead, he claimed to have combined the three sources the Qur'ān, *Sunnah* and intellect in facing Hanbalism who strictly held the divine texts and Muʿtazilite who held reasoning alone. Perhaps there was *al-wasaṭiyyah* of al-Ashʿarī in his attitude between the both Hanbalism and Muʿtazilism that might receive the supports of the later great Muslim theologians such as al-Baḳillānī and al-Ghazālī. They are known as al-Ashʿarites.

proved by rational argument<sup>28</sup> as popularly argued. If the existence of God is to be proved rationally, one also can claim to deny His existence in the name of rationality.

Therefore, man must not seek to prove the correctness of the perception of God<sup>29</sup> through reason alone as championed by Mu`tazilite in their theological discourse. With regard to the unseen information for instance, Muslims must leave them to *al-Shar`* and keep the intellect out of it.<sup>30</sup> Every Muslim is obliged religiously to hear, believe, obey and acquiesce them according to the texts of the Qur`ān and *Sunnah*. A Muslim should accept his or her limitation in knowing the reality as He is. The Holy Qur`ān always extols the human intellect and calls upon man to abide by it and takes its counsel.<sup>31</sup> The knowledge itself is limited as Allah says, "...of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you" (al-Isrā' 17: 85).

By this approach, Ibn Khaldūn followed al-Ghazālī in terms of criticizing philosophers and philosophy particularly on the matter of the use of rational arguments in discussing issues related to the religion through metaphysic and syllogism (logic) specifically. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldūn agreed with theologians who also used rational arguments in their theological discussions (*ilm al-kalām*) in defending the articles of faith<sup>32</sup> which is to meet the objective of *ilm kalām* itself in defending the faith of Islam. Knowing that philosophy differs from theology or *al-kalām* according to the fact that the first is much broader as *al-kalām* is only subject to discuss religious matters and backgrounds for the issues related.

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<sup>28</sup> C.A. Qadir, *Filsafat dan Ilmu Pengetahuan dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1989), 163.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenthal, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 390.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, 496

<sup>31</sup> Mahmud Hamdy Zakzouk, *On the Role of Islam in the Development of Philosophical Thought* (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1989), 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 495.

In this context, Ibn Khaldūn also observed that theology itself originated systematically as a defence against the atheists and the non-Muslims who attack the doctrine of Islam.<sup>33</sup> He attempted to prove that intellect has limited power and he preferred to follow traditional scholar in understanding certain concepts of Islam in accordance to the Qur'ānic injunction that one is obliged to hear and obey without creating so much questions.<sup>34</sup>

He also remarked that theologians had intermingled the problems of theology with the problems of philosophy. It became more complex when both disciplines using intellect were not given proper elucidation. For this problem it is the fact that the Muslim theologians have to concern also with the issues of philosophy as long as they are related with the faith of Islam that might influence the Muslims in general. Even the Muslims also want to know the right answers against falsehood claimed to be brought by the philosophers. According to Ibn Khaldūn, theology is built first upon belief in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and, second followed by intellect as a means of proving and conforming the teaching of the Texts.

Generally speaking, philosophy on the contrary attempts to reason first and then, believe. It means a philosopher is not to accept any information blindly without thinking properly as far as imitation (*taqlīd*) is concerned. Understanding the fact that blind imitation is not accepted in Islam because the Qur'ān itself is calling people to think and use intellect. More over the intellect is one of the most important conditions that a Muslim is obliged to practice religious duties such as prayer, fasting, etc. Who loses his mind or intellect, he or she is free from performing the duties religiously.

Therefore, Ibn Khaldūn obviously supported *`ilm al-kalām* as an independent science indicating the problems

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Āli `Imrān 3: 93.

that arouse when the issues of faith were intermingled with philosophical ideas originally coming from the Greek such as the issue of the eternity of the world and others as discussed earlier.

### **Refutation of Philosophy**

Perhaps Muslim scholars are not surprised with such subject of refutation of philosophy championed by Ibn Khaldūn. He came after al-Ghazālī had attacked philosophy as philosophy returned to be greatly concerned in the Muslim world with the excellent role of Ibn Rushd of Andalusia in the twelfth century. His role was evident through his book, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* which means *Incoherence of Incoherence* (of al-Ghazālī's book of *Incoherence of Philosophy*).

