The Perspective of Human Nature in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*

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Abstract

Ibn Khaldun's theories have exerted a lasting influence on the Islamic world and are highly esteemed by contemporary scholars. Despite the significance of his insight, Khaldun's views on human nature have been underexplored in academic research. This study delves into his perspective on human nature as presented in the *Muqaddimah*. Using qualitative methods, this study aims to elucidate how Ibn Khaldun's conceptualization of human nature impacts the development of human civilization. The findings concluded that human nature consists of good, evil, and a balance of both, influenced by social environment, education, and religion, with a tendency towards goodness. He critiques the moral decay in luxury-bound sedentary societies, linking it to the collapse of civilizations. Studying Khaldun's perspectives on human nature is crucial for understanding societal development and leadership, with cross-cultural comparisons providing valuable insights.

Keywords Ibn Khaldun; human nature; characteristics; influence factors; civilization; the *Muqaddimah*

Introduction

Humans have never ceased introspecting since the dawn of civilization. Human nature is the starting point and foundation of human self-knowledge and is regarded as a fundamental aspect of social judgment (Horodecka, 2022). Civilization development is a process of gradually realizing the potential possibilities of human nature and preserving good human nature contributes to advancing human civilization (Sheng, 2024; Hu, 2000; Ibragimova & Raisovich, 2019; Park et al., 2012).

The subject of human nature is difficult and significant, and many philosophers from both the East and the West have debated it extensively, generating opposing viewpoints. For example, Western philosophers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, Freud, and the Eastern philosopher Xunzi, advocate that human nature is evil. In contrast, the Chinese philosopher Mencius believes that human nature is inherently good. Additionally, Gaozi pointed out that human nature has no inherent goodness or badness. Other academic areas, such as psychology and anthropology, are also interested in the concept of human nature. Even outside academia, ordinary people have notions about human nature. Although these views are simple and intuitive, common-sense ideas formed in daily life influence their perspectives on the world (Hong et al., 2001). The debate on human nature spans Eastern and Western philosophy, psychology, and anthropology, presenting divergent views on whether humans are inherently good, evil, or neutral.

As a noted medieval Arab Muslim historian, Ibn Khaldun thoroughly analyzes human nature. He believed that man is a complex entity with biological characteristics akin to those of animals, as well as social characteristics that separate him from them. Human nature has changed as civilization progresses, and corruption in human nature is one of the primary causes of the demise of human culture and civilization. Hence, revisiting Ibn Khaldun's perspective of human nature and its impact on human civilization has implications for the code of conduct and values of people in the contemporary Muslim world and provides some insight into the establishment of a good society. However, a check of prominent academic websites for the keywords Ibn Khaldun and human nature indicates that, so far, few scholars have devoted their studies to it,

providing the author the opportunity to fill this gap in the literature on this discourse.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore Ibn Khaldun's views on human nature as presented in the *Muqaddimah*. The *Muqaddimah*, as the primary text, is the central source of data. Specific chapters and passages where Ibn Khaldun discuss human nature will be closely examined to extract relevant information. Content analysis helps elucidate how Ibn Khaldun's conceptualization of human nature impacts the development of human civilization.

Human Nature in the *Muqaddimah*

Ibn Khaldun does not devote a separate chapter to the concept of humanity; his discussions are scattered throughout each chapter of the *Muqaddimah*. He not only analyzes and contrasts the human nature of nomadic and sedentary cultures but also investigates the human traits of those who survived various dynasties in stationary civilizations. Ibn Khaldun opposed the metaphysical concept of human nature, which he interpreted through the lenses of history and culture, arguing that human nature is varied and malleable. He contended that humans are complicated entities affected by various influences in a changing environment and display a variety of human qualities. Human beings have developed three forms of nature as they progress through history (Dhaouadi, 2008). Table 1 points out these three types.

Table 1. The Original Text of the Three Types of Human Nature in the *Muqaddimah*

Types	Original text
Good and evil coexist	God put good and evil into the nature of man (Khaldun, 2015, p. 171).
Evil	Aggressiveness and injustice are in the animal nature of man (Khaldun, 2015, p. 104).
Good	Man is more inclined toward good qualities than toward bad qualities (Khaldun, 2015, p. 191).

