

The Place of Human Nature in Ibn-Khaldun's Thinking

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ABSTRACT

The author of this study has not yet encountered any mentionable interest in Ibn Khaldun's notion of Human Nature among those who have studied Ibn Khaldun's work. The failure to do so has two significant implications: 1) an implicit denial of Ibn Khaldun's psychological Knowledge of Human Nature and 2) A latent denial of Ibn Khaldun's true encyclopedic great scholarship in THE CULTURE OF MAN. Is it possible that he could accomplish such remarkable milestones in THE SCIENCE OF MAN without a mere concept, a working notion of Human Nature? Have famous modern social scientists no assumption on Human Nature?

Furthermore, the reader of THE MUQUADDIMAH does not find only an eventual concept of Human Nature but also a far reaching impact on Ibn Khaldun's broad social thought. This is precisely what this study has attempted to do. Like Rousseau, who came over three centuries after Ibn Khaldun, the great Arab-Muslim historian appear to believe in the goodness of the in-born as well as the primitive Human Nature. His widely known admiration for the Bedouins (with simple life style, uncorrupted nature, ready to adhere to religious faith etc...) ought to be linked to Ibn Khaldun assumption on Human Nature just outlined.

To this good Human Nature Ibn Khaldun seems to have found the religion of Islam to be its best matcher. Consequently, he remained strongly attached to Islam while laying down for the first time in known human history THE SCIENTIFIC GROUNDS for THE SCIENCES OF MAN and HIS CULTURE. As a religio- socio- cultural system, Islam has basic (simplicity, moderation, emphasis on group solidarity, anti-materialism and luxury etc...) affinities with Bedouinism. To Ibn Khaldun, both of these social orders could keep Human Nature closest to its innate goodness. The advantage of the Islamic system, however, lies in its potentiality that allows for human civilization to progress while maintaining Human Nature in a good state. Thus, when societal and civilizational orders lose essential Bedouin and Islamic values they can head only downhill. According to the author of THE MUQUADDIMAH, sedentary civilization (sophisticated, materialistic, luxurious etc...) can only corrupt Human Nature's goodness. And with it civilization's decline and disintegration are speeded up.

From all this appears to result Ibn Khaldun's STRONG CONDEMNATION of the over-dominance of excessive materialism as well as animalism in human societies and civilizations. Unlike the social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer and his followers, Ibn Khaldun had a non-linear vision of human evolution. He believed only in limited human evolution of given civilizations. The great Maghrebian sociologist does not also see eye to eye with materialistic and animalistic oriented modern thinkers. Among the latter are Freud, Lorenz, Skinner etc., who advocate materialism / animalism as progressive values while Ibn Khaldun was convinced of the negative correlation between such values and civilization's healthy and steady advancement.

I. Ibn Khaldun's forgotten Notion

Ibn Khaldun's well established positivist approach to the study of societies, cultures and civilizations seems to have given the following impression to many researchers and scholars of his heritage: in his explanation of societies' and civilizations' dynamics, the author of the **Muquaddimah** dealt only with those objective⁽¹⁾ external laws, rules and factors such as Al-Assabia, Royal authority, Religion, Bedouin and Sedentary Milieus, etc..

Consequently, he has been often described, and rightly so, as the greatest sociologist and historian⁽²⁾ not only of the Arab Muslim civilization of the Middle Ages but of all civilizations preceeding his own time.

In establishing his **New Science** of the "out there": the social objective reality (as it is often called by modern social scientists), principally through his positivist outlook of social phenomena, Ibn Khaldun appears to have remained strongly attached and influenced as well by his view of the internal "in there" nature of Human Nature.

Ibn Khaldun's notion of human nature and its deterministic impact on his assumptions, conceptualizations and theories of societies and civilizations have been largely, if not completely neglected, by those who have studied Ibn Khaldun's work. I have hardly encountered a study⁽³⁾ which preoccupies itself seriously with the subject of Human Nature in Ibn Khaldun's thinking.

This is due, of course, to the prevailing positivist spirit of the author's works, especially in his **Muquaddimah**. In all of them he stands out primarily as historian, sociologist, political scientist and economist. In brief, he is a careful observer of the "out there" social reality: societies', and civilizations' dynamic forces. His comprehensive (global, multidisciplinary) approach as well as his avant-gardist positivist-rational (and rationalizing) terminology, methodology, conceptualization and operationalization of social phenomena like Al-Assabia (group feeling), are an outloud evidence of his striking empirico-positivist scholarship⁽⁴⁾.

