Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides
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Comparative study of the *Mugaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* reveals striking similarities not only in the methods and assumptions of the two historical thinkers, but also in the conclusions to which each was driven by his experience of history. Both men are naturalists, both empiricists, both exponents of a critical approach to historiography. Yet neither is a reductionist. Both seek a lesson in history, and both believe that the message of history is to be discovered in the careful study of historical laws revealed in the play of forces which are the expression of man's political and social nature. But beyond similarities of approach, there is a deep congruity of thought between the two authors, for both believe themselves to have glimpsed the pattern, learned the lesson of history. Both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides have been led by their study of history to a cyclical, rather than linear view of historical process; both have been led, in developing their concepts of human and political reality, to a qualified relativism, which affords them, as I endeavor to show, a cautious but by no means pessimistic historical theodicy.

* Initially, perhaps primarily, what strikes us in Ibn Khaldun and in Thucydides is a demand for clarity, realism, critical thinking, a reaction against the naïveté or fausse naïveté of traditional and sacred history, a demand mature for its expression more eloquently in the methods these authors pursue and the standards they accept than any critique of prior work could be. In the spirit of philosophy or of science, each of these two men makes veracity his only goal, sets aside ulterior motives and personal interests; neither has a principle he will not sacrifice to the truth. And this recommends them to us. Studying the "archaeology" of Thucydides or Ibn Khaldun's attempt to put the history of man in the elemental context of his environment, the Arab's sociology of power or the Greek's treatment of the dialectic of war, or contemplating the dispassion with which both men viewed their own full lives in their writings or marked the downfall of empires and civilizations which were their own, we are struck with admiration. Surely such men are fathers of the science of history.

What we neglect when we indulge in such an evaluation is the positive content of both men's work. Writers of the first water do not write merely to report, but rather because they have something of moment to report or to relate; and when what we are given is the distillate of a lifetime's thought and experience, a book composed in exile and relative isolation from the literary marketplace and the corridors of patronage and power, we should be suspicious of the notion that nothing more is intended than a realistic (i.e. critical) account of events or situations, and doubly suspicious of the suggestion that what we have received is purely descriptive rather than normative or at a level of generality so removed from the metaphysical as to satisfy the dictates of a rigid empiricism. Thucydides tells us that he wrote his history as a possession for the ages, and it is easy to see from the sort of information he finds it necessary to convey that he expected his book to

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outlast the civilization within which it was written. Ibn Khaldun wrote on the last page of his preludena to the study of history that he had founded a new branch of discourse. He wrote the first draft of the Muqaddimah in five months in the year 1377\(^3\) "with words and ideas pouring into my head like cream into a churn,"\(^4\) and without the use of a library.\(^5\) Both writers think of history as containing some lesson which it is the task of the historian to impart. What is it they have set out to teach?

The roots of the message are implicit in the method, for critical thinking demands critical standards, and realism demands criteria of reality. What criteria of reality and standards of realism do the two historians accept? Evident immediately is their common acceptance of what we might consider scientific standards in the strictest sense.

Thucydides' technical terminology and his attitude \textit{vis à vis} the war of which he writes, his respect for natural, material causes and specifically environmental and climatic factors, his careful watching for symptoms and points of crisis, and his explicitly prognosticating stance have been cited as elements common to his work and the Hippocratic medical writings, notably \textit{Epidemics}, \textit{Prognostic}, \textit{Regimen in Acute Diseases}, and \textit{Airs, Waters, and Places}.\(^6\) Thucydides' treatment of the plague at Athens may easily be taken as paradigmatic of his method and indicative of his goal;\(^7\) and no doubt, a strong current of empiricism and of interest in naturalistic modes of explanation runs throughout the \textit{History}. In historiography, as in other fields that deal in descriptions of humanity, the iron law of economy is ever operative; naturalistic interpretations and empiricist methods of investigation drive out the supernatural and the metaphysical, often in favor of some lowest common denominator. It is for this reason that history writing and the allied crafts have always seemed inviting targets to reductionists of all schools.

It must be granted that much in this direction is evident in Thucydides; for he often appeals to empirical observation and never offers a supernatural explanation where natural causation will suffice. "Poverty was the real reason why the achievements of former ages were insignificant, and why the Trojan War, the most celebrated of them all, when brought to the test of facts, falls short of its fame and of the prevailing traditions to which the poets have given authority."\(^8\) Hearsay and the poets\(^9\) should not be trusted in the construction of a picture of history, especially not in quantitative matters; but the literary and physical remains of past times, if questioned critically, will offer answers that can be taken as foundations.\(^10\) Oracles are of interest primarily for the effect they have on people. Thucydides is amused and touched by men's willingness to bend an oracle to fit their present plight, "men's memories reflected their sufferings"; and in the future they would probably rewrite prophecy again so as to fit the situation.\(^11\) But the naturalism and empiricism of Thucydides are never reductionistic. Never do we find him dismissing one category of experience as no more than the disguised expression of some other. Indeed the subtle irony of his tone often leaves us wondering whether there is not more in what he means than what he says, more in history than meets even the most critical eye.

The same characteristics appear in Ibn Khaldun. Again there is mistrust of the tradition;\(^12\) again, specifically, a critique of the quantitative veracity of traditional reports in which the absurdity of old claims is demonstrated on empirical grounds.\(^13\) Again there is respect for physical as well as literary remains.\(^14\) Thucydides' caution with regard to ruins\(^15\) has disappeared, and in place of the negative consideration that lack of major public works is no definite proof of want of social development, comes Ibn Khaldun's theory by which the monuments of a state are deemed propor-

\[^{3}\] Muqaddimah concluding remark, p. 481; cf. 1 Muqaddimah preliminary remarks, p. 77.


\[^{5}\] See Rosenthal's introduction, pp. lv-lvi.


\[^{8}\] Thucydides I 11, p. 29.

\[^{9}\] Thucydides I 22, p. 33.


\[^{12}\] 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, pp. 15-65, and Preliminary Discussion, p. 72.

\[^{13}\] 1 Muqaddimah pp. 16 ff.; Ibn Khaldun's empiricism extends even to distrust of rational argument, see 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, p. 58; cf. 3 Muqaddimah VI 41.

\[^{14}\] 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, p. 57, cf. I Muqaddimah IV 3, 4, 7-11, 19 etc.

\[^{15}\] Thucydides I 8-11, pp. 27-28.
tionate to its power; taxes or expenditures may be taken as an index of political integration in much the way that a contemporary economist might invoke gross national product as an index of wealth and social development. Both Thucydides and Ibn Khaldun rely on linguisic evidence to prove sociological points. Thucydides went to great pains to get first hand information about his subject and to discount adequately for prejudice and interest in the accounts he received. Ibn Khaldun did the same; and, unlike many a medieval writer, he is not above proposing empirical tests by which his theories may be verified: one who doubts that country life is prior to city life has only to perform an impromptu survey.

In all this Ibn Khaldun, like Thucydides, is an empiricist; and, like Thucydides, he is led by his empiricism into naturalism, a respect for material causes, and an empirical tests by which his theories may be verified: one who doubts that country life is prior to city life has only to perform an impromptu survey.

The general plan of the Mukaddimah is, as Ibn Khaldun explains, a gradual progress from the most primitive elements upon which human life depends to the highest products of civilization, the arts and sciences by which human life is rendered unique. Islamic society, from its lowest to its highest levels of development, is drawn at its full length in the pages of the Mukaddimah like some great plant specimen: if the chapters of the work are taken in reverse order, the book is readily seen as a dissection, an analysis of all that constitutes civilization. Functionally the sciences come last. Having no obvious pragmatic value, yet bearing within them the means of preservation and the seeds of future development, they are the flowers of the plant. The luxury of flowers is tolerated for the sake of fruit which arises from them and teleologically is their cause. The arts, for Ibn Khaldun, are the fruit of society. Crafts, as he points out—for he prefers to call a spade a spade—are men's means of making a living. Urban civilization is the leaf and branch which gives shelter and support to the arts and crafts; for only in a large, settled, and relatively institutionalized society can the diversification of effort persist which is necessary to the efficiency of the crafts and the efflorescence of the sciences. Power is the trunk which provides structure, upholds, preserves, and protects social and economic institutions, and makes possible the effective continuity in which culture, art, science, and institutions can proliferate. Desert culture, rural life in general and subsistence farming and nomadism in the extreme are the roots, “the basis and reservoir of cities and city life.” The earth is the soil in which these roots grow; and the character of the earth, climate and topography—waters, airs, and places—are factors crucial in determining what form societies will take and what level the growth of civilization will reach. Thus the first of Ibn Khaldun's six chapters deals with the earth; the second, with primitive life, that is life at the subsistence level; the third, with sovereignty and kingdom; the fourth with urban civilization; the fifth, with the arts; and the sixth, with the sciences. In each chapter Ibn Khaldun is at pains to show how the functions and characteristics of each grade in the hierarchy are naturally affected by all that goes before.
But if Ibn Khaldun is analytical and is so in the direction of naturalism, he is no reductionist. Each phase of the development of the social organism has its own nature; none is dismissed as a disguised form of direction of naturalism, he is no reductionist. Each aggregate of its parts. Thus among the “elements”, the geographical, geological, meteorological milieu of human culture, Ibn Khaldun places revelation, offering a comprehensive discussion of “the sorts of human beings who reach ‘awareness’, whether through special gifts or by training.”

Prophecy and “true visions” are distinguished from divination by their point of origin, for true prophecy and mystic awareness demand some real, transcendent contact between man and the divine, while divination is a craft, dependent at best on human skill. Positivistically speaking, prophecy and divination are equivalent, for both may have similar effects on men’s lives; but there is no trace of positivism in Ibn Khaldun: he not only demands a clear distinction between religion and superstition, but insists that there are empirical criteria for the distinction. Like Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun seems amused by historical fables made up in the name of religion or religious sensationalism. He laughs at the notion that starlings supply Rome with the name of religion or religious sensationalism. He not only demands a clear distinction between religion and superstition, but insists that there are empirical criteria for the distinction. Like Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun seems amused by historical fables made up in the name of religion or religious sensationalism. He laughs at the notion that starlings supply Rome with the name of religion or religious sensationalism. He>.

