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Ibn Khaldūn and the Immanence of Judgment



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[W]e know when a nation goes down and never comes back, when a society or a civilization perishes, one condition may always be found. They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what brought them along. . . . They became satisfied with themselves. Unity and common understanding there had been, enough to overcome rot and dissolution, enough to break through their obstacles. But the mockers came. And the deniers were heard. And vision and hope faded. And the custom of greeting became “What’s the use?” And men whose forefathers would go anywhere, holding nothing impossible in the genius of man, joined the mockers and deniers. They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what brought them along.

Carl Sandburg, *Remembrance Rock*

Within the arc of scriptural history, from the world’s creation to the Qur’ānic revelation to the final judgment that brings down the curtain on the drama of which God is the dramaturge, Ibn Khaldūn inscribes multiple smaller arcs, themselves exacting divine judgment through the vehicle of nature—not least, human nature. Aristotle is the doyen of historical cyclicality. But the cycles Ibn Khaldūn traces are plotted not in the revolutions of the heavens but in the character of the human players here on earth as they interact with one another and with the milieu in which they struggle to flourish and survive. The scheme is licensed not by Ptolemy’s astronomy or Aristotle’s *Meteora* but by the Qur’ānic archaeology, which reads the ruins and monuments dotting the desert as portents of the fate of peoples who failed to heed God’s warnings. The motif of judgment is biblical at the root, and Ibn Khaldūn finds a proof-text for it in an Arabic translation of the Torah that he proudly cites as a marker of his wide-ranging erudition. But his vignettes of the character traits that move the action reflect Plato’s portraits of societies in the *Republic* that sketch the personalities of the men who lead them and typify their dominant values. The corresponding figures in Ibn Khaldūn’s account are transformed by his acquaintance with tribal life and the interactions of *ahl al-wabar* and *ahl al-madar*, those who live in homes of hair and those who live in homes of clay (cf. Job 4:19; Song of Songs 1:5). What drives the dialectic Ibn Khaldūn traces is not just the ecological fragility of human life but the moral finitude of human actors, who are judged at every phase by each group’s mix of strengths and weaknesses—and the dynamic of generational forgetting.

Biblical Generations

The Torah motivates a theme of corporate responsibility when Moses hears God call Himself “a merciful and loving God, long suffering and abounding in favor and truth, preserving favor thousandfold, bearing with iniquity, and sin, and missteps, but not excusing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of parents on their children and their children’s children to the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7; cf. Numbers 14:18).

Some further words are found in that caution as given in the Ten Commandments: “visiting the iniquity of parents on their children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me—but showing favor thousandfold to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5–6; Deuteronomy 5:9–10). Given the further specification of those punished in later generations, the rabbinic sources understand God’s warning as singling out only those who persist in their forebears’ vices (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7a, Makkot 24a).

The Torah itself rejects collective punishment: “Parents shall not be executed for their children, nor children for their parents. A person shall be executed only for his own crime” (Deuteronomy 24:16). The prophets, accordingly, inveigh against cynical notions of transgenerational suffering. Jeremiah foresees a day when they shall no longer say, “‘The parents ate sour grapes, so the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ Everyone shall die for his own crime—The one who eats sour grapes is the one whose teeth are set on edge” (31:29–30). Ezekiel is yet more emphatic: “The word of the Lord came to me: What mean you by mouthing this proverb on Israel’s soil, ‘The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, the Lord declares, no longer shall this proverb circulate among you in Israel! Look, all lives, are mine, the father’s life and the child’s life alike are mine. Only the sinner shall die!” (18:1–4).

Saadiyah Gaon (882–942) thus quotes Leviticus 26:39, where younger generations are foreseen suffering *with* their forebears, to back up his contention that offspring face divine punishment only when they persist in their predecessors’ crimes.¹ Maimonides (1138–1204), relying on the context of God’s warning, confines such punishments to cases of idolatry:

The words *visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children*, you see, apply specifically to heathen worship and no other sin—as shown by its saying in the Decalogue, *to the third and fourth generation of Mine enemies* (Exodus 20:5). Only an idolater is called God’s enemy—*For every horror to the LORD, that He hateth [do they perform for their gods]* (Deuteronomy 12:31). Their doom stops at the fourth generation since that is as far as one can see of his posterity—the fourth generation.²

Maimonides cites the possibility of seeing one’s great-grandchildren because he takes the biblical warnings as addressed to the original sinners, whose

punishment may include the painful witness of the fate in store for their progeny—who absorb their forebears' unwholesome ethos.

Homes of Clay and Homes of Hair

Like Exodus and Deuteronomy, Ibn Khaldūn is keenly alive to the impact of a corrupt ethos, although less anxious than the biblical prophets to link communal accountability to personal responsibility. For Heraclitus, character was destiny; for Ibn Khaldūn, the shared character of a community is a ready vehicle of divine judgment. The biblical references to the fate of the third and fourth generation, known to him from an Arabic translation of the Bible,³ resonate for him with the sequence Plato projects in the *Republic* as a dialectic of decline. But the dynamic of the desert and the sown—the lives and ways of nomads and settled groups—are overlaid on the roles enacted by the players in Plato's drama of political change.⁴

In tracing the cycles of history, Ibn Khaldūn's exposition is much like that of Euclid's *Elements*—or the *Elements* of Proclus: each thesis is advanced with its supporting argument and the evidence of case studies. Having laid out the axioms and definitions and the methodological postulates needed in a critical historiography⁵ and painted as a backdrop to the material and spiritual conditions of human life—as if recapping, and enlarging with spiritual and intellectual concerns, the naturalistic groundwork familiar to us in the *Airs, Waters, and Places* of Hippocrates—Ibn Khaldūn describes the development of culture and the emergence of urban civilization.

Nomads and settled people are natural groups, he argues. Each has its way of life and its ways of surviving. But the pastoral life of Bedouins—Arabs, as he calls them, using the term more ethologically than ethnographically—is simpler, more primitive, but also, in a way, more wholesome. It is a life that demands robust and stoic virtues like courage, self-reliance, and mutual aid. Settled folk, by contrast, seem almost to need their luxuries and creature comforts. They rely increasingly on specialization and the division of labor in every aspect of their lives, from the provision of food, clothing, and shelter to the proliferation of sciences and arts, and the provision of basic security in their cities.⁶ There is no romance of the noble savage here. Ibn Khaldūn leaves that to the aficionados of pre-Islamic poetry with its celebrations of horses and hunts, midnight assignations and fond recollections, sweetened by distance, of the hunger, thirst, and hardship of the Bedouin life.⁷ But Ibn Khaldūn, like Frederick Jackson Turner, does think that marginal conditions breed a hardier, and in a way more virtuous, human animal than, say, Aristotle did when he argued that life would not be fully human without the amenities of the polis—schools, baths, and theaters—and the agora, at once marketplace and plaza for debate and deliberation about public affairs, the truest mark of human freedom.

