

Chapter 46: Ibn Khaldun

A

Ibn Khaldun wrote no major work in fields accepted in the Muslim philosophic tradition or which he considered to be the proper fields of philosophic investigation – logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics – politics, ethics, and economics.¹ Consequently, he was not regarded by his contemporaries, or by subsequent Muslim students of philosophy, as a philosopher (*failssuf*) in the sense in which al-Farabi, ibn Sina, and ibn Rushd were identified as such. Nevertheless, both his contemporaries and later Muslim students of history and society were aware that ibn Khaldun had made the most significant contribution to these specialized fields through his undertaking a scientific investigation of them.

It was, however, the enhanced interest in the study of history and society in modern times which led to the devotion of increased attention of ibn Khaldun’s thought, to the recognition of his rank as a major Muslim thinker, and to the judgment that he was equal, if not superior, to the other well-known Muslim philosophers. This was in part the result of the higher prestige, and of the peculiar theoretical importance, which history and the sciences of society (as compared to the theoretical part of traditional philosophy) have come to enjoy in modern times.

But the more important reason for the singular interest in ibn Khaldun in modern times lies in the conclusions of his investigations in history and society. To the moderns, these conclusions appear to be more scientific than either the conclusions of the legal investigation of Muslim jurists or the politico-philosophic investigations of Muslim philosophers. Perhaps on the analogy of the revolt of modern science against traditional philosophy, and especially of modern political philosophy and social science against traditional political philosophy, it has been assumed that ibn Khaldun must have attempted a similar, or parallel, revolt against traditional Muslim philosophy in general, and against traditional Muslim political philosophy in particular.

Because of its important implications for the understanding of ibn Khaldun’s thought, this crucial

assumption deserves critical examination. The larger context of the present work seems to warrant an inquiry into the precise relationship between ibn Khaldun's new science and the Muslim philosophic tradition. This relationship has been for the most part viewed in the perspective, and under the influence, of the modern philosophic and scientific tradition. In the present work, in contrast, the reader comes to ibn Khaldun through the preceding Greek and Muslim philosophic tradition, which ibn Khaldun knew and in relation to which he can be expected to have taken his bearing.

The reader, thus, must be shown, on the basis of ibn Khaldun's conception of philosophy and science, and of his conception of the relation between his new science and the established philosophic science, whether he was in fundamental agreement with that tradition (in which case it must be shown what the specific character of his contribution to that tradition was), a new, but a novel doctrine.

That this procedure is the sound historical procedure is usually admitted. But what has not been seen with sufficient clarity is that, in addition to providing the proper historical perspective for the understanding of ibn Khaldun's thought, it is of fundamental importance to elicit the basic principles or premises of his new science, and thus contribute to the understanding of its true character.

B

Ibn Khaldun's place in the history of Muslim philosophy, and his contribution to the Muslim philosophic tradition, must be determined primarily on the basis of the "Introduction" (*Muqaddimah*) and Book One of his "History" (*Kitab al-'Ibar*).² That a work exploring the art of history, and largely devoted to an account of universal history,³ should concern itself with philosophy is justified by ibn Khaldun on the ground that history has a dual character: (a) an external (*zahir*) aspect which is essentially an account of, or information about, past events, and (b) an internal (*batin*) aspect. With respect to this latter aspect, history "is contemplation (theory: *nazar*) and verification (*tahqiq*), a precise causal explanation of things generated (*ka'inat*) and their origins (or principles: *mabadi*), and a profound science (*'ilm*) of the qualities and causes of events; therefore, it is a firm principle part (*asl*) of wisdom (*hikmah*), and deserves, and is well fitted, to be counted among its sciences."⁴

Whatever ibn Khaldun's position concerning the relation between wisdom and philosophy may have been (ibn Rushd, who was the last of the major Muslim Philosophers whom ibn Khaldun studied, considered that the two had become identical in his own time),⁵ he frequently uses the expressions "wise men" (*hukama'*) and "philosophers" (*Falasifah*) interchangeably, and it is certain that he identifies the sciences of wisdom with the philosophic sciences.⁶ Furthermore, in his classification and exposition of the various sciences, he defines the basic characteristics of these sciences, enumerates them, and makes ample reference to the Greek and Muslim authors, who represent the specific philosophic tradition which he accepts as *the* tradition.

Ibn Khaldun's definition of the philosophic sciences is based on an emphatic and clear-cut distinction, if not total opposition, between the sciences which are natural to man as a rational being (therefore, he

names them also “natural” [*tabi‘iyya*) and “rational” or “intellectual” [*‘aqliyyah*] sciences)⁷ and the legal, transmitted, or positive sciences based on the divine law, which are the special property of a particular religious community. In contrast, the philosophic sciences are “those which a human being can understand by (virtue of) the nature of his thought and the subjects, the problems, the ways of demonstration, and the modes of teaching to which he is guided by perception, until his contemplation and investigation lead him to understand the true from the false in as far as he is a human being possessing thought.”⁸