Thucydides is not so well at ease with his tradition, but the parallel remains thought-provoking; for Thucydides too is no positivist: the distortion of an oracle is not a serious matter unless an oracle is more than a fraud, unless it represents something more than any oracle can be. The by no means polemical care with which both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides cite cases both of the fulfillment and of the failure of prophetic predictions clearly suggests that their interest in such matters extends beyond mere mention of the curious, and that there are currents in their historical thinking which run somewhat deeper than what appears on the surfaces. No work of history or historical theory need be peppered with Qur’ān or orchestrated with Delphic utterances if its sole purpose is to chronicle or to write the rules for chronicling events.

Both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides assert that the lasting use or benefit of the products of the historian’s craft is in conveying the message or lesson of history. The critical standards each adopts are intended as propaedeutic to the discovery of that lesson. History would not yield up its meaning until the laws of history were known. But if critical principles are to be an aid in discovering the laws of history (and not an end in themselves) they must not contain within them from the outset hidden assumptions as to the nature of those laws. Thus, while the critical standards of both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides were decidedly empiricist epistemologically and naturalistic ontologically, neither was a materialist. This would be to beg the question.

The heart of scientific method from ancient times until the birth of nominalism and “statistical generalization” was not materialism (a fortiori not phenomenalism!) but universality. Only the lawlike proposition can be scientific, and only universal statements can be lawlike; for men who know particulars know that a thing is so but never why. Rational understanding, “professionalism,” control, teaching and communicating, invention, and above all explanation, are possible only when the subject of knowledge is “first principles” i.e. fundamental causes about which generalizations can be formed. As moral laws cannot be just unless they are universal (and not changeable with the exigencies of the moment, as some children suppose the rules of a game to be), so observations cannot be scientific unless

32 1 Muqaddimah I 6.
33 1 Muqaddimah I 6, pp. 185 ff., 226 ff.
34 1 Muqaddimah I 6, pp. 184-90.
35 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, p. 74.
36 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, p. 75.
37 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, pp. 26–27.
38 The Muqaddimah quotes the Qur’ān several hundred times, making frequent reference to most of the Surahs, not merely for pious phrases or stylistic embellishment, but frequently to bolster a theory or underline a point of view. Hadith too is heavily used; but, of course, more selectively.
39 1 Muqaddimah I 6, pp. 188–91.
40 3 Muqaddimah VI 16, cf. 17.
41 1 Muqaddimah II 14, p. 279.
42 See e.g. Thucydides V 26 f., p. 308, II 7–8 p. 101; 1 Muqaddimah I vi e.g. pp. 202 f., 207 f., 226 f., etc.
44 See Aristotle Metaphysics Alpha 1, 981a 15 ff., cf. 1139b 14 ff.
they are universalizable. An experimental result that cannot be reproduced is no result; a principle that cannot be consistently reapplied does not have the objective rationality to commend acceptance by the internal rationality of the mind.

The guide in the formation of generalizations, and more crucially to direct that most exacting process by which lawlike regularities are distinguished from the realm of coincidence, the mind derives from experience general rules of relevance, which delimit the universe of hypotheses seriously to be considered by limiting attention to specific classes of causes. Obviously the skill and timing with which the critical distinction is drawn will be crucial factors in determining the success or failure of any scientific work. To ignore the very small, to include the influence of the stars, to confuse heritable with environmental factors or arbitrarily to limit the universe of causal possibility to these, ignoring the role of the self—all these are damning to scientific enterprise. Almost as obviously, the limitations one sets to the realm of causal relevance are vitally significant to metaphysics, for to have no effects is one of the most notorious characteristics of what does not exist. Materialism is one, often successful, sometimes misleading, method of systematically delimiting the sphere of relevance. Applied a priori to a new and scarcely charted field of study it is certain to be arbitrary and not at all unlikely to be wrong.

Neither Ibn Khaldun nor Thucydides is willing to limit a priori the realm of causal relevance to the physical world. Both are anxious to leave open the door to verification or reinterpretation of traditional hypotheses. Each has a conception of the “matter” of history, the substrate and subject of historical change and bearer of the dispositions and incapacities which establish the parameters of historical possibility and delimit the realm of credible hypotheses. But neither arbitrarily identifies that substrate with physical nature.

For Thucydides the substrate underlying historical events was human nature.65 Man, as the uniquely political animal, will play an essential role in determining what can and cannot happen in politics. Over and above natural causes, floods, earthquakes, storms, and pestilence, human motives had to be considered as primary causes in history. And the spark and damper of human drives were both contained within human nature.

Human nature may be many things, of course. But Thucydides is concerned with man’s nature in times of trouble, when it bares its teeth:46 At such times human nature, “which is always ready to trangress the laws” sees them “trampled under foot” and takes perverse delight in flaunting justice and all values.6 The oppressed are “naturally animated by a passionate desire” for revenge and for “their neighbors’ goods.”44 The dialectic of hatred, anarchy, atrocity, massacre, and counter-massacre has its origin in human ambition. “The cause of all these evils—(“every form of wickedness”)—was love of power, originating in avarice and ambition and the party spirit which is engendered by them when men are fairly engaged in a contest.”40 Yet what could be more natural than avarice and ambition? As for “party spirit”, this too is natural: “For party associations are not based on established law or public good but are formed in defiance of the laws and from self-interest.”50

Human nature, as understood by Thucydides, is, as Finley shows,51 a construct out of sophist thought, amplified and informed by the tragedy of Sophocles and Euripides52 and confirmed by the experience of history: Man is selfish by nature, and self-destructive when his selfishness is (as it easily becomes) shortsighted. He is overbearing, self-seeking, self-centered, and self-deceiving. He is above all else a sophist to himself, and to explain man to himself, Thucydides must become a sophist; that is he must enter into the realm of sophistry, ta deonta, “the things called for” by a situation, which are the domain of the sophist.53 Realism itself, after all, is of the realm of the sophist, for his task is not to demonstrate but to convince. He does not present existence whole, but rather truth—or what is to his purpose the same, the appearance of truth. Realism is not reality, but the illusion of reality; and it is only this the orator need create. Within the dialectic of his context and situation (for a speaker has much more in common with an actor than with a scientist), a shared assumption will do as well as a self-evident truth. In the self-supporting dialectic of mutual mistrust and fear which arises in times of terror or confusion no assumption wins credence more readily than one which can be

44. Cf. Thucydides III 82 f., pp. 198 ff.
45. Thucydides III 85, p. 201.
46. Thucydides III 84, p. 201.
47. Thucydides III 83, p. 200.
48. Thucydides III 82, p. 199.
49. Finley pp. 51 ff.
51. Finley pp. 95–100.
construed to err only in the direction of pessimism. People (at such times) are ever ready to believe the worst, for they have learned to expect the worst. Thus in the time of Thucydides and the times of which he wrote, no form of the sophists' "likelihood" argument\(^{64}\) was more acceptable, whether as explanation or apologo—and the line between them is not always clear—than the frequently used appeal to subjective expediency, "men tend to do what profits them"—it is only human nature, and how can man be expected (morally? intellectually?) to resist nature?\(^{65}\)

To explain the course of history Thucydides must enter into the subjectivities of his subject matter, look at events from the point of view of the participants, constantly traverse the line between what is right and what appears to be right. It is for this reason that he relies so strongly on the method of speeches, for in a speech or a debate all relevant aspects of a situation can become explicit and can be counterpoised against each other; diverse points of view can be considered—thus the speeches of Thucydides are full of concessives and minority reports—and the position taken can be put on its most rational possible footing.\(^{66}\) To make things explicit in this way is the most fertile approach the historian can take; for in making explicit the motives by which men act, he has laid bare the principles of human nature. And just as an understanding of the nature of pestilence is what the scientist or doctor needs to confront pestilence in the future,\(^{67}\) so what man or the statesman needs is an understanding of human reactions to pestilence. Just as men's reactions to the terror at Corcyra were "such as have always been and always will be while human nature remains the same",\(^{58}\) so in general an understanding of human nature is what renders possible the explanatory laws embodied in Thucydides' *History* which make it "an everlasting possession", "useful" in understanding not only what has happened but "like events which may be expected to happen in the future in the order of human things."\(^{59}\)

To desire empire is natural. So are fear, honor, and interest, three all-powerful motives no natural man can ignore.\(^{60}\) Given an understanding of human nature and the mesh or clash of the forces by which it is driven, the dialectic of history becomes transparent. The causes and nature of war, which is the historian's subject, become as clear—once the nature of man is known—as physics becomes with the unravelling of the notion of matter. But war is not just another sort of physical change. It has a nature of its own; for its substrate is not matter but the human material which is the stuff of politics and political interaction.

Wars begin in optimism, with a confident, expansive, ambitious mood.\(^{61}\) No one who plans a war expects it to last long. Ambition breeds fear,\(^{62}\) expansion confirms it,\(^{63}\) and fear breeds fear in turn,\(^{64}\) for an anticipated blow is met by preparations (if not by a preemptive strike) just as an actual blow is met by retaliation. Once hostilities have begun, terror breeds terror;\(^{65}\) and atrocity, atrocity.\(^{66}\) Security, authority, and trust disappear—men imitate their nations and nations act the part of beasts.\(^{67}\) Setting aside "all law, human and divine";\(^{68}\) but unlike beasts they cannot disengage, even when they see that both sides are locked in an embrace from which neither will escape alive, for the dialectic of mutual fear and vengeance has a momentum now, and each side struggles for the last blow as quarrelers struggle for the last word, interpreting each other's silence or gestures of conciliation as signs of weakness,\(^{69}\) promises of a victory only scarcely out of reach.