Bedouins, Ibn Khaldūn argues, laying a groundwork for his cyclical theory, are the reservoir of cities and civilization. He invites the reader to

run a practical, personal experiment to verify that claim by tracing one's own ancestry and family history. One soon finds (despite citified pretensions), that a few generations back one's own people, too, were nomads. There is a like challenge to recall and acknowledge one's origins in Deuteronomy, where the Torah commands each Israelite each year to confess formally: "My father was an Aramaean nomad" (26:5). But Ibn Khaldūn has his own intent in reminding his readers of their roots.

Nomads in his argument take the place of the subsistence economy Plato calls most basic in the *Republic* (369–372), before painting a richer life with a more elaborate division of roles. Ibn Khaldūn will describe in loving detail the efflorescence of the civilization he knew best, not least in the mature form that so impressed him in Cairo. But it is in describing the tribal culture of nomads that he introduces his distinctive theme of *‘aṣabiyya*, nerve or sinew, the sense of solidarity that enables families, clans, and tribes to get by in the desert and survive—struggling not only with a harsh environment but with each other. And survive they do, even without the support of the impersonal institutions and offices that enforce the formal laws critical to city life.

Bedouins, he says, still calling them Arabs, are pure of blood. For no one covets the land in which they've learned to survive, and no one yearns to share their lifestyle—although no true Bedouin would readily give it up. Tribes with softer lives may mingle with outsiders, Ibn Khaldūn concedes; and relations of clientship and dependency permit the ingrafting of newcomers whose roots are forgotten over time.⁸ But leadership generally rests with the native born (or those presumed to be such), since notions of a common lineage underlie the sense of mutual trust and responsibility that underwrites the stability of tribal life.⁹ So, not surprisingly, prestigious pedigrees are much sought after in tribes, highly prized and passionately protected. Push needn't always come to shove, but long before it does and often critical in heading off such denouements, just hearing the lineage of a new-met stranger, showcased in his name, is enough to reveal who the allies are who would rise to his aid in case of trouble.

There is a counterpart to some of Plato's thoughts about timocracy in the opening that reputation leaves for discontinuity between prestige and reliability. Leadership, Ibn Khaldūn writes, depends on power in a rather brute sense (*al-ghalab*). But power depends on *‘aṣabiyya*, a sense of solidarity, the knowledge that there are those prepared to act on their sense of belonging—and who can count on a prudent but unflinching leader who knows how to manage and muster that sense of mutuality, rendering it effectual. In tribal life, where such effectiveness is critical, authority will lodge in well-tried lineages—but the testing is continual. In city life, by contrast, a long pedigree may bestow a false sense of worth, the message of a name insulated from the trials that desert life imposes.

Israelites, Ibn Khaldūn charges, are misled about this, relying on the past glories of their legacy of prophets, although the prophecy is long departed

that once imparted power (by uniting their ancestors in service to a shared ideal). Averroes, in the *Rhetoric*, Ibn Khaldūn argues, falls prey to a similar misapprehension, linking prestige to an ancient city lineage (like his own, as the scion of many generations of *qāḍīs* in Cordova, we add): “I’d like to know,” Ibn Khaldūn asks, “how it is that long residence in a town can help one if he does not belong to a group that makes him feared and leads others to obey him.” If rhetoric regards persuasion, he argues, it must speak to those who matter. Averroes, as a city dweller, was naive about what moves minds.¹⁰ We get a taste here of Ibn Khaldūn’s sense of Realpolitik and what he means in calling *‘aṣabiyya* the nerve of politics. Descent means belonging, and that confers power, but only when one’s group is deemed a force to reckon with.

Rise and Fall

We turn now to our central focus, Ibn Khaldūn’s thesis that prestige, at best, lasts just four generations—and its corollary, that no dynasty can well endure beyond that. Taking his text from Plato, Ibn Khaldūn opens his argument with a generalization rooted in scripture and in the physics of the Greek philosophers. The Qur’ān pronounces tellingly: “*All things perish but His face*” (28:88), and Ibn Khaldūn underwrites that claim naturalistically by spelling out the generalization: all things in this world must decay and perish—minerals, plants, and animals, including man, “as one can see with one’s own eyes.” And it is not only substances that cannot last. It is the same with sciences and arts and all the conditions affecting things in this world. Prestige itself is born and grows and dies.¹¹

Nobility comes to birth among outsiders, marginal people, who must struggle for any good they get.¹² It runs through its life cycle swiftly: the founder of a house knows what his labors cost him and holds fast to the qualities that won and bolster his prestige. His son has learned from him, but by study, not experience—thus, he cannot measure up. The grandson must rely on tradition and imitation. His knowledge of the critical ways and tactics of survival is like rote learning: formulaic, even dogmatic, lacking the freshness of independent judgment. So, it is inevitably inferior to what his father learned by example and his grandfather by bitter but vivid personal experience. By the fourth generation the scion of a noble house “has lost the qualities that preserved the edifice of their glory.” Old powers fade and new arise as the bonds of leadership lose their elasticity and the markers that are also its means lose their hold. For, in the dynamics of power, perception really is reality.

Treating the natural laws of political and social association as a clear expression of God’s plan, Ibn Khaldūn caps the sequence he discerns with lines from the Qur’ān attesting to its constancy and justice: “*If He so will He causes them to vanish and advances something new*” (14:19–20,

35:16–17).¹³ God's judgment strikes by natural means: the energies of challengers and usurpers are matched against the hubris of the unworthy.

The four generations, then: the builder, his son and ally, the mimic, and the eroder. Muḥammad recognized the pattern in the *Ḥadīth*, seeing it in the sequence from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and then Joseph. It is here that Ibn Khaldūn quotes from the Torah, his Arabic text, as De Slane showed, following the Vulgate: "God, your Lord, is powerful and jealous, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:5).¹⁴ He draws further examples from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. The cases he cites from its accounts of pre-Islamic times involve Arab houses that reached not dissolution but a zenith in the fourth generation. But his inference, evidently, is that this was a peak; all was decline thereafter. What glittered at the summit was prestige not power. For, in fact, all the chieftains named were vassals of the Lakhmid Arab Nu'mān, a Nestorian Christian, under the suzerainty of the Persian Khusraw.

The dialectic of decline, as Ibn Khaldūn describes it, suggests an underlying theme of his: the conflict of virtues. The elaboration of cultural institutions fosters refinement but undercuts the spirit that laid the rude foundations for the edifice in which a more civilized but also more effete generation flourishes. So the expectation remains: even with the tribal vassals mentioned in the *Aghānī*, the fourth generation was ripe fruit ready to fall. Ibn Khaldūn's inference, then, even from these cases, recaps his thesis: "prestige lasts at best four generations." Ever-new powers rise. But the logic and dynamic of tragedy, implicit in God's plan, reflect human moral finitude: No virtues are comprehensive. The rise of urban and urbane virtues is the inevitable demise of the virtues of the desert.

