I. Ibn Khaldun's Praised Mind

There has been an overwhelming worldwide consensus among intellectuals and scholars that Ibn Khaldun is blessed with a great mind. From the West, the British historian, Arnold Toynbee, spoke about Ibn Khaldun: “He (Ibn Khaldun) has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time and place” (Toynbee 1956:372). From the East, the famous Moroccan intellectual and PhD author on Ibn Khaldun’s thought sees the Muqaddimah as a pyramidal and unified construct and developed thought in its content as well as in the organization of its chapters, paragraphs and the harmony that prevails among its various parts (Al-Jabri 1982:118-19).

II. The Determinants of Great Minds

A Sociology of Knowledge is needed to explore and identify the basic factors behind the making of the great creative minds in the domain of human knowledge. Three fundamental factors appear to be strongly correlated with the presence of brilliant human minds: (1) wide knowledge; (2) stimulating external milieu; and (3) special human personality traits.

In the study of the Ibar, I intend to focus on the first factor: lessons to be drawn from Ibn Khaldun’s umran mind. The second factor’s impact on Ibn Khaldun’s new creative social thought is already over studied and analyzed by those who have attempted to understand and explain the roots of his New Social Science Thought (Ilm al-umran al-bashari). As to the personality traits factor, it seems to be the least studied, though it may be so important for the realization of human creativity. This essay’s limited space does not allow me to deal with it in any meaningful way. However, colleagues and readers may like to consult my modest work both in English and Arabic on the role of Ibn Khaldun’s personality traits in the making of his pioneering social thought. (Dhaouadi 2004:54–63; 2001:66–82; 1997:85–97)

However, the main focus in this essay is twofold. First, to shed light with analysis and discussion on how Ibn Khaldun’s Islamic wide knowledge shaped his cognitive world view/Weltanschauung and, consequently, his imposing intellectual social science mind. Second, to assess and evaluate the credibility in the field of knowledge-making of what is called in the Muslim culture “the Aql-Naql Mind,” which combines Revealed knowledge with human reasoning-made knowledge in the process of knowledge acquisition and creation.

This double focus is in order, because it is assumed in this essay that wide knowledge is very basic, on the one hand, for the emergence of great intellectual minds, and that both stimulating external milieu and special personality traits are considered as essential aids to the materialization of great brilliant minds. On the other hand, the Aql-Naql mind is hardly acceptable by modern learned Western culture as a means to the establishment of credible knowledge in the two cultures. The discussion of this issue is relevant at a time of serious questioning of the credibility of social and natural sciences because of the lack of the epistemological reunification of the two cultures (Wallerstein 1999:243; 2001; Wilson 1999). The Aql-Naql Muslim mind does not only strongly advocate the epistemological unity of the two cultures, but it recommends as well the unity between human-made knowledge and the Revealed knowledge.

The word “knowledge” is used in this essay to cover all branches of human knowledge including what is called today scientific branches, like the Natural Sciences.
There is, therefore, a pressing need to become familiar with Ibn Khaldun’s scope of knowledge as well as his Aql-Naql mind, which helped prepare him to be the true worldwide pioneer in the entire human history who invented in the fourteenth century the New Science of Human Civilization (Ilm al-umran al-bashari/Sociology).

III. Knowledge and Creativity
Throughout humankind’s long history and within its diverse cultures and civilizations, the emergence of great creative minds in various fields of knowledge has often been associated with a good standard of the so-called learned advanced knowledge. This requires two basic things: literacy and high command of knowledge in one’s field. The literacy factor may not be necessary for innovation and creativity in certain fields of human activities, but literacy is fundamental for creative and innovative minds in most of the branches of human knowledge. Theories in the field of creativity highlight the relationship between creativity and knowledge (Sternberg 1999:226-50; 2003). Those theories stress the rather straightforward relationship between the two (Sternberg 1999:248), because it is assumed by theorists of creativity that “the more one knows, the easier it will be to develop innovative solutions” (Kraft 2005:22). Wide knowledge also initiates intense complex cognitive processes that may lead to moments of brilliance among humans (Kraft 2005:17).

This may be a hasty conclusion because it minimizes the role of the two other factors involved in the creativity process. In spite of this caution, the relation between Ibn Khaldun’s wide Islamic knowledge background and his creative new social science remains a testing ground in this essay for those theories. Creativity’s standard definition is “people’s ability to go beyond given information and imagine new and exciting ways of reformulating old problems” (Sternberg 2003).