The philosophic sciences are classified into four fundamental sciences or groups of sciences: logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics or the divine science.⁹ This is followed by a concise history of these sciences (especially among the ancient Persians, the Greeks and the Muslims) which emphasizes (a) the relation between the rise and development of these sciences, and cultural development and prosperity, and their decline subsequent to cultural disintegration, and (b) the anti-philosophic attitude of the divine laws and religious communities, which led (especially in cases where sovereigns adopted this attitude, or religious orthodoxy was able to determine the type of learning pursued in the community) to deserting the philosophic sciences.¹⁰

The philosophic sciences reaching the Muslims were those of the Greeks.¹¹ Of the Greek philosophic schools ibn Khaldun mentions specifically those of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and also the commentators of Aristotle, i.e. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and others. Aristotle is singled out as “the most well-grounded of them in these sciences.”¹² Muslims recovered these sciences from the disuse to which they had fallen among the Byzantines, and after a period of searching for, acquiring, and translating the works preserved among the latter, Muslim scholars studied these Greek philosophic sciences, became skilled in their various branches, reached the highest level of proficiency in them, and surpassed some of their predecessors.

Although they differed with Aristotle on many issues, they generally recognized him as the foremost teacher (*Mu‘allim-i Awwal*). Of Muslim philosophers, ibn Khaldun mentions by name al-Farabi, ibn Sina, ibn Bajjah, and ibn Rushd. He indicates the decline of the philosophic sciences in Western Islam after the disintegration of cultural life in that region, and refers to reports concerning the then flourishing state of these sciences in Persia and eastward, and their revival and spread in Western Europe.¹³

Thus, there seems to be little doubt that when ibn Khaldun says that the study of the internal aspect of history is to be made one of the sciences of wisdom, he does not simply mean that it deserves a systematic, rational, and scientific study in general. What he means is much more specific and precise. The study of the internal aspect of history, if it is to be properly scientific, must be recognized as a significant part of, and is to be pursued as belonging to, one of the philosophic sciences or one of a group of the philosophic sciences (of the Socratic school)¹⁴ epitomized in the works of Aristotle and also in those of the Muslim philosophers who belonged to that school and concentrated primarily on the exposition of the works of Aristotle.

C

To which of these sciences or groups of sciences does the investigation of the internal aspect of history belong? To answer this question, a fuller statement of the character and principles of this investigation is needed. Ibn Khaldun first formulates what this investigation is to comprise, and how it is to be conducted through a critique of Islamic historiography and the examination of the causes of the errors of historians in the “Introduction,” in which he illustrates the distinction between the external and internal aspects of history and establishes that these errors are primarily due to the ignorance of the nature and causes of historical events, both in so far as these are permanent and homogeneous as well as in so far as they change and are heterogeneous

Then, in the first part of the introduction to Book One, the true character of history is said to be identical with “information about human association, which is the culture (*‘umran*) of the world, and the states which occur to the nature of that culture...(and) all that is engendered in that culture by the nature of (these) states.”¹⁵ The primary cause of errors in transmitting historical information (and, consequently, in writing an untrue account of history), thus, becomes ignorance of the nature of the states of culture.

The states of culture and what is engendered in them is considered to form a part of all engendered things, whether essences or acts, each of which inevitably has a nature specific to its essence and to its accidental states. “What the historian needs for examining historical reports, and for distinguishing the true from the false, is knowledge “of the matters of engendered [existents] and the states in existents”¹⁶ so as to be able to examine and determine the possibility or impossibility of the occurrence of the events themselves. Thus, the basic principles (i.e. the subject–matter, problems, method, and end) of a new investigation emerge, and are finally formulated as follows:

“The rule for distinguishing truth from falsehood in the [investigation of historical] information on the grounds of possibility and impossibility is for us to contemplate human association, which is culture, and to distinguish the states pertaining to its essence and required by its nature, what is accidental and need not be reckoned with, and what cannot possibly occur in it. If we do that, it would be for us a rule in distinguishing truth from falsehood in [historical] information, and veracity from lying, in a demonstrative manner admitting of no doubt. Then, if we hear about some states taking place in culture, we shall know scientifically what we should judge as acceptable and what we should judge as spurious. This will be for us a sound criterion by which historians will pursue the path of veracity and correctness in what they transmit. This is the purpose of this First Book of our work. It is, as it were, a science independent by itself. For it has a subject (namely, human culture and human association) and has [its own] problems (i.e. explaining the states that pertain to its essence one after the other).”¹⁷

We then have a seemingly independent science the subject of which is human association or culture, the problems of which are the essential states of culture, the method is that of strict demonstration, and the end is that it be used as a rule to distinguish the true and the veracious from the false and the spurious

in historical reports. To which philosophic science or group of sciences does this science belong, and in what way could it be characterized as a firm and principal part of philosophy?

That it does not belong to the logical or the mathematical sciences needs little argument. Logic is defined by ibn Khaldun as “the science which makes the mind immune to error in seizing upon unknown problems [or questions] through matters already realized and known. Its advantage is in distinguishing error from correctness in the essential and accidental concept and judgments, which he who contemplates aims at in order that he may understand the verification of truth in generated [things], negatively and positively.”¹⁸ Logic is an organon of thought and a propaedeutical science making rules used in the contemplation of all generated things, and in ascertaining the sound definitions of their essences and accidents. Since the subject and problems of the science of culture are said to belong to generated things, it will have to use the rules devised by the logical arts, but it is not itself concerned with the problems of how to achieve sound abstractions or how to distinguish them from those unsound.