As a devout Muslim, Ibn Khaldun's thoughts were inspired by the Quran and the Hadith. In investigating the origins of humans, he preferred the belief that God created humans. He believes that humans' first type of humanity is consistent with the balance and harmony espoused by Islamic thinking (Dhaouadi, 2008).

Ibn Khaldun also argues that humans have a second type of human nature because they are creatures like animals. This is animal-like nature. The third type was unique to humans. This is related to the social properties of human beings, which often involve morality, warmth, vitality, and intellect, among others, and are the most complex (Park et al., 2012, 2013).

Characteristics of Human Nature in the *Muqaddimah*

Ibn Khaldun investigates not only the three types of humanity in the *Muqaddimah* but also the characteristics of humanity in terms of the causes of these three types.

Table 2. The Characteristics of Human Nature in the *Muqaddimah*

Pro-God	Worships God	The potential to enter heaven		
Biological properties	Invasion	Pillage	Injustice	
Social properties	Cooperation	Seeking power	Solidarity	Imitation
	Possessiveness	Sympathy		

Table 2 describes three kinds of characteristics of human nature in the *Muqaddimah*. Ibn Khaldun points out that human beings have a nature because of which they worship all perfection, but "Rarely will (a human being) concede perfection and superiority to another unless he is somehow forced to do so by superior strength" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 459). When a person worships another person, he is not interested in that person's beautiful appearance or high moral character but in their wealth. God is a

flawless entity that is omnipotent and capable of answering believers' prayers (Franks, 2009). This indicates that worshiping God not only brings spiritual consolation but also gives one a feeling of connection to an utterly unsurpassable entity and hence, a sense of pride in being near perfection.

As major pathways to paradise, many faiths emphasize compassion, kindness, high morality, and the prompt rectification of sins. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that the human soul is born with the ability to enter the celestial world. "It has been established that they neither need acquired qualities… It is a natural change from humanity to angelic in the flash of a moment" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 146). In addition, he classifies the human soul into three levels: lower earth contentment, spirituality and reason, and ascension to the eternal state of heaven. Ibn Khaldun stated that the Prophet was good and pure by nature, never doing anything unpleasant or offensive; and that he taught the concept of Islam to the people and requested them to worship. "Thus, we know that there exists an agent there who directs us toward those things from a world above our world" (Khaldun, 2015, pp. 500-501). Internal and external conditions laid a strong foundation for the pursuit of a better world.

Although human civilization has regulations, morals, and norms that control human conduct, the predatory and unfair characteristics of humans persist at all levels of human society and throughout the growth process of humanity. Ibn Khaldun agrees with this perspective. He stresses that the advantages and strengths that authority holds are expressions of fury and animalism, to the point that people in power inevitably depart from justice. They tend to oppress and exploit the governed over many worldly concerns to gain more advantage in fulfilling their demands and aspirations (Khaldun, 2015; Khaldun, 2014).

Cooperation is vital for both humans and many non-human creatures, playing a critical role in individual adaptability. People's propensity to collaborate and engage in real activities stems from their desire to enhance efficiency in the labor process and thereby gain greater benefits (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Chen, 2021). Ibn Khaldun points out, "Human beings must by nature cooperate, and that calls for a restraining influence" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 438). A single person's abilities cannot meet the needs of survival; therefore, many people must be assembled. According to

Khaldun, cooperative work to attain the greatest possible riches and security is a feature of human nature (Gierer, 2001). Humans who assemble and settle down need managers to handle the problems and disagreements they experience when living in an ordered and stable existence. Hence, another characteristic of human nature that goes hand-in-hand with cooperation is the necessity for management.

Ibn Khaldun adds that "royal authority is something natural to human beings because of its social implications" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 191). The development of kingship is driven by the human tendency to be governed by individuals wielding power. The essence of power is the pursuit of luxury, comfort, and peace, so it serves as high honor and enjoyment, including all the good things on earth and all the spiritual and material pleasures (Al-Hamdi, 2006; Khaldun, 2014). Everyone expects a good life; thus, this worldly and spiritual pleasure must be coveted by everyone.

Clan consciousness refers to pride, advancement, and a spirit of struggle without sacrifice; its ultimate goal is the supremacy of kingship. People are born to trust and depend on those connected by blood, and the bond between clan members has been shown to become stronger over time. As a result, while capturing power, the leaders placed a high value on the purity of a bloodline and the consolidation of the feeling of brotherhood. After obtaining power, dignity, and lineage are considered desirable traits (Katsiaficas, 2014).