IV. Ibn Khaldun’s Education and Knowledge
In his youth in Tunis, Ibn Khaldun studied three main areas: (1) Islamic studies, which covered the science of the Quran, the Hadith (the Prophet’s sayings and behaviors), and Islamic jurisprudence (Fikh), especially the Malikite School; (2) the sciences of the Arabic language, which dealt with the grammar, conjugation, and the art of eloquent written and spoken language (al-Balaga); and (3) logic, philosophy, natural sciences, and mathematics. These studies gave Ibn Khaldun an educational background in the two cultures of his time.

In his autobiography At-Ta’rif bi-Ibn Kaldun wa riblatuhu gharban wa sharqan (Information about Ibn Khaldun and His Travel in the West and the East of the Arab World), he describes in detail two of his most distinguished masters: Abu Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al Muhaymin al-Hathrami and Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad al-Abilly. Ibn Khaldun speaks of al-Hathrami as the Moroccan leading scholar in the sciences of grammar and Hadith from whom he received fundamental knowledge on the six reference books on Hadith and other important books on the subject, such as al-Muwattaa, the reference book of the famous Malikite jurisprudent and theologian (Faqih) Maalik Ibn Anas. His is second master al-Abilly taught Ibn Khaldun the two fundamental sciences (al-asli yyayni): logic and all philosophical and mathematical disciplines.

Ibn Khaldun had a strong desire for learning and knowledge since his early infancy: “Since my very early infancy, the time of my weaning, I have never ceased to seek knowledge and the best virtues, dividing my time between attending the courses and the circles of scholars until the time of the devastating plague that killed dignitaries, notables and most of my teachers in Tunis” (At-Ta’rif A:57; F:72). Consequently, most scholars and writers who were not affected by the plague left for Morocco.

Ibn Khaldun later had the opportunity to return to his studies in Fez, which became the center of scholars and writers who immigrated from Al-Andalus (Spain) and Tunisia. Fez had the richest Islamic libraries. Ibn

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2 Published by Dar al Kitab Allubnani, Beirut (no date) pp. 430. We will refer in short to this book by the term: At-Ta’rif and followed by A (Arabic) or F (French). The French version of this book is: Ibn Khaldun, Le Voyage d’Occident et d’Orient, Abdessalam Cheddadi, Paris, Sindbad, 1980, pp. 331. To my knowledge, At-Ta’rif has not yet been translated into English.
Khaldun’s presence in this stimulating intellectual milieu expanded and consolidated his scope of knowledge and satisfied his true desire for knowledge. He writes: “I took advantage of the situation to reflect and read and meet the great scholars from Morocco and Al-Andalus who came as ambassadors of their princes to the Moroccan sultan. I thus, fulfilled my desire for the acquisition of knowledge” (At-Ta’rifA:61; F:75).

V. The Muslim Mind’s Ethics of Knowledge

In order to understand the specific Islamic wide knowledge factors that shaped Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual mind, we need to look at the main general characteristics of the Muslim intellectual mind, since it is assumed, from a sociological perspective, that Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual mind had worked out his New Science (ilm al-umran al-bashari) within the religious cultural framework setting of the Muslim intellectual mind before Western domination and colonization of the Islamic world in the contemporary period. The Muslim classical intellectual mind was heavily influenced by the Quran’s ethics toward knowledge acquisition and creation. The ethics could be summarized in the following features:

(1) The Quran gives top priority to knowledge acquisition and creation. The first revealed Quranic verses strongly stress the importance of literacy and continued learning to secure wide knowledge on everything in this world/universe.

(2) In order to seek knowledge as well as develop it, the Quranic text asks Muslims and non-Muslims to adopt the methodology of continuing observations of three main areas: (a) the universe/nature; (b) the historical events of human civilizations, societies, and their social actors; and (c) the human distinct nature. This Quranic appeal certainly serves well the development of the sciences of the two cultures. The epistemological unity of the latter comes from the Quranic idea of the one God, the only creator of all world/universe phenomena that the sciences of the two cultures study.

(3) In the Quranic view, true authentic knowledge should make scientists/scholars the most pious and humble people toward God: “Among his Servants are those who have knowledge” (The Quran 35:28). From the Islamic perspective, the achievement of good credible knowledge is an act of spiritual salvation for true scientists and scholars. This is in significant contrast to the view of the modern Western mind in the two cultures.

(4) Regardless of how enormous and vast, human knowledge always remains very limited compared with God’s unlimited and fully global knowledge.

(5) The divine knowledge has absolute authenticity, certainty, and inclusiveness of all things in the world and the universe at large.