It is only necessary to add here, first, that ibn Khaldun accepted, without reservation, Aristotelian logic as found in the logical writings of Aristotle (with the addition of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*) and the commentaries of al-Farabi, ibn Sina, and ibn Rushd. Thus, logic for him deals with the mental forms abstracted from things and useful in the knowledge of the essences and the “truths” of things. Its central aim is demonstration or “the syllogism producing certainty,” and “the identity of the definition and [the thing] defined,” i.e., the subjects dealt with in the *Posterior Analytics* or “The Book of Demonstration.”¹⁹ Ibn Khaldun doubts the validity of the attempts of Muslim dialectical theologians (*Mutakallimun*) who concentrate on purely formal syllogism and forgo the fruits of the works of the ancients in the field of material logic.²⁰

Secondly, ibn Khaldun repeatedly emphasizes that the science of culture must be a demonstrative science in the sense specified here, to the exclusion of dialectical, rhetorical, and poetic arguments which are based on commonly known and commonly accepted premises rather than on self-evident, necessary, and essential premises, or premises that are the conclusions of syllogisms based on such premises, as required by posterioristic logic.

As to the mathematical sciences, they are concerned with measurements or quantities, either theoretically, such as the study of pure numbers, or practically as applied arts. In the latter case, they are useful in the study of culture, since they acquaint us with the mathematical properties of things, such as the stars, which exercise an influence on culture, and form the bases of many of the crafts which are an important aspect of cultural life.²¹ But although the science of culture makes use of the conclusions of the mathematical sciences and is concerned with quantity as one of the categories of all generated things, its subject is not quantity as such, but the nature and causes of a specific generated thing which is culture.

This leaves us with natural sciences and metaphysics, or the sciences of natural and divine existents. Since the study of generated things, their natures, their states, and all that is engendered in them,²² is

the specific subject of natural science or natural philosophy, the new science of that specific generated thing which is culture seems to form a part of natural philosophy and to belong to it by virtue of its subject. This statement must now be amplified by giving answers to: (a) why does the new science of culture deserve to be a natural science and counted among the natural sciences, and (b) how does ibn Khaldun establish it as a firm and principal part of natural philosophy?[23](#)

D

Natural science is defined by ibn Khaldun as follows:

“Then [after logic], the contemplation among them [i.e. the philosophers] turns to: [a] the sensible, viz bodies of the elements, and those generated from them (viz minerals, plants and animals), celestial bodies, and natural motions, or the soul from which motions emerge, etc. This art is named “natural science,” and it is the second of these (philosophic) sciences. Or [b] the contemplation turns to the matters that are beyond nature.”[24](#)

This is explained further in the second and more elaborate definition supplied by ibn Khaldun in his own way:

“[Natural science] is the science which inquires about the body with respect to what adheres to it, viz. motion and rest. Thus, it contemplates the heavenly and elemental bodies, and what is begotten from them (man, animals, plants, and minerals), what is generated inside the earth (spring, earthquakes), in the atmosphere (clouds, vapours, thunder, lightning, and thunderbolts), etc, and the principle of motion in bodies, i.e. the soul in its various species in man, animals, and plants.”[25](#)

Then he mentions the standard works on natural science. The physical parts of the Aristotelian corpus, which have been followed, explained, and commented on by Muslim authors, the most well-known and reliable of these being ibn Sina in the corresponding parts of three major works (*Shifa'*, *Najat* and *Isharat*), and ibn Rushd in his summaries of, and commentaries on, Aristotle's works on physical sciences, with the difference that ibn Sina seems to disagree with Aristotle on many problems of natural science, while ibn Rushd remains in close agreement with him.[26](#)

These statements point to a conception of the character and scope of natural science, and the order of its parts, which is not ibn Khaldun's own, but one which was elaborated by ibn Sina and ibn Rushd on the basis of a tradition initiated in Muslim philosophy by al-Farabi, and which has a firm foundation in Aristotle's own writings on nature. Following the scheme suggested by Aristotle, e.g. in the opening chapter of *Meteorology*,[27](#) these philosophers included within natural science or natural philosophy the works beginning with the *Physics* and ending with the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*, and arranged their objects, order, and rank, as follows: (1) the general or first principles of all natural existents or of all that is constituted by nature, or “the first causes of nature and all natural motion” (*Physics*), (2) the simple or primary parts of the world, or “the stars ordered in the motion of the heavens” (*On the Heaven*

and the World), (3) the motion of the natural elements, or their generation and corruption, alteration and growth (*On Generation and Corruption*), and (4) the accidents and affections common to the elements (*Meteorology*).