Ibn Khaldun believes that when authority is established, the life of the powerful is opulent and desirable; therefore, most people are eager to approach those in authority, flatter, and laud them in return for fame, money, and fortune with the hope to improve their circumstances. When they receive rewards from the nobility, such as official positions or land, and serve the aristocrats, they go to great lengths to imitate the elite in order to gain a sense of satisfaction superior to that of ordinary people and to enjoy the benefits of their elevated status (Sidani, 2008). In addition, humans seek to mimic people they believe to be ideal. Many individuals believe that those in power or those who win are flawless.

The essence of power lies in the pursuit of dictatorship, which triggers a series of events threatening the consolidation of royal authority (Sidani,

2008). Dictatorship mainly occurs at the end of a dynastic rule, when the king's power is weakened, and more powerful nobles begin to vie for control. The possessiveness or innate rebelliousness of the king's power is revealed at this time (Khaldun, 2015; Khaldun, 2014). Therefore, rebelliousness follows the pursuit of power as a human characteristic but is often not revealed because of the disparity in power.

Compassion is a powerful force for embracing and wanting to cure grief; however, caring for and empathizing with others is difficult and can tax or drain a person's resources. As a result, individuals are more likely to show compassion for family members or persons who may be of interest to them than strangers (Gilbert, 2019; Jazaieri et al., 2013). Ibn Khaldun states, "Compassion and affection for one's blood relations and relatives exist in human nature as something God put into the hearts of men" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 172). He believes that compassion is a natural human trait and can bring people together to intentionally assist others. This is undoubtedly one of the most compelling reasons for a group to strengthen its feelings of clan connections. A cohesive group has a deterring effect on foes and keeps the nation secure. While compassion promotes social harmony and stability by increasing people's understanding and respect for one another. However. Overwhelming compassion for a person or group may result in the establishment of some unfairness and prejudice, as well as a psychological burden for the sympathized person.

Factors Affecting Human Nature in the *Muqaddimah*

Ibn Khaldun explores the various influences on human nature in the *Muqaddimah*. He emphasizes the intricate relationship among environment, education, Islam, and other factors in shaping human behavior and societal development. By highlighting the pivotal roles of natural and social environments, along with education and religion, Ibn Khaldun underscores their profound impact in shaping human nature and societal dynamics. The elaboration which details the various elements impacting human nature and societal development is discussed in the following subtopics:

1. Environment

In his seminal work, the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun explores the intricate relationship between environmental factors and human societal development. Geographical conditions, climate variations, and the availability of natural resources significantly shape economic activities, cultural practices, and social cohesion within communities. Favorable climates and abundant resources often lead to prosperous economic activities and stable social structures, fostering cooperation and cultural development. In contrast, harsh climates and scarce resources can result in economic struggles, cultural adaptations to survive, and sometimes weaker social cohesion due to increased competition for limited resources. These environmental factors create diverse societal dynamics that influence how communities evolve and interact.

a. Natural Environment

Ibn Khaldun classifies the various latitudes into seven zones, believing that people living in the third, fourth, and fifth zones are the most peaceful and seldom go to the extreme zones. Those who dwell in the first, second, sixth, and seventh zones are impatient and have animal-like tendencies. For example, he explains, "The physique and character of its inhabitants are temperate to the degree necessitated by the composition of the air in which they live......The four other zones are intemperate, and the physique and character of their inhabitants show it" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 122). Regions III, IV, and V have warmer and more pleasant climates as well as more abundant material resources, whereas Regions VI and VII, to the north of Region V, are colder, and Regions II and I, to the south of Region III, are warmer. The abundance of material resources in these regions is also much lower than in Regions III, IV, and V. Therefore, individuals living in colder or hotter places must dedicate more time and energy to satisfy the demands of surviving extreme temperatures, nutritional needs, and their health. They must also pay more to access adequate energy to fuel economic growth (Rehdanz & Maddison, 2005; Van de Vliert, 2007).

People living in environments rich in natural resources are more comfortable with the challenges of survival. Therefore, their social values, practices, motivations, and satisfaction are more positive, and they also

appear happy and selfless. However, people living in societies with scarce natural resources do not. They are selfish and may even betray cooperation for personal gain (Van de Vliert, 2007). Furthermore, research has shown that climate has a moderating effect on people's emotional states, with extremely cold or warm climates negatively affecting human emotions and making them more likely to behave aggressively (Eliasson et al., 2007). Negative emotions and bestial behavior are important factors that undermine people's happiness and selflessness.