VI. The Cognitive Aql-Naql Muslim Mind

It is clear from the previous short biographic and autobiographic sketches and the profile of the learning Muslim mind that Ibn Khaldun’s education and learning background, as well as the societies he studied, were profoundly Islamic in nature. On the one hand, he had a broad and high standard of knowledge of the various Islamic sciences and disciplines (the two cultures) of his time as shown in the Sixth Part of his Muqaddimah. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun had firsthand experience and knowledge about numerous Arab Muslim societies, tribes, clans, and groups that he analyzed and wrote about with his Umran mind. In other words, his social theoretical and fieldwork knowledge is inspired strongly by Islam. Thus, Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual mind is bound to be heavily a Muslim mind, which is the outcome both of the Islamic learned culture and that of the social realities of the Muslim Arab societies. Gibb’s description of Ibn Khaldun leaves no doubt about his Muslim identity as a great thinker: “Ibn Khaldun was not only a Muslim, but as almost every page of the Muqaddimah bears witness, a Muslim jurist and theologian, of the strict Maliki school. For him religion was far and away the most important thing in life. “The Sharia is the only true guide” (Shaw and Polk 1962:171). On his part, the author M. Al-Shaqaa affirms that Ibn Khaldun’s Umran Theory is Islamic from the beginning to the end. (Al-Shaqaa 1992:100-130). Ibn Khaldun himself appears to be referring to his authentic Islamic and personal thought when he denies the foreign influence on his conceptualization of his New Science: “We became aware of these things with God’s help and..."
without the instruction of Aristotle or the teachings of the M obedhan" (Dawood 1974:41). The Islamic features of Ibn Khaldun’s mind are furthermore manifested in what we may call the “cognitive Aql-Naql perspective” of the Muslim mind.

Historically speaking, Arab Muslim civilization’s earlier scholars and scientists of all disciplines and sciences (the two cultures) carried out their work on the basis of the principle of cooperation between the revealed-sacred knowledge (Naql), on the one hand, and the human acquired knowledge based on human reason (Aql), on the other. Ibn Khaldun’s well-established interdisciplinary social science thought in his Muqaddimah is no exception to the rule of the combination of the Naql and Aql knowledge (Robert 2002:11-80, 124-37). That is, he strongly adopted the cognitive dualist (Aql-Naql) perspective in writing his entire Umrān work including his Muqaddimah. As such, the Khaldunian cognitive mind is well in line with the Quranic inspired five major characteristics of the ideal type of the classic intellectual Muslim mind described earlier.

This type of extremely curious and motivated mind, to learn both from Aql and Naql worlds, should help explain the great milestones in many branches of knowledge accomplished by the Arab Muslim civilization before the Middle Ages. Ibn Khaldun’s manifested and articulated mind in his Muqaddimah is a convincing example of the potential high intellectual performance of the Muslim Aql-Naql mind. This has made me consider this type of mind as the dividing line between what I call “Khaldunian Eastern Sociology” and contemporary Western sociology (Dhaouadi 1990:319-35). The Khaldunian Aql-Naql mind is expected, for instance, to be praised by Wallerstein for its epistemological unification of the two cultures in his Muqaddimah. But given Wallerstein’s Western modern training, it is very difficult for him to take seriously the Revealed knowledge part of Ibn Khaldun’s Aql-Naql mind, since it is against the social norm of the Western modern mind in knowledge acquisition and creation.

From an Islamic epistemological viewpoint, tensions and conflicts between Aql and Naql parts have no room in the Muslim mind. Because the source of the two (Aql and Naql) is one: Allah. Seen that way, the Muslim mind could rightly be considered a meeting ground for the secular and the Revealed knowledge.

The famous religious scholar Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) is the most well-known Muslim learned man who strongly defended the legitimacy of the promotion of the combined Aql and Naql knowledge in the Islamic Culture. His book The Prevention of Contradictions Between Aql and Naql is a case in point.

VII. The Two Cultures of the Muslim and Western Minds

The sociological perspective helps understand and explain the differences between these two minds with regard to the acquisition and creation of knowledge. On the one hand, the learned Muslim Aql-Naql mind is the outcome of the Muslim culture that sees no contradictions between Aql and Naql knowledge, but rather, emphasizes their harmony.

