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Part 6. Political Thought

Chapter XLIX

IBN KHALDŪN

A

The consideration of ibn Khaldūn's political philosophy within the context provided by a work on the history of Muslim philosophy, and in a chapter concluding the history of Muslim political philosophy in the classical period,

must face and attempt to clarify the complex problem of the precise character of the political aspect of ibn Khaldūn's new science of culture, and its theoretical and practical implications when contrasted with the various philosophic practical sciences and Muslim legal sciences that share the same subject-matter. In this attempt, the investigator is faced with the dilemma that, although ibn Khaldūn shows intimate acquaintance with these philosophical and legal disciplines and with the writings of his predecessors on them, he does not present himself in his major work either as a philosopher or as a writer on legal matters; does not choose to continue either the Greek and Muslim tradition of political philosophy or any of the traditional Muslim legal sciences; and does not make a direct or thematic contribution in the form of a treatise on any of these disciplines. He considers his main contribution to be an almost wholly new science based on natural philosophy yet advancing beyond traditional natural philosophy by using certain conclusions of natural science to construct a complete science of culture.

The investigation of culture inevitably led ibn Khaldūn to the investigation of the phenomenon of government, which is both a constituent part and the "form" (*ṣūrah*), i.e., the organizing principle, of culture. The third section of Book One of the "History" is devoted to this subject, and its title indicates the various problems which it investigates: "On States, Kingship, the Caliphate, and Sovereign Ranks; and the States Occurring in These—Containing Fundamental [Propositions] and Supplementary [Inquiries]."¹ Since government is the form of culture as a whole, we also find extensive discussions of this subject in all the other sections of Book One, including the section on the sciences. This treatment of political matters is not, however, an independent discussion and is not based on premises of its own but forms an integral part of the science of culture.

Ibn Khaldūn himself distinguishes his new science, and his investigation of political matters within the scope of this science, from the traditional political science or political philosophy of his Greek and Muslim predecessors and also from the Muslim legal sciences. After recapitulating the substance of his own investigation of politics, an attempt will be made in this chapter to understand how he characterizes his new endeavour and justifies his departure from the well-established philosophical and legal traditions. We shall find that what appears at first to be an effort simply to distinguish between the science of culture and political philosophy and the legal sciences, progressively takes the form of a critique of, first, certain propositions, and, secondly, of the entire subject-matter of political philosophy and of dialectical theology, though the critique of the latter discipline is less pronounced and more implicit. In this connection, ibn Khaldūn raises a number of problems

¹ Q. I 278ff. Cf. Book 4, Part 4, Chapter XLVI for bibliographical information about ibn Khaldūn's works and other works cited in the footnotes. Complete bibliographical information will be given in this chapter only for works not already cited.

crucial for understanding the character of both his own science of culture and of the entire history of Muslim political philosophy and dialectical theology. In attempting to explore some of these problems, we have restricted ourselves to the issues that are indispensable for a fuller understanding of ibn Khaldūn's position and have presented them in a perspective that seems to us to serve this purpose best. In characterizing the political thought of his predecessors, ibn Khaldūn does not pretend to be an impartial historian; he assumes the role of a severe critic. This criticism is not based on blind faith or love for contention, but on certain theoretical and practical considerations.

B

In the section devoted to political authority and institutions,² ibn Khaldūn remains loyal to the specific character of his new science. He begins with, and thereafter repeatedly recalls, the premises he had posited for the science of culture as a whole.³ The dominant theme of his discussion of political life is the explanation of the natural causes, powers, properties, stages, and accidents inherent in the properties of the human soul, and how they lead of necessity to the formation of political life and subject it to certain natural and necessary laws of human association.⁴

Like culture as a whole, political life is considered by ibn Khaldūn to be a generated natural being. The methods he follows in determining its characteristics are, therefore, adopted from natural science in general, and from biology in particular.⁵ Genetically, he follows the development of political life through its various stages: how it is generated, grows, reaches its maturity, sickens, and dies. In biology, the efficient cause of this movement is taken to be the soul and its temper (*mizāj*). In culture, ibn Khaldūn considers the efficient cause of the movement to be a specific property of the human soul, i.e., social solidarity (*ʿaṣabiyyah*) which is a combination of the natural feeling for one's relatives and friends, and of the need for defence and survival. It cements a group together, dictates the need for a ruler, leads to conflicts with other groups, and generates the power of conquest leading to victory over others; its initial power determines the extent of this conquest; and the fulfilment of appetites and desires, finally, weakens it and leads to the disintegration of political power.⁶

This genetic method is supplemented by the analytical method through which ibn Khaldūn distinguishes and compares the various forms of political power, and the institutional arrangements within each form. Apart from the purely natural regime in which a tyrant or small bands or groups give free

² Q. I, 278; II, 201.

³ Q. I, 278: 5-7, 337-38, 394:3, 415:5; II, 126.

⁴ Q. I, 247-48, 291:15-16, 293, 294:16-18, 299-300, 309, 336-38, 342; II, 19:4-5, 65ff., 93ff., 106-07, 128.

⁵ Q. I, 299-300, 305-06, 309ff.

⁶ Q. I, 291:15-16, 293, 294:16-18, 299:14, 331:1-2, 342; II, 93ff. 108ff.

rein to their appetites, there are two major types of regimes: (a) rational regimes in which the appetites are ordered by the agency of human reason for the sake of a more peaceful and permanent enjoyment of worldly things, and (b) regimes of divine Law in which prophet-legislators, through the power of their souls to communicate with the "unseen" (explained in the sixth premise), posit laws which order the affairs of men and the enjoyment of both worldly things and things of the soul useful for man's welfare in the world to come. This inquiry is supplemented with a description of the various institutional arrangements and offices in both types.⁷

Throughout this discussion, ibn Khaldūn insists that his treatment of political life is not to be confused with the treatment of political life in the Islamic legal sciences which aim at determining the legal prescriptions to be followed by adherents to the Islamic Law, with the sayings of popular wisdom which do not explain the nature of political life, or with political science or political philosophy which aims primarily at determining how man ought to conduct himself to achieve happiness and perfection.

In summarizing the Third Book of the *Laws*, al-Fārābī informs us that Plato explained that all the *nomoi* are subject to generation and corruption and regeneration, and that he explained the growth of cities, the development of the arts, and the origins and development of governments.⁸ In this context, al-Fārābī employs the two central terms which have come to be associated with ibn Khaldūn's new science, i.e., '*umrān* and '*aṣabiyyah*.' Since al-Fārābī indicates that generation and corruption are inherent in *all* the *nomoi* and in all cities all the time (i.e., they occurred in the past, occur now, and will occur in the future), he is also alluding to the fact that Muslim governments and laws are equally subject to these natural laws.