Ibn Khaldūn in his book *al-Muqaddimah*, made a special topic in refuting philosophy entitled, *Ibtāl al-Falsafah wa Fasād Muntahillihā* that means *the Refutation of Philosophy and the Corruption of its Students*. Further Ibn Khaldūn attacked scholars who defended philosophers by saying, "Scholars whom God led stray adopted the doctrines in defending their disputations".<sup>35</sup> To him that some information on religious faith such the issue of bodily resurrection may not be understood by means of rational argument and reasoning. He criticized Ibn Sīnā on the matter noting that the religious law should be considered and consulted with these faith issues.<sup>36</sup>

The philosophers believed that beatitude or happiness are just for the soul not for the body because the body was vanished when death happened. Hence, it is impossible logically for the body to remain as it was before. This is one of the problems to become the errors of the philosophers in metaphysics or theology as discussed

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<sup>35</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, 400.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

earlier. They were unable to satisfy the conditions of proof they laid down in logic.<sup>37</sup> Allah is powerful and able to do everything He wills including to recreate the vanished body as said in the Qur'ān: "He asks: who will give life to rotten bones. Say: He will give them life again who created at first." (Yāsīn 36:78).

The Qur'ānic text clearly shown that Allah is powerful to do so understanding that Muslim philosophers argued that the verses in this context are addressed logically to satisfy common people who understand something normally in a material form -bodily- as it is easy too for them to physically understand that made them afraid of God's punishment accordingly.

Nevertheless, this kind of interpretation was not accepted at all by Muslim religious scholars known as *'ulamā'* for simply contradicting the Qur'ān textually. It should be mentioned that Ibn Rushd defended the philosophers under exercising *al-ta'wīl* (inner interpretation) permitted to them as *al-rāsīqūn fī al-'ilm* (who had been ennobled with knowledge)<sup>38</sup> arguing that such understanding should not bring the philosophers to be infidels as far as al-Ghazālī's view is concerned.

This is because the Muslim philosophers maintained their basic faith in believing that the day of judgement and the resurrection are undoubtedly to come and occur. They are the scholars (*'ulama*) who are philosophers on whom Allah has endowed with knowledge of realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq*).<sup>39</sup> Ibn Rushd himself admitted that the way to know Allah is also through the means of senses and intellect,<sup>40</sup> the areas where philosophers are struggling for in their discourse.

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<sup>37</sup> Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Āli-'Imrān 3:3-7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. by Suleiman Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Miṣr, 1971), 26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqal fī mā bayn al-Ḥikmah wa al-Sharī'ah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Muḥammadiyah al-Tijāriyyah, n.d), 134.

Ibn Khaldūn also attacked philosophy through the application of the science of logic on religious faith on the basis that logic is able to distinguish truth from false. To him logic is only to sharpen intellect but unable to prevent scholars who practice it from committing many logical fallacies in their thinking.<sup>41</sup> That statement invited a Muslim scholar, `Abd al-Raḥmān Marhaban to comment it as he did not see that Ibn Khaldūn refused the logic but, according to him, Ibn Khaldūn viewed that logic is to function as a form of analogical reasoning and of arrangement in order to make sure that results of inference, postulation and arranging facts are accurate. It cannot create something new in the knowledge except what coming from the sensual perceptions.<sup>42</sup>

He believed that the investigations based on the intellect do not lead to the certain knowledge in religion.<sup>43</sup> Again the logic is not only applicable to discuss the faith precisely metaphysics or theological issues but it is very important as al-Ghazālī viewed that whoever opposes the logic, opposes the intellect itself, and the speech without logic (*al-kalām bilā mantiq*) is not to be received and convincing.<sup>44</sup> Al-Ghazālī seemingly used the same weapon of Aristotle to face logical fallacies as his followers inherited them.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the denial of logic can be seen when al-Ghazālī argued specifically on the basis that Aristotle has built his logic on the issue that God does not know changes because knowing changes are to effect the

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<sup>41</sup> M.Saeed. Sheikh, *Islamic History* (London: The Octagon Press, 1982). 147.

<sup>42</sup> `Abd al-Raḥmān Marhaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yunāniyyah ilā al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah* (Beirut-Paris: Manshūrat Uwaydat, 1983), 779.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 779-780

<sup>44</sup> `Abd al-Sattār Nassar, *Al-Madrasah al-Salafīyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba`ah al-Taqaddum, 1979), 186-187.

<sup>45</sup> De Boer, *The History*, 159.

knower himself as God is the Knower and He does not change. The changes are absolutely attributed to the created and God is not created while He is the Creator. Based on this assumption, God does not know the particulars because of the changing information from time to time as man does. The changes will also cause the knower himself for possible increase or decrease in knowledge. This assumption certainly contradicts the belief that Allah knows everything big and small, hidden and apparent, as small as atom that indicated textually in the Qur'ān. On that basis al-Ghazālī as well Ibn Khaldūn attacked the philosophy and logic for giving primacy to the intellect or reason namely logic as such.