There are laws here, patterns, reactions, forces, moments, and inertias, but they are the laws, patterns, forces, and inertias of human nature, and the events they determine and define are not reducible to the events of physics, but are *sui generis*, the events of history.

Human nature continues to play a major role in history according to Ibn Khaldun; for as the author of

\(^{64}\) Finley p. 48.
\(^{65}\) Finley pp. 51, 54 f.
\(^{66}\) Thucydides I 23, p. 33.
\(^{67}\) Thucydides II 48, p. 122.
\(^{68}\) Thucydides III 82 pp. 198-99.
\(^{69}\) Thucydides I 23–23, pp. 33–34.

See Thucydides' accounts of the arguments for war among the Spartans, I 87 ff., p. 65; the Corinthians, I 121 ff., pp. 80 ff.; and above all the Athenians, where the cool rationality of Pericles, "the greatest politician and public speaker" of his day, initiates the events that were to bring about the self-destruction of Hellas, I 140 ff., pp. 92-96.

\(^{62}\) Thucydides I 90, p. 66.
\(^{63}\) Cf. Thucydides I 24, p. 34.
\(^{64}\) Thucydides I 103 f., p. 72.
\(^{65}\) Thucydides II 50 ff., pp. 123–24.
\(^{66}\) Thucydides II 66–7, pp. 132–33.
\(^{67}\) Cf. Thucydides III 75, pp. 196 ff.
\(^{68}\) Thucydides II 59, p. 124.
\(^{69}\) Thucydides IV 17, pp. 228–29; 39 f., pp. 240–41; V 13, p. 301, etc.
the *Muqaddimah* frequently remarks, habit, custom is second nature. Man's character is "conditioned" by his way of life; and that in turn is determined in large measure by environment. The elemental motives, too, which for Thucydides are the "dispositions" and incapacities of human nature, analogous to (but decidedly not identified with) the "characters" of the material elements, play if anything a larger role in the thinking of Ibn Khaldun than in that of Thucydides. Thus the fear-dialectical which the Greek historian views with the diagnostic-prognostic eye of the helpless ancient medical observer, Ibn Khaldun, himself a doctor of states who was not afraid to tinker with political forces, expands into the basis of a theory of sovereignty not to be fully developed until perfected in the work of the great English translator of Thucydides (1628), Thomas Hobbes, who like Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides had no small experience of civil upheaval. Ambition too, if anything, a more organic function at the nexus between the individual and the group in the thought of Ibn Khaldun than in that of Thucydides. The classical notion of "party spirit" has metamorphosed into the *'asabiyya* of Ibn Khaldun; and in lieu of the deduction by Thucydides from the sophist axiom 'men tend to do what profits them' of the principle that to desire empire is natural, part of human nature, comes the theorem of Ibn Khaldun that "kingdom is the goal of *'asabiyya*." The change is significant, for Ibn Khaldun is not content with explanations in terms of the elements of human nature. He is no more willing to reduce political questions to questions of psychology than to dismiss psychological questions as matters of physics: Political and social as well as physical and moral changes must be critically considered by the historian unwilling to be outrun by the dynamics of his subject matter. "Everything that comes into being, whether an entity or an event, must have its own special nature determined by what it is and by the conditions to which it is subject." If man is the political animal, then there must be in him some uniquely political aspect, some uniquely political set of motives which moderate and modulate human individualistic drives, allowing men to live in groups.

For Ibn Khaldun, *'asabiyya* is the political fact *per excellence*. Too literally the root word means 'nerve', the fiber or sinew by which a group is held together. Of what that fiber consists Ibn Khaldun has a clear and definite idea, and this idea is one of his major contributions to the theory of politics. The political relation is by its essence one of subordination (open or disguised), of rule and being ruled. Specifically it is the relation that binds individuals into effective groups. In Ibn Khaldun's view such a bond is achieved through subjective identification of the individual with the group in the sense that he effectively subordinates his atomic honor, interests, rights, advantage, privileges, power, wealth, etc. to those of the group. The art of governing, whether in strictly political institutions or in social organizations, loosely knit confederations, or family structures is the art of gaining effective assent to the needs or demands of others. Thus the art of governing properly is precisely the art of attaining the rational, semi-rational, or irrational identification of the interests etc. of the individual with those of someone other than himself. If such motives as fear and ambition were all that men considered, or if fear and ambition themselves had no recourse, then politics would be impossible. Men would remain isolated monads, having no centrifugal force to counterbalance the centrifugal forces of primitive human nature. Life would be a war of all against all, or as Ibn Masʿūd put it, quoting a tradition that goes back to Pirke Avoth, "men would devour each other." Without the group, individual survival would be impossible. Given the individuality and individualism inherent in human nature (whether in its creative or destructive aspect) Ibn Khaldun reasons that men can subordinate themselves to a group (even to their own collective interests) only because (and to the extent that) they identify with the group, i.e. effectively identify their own hopes, fears,
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pride, wants, needs, or for that matter their own shame, guilt, and responsibility, with those of the group, or of each other, or of some symbol, individual, institution or ideal representative of the group. The bond of loyalty arising from such identification is recognized by Ibn Khaldun as 'asabiyat in the broadest sense. The paradigm case of 'asabiyat is in the most primitive human institution, the family, where identification of self with other is most natural and least often called into question. But by various fictions and extensions the relation grows to encompass wider groups, the clan and the tribe, and by skillful management in the hands of the politically adept, it may be transmuted to a bond of loyalty among strangers, a traditional, rational, or charismatic basis for a built-up civilization. 'Asabiyat in some form is, in Ibn Khaldun's view, the foundation for all social cooperation and specifically for all political relations, for "only through 'asabiyat can any claim be enforced." It is 'asabiyat then, which is the substrate of political change; and since the metamorphoses of 'asabiyat are the metamorphoses of politics, the potentialities and limitations of 'asabiyat will mark the possibilities and impossibilities of political change: The laws of 'asabiyat will be the laws of history. What is sophisticated in Ibn Khaldun's identification of 'asabiyat as the substrate of political relations is the extent to which it transcends the narrow confines of egoistic rationalism without departing into the misty heights of an organismic conception of the social group.

All who reflect intelligently on politics and history realize that coercion in the sense of brute force is not and has never been the basis of the political relation. In cementing the bond that renders the actions of groups similar in effect to the actions of individuals (and those of some groups more so than others), power is necessary, perhaps, but total power has never been necessary and will never be possible. It will not be possible because as long as men can think (or err) they will have power of their own to disobey. It has never been necessary because as long as men can feel (or fear) some will be found to identify with even the most despicable regime. What is needed, in all economy, to allow the group cooperation which is the basis for any social effort that goes beyond the added powers of isolated individuals is neither massive power nor the fabled organismic state, but merely a common sense of purpose, a sense of community.

In any lasting social grouping, Ibn Khaldun reasons, such a sense of community fosters and is fostered by a sense of identification of the individual with the group. Identification then, loyalty of any sort is the stuff of politics and the raw material of history. How is identification achieved?

In assuming that all human motives (including those which hold the state together) are based on "self-interest," defined as the maximization of personal pleasure, the hedonist falls two degrees short of the subtlety and universality of Ibn Khaldun's analysis: for the strict hedonist not only fails to take adequate account of the fact that not all human actions are conceived in terms of the pleasure they will bring, but also utterly ignores the fact that sane men almost

84 1 Muqaddimah II 8, pp. 264 ff.; 2 Muqaddimah IV 21, pp. 302 ff.
85 1 Muqaddimah II 8, p. 264.
86 Loc. cit.; 1 Muqaddimah III 18, p. 374.
88 1 Muqaddimah II 16, p. 284; 1 Muqaddimah III 1, p. 313; III 6, pp. 322 ff., III 26, p. 414; 1 Muqaddimah II 7, p. 203.
89 See e.g. 1 Muqaddimah II 16, pp. 284-85, 1 Muqaddimah III 7, p. 328; cf. e.g. 1 Muqaddimah III 9, 21, 22, 23, 2 Muqaddimah, III 43, etc.
90 1 Muqaddimah II 6, pp. 258-59; cf. 1 Muqaddimah III 15, 18, 19, 22.
91 The basis of social cooperation at the minimal level cannot be coercion, but must be identification of the individual with the goals or values of the group. It is out of this elemental identification that all more complex (including coercive) social structures are built; see 1 Muqaddimah II 6, III 6, 8, IV 21 etc.
92 Just what "identification" is and how it is achieved will, of course, vary from state to state—a fortiori from theorist to theorist. But what all theorists must recognize is that in the mass and in the long run men do nothing totally unwillingly. That is, they must recognize what all politicians have realized and what Max Weber made explicit: that every lasting relation of control over large numbers of individuals must be based on "a certain minimum of voluntary submission; thus an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience." THE THEORY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION, tr. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, 1947, p. 324. To Ibn Khaldun, living in a society based ultimately on the tribe, it was as natural to assume that "voluntary subordination" meant quasi-familial identification as it was for Weber, living in a built up, urban society, based on money economy, to phrase the matter in terms of ulterior interests—the common insight might well represent the thread of truth: what is required is (some form of) genuine acceptance. Cf. 1 Muqaddimah III 23, p. 386.
never conceive their identities as atomic or their interests as totally isolated from those of at least some others.