Then follows the study of particular existents that are generated and corrupted: (5) the minerals which are the simplest and closest to the elements (*On Minerals*), (6) plants (*On Plants*), (7) animals (*The Parts of Animals*, etc.), and (8) the general principles of the soul and its parts (*On the Soul*), followed by the particular powers of the soul and the accidents existing in plants and animals by virtue of their possessing soul (*Parva Naturalia*).[28](#)

According to this scheme, the science of the soul, which is the form of animal and plant bodies, falls within the scope of the science of nature, and the science of the intellect, which is one of the faculties of the soul, falls to the connection of nature to soul, and of soul to intellect, and the study of these connections certainly did not mean, nor did it lead to, the reduction of one to the other. For the scheme was not merely a deductive one by which the more complex is deduced from the more simple or the particular from the general, but a methodological plan of investigation beginning with the general and simple and leading to the particular and complex, recognizing their substantial heterogeneity, and using observation, enumeration, and induction, to a greater extent than, and in conjunction with, syllogistic reasoning.

Furthermore, the study of soul and intellect leads the investigator to matters that are beyond nature, and that could no more be, strictly speaking, considered within the scope of a natural investigation, but in this case, these matters cannot claim the advantages enjoyed by natural investigation which are solidly based on human experience and perception. One could then perhaps speak with ibn Rushd of the possibility of delimiting the investigation of soul and intellect to what corresponds most to the manner of investigation conducted, and, thus, arrives at explanations similar in character to those given by natural science – taking this to be more fitting to the purpose of Aristotle.[29](#)

But to grant the difficulties raised by this scheme does not alter the fact that both for Aristotle and the Muslim philosophers mentioned above, the inclusion of the study of soul and intellect within the general science of nature is legitimate. Consequently, the study of man and of all that concerns man is considered an integral part of the study of nature or of natural science. This does not hold true only for his body in so far as it shares common properties with all natural bodies, for the properties of generation and corruption which he shares with all composite things, and for the faculties of his soul which he shares with plants and other animals, but also for his specific differentiae as a rational being: his sociability and his association with others and co-operation with them in the development of the arts, his appetites and desires, his purposeful, organized social activity, his practical and theoretical intellect, and his ability to comprehend things through visions, dreams, and prophecy, and to use what he comprehends in ordering his political life. All such matters are dealt with in the science of the soul.[30](#)

Human association or culture, as ibn Khaldun conceived it, is a natural property of man as a rational

being. He intended to investigate its modes or states, the various accidents that occur in it, and its generation and corruption; and to develop this investigation into a full-fledged inquiry or science. Since the basis of man's sociability, and its primary manifestations, can legitimately fall within the scope of natural science, the elaboration of this natural property of man, and the investigation of the various aspects of social organization to which it leads man, can also legitimately belong to natural science and be counted as one of the natural sciences.

Whether the new science will in fact prove well-fitted to be considered a natural science, will of course depend on whether it will remain loyal to the method of investigation followed in the natural sciences. Ibn Khaldun was aware of the fact that the subject he intended to investigate had been studied in contexts other than natural science, notably in the Muslim legal sciences and in the practical philosophic sciences. Thus, even if he had insisted on a science of human association or culture which had to be a part of philosophy or wisdom, he could have chosen to study it as a practical science.

The reason for not choosing this alternative will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.³¹ It is sufficient in the present context to insist that what he sought was a natural science of human association. He examined the works of Plato and Aristotle, and of Muslim thinkers, and found³² that they had not elaborated such a science before. Thus he set out to make good this deficiency in the natural sciences. But if he is to succeed in his effort, he must show unequivocally that the new science is indeed being firmly established on the foundation of natural philosophy.

E

The "History" was originally divided by ibn Khaldun into an "Introduction" (*Muqaddiman*) and three Books. The "Introduction" deals with the problem of history in general, Book One contains the new science of culture, Book Two contains the history of the Arabs and other peoples (except the Berbers) down to ibn Khaldun's own time, and Book Three contains the history of the Berbers in Western Islam.³³

Muqaddimah is a technical term meaning "premise." It can be generally defined as that upon which what follows depends and which does not itself depend upon that which follows.³⁴ It can be a general discussion or explanation introducing a subject, a book, or a science, the emphasis here being upon what needs to precede these rather than that upon which they strictly depend. In this sense the "Introduction" precedes the three Books and is a useful discussion clarifying the problems that are to follow. But this "Introduction" together with Book One came also be known as the *Muqaddimahi*, as an introduction to the last two books, or the historical account proper. This is a usage which is closer to the technical definition of the word, since, as ibn Khaldun explains, the writing of a correct historical account depends upon a prior understanding the science of culture.

The proper technical definition of *muqaddimah*, however, which is the specific definition used by logicians in the study of syllogism, induction, and analogy, is "that upon which the soundness of the proof depends, without an intermediary" or "a proposition made a part of syllogism or an argument."³⁵

Such a premise should be veracious and properly related to the question or problem. It is of two kinds: (a) definitive (such as being primary, based on observation or experience, or on multiple authoritative reports, or being the conclusion of a syllogism based on such premises and (b) based on opinion (generally known or accepted notions, etc.)[36](#)

These can be made the premises of a single syllogism or argument, or of a whole science. In this latter case, they are named the “premise(s) of the science” and are defined as those upon which the setting out upon the science depends, and upon which its problems depend.[37](#) Apart from the general usages mentioned above, ibn Khaldun uses *muqaddimah* in this specific “logical” sense,[38](#) and the first section of Book One, which treats “human culture in general,” is made up of six such premises. Since the new science “depends” upon the character of these premises, we must examine them in detail.