The context within which this and similar discussions occur, however, indicates that, for the political philosophers, the explanation of the natural origins and the generation and corruption of regimes is not an independent inquiry but a subservient branch of the art of legislation and, ultimately, of political science; its aim is to provide the legislator with the necessary knowledge upon which to base his decisions in laying down such laws as are appropriate to the particular group for which he is legislating under particular circumstances. In contrast, the immediate and apparent context within which ibn Khaldūn's inquiry into political affairs is pursued is not the art of legislation or political science, but the science of culture which he develops as an independent science. His major contribution consists in pursuing this inquiry with relative freedom from the art of legislation and of political science or the art of determining how men ought to live; and in elaborating all the natural

⁷ Q. I, 342ff.; II 126ff.

⁸ *Talkhīṣ Nawāmīs Aflākūn* ("Compendium Legum Platonis"), ed. Franciscus Gabrieli ("Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi, Corpus Platonicum, Plato Arabus," Vol. III), London, The Warburg Institute, 1952, pp. 16-18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17:4, 18:2 and 6, 24:10, 33:13, 41:6.

properties and concomitants of political life necessitated by man's natural constitution. Furthermore, he is the only Muslim thinker who has shown, explicitly and in detail, that Muslim history and Muslim regimes are indeed subject to these natural laws of generation and corruption, and, therefore, has insisted that the proper understanding of Muslim history presupposes the natural understanding of the essential properties of man and human association in general.

C

In defending the legitimacy of his new inquiry into political matters, ibn Khaldūn does not attempt to present it as a new version of political philosophy or as a substitute for it, but rather to explain the distinction between the new inquiry and the established practical philosophic sciences. This distinction is made on the ground of certain basic differences which ibn Khaldūn invokes at appropriate places in the course of his inquiry. The examination of these differences will shed light on the fundamental character of both Muslim political philosophy and ibn Khaldūn's new science of culture.

Immediately after formulating the basic principles of the new science,¹⁰ and asserting its relative independence and newness, ibn Khaldūn sets out to show that "it does not belong to the science of rhetoric, for the subject of rhetoric is convincing speeches, useful in attracting the multitude toward a certain opinion or turning them away from it."¹¹ "Nor does it belong to the science of 'political government' [*siyāsat al-madaniyyah*], for political government is the administration of the household or the city as is obligatory [*bima yajib*] according to the requirements of ethics and wisdom so that the multitude be made to follow a course leading to the protection and preservation of the [human] species. Thus, its subject differs from the subject of these two arts which are perhaps similar to it."¹² Only after having stated this difference does ibn Khaldūn proceed to suggest that the new science "is, as it were, newly discovered." This suggestion is offered reluctantly on the ground that he could not find it in the works of the Greek wise men available to him, a fact which seemed to him to be in need of some explanation: "The wise men perhaps were concerned in this with the fruits [of the sciences]; and the fruit of this [science] is, as you saw, in [the correction of historical] reports only. Even though its problems in themselves and in their proper spheres are noble, its fruit is the rectification of [historical] reports which are weak [or not significant: *ḍa'if*]. That is why they deserted it."¹³

¹⁰ Q. I, 61; cf. above, Chap. XLVI.

¹¹ Cf. Q. III, 322, where ibn Khaldūn refers to the flowing prose used "in rhetorical [speeches] and prayer, and encouraging and frightening the multitude," and also 324 where he indicates the political use of such rhetorical speeches.

¹² Q. I, 62:3-10.

¹³ Q. I, 63:5-8.

Ibn Khaldūn's claim for the relative independence and newness of his science seems thus to be intimately related to his success in distinguishing it, and setting it apart, from rhetoric and political science, or to his success in showing that it does not belong to either of them. This he does through delimiting the subject-matter of these two disciplines by emphasizing their ends or results or "fruits," i.e., imparting certain opinions to the multitude and governing it according to the requirement of ethics and wisdom. The direct fruit of the science of culture, in contrast, is not convincing the multitude or making it follow an ethical or wise course or way of life (which in turn requires the knowledge of what the ethical virtues are, the practical wisdom of the legislator and the ruler, and the ability to convince the multitude), but simply the understanding of the nature and properties of man and human association or culture, an understanding which is pursued with the specific aim of rectifying historical reports. The science of culture is not an art concerned with how man ought to live, how society is to be rightly governed, or how the multitude is to be convinced, but a scientific inquiry into how man has actually lived in the past, and the natural causes determining the modes of human association and necessitating the activities and ways of life pursued in the diverse human societies about which we possess historical reports, in order to be able correctly to judge the soundness or falsity of these reports.

This leads ibn Khaldūn to a second distinction between the science of culture and political science with respect to the inherent character of their subject-matters and, consequently, to their conclusions. It was shown that the premises of the science of culture are drawn exclusively from the conclusions demonstrated in the natural sciences. Subsequently, ibn Khaldūn claims the same natural and necessary character for the entire subject and for the conclusions of this science. In contrast, political science, having as its objective the right conduct of government according to the requirement of ethics and wisdom, does not restrict itself to these natural and necessary premises, but is concerned further with what is ethically or philosophically good for human society, and seeks to convince the multitude of the necessity or obligation of accepting it. Ibn Khaldūn insists that such matters cannot claim the natural and necessary character of the subject-matter of the science of culture. Because political science is concerned primarily with how man ought to live and how human society ought to be governed, it upholds principles which are not, strictly speaking, natural or necessary (i.e., grounded in the science of nature); and their concern with strictly natural principles, as evidenced in Plato's and al-Fārābī's treatment of the laws, is subsidiary and accidental to their attachment to these other principles.

Ibn Khaldūn does not then restrict himself to distinguishing between the new science and the traditional political science, to justifying the need for the new science of culture, and to showing that it has a relatively independent and legitimate subject-matter of its own; he makes, and repeats, certain

observations about traditional political science which are not necessarily called for as far as his immediate task is concerned. At first sight, these observations seem to present traditional political science under unfavourable light, to suggest certain fundamental theoretical disagreements between ibn Khaldūn and Muslim political philosophers, and to prove the superior character of the new science as compared to the traditional political science. Yet ibn Khaldūn's own modest estimate of the "fruits" of the science of culture is a warning against accepting these conclusions at their face value. In order to explore his intention, we must first understand the issues involved.

The central issue which ibn Khaldūn repeatedly invokes in this connection is the proof of the "necessity" of prophecy, and of the prophetic religious Law, adduced by Muslim political philosophers. Upon the first reference to this issue, ibn Khaldūn cites what is mentioned by wise men in their proof of the necessity of prophecies, what is mentioned in the fundamentals of jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) in proving the necessity of languages, and what the jurists (*fuqahā'*) mention "in the justification of legal prescriptions through their purposes."¹⁴ In all of these disciplines, the jurists attempt to present a natural proof for the necessity of a legal or conventional prescription, and they seem to argue as follows: men must co-operate in society, therefore they necessarily need a ruler who must be a prophet; men by nature need to express their intentions, therefore they necessarily need the easier method of doing this, which must be a language; men must preserve their species and their social life uncorrupted, therefore they must abstain from adultery, murder, and injustice. The necessity of prophecy thus appears to be based on the same kind of argument and, consequently, to have the same status, as the necessity of language, and of the injunctions against adultery, murder, and injustice. Now, all these have some basis in nature. But they cannot be traced directly or exclusively to nature; and they are not produced by nature in a necessary manner. They are, rather, the product of human convention and law, or of a divine Law. That they are not, strictly speaking, natural or necessary, becomes evident when we consider the diversity of languages, and differences and conflicts among the various legal arrangements (including those claiming divine origin) in different communities. The mistake of these jurists consists in beginning with the nature of man and society, showing the need for some such conventions and laws, and concluding that this is sufficient proof of the exclusively natural and necessary character of conventions and laws.