Obviously Ibn Khaldūn studied logic objectively and wanted only to deny that intellect is unlimited and the logical circulations are correct and punctual. Its vitality is also evident in passing certain judgment (*al-ḥukm*) particularly in Islamic jurisprudence. For example, the science of jurisprudence principles (*ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh*) uses analytical reasoning (*al-qiyās*) as one of the essential basis in determining the soundness of the laws. Therefore it is irrefutable that *al-qiyās* is one of the important subdivision of logic and to deny logic also means to deny *al-qiyās* automatically as well.

Under this section the new matters that arise should be judged intellectually because some of them never occurred in the Prophet's era. *Al-qiyās* should be adopted to solve the new problems facing by the *ummah* across the time. With *al-qiyās*'s formula many current issues can be solved Islamically and legally. For instance, drug is not mentioned textually in both the divine sources but its danger is taken into account based on the loss of mind caused by having liquor. The same cause also comes from the drug. So with referring to *al-qiyās*'s methodology, drug is also to be legally prohibited. Furthermore, the same verdict of *ḥarām* should be applied to both liquor

and drug in Islamic Law. Many growing new issues facing by Muslim *ummah* are in need to *al-qiya's* formula in making the Islamic teaching to stand relevant all the time.

Islam is the religion of intellect and Islam is always calling people to think about the creation of God and use his mind properly. On this thesis, al-Ghazālī in his book *Ma`ārij al-Quds* tried to show how the relationship between intellect (*al-aql*) and the text (*Shara`*) by saying that intellect is a foundation, and *al-Shara`* is a building, and both are interrelated to one another, for one is useless without the other. Any extreme or lack in utilizing the both intellect and *Shara`* are unacceptable in Islam.<sup>46</sup> It is very clear with regard to the supposed role of intellect in Islam as suggested excellently by al-Ghazālī.

On the other hand, in order to understand how the attitude of the scholars against the philosophy in Islam, it was Ibn Ṣalāḥ (1090-1153),<sup>47</sup> a Muslim scholar may be referred to as one who actively involved in grasping the issue of philosophy. On the matter he wrote his treatise known as *Commentary on the End of the Second Book of Aristotle's Posterior Analytics and the Correction of an Error in it (Sharḥ Faṣl fī Akhīr al-Maqālāt al-Thāniyyah min Kitāb Aristūṭālīs fī al-Burhān)* which finally came to his conclusion that philosophers' ideas often times were unreliable and should not be trusted and thus should be punished in the Hereafter accordingly.<sup>48</sup>

For him, the logic is also rejected because of being introduction to philosophy and the both are foundation of

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<sup>46</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Ma`ārij al-Quds fī Madārij Ma`rifah al-Nafs* (n.p.: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1981), 64.

<sup>47</sup> His name and title in full: Al-Imām al-Ḥāfīz al-Muftī Shaykh al-Islām Taqī al-Dīn Abū `Amr `Uthmān ibn al-Muftī Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn `Abd al-Raḥmān ibn `Uthmān ibn Mūsā al-Kurdī al-Shahrazwari al-Mawṣilī al-Shafī`ī. He was Ḥadīth Sciences expert (Ṣāḥib `Ulūm al-Ḥadīth), lived and died in Ḥalab (Aleppo), Syria today.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Rescher, *Studies in Arabic Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1966), 55 - 68.



*kufr* and *zindīq*<sup>49</sup> even he recognised that this subject though attracts Muslims but cannot give any positive knowledge.<sup>50</sup> By this, he claimed that philosophy and philosophers as dangerous elements in the religion of Islam and hence Muslim should avoid them. Generally, he rejected both sciences simply assuming that the Prophet (peace be upon Him) and his close companions and all the celebrated Muslim scholars in the past did not ask Muslim to study them even they never suggested that Muslim should learn the sciences from the Greek.

It should be mentioned that one said that Ibn Ṣalāḥ even he was a great Muslim scholar too in *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* -supposedly to be recognised- but he did not study philosophy and logic considerably. Probably Ibn Ṣalāḥ differed from al-Ghazālī who also attacked philosophy as said many times in this article, because of the former studied philosophy extensively and even claimed that he understood it thoroughly by depending on what was transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Ghazālī told that he was confident with both philosophers and appreciated their sincerity to the Greek philosophy. This is to say that his critics did not come from ignorance as assumed to some scholars. Also among the scholars who rejected philosophy were who claimed *salafis*, a group that hold the texts of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* literally and in other word they are against the possible adopting *al-ta'wīl* of the Qur'ānic verses as suggested by Ibn Rushd as said before.

In fact, scholarly speaking, all their ideas can be argued in order to free Muslim people from that of not

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<sup>49</sup> Abū al-Fida' Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 11 (Beirut, Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1983), 224.

<sup>50</sup> M. Saeed Sheikh, *Islamic History*, 146.

