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The Doctrine of Power in Philosophy from Ibn Khaldun to Machiavelli

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Abstract

This research paper aims to reveal the truth that the doctrine of power in philosophy emerged in ancient times with the Greeks, but evolved further and gained a realistic and intellectual aspect with Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century. He had a significant impact on philosophers who came after him, most notably Machiavelli, who also introduced a new dimension to the doctrine of power in philosophy. This is confirmed through the numerous points of intersection between the doctrines of power according to Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli, which makes us appreciate the creative philosophical effort of Ibn Khaldun and his contributions to global civilization as one of the towering figures in science and philosophy.

Keywords: The doctrine of power, Philosophy, Ibn Khaldun, Machiavelli

1. Introduction

If what distinguishes philosophy from other modes of thought is its comprehensive study, analysis, and critique of individual, societal, artistic, educational, ethical, and even political issues with a holistic perspective trying to investigate the foundations and causes from which phenomena and problems emerge, then it deserves the honor of precedence and leadership. Philosophy has long delved into various subjects and employed different methodologies, among the most important being the investigation of political issues related to human society, citizenship, the state, political systems, and other political topics. Thus, political philosophy emerged as a field within philosophy that studies political issues and problems within its philosophical dimension. It has known several currents and doctrines, one of the most significant being the doctrine of power, whose proponents view power as the foundation of political practice.

In Islamic philosophy, among the proponents of this doctrine, we find Ibn Khaldun, the eminent philosopher considered one of the founders of the theory of power in political philosophy. He emphasized the role of power in state-building. Many philosophers in the Renaissance and modern era were influenced by Ibn Khaldun, notably Machiavelli, who stressed the importance and effective role of power in shaping individuals, societies,

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and in establishing states, which are the essence of political practice between rulers and the governed. Therefore, this research paper aims to confirm that the doctrine of power in political philosophy has passed from Ibn Khaldun to Machiavelli, with a significant and clear impact.

From here, we ask: What are the most important ideas that constitute the doctrine of power in philosophy for both Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli? And what are the most prominent points of intersection between them?

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Researching and studying the subject requires a precise and purposeful examination, which necessarily entails conceptual clarification. Among the concepts that need clarification and definition are three fundamental concepts: the doctrine of power, Ibn Khaldun, and Machiavelli.

1.1.1. Doctrine of Power

The term "power" in Arabic has several meanings, including being the opposite of weakness, and power exists in both the body and the mind (Ibn Manzur). It carries various meanings such as strength, intensity, severity, empowerment, and others. The attribute of absolute power belongs to the Creator alone (Allah, glory be to Him), and human beings also possess limited power.

In philosophy, power is an ancient concept that appeared with the Greek philosophers, especially Plato, who spoke of the powers of the soul and the rational power, which is the source of absolute truths. The concept of power was also evident in Al-Farabi's discussions of the divisions of the intellect, including the intellect by power. Nietzsche also emphasized the importance of the will to power, which should prevail in the world.

As for the doctrine of power in philosophy, it is an ancient doctrine that began with the Greek educators. In Greece (Spartan education) was a very harsh education based on strength, severity, and harshness. It was supported by some Sophist philosophers who called for the ethics of utility, which combines benefit and power. This doctrine also developed with Ibn Khaldun, which we will discuss later. As for Western philosophy, we find Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche and other supporters who emphasized that the legitimate philosophy is the philosophy of power that glorifies power and calls on individuals to adopt the thought and culture of power because human survival is only possible through this philosophy. At this point, Nietzsche sees that crises and calamities in life cannot be overcome or dealt with except by the strong who only must lead, not the weak who are complacent. He cited historic arguments that confirm the submission of the weak to obedience and loyalty despite injustice, oppression, and tyranny, for nothing but a religious belief, a philosophical conception, or a social habit. Nietzsche said: "Crises cannot be dealt with or overcome except by strong men-confident men who are conscious of their strength and proud of it (Nietzsche, 2011).