Declining Generations

It was Plato who cast political decline as a drama of fathers and sons. He cannot admit that the good society projected in the *Republic* will fail through any fault in its plan. For that plan is an ideal, secured, like Rawls' ideal state, by the postulates defining it. But living human beings are fallible, and so are human institutions. The unforgiving laws of history take hold, in Plato's case, when the code is broken that preserved the anonymity of offspring, and family prestige displaces merit in the choice of rulers. Reputation now eclipses judgment, leading to the rise of the timocratic man, as Plato calls him, a pallid, twisted image of his father, "contentious and covetous of honor" (545a), stingy, but "prodigal of others' wealth," "self-willed and lacking in culture," harsh with his slaves but docile with the freeborn, "and eager for office and honor"—a veritable authoritarian personality.¹⁵ Proud of his exploits in war, or at least in military training and discipline, not to mention the prowess he displays in the more controlled environments of athletics and the hunt, he disdains wealth in his youth, but

grows avid for it as his powers wane. Spoiled early on by his mother and with little reverence for the plain virtues of his father, he is ruled, in the end, not by reason but by spirit and ambition (545–550).

His successor substitutes wealth for honor in the hierarchy of values. Self-assertion gives way to its seeming means of attainment, which now becomes an end sought for its own sake. The oligarchic man, ruled by avarice, is thrifty and hard-working, squalid and money-grubbing, an uncultured hoarder, free with others' resources, but conflicted—not yet utterly dissolute (551, 553–554).

As for democracy, Plato vividly pictures its rise: when rulers and ruled are thrown together on the road, on the march, in some festival or campaign, or as shipmates or comrades in arms, he has Socrates observe, the poor are not so readily scorned by the rich—“a lean, sinewy, sunburned pauper is stationed in battle beside a rich man bred in the shade and burdened with superfluous flesh, and sees him panting and breathless—do you not suppose he will think that such fellows keep their wealth by the cowardice of the poor. . . ?” (556). The democratic man, “bred in the illiberal and niggardly fashion” of his grasping father, “gets a taste of the honey of the drones and associates with fierce and cunning creatures who know how to purvey pleasures of every kind. . . . [T]here, you must conceive, is the beginning of the transformation of the oligarchy in his soul into democracy” (559d).

Once the poor man's desires suborn his choices, “he returns to those lotus-eaters and without disguise lives openly with them.” He soon calls reverence and awe “folly,” temperance “effeminacy,” moderation “rusticity.” Insolence, anarchy, prodigality, and shamelessness take hold and grow “resplendent” (560). The democratic man indulges the whim of the day—now wine, now music, now diet and exercise, now philosophy, now politics. He may admire the military or the well-to-do, but such values must be weighed against the pride he takes in his freedom and his relish in his lack of discipline—readily confused with liberty: “he is a manifold man, stuffed with the most excellent differences” and, like the city he inhabits, “containing within himself the greatest number of patterns of constitutions and qualities” (561).

Seduced by his whims and pleasures, the democratic man little realizes that he treads a cliff edge. For tyranny is the outgrowth of democracy. Oligarchy gives birth to democracy—“the insatiate lust for wealth,” which was its *raison d'être*, is “the cause of its undoing.” In the same way, lust for liberty hamstring democracy: “drinking too deep of that unmixed wine” turns democracy toward anarchy. Fathers emulate their children, teachers fear and fawn upon their pupils, the old attune themselves to the young, full of pleasantry and graciousness, fearing to seem disagreeable. Anyone who had not lived through it would hardly believe how even beasts take on unwonted freedoms in a democratic city, the citizens grown so sensitive that they chafe at the least suggestion of subordination. In the end they ignore

and flout the laws. Anarchy and license plant “the fine and vigorous root from which tyranny grows” (562–563).

Freedom gives way to slavery, Plato argues, when democracy breeds demagogues with a violent lust for the authority that liberty and equality denied them. Amidst the class warfare and mutual exploitation typical in a society where (in Ralph Barton Perry’s words) value is the object of any interest, someone presents himself as the people’s champion. Posing as a protector and leading a thuggish faction, he suppresses rivals and soon demands a bodyguard, lest the state and the movement he muddles with it fall to alien or internal parasites or predators. Tightly clutching the tools of coercion—and, we might add, the sources of information and education—he becomes “a perfect and finished tyrant.” Ever seeking pretexts against those who might topple him, purging any potential rival or champion of liberty, he succumbs to a paranoia bred by his very means of attaining and sustaining his astounding but delusive authority (565–568). History, since Plato’s time, has added many dozens of exemplars of this political and psychological dynamic to those that Plato knew—in one case, at Syracuse, by nearly fatal, personal experience.

Ibn Khaldūn recasts this narrative in a new setting, lacking only the Philosopher King. Under the heading “Prestige lasts at best four generations in a single lineage,” he writes:

In the world composed of the elements, all things—every reality and state of affairs—comes and goes. Everything that arises—mineral, plant, and animal, human and non-human—has a start and a finish, as is plain to see. So do the phenomena dependent on them, not least in the human case: Sciences rise and disappear; so do arts and industries, and the like. Prestige is one such phenomenon in the human case. It arises and inevitably declines. No human being has an unbroken pedigree running back to Adam—except the Prophet, peace be upon him, a special act of grace guarding his nobility.

Nobility always begins, as they say, on the outside, excluded from leadership and distinction, humble, abject, and lowly. Like everything that comes to be, it stems from its opposite. But it ends within four generations. The one who built up a family’s glory knows what it cost to build it and preserves the means that won and sustain it. His son is close to his father and has heard all this from him. But he cannot measure up. Hearing is not the same as experience. By the third generation an heir is walking in another’s footsteps, following by rote. Like any imitator he cannot match the original. The fourth falls short in every way. He’s lost the qualities that sustained the edifice, despises them, in fact, little imagining that it was built by effort and application, fancying it was his family’s due from the start, simply for their birth, not won by strenuous cooperation. He sees how people respect him but does not know where that came from or what it’s based on. He assumes it’s all about his pedigree.