To the egoist-rationalist who confines both identity and interest to the subject monad, the phenomena of group activity pose no major threat, for such a thinker can always explain that containment of human irritability and involvement in social cooperation are readily justified on the individual level by the manifest pragmatic benefits they bring—and as readily suspect when they cannot be so justified. With this line of justification Ibn Khaldun is in hearty agreement. As a standard apology for politics, such an explanation is as adequate as need be. But as a social theory it is not. For it does not expose the extent of the individual’s reliance on the group, nor does it explain fully why some will make sacrifices for a group, or die for it. Above all it fails to explain the selectivity with which groups are singled out as foci of cooperation or beneficiaries of self-sacrifice. By abstract standards any social body might expect cooperation and even self-sacrifice from anyone, merely in virtue of the fact that it is a social body. But, of course, men do not cooperate with simply anyone but among “themselves.” Sacrifices are never made for a group qua group, but rather qua “us”—whoever us may be. Only a theory which takes account of subjective identification as a foundation of social cooperation can come to grips with real political questions about how such cooperation actually operates. Only a theory which recognizes subjective identification (or something very like it) as the basis of political authority can begin to ask those most puzzling questions of the historian ‘What are the substrates of political continuity and the causes of historical change?’ Once subjective identification is seen to be the basis of group action (as such), the question is no longer, ‘How is it that aggregates of individuals come to function as effective groups?’, but rather ‘What causes group loyalty, the sense of ‘us’ to be focused in one group or transferred to another, shrunken or enlarged, weakened or strengthened, or translated from one basis of identification to another?’ These for Ibn Khaldun are the primary questions of political theory.

‘Asabiyya in the narrowest sense, ‘asabiyya proper, is the bond of cohesion among the members of the most primitive political grouping, the tribe. Living at the subsistence level and without the benefit of entrenched political institutions, elaborate systems of legal authority—or of walls, exposed not only to the elements but to enemy depredations, tribesmen can rely on no one but one another. Tribal life is inherently cohesive, and the bond of cohesion in such a situation must be intense, personal, and (unless the group is to die) unwavering. It must be as like as possible the bond which holds together families. In other words, it must be ‘asabiyya.’ But if ‘asabiyya in the narrow sense is the basis of the lowest level of political relation, it is not for that reason something which is left behind in higher stages of political development: Like the matter of physical science, ‘asabiyya is a lowest common denominator, the irreducible substrate of all forms of political change. Ibn Khaldun’s reasoning in thus expanding the scope of the term is as clear as it is blunt: “in every human activity, whether prophecy, founding a realm, or appealing for support of a cause, nothing can be won without fighting for it (for it is the nature of men to resist), and in fighting ‘asabiyya is a sine qua non.” Only if men effectively enlarge the sphere of their subjective identities and subjectively perceived interests to someone or something beyond themselves can they be expected to risk death, to stand and fight rather than “slink away.” Neither Hegel nor Ibn Khaldun, nor any theorist was the first to observe that the ruler (when other things are equal and when it has come to that) is the man who is least afraid to die.

The aim and end of ‘asabiyya is kingdom. It is for this reason that nations are born; and for this reason they die, for ‘asabiyya relaxes its grip on men when it has reached its goal. The sickness and death of states and of civilizations is for Ibn Khaldun no metaphorical matter; in arguing that the process of social “senescence” is irreversible, Ibn Khaldun is not merely arguing from analogy or pressing a conceit; he is explaining the facts of history in terms of the laws he has observed there. As an “accident” pertaining to human affairs, ‘asabiyya cannot be eternal. It has a minimum effective level and a maximum; for politically men cannot do less than act or more than die. There is a limit beyond which ‘asabiyya cannot be distended. It may take many forms, but it cannot be totally transmuted. In short it has a nature of its own governing and limiting its mode of development—and for this

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93 1 Muqaddimah II 7, 8, pp. 261–64; cf. 1 Muqaddimah III 1.
94 1 Muqaddimah II 7, p. 263.
95 1 Muqaddimah II 7, p. 263.
96 1 Muqaddimah II 16.
97 1 Muqaddimah III 12, 2 Muqaddimah III 44.
reason alone, in abstraction from concrete considerations of its specific nature—it must die, for all things which come to be must perish.98

'Asabiyya (like the matter of the ancient physicist) has no birth; or rather its birth is with the birth of human civilization, of which it is at once an epiphenomenon and a mainstay. The childhood of 'asabiyya is tribalism. But 'asabiyya is restless, with a motion of its own—for it is, after all, the stuff that human loyalties are made of. Childhood is easily left behind for adolescence: Religion is the adolescence of 'asabiyya, at once transforming and in a way creating 'asabiyya as a basis of society. If the Muqaddimah is to be regarded as in any way dramatic in structure, then the first chapter must contain the setting of the scene; and the inclusion of revelation (in the place of fire, as it were) along with, water, earth, and air, must be explained as the exposition of the motive force just before (as in the manner of Greek drama) the introduction of the dramatis personae in Chapter II.

Religion involves the self with the transcendent as such. Thus only religion can transform the otherwise diffuse energies of particularistic 'asabiyya into a coherent unity—for, to put the matter in military terms (since 'asabiyya is at bottom a military force) only religion can align and unify the otherwise mutually destructive forces of rival 'asabiyya, transforming "bands of savages" into an effective striking force.99 Only religion, by an appeal at once concrete and universal, can broaden the purview of identification beyond the immediately interdependent group. Thus only religion (through the new values it introduces and its appeal to the unseen, its supplanting of exclusive standards of identity with inclusive ones) can offer fulfillment to the groping aspirations of 'asabiyya in search of horizonless worlds to conquer.

The target of 'asabiyya in its drive for power is not, of course, the absolute, the universal as such, but rather "the possessions of others." The dynamic of religiously channelized 'asabiyya is one of expansion, for the net effect of religion on 'asabiyya at the primitive stage, regardless of its effects on men as men or at higher stages, is to give real force to the otherwise idle expansionism of the tribe. It must never be forgotten that in any language the 'asabiyya of an enemy is fanaticism. Of course the political impact of universal religion is a mere byproduct of its transformation of man and society; but strictly politically speaking, at the elemental level, it is this byproduct alone which is of primary significance. What religion allows is a transformation of the base and focus of 'asabiyya, allowing in turn a transformation of society. In the metamorphosis of primitive into civilized which must be undergone by every conqueror or creator of civilizations, religion is the critical "growth factor," expanding the sense of self beyond the "atomic" family, clan, or tribe. Only through such subjective expansion can the self feel unimpeded by the impersonal social bonds, newly necessary to make possible urban life and the transition from heir or founder to possessor; thus only through such expansion can these bonds be workably introduced and "civilized" societies be established.

Civilization in our broad sense, or as Ibn Khaldun calls it, "life" is, like asabiyya, predicable of all forms of human social organization. But in the narrower senses of the terms, 'kinship loyalty' and 'citification' or 'urbanization', 'asabiyya and civilization seem to exclude one another; or, to put it more vividly, each seems to retreat where the other advances. The reason is plain: the institutionalized, rationalized foundations of "civilized" society represent an "advance" beyond the direct personal relationships of the family or the tribe; they are more efficient, more fair—at any rate they are of the sort necessary in a large, impersonal society based on a money economy and a written (i.e. universally applicable) law. Does this imply that in urbanization, 'asabiyya as the ground of all political relations has been transcended, or, for that matter that civilization in the broadest sense can ever be left behind by a human group? Ibn Khaldun thinks not. What has become of 'asabiyya, of course, with the coming of civilization is that this protean stuff of political relations has undergone another metamorphosis in the course of its development; it has reached maturity with the development of the state. Only in the state, where institutions are impersonal, office-holders are interchangeable, laws are immutable, can the claims of 'asabiyya be made public, explicit, enforceable. Thus the state, that is the political institution, the kingdom or dynasty, to use Ibn Khaldun's language, is the telos of 'asabiyya.100 Ironically (and this is an irony we must shortly explore), kingdom is an end in more ways than one; for when 'asabiyya requires publicity and enforcement, it is no longer 'asabiyya. The focus

98 1 Muqaddimah II 14, p. 279. The doctrine of the temporal finitude of creation is at the heart of Islamic radical monotheism, as is demonstrated at length in my recent study of Ghasali's Argument from Creation. International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies II, 1, 2, 1971
99 Cf. 1 Muqaddimah II 26, pp. 305 ff.
100 See 1 Muqaddimah II 16, p. 284, III 1, p. 313; 2 Muqaddimah IV 18, p. 291.
of ‘asabiyya in the state has been drastically changed. Men continue to “identify”; they must, for they continue to subordinate their atomic interests to those of others. But they no longer identify directly with the other members of their group, rather they tender such sacrifices as they make in the name of some principle or ideal, the group itself as an abstract, corporate entity, some institution or individual or even symbol representative of the group. ‘Asabiyya has been sublimated. Its rationale is still at work, and its effects in relating its subject to its object are much the same; but both subject and object have greatly changed, and the modalities governing acceptable and unacceptable expressions of identification and alienation of the one vis à vis the other have been transformed often into diametrical opposites—for “crime in the streets” is the nobility of the tribe.

‘Asabiyya in the broadest sense can never be wholly absent in any group that functions at all differently from a mere collection of individuals; for in so functioning the group must somehow have commanded the identification (i.e. effective subordination of the atomic self) of a pragmatically significant number of its members. By the same token, ‘asabiyya has a minimum effective level. A group which cannot command the allegiance of its members, or a group which commands identification, respect, reverence or even passion, but cannot bring these feelings to the pitch of action cannot function as a group. We have seen that action is the least expression of effective identification and dying is the greatest, that these define the upper and lower levels of the modalities of politics. The tragic fact of history, however, which Ibn Khaldun insists on bringing before us, is that in politics whatever can be demanded will be demanded. Thus ‘asabiyya, whether in the nation or the tribe, becomes a matter of willingness to die.101 It is because this is so that nations and tribes, and the families, states or dynasties which rule them, have finite lifespans. Unless individuals are prepared to die for their group, the group itself will die. For this reason specifically (apart from the fact of metaphysical scope that all things perish under the sun), all political institutions must die and therefore such a process as history takes place.102 Willingness to die itself may die.