Referring, thus, to the author of the **Muquaddimah** only by those titles, though understandable, leaves out certainly some rather important dimensions of the thinking of this encyclopedic scholar of the Middle Ages. His concept of Human Nature and its implications on the individual's behaviour and civilization's destiny ought not to be discarded or neglected in any rigorous analysis of Ibn Khaldun's works. Indifference⁽⁵⁾ toward the Maghrebian sociologist's intimate vision of Human Nature would, as expected, make positivist modern social scientists perceive his thinking as obscure, subjective, irrational and unpersuasive. Such is the case with his **empathy** with the bedouins, on the one hand, and his manifest hostility to the sedentaries, on the other⁽⁶⁾. Thus, Ibn Khaldun's psychology of Man becomes basic for a better understanding of his wide-ranging thinking.

II. Ibn Khaldun's Contribution to the Understanding of Human Nature

A) Psychology's Place in Ibn Khaldun's Work

On the one hand, the author's famous scholarly treatise (the **Muquaddimah**) on Man as a social being, societies' dynamics, the moving forces of human cultures and civilizations etc... has neither a separate chapter nor even a section on "the Psychology of Man". On the other, chapter III of the **Muquaddimah** deals with Politics, and section I of chapter V treats adequately with the subject of Economics. This is a further specific good reason why Ibn Khaldun's vision of Man's basic Human Nature has **not** drawn attention from those who have studied his social thought. Nonetheless, Ibn Khaldun's psychological knowledge of Man can surely be found scattered⁽⁷⁾ throughout the **Muquaddimah**. In it one encounters not only the author's set of types of Human Nature but also its actual varying effects on the dynamics of human societies and civilizations as well. Thus, the interactions of the social and the psychological forces are not only the shaping factors of human personality as modern psychology asserts, but also of societies' and civilizations' unfolding. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun's view of social psychology has a larger frame and scope of analysis which goes beyond the realm of the individual to cover human societies and civilizations. This perception of the author of the **Muquaddimah** makes one realize that Ibn Khaldun is more than just a rigid socio-historian.

B. Ibn Khaldun's Typology of Human Nature

No doubt that there is a number of references to Human Nature in the **Muquaddimah**. But the difficult task lies in identifying with precision its specific categories referred to by the author. In reading Ibn Khaldun's statements on Man's Nature, **three** types seem to emerge.

a) Human Nature as reflected in "Al-Fitrah"

In Islamic thought, **Al-Fitrah** is either that human state void of bad traits and customs at birth (creation) or, at worst, it is that human state that predisposes Human Nature more toward virtues than vices.

Ibn Khaldun's use of Al-Fitrah concept is inspired by the Quran as well as the Hadith⁽⁸⁾. In these two basic Islamic sources, the notion of Al-Fitrah still appears to mean also a balanced human inclination to live according to the laws of the natural divine order.

The Quran sees Islam as the best matcher of Al-Fitrah as defined above. Thus Islam is referred to in the Muslim Holy Book as "Din Al-Fitrah", that is, the religion whose teachings, laws, rules, ethics etc... are inspired by the very balanced (primitive/bedouin)⁽⁹⁾ state of Human Nature. In other words, Islam as an ethico-religio-cultural and social system meets and satisfies the basic innate (fitric)/primitive human needs on which depends

not only the harmony of the individual and his human collectivity but also that of the entire divine order.

Al-Fitrah type of Human Nature seems to correspond to Rousseau's "L'homme est né bon". Thus, it had become Ibn Khaldun's yardstick by which he measures the quality of human individuals, groups, societies and civilizations. **The closer they remain to the primitive/innate state of Human Nature in terms of goodness the better they are.** It may be argued here, on the one hand, that the explanation of Ibn Khaldun's hostile attitude toward the sedentaries (seen as having corrupted their good primitive/innate Human Nature), and his admiration of the bedouins (because of their closeness to the primitive goodness of Human Nature) on the other, can be traced at least **partially** to the author's preference⁽¹⁰⁾ of Al-Fitrah state for human existence.

b) The Dualistic Human Nature

Ibn Khaldun's second type⁽¹¹⁾ of Human Nature resembles, in its dynamics, very much that of Al-Assabia. The latter is a conflicting set of historical moving forces which often clash with each other, thus creating a chain of conflicts and antagonisms. Viewed that way, Al-Assabia's dynamics offer a compelling explanation to human history as an endless chain of exhaustion, rotation and evolution.

Likewise, the author's second view of Human Nature shows the conflicting nature of Human Nature's make up. The roots of the conflicts are the result of the dualistic constituting components of Human Nature itself.