He avoids the folk of his *‘aṣabiyya* thinking himself their superior, confident of their support since he was raised to expect it and has no idea of the qualities

that command such loyalty—tact and fellow feeling. He looks down on these comrades; and they, in turn, despise and scorn him. Soon they look to someone else, from another branch, still respecting their *‘aṣabiyya*, as I’ve said, but loyal now to someone they trust will show the qualities they prize. So the new branch thrives, and the old one withers.¹⁶

Kamal Mirawdeli helps us see the root of the ambivalence that Plato, too, detected in hereditary leaders—not just in tribes but among dynasts, as their hold on power weakens and authority begins to slip from their hands: “Egoism replaces common cause and common sense. . . . However, the past still lives in their memory as an illusory reality”—then, quoting Ibn Khaldūn’s text: “They live in hope that the conditions that existed in the first generation may come back, or they live under the illusion that those conditions still exist.”¹⁷

The fourth-generation scion of a noble house, arrogant and self-deceiving, has learned to despise the qualities that brought his ancestors to power. He fails to see that the nobility he basks in is not the warrant of the favor he enjoys but a prize won by harsh endeavor, risk, and sacrifice long distant from the life he takes for granted. His wealth and honor, even the security that guards his life, his things, and the peace in which he cultivates his favored pursuits, were hard won and are all too easily lost. The embers of prestige may still glow, if stirred, but what was won by his forebears will cool and fade with his own moral dissolution. He cannot see how critical it is for him to show deference to those whose strength anchors any repute still clinging to his name.

The pattern is general, Ibn Khaldūn argues, in monarchies as well as tribes, and any group whose energies depend on loyalty and spirit. It is general enough that Ernest Gellner, studying the same regions that were Ibn Khaldūn’s base of operations and source of his grasp of tribal, civic, and imperial dynamics, convincingly applied to modern and modernizing populations theories built from the master’s categories: group solidarity and the ecological and economic groundings of human lives.¹⁸ That is not at all surprising, given the range of Ibn Khaldūn’s experience, his anthropological penetration, and the breadth of generality in his ideas.

History’s Lesson

In keeping with the humanistic tradition of predecessors like Mas‘ūdī and Miskawayh, Ibn Khaldūn calls his history *‘Ibār*, The Lesson. What does he take the lesson of history to be?

Aziz al-Azmeh reads the cycle Ibn Khaldūn describes in metaphysical, almost logical terms, as if to locate its necessity in the nature of things:

The flow between beduinity and urban life . . . is totally dependent upon its beginning, just as a conclusion is dependent upon its premise. And indeed

urban life and its inevitable atrophy is very much the conclusion of beduinism. It concludes it in the sense of ending it in precisely the manner that its nature requires. The natural movement whereby beduinism passes through the medium of the state and engenders urban civilization is one in which a beginning is consummated. . . . The metaphysic of decline—one commentator has very aptly called the *Muqaddima* “an aetiology of decline”—which concretized the movement of civilization to its inevitable doom is one in which the metaphysic of nature takes on a form which is very homologous to that of a logical process, one in which the end is fully contained in the beginning.¹⁹

Aziz al-Azmeh aptly describes here the dynamic of social change that Ibn Khaldūn’s theory captures. But the determinism of his language needs some qualification. To press Ibn Khaldūn’s idea of historical necessity in the direction of logic yields rather too strong a version of necessity. One can speak of a logic of change here only if one understands the dynamic Ibn Khaldūn describes by positing as *givens* the character traits and dispositions he observes. Similarly, to speak of the changes of human regimes in terms of metaphysical necessity is too strong and potentially misleading. For Ibn Khaldūn does not presume a uniform human nature at the base of the dynamic he describes. Rather, he anticipates the culture-personality approach of twentieth-century anthropologists, forecast in Plato’s personality sketches of the timocratic, oligarchical, democratic, and tyrannical man. Since personalities are the determinants in Ibn Khaldūn’s analysis, and since personalities, by his account, vary with the circumstances—environmental and generational—one does not find a uniform human condition as the determinant of the historical laws Ibn Khaldūn means to describe. All his stress is on human nature *contextualized*. The model becomes metaphysical only at its most general, in terms of universals like human finitude and need.

Decline, for Ibn Khaldūn, moreover, is only half the story, of course. For the fall of cities is also the rise of new dynasties, and the rise of dynasties is the decline of tribal virtues. In neither case do the cycles of history yield steady progress. City life advances the sciences and promotes proliferation of the arts. But the efflorescence of culture and the rise of specialization bring (not alienation, as in Marx, but) a corresponding decline, through the gradual and inexorable demise of self-reliance and the sturdy *‘aṣabiyya* that gave a house political heft.

Where democracy in Plato’s model gives way to anarchy and the rise of a demagogue, Ibn Khaldūn sets the Bedu in the place of Plato’s Demos. A new headman or strongman seems inevitable. There is no posit of a philosopher king but just a natural leader, a personality of the sort that Ibn Khaldūn knew all too well among the shaykhs he worked with, the amīrs he served, and Tamberlane, whom he met and parlayed with and fed strategic information about the Maghreb at the height of the devastating Mongol siege of Damascus. A shaykh of the sort that Ibn Khaldūn knew was no mere figurehead but a leader capable of marshaling *‘aṣabiyya* and making it a

force to be feared. And the leaders he encountered in person or in the pages of the histories he read and wrote, who rose above tribal squabbles and seized principalities to become amīrs, were men capable of seizing hold and riding or directing the sublimated *‘aṣabiyya* of a larger group and uniting more than merely tribal energies under the banner of a triumphalist spiritual ideal—as, say, the Almohades had done.

Ibn Khaldūn was no reformer. He loved the world he wrote of, both its tribal powers and the plashing fountains, learned *diwāns*, and tiled courtyards, where power took on quite a different meaning than the sense it bore in the ungoverned reaches that were tribal domains. But, although he loved the world he knew so well, he did not love it blindly. His achievement rests on his efforts to understand it, not to change it. He never gave up his youthful hopes for power, if not in the highest seat, then close by. But the power he won in fact was intellectual, not political, and it came to him through his ability to trace the rise of power, from its infancy among the adullamites of the desert to its efflorescence and decline. It cannot have failed to make him smile to find the embryo of power where least expected, in older, hardened faces probing each others’ eyes around a desert campfire, and to watch with a rueful sense of inevitability its senescence in the young and fresh, naive and spoiled scion of a great house.

‘Aṣabiyya, as the nerve of politics for Ibn Khaldūn, in a way takes the place that *philia* had held in Aristotle’s politics. “Only through *‘aṣabiyya*,” he writes, “is any claim enforced.”²⁰ *‘Aṣabiyya* preserves the elements of empathy and fellow feeling that Aristotle counted on as the cement of social order and civic vitality. But *‘aṣabiyya* is aggressive. The cooperation it evokes is protective and indeed expansive, quite unlike the constructive collaboration on which Plato built his politics, or the consultative, deliberative way of public life that was the soul of Aristotle’s polity of free men. Implicitly Ibn Khaldūn’s model charges Plato with too hopeful an idea of politics, too vested in the assumption that the foundation of social cooperation is constructive rather than defensive or aggressive. Plato had witnessed *stasis* and survived it. But he did not draw the conclusion Hobbes would read in the events Thucydides described and did not deem inevitable. Plato, too, knew tyranny, far better than most. But he still saw the core political motive, at its most elemental, in constructive terms. And the only state he built to replace the one he knew was an ideal.