Empire is the goal of ‘asabiyya, because, as we have seen, ‘asabiyya is fundamentally a force for self-betterment in a broad and rather subtle sense of ‘self’ and a crude and rather narrow sense of ‘betterment’. As aspirations go, the aspirations of the tribesman are easily satisfied. For the primitive is not a romantic; he wants to live otherwise than as he has. He wants property and the leisure and security to enjoy it, the possessions of the city. He wants the permanence, order and organization which can make him master of time, space, and the elements instead of their victim. Thus by implication he wants laws, institutions, sedentary life and the division of labor. But when these are achieved (even while they are being won) what becomes of the power which gave them to him? Ibn Khaldun’s answer is neither delicate nor equivocal: “The reliance of sedentary people upon laws destroys their courage and power to resist.”103 The same effect is produced by education, whether in the arts by which civilization is upheld or in the sciences, secular or religious, by which it is refined.104 Of course there are institutions now to fill the power gap, indeed the development of such institutions in urbanized society is the chief cause of the decline of tribal ‘asabiyya. But although state institutions supplant tribal ‘asabiyya, they cannot, by their nature, completely replace it; for civilized institutions by their very nature (as telos of ‘asabiyya, that is at once its target, its goal, its satiation, and its end) lack that savagery105 which made possible life in the open desert.

“By its nature, kingdom demands peace. When people grow used to being at peace and at ease, such ways, like any habit, become part of their nature and character. The new generations grow up in comfort, in a life of tranquillity and ease. The old savagery is transformed. The ways of the desert which made them rulers, their violence, rapacity, skill at finding their way in the desert and travelling across wastes, are lost. They now differ from city folk only in their manner and dress. Gradually their prowess is lost, their vigor is eroded, their power undermined.... As men adopt each new luxury and refinement, sinking deeper and deeper into comfort, softness, and peace, they grow more and more estranged from the life of the desert and the desert toughness. They forget the bravery which was their defense. Finally, they come to rely for their protection on some armed force other than their own.”106

Once this has happened, in Ibn Khaldun’s view, a

101 1 Muqaddimah III 1.
102 1 Muqaddimah III 12, p. 344; 2 Muqaddimah III 44, p. 117.
group’s rule is ended and its existence hangs in a balance.

Sublimated ‘asabiyaa, the “identification” of individuals with the group such that they effectively subordinate their atomic interests not to one another, simpliciter, but to one another as office holders, as possessors of various special and general rights which arise in a diversified, money economy and a more or less peaceful, legalized civil society, is necessary qua social bond for the maintenance of such a society; but qua sublimated, it bears within it the seeds of its own destruction. For inasmuch as the members of a “civilized” society “identify” with one another impersonally, i.e. as bearers of offices, privileges, rights, contractual relationships etc., they do so through the medium of principles. Now principles are abstract, and as such they are subjective—they may, to be sure, have some higher reality, objectivity at least, in some court beyond the jurisdiction of human conscience; but as entering into human affairs, any principle or ideal is liable to being made the object of inadequate human conceptions, thus to being compromised, either publicly or, more probably, by that most self-deceiving of tribunals, human nature. Such was not the case, regardless of its other drawbacks, with primitive ‘asabiyaa: In the tribe it does not much matter how one feels about one’s obligations; the painful and immediate consequences of dissociation from the group are all too evident and pressing. But in civilization obligations have proliferated and grown complex; multiple substitutions of doer and recipient are possible (for the relation, not the identity of its participants is what counts); a thick cushion against the consequences of neglect is provided by the built-up institutions of society itself; and above all, the rise of wealth, the products of industry, including leisure (which is at once the most precious and most dangerous product of human industry) have opened the door to the most convincing enemies of duty (for sublimated ‘asabiyaa in the most general sense is duty), namely personal ease, personal safety, personal pleasure. Individualism is perhaps the most ambiguous of all the ambiguous byproducts of civilization. In primitive life this ambiguity, at least, did not exist, necessity demanded otherwise. But with the growth of wealth and leisure, the individual grows eager to defend the new freedom of his person afforded by the sublimation of ‘asabiyaa, and the thin line grows blurred between the liberal, who believes he can do better (even for the group) if left alone, and the permissive, whose demands sound the same in abstracto, but whose motive is affection for his own pleasures and his own vices. Pleasure and vice are not, of course, identified by Ibn Khaldun, but where pleasure is the commonest ground for self-deception, the commonest cause for obfuscation of motives and distortion of perspectives between self and others, it must be expected that the connection between dissolution and corruption will be intimate, and the slide from a life of pleasure to a life of vice almost impossible to abate; for, as Ibn Khaldun observes, pleasure, once it has become a prime object of human concern, is demanded in ever increasing doses and ever more exquisite, exotic, or perverse variety.

All this would matter not in the least (politically, that is) were it not for the fact that both within and outside the walls of any society there are those who do not share in the dilemma of the affluent civilization, or deem themselves to be above it. To the opportunist, whether political or intellectual, society (even while it lives) appears to be no more than a bloated and moribund body whose resources (and last vigor) exist only to be sapped—often under the guise of response to its own desperate recognition of its need for help. Thus the infusion of a new spirit of resolution may forestall the inevitable decline, but cannot prevent it, for highly organized, urbanized societies by their very nature seek remedies to their problems in professionalism and expertise, thus offer themselves as bait to charlatans and political (and ultimately military) opportunists. But militarism, demagoguery and the intellectual authority of the pseudo-prophets whom the situation calls forth are as destructive of the fabric of society as decadence itself. Meanwhile, outside the cities, to the primitive, whose main concern remains survival, whose social, legal and even familial status remain intertwined with one another, whose ‘asabiyaa is still direct, personal, unquestionable, still a matter of life and death, the affluence of urban civilization can only appear (once religion or some religious surrogate has begun the dialectic of the expansion of ‘asabiyaa) as a target. And a tempting target indeed, for the urban individualist has lost the ultimate sanction of ‘asabiyaa, lost it willingly, by his eager entry into the more comprehensive but less personally demanding bonds of civilization, has forgotten, as Ibn Khaldun puts it,

107 Cf. 1 Muqaddimah III 14, p. 351.
108 See 2 Muqaddimah V 16, p. 347; 2 Muqaddimah VI 8, p. 434.
110 1 Muqaddimah III 12; cf. II 14.
how wealth and power (the sources of his pleasure and security) were won, that is he has lost what the desperate man and the most dangerous members of a primitive society have in common, willingness, if necessary, to die.

It is the willingness of some to die, then, which renders history so like a drama, with the players ever changing while the roles remain the same. In propounding the theory that “nations, like individuals, have lifespans” Ibn Khaldun is neither engaging in model building nor indulging in metaphor, but merely deducing from the fact that as ‘asabiyya is widened it is weakened, the conclusion that there must come a point in the expansion and attenuation of the social bond when it will snap. Given the existence of alien, naturally hostile ‘asabiyyat which seek the subordination of one another, and given the natural selfishness of man, it becomes apparent that the balloon will be burst long before its own natural breaking point is reached. Nor is confirmation of the hypothesis far to seek, for as Carl Sandburg observed, “the world is strewn with the burst bladders of the puffed up.”

Nations are born, grow to maturity and die in a regular pattern that mirrors the transformations of physical nature and seems somehow to reflect the ceaseless motion of material, finite being in its restless striving and constant failing to reach changelessness and perfection. But the pattern seen by Ibn Khaldun in history is neither extrapolated from the laws of natural science nor superimposed from the projected image of some higher principle, the knowledge that all things less than God are ever moving, ever imperfect, rising, falling, growing, and dying. Rather it is perceived (for all sound metaphysics begins with observation) in the expanse of history and the course of historical events. The patterns of historical change follow lines of growth and decay inherent in a nature which pertains specifically to politics and history.

Like Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun bases his notion of the laws of history on his conception of human nature and relies for the credibility of those laws on a certain pessimism, at least regarding the propensities of that nature in adverse circumstances. Like Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun is concerned with the manner in which historical forces may grow in magnitude and momentum beyond the powers of their participants to contain or control them, by an incremental effect which is not purely arithmetical. But Ibn Khaldun goes further in his analysis, building out of the elements of human nature, considered in the dialectical context of history, a political nature, analogous to the “party spirit” of Thucydides but far more comprehensive in function and effect, providing as it does the basis of political affiliation and in consequence the substrate of historical change. Having discerned the peculiar nature of ‘asabiyya and discovered the unique laws of its growth, development, transferral, and decay, Ibn Khaldun is in a position to write not merely of the laws of history as they relate to particular historical events, but comprehensively of the laws of history at large.

A recent historian might feel little need to delve as deep as does Thucydides into human nature and motivation for an understanding of historical events and their “principles”; a contemporary political scientist might well feel he had gone far enough, had he gone as far as Ibn Khaldun in discerning the pattern according to which history is governed. For both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides, however, merely to discern the pattern and the law of history is not enough. Both maintain a by no means casual or private desire for answers to bigger questions, which only their hard won empirical grasp of those patterns and laws can satisfy ‘What is the meaning behind the laws and patterns of history?’, ‘What is the relationship of history to human values?’ In what sense can the laws and patterns of history, as, now understood, be taken to imply the operation of a government beyond the governments of human beings?”

