

The Ethical Thought of Algeria: Abdulah Sheriat as a Model

الفكر الأخلاقي في الجزائر "عبد الله شريط أمودجا"

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Abstract:

This article aims to focus on Algerian thought, specifically on the thinker Abdulah Sheriat, who served Algeria with his intellect until his death. He was deeply interested in ethical philosophy and sought to create a practical philosophy that differs from traditional idealistic ethics, such as Platonism and Kantianism. Instead, he aimed to develop an ethics that seeks to change reality through reality, influenced by Ibn Khaldun, the founder of scientific thought in the Islamic environment.

1- Research objectives and originality: Giving importance and value to Algerian thought

2- Study methodology: Analysis and comparison

3- Results and discussion: The Algerian thinker Abdulah Sheriat distinguished himself with an exceptionally critical rational thought.

Keywords: Algerian thought, ethical philosophy, practical philosophy, realism, Abdulah Sheriat.

ملخص باللغة العربية

يهدف هذا المقال إلى التركيز على الفكر الجزائري، وبالتحديد على المفكر عبد الله شريط، الذي خدم الجزائر بعقله حتى وفاته. كان مهتماً بشدة بالفلسفة الأخلاقية وسعى إلى إنشاء فلسفة عملية تختلف عن الأخلاق المثالية التقليدية، مثل الأفلاطونية والكانطية. بدلاً من ذلك، كان يهدف إلى تطوير أخلاق تسعى إلى تغيير الواقع من خلال الواقع، متأثراً بابن خلدون، مؤسس الفكر العلمي في البيئة الإسلامية.

1- أهداف البحث وأصالته: إعطاء أهمية وقيمة للفكر الجزائري

2- منهجية الدراسة: التحليل والمقارنة

3. النتائج والمناقشة: تميز المفكر الجزائري عبد الله شريط بفكر عقلاني نقدي بامتياز

كلمات مفتاحية: الفكر الجزائري، الفلسفة الأخلاقية، الفلسفة العملية، الواقعية، عبد الله شريط

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1- Introduction

Ancient philosophers were concerned with linking ethics to politics due to the importance of moral values in organizing societies and achieving justice and stability. Ethics were always considered a foundation for guiding political behavior. Therefore, philosophers sought to determine what is just and right within the context of managing state and society affairs. However, the study of ethics among ancient philosophers did not take on a precise scientific character; rather, it appeared in fragments and scattered ideas, especially in Aristotle, who was a pioneer in proposing some methodological foundations for the study of ethics.

As for the Arab-Islamic heritage, Ibn Khaldun made notable contributions in this field, linking ethics to the social and historical context, thereby presenting a comprehensive philosophical conception of how ethics develop and their impact on social and political life. However, despite these contributions, the study of ethics remained confined to the traditional philosophical framework and did not witness systematic scientific development until later periods.

In light of the development of Islamic philosophical thought, Abdullah Sheriat emerged as one of the most important thinkers who sought to introduce a scientific methodology in the study of ethics. He benefited from the intellectual legacy of Ibn Khaldun, who provided a profound analysis of ethics and considered it a variable phenomenon influenced by social factors. This established the concept of the necessity of using the scientific method to understand moral behaviour. Sheriat adopted this vision and his scientific methodology in the study of ethics.

We will explore how Ibn Khaldun's thought influenced the development of ideas about ethics, particularly through the introduction of scientific elements in the study of values and behaviours, starting from the following question:

What are the foundations that Abdullah Sheriat relied on to understand and develop the ideas of Ibn Khaldun in order to present a new ethical vision that addresses contemporary challenges?

These are some of the hypotheses that come out of this problem:

- Perhaps Abdulah Sheriat did not present pure philosophical thought but merely an analysis of the Khaldunian thought.
- Perhaps he was able to surpass the Khaldunian thought and establish an ethical philosophical thought that reflects the value of contemporary Algerian thought.

History and sociology as an introduction to understanding ethics according to Ibn Khaldun:

Ibn Khaldun's ethical thought is woven into his overarching philosophy of human civilization and history, offering a comprehensive perspective on ethics' evolution within historical and sociological

contexts. He argued that truly understanding morality requires examining its ties to society and values, and that a society's rise or decline ultimately reflects its ethical standards.