1. Association is Necessary for Man

Ibn Khaldun presents this premise or proposition as being the same as what the wise men express when they say that “man is ‘political’ by nature, i.e., he cannot dispense with association, which in their technical usage is the *polis*’, and this is the meaning of culture.”[39](#) It is significant, however, that ibn Khaldun substitutes, here at the outset, “necessary” for “by nature” and his explanation of the first premise indicates that this substitution was deliberate on his part. For, the way he grounds the need for association in human nature is by explaining that, while the “animal nature” of human beings are the same as those of the rest of the animals (in that like them they cannot exist except through nourishment and self-defence), they are inferior to some animals in that the ability of a single human being cannot possibly be equal to meeting his needs for nourishment and self-defence.

Therefore, man associates with others and develops the arts and tools, and the social organizations, necessary for nourishing and defending himself, not because his specifically “human nature” is essentially superior to the rest of the animals, or because he needs these arts and tools and organization to satisfy his specifically human needs, but because his natural constitution is deficient for conducting a solitary life, and because without associating with others he remains helpless and unable even to exist.[40](#)

Thus, ibn Khaldun, while purporting simply to “explain” what the philosophers meant by “man is political by nature,” in fact concentrates on those traits of man’s animal nature which render association a necessary condition for the very life and continued existence of man. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that this premise and its explanation as he presents them are also based on the conclusions of the investigation of animal and human natures conducted by the philosophers and confirmed by the investigation of the organs of the human body conducted by Galen – more specifically, that the “demonstration” of this premise was presented by the philosophers[41](#) referring to the appropriate passages of *De Anima* and the commentaries of them.[42](#)

On the surface, ibn Khaldun’s only object is to the attempt of the philosophers to “add” a rational proof of

prophecy to their demonstration of the political nature of man, while in fact he seems also to object to the widening of the scope of the proposition in such a manner as to state that association is necessary for man's well-being in addition to its being necessary to his existence. What he seems to indicate is that the study of human nature within the scope of natural science cannot demonstrate this proposition in this wider sense; therefore the science of culture must restrict itself to accepting the proposition in its narrower sense, susceptible to demonstration within natural science, only. In other words, according to him, the study of culture should be a sociological one without ethical extensions.

2. Distribution of Culture on Earth

This premise simply recounts what has already been explained by the wise men who have contemplated the states of the world relative to the shape of the earth, the generation of animals and of human species, and the inhabited parts of the earth; it is a summary of the geography of the seven zones and the information available concerning the conditions prevailing in each.⁴³ Here, ibn Khaldun restates the various conclusions demonstrated in such parts of natural philosophy as the investigation of the nature of elements of generation and corruption, of minerals, and of localities of animals,⁴⁴ and completes them through such information as has been supplied by observation and authenticated multiple reports found in the works of astronomers, and, in particular, in the works of Greek and Muslim geographers like Ptolemy, al-Mus'udi, and al-Idrisi.⁴⁵ It is also in these works that the word *'umran*, which ibn Khaldun used as a technical term indicating the subject of his new science, is most frequently encountered.

3. Temperate and Intemperate Zones and the Influence of the Atmosphere upon the Colour of Human Beings and many of their States

This premise is again based on the investigation of the nature of generated beings, and the nature of heat and cold and their influence upon the atmosphere and the animals generated in it, proving that the colour of human beings and many of their arts and modes of life are caused by atmospheric conditions.⁴⁶ The only specific authority he invokes here is ibn Sina's *rajaz* poem on medicine.⁴⁷ He refutes the errors of genealogists which he attributes to their inattention to the natural basis of such matters as colours and other characteristic traits.⁴⁸

Throughout, the emphasis is upon the natural (in contrast to the specifically human or the divine) basis of culture as a whole, for in addition to relatively, elementary things (such as colour and other bodily traits, and the manner of preparing food and housing), ibn Khaldun indicates the dependence of even the highly complex aspects of culture (such as the sciences, political authority, and whether there are prophets, religions, and divine Laws) upon the nature of the elements and their effects upon the atmosphere.⁴⁹

4. Influence of the Atmosphere upon the Habits of Character (akhlaq) of Human

Beings

Ibn Khaldun indicates that the valid causal explanation of this premise has been established in the proper place in philosophy where gladness and sadness are explained as the expansion and contraction of the animal spirit, and are related to the more general premise establishing the effect of heat in expanding the air.⁵⁰ This completely natural explanation, founded on the properties of the elements, is made the basis of mirth, excitability, levity, etc. In contrast, the opinion of al-Mas'udi (copying Galen and al-Kindi), which attributes these habits of characters to the weakness or power of the brain, is considered inconclusive and undemonstrated.⁵¹

5. Effects of the Abundance and Scarcity of Food upon the Bodies and Habits of Character of Human Beings

The causal explanation of this premise is based on the investigation of the quantity of food and the moisture it contains in the various localities of animals, their action in expanding and contracting, and in increasing and decreasing the moisture of the stomachs of all animals, including human beings, and the effect of this upon the coarseness or delicacy of bodies, and upon the habits of character of human beings, including their piety and religion.⁵² This natural causal explanation is based on experience and confirmed by the students of agriculture.⁵³