In cutting himself loose from the comfortable acceptance by an older, stabler society of religious (and political) myth and hyperbole, neither Thucydides nor Ibn Khaldun was rejecting the values such acceptance stood for. Both men were scientists in the sense that their criteria of reality were naturalistic and their standards of critical thought were empiricist, especially by contrast with the methods and assumptions of their forerunners. Both were “realists” but neither understood realism to imply value-neutrality. Man had had experience enough to see how the divine does not take part in history: the gods of Homer were dead for Thucydides; and so, for that matter, was the God of primitive faith for Ibn Khaldun. Yet neither Ibn Khaldun nor Thucydides was prepared to say flat out that the divine had no role to play in human events or to assert dogmatically that values have no essential relationships to history. Neither man was ready to beg such questions positivistically, for the pristine achievement of both, be it remembered, was their principled refusal to beg such questions in any direction. It was

111 Loc. cit. 1 Muqaddimah III 12, II 14; 2 Muqaddimah III 44.
about such questions as these, 'What role has God in history?', 'Can right triumph?', 'What is the relation of historical events to the good?' that both men had doggedly determined to be empiricists.

It cannot have occurred to either to doubt that metaphysical and evaluative questions had a clear and definite meaning. Both historians lived at what they saw to be the end of an era, what both wanted to assess was the "outcome" of history. The answers, however, which each of them found through his long empirical involvement with history, in the flesh and in the ashes, were probably not what he had expected to find. The answers to the big metaphysical and value questions about history were more complex than a young man might have suspected, and perhaps more so than most had realized before. The lesson of history was not to be stated baldly, but rather to be worked out progressively within the dialectical context of the situations which gave it its reality and the experience which made it clear in the mind of the historian. It was for this that a critical framework was needed, a notion of what can and cannot happen in human history.

The roots of Ibn Khaldun's cyclical view of history lie in the same ground across which Thucydides had been forced to retreat from the dogma of inevitable progress, acceptance of what seems to many a manifest fact of life, that values conflict and that their conflict is more than a casual (i.e. per accidens) matter. In a finite world of more than one participant, to act at all is to have interests and a point of view, thus to risk becoming an aggressor or a victim, if not both. Both the sophists and the tragedians, in their different ways, had been struck by the fact that no human conscious act is without its explanation, and indeed its justification; it is this awareness of theirs which gives the actions of characters in Greek tragedy their depth and which colors the value theory of the sophists so deeply with relativism: The very fact of intersubjectivity, underlying human aggressiveness and vulnerability, made crime, either in the doing or the "being done by", the inevitable human condition.

Both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides are gravely concerned with the dilemma of action and passivity implied in any widespread acceptance of sophist "likelihood" assumptions: The elevation of the vulgar motto 'Do unto others before they do unto you' into a universal norm of action. Neither historian adopts the perspective of such a standard of morality, but both are keenly aware of the urgency with which such standards press themselves upon individuals; and (since groups have no conscience of their own yet often bear heavier "responsibilities" than their members), all the more so upon nations, parties, and tribes. Thus although both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides reject the sophist morality (and repeatedly reject the opportunity such a conception affords for the evasion of value judgements) both have learned from it, both accept it partially, both are seeking an evaluative framework in which to assay a world where such standards have become the norm.

Because interests vary, conflict is inevitable; and for the same reason, no party to a conflict can claim to be absolutely right or to know that the other is absolutely wrong. Contrary to sophist presumptions, there may be a right, but it cannot be exemplified in conflict. Thus no party to a conflict can claim that "God is on our side." In an imperfect human world—a fortiori in a world of conflict—the sophist notion that no action in itself is either right or wrong seemed only narrowly to miss the truth. What was in fact the case was not that actions were somehow stripped of moral qualities by their relativity, but rather that they took on (inasmuch as they were less than divine) a taint of moral ambivalence, the same ambivalence which had been perceived by Euripides to attach to all major interpersonal undertakings. The same act (from different points of view) was at once right and wrong; in defending one's interests (or aggressing to secure further interests to defend), one was almost certain to be right, and almost equally certain to do wrong.

In the theory of authority as a restraint on human aggressiveness embodied in Thucydides' description of the unleashing of the human passions of vengeance and greed with the "trampling of all laws under foot," and more explicitly in Ibn Khaldun's doctrine of the ruler as "restraining force", sophist assumptions regarding the inevitability of conflict and the relativity of all values over which such conflicts may be fought are organically embodied—and indeed are taken at their full face value, for neither the sophists nor the tragedians, neither Ibn Khaldun nor Thucydides are committed to the assumption that the ruler himself will be immune to the fear dialectic or above the arena of conflict, interest, and aggression. Any finite point of view, whether that of a subject, a ruler, a people, or a state, is only partial, is liable to conflict, is liable

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113 Cf. Finley pp. 84 ff.

114 Thucydides III 83 ff. p. 201; see also the passages immediately preceding and II 51 ff. p. 124; III 11, p. 161.
to be wrong as well as right, and indeed most likely, being one-sided, to be both wrong and right. There are, as the sophist advocate would say, two sides to every case. Creon is as liable to be wrong as Antigone. Athens has no more claim to be “the injured party” than Sparta. The “greatest” conqueror is as much the victim of history as he is its curse.

What we have in Ibn Khaldun, every bit as much as in Thucydides, is a view of history as tragedy. The notion of progress has been forced back before the ever mounting evidence not of decline, but of the moral ambivalence attaching to all human affairs—nor, perhaps, by their essence, but as the endemic, chronic, and ineradicable affliction which preys upon their inherent weaknesses. Neither Ibn Khaldun nor Thucydides is willing to accept sophist claims as to the relativity of all values, absolute relativism as it were. But both recognize that inasmuch as values are subject to human conceptions, and to human desires, passions, and fears, no ideal will be wholly untainted, no principle (in action) will be wholly uncompromised. Values as such have not the sort of being that can be tarnished; but institutions have, and no law or principle by which men endeavor to live, regardless how nobly conceived, is immune to distortion, perversion or mere “trampling underfoot.”

In a complex world of action and reaction, causation and effect, where the dialectic of interaction itself produces complex and often unpredictable feed-back effects, and events move with an unwieldy inertia and momentum of their own, ever threatening to break loose from the slender reins by which men hope to control them, every action begins to appear double-edged, every accomplishment imponderable—for as acts and institutions, programs, laws, and wars loose themselves from the moorings in which they were created, taking on an autonomy, a life of their own, what creator would not shudder to accept total responsibility for what he has set in motion?—every value, that is every human value, begins to appear ambiguous. Greatness is a neutral quantity, easily measured and assigned, but with the mounting complexity of social enterprise and the transformation of the once strait and narrow paths of possibility and necessity into a labyrinth, the once clear direction of achievement forks and branches in a myriad of confusing directions. The moral qualities and moral effects of action are increasingly perceived to be complex and a persuasion becomes current that the greater and more impressive an undertaking is, the more it is ambivalent in effect and ambiguous in intention.

In such a time if objective values, as both Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides believed, are still to be affirmed, then they must be seen no longer as the guide but as the test of human history. And if a pattern is to be affirmed by which right is seen somehow to prevail, then that triumph must occur not in the victory of one finite and misguided force over another, but rather in some “higher” justice (for justice is the stand-in for right where right cannot entirely prevail) by which the inadequate (and inadequately justified) forces of countervailing positions somehow fight each other to a standoff, or standoff. Or better, from the point of view of poetic justice (for in such times justice falls by default to the province of the poet, the contriver of situations), perhaps such forces can be seen to cancel one another, the good and evil of each reducing those of the other to “spotless nullity.” Or best of all, let the cancellation be internal, let each event, value, and action, bear within itself, by virtue of its very ambiguity, the seeds and the force of its own moral cancellation. If acts are so be ambivalent, at once a blessing and a curse, let each act be at once its own crime and its own punishment, its own virtue and its own reward. Such was the image of life the tragedians attempted to project. Such, I submit, is the image both the Maghribi Ibn Khaldun and the Athenian Thucydides reflect in their visions of history.

Thucydides undertook the writing of his history in the belief that the war of which he had witnessed the beginning would be the “greatest” event in the history of Hellas, perhaps of the world. The whole prior history of the Greek-speaking peoples he had seen as a progress to the build-up of the political and military establishments which rendered such a war possible and, indeed, inevitable. But the vision of the past as a cumulative upward progress to the present was not to be superimposed on the present and the future. For the very achievements which had given the present events their “greatness” had planted deadly ambiguities in greatness itself. Thus the last great action of the war, the Sicilian expedition (along with the reprisals by which it was met) was “the greatest—the most glorious” of all Hellenic actions which took place in this war, or indeed,” adds Thucydides, “as I think, of all Hellenic actions which are on record,”—and at once “the most ruinous.” The dialectic by which such “greatness” is achieved is no progress in the optimistic sense of the

115 Thucydides, on the first page of the History.
117 Thucydides VII 87, p. 463.
term, but rather an escalation which gradually strips away not only all tactical restraints, but every moral or religious inhibition to the perpetration of ever more egregious crimes. And in the background, echoing the rising pitch of violence, inhumanity, and impiety, as if in some ominous counterpoint, again and again Thucydides records oracles, omens, natural disasters.

Men had committed crimes not only against each other, but against the gods.118 As an empiricist, Thucydides cannot fail to note the "earthquakes unparalleled in their extent and fury, and eclipses of the sun more numerous than are recorded to have happened in any former age. In some places there were great droughts which caused famines, and, lastly, there was the plague which did immense harm and destroyed numbers of people. All these calamities fell upon Hellas simultaneously with the war."119 He cannot fail to associate these disasters with the fact that "never before had so many cities been depopulated and resettled, never had exile and slaughter been more frequent."120 Thucydides' general sophistication, if not his naturalism, prevent him from attributing the calamities he observed to the direct causal influence of the gods. But the historian was deeply sensitive to the fact that such attributions were precisely what much popular and popularizing thought was engaging in.121 What then is his purpose in the careful parataxes by which he juxtaposes or records the juxtapositions (for the method of speeches allows him to do both) of the crimes of men with what were held universally, in popular opinion, to be the punishments of the gods?