While the proof of the "necessity" of prophecy shares in this general mistaken way of argumentation, it is in a class by itself, and we need to follow ibn Khaldūn's refutation of it more closely. According to him, the philosophers begin with the demonstration of the necessity of a government and a ruler. This demonstration he accepts as valid and adopts as the first premise of

¹⁴ Q. I, 63-64.

his science. However, "The philosophers (*falāsifah*) make an addition to this demonstration when attempting to establish prophecy by rational argument, and that it is a natural property of the human being. Thus they confirm this demonstration [i.e., the indispensability of the ruler] up to its conclusion and that humanity cannot escape being under restraining and reconciling rule (*ḥukm wādī*). Then they say, after that, 'That rule comes to be by a [divine or religious] Law (*Shar'*) imposed by God and introduced by one [member] of the human species distinguished from them [i.e., the rest] by the special [properties] of His guidance with which God entrusts him in order that submission to him and acceptance from him take place; so that ruling among them and on them be completed without disacknowledgment or [angry] reproach.' This proposition by the philosophers (*ḥukamā'*) is, as you see, not demonstrable; since existence and human life may become complete without that [Law and prophet] by [virtue of] what the ruler imposes by himself or by [virtue of] the [social] solidarity (*ʿaṣabiyyah*) by which he is enabled to conquer them [i.e., his subjects] and make them follow his path. Thus, the People of the Book and the followers of the prophets are few compared to the Magians who have no [revealed] Book; for they [the latter] form the majority of the inhabitants of the world. Despite that, they possessed States and monuments in addition to [simply] having lived; and they still have these to this epoch in the intemperate regions of the north and the south, in contrast to human life in confusion and without a restraining and reconciling [ruler] at all; this is impossible. By this becomes plain to you their mistake concerning the obligatory [character] of prophecies, and that it [this obligation] is not rational; rather, it is apprehended by the Law, as is the doctrine of the ancestors of the community."¹⁵

On the surface ibn Khaldūn's argument is extremely simple, if not naïve. The supposed demonstration of the philosophers is based on the minor premise that every ruler must rule with a divine Law.¹⁶ This is evidently false, since a ruler can rule by virtue of royal authority alone, and even a simpleton knows that there have been innumerable rulers without divine authority. This simple fact could not have escaped the notice of the philosophers whom ibn Khaldūn calls "wise men," and the issue cannot be dismissed on this level.

D

There are two possible philosophic approaches to the study of man and society: the first, which is characteristic of ibn Khaldūn's science of culture, is through the natural sciences; the second, which is the characteristic approach of the Greek and Muslim political philosophers, is through a consideration of the end of man. Since the end of man, his perfection or happiness, pre-

¹⁵ Q. I, 72:7-73:5.

¹⁶ Q. I, 345-46.

supposes the understanding of the place of man within the cosmos of which he is a part, this latter approach comes after metaphysics or divine science (*ʿilm ilāhī*) in the order of investigation.¹⁷ The first approach is based exclusively on natural science and does not admit any premises that cannot be demonstrated therein. It can, therefore, be properly called a "natural" science of politics. The second approach is based on metaphysics or the science of divine things and can, therefore, be called meta-natural or "divine" politics.¹⁸

The comprehensive works of ibn Sīnā, which ibn Khaldūn specifically has in mind in discussing this issue, present us with two features significant for understanding ibn Khaldūn's exposition. (1) They all include two discussions of political matters, the first coming at the end of the natural sciences (in the sections corresponding to Aristotle's *De Anima*), and the other at the end of the divine science.¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā's works thus point to the fact that both "natural" and "divine" political sciences owe their origin to the philosophers. Yet in studying ibn Sīnā's "natural" version of political science, we come to realize the significant difference between him and ibn Khaldūn: ibn Sīnā restricts himself here to the natural foundations of man's political life and does not proceed to develop a full-fledged science of society or politics on that foundation alone. He seems thus to suggest that these natural foundations are not sufficient for understanding the full scope of man's political life and cannot offer the proper directives concerning how he is to conduct himself as a political animal. Such an undertaking will have to wait till after the completion of divine science; or, as ibn Khaldūn explains, it needs "additional" arguments which cannot be presented prior to the investigation of the world

¹⁷ *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm* (La statistique des sciences), ed. Osman Amin (2nd ed., Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1949), pp. 102ff.

¹⁸ In al-Fārābī's "Enumeration of the Sciences," political science (which includes the art of jurisprudence and the art of dialectical theology) comes at the end immediately following divine science. Following the same scheme, all of ibn Sīnā's comprehensive philosophical works relegate political science to the very end to be treated as an ancillary to divine science. This arrangement is based on the consideration that the subject of divine science includes the study of "spiritual" beings, and is, thus, in a position to correct the false opinions about them in the city, and that, for ibn Sīnā in particular, the "branches" (*furū'*) of divine science are concerned with the study of revelation, miracles, resurrection, and reward and punishment; cf. al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā'*, pp. 99-101; ibn Sīnā, *Aqṣām al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyyah* (The Parts of Rational Sciences) in *Tis' Rasā'il*, Cairo, Maṭba'ah Hindiyah, 1326/1908, pp. 112-16. A political science concerned with the opinions and actions of a religious community must, therefore, follow the study of the principles of these opinions and actions in divine science. Ibn Khaldūn, who clearly saw the close relation between divine science and the "divine" version of political philosophy, adopts, as we shall indicate, an equally critical attitude towards both.

