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EXPLORATIONS IN MEDIEVAL ARAB-ISLAMIC ECONOMIC THOUGHT:
SOME ASPECTS OF IBN QAYYIM'S ECONOMICS
(691-751 AH/1292-1350 AD)

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This paper explores the economic thought of a medieval Arab-Islamic scholar, Ibn Al-Qayyim al-Jauziyyah (691-751 AH/1292-1350 AD), who is one among at least 35-40 medieval Arab-Islamic scholars who wrote on various specific economic issues.

Ibn Qayyim authored at least 11 books, but much of his economic thought emanates from al-Tawq al-Mahbubiyah (The Rules of Governance). Based on his original works (written in a teleological context connected to all medieval scholarship), the paper explores (a) his economic philosophy, (b) views on affluence and poverty, (c) significance of public charity, (d) prohibition of usury, and (e) market exchange and the need for public intervention. Given such insights, Ibn Qayyim is clearly among the pioneers of contemporary economic thought.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the economic thought of a medieval Arab-Islamic scholar, Shams Al Din Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ali Baqr Al-Zar'i, known as Ibn Al-Qayyim Al Jauziyyah (691-751 AH/1292-1350 AD), hereafter called Ibn Qayyim. As a theologian and interpreter of Islamic scriptures, he was among the leading jurists of the Hanbali school — last of the four streams within Islamic Shari'ah (Islamic Jurisprudence) that emerged between the 8th and 14th centuries (the other three, chronologically, being Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i — each named after its founder; see Levy, 1962, 168-91).

In reference to medieval Arab-Islamic scholarship, Ibn Qayyim is one among at least 35-40 prominent scholars who wrote on a variety of specific economic issues — some even wrote separate treatises (see, for

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example, Abu Yusuf, 731-798AD, Al-Farabi, 876-950AD, and Na`im al-Din Tusi, 1201-1274AD). To the best of our knowledge, none of Ibn Qayyim’s works has been translated into English or other European languages. The present paper relies primarily on the original Arabic language sources.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that there is hardly any Arab-Islamic scholar whose economic thought is familiar in the profession or incorporated in the relevant literature. Such neglect is only tangentially rectified by some English language literature on the economics of a late-medieval Arab-Islamic scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD). About 25 years ago, the late Joseph Schumpeter wrote an excellent paper on this scholar, and in referring to Arab-Islamic literature of the era, he observed that “the knowledge of economic behavior in some circles was very great indeed, and one must turn to the writings of those with access to this knowledge and experience if one would know the actual state of Muslims economic knowledge” (Schumpeter, 1934, 324). Thus, part of the stimulus for the present effort comes from Schumpeter’s suggestion.

Further, it might be noted that another scholar, also writing on Ibn Khaldun, referred to him as “among the fathers of economic science,” but erroneously concluded that he was “an accident of history—without predecessors and without successors” (Bouard, 1971, 1110). Another exception is the recent article on the economic thought of a prominent early-medieval Arab-Islamic scholar, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (5058-1111AD) (see Ghaithar-Idrissi, 1992; also see Esst, 1987).

It is appropriate, in the present context, to briefly refer to the controversial “great gap” thesis, propounded by the late Joseph Schumpeter in his classic, History of Economic Analysis. According to this thesis, the period between the Greeks and the Latin Scholastics (particularly St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274 AD) represented “blank centuries,” during which nothing of relevance to economics was written anywhere (Schumpeter, 1962, 72). Such a claim is untenable, although, given the cultural context in which he wrote, Schumpeter perhaps was not aware of the Arab-Islamic literature on economics (see Ghazaliar-Idrissi, 1992).