6. Classes of those who perceive the “Unseen” (ghaib) among Human Beings by Natural Disposition or by Exercise

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This premise is introduced in a discussion on prophecy and dream-vision which deals with (1) practical guidance as the aim of prophecy, and (2) the signs of prophetic mission: (a) the psychological state at the time of revelation, (b) good character prior to embarking upon the prophetic mission, (c) the call to religion and worship, (d) noble and pedigree, and (e) marvels and miracles. The difference between the dialectical theologians and the philosophers concerning how marvels and miracles take place through the power of God or through the power of the prophet himself. The philosophers assert the latter on the basis that “the prophetic soul, among them, has essential properties from which these invasions (of nature) (*khawariq*) emanate through his (i.e. the prophet's) power and the obedience of the elements to him in this generation (of these invasions of nature).”⁵⁵

As distinct from this introduction, ibn Khaldun presents his own statement (*qal*) in which he sets down “the interpretation of the true meaning (*haqiqah*) of prophecy as explained by men of verification (*muhaqqiqun*),” and mentions the real meaning of soothsaying, dream-vision, etc. The verified interpretation which ibn Khaldun adopts as the basis for his explanation of the true meaning of these phenomena proves to be a summary recapitulation of the entire subject of natural science, i.e., the

observable world (*'alam*) and the observable effects of unseen powers, sensible bodies, the elements, the spheres, the generable (minerals, plants, and animals ending in man), and the human soul and its powers.

These powers are again arranged in an ascending order: (1) the active powers, (2) the apprehensive powers which include (a) external senses, (b) internal senses, i.e. (i) common sense, (ii) imagination, (iii) estimation, (iv) memory, and (v) the power of thought which the philosophers call the rational calculative (*natiqah*) power.

“They all ascend to the power of thought (intellect) the instrument of which is the middle hollow of the brain. It is the power by which take place the movement of deliberation and the turn toward intellection, the soul is moved by it (i.e. this power) constantly through the longing instituted in it (i.e. the soul) towards that (intellection), to deliver (itself) from the abyss of potency and preparedness which belongs to human (nature) and to come out into act in its intellection (with which) it makes itself like the Heavenly Spiritual Host and comes at the lowest rank of the Spiritualities when it apprehends without bodily instruments. Thus, it moves constantly and turns toward that (intellection).

It may pass over altogether from human (nature) and its form of spirituality to the angelic (nature) of the upper region, not by (any) acquiring (of something from outside), but by the original and primary natural disposition toward it which God has placed in it.”[56](#) On the basis of the structure and nature of the observable world, and the structure and nature of the human soul, and on the basis of the natural powers inherent in the latter, ibn Khaldun proceeds to classify and explain the various types of the activity of the soul in relation to the unseen world.

Thus, ibn Khaldun’s own explanation of the foundation and the true meaning of these phenomena can be seen to be indeed based on the explanations of the natural world, and of the nature and powers of the human soul, as presented by “most” philosophers. Like them, he considers all such activities to be grounded throughout in the natural properties of the human soul which, in turn is closely related to the human body and the world of generation, of the elements, of sensible bodies, and of their motion and rest.[57](#) All other explanations are the “guesses and conjectures” of those who are not well grounded in these matters or who accept them from those who are not such, and are “not based on demonstration or verification.”[58](#)

F

These, then, are the premises, and the only premises, of ibn Khaldun’s new science of culture. Even a superficial examination of them reveals that they are all conclusions of inquiries undertaken by other sciences which are all *natural* sciences. The new science of culture, therefore, does not make a clear, a first, or a true beginning; it is not a pre-suppositionless science. It pre-supposes not only all the natural sciences that have provided it with premises, but also the validity of their principles, the soundness of their procedures and explanations, and the veracity of their judgments and conclusions.

The inquiry into the place of ibn Khaldun's new science of culture within the Muslim philosophic tradition thus indicates beyond reasonable doubt that (a) ibn Khaldun conceived of the new science as a philosophic science, and that by philosophy he understood the sciences originated by the Socratic school, and elaborated by Aristotle and his Muslim followers, (b) the new science falls within the general scope of traditional natural science or natural philosophy, and (c) more especially, all of its premises are drawn exclusively from the various natural sciences, and, thus, it is indeed firmly grounded in these sciences because it pre-supposes their conclusions, and builds itself on the firm foundation.

Ibn Khaldun's science of culture was conceived by him as a contribution to the established philosophic sciences within a limited field. The grounds for this science, or its basic premises, were already established by traditional natural science or natural philosophy. No philosopher before him had used these premises to develop a science of human association or culture based exclusively on them. The Greek and Muslim philosophers, with whose works on practical philosophy ibn Khaldun was acquainted, invariably found it necessary to proceed by utilizing other premises which could not claim the same solidity and demonstrable character as the premises provided by natural philosophy. Therefore, the understanding of the specific character of ibn Khaldun's contribution requires an examination of the relation between his new science of culture and traditional Greek and Muslim political philosophy. This will be attempted in Chapter 49 of this work.