Aristotle, like Plato, might be charged, implicitly, from the perspectives of Ibn Khaldūn’s alternative, with too rosy a view of politics, still focused on the fruits of civic life, even as his sometime pupil and lifelong patron, Alexander, profoundly altered the political landscape of the known world by his conquering, colonizing energies, displacing Aristotle’s deliberative and localizing ideal of the polis (an archaizing fiction long before Aristotle was born), to build a short-lived but highly hegemonical dictatorship and an empire on a scale unimagined by Aristotle, the champion of the

self-contained, self-sufficient polis. Successor states like those of the Ptolemys, Attalids, and Seleucids, even as Alexander's empire fissured and its pieces fell to Rome, did not relinquish Alexander's hopes of world empire. The ideal of a state far larger than a single city (and its necessary truck gardens, vineyards, orchards, and fields) was not foreign in the least to Muslim dynasts like Maḥmūd of Ghaznā or Bābūr. And Alexander's dream survived, not just among those loyal to the dynast or merely in the fairy-tale Alexander romance of Arabic and Persian legend, but in visions of a polyglot imperium to rival and replace the ancient Iranian empire the Greeks had so abhorred for its dehumanizing hierarchy and scale.²¹

Yet even under the Islamic *umma*, where regnant Islamic states replaced the *pax Romana* with dreams of a new polyglot and pacific imperium,²² older myths of an ideal state remained—a consultative tribal body, led by devout or even inspired men.²³ That vision still survives, projected onto the past or into the apocalyptic future by mahdist rebels and revolutionists, avatars of the makers of the Abbasid and Fatimid revolutions. But in Ibn Khaldūn's world the political ideals of Plato and of Aristotle survived as well. Averroes knew Plato's *Republic*, cared about it deeply enough to paraphrase it fully, and applied its lessons to Islamic historical experience, both in the days of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs" and in the more recent times of the Almoravids, who, as he argues, aimed for virtue but ended in corruption. Al-Fārābī, long before, had kept alive the ideal of a city governed and guided under sound (neoplatonizing) principles. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', writing in a mirror-for-princes mode, imagined the king of the bees flying to the court of the King of the Jinn, to represent his myriad subjects, making the journey in person, "out of tender feelings of compassion and concern" for them, lest "some harm, ill or misfortune" befall them. Ya'sūb, the bee monarch, serves his subjects in gratitude for God's gifts. Governance in his idealized society is not *of* or *by* his people, but it is clearly *for* them.²⁴

Al-Fārābī, echoing biblical as well as philosophical models, sharply distinguishes the virtuous from the barbarous or ignorant (*jāhila*) city, and those in turn from the errant or iniquitous (*fāsiqa*) city—or state, for al-Fārābī has dropped the Platonic and Aristotelian absolute privileging of the polis.²⁵ The ruler of the virtuous state, besides having a native talent for leadership, must be a man who has fulfilled the human potential for understanding. His imagination, moreover, must be attuned to the intellectual outpourings his reason receives from the Active Intellect (*Arā'* 240–241). Practical and speculative reason must be in harmony in his mind (*Arā'* 244–245), allowing him to understand not only what true felicity is but how it is to be attained, both for himself and for those he governs. And he must be an eloquent and effective speaker, able to rouse his subjects' imaginations and lead them toward felicity (*Arā'* 244–247). He will be abstemious and resolute, proud of spirit, and a lover of learning as well as justice (*Arā'* 248–249).

The people of the ignorant or barbarous state have no idea of true felicity. They prize only bodily health and ease, pursuit of pleasure and caprice, wealth and honor. The list, of course, reflects Plato's table of the interests of the timocratic, oligarchic, and democratic figures. Lacking the ruling virtue of wisdom, ignorant states diverge in their prevailing interests: There are sensuous states, where pleasure is the *raison d'être*; power states, which live to dominate others; and democratic states, focused on liberty, falsely conceived as absence of constraint. The rulers of these states serve the values dominant in the ethos of their people, which they exemplify, model, and notionally lead. But their "rule" is not only passive, it is also selfish. Unlike Ya'sūb, they do not rule to serve their subjects' interests, real or even imagined (*Arā'* 254–257).

As for the errant state, here there is knowledge of the true nature of felicity, but it is scorned. The people have abandoned the practices conducive to true happiness. The ethos has been knowingly corrupted, and mores take the path of the ignorant state. True beliefs may yet persist, at least in their symbolic forms. But a false prophet has perverted the message that might have been drawn from them and that might have drawn the populace in turn toward genuine felicity. So the lives of the people are corrupt (*Arā'* 258–259).

In the interest of the realism that motivates his critical approach to history and the writing of history, Ibn Khaldūn has dropped the philosophers' quest for the ideal monarch. His tribal or post-tribal strongman serves his appetites and passions and, if effective, caters to those of his followers and dependents. The expansive drive of *'aṣabiyya* does not pursue the higher values that al-Fārābī, like Plato, expects reason to achieve—and that Miskawayh, for one, expects the study of history, philosophy, and poetry of the right sort to cultivate and refine.²⁶ The spirit voiced in a combative Bedouin motto is salient here: "I against my brothers; I and my brothers against my cousins; I and our cousins and brothers against our village; our village against the world!" Courage has not been forgotten, but wisdom and justice have shifted their sense and become merely instrumental, and temperance itself is now an instrument of the will to power. It is no longer the discipline enabling wisdom to guide the work and play of all the cardinal virtues. Generosity, loyalty, and reliability are the prime tribal virtues. Religious symbols can greatly augment the effectiveness of these virtues. But brutality may also help a rising power win the day. And the prize is not felicity as Plato, Aristotle, or al-Fārābī conceive it but the worldly goods that Bedouins naturally covet and the authority that kingdoms seek, defend, and hold while they may, a dominance won at heavy moral and material cost and bearing within it the seeds not only of civilization but of ever-new corruption, including varieties of corruption undreamed of and unfeasible in the desert's bare and hostile milieu.