- History as a necessary condition for understanding ethics:

Ibn Khaldun sees history as indispensable to ethics, a school of practical wisdom that guides moral conduct now and in the future. By studying past narratives, each generation draws lessons from predecessors' successes and mistakes, steering clear of repeating old errors.

Ibn Khaldun clearly articulates this perspective in his definition of history, as follows:

"The discipline of history is among the sciences transmitted across nations and generations. Journeys are undertaken and efforts devoted in its pursuit... Beneath its surface lies critical reflection and analytical inquiry, a subtle examination of events and their origins, and a profound understanding of the conditions and causes behind them. It is, therefore, intrinsically connected to wisdom and deeply rooted in philosophical thought". (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 14).

In his thought, history transcends mere narration to become an analytical science of wisdom. It uncovers deeper causes and the moral laws governing individual and collective behaviour.

By exploring these ethical dimensions, history guides present and future generations, drawing lessons from past successes and failures to steer societies toward a more virtuous and prosperous future. (Sheriat, the ethical thought of ibn khaldoun , 1975, p. 13).

pioneer in transforming history into a social and ethical science—one grounded in the analysis of events, the investigation of their causes, and the extraction of moral lessons. In this, he aligns with Abdullah Sheriat, who likewise viewed history not as a mere sequence of events but as a field of inquiry into their deeper logic and significance. Sharit explicitly articulated this view in the introduction to his book *Algeria in the Mirror of History*, stating, "We were careful not to reduce history to a mere narration of historical events; rather, we focused on analysing those events and investigating their causes" (Sheriat, *Algeria in the mirror of history* , 1965, p. 04).

Here, Sheriat's ethical project intersects with Ibn Khaldun's civilizational approach, as both perceive history as a means to understand the present and guide the future—not simply to chronicle the past.

- Sociology as a necessary condition for understanding ethics:

Ibn Khaldun lived during a turbulent period in Islamic history, marked by the collapse of states, the spread of moral decay, and political decline. Thus, the unstable society in which Ibn Khaldun lived inspired him to study that very society. He defined *‘umrān* (civilization) as "cohabitation," noting that civilization may be Bedouin in mountainous or desert regions, or urban in cities.

(Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society,politics and culture), 1984, p. 28) .

This dual conception of "*umrān*" enabled him to provide a comprehensive understanding of social life, ranging from the simple to the complex, from nomadism to urbanization—thus reflecting the breadth of his anthropological and civilizational vision.

Building upon this broad understanding of civilization, Ibn Khaldun established the science of '*umrān*', which he defined as "the science whose subject is human civilization and social organization" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society,politics and culture), 1984, p. 10) .

. Through this definition, he made human society a legitimate object of empirical analysis, laying the groundwork for what would later be recognized as the field of sociology.

Ibn Khaldun did not limit himself to describing social phenomena; he also sought to explain them on the basis of a principle of determinism. He asserted that "social events are governed by causes that arise from social life itself" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society,politics and culture), 1984, p. 10).

In this way, Ibn Khaldun can be seen as having applied the scientific method to the study of society, treating it as a phenomenon akin to natural phenomena—governed by its own causes and deterministic laws. He succeeded in this endeavour thanks to the precision of his observations, the depth of his insight, and his original conclusions based on a profound analysis of history and social conditions (Sheriat, the ethical thought of ibn khaldoun , 1975, p. 23).

This scientific foundation was not disconnected from the ethical dimension of his thought. Ibn Khaldun viewed both sociology and history as gateways to understanding the evolution of ethics within societies. As he put it: "The reality of history is that it is an account of human social organization (*ijtima' insānī*), which constitutes the civilization (*umrān*) of the world, and of the transformations that befall it—such as savagery, tribal solidarity (*asabiyya*), and various forms of domination among human groups" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society,politics and culture), 1984, p. 23).