1.1.2. Ibn Khaldun

Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun lived during the period (1332-1406 AD) and was a Tunisian thinker and philosopher. He received his early education in Tunisia, where he memorized the Quran and delved into linguistic and religious sciences. He expanded his pursuit of knowledge to include intellectual sciences such as philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, political science, education, and others, presenting a comprehensive scientific and intellectual project that expressed his genius and prowess. Ibn Khaldun ventured into every field of knowledge despite the challenges he faced. He wrote in his autobiography that he did not leave any science unstudied, understood, or written about. He traveled extensively to countries like Egypt, Andalusia, the Hijaz, and Algeria, seeking knowledge and enlightenment. Abu Hayyan said of him, Ibn Khaldun was among the nobility of Seville, proficient in philosophy, renowned for his knowledge of engineering, astronomy, and medicine (Wafi).

Ibn Khaldun left us a rich intellectual and philosophical legacy that attests to his competence and the comprehensiveness of his thought. Among his notable works are: "The Book of Lessons, the Diwan of the Beginner and the News in the Days of Arabs, Persians, and Berbers and those of their Contemporaries who had the Greatest Authority", "the Introduction", "Ibn Khaldun's Journey"... etc.

1.1.3. Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli was a renowned Italian philosopher and politician who lived during the period (1469-1527 AD). He received his early education in Italy, where he studied humanities and social sciences such as

philosophy, literature, politics, art, and more. He also visited several countries on research, political, and diplomatic missions. Machiavelli held various positions in the Kingdom of Florence and significantly contributed to many of its policies. However, the overthrow of the ruling Medici family led to severe consequences for him. He was accused of conspiring against the state, causing chaos, and participating in the coup, despite his innocence according to some sources. He was imprisoned, tortured, exiled, and banned from engaging in any political activity. Some of his friends intervened on his behalf, allowing him to return to writing and political engagement, but it was too late. After a painful ordeal that destroyed his life, he did not live long and died, leaving us a valuable body of thought considered one of the most important of that period (Mahfouz, 2007).

Machiavelli left behind several works covering various fields, including "The Prince," "Discourses on Livy," "The Art of War," and others.

1.2. The Doctrine of Power in Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy

One cannot discuss political philosophy in Ibn Khaldun's context without considering its historical background. Ibn Khaldun lived in a very turbulent era characterized by political, moral, and even religious corruption. Conflicts and wars between states proliferated, and societies became fragmented and fragile despite the numerous bonds of religion, language, values, and moral and social principles that united them. Ibn Khaldun lived during the Hafsid dynasty's rule over Tunis, which was in constant conflict with the Zayyanid dynasty in Algeria, while also clashing with the Marinid dynasty in the far Maghreb. All of these events and phenomena shaped the general context in which Ibn Khaldun's philosophy, especially his political and ethical philosophy, emerged.

Ibn Khaldun's interpretation of his philosophical doctrine, based on power, stems from his view of human beings. For him, humans are social beings who can only live in a social environment. Therefore, he says, "Man is civilized by nature (Ibn Khaldun, 2007).

According to him, humans are compelled to interact with their fellow humans because they need them based on the principle of mutual interests, benefits, and needs. Ibn Khaldun delineates three stages of human development:

a. **The Stage of Bedouin Life (Nomadism):** This stage represents a primitive life where individuals engage in manual labor, agricultural activities, and self-reliance in meeting their needs. Manual labor holds a sacred value, and noble ethical traits such as generosity, courage, and honesty prevail among the Bedouins (Nomads). Here, tribalism mixed with racism emerges.

b. **The Stage of Conquest:** In this stage, humans move towards socialization through tribal organization, supported by tribalism. Here, the concept of the state emerges as ambitions grow, conquests increase, and power and strength prevail. This stage resembles the pre-civilization era.

c. **The Stage of Civilization:** This stage marks the development of life, urbanization, and legislation. Luxury, extravagance, and laziness increase, and people become content with comfortable living. As aspirations diminish, willpower weakens, creativity declines, and work is abandoned. Men and women dominate, and weakness and inability to fight and compete arise. Another conquering tribe appears, subdues them, and prevails over them, falling prey to conquest and colonization (Shams al-Din, 1994).