In the main, however, after a sketch of Ibn Qayyim’s life and the environment in which he lived and a brief perspective on his socio-economic philosophy, we present a detailed discussion of his ideas on some major economic themes. Like most other Arab-Islamic and Latin-Christian scholars of the era, Ibn Qayyim was “well-versed in the main disciplines of the time” and “his education was particularly wide and sound” (Leete, 1971, 823). Further, as with medieval scholarship generally, his works emphasized the “holistic” intellectual approach. However, one finds considerable economic content in his writings, similar to that found in the works of his Arab-Islamic and Latin-Christian counterparts. It may be further noted that consistent with the prevailing intellectual tradition, his scholarship was not dominated by economic aspects of life, nor does one discover the economic abstractions and constructs to which contemporary economics has become accustomed.

2. Ibn Qayyim: His life and the environment

Born in Damascus (Syria) in 1292, Ibn Qayyim spent most of his life in that city, and died there in 1350. Both Syria and Egypt were part of the Fatimid Caliphate Dynasty (1250-1328 AD), and Ibn Qayyim’s scholarly achievements, as those of his mentor, Ibn Taimiyah (661-728/1263-1328AD), belong in this period (see Ghaithar-Idrissi; 1992). Egypt and Syria represented the centers of learning during the Mamluk period. According to Hitti, “Damascus and Cairo, especially Cairo,” Ibn Qayyim’s scholarly achievement is “amazing” (Hitti, 1938, 20).

1. Schumpeter might well have referred to a more generalized, cultural phenomenon concerning Arab-Islamic scholarship, as observed by Norman Biren in a similar fashion. In recognizing knowledge from an alien source (itself derived from another source) but believed to be true” (Biren, 1978, 87). In the same vein, well regards to Western authorities toward Arab-Islamic thought generally, Montgomery Watt says, “The Almohads is that we are at the heart of a deep-seated religious prejudice which goes back to the ‘pre-Christian’ or medieval...
after the fall of Baghdad (due to Mongol invasions) and the disintegration of Modern Spain (after the Crusades), remained the educational and intellectual center of the Arab world” (Hitti, 1951, 639). Further, the struggle between Greek rationalism and the comprehensive, passive, and intuitive quality of Islamic thought continued in the Mamluk period and is reflected in the writings of numerous Arab-Islamic scholars, including Ibn Qayyim.

Ibn Qayyim learned from many teachers. “But, in particular he was, from 713/1313, the most famous pupil of Ahmad Ibn Taimiyya, all of whose ideas can be said to have absorbed and whose work he helped to popularize, while retaining his own personality.” Further, “much less of a prophet than his master and much more of a preacher (sawri), Ibn Al-Kayyim finally left behind him a justified strokes of a writer of great talent, whose eloquence contrasts with the impressive dryness of the succinct prose of his famous master.” (Larouz, 1971, 821). While his “doctrinal and literary output was considerable,” his “career was modest, and was hampered by the opposition which the neo-Hashidism of Ibn Taimiyya encountered in the governmental circles of the Mamluk state.” Several Muslim scholars of this period were among Ibn Qayyim’s pupils and followers. “Indeed, he is still today an author very highly esteemed not only among the Mamluk and also among the Salafiya and in many circles of North African Islam” (Larouz, 1971, 822).

As for the nature of economic life during this period, some insights become available from several sources. According to Lane-Poole, “It was an age of extraordinary brilliance in almost every aspect. In spite of the occasional records of scarcity and high prices, the wealth of the country, whether from its fertile soil or from the ever-increasing trade with Europe and the East, was immense.” The Mamluks were aware of their dependency on the colossal economy, along with their army. Thus, they freely explored the sources of wealth and developed agriculture, trade, and industry. Indeed, Egypt and Syria were centers of trade and commerce long before the advent of Islam. According to Hitti, “The concessions offered by al-Malik and Barquq (Mamluk rulers) to the Venetian and other European merchants stimulated an exchange of commodities and trade to Cairo a great

“Wahhahahia” is a reference to the followers of the most prominent Islamic reformer of the 13th century, Muhammad ibn Al-Wahhah (d. 741), whose ideas have been influential in contemporary Saudi Arabia. Almost all historians agree on the deep impact of the works of Ibn Taimiyya and Ibn Qayyim on Al-Wahhah.