¹⁹ *Uyūn*, pp. 40-46, 59-60; cf. pp. 16-17; *Ishārāt*, pp. 119-37, 176-222; *Najāt*, pp. 157-93, 284, 38; "Nafs," *Shi'ā'*, pp. 157-268, "Siyāsah," *Shi'ā'* ("La sociologie et la politique dans la philosophie d'Avicenne") ed. Moḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā ("Memorial Avicenne" I), Cairo, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1952, pp. 8-27.

and of the place of man within it. (2) Further, in his "Parts of Rational Sciences," ibn Sina specifies that the aim of the practical part of philosophy or wisdom is not the attainment of certainty about existents, but "perhaps" of opinions, and not opinions simply but opinions for the sake of realizing the good.²⁰ In addition, that part of political philosophy which deals with political governments studies all classes of governments, good and bad, those based on kingship as well as those based on prophecy and divine Laws.²¹ Although political philosophy may favour the political government based on prophecy, it transcends any particular class of political arrangements. These issues, however, are not raised in the exposition of the "divine" version of political philosophy in his comprehensive philosophic works; instead, he purports here to offer not a discussion of the total subject of political philosophy or the various classes of opinions and action in all political regimes, but what appears to be a rational justification, or the "obligatory" character, of a specific class of political regimes, i.e., that which is originated by a prophet-legislator. The final four chapters of the *Shifā'*, for instance, indicate that ibn Sina would treat the proof of prophecy, and the prophet's call to God and the return to Him; prayers and their utility in this world and the next; the foundation of the city and the household, and legal prescriptions relating to them (discussed within the framework of prophetic legislation); and successors to the Prophet (Caliphate and Imāmate), and other matters relating to governments and ethics.²² The whole discussion is, thus, centred around prophecy and presupposes its "obligatory" character.

Ibn Khaldūn's first and foremost observation on the total scope of the subject-matter of "divine" political science is that it is not natural (*ṭabī'ī*) or necessary (*ḍarūrī*), by which he means the same thing and it is fundamentally this: Considering the natural constitution of man as a political animal, we do not find that revelation, divine Laws, and divine governments, and the concern with resurrection and reward and punishment, to be necessary conditions for his survival, for the formation of society, and for the continued existence of both. Religion does not belong to those requirements that form the indispensable minimum for the existence and preservation of society; it is not the sufficient condition, nor even one of the sufficient conditions, required for social life in order that it may exist and continue. Man's natural constitution and the character of society do not make it absolutely mandatory upon man to be a member of a religious community and to obey the prescriptions of a divine Law.²³ Given human nature, prophecy and revelation are

²⁰ *Aqsām al-'Ulūm*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–08. This philosophic discussion of the prophetic regime, according to ibn Sina, is contained in Plato's works on the *nomoi*.

²² "Siyāṣah," *Shifā'*, pp. 8ff.

²³ For a more detailed discussion of this problem, cf. Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*" in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1952, pp. 95–141, and *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1953, pp. 156–64.

possible phenomena. Supposing that a prophet does come and that he possesses, in addition, the ability to rule, to command obedience, and to legislate, there will come to exist a divine Law. And given certain climatic and other conditions, his Law may be followed and preserved. To be obeyed and preserved, this Law must include certain opinions, such as that prophecy is necessary. These opinions are *legally* "obligatory" or binding upon the followers of that Law; the source of this obligation is not human nature and the nature of society, or unaided human reason, but a specific divine revelation and a specific divine Law. Thus, what induces ibn Khaldūn to reject the natural and necessary character of religion and divine Laws, and, consequently, of the whole subject-matter of "divine" political science, is not merely that divine government, like man-made language, and injunctions against adultery, murder, and injustice, is conventional or legal in character.²⁴ For, despite their conventional character, it could be shown that, unlike divine government, all the rest are necessary conditions for the existence and preservation of any society,²⁵ and that the authority of unaided human reason is sufficient to prove that. (Ibn Khaldūn says, for instance, that the authority of human reason is "sufficient" for "forbidding injustice."²⁶) Divine government is not only a legal convention; it does not even belong to those legal conventional arrangements that form the indispensable minimum required for the existence and preservation of society and which can be said, therefore, to be natural and necessary conventions.

Ibn Khaldūn's second major observation is that the premises and, consequently, the conclusions of "divine" political science are not rationally demonstrable (*burhānī*), i.e., unaided human reason cannot achieve certainty concerning such subjects as the obligatory character of divine revelation and the divine Law; the necessity of believing in the opinions about God, resurrection, and reward and punishment; or the necessity of performing the actions prescribed in a divine Law, such as worship. The authority for the obligatory character of these opinions and actions is the divine Law itself. Divine Laws, however, command and do not demonstrate (at least not rationally) the necessity of holding the opinions and of performing the actions commanded. So far as human reason is concerned, these commands remain undemonstrated, i.e., they continue to hold the status of belief or opinions. Whether these opinions are true or false, generally accepted or not, practically good and useful or bad and harmful, or whether they are preferable or objectionable, is not here the issue; rather, it is that the obligation (set up by those who pretend to have shown that these opinions are rationally obligatory) does not impose itself on human reason. The only obligation that seems to be convincing is the legal obligation set up by divine Laws. Unlike demonstrated

²⁴ Cf. above, pp. 966–67.

²⁵ Not that a particular language, etc., is necessary, but that some language is necessary.

²⁶ Q. I, 346:4–5.

conclusions, undemonstrated opinions do not by themselves compel the assent of human reason; in order to be accepted, they need an additional force, which in this case is provided by divine Laws.

We are now in a better position to understand the reason why ibn *Khaldūn* distinguishes at the outset between his new science of culture, on the one hand, and the practical philosophic sciences, the legal sciences, and popular wisdom, on the other; and why, in discussing the six premises of the new science, he distinguishes between what can be demonstrated and what cannot be demonstrated within the science of nature. Only in the science of nature are we able to arrive at demonstrated conclusions about what is natural and necessary for man and society. The conclusions of all these other sciences are undemonstrated opinions. This is also the case with the conclusions of the divine science or the science of divine beings. The fact that "divine" political science is based on premises derived from divine science deprives all of its conclusions of their demonstrable character. This is also the reason why ibn *Khaldūn* mentions rhetoric as the first of the practical philosophic sciences. Since the practical sciences deal with opinions, and opinions do not compel assent immediately, an art is needed which is capable of convincing men to accept certain opinions and to reject others. This is precisely the function of rhetoric. In the practical sciences, the philosophers do not follow the method of demonstration; they are not, strictly speaking, philosophers but rhetoricians.²⁷

E

Ibn *Khaldūn*'s critique of "divine" political science presents a curious paradox: it defends religion against the mistakes of theologians and it defends philosophy against the mistakes of philosophers. His defence of religion consists in establishing revelation and divine Laws as the exclusive source for beliefs in the substance of the doctrines relative to prophecy and divine government; yet he objects to every kind of theology or the effort to prove these doctrines rationally. His defence of philosophy consists in the bold assertion that, in as far as reason is concerned, the political doctrines purporting to support religion cannot claim a status higher than that of undemonstrated opinions, and he exposes the philosophers who claimed that they were presenting properly a philosophical support or defence of religious doctrines, or had succeeded in turning philosophy into a rational theology. From this it appears that ibn *Khaldūn*'s critique is not directed against philosophy, but against theology; not against philosophers as philosophers, but against philosophers in their role as theologians, dialecticians, and rhetoricians.