For Ibn Khaldun, the state represents the pinnacle of achievement for individuals and civilized societies. The state is a political and moral entity through which humans express their various needs for security, stability, cooperation, trade, work, and other social activities. Humans are compelled to socialize, as previously mentioned, echoing Plato's concept of human sociability and the necessity of the state due to humans' inability to meet all their needs individually (Abd El-Muty, 1985).

Moreover, the state's function, according to Ibn Khaldun, is to serve the people, establish justice among them, preserve ethics, defend values, systems, and the land. The state cannot last beyond three generations, after which decline, regression, and downfall occur. Here, Ibn Khaldun's perspective appears historical and realistic, derived from the reality he experienced, where most states did not endure for long.

Regarding the political system, it is crucial for Ibn Khaldun, as it should be based on understanding and consent between the ruler and the ruled. It should not be a creed or law that must be followed or enforced but rather a social organization within the political framework, as long as the goal is noble which is to build a political system that serves citizens. It is primarily subject to customs and traditions. Therefore, the people must find the appropriate method to choose their ruler. Although Ibn Khaldun discusses caliphate, the caliph, the king, and other forms of governance, the ruler must be capable, knowledgeable, righteous, and strong in thought, speech, and action.

Ibn Khaldun believes that the state must be governed with moderation and strictness, without leniency, laziness, or allowing injustice. Therefore, he considers power essential in establishing the state, as with power, no one would dare to seize control or interfere with its affairs (Ibn Khaldun, 2007).

It's not surprising that Ibn Khaldun doesn't insist on a caliphate state because he was influenced by reality. He sees the Islamic nation fragmented into states, where rulers often ascend to power through inheritance. He views the call for power as fundamental to building a prosperous state. Through his experiences and travels, he realized that a weak state has no place in reality. Hence, a state must be politically strong through its ruler and officials, economically robust to provide food for its citizens through work and production, socially cohesive with the rule of law and adherence to rights and duties, and educationally sound to foster positive and capable individuals contributing to the progress of their state.

Ethical strength is also necessary, as the state should uphold virtuous values and defend them, away from deviation, vice, and injustice. While ethics aim to regulate individual behavior, the state, as a political entity, should aim to regulate collective behavior (Imam, 2001).

In this duality, ethics align with politics, meaning ethical strength ensures the stability and continuity of the state. Ibn Khaldun also establishes a connection between tribalism and the state. He believes that tribalism is an effective force with the meanings it carries, as it is attributed to the Bedouin people who are known for their solidarity, cooperation, self-reliance, consideration of blood kinship and neighborliness, and virtuous values such as courage that make them delegate a leader with knowledge, righteousness, prestige, and status. Hence, tribal solidarity lays the foundation for authority or monarchy or what we call the state. Thus, power, represented by a combination of virtues aimed at managing public affairs and serving the community, is the cornerstone of any political practice.

Ibn Khaldun believes that changing corrupt conditions requires not only advocating for better conditions but also the material force, which, in most cases, is tribalism combined with religion (Al-Jabri, 1994).

So, according to Ibn Khaldun, the source of power is the tribe governed by a strong leader, based on tribalism, which represents the social bonds between individuals through the unifying leader. It's also the ultimate goal that leads to the state, which necessarily requires a strong man to govern it. Here, the doctrine of power is evident despite the interplay and entanglement of concepts.

When discussing the ruler governing the state, Ibn Khaldun doesn't specify a particular title such as king, prince, caliph, or regent. He speaks realistically, attempting to transcend the heritage and engage more with reality and reason. He emphasizes that those who manage state affairs must be sound-minded, knowledgeable about various sciences and knowledge, whether transmitted or intellectual, to rule from a position of knowledge. They should also be virtuous, with noble character, adhering to religious law and civil law to achieve justice within themselves and with their subjects. Moreover, they must be competent in the affairs of governance. As for power, it's necessary for the ruler not to be oppressive or tyrannical but to be strong enough to command respect as the ruler of the state. His word should be final, and his decisions must be implemented. He should be stern and harsh with the enemies and conspirators.