3. Ibn Qayyim’s economic thought

As a versatile scholar, Ibn Qayyim wrote on numerous topics, including economic issues of his age. Like his mentor, Ibn Taimiyya, he had seen the socio-economic upheaval of the time (especially the Crusades and the Mongol invasions), as well as the plight of the poor and the exploitation of the ruling class. Additional inspiration for him was the fact that Islam as a religion and a way of life focused specifically on prevailing economic problems, encouraging economic endeavor, as well as emphasizing the pursuit of socio-economic justice.

Ibn Qayyim authored at least 11 books (some with multiple volumes) on various topics. A few of these can be identified: (1) Mautafij al-Salihiin (3 volumes), considered “the masterpiece of Hanbali mystic literature;” (2) Plam al-Musawwirin (3 volumes), “a treatise on judicial methodology (“wawal al-faqih”), following the ideas of Ibn Taimiyya in this field;” and (3) al-Turrq al-Hakimiyah, “based on the ideas set out by Ibn Taimiyya in his Hikma and
his al-Siyasah al-Shariyyah (Laqueur, 1971, 522). Much of Ibn Qayyim’s economic thought emanates from his al-Tamq al-Falakiyyah.

Ibn Qayyim has significant insights to offer on several key economic issues of universal relevance, historically as well as contemporaneously. His contributions to economic thought are quite similar to those of his worthy predecessors, such as Ibn Tamayya and Al-Ghazzali. We shall briefly explore the following aspects of his economic thought: (1) economic philosophy under Islam; (2) views on affluence and poverty; (3) economic significance of public charity (Zakat); (4) prohibition of usury (riba); and (5) market mechanisms and need for public-sector intervention.

a) Economic philosophy under Islam

As with other medieval scholastics, Arab-Islamic as well as Latin-Christian, the economic philosophy of Ibn Qayyim is heavily permeated with, and indeed subordinate to, the larger normative, ethical-moral concerns of the society, rooted in the revealed scriptures and embedded in the Shariyah (Islamic Jurisprudence, or Fiqh), the comprehensive Islamic equivalent of the Christian Canon Law. The primary focus of these scholars was not the domain of economic aspects of life.

The accompanying bibliographic environment various Arabic-language works contemplative, along with the approximate English translation of each text. It may be noted, however, that the English translation does not always capture the nuances of the original Arabic idiom, something that is often seen when translating from one language to another.

The word Shariyah literally means “The Way” – the comprehensive code of Islamic way of life, including the secular and the sacred, based on two main sources: the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah (Tradition, or Hadith). But further evolved through interpretations based on Imaams (Consensus) and Ulema typology or syncretic on the basis of smaller concentrations. There are four major compatible schools of thought within Shariyah (Ismaili, Islamic Jurisprudence, or Legal Systems), each with its own comprehensive, though comparable to the Christian Canon Law’s, evolved during early Islamic history, and called after the chief exponents of each of them. These schools or thought, chronologically, are Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali. These (also) sought to answer every conceivable question and organize their findings into several categories – political, economic, judicial, social, family, spiritual, and so forth. Further, all human activities are grouped into four broad categories: (I) obligatory (fard), (II) recommended (mustahab), (III) prohibited (haram), and (IV) forbidden (haram). Particularly concerning economic, the Shariyah guides in three ways: (1) a set of basic values, known Allah (the boundaries of god), movement and determines the area of permissible economic activities (II) along with these values, general guidelines are provided to guide the exercise of human freedom in the sphere of economic activities, and (III) a set of diverse ordinances is determined, specifying methods to promote social welfare. See Riva (1979) for more details. There is voluminous literature on the subject, available in English as well as other languages, and the interested reader may wish to explore further. See, for example, Riva, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1988, and Kassim, 1993.
welfare. Thus, if individual owners use property in a manner that violates social welfare, the state may have the right to intervene and even confiscate such property, with proper compensation, if by so doing the greater good of the society will be served (Ibn Qayyim, al-Tariq, 245-46, 254-60). Indeed, property ownership and issues concerning poverty and affluence are closely related; and Ibn Qayyim devoted a full treatise on such interrelationships.