Locating Ibn Khaldūn's Realism

Early on in the *Muqaddima* Ibn Khaldūn quotes a maxim from a legendary speech addressed to Bahrām in a fable retold by al-Mas'ūdī, informing the king that monarchy depends on law and obedience to God—which in turn depend on monarchy. Monarchy itself needs men, and men need holdings, which must be worked. That, in turn, depends on justice, meaning due balance and equity among men, to be overseen by God's appointed ruler.²⁷ The speech sketches an Iranian model of statecraft, with the *dihqān* or land owner at its heart, and justice, instrumental but central, its mechanism. As if to specify the nuts and bolts and set the machine in motion, Ibn Khaldūn follows up with another story drawn from Mas'ūdī, ascribing to Anūshirwān the thought that monarchy depends on an army, and thus on money—therefore, on taxes, which again depend on agriculture. Here, too, justice is justified, prudentially: it is critical that cultivation be stably sustained, and that requires sound administration, able appointees, and judicious oversight by the ruler, to ensure that appointees are well qualified in the requisite skills and in discipline and loyalty.²⁸

The detailed workings of a society are of critical import to Ibn Khaldūn, from the ecology of pastoral nomadism to the arts and sciences and even the superstitions of urban populations. The structure—and equity—of the tax system that binds the city to the sown are critical links in the societies Ibn Khaldūn studies and, correspondingly, in his theory. Perhaps the best known idea of Ibn Khaldūn's among policy pundits today, for that reason, is the idea Arthur Laffer once supposedly sketched on a napkin while at dinner in Washington with Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. The heart of the idea: that extortionate taxation suppresses production—at least that portion of production that takes place in the daylight and is visible to tax gatherers. Laffer credits an early version of the idea to Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, which he quotes: "It should be known that at the beginning of a dynasty, taxation yields a large revenue from small assessments. At the end of a dynasty, taxation yields a small revenue from large assessments."²⁹ But the core idea is much older. A policy based on the recognition that moderate and fairly collected taxes will enhance revenues, as compared with extortionate, punitive, or uneven exaction, was implemented with some success by Miskawayh (ca. 930–ca. 1030) and is rooted, like so many sound ideas, in the argument of Plato's *Republic* (567a).³⁰

Studies of Ibn Khaldūn tend to the celebratory—not an unhappy afterlife for a penetrating and original thinker, but one that bears the risk in Ibn Khaldūn's case (at least for the celebrant) of over-stressing the claim that his achievement is neglected. In fact, there is quite a literature on Ibn Khaldūn, and his work has been mined and appropriated at least since the days of Montesquieu.³¹ Appreciated by Toynbee and admired by theorists East and West, Ibn Khaldūn is at risk less of neglect than of Spinoza's fate: being

recast in the image of every reader's wishes. It is not terrible to see him called the founder of sociology, anthropology, or even economics. Ibn Khaldūn knew, after all, that he was founding a new science. He thought of it as the science of culture and civilization, and that isn't bad. But, despite his admirers, his new science had no direct offspring of its own, only later admirers and practitioners of various extractive industries. What is embarrassing is the projection of readers' wishes onto Ibn Khaldūn's text. So he gets made a positivist or a poster child of the creative genius of the civilization that gave him birth—as if he were somehow typical rather than a standout, the same fallacy that wants to credit Socrates to the Athens that condemned and executed him.

Aziz Al-Azmeh writes that the two main strands in reading Ibn Khaldūn project onto his image the polarity many an author brings to many a medieval text: between reason and revelation, hoping to make him the champion of the side they favor in what they (like Andrew Dickson White) picture as a world-historical struggle between Faith and Reason. Muhsin Mahdi advances as the champion of Reason here. My teacher, Sir Hamilton Gibb, whom Mahdi succeeded in Gibb's chair at Harvard, after a long, painful, and fruitless search, steps forward as the champion of Faith. Responding to E.I.J. Rosenthal's complaint that Ibn Khaldūn, as if anticipating Machiavelli, "passes no judgments of value and prefers no form of state over another," and addressing the similar, if more congratulatory, appraisal of Kamil Ayad, that Ibn Khaldūn "refrains *on principle* from judgments of value," Gibb rightly reminds us that ultimate moral judgments, for Ibn Khaldūn, are not so much pronounced by historians as executed by God—through the inexorable work of history. Gibb calls to witness Ibn Khaldūn himself to bear him out; Ibn Khaldūn says:

The state whose law is based upon violence and superior force and giving full play to the irascible nature is tyranny and injustice and in the eyes of the law blameworthy, a judgment in which also political wisdom concurs. Further, the state whose law is based upon rational government and its principles without the authority of the *Sharia* is likewise blameworthy, since it is the product of speculation without the light of God . . . and the principles of rational government aim solely at worldly interests.³²

Al-Fārābī himself might have made the point. Indeed he did, in differentiating self-serving polities from those that seek the common good. But Ibn Khaldūn, in adopting the point, has raised the reader's gaze beyond the mere felicity that a selfless leader seeks for all his people, in al-Fārābī's account, to focus on the higher goals toward which Ibn Khaldūn gestures in the name of the *Shari'a*. Gibb grants that, pace Mahdi, Ibn Khaldūn was no pure idealist. He was no Plato, as Gibb's friend and my teacher, Richard Walzer, used to say. It is doubtful, given Ibn Khaldūn's tergiversations throughout his life, and not just in his early years, that he was ever seeking

political reform through the leaders and patrons he befriended and so frequently betrayed (it was always *their* fault, as Mahdi reads the record). A fortiori none of those leaders was a Mahdi or a Platonic Guardian.

Both Gibb and Mahdi were far too deeply immersed in Ibn Khaldūn's formidable text to oversimplify. Mahdi knows well and lucidly explains how Ibn Khaldūn's search for the moving principles of a scientific science of society "resulted in narrowing the horizon of science to what actually exists"—and therefore including in his model of history only those "ends which are found to be actually pursued by most societies or which are deemed easy to realize."³³ Ibn Khaldūn, he argues,

believed that the knowledge of the actual state of society demands an empirical method. . . . But he was not an empiricist. . . . He believed that the understanding of the origins and various stages of social life could explain the existential character of certain habits and conventions and even certain opinions. But he was not a historicist. . . . He believed that physical, geographic, biological, psychological, and social forces determine, as conditions or by compulsion, the development and character of culture. But he was not a determinist. . . . He believed that disciplined reflection could reveal certain tendencies and regularities in social development. But he was not a positivist. . . . He believed that the science of culture was, ultimately, a practical science. But he was not a pragmatist. He did not believe that success is the sole criterion of truth. . . . He believed in the necessity of knowing what man and society really are. . . . But he did not believe that such knowledge is possible without "value judgment," or without knowing the true end of man and society. . . .³⁴

This is a subtle and nuanced appraisal. And I believe it is mostly true. But Mahdi, clinging to Ibn Khaldūn's self-presentation, reads him as a disappointed reformer, imbued with the hope that the new, clearly secular science he framed from the materials of his own experience, observation, conversation, and vast learning, would lay the foundations for the reformation of the society he knew and loved. The evidence for that inference is thin on the ground and deeply invested in reading into Ibn Khaldūn's life and work the values of the philosophers he learned from, whose Platonizing ideals were part fantasy, part hope, and part panegyric of the patrons on whose protection they depended.³⁵ It is also an appraisal more invested in admiration for a genuinely great thinker than in recognition that the cyclicity at the heart of Ibn Khaldūn's theory of history projects tragedy as the inexorable outcome of human finitude and the incompatibility with one another of the virtues of tribal and city folk and their leaders.