The ethical philosophy of Ibn Khaldoun:

In his ethical philosophy, he divided society into two main groups: Bedouins (rural dwellers) and urban inhabitants. This distinction reflects his belief that moral values are shaped by social and economic environments. Each group, he argued, develops ethical traits rooted in its lifestyle.

For Ibn Khaldun, ethics were inseparable from material and social realities. He saw moral values not as abstract ideals but as products of lived experience—central to both the rise and fall of civilizations.

His view is captured in the statement: "Dwelling, clothing, and food—all of these affect the formation of the human body as well as the development of one's psychological, intellectual, and spiritual life. Excessive indulgence in luxury is harmful to both body and soul, while moderation is beneficial to both." (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 31).

- Morality among the settled people (people who live in the city):

Building on this perspective, Ibn Khaldun argued that urban dwellers—due to their attachment to worldly pleasures, their pursuit of desires, and their love of comfort—had souls that had become tainted by numerous reprehensible traits. As a result, he saw urban life as increasingly characterized by moral decline (Sheriat, the ethical thought of ibn khaldoun , 1975, p. 38).

He believed that city inhabitants tend to adopt luxurious habits, live in comfort, and rely heavily on an organized society. Over time, this leads to a weakening of their moral fortitude and physical resilience.

He expressed this idea clearly when he stated: "Nothing is more detrimental to human health than overeating, luxurious clothing, and extravagance in housing" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 31).

He also noted: "Among the urban population, especially those living in luxury, we find an abundance of crops and fruits, and we observe that their minds are dulled and their bodies have become coarse" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 32).

- Morality among the Bedouins (people who live in the countryside):

In contrast, Ibn Khaldun observed that although Bedouins love the world just as urban dwellers do, their attachment is not rooted in corruption, indulgence, or sensual excess. Their upbringing, he argued, surpasses that of city inhabitants, rendering them less susceptible to immoral living (Sheriat, the ethical thought of ibn khaldoun , 1975, p. 38).

He portrayed their condition as follows: "You will find among the Bedouins a better state of physical and moral character than among city dwellers" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 32).

and he elaborated further: "Their complexions are clearer, their bodies purer, their features more complete and handsome, and their morals further removed from deviation" (Sheriat, selected texts from the philosophy of ibn khaldoun (on society, politics and culture), 1984, p. 32).

According to Ibn Khaldun, these virtues stem from their simple lifestyle, self-reliance, close connection with nature, and adherence to the values of tribal solidarity (*ʿasabiyya*) and mutual support.

Though their way of life is harsher, it is also morally purer—making them, in his view, closer to virtuous character than others.

In this light, Ibn Khaldun compared the moral disposition of urban dwellers—inclined toward decadence—with that of the rural Bedouins, who are marked by noble ethics. From this comparison, he concluded that moral values constitute a fundamental pillar of civilizational development and that moral decay is the first sign of its decline.

He thus drew a direct connection between the course of civilization and its ethical foundation: those who embody virtuous character contribute to its advancement and stability, while those who exhibit corrupt and reprehensible conduct accelerate its deterioration and eventual fall.

The ethical thought of Abdulah Sheriat:

Ibn Khaldun and Abdallah Sheriat shared several common experiences. Both lived through political and cultural upheavals and were deeply aware of the intellectual and social challenges of their time. They studied at the Zaytuna Mosque in Tunisia and spent time in the Levant, which broadened their intellectual horizons. Their strong religious grounding, shaped by their study of the Qur'an, and their keen powers of observation and analysis enabled them to develop realistic insights and a philosophical social thought rooted in objectivity.

So, can Abdallah Shariat's ethical thought be considered a direct extension of Ibn Khaldun's? Or did he merely draw inspiration from him to develop an independent ethical vision shaped by the specific realities of Algerian society?

Postcolonial Ethics:

Abdulah Sheriat emerged in postcolonial Algeria, yet stood on terrain akin to that of Ibn Khaldun. Whereas Khaldun charted the collapse of states through moral decay, Sharit diagnosed the ethical disintegration that followed liberation. He saw French colonialism not just as military occupation but as a campaign to annihilate values and warp the collective conscience.