b) Views on Affluence and Poverty

Given the background of prevailing influence of Sufism, which promoted self-denial and poverty, Ibn Qayyim examined the arguments of those who preferred poverty and those who advocated affluence. He adopted a balanced and realistic position, consistent with the Islamic scriptures, in that affluence is preferable, provided that it is accompanied by gratitude of God as well as fulfillment of one's duties and obligations towards fellow human beings (Ibn Qayyim, Umdat, 313-14). Further, according to Ibn Qayyim, wealth enables one to more readily perform good deeds, religious as well as secular, obligatory as well as voluntary (e.g., pilgrimage, charity, endowments, construction of religious sites, roads, and canals) (Ibn Qayyim, Umdat, 303). However, he subscribes to the opinion of his teacher, Ibn Taimiyah, that “from among the rich and the poor the most favored is the one who is most God-fearing and who exceeds good deeds; if a rich and poor person are equal on the basis of this criterion, they are equal in their ranks” (Ibn Qayyim, Zad, 162). Ibn Qayyim warns against confusing poverty with Zakah (literally, to abstain, to avoid, to desist) — an important Islamic virtue often misconstrued as renunciation of wealth and worldly life. In his book Majma‘ al-Sabab, he examines the meaning of Zakah and concludes that it does not mean rejection of worldly things. He argues that Zakah is a state of mind which means purification from the lust for material things and from an exclusive focus on them. One can indeed have such a state of mind despite having material things, as it is also possible to possess material wealth, but lack in piety.

c) Economic Significance of Zakah (Mandatory Charity)

One of the five pillars of Islam is Zakah (or mandatory charity, as opposed to voluntary charity, Sadaqah), which has important repercussions on the economic life of a society. Ibn Qayyim discussed the economic significance of Zakah and offered several insights.

According to Ibn Qayyim, the purpose of Zakah is the promotion of socio-economic justice and development of kindness and goodwill toward others. For these reasons, a specific and relatively low rate has been fixed. Thus, the amount payable is not excessive for those who must pay, and it is small enough for the less well-to-do to fulfill their needs despite payments. A high rate would not only hurt incentives but also encourage evasion on the part of the rich. On the other hand, “excessive” assistance to the poor would make them dependent. The two extremes would defeat the purpose of Zakah (Ibn Qayyim, Madan, 183; also, P.Lam, Vol. 2, 92).

After identifying various bases subject to Zakah, Ibn Qayyim discusses four different rates applicable to them. In evaluating the economic rationale for these rates, he is concerned with efficiency as well as equity. He argues that the labor content of the Zakah bases is a key factor in determining the rates. In general, in order to encourage human effort, he favors a lower rate, the greater the labor content of economic activities. Thus, irrigated farming, involving more labor, is subject to a lower rate than rain-fed farming, other things constant. Highest rate is applicable to any treasures discovered (presumed to be minimal in labor content) (Ibn Qayyim, Zad, 149; and P.Lam, Vol. 2, 91-92). Thus, the rationale for such rate variation is to promote economic efficiency and equity. Identical rates for all goods and properties, regardless of labor content, would create work disincentives and give rise to inequities. It might be mentioned that Ibn Qayyim’s more famous teacher, Ibn Taimiyah, also offered similar views on this topic (Ibn Taimiyah, Majma‘, 28, 8).