On the other hand, the Western learned mind has witnessed a sweeping liberation from the influence of the Christian Theological Thought since the Renaissance. Rational reasoning, experimentation, the collection of empirical data . . . have become the only basis for Western contemporary knowledge in the two cultures. Al-Jabri sees the difference between these two minds in the way each of them prioritizes the following: Man, Nature, God. On the one hand, the Greek European mind gives more importance to the first two; on the other hand, in the Muslim Arab mind, priority is given to God and Man. This certainly helps account for the nonreadiness of the former and the readiness of the latter to adopt the perspective of the Aql-Naql mind (Al-Jabri 1988:27–31).

With these cultural differences toward knowledge acquisition and creation in mind, it becomes easy to understand why Westerners have often been impressed by the Aql side of Ibn Khaldun’s mind while they have denied and criticized him for his use and reference to the Naql side (Lacoste 1998:241–57; Schmit 1999:66–67).


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The presence of these two minds in the world of knowledge acquisition and creation creates controversy. The Western modern mind looks with suspicion, disbelief, and even hostility to knowledge colored by religion. The classical Muslim mind, however, finds support in the fundamental Revealed Islamic texts for the human-made knowledge. Furthermore, and more controversial, each of them has contributed to the advancement of human knowledge. Since the Western learned modern mind is the dominant adopted reference for knowledge creation and acquisition in contemporary times, a discussion is appropriate here to see if there is ground or justification for the Muslim Aql-Naql mind to stand on its own feet and even compete with the Western mind in the knowledge acquisition and creation turf.

First, the Muslim learned mind is strongly pro-knowledge acquisition and creation. The Quranic text (the first Naql source in Islam) is an open invitation to Muslims and non-Muslims alike to think and reflect on the world/universe' endless phenomena. It is estimated that the sixth of the Quran's verses speak directly or indirectly about the importance of knowledge for humans. It is in this sense that "true scientists and scholars are the inheritors of the prophets," according to the Prophet Muhammad (the second Naql source in Islam), who strongly and repeatedly appeals to Muslims to seek knowledge: "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave"; or "seek knowledge even in the far distant China." The knowledge-seeking ethic is deeply rooted in the Muslim Aql-Naql mind.

Second, both the Quranic and the Hadith texts include explicit statements or implicit references to scientific facts about various phenomena in the world/universe that have only recently been discovered by modern science. One example from the Quran is sufficient to make the point. The Quranic text has its own terms for the newly developed Science of Embryology. It described over fourteen centuries ago the specific stages of human development: "We created man from the quintessence of mud, thereafter We placed him as a drop of liquid (sperm) in a firm lodging (the womb). Then We fashioned the sperm (Nutfah) into something that clings (Alakah) which We fashioned into a chewed like lump (Muthgha). The chewed like lump is fashioned into bones which are then covered with flesh. Then, We developed it into another act of Creation. Blessed is God, the best Creator." (The Quran:23: 13). The famous embryologist Keith Moore has strongly praised the Quranic precise terms for the phases of human embryo development (Moore 1982).

Furthermore, in his comparative analysis of the place of scientific facts in the Bible and the Quran, the French surgeon Maurice Bucaille comes to this conclusion: The Quranic statements are in perfect agreement with modern scientific facts which are unconceiveable to consider Mohammad as their author. Thus, modern scientific knowledge permits to understand the meanings of certain Quranic verses which have not been well understood until the present day (Bucaille 1976:254–255).

Such scientific credible evidence in favor of the meanings of the Quranic verses can only strengthen the stand of the Aql-Naql cognitive Muslim mind in the past and in the present among Muslims. And it may, as well, solicit some attention on the part of the modern learned Western mind in the two cultures to reconsider its negative attitude toward the validity of knowledge whose source is Revelation. This may improve the image of Islam in time of crisis between the West and Islam.

Third, it could be argued that the adoption of the Aql-Naql mind is also justified because human-made knowledge always remains problematic. This type of knowledge is a combination of correctness and error, a mixture of certainty and doubt. Man's use of his thoughtful and analytical reasoning often involves probabilities of truth and falsehood in the corpus of knowledge he attains. Thinkers, philosophers, and scientists throughout the ages have been aware of the problematic nature of the correctness/error dimension that characterizes the human-made knowledge.

Ibn Khaldun's law of al-Mutabaqa (the matching between historical events and human social realities) in the Science of History aimed to minimize the pitfalls of historical knowledge in which Muslim historians were involved before and during Ibn Khaldun's time. This law was meant to raise the level of rightness and credibility of historical knowledge. Something similar could
be said, as well, of the influence of the ethics of Positivism and Empiricism on modern knowledge. But no doubt, modern knowledge will hardly be able to exhaust all the causes that lead to errors and pitfalls in the human-made knowledge. Being limited in scope (in terms of its correctness and certainty in its facts), human-made knowledge would legitimately and modestly need divine knowledge as its complimentary to help humans deal particularly with controversial ethical, moral issues that have proven to be rather difficult to settle for the good of Man and society when relying only on human reasoning.