Building on Khaldun's premise that ethics spring from social and economic structures, Sharit cast Algeria's post-independence crisis as fundamentally moral. He traced contemporary challenges—social fragmentation, economic stagnation, and frayed Arab-Berber ties—to a national ethical breakdown.

The Ethics of Communal Coexistence Between Arabs and Berbers

Abdulah Sheriat maintained that a proper understanding of the ethical present can only be achieved through a deep comprehension of the historical past. Just as Ibn Khaldun had relied on the principle of social determinism to understand the development of human civilization, Sharit applied this analytical approach to postcolonial Algerian reality, turning to history to uncover the roots of the moral crisis that erupted after independence.

Sheriat insisted that today's ethical crisis in Algeria can only be grasped through a deep study of history. Drawing on Ibn Khaldun's social determinism, he argued that French colonialism was more than military rule—it was an ideological war meant to shatter shared values and undermine national unity.

He contrasted the solidarity of the anti-colonial struggle with the post-liberation era's internal fractures, cynically sown by the colonizer. "It was not merely a political war—it was an ideological war, a war of total destruction, whose primary objective was to dismantle national unity and provoke ethical crises." To trace these fractures, Sharit excavated moments of genuine cohesion—above all, the Unified Numidia under Massinissa, whose political, administrative, economic, and social organization had forged robust national unity. (Sheriat, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 – A Concise Political, Cultural and Social History of Algeria, 2009, p. 160).

He continued to trace the roots of coexistence, referring to the Islamic conquests, during which integration between Arabs and Berbers was neither forced nor tense but based on spiritual and ethical foundations, expressed in "cooperation, mutual support, and unity under the banner of religion." He observed, "The sons of Numidia understood the message the Arabs brought and embraced Islam quickly" (Sheriat, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 – A Concise Political, Cultural and Social History of Algeria, 2009, p. 201).

He did not stop at these historical junctures. Sharit went on to highlight eras of strength and unity, such as those of the Hammadids, Almoravids, and Almohads, as well as the Ottoman period describing them as moments of prosperity built upon Arab-Berber cooperation. For Sharit, history was not a mere record of events but a space for recovering historical figures and values that preserved Algeria's ethical and cultural cohesion—"under the banner of religion and Islamic values."

Regarding cultural life prior to colonization, Sharit depicted it as a model of moral and religious harmony. Islamic civilization, he argued, provided the normative framework for Algerian society: "Education was cantered on jurisprudential principles and the foundations of legislation" (Sheriat, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 – A Concise Political, Cultural and Social History of Algeria, 2009, p. 318).

In contrast, it was French colonialism that planted the seeds of division, as Sharit unequivocally stated: "It was French colonialism that introduced religious and racial discrimination into a society that had known only tolerance" (Sheriat, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4 – A Concise Political, Cultural and Social History of Algeria, 2009, p. 32).

Thus, the ethical project of Sharit comes into clear focus: it was not mere nostalgia for a lost past, but a deliberate attempt to understand the present by retrieving historical moments that embodied shared living. His aim was to reconstruct an ethical consciousness capable of confronting the modern challenges left behind by colonialism.

The Ethics of Consumption and Importation: “The Crisis of Labor and Production”:

For Sheriat, labor and production are the clearest indicators of a society's ethical core. Values manifest in our willingness to work, innovate, and build civilization—not in empty slogans. He saw passive consumption and reliance on imports as symptoms of deep moral decay: a fading civilizational consciousness and the eclipse of creative labor. Algeria's rich heritage of agricultural, industrial, and artisanal productivity once testified to its dynamism. After independence, however, Sheriat diagnosed “the problem of non-work”—a shift from self-reliant production to import dependency—as evidence of a profound ethical rupture.

In describing the attitudes of some contemporary merchants, Abdulah Sheriat critiques the disconnect between capital and labour, highlighting a striking contradiction: “We see merchants importing luxurious furniture from abroad, then sitting idly in their shops waiting for someone to buy it—when they could have instead invested in machines, applied both intellectual and physical effort, and produced something from what they had imported” (Sheriat, from the reality of Algerian culture, 1981, p. 97).

