

# The Islamic Philosophy of Labor and Crafts: The View of the Ikhwan al-Safa', Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this essay is to compare the views of the Ikhwan al-Safa', Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun on labor, not to trace their influences, which would require separate treatment. However, we could presume the direct or indirect influence of figures such as the Ikhwan al-Safa'. A study into the attitudes toward labor is important for understanding a society's economic rise or decline.

## **Introduction**

Early Islamic economic philosophy adopted or adapted the ancient economic philosophical legacy; particularly, from Bryson, whose work was available in the tenth-century in anonymous Arabic translations. These philosophical texts influenced Muslim educational and economic monographs,<sup>1</sup> especially Persian works on slaves, servants, and merchants.<sup>2</sup> In those days, free people could not easily perform the menial tasks of the family and the state. The family is a microcosm of the social function of the state and, therefore, operates on the same principles as the state. Since servants are vital to the smooth functioning of the family and society, masters should be grateful to God for their labor and always treat them with kindness and benevolence. Masters should know that their servants suffer exhaustion and fatigue, just as they do. Therefore, masters should be just toward them.<sup>3</sup>

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In the mercantile domain, al-Dimashqi, partially reproducing Bryson's teachings, provides practical advice for tradespeople in his *Isharat ila Mahasin al-Tijarah*, probably between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The author justifies trade and states that a wealthy man is worthy of respect. His affluence reflects his elevated nature: If inherited, he is noble; if acquired, he is strong in character. Wealth does not indicate riches, and many rich men squander their wealth. However, those who preserve their wealth and spend it carefully are truly rich. They are moderate in spending, and so will never spend more than their income.

For the classical religious perspective, we turn to the view of al-Shaybani, a student of Imam Abu Hanifah who focused on labor, not on the merchant's profession. He looked at how one could profit through trade, crafts, agriculture, and salaried work, as well as the religious ethics associated with this economic activity. For him, acquiring wealth is a religious duty, provided it is done by lawful means. God created humanity dependent on four things: food, drink, clothing, and housing. The pursuit of wealth is a fact of social organization, but no single individual can master all of the crafts required to fulfill his or her basic needs. Therefore, people must cooperate with each other. As a religious justification of labor, he gives the example of prayer. Prayer is only possible with ablution, which means someone must extract water from the well. Prayer is only possible with clothing, which means someone has to know the craft of weaving. He recommends frugality and moderate expenditure. If people eat to satisfy hunger, why should there be a variety of dishes? This is wasteful (*israf*). Unlike al-Dimashqi, his arguments are more religious than philosophical.<sup>4</sup>

This positive attitude to labor is echoed in the writings of the Ikhwan al-Safa' (tenth century [hereinafter the Ikhwan]), al-Raghib al-Isfahani (eleventh century), and Ibn Khaldun (fourteenth century). The aim of this essay is to compare their views on labor, not to trace their influences, which would require separate treatment. However, we could presume the direct or indirect influence of figures such as the Ikhwan. A study into the attitudes toward labor is important for understanding a society's economic rise or decline.

I chose these three figures because they all have a positive attitude toward labor and agree with the three essential crafts set out by the Ikhwan. Isfahani is significant not only because he follows the Ikhwan, but because he introduced a significant addition to the essential crafts: that of ruling. Ghazali merely copied Isfahani's classification, so I did not choose him for comparison. Although Ibn Khaldun is a much later figure, he wrote extensively on the crafts and gave their study a new direction. His view of labor

and wealth provides us with a scientific explanation for the economic rise and fall of civilizations. Thus, I chose these three figures because they represent three different strands on labor within the Islamic legacy.

The growth of an urban working class during the ninth century, a time when artisans and laborers played an important role in expanding cities, account for the surge of literature on laborers and labor. A fuller discussion on the subject took place in the tenth century, which dealt with the superiority of commerce over menial labor as well as the value of labor as opposed to those who negated it. Otherworldly Sufis of the ascetic (*zuhdi*) type cultivated a fatalistic attitude by renouncing worldly possessions and preferring dependence on God's favors for providing them with food, shelter, and clothing. The Hanbalites, including Ibn Taymiyyah, attacked this kind of asceticism, arguing that engaging in hard labor for material gain was completely within Islam.<sup>5</sup> Such Sufis as al-Talib al-Makki rejected the *zuhdi* attitude, as did such intellectuals as al-Dimashqi<sup>6</sup> and al-Raghib al-Isfahani. The latter, as we will see below, condemned lazy ascetics and supported the principle of lawful labor as essential for earning a living.