Ibn Qayyim also discusses the period of Zakah payment. First, Zakah be collected only when crops have been harvested and revenue generated (except for treasures discovered, from which Zakah is due immediately) — i.e., when revenues accrue. Further, weekly or monthly collection can create difficulties for the payers; on the other hand, once-in-life collection can be especially difficult for the poor. Thus, he argues, annual collection is most appropriate not only from the payers’ viewpoint but also from an administrative perspective (Ibn Qayyim, Zad, 147-48; P.Lam, Vol. 2, 92). Such prescriptions are obviously reminiscent of the “taxation canons” (convenience, simplicity, etc.) of Adam Smith.
d) Prohibition of Interest (Usury, or Riba)

For Ibn Qayyim, as with all Jewish, Christian, and other Islamic scholars of the medieval period, prohibition of interest (viewed synonymously with usury) is absolute, as per the scriptures, some arguments (aside from "fairness") being the possibility of economic exploitation and injustice in transactions. This prohibition is quite clear with respect to the "extra" or "excess" (riba) charged in conventional borrowing-lending transactions. Such transactions involved the payment of interest against time ("open interest," or riba' al-jad) and were quite common among the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs. Islamic scriptures clearly prohibited such practices.

Besides the prohibition of conventional interest, Islamic scholars, based on traditions (hadith) of Prophet Mohammad (SAW), have generally considered that any disguised forms of interest (riba' al-khadra) arising in barter transactions are also forbidden. It might be noted that similar arguments as to what is or is not acceptable "scripturally" were also developed by St. Thomas Aquinas, as by Al-Ghazali 200 years earlier (Pitirim, 15; Dempsey, 139, also see Ghazzali-Idrisi).

First, interest in disguised forms (riba' al-khadra) can arise in two ways: when, as per an hadith attributed to Prophet Mohammad (SAW), there is exchange of "gold for gold," "wheat for wheat," etc., but with differences in quantity or time of delivery; and when one who demanded extra or paid extra has induced the interest. Thus, riba' al-latfa' (interest due to extra payment) is defined as charging extra quantity in barter exchange of the same commodity, as, for example, selling or buying one bushel of wheat against one and one-half bushel of wheat. The point is that, strictly according to the ruling against riba' al-latfa', exchange of dates should be in exactly equal quantity: but exchanging by approximation (as when there is some difference in quality), which is more likely to involve inequality, may be acceptable. And, riba' al-maslab (interest due to late payment or delivery) is defined as barter exchange of certain commodities for the same or similar commodities in which the commodity is handed over instantly while the other is delivered at a later date. Both represent situations of barter that involve exchange of unequal by way of quantity or time of delivery. As precautionary measures, both are forbidden in order to prevent the possibility of exploitation and of wastefully acquiring others' property. However, riba' al-latfa' may be permissible under certain circumstances, e.g., when exchange is between the same types of commodities (metals, such as gold and silver, or foodstuffs, such as wheat and barley).

The Qayyim discusses these arguments in considerable detail. He talks in terms of "open" (riba' al-imy) and "disguised" (riba' al-khadra) interest—the former refers to conventional interest mentioned above, and the latter refers to the aforementioned two types that may arise in barter transactions. As indicated, the latter two types are prohibited as a precautionary measure. However, he concluded that anything prohibited as a precautionary measure may yet be permitted for the sake of a higher social good (al-maslah al-maslima) (Ibn Qayyim, F.T., Vol. 2, 133-42). Thus, he argued that the sale and purchase of gold or silver ornaments with gold or silver (bullion) could be permitted, despite inequality in weight. If such transactions (which imply riba' al-latfa') were prohibited, people would face enormous difficulties (Ibn Qayyim, F.T., Vol. 2, 142). Further, he would allow such exchange, for gold and silver, after their transfer into ornaments, because goods; and then there was no question of interest in the sale of goods for payment (Ibn Qayyim, F.T., 141-42). In other words, inequality is permissible when goods with gold or silver ingredients are exchanged, but not when mixed coins made from gold (dirhams) and silver (dinars) are exchanged.