It is clear from the above that the Western learned mind’s prejudice against religion is the result of special sociohistorical circumstances that Western civilization has experienced since the Renaissance in the confrontation between The Church, on one hand, and scientists and Western modernizing societies at large, on the other. These specific experiences have created among Westerners a culture of separation and distrust between science and religion. Thus, they could hardly understand, let alone accept, the cooperation between religion and science as shown in the Aql-Naql Muslim mind. At present, the latter is gaining even more strength from modern scientific discoveries.

From an Islamic perspective, the Aql-Naql mind is the ideal mind to reach out for a more credible and complete corpus of knowledge. Ibn Khaldun’s Umran mind in his *Muqaddimah* is an excellent manifestation of the work of the Aql-Naql Muslim mind. Ibn Khaldun’s Umran mind may be considered as the avant-garde of today’s Islamization of knowledge movement.

This type of mind has not only accomplished a good standard social science Handbook (the *Muqaddimah*), but has achieved, by all objective accounts, a real breakthrough in the field of social sciences, not only in the Arab Muslim civilization, but also in the entire long history of the rest of human civilization. Ibn Khaldun made explicit reference to this: “In a way, it is an entirely original science. In fact I have not come across a discussion along these lines by anyone” (Dawood 1974:39).

Ibn Khaldun’s high intellectual pioneering Umran (social science) work raises serious questions about the assumptions of the modern Western mind’s persistent claims that true science and authentic knowledge cannot be obtained if religion and science are not kept separate from each other. As shown, these claims are based on the Western knowledge/science special experience with the Church. Thus, they ought not to be generalized to other religions’ experiences with knowledge creation and acquisition. Ibn Khaldun’s Aql-Naql Muslim mind strongly defies the substance of those claims and opens the lead for scientists and scholars to seek more than one way to create and establish solid knowledge in the two cultures.

**References**


The Return of Anthropology

Anthropology has much for which to thank Osama bin Laden. After decades of criticism, anthropology was on the ropes not long ago. Its founding fathers and mothers were discredited: Bronislaw Malinowski for lusting after young natives, and Margaret Mead for cooking up ethnographic accounts. Its own practitioners despaired and predicted "The End of Anthropology" (title of Worsley 1966; see also Banaji 1970). When the field appeared at its weakest, the powerful new voice of Edward Said emerged to denounce it as tainted by the dreaded word "Orientalism" (Said 1978). Perhaps the unkindest cut was that anthropology was not even seen as a bulldog in the service of the Western imperialists but rather as a mere puppy. Students of anthropology wandered aimlessly, sometimes into postmodernist literary conceit and sometimes into autobiographical excess. Like John Keats' knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," anthropology appeared to be "ailing," "alone and palely loitering."

September 11, 2001, changed all that. The main interests of anthropology, ideas of ethnicity, group loyalty, honor, revenge, suicide, tribal code, and the conflict between what anthropologists call the Great Tradition of world religions and their local practice, or the Little Tradition, were being discussed everywhere. Perhaps people were not even aware that they were discussing these issues as they were identified with traditional, even "primitive" societies, and therefore discredited; now they were front-page news.

But while Americans asked the right questions, such as "Why do Muslims hate us?" and "Why is there so much violence coming from Muslim societies?" they were provided the wrong answers. Some Americans said it was because Muslims hated American's "freedoms" (whatever that meant); others said it was simply because Muslims loathed Western culture; yet others blamed Islam, casting it as an "evil" Satan-worshipping religion and thereby reviving memories of a thousand years of hostility. This was a spectacular intellectual and methodological failure in understanding one of the major global civilizations of the twenty-first century and one of the most influential world religions.

It was not surprising that commentators failed to turn to the work of Muslim social scientists like Ibn Khaldun for assistance. After all, Muslims were being seen as part of the problem not the solution. The result was that the majority of commentators, judging from what we saw on television and in book titles, viewed the post 9/11 world simplistically through the lens of "security," "terrorism," and "the war on terror." Most were explicitly hostile to Muslims in a general and even irrational way. Others just pretended Muslims did not exist. There was not, for example, a single Muslim among the eight authors of the major Rand study The Muslim World After 9/11, which ran to 525 pages.

1 The arguments in this article are developed and based in my book Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World, Polity, 2003.