### **The Ikhwan's Concept of Labor and Craft**

The spirituality of each craft is inborn, and the soul is naturally inclined to the one that is most suitable for it. Just as the seed requires fertile soil to flourish, the craft requires the proper effort to flourish. Our happiness, the Ikhwan tell us, depends on fulfilling our natural inclinations. This requires education and nurturing, starting with the parents, who are the first teachers. They must educate their children and teach them certain crafts. The planets determine our talents, but society must provide the stimulating environment in which they can be realized.<sup>7</sup> The rational soul impels us toward these crafts and guides us with its wisdom to perfect the craft. This perfection, a manifestation of divine perfection, comes from the rational soul. The root of this perfection lies in our soul's rational inclination. When a person dies, his or her body loses all power because the soul, which has the real power, has left the body.

Know, brother, we have enumerated these crafts and related this epistle to the intellect as one performs these crafts with one's intellect, discrimination, and thought – all intellectual, spiritual faculties. Also, every intelligent person who reflects upon these crafts and uses one's hands knows that besides the body, there is another substance – the object in which these creative acts are a manifestation. The body produces the perfect crafts, but it remains intact after death; thus, it is not the body that has

been removed, but the intelligent one knows that it is the soul that has been removed.<sup>8</sup>

Corresponding with the distinction between the body and the soul, there is a distinction between the spiritual (*ruhani*) and physical (*jismani*) crafts. The latter are of two types: simple (made of fire, water, air, and earth) and complex (made of mineral, plant, and animal bodies).<sup>9</sup>

Some craftspeople, like writers, require only bodily organs for their craft, while others, like builders, require tools and utensils. Fire is used by cooks and blacksmiths.<sup>10</sup> Sagacity and proficiency are essential to a fine craft; one that imitates divine perfection. There is a link between nature, the soul, and art: Art imitates nature, and the soul's effect is manifested in the craft. The purer the soul, the purer the craft; the more perfect the soul, the more perfect the craft. They said: "Wisdom in every craft is akin to the Wisdom of the Divine Craftsman. It is said: 'God loves the wise craftsman.' The Prophet said: 'God loves the craftsman who perfects his or her craft. Hence, philosophically, the perfected craft resembles the Divine according to human capacity.'" <sup>11</sup> Thus, the more proficient one is in the craft, the nearer one is to God. The Ikhwan illustrate this proficiency with a Qur'anic verse (17:57) pertaining to the angels.<sup>12</sup>

This nearness to God is the goal of education.<sup>13</sup> The universal soul is the driving force of movement in the creation; the craft of the artisan (*muhtaraf*) reflects the universal soul.<sup>14</sup> Crafts are theoretical (*'ilmi*) or practical (*'amali*); the latter is from God's mind, which creates an image manifested in the material world. This image (*surah*) and this matter (*hayuli*) is contained in the universal soul and is supported by the universal intellect by God's command.<sup>15</sup>

The Ikhwan developed the concept of the universal person (*al-insan al-kulli*), whereby "all branches of knowledge, all kinds of professions and crafts, and all types of morals exists collectively."<sup>16</sup> One person cannot encompass all knowledge, professions, and talents, and so each person needs the help of others to attain worldly perfection, which should be directed toward the soul's happiness in both this world and the next. Thus, economic activity leads to the Hereafter. Given that the soul drives the body, the body should be cared for so that the soul will be happy. This calls "for the individual's association with others, each performing the one profession he or she is well equipped to do and all helping each other live a good comfortable life."<sup>17</sup> This need for togetherness is innate, for humanity as a whole has a natural sense of "intimacy" and "love" and feels the need to be with others.<sup>18</sup>

The Ikhwan classify the crafts into three main categories: the essential, the complementary, and the aesthetic crafts. The essential are agriculture, weaving, and building, which provide food, clothing, and shelter, respectively. The complementary support the essential crafts. The aesthetic crafts are for decoration. Each classification has subdivisions. For example, weaving comprises spinning, fuller, carding, mending, tailoring, and embroidering.<sup>19</sup> Aesthetic crafts are popular among the rich, who decorate their homes with calligraphy and ceramics. Garbage collecting is not aesthetic; however, it keeps the city clean and prevents contamination and disease. If no one made perfume, the city would not be harmed, but if no one removed the garbage, people would become sick. Music does not have a practical value; rather, it has a spiritual value, for it benefits the soul and requires training and talent.<sup>20</sup>

There are three types of people: craftspeople, rich merchants, and the poor. The craftspeople use hands and utensils to improve their material standards of living. The merchants buy and sell for profit. The Ikhwan state:

The rich own these natural and synthetic crafts; their aim is to amass and preserve these, as they fear poverty. The poor pursue these crafts to overcome their poverty. Fear of poverty drives the rich to pursue crafts to trade with them. Whether rich or poor, they both want to improve their material conditions and to provide a service for their customers. God has intended, thereby, that they enjoy this world for a while. But the real enjoyment is to perfect the soul with true knowledge, beautiful character, sound opinions, and pure actions. The aim of perfecting the soul is ascension to the heavenly spheres, which is meant to free humanity from matter and the captivity of nature, and for exiting from the infernal depth of the material world and the corruption of the wide world of spirits, dwelling therein forever, in happiness and joy.<sup>21</sup>

Poverty drives the poor to pursue crafts to overcome poverty or become rich; but the fear of poverty drives the rich to pursue crafts to preserve their wealth. Thus, people work to be rich or to preserve riches.