Gibb, for his part, knows well that Ibn Khaldūn "never puts forward suggestions for the reform of the institutions which he describes so minutely, nor considers the possibility that they might be modified as a result of human effort and thought, but accepts the facts as they are and presents the cycle of states and dynasties as an inevitable and almost mechanical

process.”³⁶ All the same, he finds a higher ideal in Ibn Khaldūn’s gaze than mere discovery of historical realia. He finds a religious lesson:

[I]t is impossible to avoid the impression that Ibn Khaldūn, besides setting out to analyze the evolution of the state, was, like the other Muslim jurists of his time, concerned with the problem of reconciling the ideal demands of the *Sharia* with the facts of history. The careful reader will note how he drives home the lesson, over and over again, that the course of history is what it is because of the infraction of the *Sharia* by the sin of pride, the sin of luxury, the sin of greed. Even in economic life it is only when the ordinances of the *Sharia* are observed that prosperity follows. Since mankind will not follow the *Sharia* it is condemned to an unending cycle of rise and fall, conditioned by the “natural” and inevitable consequences of the predominance of its animal instincts. In this sense Ibn Khaldūn may be a “pessimist” or “determinist” but his pessimism has a moral and religious, not a sociological basis.³⁷

Without its moral side the mechanics of history in Ibn Khaldūn’s account would seem far too lifeless to represent his full-blooded narratives. Even in the metaphysical terms Al-Azmeh invokes, so bloodless an account rings too hollow to represent Ibn Khaldūn’s full-bodied theory. Granted, one cannot help but notice a bit of Gibb’s Scottish upbringing peeking from behind the lace curtains of his apologetic. But the dichotomy³⁸ Al-Azmeh pinions, which both Mahdi and Gibb presume, misses the synthesis of reason and faith that is the hallmark of all the greatest of the medieval thinkers. It thus misses what is most distinctive in Ibn Khaldūn’s vision of history: the judgments wreaked upon every human venture are not moral and religious *rather than* social and political. The dying falls of human history are inexorable precisely because they are inevitable consequences of humankind’s social nature. They are the very judgments marked in the Qur’ānic archaeology, where Muḥammad views the ruins of vanished cities and assays their fate as consequent upon the failure of their people to heed the warnings given by God’s monishers. What Ibn Khaldūn has supplied is the mechanism, rooted in human nature and the dynamics of human culture, by which that sentence is exacted: one can see in the downfall of every worldly state the inevitable sentence of divine judgment.

Ibn Khaldūn may be a realist. And Mahdi is right that he is not a positivist or a pragmatist. As I argued years ago,³⁹ he sees divine judgment in the rise and fall of every human power, the interplay of natural human strengths and weaknesses working out, on the dynamic stage of history, the inevitable partiality of the human condition, as if to pronounce in historic terms the judgment that every human virtue brings with it its corresponding weakness: the tragedies of history result not from internal contradictions but from the simple facts of human moral, natural, and cultural finitude.

Notes

- 1 – At Job 21:19; see Saadiyah Ben Joseph al-Fayyūmī, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. from the Arabic by L. E. Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 301.
- 2 – Moses Maimonides, *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, ed. with French translation by Salomon Munk, as *Le Guide des Égarés* (Paris, 1856-1866; repr. Osnabrück: Zeller, 1964), 3 volumes. Translations here are from the new translation/commentary by L. E. Goodman and Phillip Lieberman as *The Guide to the Perplexed* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming), and cited by Part and Chapter, with references to Munk's critical edition by volume and page. Here: I 54, ed. Munk, 1.66b.
- 3 – See Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 139–155. Ibn Khaldūn repeatedly tells of reading an Arabic version of the Hebrew Bible (*Tawrāt*). He seems to have been the first Muslim writer to have read such a text rather than have its contents relayed to him by an informant. He reads critically, aided by information culled from Christian historians: Orosius (ca. 375–at least 418), who helped Augustine with his vast project of *The City of God*; Eutychius (Sa'īd ibn Biṭrīq in Arabic, d. 940); Ibn al-'Amīd (the Coptic Chronicler also known as Jirjīs al-Makīn, d. 1273); Ibn al-Rāhib (another Copt, also called Abū Shākir Buṭrus, d. 1282); and Josippon, whose work was regularly taken by medieval readers to have been written by Josephus.
- 4 – Lenn E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), chap. 7; Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 204–211.
- 5 – As Stephen Dale points out, the Arabic word *Muqaddima*, meaning introduction, given as the title of the great work of theory that opens Ibn Khaldūn's world history, the *'Ibār*, is also the standard word for the premise of an argument (Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh: Ibn Khaldūn and the Science of Man* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015], pp. 23–24). It was the translation into Arabic of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, meant to serve as a portal to the Aristotelian corpus, that gave birth to the Arabic genre of *introductions* to a subject. An introduction, understandably, would define key terms and lay out key assumptions.
- 6 – Cf. Plato, *Republic* IV 422a, where wealth and poverty are the great enemies of every craft, and not least of warfare, "For the one brings luxury and sloth; the other, meanness and slipshod work. But both foster conflict."

- 7 – See Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, pp. 50–56.
- 8 – *Muqaddimah* 2.10; cf. Plato on the destructive effects of loss of the anonymity code. Ibn Khaldūn, in effect, reverses Plato’s polarities here: since prestige anchors authority, birth matters in a tribal society—but not in any absolute way. Confusion of pedigrees is a fact of life; and the imprecision can, in fact, strengthen ‘*aṣabiyya* by the infusion of new blood, a counterpart to the social mobility that Plato’s model promotes.
- 9 – Ibn Khaldūn did not know, of course, that Stalin was a Georgian rather than a Russian, and that Hitler was an Austrian, not a German, and may have had both Jews and Blacks among his ancestors (nor that he evaded military service). Nor was Ibn Khaldūn aware that Stalin was an assumed name. But he clearly sees that ‘*aṣabiyya*, like the sense of kinship that underwrites it, is an idea, not an instinct.
- 10 – *Muqaddimah*, 2.12 = Arabic, 134–135; in citing the *Muqaddimah* below, I cite the chapter, section, volume, and page in Franz Rosenthal’s translation as follows, 2.14, 1:275–276. As Rosenthal notes, neither he nor E.I.J. Rosenthal was able to trace Averroes’ remark here, although, as De Slane saw, it is clearly based on Aristotle’s thoughts in the *Rhetoric* I 5, 1360b34.
- 11 – *Muqaddimah* 2.15, 1 = Arabic, 136.
- 12 – In this and the three paragraphs that follow I closely paraphrase Ibn Khaldūn’s language in 2.14 = Arabic 2.15.
- 13 – *Muqaddimah* 2.14, 1:280.
- 14 – *Muqaddimah* 2.14, 1:281. Ibn Khaldūn’s reading of the Bible is not casual. He cites the Torah’s account of Israel’s forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert to bolster his calculations of the life span of a generation and to confirm his thesis as to the generational change of a communal ethos (*Muqaddimah* 3.12, 1:343). His description on the next page of the life of a third royal generation resonates with the Mosaic diatribe, *Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—You grew fat and gross and coarse* (Deuteronomy 32:15). But he does not echo the Torah’s linking that coarsening to idolatrous practices.
- 15 – The idea of an authoritarian personality was developed by Erich Fromm and mapped by Theodore Adorno, Abraham Maslow, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and others during and in the aftermath of World War II.
- 16 – *Muqaddimah* 2.14, 1:278–280 = Arabic 136–137.
- 17 – Kamal Mirawdeli, *Asabiyya and State: A Reconstruction of Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History* (Bloomington: Author House, 2015), pp. 93–94, quoting 5.1 from Franz Rosenthal’s translation, 1.345.