As in the first type, Ibn Khaldun's second type of Man's Nature is inspired by the Quranic vision. He writes: "It should be known that God put good and evil into the Nature of Man. Thus, He says in the Quran (we led him along the two paths). He further says: "and God inspired the soul with wickedness as well as fear of God" (Ibn Khaldun, 1974:97). Thus, Human Nature has equal inclinations toward doing good and evil. With this **even** emphasis on the weight of good and evil elements, the Quranic perspective appears to give Human Nature a fundamental dialectical characteristic. The latter would imply that Man's own Nature makes out of him a being always in movement, rotation, regression, transformation, ascent and decline. Man can't be but a dynamic creature: incapable to escape his human condition whose characteristics are endless tension, agitation and confrontation. Ibn Khaldun translates the human duality into animalistic as well as human dimensions. On the one hand, the former refers to such things which Man shares with the species of the animals like food, dwelling, movement, senses and many other things (Ibn Khaldun:47). On the other, Man's capacity to think and reason are his most distinct human quality (Ibn Khaldun:42). Conflicts and tensions arising out of these two poles are **uniquely human**. With this type of a dichotomic Human Nature, Man has a strong chance to be involved in evil doing. In Ibn Khaldun's terms Man has the capacity to

move away from his initial good (primitive) Human Nature. However, he can presumably avoid that either by dedicating his personal good inclinations to improve himself or by relying on religion as a guiding model for good behavior. "Evil is the quality that is closest to man when he fails to improve his customs and when religion is not used to improve him" (Ibn Khaldun:97).

In this way, the author seems to consider religion (particularly Islam) as a system which can preserve Human Nature closest to its primitive good state while allowing for the individual's as well as the collectivity's evolution. With this interpretation of his thinking, the religion of Islam would allow mankind to have its cake (the preservation of the innate good Human Nature) and eat it at the same time (develop it without corrupting it through the compelling processes of civilizations). Thus, Ibn Khaldun's high regards for Bedouins as well as his strong Islamic belief should **not** be seen as just a mere coincidence. They are, I believe, intimately related to the strong link between Al Fitrah and Bedouinity states as outlined here. Nonetheless, Ibn Khaldun's committed belief in the good effect of religion on Human Nature would not certainly invalidate the **duality** of Human Nature (by transforming it to **pure** goodness "one dimensional in nature") but rather it will only tip off the balance in favor of preserving **much** of that innate human goodness⁽¹²⁾ witnessed by Ibn Khaldun among the bedouins.

c) The Aggressive Human Nature

Ibn Khaldun had bluntly stated that the roots of human aggression as well as injustice are to be found in the animalistic side of Human Nature "Because aggression and injustice are in the animalistic nature of Man". Like some contemporary ethologists and psychologists⁽¹³⁾ studying Man and animal's behavior, the author considers aggression as a fundamental inborn feature whose infrastructure is widely observed among all living beings including Man: "Aggression is in the nature of living beings. God has given each of them a defensive organ"⁽¹⁴⁾.

Furthermore, Man does not only manifest what may be labelled "reflexive aggressive response for survival", toward other humans. Ibn Khaldun's observations and experiences enabled him to unshield other complex forms which human aggression could take. He had noticed injustice committed by humans, not because their physical survival was at stake, but rather it appears to be the result of a sort of human readiness to do injustice to others in the **Hobbesian sense** of the term. He writes "He who casts his eye upon the

property of his brother will lay his hand upon it to take it, unless there is a restraining influence to hold him back'' (Ibn Khaldun, 1974:47). Viewed this way, Human Nature's **animalistic** components are far from being conducive to human harmony, cooperation, social solidarity and evolution. On the contrary, Ibn Khaldun considers them to be fundamentally destructive and disruptive to Man's advancement collectively as well as individually⁽¹⁵⁾. In looking at these three forms of Man's Human Nature, one can assert that there is unambiguous Quranic/Islamic influence on the author's thinking on Man's Nature. The first type (Al-Fitrah state) and the second one (the dualistic nature) are drawn from the Islamic out-look on the range of Human Nature as expressed especially in the Muslim Holy Book. These two categories depict Man's Nature at its very primitive/natural state either as good more and less or neutral (dualist) toward bad or good doing. In both cases Man's Nature is overwhelmingly **dialectical**.