Echoing al-Farabi, the Ikhwan state that people are unequal because of their different intellectual and moral capabilities.<sup>22</sup> Thus, they distinguish between seven types of people: craftspeople, businesspeople, construction engineers, rulers, servants, the unemployed, and scholars of religion and other sciences. They attack the privileged professionals, including the ruler, who are uncaring and unjust toward the poor, propose the divine law (*namus*) of the Prophet for the virtuous state,<sup>23</sup> and insist that the ruler must be both a prophet and philosopher.<sup>24</sup>

### Isfahani's Concept of Labor and Crafts

Labor brings joy, not so much because of its material benefits, but more because it is an expression of divine excellence and perfection. The material benefits are God's bounties for which humanity should be grateful, knowing that the greatest joy awaits each person in the Hereafter. The worldly bounties give us a taste of the eternal bounties that awaits us in the afterlife. We work for food, shelter, and clothing, and we want a decent wage to buy these essentials.<sup>25</sup> The fear of poverty drives us to work hard, which is natural. However, we should not be neurotic about it, for all of us know how workaholics sacrifice the welfare of their families to their work.

Frugality, not stinginess, is a virtue. The rich should not waste and the poor should not be ungrateful. One's livelihood should be lawful.<sup>26</sup> Workers should not be exploited and should be paid a decent wage.<sup>27</sup> Begging, a sign of sloth, should be condemned, along with the extreme Sufis who refuse to work for a living:

For this [reason] the Sufi pretender should be admonished for not working [for a living]. He can provide no knowledge and is no moral example. He should be reproached for only gratifying his belly and sexual organs. [Like a parasite], he profits from people; he is useless, and cramps aristocratic livelihood. Such vagabonds destroy drinking places and cause prices to soar. When `Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) asked a pious man if he had a profession, and when his answer was negative, `Umar displayed a poor opinion of him. The Prophet praised the clan of `Abd Qays when he asked: "What is manliness (*murū`ah*)?" They replied: "Temperance and professional skill."<sup>28</sup>

Why should temperance be linked to professional skill? The skill earns money, which could be wasted; but if a person is temperate, the money will be spent frugally. For `Umar, professional skill goes with frugality. Wealth must be used for essentials, and poor people should not complain about the little that they have.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the poet states: "Whoever strives for wealth out of fear of poverty, his/her striving is poverty itself." Also: "If you truly rely on God for sustenance, He will give you sustenance like the bird that goes hungry and returns full."<sup>30</sup> Thus we should not fear poverty, for it drives one to work. However, it should not foster dissatisfaction. One should work hard, but rely on God for sustenance.

Whoever seeks sloth for the sake of ease will, in reality, have no ease, only disease. Thus it is said: "Beware of laziness and tiredness; laziness makes you unmoved by the rights of others, and tiredness impedes your

persistence in the pursuit of truth.”<sup>31</sup> God created animals to move and sustain their bodies, and people to think and sustain their souls. He did not create people to be idle in intellect. As (physical) sloth spoils the body, mental sloth spoils the soul, making a person dull, just like an animal. People should not waste time, but should perfect their religion and their world, thereby correcting matters pertaining to the Hereafter and caring for it.<sup>32</sup> Thus, high rank is only attainable with effort and struggle. Isfahani commends labor and condemns sloth. All faculties, especially the rational faculty, should be used and directed to care for the affairs of this world and the Hereafter.

Echoing the Ikhwan, agriculture, building, and weaving are essential crafts. He adds a fourth one: the craft of ruling (*siyasa*),<sup>33</sup> which also has ethical and religious connotations. This is the noblest of crafts, for prophetic rule is vital for a just society and is important for this world and the next.<sup>34</sup> Isfahani’s ruling includes worldly and otherworldly rulings. His list of the essential crafts is unique to him.

Isfahani states that there are three categories of crafts.<sup>35</sup> First, there are the essential crafts, without which the world cannot continue in an orderly way. Its subdivisions are agriculture (*al-zira`ah*),<sup>36</sup> weaving (*al-hiyakah*), building (*al-bina`*), and ruling (*siyasa*).<sup>37</sup> These satisfy the basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, as well as the need to organize society. Ruling is the noblest of the four. Second are the complementary crafts that serve such essential crafts as smithing, which complements agriculture, and carding (separating the cotton threads from their seeds) and threading, which complement weaving.<sup>38</sup> Third are the aesthetic crafts that adorn the essentials with such commodities as silk and perfume. They adorn the essential and complementary crafts, just as milling and baking adorn agriculture and as tailoring adorns weaving.