According to Ibn Khaldun, one of the main roots of the nomad's courage is the harsh desert environment. Those who live in this environment tend to be braver, have a greater feeling of unity, and are more capable of battling and subduing others (Gierer, 2001). People are accustomed to a given environment and have established certain character habits that become natural to the community over time. Therefore, we need to objectively and dialectically examine the double-sided influence of the natural environment on human nature.

b. Social Environment

A benign social context promotes the internalization of individual moral values and aids in preserving the goodness of human nature (Long, 2020). However, an unattractive civilization encourages individuals to act dangerously by exhibiting their wicked animal nature. Thus, the social environment is vital in the development of human nature, and Ibn Khaldun acknowledges this. He argues:

> "Such Bedouins became wealthy, settled in the city, and adopted a life of ease and luxury, such as exists in the sedentary environment…Bedouins are closer to being good than sedentary people…Therefore, their souls are colored with all kinds of blameworthy and evil qualities." (Khaldun, 2015, pp. 166-167)

Ibn Khaldun believes that every newborn is born in a natural condition and that whether they grow up to be good or bad individuals is heavily influenced by the social conventions to which they are exposed. The desire for a comfortable and happy existence is universal, and Bedouins are no different. When they have sufficient money, they select a pleasant way of

life. They succumbed to the invisible shackles of the city and adapted to the luxury of settlement life as soon as it became possible. Bedouins who choose to settle down will be kinder than the aborigines of the city, but over time, with the accumulation of wealth, and the multiplication of life, they will also be more distant from goodness. Similar to the different developmental stages of a dynasty, people have different personalities and morals. In the early days of a dynasty, people were united and of a kindred spirit. People in the later dynasty were used to a life of luxury, and they even went above and beyond their means to pursue this luxury. They did anything they could to achieve fortune, including engaging in harmful activities that harmed others. At that time, society was filled with luxury and a wicked culture, and individuals living in such a society made the quest for luxury a deeply ingrained habit.

2. Education

Education is often interpreted as a continuous and dynamic process of actively helping individuals enhance their talents and growth by acquiring new information and skills to adapt to ever-evolving knowledge. Good education also promotes the development of desirable personal characteristics, such as endurance, self-control, and tolerance (Kogan et al., 2021; Öztürk et al., 2022). Ibn Khaldun pointed out that there is no difference between people in the same environment; this difference arises from their education. Most people do not follow customs, rituals, or religious teachings and are prone to evil, while only a few are good. However, a person's nature can accept both good and bad things; therefore, the majority of those who are prone to evil have the possibility of being educated about good.

During the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties, education conveyed information rather than a transfer of skills, and only those of noble origin and authority were competent in teaching the Quran and the Hadith to the public. One of the important roles of the thematic material of the Quran and Hadith was to develop the noble values of a nation. So much of this educational content combined with moderate Islamic universal values not only guided their behavior but also firmly maintained the Islamic population's nature to follow goodness (Sukino et al., 2020).

Old conventions and traditions were continually merged and updated as time passed and empires changed, creating a new social environment. The social reality was significantly more complicated and diverse than it had been at the beginning, and new rules were required to maintain this new social order in place. New legislation must be communicated to the public through the educational system. As previously stated, the powers that delegate the task of education to others focus on the management of state affairs. Since then, knowledge has become a skill, and education has become a means of livelihood. In other words, education significantly enriches people's knowledge and improves their minds.

Educational institutions aim to establish and nurture a friendly and peaceful national character, thereby strengthening the foundations of society (Sukino et al., 2020). However, the way education is delivered impacts the direction of human nature. Ibn Khaldun argued that placing too many expectations on children in school is damaging. A pupil who grows up in an environment of aggression and pressure will always be fearful and ultimately become retarded and malevolent. Violence causes a person's mind to become cunning and filled with deception. Over time, this cunning behavior eventually becomes habitual, leading to the gradual disappearance of the magnificent essence of humanity, which is characterized by emotion and dignity.

Ibn Khaldun also mentions the influence of parental guidance on human nature. He quotes a hadith of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) which means, "Every infant is born in the natural state. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a heathen" (Khaldun, 2015, p. 167). Childhood is a critical period for shaping one's personality, as it is the period when parents spend the most time with their children and provide the most profound guidance to their thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, parental guidance can have a predominant effect on the formation of a child's personality (Wang & Li, 2013).