However, the **third type** of Human Nature is strikingly an **ugly** one. Man falls into this state when he becomes dominated by his animalistic (materialistic) desires. Every extravagant materialism bears within it the seeds of its own destruction. The corruption of the primitive goodness of Human Nature is one of the most important, though the **last** compared with the destruction of Al-Assabia and religion, casualties⁽¹⁶⁾ of the sedentarization process. In the luxurious sedentary milieu, Man is transformed **from a human being to an animal**⁽¹⁷⁾. With this taking place, the undermining of Islamic as well as bedouin/natural values becomes fait accompli.

Thus, nothing is left (neither Al-Assabia nor religious guidance) in the luxurious sedentary culture to preserve the essential goodness and dualism of the primitive Human Nature. Then, the ultimate fatal decline of human civilization becomes inevitable.

According to this frame of analysis, Ibn Khaldun's **Muqaddimah** can be assessed and evaluated on **two** fronts: 1) there are in the **Muqaddimah** the visible stated socio-historical forces which explain, among others, societies' and civilizations' growth and decline. 2) There are in the **Muqaddimah** as well tacit and latent statements of psychological nature which make **Human Nature** (in its **three** forms) as an essential contributing factor (through the actions of the social actors) in societies' and civilizations' ups and downs.

d) Human Nature's Dynamics

Ibn Khaldun's favorite⁽¹⁸⁾ type of Human Nature is Al-Fitrah. This is seen to represent the primitive/bedouin/natural good Human Nature itself. From his outlook of Human Nature one could infer that Man's potential

inborn good nature would remain closer to **Al-Fitrah** state if the outside milieu's structural and living conditions are fundamentally **bedouin** (primitive) or **Islamic** in nature

Type II of Human Nature is a **dialectical** one. Good and bad human tendencies are continuously in confrontation. As such, Human Nature is very precarious and offers little resistance to the influence of its milieu. The direction it will take is externally determined⁽¹⁹⁾. It can swing one way or the other depending on the nature of its surrounding environment.

Finally, Man's good human nature would be **transformed to type III** if his external social milieu was deprived of both the bedouin/simple primitive living conditions as well as the Islamic teachings, values and practices.

III. Ibn Khaldun's Three Types of Human Nature as Tools of Research

Can these sub-categories of Human Nature be put to use in the understanding of the theory of civilization's rise and fall? This is what we attempt to do in the following pages of this study which will deal with the main forces behind the Arab-Muslim civilization's rise and fall

When the **three** sub-notions of Human Nature are correlated with civilization's **rise** and **fall** one finds, on the one hand, that the author of the **Muqaddimah** linked the Arab-Muslim civilization's **rise not only** to the presence of a strong Assabia and Islamic belief among the early Arab-Muslim bedouins, as commonly **claimed** by Khaldunists, but also to **their** good/innate/primitive Human Nature (types I + II).

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun was **absolutely convinced** that the Arab-Muslim civilization's (and all civilizations for that matter) breakdown is due to excessive materialism which disintegrates Al-Assabia, weakens religion and **animalizes** Human Nature (type III).

Looking closely at these factors of civilization's **rise** and **fall**⁽²⁰⁾ one can identify **two** patterns as shown in Table I below. (1) In the case of the Arab-Muslim civilization's **rise**, the variable of good Human Nature (types I + II) appears to be there first since the human personality is, by Ibn Khaldun's Quranic definition, born with them. The development of Al-Assabia then religion follow suit **later**. (2) As far as the causes of the Arab-Muslim civilization's **fall**, the corruption of Human Nature (type III) seems to be the **last** casualty causing the decline of the sedentary civilization **after** Al-Assabia's disintegration and religion's weakness.

TABLE I

The forces involved in the Arab-Muslim civilization's **Rise** classified according to their time position in its life span.

- With bedouin simple life style there was:

1. A primitive good Human Nature (types I + II) of the Arab-Muslim bedouins.
2. Strong Assabia among the Arab-Muslim bedouins.
3. Strong commitment to the Islamic faith by the earlier Arab-Muslim bedouins.

The forces involved in the Arab-Muslim civilization's **Fall** classified according to their time position in its life span.

- excessive materialism led to:

1. The weakness and disintegration of Al-Assabia among the Arab-Muslim sedentaries.
2. The weakening of the religion of Islam among the sedentaries.
3. The spread of Human Nature type III among all social categories of the Arab-Muslim sedentary culture.

IV. Islam, Al-Assabia and Bedouinity and the Rise of Civilization and its Evolution

A) Bedouinity and its dynamics

For the author of the **Muqaddimah**, the very rise of the Arab-Muslim civilization appears to have been contingent on the **three** conditions (see table 1) which existed among the earlier founders (bedouins) of the new empire. Ibn Khaldun describes the bedouins as people whose worldly affairs don't go beyond basic necessities. Their **Nature** is preserved **free** from distorted habits (closest to Al-Fitrah state). They are people who accept quickly religious truths and right guidance. Cooperation is strong among them because of the prevailing spirit of Al-Assabia (group feeling).