Isfahani compares the crafts to bodily organs. Just as bodily organs are necessary for the body’s upkeep, crafts are essential for the world’s upkeep. He divides the body’s organs into three categories<sup>39</sup>: the essential organs (e.g., the heart, liver, and brain), the complementary organs that support the first category (e.g., the stomach, veins, and arteries), and the supplementary organs that support the first two categories (e.g., the hands<sup>40</sup> and the eyebrows).

The noblest craft is ruling,<sup>41</sup> which has four subcategories: the Prophet’s rule over the elite and the masses on the extrinsic and intrinsic levels; the governor’s rule over the extrinsic, but not the intrinsic, beliefs of the elite and the masses; the sage’s rule over the elite’s internal condition; and the jurist’s<sup>42</sup> and

preacher's rule over the masses' internal beliefs.<sup>43</sup> The sages are the second noblest, for they rule over the soul (viz., the elite's internal condition)<sup>44</sup> and specialize in philosophy (*hikmah*), which requires the use of reason.

The value of a craft is measured in terms of its service. Agriculture is superior to goldsmithery, and the latter is superior to tanning. Any craft that requires the rational faculty is superior. Since wisdom is the virtue of the rational faculty, the craft emerging from this faculty is superior and more lasting. We provide below a classification of Isfahani's crafts in the following order of importance: the essential, the complementary, and the aesthetic. Four essential crafts are mentioned, ruling being the most important. We give our own examples of the secondary crafts, as Isfahani did not specify any.

Table 1: *Isfahani's Classification of Crafts.*

Essential	Agriculture	Weaving	Building	Ruling
Complementary	Smithing	Spinning	Carpentry	Government
Aesthetic	Baking	Embroidery	Decoration	Law

### **Ibn Khaldun's Concept of Labor and Crafts**

Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century North African thinker, devoted a chapter in his *Muqaddimah* to the value of labor, in which he agreed with his precursors in some respects and differed with them in other respects. He viewed labor as something that should be valued and that is vital for profit. Some trades, like agriculture and manufacturing, are natural, while others, like commerce and intellectual services, are unnatural. His hierarchy of crafts resembles the Ikhwan's, including the distinction between labor and commerce. The former is at the bottom of the hierarchy.<sup>45</sup>

He preceded Max Weber and Adam Smith in holding that work is vital for capital accumulation. He states: "Human labor is necessary for every profit and capital accumulation ... the capital a person earns and acquires, if resulting from a craft, is the value realized from his/her labor."<sup>46</sup> However, Ibn Khaldun does not consider labor to be the only factor in determining material success. (Similarly, Weber's thesis that a person's labor determines capital is partially correct; the social pressures of industrialization also played a role.) Society determines the need for certain occupations, either as service or as production. Knowledge and skill are important, but the relationship to the ruler is a crucial factor to prosperity. The social hierarchy and the trade hierarchy are also important. He introduced the idea of social mobility and historical change, which should be applied to labor.

According to Shatzmiller, Ibn Khaldun found a realistic compromise between Sufi doctrines and intellectual wants. The significance he gave to labor was relative to social circumstances. The debate on labor was particularly animated during the tenth, eleventh, and fifteenth centuries. Literature on labor varied from the philosophical to the religious. The philosophical gave it spiritual and economic value and took a middle position between the ascetics who rejected labor and the religious scholars who accepted it. The philosophers elevated labor, both physical and mental, as an act of creativity and of divine origin, and not merely a physical act. They conceived of labor not purely in theological terms, but also in human terms, as something with its own logic and that has a legitimate part in the world order.<sup>47</sup>

History testifies to people's working for their basic needs; monarchies and dictatorships will reign, and people will continue to make war for survival. But as society moves into the city and adapts to a settled lifestyle, people begin to live a life of leisure and pursue the higher arts and crafts. The resulting division of labor and spirit of cooperation produce a civil society that is prosperous; but ironically, this very prosperity provides the seeds of decline. Labor produces prosperity, but this prosperity leads to laziness, idleness, and luxury. The cities' surplus wealth leads to more cravings for such luxury items as carpets, perfumes, and calligraphy.