This critique is based on the distinction between religion or, more specifically, religious beliefs and practices based on a particular revelation and divine Law, and philosophy or, more specifically, the body of scientifically demonstrated

conclusions based on rational inquiry. It is characteristic of ibn *Khaldūn* that he upholds the legitimacy of both religious knowledge and scientific philosophic knowledge in their proper spheres, and contests the theoretical legitimacy of all disciplines that occupy an ambivalent position between the two and profess to demonstrate their agreement. Such disciplines, which according to him belong to sophistry and rhetoric rather than either to religion or scientific philosophy, are primarily the dialectical theology of the *Mutakallimūn* and the political theology of the philosophers.

Religiously, ibn *Khaldūn* identifies himself with the early Muslims or the pious ancestors who rejected all attempts at rational justification of religious beliefs and practices as unnecessary, if not dangerous, "innovations." But since these pious ancestors were innocent of the philosophic sciences, they could not be considered his true precursors. Philosophically, he supports his position, not only on the basis of the requirements of scientific demonstration, but by invoking the authority of the philosophers who followed the method of verification (*muḥaqqiqūn*). He thus shows a predilection for pure religion and pure philosophy over against any kind of theology which is necessarily a confused mixture of both.

It is noteworthy that in the crucial passage where ibn *Khaldūn* criticizes the divine science and the political theology of the philosophers, he mentions al-Fārābī and ibn Sina but not ibn Rushd.²⁸ Of Muslim philosophers, it was precisely ibn Rushd who (like ibn *Khaldūn*) was a recognized religious judge (*qāḍī*) and a philosopher who criticized al-Fārābī and ibn Sina for imitating the dialectical theologians, and who wrote the most celebrated treatise on religion and philosophy the main theme of which is the defence of the legitimacy of religion and philosophy in their proper spheres, and which is a devastating attack upon the combination of religion and philosophy in the form of theology.²⁹ It is not possible here to enter into the historical and doctrinal developments that led to ibn Rushd's new attitude towards theology. For our immediate purpose we need only note that in this decisive respect ibn *Khaldūn* is following in the footsteps of one of his most illustrious Muslim predecessors. Therefore, his position could not be construed to be anti-philosophic or based on any lack of understanding of the intentions of al-Fārābī and ibn Sina. To understand his specific reasons for criticizing them, we must now analyse his treatment of Muslim dialectical theology (*Kalām*), and of the divine science and political theology of the "philosophers."

"Dialectical theology," says ibn *Khaldūn*, "involves arguing for the beliefs of faith with rational proofs, and answering the innovators who deviate in [their] beliefs from the ways of the ancestors and the followers of orthodoxy."³⁰

²⁸ Q. III, 213.

²⁹ *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (Traité décisif), ed. L. Gauthier, 3rd ed., Alger, Editions Carbonel, 1948, pp. 20ff.

³⁰ Q. III, 27:1-3.

²⁷ Cf. above, p. 965; Q. III, 73.

The beliefs of faith consist of such things as the attributes of God, the truth of revelation and prophecy, the angels, the spirits, the *jinn*, resurrection, paradise, hell, etc. Unlike things that have rationally ascertainable natural causes, these are ambiguous matters, the reality of which reason cannot ascertain. Therefore, it must be left to the divinely-ordained legislator (the Prophet) to determine them and teach them. The general run of believers, like the deaf and the blind, must accept the authority of their fathers and teachers, and since they cannot establish the truth of these matters, they must follow the generally accepted opinions about them, based on the command of their prophet-legislator.³¹ More important, however, is the fact that these beliefs are not theoretical assertions but part of a way of life within a system of divine government intended for the happiness of the believer. Their purpose is not mere knowledge or belief or assent or faith. Perfection, according to the legislator, consists of "perfect faith" or the habit firmly rooted through practical repetitive action (worship, obedience, and submissiveness), until believers possess the established attribute moulding their souls. Beliefs are not primarily intended to be known, but to "be possessed"; their purpose is not knowledge, but practical utility; their end is not theoretical perfection, but the happiness promised by the legislator.³²

The proper function of dialectical theology is to defend beliefs with rational arguments, but since this is not necessary for faith, it is only useful when these beliefs are endangered by innovators who attack them by the use of rational arguments. This happened in Muslim history with the rise of the Mu'tazilites, the Shi'ites, and other innovators. At that time, dialectical theology had a useful function to perform. Once innovators are suppressed (rational argument being one of the tools used in this fight),³³ dialectical theology has no further reason to exist; indeed it can be harmful, since it gives the impression that rational arguments are somehow necessary for accepting beliefs. This is false both because (except in the case of rational attacks upon them) beliefs do not need rational support and because the rational support offered by dialectical theology is only dialectical, sophistical, or rhetorical (i.e., based on common opinions); it has no scientific value.³⁴

While discussing the emergency of dangerous innovations, ibn Khaldūn notices a certain identity of origin and a certain parallelism between the opinions of the innovators (the Mu'tazilites and the Shi'ites) and the writings and opinions of the philosophers "which are in general at variance with the beliefs of the divine Law."³⁵ He indicates that innovators in Islam studied the works of the philosophers. But it seems also that the philosophers in turn took notice (e.g., in their rational proof of the obligation of having successors

or Caliphs to the Prophet)³⁶ of the opinions of the innovators or of the Mu'tazilite and Shi'ite theologians, and presented identical or similar opinions; or that philosophers presented themselves to the Muslim community in the guise of Muslim theologians purporting to give a rational support for certain Muslim beliefs, and more specifically of those beliefs, held by the heterodox minorities, which were closer to their own views. Be this as it may, ibn Khaldūn was also aware of the radical difference between the content and the ultimate intentions of the views of the philosophers and those of theologians of all shades. That is why he devotes special chapters to the exposition of divine science and of the philosophy centred around this divine science.

In contradistinction to all dialectical theologians, philosophers suppose that "all" existence can be apprehended by "mental contemplation and rational syllogisms."³⁷ It thus appears that they include all "spiritual" beings in their contemplation; hence, they purport to give (in divine science) a rational, syllogistic knowledge of God, the soul, resurrection, etc., or of the religious beliefs revealed and commanded by the prophet-legislators. Unlike dialectical theologians, however, philosophers do not begin with religious beliefs as revealed by the prophets and attempt to elucidate them or support them rationally; their position is that reason can know these matters independently of revelation. Being philosophers, they also believe that the rational syllogistic knowledge of these matters is superior to divine revelation and, therefore, must be made the final judge of the correctness of revelation, or that "the rectification of the beliefs of faith is through contemplation, not through tradition [hearing: *sam'*], for they [i.e., the beliefs] belong to the apprehensions of the intellect."³⁸

But philosophy does not content itself with presenting theoretical knowledge as a superior alternative to religious belief; philosophy is also a way of life, and the philosophers contend that true happiness consists of complete theoretical knowledge, or "the apprehension of all existents . . . through *this* contemplation and *those* demonstrations," together with the improvement of the soul and the acquisition of the virtues (all of which can be known and established by the sole agency of reason). In contrast to the religious way of life and the happiness promised by the prophet-legislators, this philosophic way of life and the happiness of the philosopher "is possible for the human being even if no divine Law comes down." For the lovers of wisdom, the blessed life means theoretical knowledge and living according to the dictates of reason, and eternal suffering means ignorance.³⁹

³⁶ Q. I, 345-46.