Bedouinity appears to mean to Ibn Khaldun what primitiveness has meant for most social scientists in contemporary times. By inference the bedouin / primitive Human Nature is the closest to Man's original good nature (types I + II). As reflected in the Quran, Al-Fitrah type is equivalent to Rousseau's concept of "L'homme est né bon". This state of good Human Nature does not seem, however, in the long run to be equipped to preserve its own entity inspite of external influences. Bedouins were found by Ibn Khaldun to be aspiring to sedentary life style and not vice versa. This is confirmed by contemporary world rural population's movement trend from rural areas to urban ones. And this is despite the apparent spreading public attitudes in today's urbanized centers against the dangers of urban habitat. This irresistible semi-in-built pulling temptation is the fateful anti-thesis of Al-Fitrah state. In other words, **Human Nature's bedouin (good-primitive-natural) state is not made to be easily preservable**. In other words, it is at the mercy of outside conditions.

B) Islam and Human Nature's Goodness

Islam, as a new socio-cultural system, appears to be compatible with many of a bedouin community's main characteristics. **First**, the Quran has emphasized that Islam is the religion of Al-Fitrah (Din Al-Fitrah)⁽²¹⁾, the natural good Human Nature. As such, it is compatible with Bedouinity as described earlier.

Second, throughout the Quran and the Hadith it is made clear that Muslim must never be dominated, or worse, obsessed by insatiable materialism. However, he should not feel guilty when enjoying it **moderately**. In this sense, **the Islamic ethic** appears to allow for a **greater** share of materialistic goods and possessions than the bedouin life style could then offer. With this additional nuance, Islam remains, however, firmly anti-luxurious materialistic life style.

Third, Islam had strongly encouraged the development of strong Islamic ties among all Muslims: **the spirit of Al-Assabia** (solidarity). But the basis of the Islamic solidarity is no longer the blood ties of Al-Assabia. Its new foundations are the new Islamic values system. With this new concept of solidarity, the grounds were laid down for a broader sense of solidarity among all Muslims, be they of Arab or non-Arab origin.

As a socio-cultural order, Islam seems to have maintained some main important features of the bedouin community. Despite some modifications, the similarities between the **two** orders make tensions and conflicts on these points unlikely. Ibn Khaldun's observations "that the bedouins are quick to accept religion's truths and right guidance" are therefore in order.

Seen this way, Islam may be considered as a global system by which the original bedouin Arab-Muslims were able to move away from their confined restrictive bedouin milieu, **yet preserving the goodness of Human Nature**.

Thus, Ibn Khaldun's view of Islam may be interpreted that Islam's most significant role to the Arabs of Arabia lies in enabling them to take a world leadership status. Without the spirit of religion, the author concedes, the bedouin Arabs could not even acquire royal authority, let alone world dominance. As such, Islam constituted a revolutionary event (combining the three forces of civilization's rise) that completely transformed Arabia's **qualitative entity** and made it in less than one century a world power. Fourteen centuries later (today), the Arab Islamic fact is there to be reckoned with not only in the Middle East but on the world scene at large.

Ibn Khaldun's vision of the bedouin (good) Human Nature and of Islam as its protector (yet revolutionary), as presented here, should explain the undisguised hostility which the author of the **Muqaddimah** had consistently manifested toward the sedentary population. By definition, sedentary culture represents a distant evolution from the natural simple bedouin state (types I + II) of human existence. The sedentary urban complex is a blunt

contrast with the bedouin social order. There are in the sedentary culture more than the basic necessary goods which the bedouin community needs for its physical existence. Furthermore, luxury is a typical characteristic of sedentary civilization. Obsession with materialism, thus, becomes adominant feature. To the author of the **Muqaddimah**, the **obsessive materialism** is the most corrupting element to the very primitive goodness of Human Nature. He offers, thus, a **materialistic explanation of "the quality" of Human Nature** as civilization develops.