The power that should be present in the ruler is the power of justice, not the power of injustice, the power of good, not the power of tyranny and evil. However, it's essential and the foundation of political practice. Ibn Khaldun justified his positions based on past experiences, where many states fell and their rulers collapsed due to the weakness of their rulers. Therefore, there is no room for tolerance, complacency, laziness, or indulgence. Strictness is necessary because strength alone ensures the security and safety of the state and its citizens, ensuring its continuity and the well-being of its people.

It's crucial to clarify that the power Ibn Khaldun speaks of is the power of tribalism, while the power of the ruler is relative, bound by religious law, civil law, and prevailing values. It doesn't entail oppression or tyranny. He says, "Leadership is about strength, and its followers are obedient. It's not about domination. Domination is about overcoming and ruling through coercion. The one with tribal allegiance never abandons it because it's essential to his being (Ibn Khaldun, 2007).

Based on all the above, it can be said that Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of power is summarized in the following points:

1. The individual is a social being who lives in society, primarily in the tribal society (Bedouin or Nomadic), which is the first society.

2. In the tribal society, tribalism based on blood ties and kinship emerges, forming power and authority.

3. States are formed, marking the attainment of civilized society.

4. All these processes can only be achieved through power as a method and approach.

5. The power of the state is necessary to avoid collapse, and this is achieved thanks to a strong ruler who is competent.

1.3. The Doctrine of Power According to Machiavelli

Machiavelli's philosophy emerged in an era where Europeans began to rebel against the church and reject the authority of the ecclesiastical religion imposed by religious leaders. It was an era of religious reform and intellectual and philosophical enlightenment that encompassed various fields and was led by philosophers, writers, and reformers. People turned to building nations and seeking noble freedom. Machiavelli lived in Florence and was politically close to rulers, fully aware of the methods and techniques of state administration and its various affairs. He suffered from injustice and oppression imposed on him by false accusations, which changed many of his thoughts and beliefs. All this and more influenced Machiavelli and led him to the conviction that power shapes men, establishes justice, and commands respect. He emphasized its role in authority and administration, deeming it necessary for the existence and continuity of the state. Therefore, Machiavelli was considered one of the advocates of the doctrine of power in philosophy.

Machiavelli's doctrine of power is based on the idea of the individual. He sees humans as inherently wicked, difficult to deal with unless under strict laws or strict authority that imposes order, respect, obedience, and loyalty. In his view, humans are malicious, clinging more to material interests than to their lives, ready to change their desires and emotions (Machiavelli, 2002).

Hence, what is called religion or ethics for Machiavelli is merely a means used to gain power. These are methods that some may use to achieve their interests, so they should not dominate the practice as a coercive factor. As for his discussion about the state, he sees it as necessary for both the individual and society, deriving its necessity from the natural principle of the individual. It guarantees security and stability for individuals and groups and was established to curb the ambitions of power-hungry individuals seeking to control their weaker peers. Machiavelli touches on the prince governing the state or principality, emphasizing that they must possess a great deal of cunning, intelligence, and strength, along with all legitimate and illegitimate means to achieve the goal of governance. He gives historical examples of individuals who reached high positions, even to the point of ruling, through cunning alone, meaning through hidden power (Machiavelli, 1982).

As for political power, the political system must be authoritarian, based on strength, severity, and harshness, with no room for tolerance, leniency, or talk of ethics. Machiavelli separates politics from ethics, stating that what matters in political practice is the goal, not the means. Hence, he became famous for his immortal quote: "The end justifies the means." He prioritized power, meaning the preservation of the ruling seat, even if it required violence, murder, and torture because power justifies everything we do to preserve it.

Machiavelli believes that the best system for governing the state is an authoritarian system based on power, or rather a combination of power and authority, despite his admiration for the republican system, provided that the people are educated and virtuous. He sees the relationship between the state and the ruler as a sacred relationship, like a contract (Zaroukhi, 2001).