For Sheriat, authentic work ethics rest on initiative, productivity, and turning raw materials into added value—not on merely circulating ready-made goods.

Grounded in historical analysis, he traced Algeria's labour and dependency crisis to a colonial policy of systematic ignorance. French colonialism did more than occupy territory: it methodically attacked Algerian intellect—decimating schools, culture, and educators. As Sheriat wrote, “French colonialism waged war against Algerian schools and culture and pursued teachers more fiercely than anything else.” (Sheriat, the ideological problems and issues of development, 1981, p. 30).

Sheriat insists that Algeria's labor and production crisis isn't born of individual laziness or inevitability, but of a deliberate colonial strategy to sever the people from their intellectual and productive roots. His critique goes beyond economics, casting work as a civilizational act and a keystone of national identity. When a society abandons creativity and effort, it signals not just stagnation but a collapse of collective conscience and responsibility—a moral crisis Sheriat seeks to heal through renewed ethical awareness.

The originality and the purity of the ethical thought of Abdulah Sheriat:

Influence doesn't preclude originality. Though Sheriat drew on Ibn Khaldun's ethics, he fashioned his own moral framework shaped by Algeria's unique society and environment. Which internal Algerian factors forged Sheriat's authentic ethical philosophy?

- The Algerian society:

Sheriat's moral philosophy sprang from post-colonial Algeria's urgent need to rebuild authentic values. After a brutal liberation war left society fragmented and its traditions eroded by French influence, he rejected abstract theorizing in favor of grounding ethics in the community's historical and religious identity. Describing the era as a "moral crisis" that demanded reconstruction rather than repetition, he warned of habits imported from a century of French rule that remain invisible until we step back and truly see them: "Our contact with the French society ... has left us with habits that we do not even notice—except when we read about them." (Sheriat, western ethics in algeria, p. 09). He turned his philosophy into intellectual and cultural resistance, urging the recovery of an authentic moral self—not through slogans, but by redefining values around Islamic-Algerian identity and building a framework rooted in local reality rather than foreign ideals. The post-independence moral and social challenges ignited his realist approach, grounding his ethics firmly in Algerian soil instead of imported doctrines.

- The realistic study:

What distinguishes Sheriat's ethical project is his strong inclination toward practical realism. He firmly believed that addressing the moral crisis in Algerian society could not be achieved through abstract metaphysical theorizing but rather by grounding ethics in the lived reality of daily life. In this regard, he introduced what he termed the "phase of seeking solutions." Within this context, he criticized the rhetorical and idealistic character of moral discourse when detached from real society. He said: "So long as ethics continues to fly on imaginary wings in a world far removed from the real world of human beings..." (Sheriat, the ethical thought of ibn khaldoun , 1975, p. 11).

Elsewhere, he emphasized the need for ethics to move beyond abstraction and toward practical implementation: "Moral principles should not remain abstract concepts but must transcend abstraction toward practice." (Sheriat, the edeological problemand issues of development , 1981, p. 35). This realist orientation in ethics aligns Sharit with the rational and practical realism of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who also connected moral reasoning with political and social analysis. In his commentaries on Plato's *Republic*, Ibn Rushd did not merely reiterate the ideas of his predecessors; rather, he illustrated them with concrete examples from Islamic states, such as the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties. He explained how states transition from virtuous governance to corruption as a result of moral decay in the structure of power. He pointed, for instance, to the deviation of the Almoravid state from *sharī'a*-based politics toward "Karāmiyya politics" due to indulgence and materialism: "An example of this is the Almoravid state, which at its inception followed the *sharī'a*-based politics under

its first leader, Yusuf ibn Tashfin. But under his son, it transformed into a Karāmiyya regime, then into one driven by sensual desires" (Arfa, 2006, p. 203) .

He also criticized the Almohad state, which shifted from an ideal state to a "city of domination" due to excessive pursuit of freedom: "The cause of this transformation was the excessive demand for freedom" (Arfa, 2006, p. 208).