[Bibliography](#)

The following list contains ibn Khaldun's surviving works (cf. above, n. 1). For a more detailed bibliography of editions, translations, and studies, cf. Walter J. Fischel, "Selected Bibliography" in F. Rosenthal's translation cited below, Vol. 3, pp. 485 – 512.

Kitab al-'Ibar (The History), ed. Nasr al-Hurini, 7 vols., Bulaq, 1284/1867; *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun* (Prolegomenes d'Ebn-Khaldoun), ed. E. M. Quatremere ("Notice et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliotheque du Roi et autres bibliotheques, publies par l'Institut Imperial de France," t. 16 – 18, premieres parties; also "Tirage a part des..."), Paris, 1858. The three volumes correspond to the Bulaq ed., vol. 1; *The Muqaddiman: An Introduction of History*, English tr. by Franz Rosenthal (Bollingen Series 43), 3 vols., Pantheon, New York, 1958; *Les prolegomenes d'Ibn Khaldoun*, French tr. by M. de Slane, 3 vols., Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1934 – 38; *al-Ta'rij bi ibn Khaldun wa Rihlatuhu Gharban wa Sharqan* (Auto-biography), ed. Mohammad ibn Tawit al-Tanju (*Athar ibn Khaldun*, vol. 1), Lajnah al-Talif, Cairo, 1370/1951; *Lubab al-Muhassal fi Usul al-Din* (Extracts from Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's *Muhassal*), ed. P. Luciano Rubio, Editori Marroqui, Tetuan, 1952; *Shafa' al-Sa'il li Tahsil al-Masa'il* (Answers to Questions on Mysticism), MS No. 24299B, Dar al-Kutub, Cairo, edition in preparation by Tanji.

1. The summaries of "many" of the works of ibn Rushd, which he wrote as a young man (reported by ibn al-Khatib, cf. al-Maqqari, *Nafh al-Tib*, ed. Mohammad Muhyi al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid [10 vols., Cairo, al-Maktabat al-Tijariyyah, 1367/1947, vol. 8, p. 286]), may prove of value in corroborating the philosophic notions found in the "History." Ibn Khaldun himself did

not evidently consider them of permanent value; they have not as yet been recovered and it is not known whether they have survived at all.

[2.](#) The Introduction and Book One are known together as the “Introduction” (Muqaddimah), cf. below p. 898. References in this chapter and in that on ibn Khaldun’s Political Philosophy (cf. below, Book 4, part 6, Chap 49) are to the volumes, pages (and lines) of the Quatremere edition (Q) together with the corrections and/or additions supplied by the de Slane and F. Rosenthal in their respective French and English translations, both of which reproduce the pagination of the Quatremere edition on the margin. Cf. the Bibliography at the end of this chapter.

[3.](#) Cf. the account of the parts of the ‘Ibar, below, p. 898.

[4.](#) Q 1, 2: 17 – 19.

[5.](#) Or that philosophic questions (i.e., the quest for wisdom) have become scientific logoi. Therefore ibn Rushd omits the well-known opinions and dialectical arguments found in Aristotle’s works and does not enumerate the views current in his own time as Aristotle did, “because wisdom in his (Aristotle’s) time had not become complete, and contained opinions of groups who were believed to be wise. But now that wisdom had become complete, and there being in our time no groups (merely) believed to be wise...the contemplation of these sciences must according to the mode in which mathematics is contemplated today. For this identical reason we must omit from them also the dialectical arguments.” Ibn Rushd, Talkhis al-Sama’ al-Tabi’i (“Paraphrase of the Physics”), MS. Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, Hikmah, No. 5, fol. 1 of Ahmad Fu’ad al-Ahwani, Talkhis Kitab al-Nafs (Paraphrase du “De Anima”), (Cairo, Imprimerie Misr, 1950), Introduction, p. 16; Kitab al-Sama’ al-Tabi’i, (Hyderabad, Dairatul-Maarif, 1365/1945) pp. 2 – 3.

[6.](#) Cf., eg. Q. 2, 385:5, 3, 87:3 – 4 (where both wisdom and philosophy are used together in naming these sciences), 210.

[7.](#) Q. 2, 385, 3, 86 – 87.

[8.](#) Q 2, 385:5 – 9.

[9.](#) There are three schemes according to which these sciences are enumerated. The four sciences or groups of sciences mentioned here appear in all of them. The order is that of the central scheme which divides the philosophic sciences into seven (mathematics, being sub-divided into arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) (Q. 3, 88:12 – 19). This scheme seems to emphasize the order in which, according to ibn Khaldun himself, these sciences follow one another. Consider the characterization of logic as that which comes first (muqaddam) – (note also the use of muqaddimah as “principle” or premise) – and of mathematics as “coming after” logic (ba’dahu). In the first scheme (logic, natural science [or] metaphysics, and mathematics), the order seems to be in accordance with the contemplation of these sciences as pursued among them (‘indahum), i.e. among the philosophers (Q. 3, 87 – 88). The third scheme (mathematics, logic) gives a summary exposition of these sciences “one by one” (Q. 3, 88:19 – 20, 93ff.).