Machiavelli emphasizes that the ruler, in addition to being cunning, must also be strong like a lion, intelligent like a fox, characterized by deceit and cunning, and wielding overwhelming power, as there is no room for principles and ethics. From here, he can only maintain the state and preserve its security. There is no room for fulfilling promises, covenants, or agreements unless they serve his power and the interests of the state. The people must be subjected to him through strict laws to ensure obedience and loyalty without showing them, but rather through intelligence, cunning, deception, and management, even if it is immoral. He guides them, deceives them into believing they are free, and appears strict with them, justifying his actions by claiming to protect their interests and those of the state. It's political hypocrisy aiming for one goal only: serving the king and preserving the throne. He contemplates his subjects, presenting what is bad as good and defending it (the rule) fiercely, then laughing at their minds. He also prefers consulting the subjects on some state affairs and seeking their advice without taking their opinions, but rather pretending to do so because they are not qualified to know governance and political issues. He is convinced that achieving glory for the state can only be through power and by embodying these negative traits (Al-Muhamadawi, 2015).

Machiavelli emphasizes that politics has goals and objectives that define the project of the state and the principality. The prince must strive to achieve them with every effort and strength, and all methods and strategies are legitimate as long as the goals are noble, namely the state and its people. Therefore, virtue is available to the statesman, but it must be employed according to utility, meaning both good and evil are available to the prince for the sake of the state. He should act according to the exigencies of the situation and not always invoke ethics. If one wants to maintain a virtuous reputation in every circumstance, they must lead a private life and avoid governance; otherwise, they will perish amidst the abundance of evildoers (Karam).

Machiavelli believes that power is necessary in political practice, whether dealing with subjects or with enemies and adversaries abroad. There are qualities that must be present in the prince that positively influence obedience, respect, and loyalty. He may sometimes demonstrate ethics, such as forgiving wrongdoers to show tolerance, or sympathizing with the needy and sick to demonstrate kindness, or even participating in celebrations with his subjects to showcase his humility. However, at the same time, he may punish severely, speak boldly and harshly, and use force, imprisonment, and exile for reasons that may seem unjustified. The important thing is that his personality remains inscrutable, and his mood is unpredictable so that his subjects always feel reverence and awe towards him, serving his interests and the interests of the principality.

Cruelty and severity must prevail with all sections of the population, including the military, where they must show obedience and respect for the prince and be feared among soldiers due to his strength, fierceness, and sternness. His discourse should always be about war to ensure the readiness and preparedness of soldiers for wars, as elucidated in his book "The Art of War," which many praised, considering Machiavelli as truly developing the philosophy of war and making it an extension of politics (Machiavelli, 2015).

Therefore, it can be said that the doctrine of power in Machiavelli's philosophy is clear, as he focuses on power as a concept and meaning in building states and principalities and that they are necessary in political practice. Having power is necessary for the ruler to consolidate his rule and stabilize the state. These ideas are unsurprising as Machiavelli is a philosophy of war advocate and not peace.

1.4. The Intersection Between Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli

Many scholars and specialists in political philosophy confirm that there is an intersection in the doctrines of power in the philosophy of Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldun. Their convergence on certain political issues confirms their belief that power is what drives political action, despite some differences between them.

The similarity in some political issues between Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli confirms their conviction that power is what shapes political action and preserves its existence because it is an essential factor. They agreed on issues such as governance, the conditions of the subjects, and the avoidance of flatterers and in explaining the fall and rise of the state and the necessity of relying on the soldiers, ... etc. (Ibn Khaldun, 2004).

They both focused on religion, as Ibn Khaldun made it the basis of political projects, linking tribalism with religion to ensure the success and prosperity of the state. Religion, with its rulings and legislation, along with

tribalism, are sufficient to guarantee the continuation and prosperity of the state. Similarly, Machiavelli criticized religion only when used as a means of controlling subjects and taking their rights. As for religion, as a heavenly gift, he has all the respect because a country will not be able to guarantee its security unless it relies on and encourages religion (Machiavelli, 1982). Ibn Khaldun does not consider religion only as a means of governance, but a means and an end. Whereas Machiavelli makes it an instrument of government. So, the principle is the same: emphasizing its role as a source of power in their political philosophies.