The aesthetic crafts flourish in the cities and not on the farms, where the needs are basic. City-dwellers employ servants, slaves, and artisans to labor for them, a practice that leads to their dependence and laziness. Their unnatural lifestyle makes them ill, miserable, and immoral. Their sense of belonging is weakened, and they stop living as a close community. These are the seeds of decay. In the meantime, a less civilized but more powerful race, one with a firm public spirit, emerges and eventually takes over. And the cycle begins again, for the new race becomes civilized and immoral and then declines. This is Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall of civilizations.<sup>48</sup>

The Ikhwan and Isfahani's classification of crafts paved the way for Ghazali, whose classification had an impact on Ibn Khaldun. They agree about the three essential crafts and labor's importance. Ibn Khaldun holds that government positions are unnatural and that the city corrupts moral life. He also differs from his precursors with regard to one's motivations for pursuing crafts. Wealth, not poverty, drives people to work. This drive is reinforced by a fear of the state. Wealth creates crafts but also encourages laziness; hence, the need for state coercion.<sup>49</sup> Ibn Khaldun adds two essential crafts to the earlier-mentioned three: tailoring and carpentry. Luxury crafts

are found in cities with a developed culture, such as cooking, biscuit baking, and the weaving of brocade.<sup>50</sup>

Like Isfahani, inspiration from God also determines sustenance, but labor is essential for profit.<sup>51</sup> Some crafts are associated with other crafts: for example, carpentry and weaving are connected to wood and yarn. Profit is acquired through labor. Cities with hardly any human labor will suffer, and those with enough labor will flourish. With more sustenance and profit, civilizations will be sustained.<sup>52</sup>

Labor is the key to profit and is applied to such skills as writing, carpentry, horsemanship, and similar crafts. Agriculture and commerce, as opposed to politics, are natural ways of making a living.<sup>53</sup> Working as a servant is not natural; it is wrong to have servants when one can depend on oneself. In sedentary cultures, people are spoiled by luxuries and dependence on servants for their work. A man's inability to do things for himself conflicts with his natural "manliness." People have servants because they are too lazy to take care of their own needs or because they are unable to do so.<sup>54</sup>

Rank also contributes to material success. A laborer with no rank could acquire a fortune just by working. Merchants, farmers, and craftspeople fall into this category, for they make a bare living and thus merely fend off poverty. People who aspire to rank may achieve it by flattering rulers and the social elite, and in that way can move from the lower to the higher classes. High-ranking people can lose their status if they do not flatter their "betters" to the proper degree. Thus, a rank that is influential can accrue much profit. Since people cannot live alone and need to cooperate with others, these ranks enable them to be active among themselves. The higher ranks have the power to control the lower ranks via permission or prohibition. There is a dynamic relation between those of high rank and those of low rank, and the rise and fall of dynasties can also be explained in terms of this dynamic.<sup>55</sup>

Profit is equal to one's effort and good circumstances, but "sustenance" is what one enjoys from one's profit for one's needs. Everything comes from God, but people must work for their wealth. Ibn Khaldun states:

It should further be known that profit results from the effort to acquire (things) and the intention to obtain them. Sustenance requires effort and work. The effort to (obtain sustenance) depends on God's determination and inspiration. Everything comes from God. But human labor is necessary for every profit and capital accumulation. When (the source of profit) is work, it is obvious. When the source of gain is animal, plants, or minerals, human labor is still necessary. Without it, no gain will be obtained and there will be no useful (result).<sup>56</sup>

The labor that goes into crafts that require specific materials, such as writing, carpentry, tailoring, weaving, and horsemanship, is called “profit.” But when labor is applied to non-materials, it refers to other professions.<sup>57</sup> The secondary crafts flourish in the cities, where people require essentials but need to supplement them to achieve beauty and convenience.<sup>58</sup> The cities provide the fertile ground for the luxury products made by cobblers, tanners, silk weavers, goldsmiths, and other craftspeople.<sup>59</sup> Ibn Khaldun states:

When the city is organized and (available) labor increases and pays for the necessities and is more than enough (for the inhabitants), the surplus is spent on luxuries. The crafts and sciences are the result of one’s ability to think, though which one is distinguished from the animals. (One’s desire) for food, on the other hand, is the result of one’s animal and nutritive power. . . . The (susceptibility) of the crafts to refinement, and the quality of the purposes that they are to serve in view of the demands made by luxury and wealth, then correspond to a the civilization of a given country.

When civilization flourishes and luxuries are in demand, it includes the refinement and development in crafts. Consequently, these are perfected with every finesse, and another of other crafts, in addition to them, are added as luxuries customs and conditions demand. . . . They become the most lucrative activities, because urban luxury demands them.<sup>60</sup>

Crafts improve with demand. With demand, people are eager to learn the skills of these crafts. Moreover, there will always be buyers. Demand is also created by the state’s support for these crafts. If the dynasty does not want these products but the people do, the demand for them will be less, because the dynasty is the largest market.<sup>61</sup>

**Table of Classification**

Note below the comparison in the classification of crafts between the Ikhwan, Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun.