With the outbreak of war came the breaking of oaths, the violation after fourteen hears of what was to have been a thirty year peace—a peace which must have been itself no small achievement but which somehow lacked the strange quality of "greatness" to recommend it to the pen of the historian. The first actions of the war had been founded on treachery and deceit; and, with the mounting dialectic of deceit, it gradually becomes apparent what form the "vengeance" of the gods will take.

All the elements of the Thucydidean dialectic are manifested in the affair of Plataea: fifth column treachery, the self-deceiving ambition which demands a pre-emptive strike, crimes against both human and sacred law by the Thebans in aggressing during a truce and by the Plataeans in murdering their prisoners in violation of the oath or understanding by which they had induced the Theban army to withdraw—and in parataxis with these events, the ominous mutterings of the oracles—mongers and soothsayers. The threats immanent in the situation have not yet manifested themselves, but by the time the many little dramas of Thucydides' history have been played out, ambition will have turned to hubris, frequent and flagrant violation of oaths, of sanctuary, of the rights of prisoners; crimes against all laws of mankind and the gods will have become the norm; ambition and the fear dialectic will have created a juggernaut which neither side has the power or the will to stop, and the gloomy predictions of the prophetes, the mouthpieces of the gods, will have been fulfilled, not only by natural disasters but by the doings of men, through the nemesis of self-destruction. Thus when the tables are turned on the Plataeans,124 and it becomes their turn to pay for their crimes, their violation of oaths and of the rights of prisoners,125 they must repay with compound interest, for by now the level of violence has risen—men have lost their fear of the gods;126 it has become possible to fell fruit trees and mount a massacre in the name of the gods.127 The Thebans and the Lacedaemonians are able to convince one another, and themselves, that justice and truth are in fact served by the destruction of Plataea and the massacre of the Plataeans.128 They see nothing barbarous in the slaughter of the surrendered populace,129 for by now massacres have become almost the rule.130 It no longer seems strange that the possessions of the betrayed should be made over to Hera,131 for the crimes of others have turned men's own crimes into inspired acts of vengeance,132 and sophistry and self-love blind them to the meshes in which they are becoming deeper and deeper ensnared. With each new crime and atrocity, each new act of self-deception and mutual destruction, the irony of Thucydides rises and his distance grows more pronounced. Both reach tragic proportions long

118 Thucydides II 51 ff., III 81 ff. among many others.
119 Thucydides I 24, p. 34.
120 Loc. cit.
121 Loc. cit.
122 Thucydides II 1, p. 97.
123 Thucydides II 2–9, pp. 97–101.

125 Thucydides III 66, p. 191.
126 Thucydides II 52, p. 124.
127 Thucydides II 74, p. 137.
130 Cf. e.g. Thucydides III 34 ff., the near massacre of the Mytilenaeans.
132 Thucydides II 66 ff., pp. 132–33.
before each last blow is struck, for the vantage point of hindsight and the detachment of exile allow Thucydides to see what neither side can see: that war has a force and justice of its own, that a crime against another people is a crime against one's own, because of what it makes of us and, in a way no sophistry or blasphemy can hide, because of what it makes of them. Thus the Plataean massacre brings that of Corecyra in its train.

It is not by chance that the model act of hubris in the history of Thucydides, Pericles' funeral oration, should be juxtaposed with the historian's description of the plague at Athens; nor is it mere casual chronicling which places the historian's development of the Corecyren plague at Athens; nor is it mere casual chronicling which the tragedian creates, an internal logic and dynamic in interhuman events which does the work of any primitive set of gods, furies, or fates, but far more subtly, directly and inevitably; for in the complex political situation, as in the complex system of human relations of which the tragedian writes, as in the world of physics, for that matter, every act bears within it its own consequences, its own price, its own reaction and cancellation. Thus the subtle irony of the historian (and the polite refusal of the tragedian to appear upon the stage): it is not necessary for either to do more than the gods—let their characters write their sentences with their own hands, damn themselves out of their own mouths.

Thus the funeral oration of Pericles, that masterpiece of Attic clarity, so inept to the occasion as hindsight would perceive it, so insensitive, in its brilliance, to human feelings and human grief, yet so keenly perceptive of the mainroads and short-cuts of flattery. Even to the modern reader, who sees himself as an Athenian, side by side with the others among the throng, the speech is so skillful in its appeals to chauvinism and self-love, so lofty in conception, lucid in design, noble in the standards it sets forth to be died for, that one is almost tempted to read it as Thucydides lets us understand Pericles would have wished the Athenians to have heard it, as a stirring appeal to ideals to be fought for. Only little hints like the tone, or the showmanship of Pericles in arranging his rostrum—or above all the immediate following of the speech by Thucydides' description of the plague bring us to our senses, remind us of what every Greek reader of Thucydides knew, that the speech of Pericles was the prelude and invitation to disaster. And the parataxis of the speech with the plague forces us to wonder (as most Greek readers of Thucydides must have wondered) whether Thucydides means to ascribe the plague to the hubris of Pericles, and to inquire why, if he did not, did he contrive to juxtapose the two events. But in studying the description of the plague the answer becomes patent: this wondering and inquiring were all Thucydides desired. He wanted only to raise (and to raise in just this context) the popular and inevitable hypothesis that divine vengeance was involved in the punishment of specific human crimes (the breaking of oaths, the atrocities which had already occurred and had already been blasphemously performed in the name of the gods, above all the hubris of empire)—and then to let it be seen that the real punishment was within the crime itself, within the logic of the crime, within the crime in its situation, in a plural and reacting universe. He made this conclusion inescapable by his description of the plague itself, for what made the plague utterly unbearable, beyond the dying and the suffering, was the depth of human bestiality and impiety which it unleashed.

To desire empire is natural, thus so is the desire to

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132 Cf. Thucydides V 32, p. 311; and, for an earlier stage, I 127 ff. pp. 84-85.

134 See Thucydides II 34 ff.

135 Thucydides II 53, p. 124.
defend it. Empire can be won only by aggression and defended, as Cleon argues,138 only by severity. Thus the massacres, the dragging of suppliants from the altars,137 the enslaving of women and children,138 the razing of cities,139 and the whole gamut of terror and treachery which goes by the name of war is the product of natural human desires, which may be debated, compromised, or even denied, yet which seem somehow never to be totally suppressed. But beyond these drives and their products are further consequences, reactions, dialectics of mutual destruction and self-destruction—and often the two can hardly be distinguished. These are the punishment of crime as surely as the attainment of its object is its reward. They are not punishments in the sense of religion at the mythic stage, but they are as inexorable as the furies in pursuing the guilty, for no act can be divorced from its consequences, isolated from its logic; no criminal can free himself from the consequences of his act, from his conscience if he has one, from what he has become if he has not, from what he has made of his enemies; no criminal can reverse the transformation he has brought about in himself and his entire universe until his act itself is somehow cancelled or avenged.

Thucydides delineates the complex patterns along which the logic of such actions and reactions flow. In describing the Corcyraen blood-bath, he shows how human beings vied with rumor in the perpetration of atrocities,140 discarded all “higher motives,” for (as Ibn Khaldun might have said) “their characters were assimilated to their conditions,”141 submerged all social and even family bonds in favor of partisanship and the fellowship of crime.142 That the pattern is self-sustaining and self-aggravating is obvious, but it takes the poet’s touch, the following of the description of the Corcyraen atrocities and sacrileges as typical of what was to come142 with the renewal of the plague in its natural cycle and the coincidence of earthquake and tidal wave, to remind us that the mounting and uncontrollable dialectic of crime and reaction is its own punishment. For only the putting forth (but not the espousal) of the hypothesis of divine vengeance on the traditional pattern could put the whole vision into the context of punishment, thereby raise it beyond the level of mere political science and force consideration of Thucydides’ own hypothesis, that a subtler sort of nemesis was at work, divine too although not in the traditional way, a vengeance which was immanent in the act in the same way that the divine order and law were immanent in physical nature. Nothing might overstep, for order and rule governed all, and the limitation of any finite being would be its destruction when it overran itself. The logos, the logic of human action and human events, were the Erynes which would inevitably avenge injustice.

The irony of Thucydides is neither cheap nor facile. His object is not to expose the inner natures of the men of whom he writes; he allows them to do that well enough for themselves. His purpose, rather, like that of the tragedian, is to add a profundity and subtlety to our understanding of human motives and human action which will allow the cancellation of all moral debts, the readjustment of all moral imbalances, either by explanation which makes way for forgiveness or by delineation of the patterns within the logic of human events which make every act its own requital. Like the tragedian Thucydides offers a moral purge; thus like the tragedian he is dealing in more or less secularized theodicy, answering man’s incapacity to live in the same universe with evil, first by the attempt, godlike, to see every side of the issue, second—for what cannot be forgiven—by demonstration of the operation within history of an inexorable and supremely even-handed justice, which (if the work of the gods be seen as immanent) may be described as divine.

What Thucydides saw in the Peloponnesian War, Ibn Khaldun, in his own way, saw or attempted to see in the whole of human history and social relations accessible to his view. The lesson which Thucydides extracted from the archetypal confrontation he considered was in its philosophical essentials fundamentally equivalent to the lesson Ibn Khaldun drew from history at large.

Thucydides had begun his history with the famous digression on ancient history, which had set the critical tone of the book by parting the curtains as it were, broadening the scope of the work beyond the flat, peep-hole view of history which sees the past as a narrow and dimly lit staircase leading inevitably upward to the present. His method was to provide a summary account of ancient life, drawing out the contrast between the highly organized, urban, commercial civilization with which his readers were familiar, and the migratory existence of their forbears at a subsistence level of

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138 Thucydides III 81 ff., p. 198.
140 Loc. cit. inter alia.
141 Thucydides III 82, p. 199.
142 Loc. cit.
143 Loc. cit.
144 Thucydides III 81 pp. 198–199.
economy, a primitive state of social organization, and a rude stage of technical and scientific development. The contrast, by heightening the complexities of the life known to his contemporaries not only enables him easily to wriggle free of the strait-jacket of a doctrinaire progressivism, to candle the present and the future by a different light from that he has applied to the distant past, but also prepares the way for the introduction of moral ambiguities among the "complexities of modernity" on the wider and better lit stage Thucydides chooses for the exposition of his drama. And such ambiguities, it must be remembered, (as in tragedy) provide the depth and the meaning of the author's vision.