Commenting further on the two types of "disguised" interest, Ibn Qayyim observes, "If people were allowed to exchange food grains on credit, no one would do so except when it was profitable and they would not sell their goods straightaway, preferring to wait for a profit later on. Thus, the needy would hardly be able to get the food-stuffs of their choice, because so often exchange takes place in barter (i.e., one kind of food grain for another) and cash is not used much especially in the rural areas. So it was wise and justifiable of the Law-giver to prohibit deferred payment in exchange of foods as he has done in the case of precious metals" (Ibn Qayyim, F.T., Vol. 2, 138). Ibn Qayyim's argument deserves careful note. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) prohibited deferred delivery by one of the parties in such cases, though he allowed inequality in the quantity of food grains exchanged, providing they were different in kind (e.g., wheat for barley). Had deferred delivery been allowed, the inequality would, in all likelihood, become a function of the time allowed to the other party, thus nullifying the essential feature of interest: increase in value due to increase in time allowed.

It may be noted that early discussions on interest rate by Arab and Latin scholars, as well as their Greek predecessors, tended to be couched in terms of precious metals and foodstuffs. Ibn Qayyim provided an explanation for this. He stated, "The secret behind the prohibition of unequal exchange of the same kind of precious metals is that..."
their purpose of "usefulness" (zamaniyyah) will be destroyed; and the reason behind the prohibition of unequal exchange of the same kind of goods is that it will destroy their purpose of serving as diets" (Ibn Qayyim, *I‘Ilan*, Vol. 2, 140). That is, foodstuffs represent the most important basic need for mankind. And the two precious metals are meant for the purpose of facilitating exchange of goods and services, including foodstuffs — i.e., in contemporary terms, to serve as medium of exchange. If unequal exchange of some commodities was to be allowed, their natural purpose would be distorted and hoarding would not be encouraged; and, further, these commodities would not be readily available for the purpose for which they were naturally intended (i.e., metallic coins).

3. Market Mechanism and Need for Public-sector Intervention

As a student of Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Qayyim followed and adopted many of the teachings of his master. Especially in his book, *al-Tawq al-Hakimiyah*, he has discussed essentially the same economic issues that Ibn Taimiyah pursued in his book, *Hukab bi al-Islam*. Thus, Ibn Qayyim subscribes to his master’s views as to the operations of the markets through forces of demand and supply, functioning in an orderly manner in which knowledge, honesty, fair play, and freedom of choice represented essential ingredients. Like Ibn Taimiyah, he stresses the importance of profit-seeking for entrepreneurs. Thus, he says, "No jurist will allow public authority to dictate to the sellers and ask them to sell their goods at a certain price without considering whether or not they (the sellers) earn a profit and without considering the cost at which they bought (or produced) those goods. There will be no justice in so doing. Further, no public authority should force sellers to sell their goods at a price which is equal to or below their own purchase (or production) costs" (Ibn Qayyim, *al-Tawq*, 255).

However, if market imperfections prevail, then public-sector intervention may be essential, in the form of an administrative institution called hukab — a term which is not found in the *Holy Quran* but whose functions and goals, however, are attributed to the Islamic scripture. *Hukab* represented an institution through which a number of economic activities, not otherwise conducted in the public interest through the free-play of markets, were supervised and administered by the shahabah, a kind of a grand "auditor-general" (or a "grand ombudsman") (see Ghazanfar-Ishtiaq, 1992, and Holland, 1982, for details).