Table 2: *The Ikhwan’s, Isfahani’s, and Ibn Khaldun’s Classification of Crafts.*

	Essential/Noble	Complementary	Aesthetic	Noble
Ikhwan al-Safa’	agriculture	irrigation	baking	
	weaving	smithing	milling	
	building	spinning	embroidery	
		tailoring	decoration	
		carpentry	painting	
		plumbing		

	Essential/Noble	Complementary	Aesthetic	Noble
Isfahani	ruling agriculture weaving building	irrigation smithing spinning tailoring carpentry plumbing	baking milling embroidery decoration painting	
Ibn Khalidun	agriculture weaving building tailoring	irrigation baking and so on		midwifery writing book production singing medicine

The Ikhwan, Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun consider agriculture, weaving, and building to be the essential crafts. Ibn Khaldun adds tailoring and carpentry.<sup>62</sup> Isfahani's treatment of this topic is brief, whereas the Ikhwan's and Ibn Khaldun's are detailed. Ibn Khaldun limits his discussion to the essential and noble crafts. As Isfahani does not give examples of the complementary and aesthetic crafts, I have inserted my own examples. Ibn Khaldun places such crafts as singing and calligraphy in the "noble" category. Calligraphy has a higher value, for it sharpens the intelligence, which is of value to the soul.

Isfahani's craft of ruling is unique and includes the rule of prophets, governors, sages, and jurists. The noblest example is that of the prophets. For Ibn Khaldun, however, ruling is an unnatural way of making a living. The agricultural and commercial crafts are common to both scholars, but Ibn Khaldun places the aesthetic crafts in the "noble" category. Calligraphy is noble because it requires intelligence. Writing conveys what is in the minds of people to other places and other people. Instructing people who live in cities in the art of handwriting is "more proficient, easier, and methodologically better" than doing so elsewhere. Intelligence results from the pursuit of such a craft, especially in the cities. Writing is the most useful of all crafts, for it deals with scientific matters and transforms the imagination's verbal expressions into writing and, therefore, the concepts underlying them, which are in the soul.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

We have discussed the concept of labor and the classification of crafts according to the Ikhwan, Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun. They all commended labor and despised sloth. The Ikhwan classified crafts according to a hierarchy relating to human utility. Commercial trade was at the top, but the attitude was not utilitarian, but spiritual. The Persian *futuwwah* (guilds) of the tenth and eleventh centuries held that *kasb* (acquisition) is a value sanctioned by God.<sup>64</sup> The latter's *Muhadarat al-Udaba'* reflected the conflict between those who support labor and those who reject it.<sup>65</sup> This polarization continued into the fourteenth century. In that century, the Sufis spiritualized the crafts, whether menial, commercial, or intellectual. The religious scholars attacked the artisans and professional guilds for patterning themselves according to the Sufi orders.<sup>66</sup> Cahen's research refutes Massignon's thesis that the *futuwwah* organization corresponded to professional guilds.<sup>67</sup>

The Ikhwan, Isfahani, and Ibn Khaldun accepted the essential crafts of agriculture, building, and weaving. Isfahani added the craft of ruling, and Ibn Khaldun added two other crafts that, he thought, contribute to civilization (*imarah*) and to humanity's material and spiritual welfare. Ibn Khaldun also developed the sociological implications of the crafts and showed how rank and the state help with the accumulation of wealth.

In response to Ibn Khaldun's critique in employing servants, we agree that this could lead to laziness; however, it is not necessarily a sign of sloth. On the contrary, one may employ others to do the menial work precisely because one wants to work harder on some other kind of work. The age of globalization, which is driven by technology, is the age of speed, and one cannot easily cope with the pressures of work without the help of servants to do the cleaning, washing, and ironing. The help makes it possible to work more efficiently on tasks that require cognitive skills. And it is these skills that bring in the greatest amount of wealth in this age of globalization.

Thus, the demand is greater for capable people who can use sophisticated technology efficiently. Aesthetic crafts also require some cognitive skill, but not the kinds of cognitive ability that is needed in a knowledge-based economy. Thus, the importance of aesthetic crafts recedes into the background and the aesthetic craftspeople who are masters of their crafts manage to make a living and remove themselves from poverty. However, they are hardly in any position to become rich. Today, aesthetic crafts require specialized cognitive skills that are computer-related. Traditional

crafts are not much practiced today in the traditional way. In the past, artists would not only paint, but would also make their own paint. Today, they do not produce the materials, since they are readily available and all they have to do is paint.

Globalization challenges the importance of aesthetic crafts, which cannot cope with the new demands for the mass production of goods that are faster, easier, and cheaper. The artist's individual creativity is not appreciated, and people today want to acquire what is affordable. Traditional crafts are expensive and can only flourish in the cities where there is wealth and a demand for luxuries. Being wealthy is not enough to appreciate the crafts; one must also be educated, and the state should provide adequate support.