³⁷ Q. III, 210:2-5, 211:15-17.

³⁸ Q. III, 210:5-6. Here we see another similarity between the philosophers and the innovating theologians (the Mu'tazilites): the latter sought to "understand" and "interpret" religious beliefs through reason.

³⁹ Q. III, 210:7-8, 211-12.

³¹ Q. III, 29-30.

³² Q. III, 31-35.

³³ Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā'*, pp. 108-13.

³⁴ Q. III, 40-42, 45-49.

³⁵ Q. III, 40, cf. also 41.

In presenting the content of their theoretical knowledge and of their way of life, however, philosophers have committed grave errors, not only from the more apparent standpoint of religion, but also from the standpoint of philosophy itself. Philosophy says that scientific knowledge has to conform to certain conditions and that scientific demonstration is possible only within the limited range of what can be humanly experienced and known. Yet philosophers in general, and al-Fārābī and ibn Sina in particular, seem to speak about all sorts of "spiritual" matters: the One, the source of all beings; the emanation of beings; the states of the soul after departing from the body, its return to the source, joining the active intellect, and resurrection. Further, they present these matters in a manner suggesting that they are the philosophical parallels to, or the true meaning of, religious beliefs, and even "that the joy resulting from this apprehension is *identical* with the happiness promised [by the Prophet-legislator]."⁴⁰ Yet their great master, Plato, had said: "As to divine (things), no certainty can be realized concerning them; rather, they are spoken of in accordance with what is most fitting and proper"—he means "opinion."⁴¹ Since Plato was indeed the great master of al-Fārābī and ibn Sina in their exposition of divine matters, and the *Timaeus*⁴² and the *Laws* were their models, we are faced again with the question why the philosophers, including Plato, should find it necessary or useful to speak profusely concerning matters of which one cannot achieve certainty; why, having done this, al-Fārābī and ibn Sina did not indicate clearly that they were only giving the most fitting and proper "opinions" about these matters; and why, finally, they gave the impression that these opinions were the equivalents or the fitting interpretations of religious beliefs—in short, why they presented fitting opinions in the guise of demonstrated conclusions on religious beliefs. The exploration of this theme is an indispensable prerequisite for a sound understanding of Muslim political philosophy. For the present, we shall restrict ourselves to the following observations with the intention of clarifying ibn Khaldūn's position.

In his section on "divine science" (*ilm ilāhi*) in the "Enumeration of the Sciences," al-Fārābī divides this science into three parts: the first two examine existents as existents, and the principles of the demonstrations of particular theoretical sciences (logic, natural science, and mathematics), respectively. The third part examines incorporeal existents, their number, order, and progression to the most perfect One; explains the attributes of this last and perfect incorporeal existent; explains "that this which has these attributes is the one which must be believed to be God"; makes known the descending order of existents beginning with Him; explains that the order of existents involves no injustice or irregularity; and finally "sets out to refute corrupt

⁴⁰ Q. III, 121, 213-18.

⁴¹ Q. III, 215:12-13.

⁴² The quotation from Plato apparently refers to *Timaeus* 28C; cf. Rosenthal's translation of Q. Vol. III, p. 252, n. 1029.

opinions" about God.⁴³ The relation between political science, treated by him in the following chapter, and this last function of divine science is not immediately clear, although the inclusion of dialectical theology (*Kalām*) as part of political science leaves no doubt as to the political importance of the opinions of the citizens concerning incorporeal existents. In his strictly political writings, on the other hand, he does set up a detailed theology for the inhabitants of the city.⁴⁴ But here he does not speak about the relation between this theology and the examinations conducted in divine science. We conclude that al-Fārābī leaves the problem of the relation between divine science and political theology set up for the inhabitants of the city ambiguous, at least in his more public writings.

At first sight, ibn Sina appears to have followed a different course. In all of his works that deal with the whole subject-matter of philosophy, he presents the conclusions arrived at in divine science as making "obligatory" the existence of the prophets, the legislation of divine Laws, and even the contents of the beliefs and practices legislated in these Laws.⁴⁵ It is true, as ibn Khaldūn observes, that ibn Sina begins his second version of political science with a recapitulation of the conclusions arrived at in the first (natural) version of political science and seems to be building the "obligatory" character of prophecy and divine Laws upon that natural basis; but ibn Khaldūn correctly notes that the "proof" of the obligatory character of prophecy and divine Laws is not based on the nature of man as explained in *De Anima*, but on the additional examinations conducted thereafter in divine science.

Ibn Sina's presentation of his political theology is indeed based on rational considerations, but not on the rational consideration of the nature of man as in *De Anima*; rather, it is based on the attributes of "the First Cause and the angels." Being what divine science has presented the First Cause and the angels to be, it is obligatory that they should send prophets and divine Laws.⁴⁶ Since divine science is a rational science, the obligation set up here seems to be rational, not legal; God and the angels are not bound by Laws but by their very nature. Thus, ibn Khaldūn is again justified in interpreting this rational obligation to mean natural necessity, and in wondering why God and the angels do not uniformly act in accordance with what is purported to be their very nature, why they have not fulfilled their obligation to the overwhelming majority of mankind, and why only on rare occasions have there been prophets and divine Laws.

Ibn Sina seems indeed to argue in the context that the realization of prophecy is necessary as a preparation for the existence of the "good order"

⁴³ *Iḥṣā'*, pp. 99-101.

⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnat al-Fāḍilah* ("Der Musterstaat"), ed. Fr. Dieterici, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1895, pp. 5ff.

⁴⁵ "Siyāsah," *Shifā'*, pp. 12ff. Consider the frequent repetition of *wa-yajibū* (and it is obligatory) throughout the text.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9:8 and *passim*.

or of man's possible perfection, a perfection which he assumes to have become evident as the proper end of man in divine science, but this raises the further question whether prophecy and divine Laws, as they are known to exist, are preparations for this type of perfection. We are, thus, forced to note that despite the apparent clarity of his presentation of the relation between his divine science and his political theology, ibn Sina leaves many questions unanswered, or that his presentation is as ambiguous as that of al-Fārābī. There is, thus, ample justification for ibn Khaldūn's criticism. Following Plato, he explains that these ambiguities follow from the fact that in divine science itself the philosophers have not attained, or at least have not presented, certain knowledge, but only fair and fitting opinions. Therefore, their political theology has the same character.