Both Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli emphasized the ethical dimensions in political practice. Ibn Khaldun, although he did not dedicate a separate section to ethics in his writings, the scholar of his philosophy can discern many ethical ideas and analyses. Abdullah Shrite says: "We are confident that Ibn Khaldun did not think while writing the introduction that he raised issues of the essence of ethics (Sharit, 1975). He makes it the basis of political action when he stipulates justice in the ruler and sufficiency. Justice is only achieved by a man of ethics who believes in it and seeks to embody it in reality. Sufficiency is the ability and power to spread justice, virtue, and fight injustice and vice. As for Machiavelli, despite his separation between ethics and politics in some aspects, he made them necessary in governance and politics. In his book "The Prince," he speaks that ethics and virtue are necessary in a virtuous civilized society. He also stipulated strength, dominance, and ferocity as essential qualities that must be achieved in the ruler. However, he advises him to adopt virtuous moral values such as justice, equality, and courage, even if only superficially. For him, there are two types of ethics: political ethics, which are not related to politics because the matter is related to the state's interests, and personal ethics, which concern the prince himself. These are constant ethics that must prevail in his behavior. Here, the convergence and intersection between Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli emerge, as both of them involved ethics in politics as a compelling force towards achieving the highest interests of the state, and here, power emerges as a positive factor in politics.

Both Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli invoked reality and the experiences of the past and the ancient history of states and empires. Ibn Khaldun traveled extensively in the East and the West, visited several Arab countries, met kings and sultans, and mingled with various peoples and tribes, as he clarified in his book "Ibn Khaldun's Journey." He concluded that power is a fundamental factor in politics, from which kingship, authority, and the state are formed. It is also necessary for preserving, stabilizing, and continuing states. He says: "The caliphate is not just a title but rather belongs to the one with the tribalism based on strength and protection." (Ibn Khaldun, 2004).

Returning to Machiavelli, we find that he also practiced politics for over 14 years in the governance of the Medici family. He also visited several countries as part of his diplomatic missions and was close to princes and kings. He also studied the history of states, their rise and fall, the philosophy of civilization, and history. All of this led him to believe that power is necessary and is the cornerstone of political practice.

All these intersections and others between Ibn Khaldun's doctrine of power and Machiavelli's doctrine of power clearly confirm Ibn Khaldun's significant influence on Machiavelli through many political ideas, with power as a fundamental principle that cannot be dispensed with in the formation, management, and preservation of states.

It is not surprising to say that Machiavelli may have read Ibn Khaldun's books, especially the Introduction, and benefited from them, and was influenced by many ideas about the state, politics, citizens, power, and others. As the deep scholar of the humanities and social sciences, especially philosophy, we can confirm that Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli have a political ideology based on power as a fundamental principle, and their ideas are almost identical, as Abdul Araoui stated in his famous book "Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli". He said succinctly: "When we read the works of Ibn Khaldun and Machiavelli, we find almost identical statements (Al-Araoui, 1990).

Many have also spoken about Ibn Khaldun's relationship with Machiavelli, and the clear aspects of influence from Ibn Khaldun to Machiavelli, especially regarding the doctrine of power. This may lead us to say that indeed Machiavelli was influenced by Ibn Khaldun due to the convergence between the philosophies on the concept of power and its role in political action, despite the differences between them in culture, language, and history. This is not problematic because philosophy has a universal message. We also do not deny Machiavelli's influence on many modern and contemporary philosophers such as Hobbes, Nietzsche, and others.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can conclude that the doctrine of power in philosophy appeared in ancient philosophies but developed further and gained a realistic and rational aspect with Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century, who had a significant impact on later philosophers, notably Machiavelli, who also introduced a new chapter in the doctrine of power in philosophy. This was confirmed through the numerous points of intersection between the two doctrines of power, Ibn Khaldun's and Machiavelli's, which makes us appreciate our creative philosophers like Ibn Khaldun, cherish them, disseminate their ideas, and illustrate their role in building global civilization.

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