V. Civilization's Decline and its Relation to Al-Assabia, Religion's Weakness and Human Nature

A) Sedentary Civilization's Economic Problems

In a sedentary culture, individuals, groups and collectivities are strongly affected by economics. Modern materialistic civilization is no exception. Because of this, sedentary citizens, as Ibn Khaldun (p. 286) argues, tend to look and strive for more and more luxury. This tendency is more than confirmed in the present advanced (sedentary) modern societies. This collective orientation puts financial pressure both on the rulers and the ruled of the sedentary culture. The compelling drive toward luxury becomes irresistible throughout the entire fabric of the affluent civilization. The author of the **Muqaddimah** offers an adequate description of what goes on in the economics of this type of civilization. He writes: "We have stated before that the city with large population is characterized by high prices in business and high prices for its needs. These are then raised still higher through the customs duties; for sedentary culture reaches perfection at the time when the dynasty has reached its greatest flourishing, and that is the time when the dynasty levies customs duties because then it has large expenditure. The customs duties raise the sale prices, because small businessmen and merchants include all their expenses, even their personal requirements, in the price of their stock and merchandise. Thus, customs duties enter in the sale price. The expenditure of sedentary people, therefore, grows and is no longer **reasonable** but extravagant. The people cannot escape this because they are **dominated** by and subservient to their customs"⁽²²⁾. [emphasis in mine].

B) Sedentary Civilization's Social and Moral Problems

According to our Arab sociologist, Ibn Khaldun, sedentary population's obsession with luxury deals a devastating the socio-cultural blow. The collective normative regulating the socio-cultural system is bound to loosen up in favor of a new assertive/aggressive individualism. With it, the chance of a state of **anomie** (weakening of **Al-Assabia**) is greatly enhanced (Ibn Khaldun: 288). On the one hand, the sedentary individual desires more and more luxury. On the other, he often fails to satisfy his expanding needs. Put

in modern sociological terms, the sedentary person of Ibn Khaldun's time is under the pressure of an ever **rising expectations**.

This anomie situation has a direct impact on sedentary society's statistical rate of deviance and crime, as Emile Durkheim has shown in the 20th century. Like in modern civilization, the wide spread of criminality and deviance was seen by Ibn Khaldun as a symptom of the breakdown of a socio-cultural system. This is often linked by modern social scientists to the phenomenon of social disorganization whose psychological and social results are outlined by the author of the **Muqaddimah** as following: "corruption of individual inhabitants is the result of painful and trying efforts to satisfy the needs caused by their (luxury) customs; (the result) of the bad qualities then have acquired in the process of satisfying (those needs), and of the damage the soul suffers after it has obtained them. Immorality, wrongdoing, insincerity and trickery, for the purpose of making a living in a proper or an improper manner, increase among them. The soul comes to think about making a living, to study it, and use all possible trickery for the purpose. People are now devoted to lying, gambling, cheating, fraud, theft, perjury and usury. Because of the many desires and pleasures resulting from luxury, they are bound to know everything about the ways and the means of immorality, they talk openly about it and its causes, and give up all restraint in discussing it"⁽²³⁾.

The above problems of sedentary civilization are not by any means the only ones that threaten society's social fabric. Sedentary civilization's increasing permissive sexuality is one of the gravest threats to **society's solidarity** (Al-Assabia). The relations between luxury, pleasures and sexual activities are expressed by Ibn Khaldun in this manner: "among the things that corrupt sedentary culture, there is the disposition toward pleasures and indulgence in them, because of the luxury (that prevails). It leads to diversification of the desires of the belly for pleasurable food and drink. This, followed by diversification of the pleasures of sex through various ways of sexual intercourse such as adultery and homosexuality, leads to the destruction of the species" (Ibn Khaldun: 288).

C) The Steps Leading to the Corruption of Human Nature

Within the context of sedentary culture as just outlined, the author of the **Muqaddimah** spells out **how Human Nature** is led to deterioration and corruption. He enumerates four modifications which push Human Nature to the ultimate loss of its Humanity: **when it is animalized** (type III).

1) Man's Strength:

this concept is considered essential to the very entity of Man as a man. Ibn Khaldun writes "Man is a man only in as much as he is able to procure for himself useful things and to repeal harmful things and in as much as his character is suited to making efforts to this effect" (Ibn Khaldun, 288).

2) Sedentary Man's Character:

Through his own observations of sedentary people, the author of the **Muqaddimah** finds negative transformations in the sedentary personality/character. Those special changes leave the sedentary individual in a contrasted personality portrait vis a vis the natural/good/bedouin human character. The opposition between these two types of personality characteristics (types I + II with type III) is spelled out in details **throughout** the **Muqaddimah**. Here is one of the descriptions of the character of the sedentary human: "the sedentary person cannot take care of his needs personally. He may be too weak because of the tranquility he enjoys or he may be too proud, because he was brought up in prosperity and luxury. Both things are blameworthy" (Ibn Khaldun:228).

Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun continues to illustrate the opposition between sedentary (unnatural, unfitric) and bedouin (natural, fitric) characteristics by citing the government soldiers as a case in point: "it is in this sense that those government soldiers who are close to bedouin life and toughness are more useful than those who have grown up in a sedentary culture and have adopted its character traits. This can be found in every dynasty. It has thus become clear that the stage of sedentary culture is the stopping point in the life of civilization and dynasties" (Ibn Khaldun:289).

3) The Corruption of Religion

As pointed out earlier, deep involvement in sedentary life weakens, to say the least, society's restraining collective control system. In Ibn Khaldun's time the normative socio-cultural tissue was profoundly regulated by the principles of the Islamic culture. But with the spread of sedentarization much of the Islamic religious values, norms etc... were bound to be either entirely or partially abandoned by a great majority of the sedentary population. Thus, the process of **secularization** was set in. The Maghrebian sociologist comments on the relation between religion deformation and the spread of luxury in societies this way: "He [the sedentary person] then usually becomes corrupt with regard to his religion, also the (luxury) customs and his subservience to them corrupt him, and his soul becomes stamped by habits of luxury, as we have stated"⁽²⁴⁾.

4) Man Becomes Animal

In the view of Ibn Khaldun, the sedentary bad accumulative effect reaches its **extreme** negative impact when Man's noble distinct Humanity is transformed into an animal. This ugly human transformation (type III) is described by the great arab-historian-sociologist in this manner: "when the strength of a man and then his character and religion are corrupted, his humanity is corrupted and he becomes, in effect, transformed into an animal" (Ibn Khaldun:288-89).

Man's animality state appears to mean the lowest level Human Nature (type III) can fall into. With it, not only Al-Fitrah state of Human Nature is lost but also its **duality**. Once animality has taken over the whole direction of Man's behavior, that is a clear sign that social solidarity (Al-Assabia) and the religious values system have reached a point of no return in weakness and disintegration. This, as Ibn Khaldun often points out, has always been a universal pattern of the process of all ailing materialistic human societies and civilizations. This is in line with the Islamic perspective of how civilizations rise and fall. Islam has distinguished man from all other living beings by according him **spiritual, thinking and reasoning** dimensions⁽²⁵⁾. Consequently, Man's excessive materialistic involvement is strongly condemned by Islam since it overshadows these distinct human traits and, thus, triggers imbalance in the human condition. Religion's role becomes critical here. When behaviour is not guided especially by **religious ethics**, the deformation, animalization and dehumanization of Man's entity will be the inevitable ultimate result. As such, the disfiguring effect of the materialistic sedentarizing cultural process is not only confined to the macroscopic (societal) structural levels of societies and civilizations but it undermines as well the microscopic (personality of the individual) level by setting out a **denaturalizing** (anti-Fitrah) process on a large social scale. Once that macro-microscopic (social psychological) process has pushed far away (ending in type III of Human Nature) the **personality structure** of the collectivity from its natural (primitive) good human traits, there is no hope left for the civilization of luxurious sedentary culture to avoid weakness, disintegration and final collapse.

VI. Human Nature Between Western Thought And Ibn Khaldun's Thought.

The question of what is Human Nature is as old as man himself. A number of thinkers from all human civilizations have tackled it but without a **decisive** success. To take just Western civilization, as an example, one may single out such names like Plato, Aristotle (from Antiquity), Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas (from the Middle Ages) and Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Freud, Hegel, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons, Sartre and Levi-Strauss (from modern times). On the one hand, some of those have defined man's Nature through his **innate capacities** (Pennock & Chapman, 1977:297) alone (mainly in the Enlightenment period). On the other, some contemporary social scientists have put emphasis on **external actual behaviour** as a reflection of Man's Human Nature. (Pennock & Chapman, 1977: 297).

Ibn Khaldun, as we have seen, had indeed combined the **two**. He believed that Man inherits at birth a basis of Human Nature (types I + II) of good standing. But this is by no means a **fixed** one. It changes its nature under external influences. Human Nature type III is a result of this process. Thus, the nature of Human Nature is plastic and mealeable. Ibn Khaldun's type II of Human Nature is clearly **dualistic** in nature: 1) aggression and injustice