Ibn Khaldūn raises this issue in the most acute and critical fashion; he reveals that the philosophers, in presenting fair opinions and undemonstrated conclusions concerning the way to theoretical perfection and happiness, could only defend them by means of dialectical and rhetorical arguments; and, though beginning with the opposite extreme of the starting-point of the dialectical theologians, they do in fact assume the same role as the dialectical theologians when presenting and defending these opinions. In taking his bearings on these matters, ibn Khaldūn distinguishes between philosophy properly so-called, i.e., the philosophic sciences which do in fact pursue the method of demonstration and about the conclusions of which, when properly arrived at, there can be no doubt, and philosophic theology (the greater portion of divine science) and political theology (or "divine" political science) which are in fact the philosophic versions of dialectical theology (*Kalām*). He accepts the former (i.e., logic, natural science, mathematics), while rejecting the latter.⁴⁷

Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical reason for this rejection is justified but cannot be considered sufficient. For, granting that ultimately the theology and divine political science of the philosophers are in fact likely images and opinions presented in the guise of rational beliefs, it remains to be shown that these images and opinions are not only contrary but in fact inferior to the religious beliefs of the community in which they were being propagated. From the standpoint of demonstrative science, religious beliefs and philosophic or rational opinions enjoy the same status—they are all opinions. The quotation from Plato, however, indicates that opinions are not all alike: they can be distinguished as being more or less fitting or proper. The philosophers hold, in effect, that their rational opinions are more fitting or proper than religious beliefs, and that their way of life, their virtues, and their happiness are more truly such than the way of life, the virtues, and the happiness, pursued on the basis of divine Laws. Ibn Khaldūn is silent on this subject; he does not attempt a direct refutation of this contention.

⁴⁷ Q. III, 212–20.

Instead, he explains that the philosophic way of life contradicts the religious way of life which is based on faith and obedience to the commands of a prophet-legislator; that the content of the "promised" happiness is radically different from the content of the happiness pursued by the philosopher; and that the attempt to equate or harmonize the two is an impossible task and one which is fraught with danger for the religious community—it breaks the protective wall around it, leads to doubts and scepticism about the beliefs of faith, and turns the faithful away from the tasks appointed for them by their prophet-legislator. The philosophers were not justified in preaching their opinions to the Islamic community. Whatever their intention about reforming the beliefs of the Islamic community might have been, they had only sown confusion in the minds of the faithful, and led to the emergence of mistaken notions about the distinct purposes of religion and of philosophy. Their own way of life and their own happiness are of no concern to the religious community; and since they assert they can pursue this way of life and attain happiness regardless of the existence of divine Laws and of a religious community, they had no compelling reason to sow the seeds of confusion and dissension within the religious community and endanger its peace.

Political life, as practised in all human communities, has to take into account the nature of all men, and should be directed to the common good of the multitude. This requires a ruler and a law based on the rational understanding of their common needs and interests in this world, or a divine Law based on their common good in this world and the next. But in every case, it is mandatory that the ruler and the law should set up opinions and actions in the form of commands to be obeyed without qualification. The philosophic life, however, transcends all established laws. The real "meaning" of political science, "according to the wise men" themselves, is to lead a way of life in which "they dispense with rulers altogether"; their "virtuous city" is not an association of men subject to commands serving their common interest, and they talk about it as a supposed or hypothetical city whose realization is highly improbable.⁴⁸ The philosophic life is then radically different from the ordinary political life of the citizens. It requires rare natures and rarely accomplished arts. The philosopher is essentially a solitary being, and the best he can hope for are few kindred spirits within a vast majority of men leading different ways of life and pursuing different ends. Since he needs to live in a political community, ibn Khaldūn offers him this opportunity, but within clearly defined limits: he is not to interfere in the political life of the community in his capacity as a philosopher, not to attempt to reform the opinions of this community, not to communicate his opinions or propagate his way of life among the multitude, and he is to relinquish his role as a theologian and as a divine politician. He should restrict himself publicly to practising the demonstrative sciences (logic, natural science, mathematics)

⁴⁸ Q. II, 127.

and the useful arts (e.g., medicine, music, and jurisprudence). But, above all, he should, like ibn Khaldūn, uphold in no uncertain terms the Law of his community and obey it. The philosopher must present himself to his community in the guise of an ordinary citizen.

F

For certain thinkers, polemic is a method of examination and investigation, a way of entering into a dialogue with their predecessors, and a means of uncovering what lies behind or beyond the garb with which their predecessors chose to clothe their thought or the manner in which they expressed it. When, in addition, this polemic is presented to the reader to draw his attention to the theoretical difficulties encountered by the author and his proposed direction for finding a solution, and to an audience which the author intends to convince to accept or reject certain opinions or a course of action, the polemic necessarily gains a formal complexity difficult to comprehend without a sustained attention to the diverse, and perhaps conflicting, purposes which it is designed to serve. Ibn Khaldūn's polemic against ibn Sina is an instructive example.

Muslim philosophers, dialectical theologians, and mystics, like the jurists, the pious leaders of the community, and the common run of Muslims, seem to accept the superior character of the opinions and actions legislated by prophets in general and their own Prophet in particular. The unsophisticated Muslim believes in the opinions of the Prophet and performs the actions commanded by him because of his faith in their divine origin, his expectation of rewards, and his fear of punishment in the world to come; the pious leaders of the community defend and promote, by exhortation, example, and threat of punishment, communal obedience and devotion to the beliefs and the way of life of their community; the jurists formulate and elaborate the prescriptions of the Law of their community; the mystics devote themselves to practical exercises designed to facilitate the institution of the verities beyond the beliefs and legal prescriptions designed for the common run of Muslims; the dialectical theologians protect the beliefs and the ways of life of their community against rational doubts and attacks; and the philosophers attempt to present an additional rational ground for the coming of the prophet and the setting up of the opinions and actions he commands. Ibn Khaldūn, too, presents himself as the defender of Muslim beliefs and the Muslim way of life. But, instead of choosing to join the apparent consensus of all the parts of the community, or to re-establish such a consensus where it is lacking through harmonizing apparently conflicting views, he labours to make implicit conflicts explicit, to show that the apparent consensus conceals some fundamental differences, and to intensify these conflicts and differences by a show of vigorous partisanship. He is the partisan fighting for the simple, unsophisticated beliefs and way of life of the common run of Muslims, and for the undiluted,

unexplained, and unsupported faith, against the useless and dangerous efforts of mystics, dialectical theologians, and philosophers, to defend, explain, and support Islam. What were the fruits of the victory, so intensely coveted by him?

On the scientific and theoretical plane his immediate aim is to disentangle the confusion between dialectical theology, mysticism, and philosophy. This confusion or mixture (*khalt*), as we learn from his account, reigned in these disciplines in his time; and those primarily responsible for it were the "modern" school of dialectical theology and the later extreme rational mystics.⁴⁹ This objective is achieved through the reassertion of the legal character of dialectical theology and mysticism. Both must accept the beliefs and the way of life of the community as unquestionable basic axioms; they should make no pretension to extra-legal or properly rational knowledge of the nature of things: dialectical theology is to restrict itself to the defence of the beliefs and practices of the community when these are questioned; and mystics should keep their supposedly intuitive achievements to themselves. Since this confusion has been harmful to philosophy (it was in danger of losing its distinctive character and of becoming a tool of dialectical theology and mystical exercises), philosophers should not contribute to it by presenting themselves to non-philosophers in the guise of dialectical theologians and mystics, as ibn Sina had done: philosophy is to exercise greater circumspection.