### Endnotes

1. See Cahen, "kasb" in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed. 4, p. 690f. The author alludes to the influence of Bryson on Islamic economic thinking. See also Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: 1970), 284-85. These Arabic texts were used by Miskawayh and Ghazzali. This is shown by Plessner (see Martin Plessner, *Der Oikonomikos des Neuphythagoreers 'Bryson' und sein Einfluß auf die islamische Wissenschaft* (Heidelberg:1928) (Orient und Antike, v. 5), 49ff and 13ff. An Italian translation based on the Arabic is published by M. Zonta, in *Aristotele: L'amministrazione della casa, a curi di C. Natali* (Roma-Bari: 1995), 140-71.
2. We also see reflections of Bryson's "Economics" in the works of the early Persian philosophers, namely al-Tusi and al-Dawwani, especially with regard to their views on the servants, slaves and the merchants. The Persian philosophers made little distinction between the slaves and the servants. See Yassine Esside, "The Critique of the Origins of Islamic Economic Thought," in *Islamic History and Civilization*, ed. U. Haarman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 2:217-28.
3. *Ibid.*, 217.
4. *Ibid.*, 220-28.
5. Maja Shatzmiller, "Labor in the Medieval Islamic World," in *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, ed. U. Haarman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994). (Compare pages 369-98: "The Theoretical Dimensions of Labour: Image and Doctrine.")
6. *Ibid.*, 381.
7. Ikhwan al-Safa', *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*, ed. Khayr al-din al-Zirikli, 1-4 (Cairo: 1928), 290-92.
8. *Ibid.*, 286, 12-22; 287, 1-8; For the influence of the planets' spirituality (*ruhaniyah*), see *ibid.*, 296f.
9. *Ibid.*, 280.

10. Ibid., 282.
11. Ibid., 290, 1-5. For the relationship between nature and the soul, and the effect of the soul on art, see cf. Afif Bahnasi, *ʿIlm al-Jamal ʿinda Abi Hayyan* (Baghdad, n.d.), 36f.
12. The verse does not mention the angels. The Ikhwan interpret it as such. Bell mentions this interpretation, but he comments on the wrong verse (verse 59). The correct verse is verse 57 (See Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qurʿan*, vols. 1 and 2 (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 1937-39). The Qurʿanic idea of “seeking means (*wasilah*) to their Lord” is elaborated further by the Ikhwan, who consider this “means” to come from “work, knowledge or worship.” They stress striving as suggested in “And that humanity will only earn what it strives for” (53:40).
13. Yves Marquet, “La place du travail dans la hiérarchie ismaʿilienne d’après l’Encyclopédie des Frères de la Pureté,” *Arabica*, 8, 236f.
14. Ibid., 231.
15. *Rasaʿil*, 1:277.
16. Ola Abdelaziz Abouzeid, *A Comparative Study between the Political Theories of al-Farabi and the Brethren of Purity* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1987), 397.
17. Ibid., 398.
18. Ibid., 399.
19. *Rasaʿil*, 1:284f.
20. Ibid., 1:288f.
21. Ibid., 1:286.
22. Abouzeid, *Political Theories*, 475.
23. Daiber, “Political Philosophy,” 850f.
24. Abouzeid, *Political Theories*, 479f. One difference is that al-Farabi considers the people’s destiny in the Hereafter to depend on the political regime (viz., the ruler) under which they live. However, the Ikhwan hold that an unjust ruler does not nullify the individual’s responsibility to purify his/her own soul. The individual should seek his/her personal liberation from matter and his/her happiness in the Hereafter. This view is echoed by the Spanish philosopher Ibn Bajjah.
25. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Dhariʿah ila Makarim al-Shariʿah*, ed. Abul-Yazid al-ʿAjami (Cairo: 1987), 380.
26. Ibid., 380.
27. Ibid., 380; Isfahani cites Qurʿan, 5:2 and 9:71.
28. Ibid., 380.
29. Ibid., 381.
30. Cited in Ibid., 381. For the authentic hadith by Tirmidhi, see *Muhadarat*, note, 515.
21. *Al-Dhariʿah*, 382, 10-12.
32. Ibid., 382, 4-7.