[10.](#) Q. 3, 88 – 92.

[11.](#) Cf. Q. 1, 62 – 63.

[12.](#) Q. 3, 90:14.

[13.](#) Q. 3, 90 – 93.

[14.](#) For the distinction among the various Greek philosophic schools (which had equally distinct groups of followers in Muslim philosophy), and of their different attitudes to divine Laws, cf. al-Shahrastani, al-Milal w-al-Nihal, ed. Ahmad Fahmi Mohammad, three volumes, Cairo, Maktabat al-Hussein al-Tijariyyah, 1367 – 68/1647 – 48, vol. 2, pp. 104 – 07, 231ff.

[15.](#) Q. 1, 56:6 – 13.

[16.](#) Q. I, 57 – 58.

[17.](#) Q. 1, 61:7 – 19.

[18.](#) Q. 3, 87:5 – 9.

[19.](#) Q. 3, 108 – 12.

[20.](#) Q. 3, 112 – 16.

[21.](#) Cf. Q. 3, 87 – 88, 93 – 108.

[22.](#) Cf. above p. 893

[23.](#) See above, p. 890.

[24.](#) Q. 3, 87:9 – 15.

[25.](#) Q.3, 116:12 – 17.

[26.](#)

Q. 3, 116 – 17. This judgment is based on ibn Sina's own statements and the accusations levelled against him by ibn Rushd.

[27.](#) Meteorologica 1, i. 338a, 20 – 39a, 9.

[28.](#) Ibid., al-Farabi, Falsafah Aristutalis (The Philosophy of Aristotle), MS., Istanbul, Aya Sofia, No. 4833, fols. 34b ff; ibn Sina, "al-Nafs," Shifa', 2, 6. "Psychologie d'Ibn Sina (Avicenne) d'apres son oeuvre As-sifa," ed. Jan bakos, Prague, L'Academie Tchecoslovaque des Sciences, 1956, pp. 7 – 8 (where he defends changing the order with respect to the soul and to treating it before plants and animals); al-Najat, 2nd printing, Cairo, 1357/1938, Part 2; 'Uyun al-Hikmah (Fontes Sapientiae), ed. Abdurrahman Badawi (Memorial Avicenne 5), Cairo, Institute Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 1954, pp. 16 – 46; ibn Rushd, Kitab al-Athar al-'Ulwiyyah, Hyderabad, Dairatul-Maarif, 1365/1945, pp. 2 – 5; "al-Nafs," op. cit. pp 1 – 5.

[29.](#) "al-Nafs," op. cit., p. 3.

[30.](#) Cf. the references given in note 42.

[31.](#) Below, Chap. 49.

[32.](#) To his surprise, for he expected to find such a science elaborated by them; and only they could have elaborated it.

[33.](#) Q. 2, 16

[34.](#) Al-Tahanawi, Kashshaf Istilahat al-Funun (A Dictionary of Technical Terms), Eds. M. Wajih et al. Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1853 – 62, pp. 1215:21, 1217:2 – 6.

[35.](#) Ibid., p. 1216:4ff. (Cf. Q. 1, 308:7 – 8, 345:30).

[36.](#) Ibid. p. 1216:20 – 1217:2.

[37.](#) Ibid., 1217:5 ff.

[38.](#) Cf. Q. 1, 71 – 78.

[39.](#) Q. 1, 68:14 – 16.

[40.](#) Q. 1, 69 – 72.

[41.](#) Q. 1, 68:14 – 16, 11 – 12, 72:3 and 7.

[42.](#) Cf. Q. 2, 368 – 71, where the same argument is present in connection with the practical intellect, with a similar reference to the philosophers. Aristotle, De Anima, 3, 4 – 7; ibn Sina, Nafs, pp. 198ff.; Najat, pp. 163 – 65; Kitab al-Isharat w-al-Tanbihat (Le livre de theorems et des avertissements), ed. J. Forgot, Leyde, E. J. Brill, 1892, pp. 134 – 37; 'Uyun, pp. 44 – 46; bin Rushd, Nafs, pp. 69 – 72.

[43.](#) Q. 1, 73 – 148.

[44.](#) Q. 1, 73, 75, 82 – 85, 88 – 89, 94 – 95.

[45.](#) Q. 1, 75, 82, 84 – 88, 92, 93, 97.

[46.](#) Q. 1, 48ff., 151, 153 – 54.

[47.](#) Q. 1, 153.

[48.](#) Q 1, 151, 154.

[49.](#) q. 1, 149 – 59, 153 – 54.

[50.](#) Q 1, 155 – 56.

[51.](#) Q. 1, 157.

[52.](#) Q. 1, 157 – 61, 165.

[53.](#) Q. 1, 164.

[54.](#) Q. 1, 165ff. The sections translated by D.B. Macdonald (The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1909, pp. 43ff.) remain the most exact rendering of the Arabic text.

[55.](#) Q. 1, 170:8 – 9.

[56.](#) Q. 1, 176:9 – 18. Cf. Macdonald, op. cit. p. 57.

[57.](#) Q. 1, 181, 186 – 87, 190, 192 – 93.

[58.](#) Q. 1, 196, 203 – 04.

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