What unites Sharit and Ibn Rushd is the conviction that ethics are not measured by speech but by the real transformations experienced by societies. Both thinkers linked ethical action to specific historical and political trajectories, and both rejected the reduction of moral values to theoretical concepts disconnected from their practical contexts.

- The critical study :

Abdulah Sheriat's work wasn't idle reflection but a rigorous critique of postcolonial Algeria's moral void—a moment when values and the ethics of power lay in ruins. He urged that rebuilding the state on national and Islamic ethical foundations was both a moral and political imperative. Dr. Mahmoud Qassem, in his introduction to *The Battle of Concepts*, "While many readers perceive Sharit as pessimistic due to his frequent critiques and satirical tone, this attitude is better understood as a form of moral urgency shaped by his admiration for al-Jahiz." (Sheriat, . *The Battle of Concepts*, 1981, p. 06). Sheriat insists that selecting the right leader is essential—far beyond Plato's or al-Farabi's idealized conditions, it demands real-world adherence to one's own ideas and directives. Emir Abdelkader and Sheikh Ben Badis exemplified this by living their teachings daily. Likewise, Prophet Muhammad embodied honesty, integrity, justice, and mercy in every action, forging a cohesive moral community through his example. (Sheriat, *the edeological problemand issues of development* , 1981, p. 34) .Therefore, according to Abdullah Sheriat, we do not need a ruler who follows socialist or liberal governance but rather one who follows the path of the Prophet.

- Reformulating the Khaldunian thought:

Sheriat was indeed influenced by Ibn Khaldun in his approach to ethics, yet he distinguished himself in a fundamental way: he viewed Algerian society as an integrated whole, undivided by geographical location or modes of living. This marks a unique aspect of his ethical project, as he made no distinction between the peasant, the religious scholar, or the ordinary citizen—all were seen as equal members of the same national community. This inclusive vision is clearly reflected in his statement: "In order to produce virtuous men capable of mobilizing the people, we must raise their awareness of ethical principles..... and these principles must go beyond abstraction to become practice." (Sheriat, *the edeological problemand issues of development* , 1981, p. 35). Here, Sheriat does not address ethics to any specific social category, nor does he draw a line between rural and urban populations. Rather, his ethical discourse is directed toward "the people" as a unified body,

underscoring his ambition to build a shared moral consciousness that reinforces national unity in the face of social and political challenges.

Moreover, our previous study of Sheriat's ethical thought clearly shows that he did not construct a system of ethics tailored separately for Bedouins or urban dwellers. Rather, he envisioned a unified ethical framework applicable to all Algerians, regardless of lifestyle or geographic setting. The only distinction he emphasized was between authentic Algerian virtues and the foreign, colonial moral codes imposed from outside. This distinction reflects his broader project of reclaiming a native ethical identity grounded in national values and collective memory.

Conclusion:

The study of ethical thought in Algeria, with Abdullah Sheriat as a model, reveals several key insights:

- Sheriat was deeply influenced by the ethical philosophy of Ibn Khaldun, which was evident in his doctoral thesis.
- His engagement with Ibn Khaldun's ideas shaped his understanding of morality as a product of social and historical contexts. However, this intellectual influence did not prevent him from developing his own unique ethical vision. Sheriat was not merely a follower of Ibn Khaldun but a philosopher in his own right, contributing original ideas to the field of ethics.
- Sheriat's approach to ethics was marked by a strong sense of realism. Rather than adhering to abstract moral theories, he grounded his ethical thought in the lived experiences of Algerians, demonstrating the practical relevance of philosophy in addressing societal issues.
- His work also served as a critical examination of Algerian society, particularly its moral transformations under colonial rule.
- He identified and critiqued the adoption of foreign ethical values imposed during the colonial period, advocating for an ethical framework that was both authentic and adaptive.
- His focus on national identity and patriotism allowed him to develop an ethical philosophy that transcended local and regional divisions, making his work highly relevant in the broader discourse of Algerian and Islamic thought.
- Abdullah Sheriat's ethical philosophy stands as a significant intellectual achievement. It blends historical influence with originality, realism with philosophical depth, and critical analysis with national unity.

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