33. Ibid., 385, 1-11; cf. *Mizan*, 328, 14-21; 329, 1-5, for almost identical passages. Ghazali changes certain terms: p. 328, 17: *muhayyatah* replaces *murash-shahah*; p. 329, 9: *hadab* replaces *yad*.
34. See *The Rasa'il*, 4:290f, about the "secular and religious legal sciences" (*al-ulum al-namusiyah wa shar'iyah*). They state that there are two dimensions to human benefit: worldly (*dunyawiyah*) and otherworldly (*ukhrawiyah*). The fulfillment of these two rulings (*siyasatani*), makes people deserving of humanity (*al-insaniyah*). If they receive the "intellectual benefits" and the "practical crafts" (*al-sin'at al-'amaliyah*), they will be averse to worldly pleasure and attain noble moral qualities. Note their use of the term "rulings" (*siyasatani*), suggesting that they have a comprehensive idea of ruling. Also, the "practical crafts" play a role in humanity reaching a high spiritual and moral level.
35. *Al-Dhari'ah*, 385, 1-11; cf. *Mizan*, 328, 14-21; 329, 1-5. See note above.
36. The *Rasa'il* uses the term.
37. The *Rasa'il* mentions only the first three. Isfahani uses the same terms except for "weaving," and adds a fourth primary item: "government." This is not essential for the Ikhwan. See *Rasa'il*, 1:285; cf. B. Lewis, "An Epistle of Manual Crafts," *Islamic Culture*, 12 (1943): 142-51, for the chief and subsidiary crafts.
38. Lewis mentions that this principle was applied by the guilds in Istanbul: The salt-makers and water-carriers were ancillary to the bakers, as water and salt are necessary for the making of bread (see Lewis, "An Epistle on Manual Crafts," note 5, 148).
39. *Al-Dhari'ah*, 385. These analogies are not mentioned in the *Rasa'il*. Further on, Isfahani provides a classification for ruling society at various levels. He did not do this for the other essential crafts.
40. Ghazali has "eyelashes."
41. *Al-Dhari'ah*, 385, 12-17; cf. *Mizan*, 329, 10-19, for an identical passage. Ruling is the noblest essential craft. Each craft should be accorded due respect, and can be superior or inferior depending on its quality of craftsmanship. The craft of ruling is absent in the Ikhwan.
42. *Al-Dhari'ah*, 251. The author does not mention the jurists on page 385.
43. Ibid., 386, 13-17; 251, 4-6 for identical passage; cf. *Mizan*, 328, 13-20 for almost identical passage. Ghazali adds to the second category *khulafa'* (caliphs), and *ulama'* (scholars) to the third.
44. For him, a craft is designed is to refine the internal condition of the people. This is similar to the Ikhwan, who state: "To fulfill human needs, reaching out to those in want, gratified with perfecting the soul with true knowledge and beautiful character, sound opinions and pure acts – to reach heavenly spheres, to be liberated from the world of matter and corruption, and (to rise) to the purity of the spiritual world, abiding therein happily and eternally" (see, *Rasa'il*, 1:286, 5-11, slightly paraphrased in English).

45. Ikhwan al-Safa', *Rasa'il*, 394-95.
46. *Ibid.*, 395
47. *Ibid.*, 397-98.
48. T. J. de Boer, *History of Philosophy in Islam* (London: Luzac, 1993), 205-06.
49. Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (London; 1957).
50. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun* (Beirut: 1978), 266; trans. Rosenthal, (London; 1958), 310f.
51. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 275f; trans. Rosenthal, 313.
52. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 274ff; trans. Rosenthal, 311ff. Ruling promotes labor. On the difference between a primitive and a sophisticated society, and on labor and wealth as cornerstones of a civilized city, see G. S. Firzly, *Ibn Khaldun: A Socio Economic Study* (Ph.D. diss., Utah, 1973), 213-65.
53. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 277; trans. Rosenthal, 316. Ibn Khaldun does not acknowledge the political craft as a normal way of living. He has a modern idea of politics as separate from ethics. Isfahani uses the term *siyasa* (ruling) to embrace all levels of rule. Ibn Khaldun's idea of the craft was something intended for personal profit and survival. Isfahani, however, had in mind both the material and spiritual progress of society.
54. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 277; trans. Rosenthal, 316.
55. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. F. Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 305-08.
56. *Ibid.*, 298.
57. *Ibid.*, 299.
58. *Ibid.*, 300.
59. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 307; trans. Rosenthal, 2, p. 347ff. This idea is supported by Isfahani. A person will be unhappy with a craft that conflicts with his/her innate nature. Ibn Khaldun's idea of a habit ingrained in the soul is intended to suggest that it is difficult for the craftsman to learn a new craft once the previous one is already ingrained in the soul.
60. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, ed. Dawood, 314-15.
61. *Ibid.*, 316-17.
62. Bernard Lewis incorrectly attributes three, not five, essential crafts to Ibn Khaldun. See Lewis, *An Epistle on Manual Crafts*, 149.
63. *Ibid.*, 327-32.
64. *Ibid.*, 393.
65. *Ibid.*, 387.
66. *Ibid.*, 392.
67. *Ibid.*, 393.