<sup>51</sup> Therefore al-Ghazālī suggested that a scholar should be more knowledgeable than some one's is to be criticized for his ideas. That what he had done in terms of rejecting philosophy. As Ibn Khaldūn said that a man is enemy for what he does not know.

open-minded thinking which blocked some creative and brilliant ideas to grow and develop especially in this modern time and presently. It is not impossible that not-open-minded attitude is very dangerous with regard to the growing issues of extremism and terrorism in the name of Islamic *jihād*. It is mainly caused by holding strictly one opinion without tolerating the opinions of other scholars. Even holding the divine texts without proper interpretations especially by outstanding scholars is also behind such wrong understanding of real Islam which is the religion of *al-wasaṭiyyah* (moderate).

However, Ibn Khaldūn at the end somehow endorsed the harm of philosophy suggesting that a student should take care of the Qur'ān and jurisprudence in order to save from its pernicious aspects. In this regard, al-Fārābī previously had laid conditions that a student should have studied al-Qur'ān, Arabic language and *Shari'ah* prior to expose in philosophical discussion.<sup>52</sup> This probably somehow worry some Muslim scholars for students in philosophy of not having such backgrounds would easily go astray or misguided.

It seemed clearly that Ibn Khaldūn followed al-Ghazālī's attitude in the matter of philosophy in Islam although he did not mention that but he expressed his gratitude and great admiration to him. In this context, he recognized al-Ghazālī as a noted juris consult (*al-faqīh*), fundamentalist (*al-uṣūlī*), theologian (*al-mutakallim*) as well as a philosopher.<sup>53</sup> Such recognition from Ibn Khaldūn is very significant in order to appreciate the ideas of al-Ghazālī on such areas knowing that some did not recognize al-Ghazālī as a philosopher because of his

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<sup>52</sup> Mohd Fakhrudin Abdul Mukti, "al-Farabi: Hayatuhu al-'Aqliyyah wa Masadiruhu al-Falsafiyah", *Jurnal Usuluddin*, Bil. 20, APIUM, Dec. 2004, 223-243.

<sup>53</sup> Marhaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yunāniyyah*, 775.

condemning the philosophy and philosophers as far as his book *Tahāfut* is concerned.

However, Majid Fakhry argued that Ibn Khaldūn in general did not deny the importance of philosophy but appreciated its advantage "to sharpen the mind and enable us to formulate arguments in accordance with rules of logic".<sup>54</sup> This idea exactly met with al-Ghazālī who reminded that speech without logic was not convincing. Apparently the rejection was only confined to metaphysics as one of the philosophical sciences as mentioned in many places in this article.

### **Conclusion**

Ibn Khaldūn was a scholar that contributed to the development of philosophical ideas in Islamic history. It seems that Ibn Khaldūn's analysis was objectively coherent as he did not simply jump into an emotional attack against philosophy without first defining the subject and appreciating its advantage. He classified the philosophical sciences to include logic, mathematics, metaphysics, physics and their subdivisions etc.

This classification of philosophical sciences by Ibn Khaldūn as such was the real sciences of philosophy as they were in the past. Also his dividing of sciences to rational, traditional and linguistic is quite interesting. He appreciated Aristotle for his contribution especially to logic which is still relevant up to date. The only he rejected was about the metaphysical aspect of philosophy that reminded previously by al-Ghazālī for the fact that Muslim philosophers were mistaken when depending on rational argument even contradicting the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* textually.

He also criticized the logic as a definite means to judge the truth as believed by Muslim philosophers suggesting that the religious law should be consulted with

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<sup>54</sup> Fakhry, *A History*, 109.

regard to all the issues of faith. A critical appraisal of philosophical ideas is to reject philosophers' notion that intellect is the supreme element transgressing the framework of faith. What appeared that Ibn Khaldūn was mainly influenced by al-Ghazālī's attitude on the philosophy as well as he benefitted much from the former by focussing the issues related to the faith of Islam thoroughly.

He also defended the importance of *kalām* in defending Islamic faith and distinguished it clearly from philosophy concluding that those Muslim theologians are not philosophers. Scholarly speaking, this attitude of Ibn Khaldūn is greatly appreciated as he is very open-minded and a progressive Muslim scholar ever known. Probably the initiative of Islamization of knowledge versus the secularization of knowledge that denoted for the separation of religious and secular sciences, Ibn Khaldūn's ideas are worth for that matter.

Finally, Ibn Khaldūn should be considered as a great scholar after Ibn Rushd in discussing philosophical ideas in the history of Islam. Therefore he shall be regarded as a role model for Muslim scholars in the modern time in terms of having excellent attitude towards the knowledge or *al-hikmah* wherever it comes from based on the real teaching of Islam as a religion of knowledge and intellect.

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