What induced the philosophers to present a rational support for prophecy and divine Laws was no doubt the realization that a community living in accordance with such Laws is superior to other communities—to communities without God or gods, without concern for the welfare of the soul, and without hope of a life to come. This has a demonstrative rational foundation (it is shown in the science of nature that the soul is higher than the body), and it is at the basis of ibn Khaldūn's division of regimes into "rational regimes" and "regimes of Law." But to say that the soul is higher than the body, that prophecy is possible, and that a regime of divine Law is higher than a regime without a divine Law; and to say that prophecy and prophetic Laws are obligatory, or that reason can prove or support the commands, the beliefs, and the virtues, set up by a legislator—these are two radically different things: the former set of propositions has solid support in the investigation of the nature of man and society; the latter has no such support.

A strictly natural, rational, and demonstrative approach to man and society is then faced with the dilemma that, while it can attain certainty about the necessity of society, the need for a ruler, and the preservation of peace through a minimal practice of justice, it can attain no such certainty about morality, virtues, or rules of conduct. Morality and virtues of character are not, strictly speaking, natural or necessary; they have no natural basis, no ground in nature. There is not a single universally valid rule of conduct. Rational morality has no secure foundation or justification

⁴⁹ Q. III, 121-24.

in nature, and rational moral laws are not essential to man's nature or to the nature of society.⁵⁰ There can, consequently, be no theoretical science of ethics or politics except in the extremely limited sense developed by ibn Khaldūn in his science of culture. But although not simply natural, rational, and universal, morality, virtues, and general rules of conduct are not simply against nature. Society, to flourish and to be preserved, requires the common pursuit of practical ends, and these require in turn a morality and virtues readily accepted and commonly agreed upon by all, the majority or the better part of society. This is not the morality of the philosopher. The philosopher sees human perfection in theoretical knowledge. Theoretical activity has its own immediate reward. The rewards of the practice of moral virtues, in contrast, are neither evident nor immediate. They must be based on less evident rewards, such as glory or honour, or future rewards, such as the happiness promised to the just and the virtuous in the world to come.

The philosophic study of ethics and politics, if it is intended to go beyond the perfection and the happiness reserved for the philosopher and possible only through the philosophic way of life or the life of theoretical activity, has to assume the character of a practical discipline and to have as its object the generally acceptable opinions about goodness and happiness, e.g., that moderation is good, that the pleasures of the soul are superior to the pleasures of the body, or that the future rewards of virtue are preferable to the immediate rewards of vice. The aim of such a practical philosophy, however, is not knowledge, but action, i.e., the practical pursuit and realization of the good. Yet philosophy, since it does not rule in cities, lacks the practical implementation of what it considers fair and fitting; therefore, the need for a ruler, a legislator, a law, and a tradition as instruments for the execution of moral duties and obligations. It is thus not philosophy, but the legislator, the legal prescriptions, and the embodiment of the law in the traditional way of life of the community that are the efficient cause which forces the citizens to lead a virtuous way of life. The law, and not practical philosophy or reason, is what redeems that lack of ground or necessity in nature: it supplies the justification, the obligation, and the authority that compel the citizens to hold fast to fair and fitting opinions entailing the renunciation of their natural and compelling desires which opinion alone is unable to achieve. Divine Laws revealed to prophet-legislators have the additional force of being based on the belief in their divine origin, in the overpowering will of God, and in the certainty of the rewards and punishments in the world to come; they are thus

⁵⁰ Since the attack of al-Ghazālī and ibn Rushd on ibn Sina, the latter's star declined, especially in western Islam. To attack ibn Sina was fashionable, not only in theological, but in philosophical circles as well. The significance of ibn Khaldūn's attack, however, consists in uncovering those fundamental, bitter, and practically dangerous philosophical truths which philosophers before him, precisely because they identified themselves with the philosophers, could not utter.

the most efficient laws and offer the most compelling ground for accepting as valid what cannot be demonstrated by nature and reason.

The attempt to offer a natural and rational explanation of the beliefs embodied in these Laws, as practised by dialectical theology, mysticism, and philosophy, is unwise and dangerous. It may, in certain cases, strengthen the faith of the believers in the commands of a divine Law, but it may also weaken that faith by bringing to light certain discrepancies between these commands and what is rationally most fitting and proper. Since, ultimately, there is no naturally or rationally demonstrative and compelling ground for these commands, the multitude will be made aware of this fact and this will lead to the loss of unquestioned faith in them; and since the multitude are incapable of knowing or pursuing the human perfection attainable by theoretical activity, they will pursue sham and pseudo-scientific activities: the citizens will lose their civic or religious virtues without finding the happiness reserved for the true philosopher.

Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical consideration of the nature of man and society thus results in a practical teaching aimed at the protection of the Muslim religious community and its divine Law against the confusion and disruption resulting from the vulgarization of philosophy. This practical teaching is founded on the consideration of the respective character of rational morality and the Law, but in recommending it to the Muslims of his time, ibn Khaldūn supports it by the more acceptable authority of the Prophet, the pious ancestors, and the consensus of the leaders of the community, i.e., he presents it as a legal injunction. Whatever the theoretical status of his critique of the social role of philosophy may be, his practical recommendation to the faithful must be obeyed because of its legal character.

Ibn Khaldūn did not consider the critical issue for the Muslim community of his time to be the rational justification or support of its divine Law. Indeed, he thought that this issue was a luxury which his community could not afford because it was faced with problems that involved its very existence. Long periods of cultural decline and disintegration were threatening to dissolve the fabric of society. What the community and its leaders needed most was clarity concerning the elementary and natural foundations of human association or culture and the understanding of the natural and necessary conditions without which no society can exist at all. Muslims had for centuries lived as members of a religious community under the aegis of the divine Law until they came to forget other forms of social life and the fact that religion and the Law cannot continue to exist except when based on a solid foundation of social solidarity, royal authority, and other indispensable natural conditions. The Prophet and the early Muslims were clearly aware of that and acted accordingly. But in ibn Khaldūn's time, this was no more the case. Therefore, he set out to teach his compatriots and co-religionists the telling lessons of history; and his new science of culture and his investigation of the natural basis of political life within this science were intended to explain to his readers

A History of Muslim Philosophy

those elementary, indispensable natural conditions which Muslims and their rulers need to consider if they are to succeed in preserving their religious community and divine Law. They may not need philosophy to explain and support their religion and Law, but they are in desperate need of it for understanding the natural foundation of their religion and Law, and this in turn is an indispensable condition for preserving their way of life.

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