Following his master, Ibn Qayyim elaborated the idea of the "equivalent" or "just price". For him, as for Ibn Taimiyah as well as the Latin St. Thomas Aquinas, just price ("prevailing price" with al-Ghazali) was the normal (natural, equilibrium) price established by the free-play of markets, i.e., demand and supply forces (Ibn Qayyim, *al-Tawq*, 244-45). If markets lead to deviations from the just price, then public-sector intervention may necessitate price controls and regulations. Similarly, he talked of just compensation, just wage, and just profits. The word "just" reflected not only a positive standard established through market forces, but also a normative gauge that maintained fairness governing relationships in transactions among individuals. It is this new type of commensurative (commensurate, or transactions) justice ("morality of buying and selling" and similar exchanges) that was the main focus of economic analysis emerging from St. Thomas Aquinas and other Latin schoolmen (Gordon, 1975, 158). For the Arab-Islamic scholastics (e.g., Al-Ghazali, 1028-1111; Ibn Qayyim, 1263-1338; and others), this notion of "fairness in market transactions" formed the basis of administrative guidelines and regulation in the part of the authorities to protect the general public from possible exploitation (Ibn Qayyim, *al-Tawq*, 248). As with Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Qayyim’s position is between the two extremes of absolute prohibition and unconditional state regulation of prices. He does not favor price control when competitive markets effectively perform their tasks. However, he recommends price regulations if and when elements of monopoly or other market imperfections emerge, to the detriment of social well-being (Ibn Qayyim, *al-Tawq*, 245, 247). It may be noted, however, that while the notion of commensurate justice is

8. Some Islamic scholars refer to the following verse of the *Holy Qur’an* to support the origin of the hukab institution: "Let there arise out of you a band of people recalling to all that is good, exhorting to what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity" (*Holy Qur’an* Sura 3, verse 149-50). Also there are some supportive traditions (hadiths) of Prophet Muhammad.

9. In the current context, it is useful to present some insights by S. Todd Lawley as to the emergence of the free-market philosophy. Thus, "It is true that the Greeks looked to realize the correct end of the market and, instead, approached efficiently, distribute economic organizations, and valued public order from ethical, judgmental, and administrative perspectives. This approach to economic questions was
implies in Ibn Qayyim’s emphasis on fairness and “morality” of market exchange in individual-to-individual transactions, the goal of distributive justice (“community’s obligations to individuals”), as Gordon calls it (see Gordon, 1975, 158) is to be pursued by other social institutions of public charity, in particular the institution of Zakah.

A few remarks concerning the institution of ibrabah are appropriate. Ibrabah is defined as the exercise of administrative control over members of the society in order to ensure that they observe what is “good” (al ma’ra’uf) and avoid what is “bad” (al munkar). This control is particularly related to those activities which otherwise might not fall under the authority of other public officials (Ibn Qayyim, al Taraj, 236-37). The scope of ibrabah extended beyond economic matters; it also encompassed moral and spiritual concerns, as well as the supervision of social and civil works. Ibn Qayyim, like Ibn Taimiyah, has especially emphasized some economic activities he subjects to the administrative control of ibrabah. Some specific areas included the following: (a) supply and provision of necessities; (b) supervision of industries, trade, and other services (standardization, arbitration, and minimum wages, services of professionals such as physicians, teachers, etc.); and (c) supervision of trading practices (weights and measures, product quality, enforcing laws against hoarding, usury, and other forbidden practices) (Ibn Qayyim, al Taraj, 240-44).

4. Concluding remarks

Based on Ibn Qayyim’s original writings, we have explored some aspects of the economic thought of this well-regarded 14th century Arab-Islamic scholar. Writing several centuries before the dominant era throughout most of recorded Islamic history, with market-oriented economic analysis a very recent development. Indeed, the concept of ibrabah is part of that administrative approach that preceded the medieval Islamic civilization. Later, A Stevenson’s selection included elements of both the ancient and medieval civilizations (Stevenson, 1982, 249). And, according to Stevenson, the medieval concept “to the 14th-century economy is of the same nature as the market mechanism in which the market mechanism is viewed as the only ‘natural’ regulator of economic transactions, a principle which would have been unattainable in the medieval context” (p. 249). Stevenson, referring to the medieval era, it is true that such “market-oriented economy” (as it shaped the economic methodology in which the market mechanism is viewed as the only ‘natural’ regulator of economic transactions) is unattainable in the medieval context (p. 249).

30. See Gordon (1975) and Ibn Taimiyah for more detailed discussion on the origins of the institution of ibrabah, as well as similarities to the Greek agrarian and Roman legal (more comparable to Jewish-Islamic, multidisciplinary) tradition (see also: Weismann, 1982).
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