By the time of Ibn Khaldun's writing, the now traditional introductory passages, in which the historian is expected to defend his craft and outline his method and assumptions, have been augmented by the assimilation of vast stores of "eisagoge literature" and "encyclopedia literature," offering an intellectual framework which the North African statesman was eminently capable of supplementing from his personal experience. But more importantly, the image of two kinds of life, one in which arts, leisure, and the law prevail, the other in which even ordinary men wear arms in their day to day routine, has expanded from a glimpse of the remote past and exotic present to fill the universe of present and future. The settled and unsettled lives have become archetypes of the two main kinds of possibility for man—not only for societies, but for individuals and the human personality as well. Plato had early observed how one social type might metamorphose or die into another, and Ibn Khaldun was quick to note how social types in reality normally verge into one another at their temporal or geographical frontiers. The conclusion was not far to seek: Man himself bends with the ebb and flow of history.

The Greek, and for that matter the Muslim experiment had failed. The state of the Laws had not been built on earth; and the less ambitious demands of Muhammad were far from fulfilled. History was not a progress, but the endless interaction of two ways of life, desert and town. Ibn Khaldun was quick to note how social types in reality normally verge into one another at their temporal or geographical frontiers. The conclusion was not far to seek: Man himself bends with the ebb and flow of history.

The acumen of Ibn Khaldun in social science prevents his socio-economic types from remaining mere socio-economic types. The types take on moral qualities because of the social fact that men's characters are conditioned by the social and economic conditions in which they live. And as a value typology, Ibn Khaldun's categorization will have a vital role to play in answering the historian's evaluative and metaphysical questions, for the values represented by the two types are complementary, and the interplay of those values—sometimes one, sometimes another prevailing—is the closest approach to perfection that may be made in a finite world of conflicting individuals.

The bedouin (paradigmatically) is savage, greedy, courageous, healthy, self-reliant, easily molded. He lives at an inferior level of civilization, but is "closer to being good" than a comparable city dweller. Civilization is cultured, law-abiding, spiritual, flaccid, superstitious, dependent on professionals for everything from his daily wants and luxuries to his personal protection, sensual, prone to sickness, and easily corrupted. His type of society is man's only means of accomplishing anything truly "great", yet as an individual he may well not be as superior as the achievements of civilization (that is, primarily of others) have led him to presume. Civilization is the custodian of the arts and sciences; but in such realms

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144 See F. E. Peters, Aristotle and the Arabs, New York, 1968, pp. 15-16, 20, 104-120, for these two genres.
145 Thucydides I 4 ff., p. 25.
146 Thucydides I 5, p. 25; cf. 1 Muqaddimah Introduction, p. 36.
147 Thucydides loc. cit.
148 1 Muqaddimah II 25, pp. 302 ff.
149 1 Muqaddimah II 14, 15, 16, 18, etc.
150 1 Muqaddimah II 5.
151 2 Muqaddimah III 49, pp. 135 f.
152 1 Muqaddimah II 3-7.
153 1 Muqaddimah II 4.
154 1 Muqaddimah II 28.
155 1 Muqaddimah II 4.
156 Muqaddimah IV, V, VI passim.
157 1 Muqaddimah II 6.
158 3 Muqaddimah VI 16.
159 2 Muqaddimah III 2, 11-15. cf. 2 Muqaddimah V 4-6, 11 etc.
160 3 Muqaddimah VI 31, esp. p. 262; and in general VI 27-32, where Ibn Khaldun attacks the false intellectual authorities of the pseudo-sciences—including philosophy.
161 2 Muqaddimah V.
162 1 Muqaddimah III 2, 3, 11-12, 17, 44, etc.
163 2 Muqaddimah III 49.
164 2 Muqaddimah IV 18, pp. 293 ff.
165 1 Muqaddimah III 8, 10, 13, 16, etc.
166 3 Muqaddimah V-VI, that is civilization with all its complexities and ambiguities, must somehow be weighed against II. As to quality of people (distinguished from quality of life) Ibn Khaldun's judgement is expressed in II 4, "Bedouins are closer to being good than settled people."
as language, poetry, and pedigree, where nature must take artifice by the hand, it is the bedouins who excel.

In short, there is a cleavage among the values which human beings may represent such that one compossible set is incompatible with another. The highest, best, and most beautiful product of men's efforts, civilization, was not the state in which the purest, simplest, bravest spirits ranged.

Each way of life had its own virtues and vices, and indeed (the vices being no more than natural diseases of the virtues—since nothing good in a world of becoming will lack the mode of its own decay) the two were inseparable from each other, complementary aspects of the same bi-valent human (and political) material. Moreover the excess of either set of traits, the over-reaching of civilization or the overstepping of the bedouin, casts the die which marks the inevitable death of either into the other.

Like Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun is never a relativist of the dogmatic type. His willing concessions to "realism" never bring him to the point of confessing all values and ideals to be nugatory or subjective; rather he never ceases to believe (and to act on the belief) that men are (and should be) judged by standards which it is at best unrealistic to expect they can live up to. Ibn Khaldun was no Plato in Arab dress, but neither was he a mere opportunist or apologist and agent of opportunists. In his eager and repeated participation in the art of coup-manship he was doing no more than playing the game. In giving aid and information to Tamerlane, he was doing no more than failing at the same game—and had it not been the failure of Thucydides which occasioned his taking the stance of spectator rather than participant of history? But in his zealous stewardship of his tasks as qādī in the last years of his life, Ibn Khaldun rose perhaps somewhat or endeavored to rise above the partialities of human inadequacy which it had been his task in the Muqaddimah intellectually to transcend.

The discovery of the Muqaddimah was that mankind is divided—that man is divided, if not by nature, then by that second nature imprinted on him by society and by his way of life, that the complementary aspects which man's character may take on are mutually contradictory, yet bear within themselves not only the natural means of the destruction of one another, but also the inevitable causes of their own destruction into one another, that the two states (like the two aspects of the human and political material which they at once preyed upon and fed) were destined to live on in uneasy coexistence until somehow someone was found to unite or surpass them. The content of history was the struggle of each against the other and against itself. The message of history was that in that struggle, in the expression of the virtues of one aspect, their overarchings into vices, and their suppression by their own internal logic and the dialectic of their interaction with countervailing forces, all moral debts were cancelled, all injustice overcome. The meaning of history was not in the outcome but in the process itself.

Relativism is one answer to the problem of evil, and indeed the only answer-type which can avoid the obvious empirical difficulties of the various monistic answers. In the dynamic sphere, where history has its life, the same point can be made: only a dialectical vision of history allows the possibility of theodicy or its humanistic counterpart, and only a cyclical theory of history can confront empirical realities in the name of reconciling the existence of evil with the divine or human natures, once a simply progressive dialectic has lost its credibility. Only a cyclical theory of history offers the possibility of a theodicy of history without historicism, an opportunity to exonerate God and being at large from charges of injustice without acceptance of the odious and manifestly false doctrine that whatever is is right. Just as relativism is the obvious line of retreat from monism once pluralism has been accepted, so cyclicalism is the obvious line of retreat from progressivism once ambiguities and threats of decline have begun to manifest themselves—provided that the historian preserves the almost universal human motivation, if not to justify the ways of God to man, then at least to reconcile the ways of nature with human conscience.

What answer then has Ibn Khaldun to the problem of values and of God in history? His answer, fundamentally, is the same as that of Thucydides: the laws of human and of social nature (if not those of human existence) bring men into conflict, cause them to overstep. In the dialectic of history each man in his society pursues what may seem goods (and partly be such) which lead both to virtue and to vice (in a partial sort of way) and bring in their train, or rather contain, their own retribution and their own reward. For societies, as for individuals, crime and punishment, virtue and reward are inextricable from one another. Caligula must live the life of Caligula and die the death of Caligula, and so must every empire or horde live the life which is
in its nature and die the death which is of its nature. For nations, like individuals, must pay for their crimes, even when those crimes were the products of natural desires. To know these things implies obligations, but does not guarantee that they will be met, for even the best of men cannot encompass all that is good, nor can the best society embody all possibilities. And something within finite being makes it impossible for the inadequacy of finitude to remain forever acceptable. The maintenance of this internal justice might well be identified (by a man seeking spheres of action for the divine on higher planes than those assigned by popular religion) as the act of God: The true answer to the problem of evil (and of failure) in history was to be found in the tragic finitude of men and all that they create, a finitude at once noble and degrading, which God in His wisdom and grace bestowed upon men and nations, allowing them to live and causing them to die through a nature of their own. In the light of all that Ibn Khaldun wrote, there can be no other explanation of the words by which he opens his Muqaddimah:

Praised be God, whose is the Kingdom of Heaven and in whose hand are all earthly rule and kingdom. His are the most exquisite names and attributes, and nothing, be it whispered or left unsaid, is unknown to Him. He is all powerful, and nothing in heaven or on earth is impossible for Him or escapes Him. He raised us up from the earth and gave us breath, let us live on earth as nations and tribes, gave us our portion and sustenance from the earth. The wombs of our mothers and our houses were our shelters. Food keeps us alive. Time wears us out, and our fate, which has been fixed in the Book, comes. But He endures. He lives and does not die.

See 1 Muqaddimah II 14, p. 281 for Ibn Khaldun's tragic exegesis of Exodus xx 5; cf. especially the quotations from Qur'an at 1 Muqaddimah III 11-15.