- 18 – Gellner’s studies of the societies of the Maghreb are collected in *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). “Orientalists,” he wrote, “are at home in texts. Anthropologists are at home in villages.” Gellner was a philosopher of note, an early and prominent critic of linguistic philosophy, and an anthropologist and social thinker, much like Ibn Khaldūn, who was clearly a social thinker and an anthropologist *avant la lettre*, as well as a philosopher at a time when that word made one a marked man in the society he lived in, leading him to avoid describing himself as such and to devise or choose terms of his own to replace key terms of the Islamic tradition of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy, in which he was well versed. He was probably never quite at home anywhere. But that is part of what made him a great thinker. For a philosopher, like a poet or an artist, must be alienated enough from his surroundings to see and say what others cannot—just not alienated enough to go mad.
- 19 – Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), p. 55.
- 20 – *Muqaddimah* 2.7, 1:263; 2.16, 1:284; 3.1, 1:313; 3.6, 1:322–327; 3.26, 1:414; 4.3, 2:238; 4.21, 2:302–305.
- 21 – For the survival of Alexander’s dream, as fathered upon Aristotle under the guise of a letter from him to Alexander, see Samuel Miklos Stern, *Aristotle on the World State* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).
- 22 – See Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
- 23 – For the survival in Ibn Khaldūn’s thinking of the Arab ideal of the *shūra* or tribal council, which modern thinkers pose as an ancestral base for a parliamentary institution, in much the way that Britons may look to the Anglo-Saxon *Witenagemot* or William the Conqueror’s *Curia Regis*, see Muhammad Mahmoud Rabī’, *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldūn* (Leiden: Brill, 1967). And see Sadek Sulaiman, “The Shura Principle in Islam,” at alhewar.com/SadekShura.htm.
- 24 – See *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn: A Translation from the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, trans. Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 232 = Arabic, p. 173.
- 25 – Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Mabādī Arā’ Ahl al-Madīnati al-Fāḍila* (Book of the principles underlying the beliefs of the people of the virtuous state), cited here by the short title *Arā’*, with the page references given parenthetically to the edition of my teacher, Richard Walzer, who translated the work as *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State*. See *Arā’*, 228–229.

- 26 – See Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, pp. 102–112.
- 27 – *Muqaddimah* 1—Preliminary Remarks, 1.80.
- 28 – *Muqaddimah* 1—Preliminary Remarks, 1.80–81. Ibn Khaldūn goes on to cite the pseudo-Aristotelian *Politics* (better known as the *Secretum Secretorum*; the actual *Politics* of Aristotle was the only work of his widely thought not to have been translated into Arabic). He voices doubts about the work he cites, calling it “ascribed to Aristotle,” and finds it disappointing and digressive, complaining that it adds little to the thoughts he finds in al-Mas‘ūdī.
- 29 – Arthur Laffer, “The Laffer Curve: Past, Present, and Future,” Heritage Backgrounder on Taxes, June 1, 2004, posted 2016, accessed November 9, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/taxes/report/the-laffer-curve-past-present-and-future>. Laffer knows that Ibn Khaldūn did not originate the idea. He cites the *Muqaddimah* as just one example of the point he was making, which he developed and expanded considerably and lectured about frequently in his economics classes. He professes not to recall holding forth on the subject at the restaurant. He does not doubt it may have happened but does discount the napkin since “the restaurant used cloth napkins and my mother had raised me not to desecrate nice things.”
- 30 – Plato sees extortionate taxation as ruinous to the society and above all to the productive segments of it—a policy ultimately ruinous even to its would-be beneficiaries: the tyrant kills the goose that laid the golden egg. Averroes preserves Plato’s thoughts about the impoverishing impact of punitive taxation in his summary of the *Republic*, associating such policies, as Plato does, with the tyrant’s stirring up wars to pauperize the people and eliminate all threat of resistance. Quoting a proverb equivalent to our own about getting out of the frying pan and into the fire, he remarks that those who surrender authority to an intended protector have only exchanged a lesser for a harsher slavery. He finds Plato’s argument pointedly relevant to patterns of tyranny and policies of tyrants all too familiar in his own times. The Arabic original of Averroes’ paraphrase of the *Republic* is presumed lost, but the text survives in Hebrew. It was edited and translated by E.I.J. Rosenthal as *Averroes’ Commentary on Plato’s Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966)—Hebrew, for the passages cited, pp. 96–98; English, pp. 234–237—corresponding to Stephanus pages 565–569. The work is also translated by Ralph Lerner in *Averroes on Plato’s Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).
- 31 – As my late first wife and I wrote back in the 1980s, “Montesquieu’s climatic theory of cultures and dispositions may have followed Ibn Khaldūn, reaching him via the ardent traveler Jean-Baptiste Chardin,

who may have used the work of Jacob Golius, first tenant of the Arabic chair at Leiden, whose life of Tamberlane introduced the name of Ibn Khaldūn to Europe" (L. E. Goodman and M. J. Goodman, "'Particularly Amongst the Sunburnt Nations . . . '—The Persistence of Sexual Stereotypes of Race in Bio-Science," *International Journal for the Study of Group Tensions* 19 [1989]: 239, citing Warren Gates, "The Spread of Ibn Khaldūn's Ideas of Climate and Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 [1967], p. 418).

- 32 – Quoted in Gibb, "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldun's Political Theory," from Gibb's collected essays edited by Stanford Shaw and William Polk as *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), pp. 172–173.
- 33 – Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957; reprint, 1964), p. 286.
- 34 – *Ibid.*, pp. 293–94.
- 35 – It is easy for Averroes to condemn the Almoravids. But a critique of the Almohads is, perhaps forgivably, out of his reach.
- 36 – Gibb, "The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldun's Political Theory," p. 170.
- 37 – *Ibid.*, pp. 173–174.
- 38 – Stephen Dale presses the dichotomy when he finds that Ibn Khaldūn "negates fundamental aspects of his rationalist dialectical model by offering a religious explanation for social change" (*The Orange Trees of Marrakesh*, p. 22).
- 39 – See Goodman, "Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (1972): 250–270, and the corresponding chapter in Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 201–239.