3. Religion

Religion fosters patience, self-control, and forgiveness through its moral teachings, structured practices like prayer and fasting, and the support of a community that encourages these virtues. It provides a higher purpose and

eternal perspective, which helps individuals endure hardships and forgive others. Additionally, role models within religious traditions offer concrete examples for believers to emulate (Holt et al., 2014; Smither & Khorsandi, 2009). Ibn Khaldun unequivocally asserts that evil is the closest attribute to a person when he is unable to modify his traditions and habits and does not model his religion to improve himself. Most of the religions he referred to were Islamic.

Ibn Khaldun investigates the influence of Islam on the humanity of nomads and urbanites. His examination of the impact of Islam on the humanity of sedentary people is the most complex, as it combines religion, humanity, and the rise and fall of states in his discourse. He points out that the Bedouins are by nature barbaric, rude, self-respecting, and have a strong desire for power, making it difficult to agree on aspirations and desires.

Ibn Khaldun adds that if a new dynasty is established on religion and the king is compassionate and just in his administration, then the ruler's mercy and justice are more solid because they are based on his faith. Furthermore, the people of this nation have faith, hope, and fear, which result in faith, bravery, and strength. A country with such leadership and citizens is deemed invincible (Khaldun, 2014; Gule, 2014).

In the middle period of the dynasty, during which the land was expanding, the economy was thriving, and civilization was at its zenith, Khaldun believed that religion was fundamental for maintaining the stability of a powerful state. Power is derived from a sense of superiority, which in turn arises from a strong sense of clan kinship. When people are driven by selfish desires and consumed by greed for worldly luxuries, social divisions inevitably widen. However, if people turn their hearts towards the truth, avoid earthly vanity, and believe in Allah, they will share the same direction and perspective, significantly reducing their differences (Önder & Ulaşan, 2018; Alidjanova, 2020).

This unity strengthens cooperation among individuals, solidifying the state regime. Additionally, human nature includes a tendency to dominate the weak. Therefore, a strong nation is often tempted to invade neighboring countries to expand its territory. Although people do not inherently fear death, the promise of an afterlife in religion makes a devoted army

formidable. Such armies excel in both offensive and defensive actions, and a secure environment fosters favorable conditions for economic development (Łuczyszyn, 2020).

However, economic development must also consider principles of fairness and justice (Seng, 2021). Injustice is a natural outcome of human nature, but Ibn Khaldun stresses that those who possess power are particularly prone to it. This behavior can be effectively regulated by religious laws, as the prohibition of injustice is a core principle of the five basic requirements of religious law. Hence, religion can counteract the negative aspects of human nature, strengthen people's faith, promote unity and courage, and maintain the stability and prosperity of a nation (Alidjanova, 2020).

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldun examines three varieties (good, evil, and the balance of good and evil) of human nature, arguing that it functions like a scale with good and evil that concurrently exist at opposite ends. Influenced by various factors, the different stages of human development present two distinct states, except for the state of equilibrium. The other two states differ only in being explicit or implicit, without a difference between existence and disappearance. He explains that these three states are created by man himself, with the pro-God category reflecting an Islamic-influenced conclusion. This also represents Ibn Khaldun's thoughts on human capabilities and the path to Paradise after death. The characteristics of human nature linked to this perspective are difficult for non-religious individuals to identify with and are, therefore, not universal.

A comparison of Khaldun's views on human nature, based on the other two factors reveals that he believes that individuals are more predisposed to being good. Thus, when analyzing the factors influencing human nature, he examines the influence of the social environment, education, and religion on human nature. He criticizes long-term sedentary people who have gradually fallen into luxury, concluding that the corruption of human nature is one of the main reasons for the collapse of human civilization.

Classical texts are jewels bequeathed by the wise, holding profound insight that can only be gleaned by continuous study. *Muqaddimah's* notion of

human nature shaped Khaldun's historical and sociological theories. Therefore, studying this theory is important for understanding human behavior and the growth of society. There is a subtle but significant connection between leadership, as a crucial factor in civilization's development, and human nature, which deserves researchers' attention. Additionally, comparing the perceptions and understandings of human nature across different cultures and times presents an interesting research direction.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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