are in the **animal nature of man** (Ibn Khaldun: 47); 2) To man, instead, He [God] gave the ability to **think** and the **hand** (Ibn Khaldun: 46). This duality of man's nature is the root of all difficulties and controversies hindering the reaching of one consensual view of Human Nature by all interested thinkers. The confusion is not confined to the philosophical thought of ancient times but it continues to prevail in contemporary times as well. In general, modern western scientific studies of animals and men are **far** from agreeing and, thus, settling the issue of Human Nature once for all. On the one hand, some have shed more light on certain specific similarities that unite Man and the animals. On the other, some have outlined the subtle but very critical differences that separate Man's world from that of the animals. There are those, however, who have spoken out loudly of Man's combined animal and human nature: "Consider our lives. All other activities we share with the other inhabitants of the planet. Animals, birds, reptiles, fish and insects also struggle for power, as we do. They organize themselves in social groups. Many build. Some control their environment by ingenious inventions... They play games. Some have power we shall never possess and can scarcely comprehend. Cunning and skillful, that they are. **Yet collectively they learn little that is new and individually almost nothing.** Their skills are intricate, but limited. Their art, though charming, is purely decorative. Their languages consist of a few dozen signs and sounds. Their memory is vivid but restricted. Their curiosity is shallow and temporary, merely the rudiment of that wonder which fills the mind of a human scientist or poet or historian or philosopher. **They can't conceive of learning and knowledge as limitless activity administered by the power of will... we are Homo Sapiens: Man the Thinker**" (Highet, 1954:7-8) [emphasis is mine]. Modern Western thought's resistance to accept Man's dualistic (animal/human) nature should be understood against the background of the relationship between the humans and the animals in Western civilization. Going back as far as Aristotle one finds him equating the **two** completely. "It is impossible to determine the exact demarcation between them" (Bock, 1980:9). In modern times, Darwin asserted that Man's Nature is conducted by instinct rather than by God-implemented consciousness (Bock 1980:7). Still closer to us is Lorenz who asks us to accept with humility our place in nature with other animals⁽²⁶⁾. These unidimensional Western assumptions about Man's Nature being overanimalized (materialized) help explain why, for instance, Marx did not extend his notion of conflicts and contradictions (as central forces for societies' dynamics) to englobe the microscopic level of society: **the individual**. It is well known that Marx paid **little** attention to the non-materialistic (particularly the spiritual) side of Man in history making. As such, Man's antagonisms and conflicts can't be for the author of *The Capital* internally (that is, from the dualistic nature of Man's Nature) provoked. With this vision of Human Nature, Man ends up like a feather which the wind pushes or pulls as it wishes. Has Man's (the individual) role and place in history making been like that? Marx, the historian, should know better!

Notes

- (1) It will be shown throughout this study that Ibn Khaldun's perception and reactions to social phenomena were both objective and subjective.
- (2) See particularly A. Toynbee in *Study of History* (Oxford University Press, 1948, vol. III) as well as Y. Lacoste in *Ibn Khaldun* (Paris, Francois Maspero, 1956).
- (3) There is a very limited reference to Human Nature, as discussed here, in Abdullah Shrait's book: *EL FIKR EL AKHLAKI INDA IBN KHALDUN* (Ibn Khaldun's Moralistic Thought) SNED, Alger 1975, p. 178. Shrait admits that the *Muqaddimah* does not have a specific chapter or section on morals. The latter has to be inferred as we have done regarding Human Nature.
- (4) A.S. El Messidi points out that solid and exhaustive scholarship is a general phenomenon in the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage. He mentions such names like Al Ghazali, Ibn Sibawaih, Al Razi, Al Jurjani.. All of them had written before Ibn Khaldun well articulated works in their domains. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun had only followed suit but in new fields: history, sociology, economics, politics, psychology... to which he devoted his *Muqaddimah*. See *EL FIKR EL ARABI*, July-August 1980, Year II, pp. 8-38.
- (5) The Modern Western positivist spirit must have played a role in the lack of interest in the less obvious side of Ibn Khaldun's thought.
- (6) Y. Lacoste's high admiration of Ibn Khaldun's talent and depth of vision has not kept him from criticizing Ibn Khaldun's unabated religious commitment. Ibn Khaldun's apparent mysticism at times was seen as embarrassing to Lacoste: the admirer of Ibn Khaldun's empirical and positivist approach to the study of social phenomena.
- (7) One can say Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* has, as other great works, the **obvious** and the **hidden** sides. The latter is what may be called "between the lines thought". Its importance can be fundamental to the understanding of any great work. Both Satia El Husri in *Dirasat fi Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldun* and A.A. wahid Wafi in *Abdulrrahman Ibn Kuldun* make mention of Ibn Khaldun's study of psychology and education. But none of the two authors deals directly with what is being discussed in this study: that is Ibn Khaldun's notice of Human Nature.
- (8) On the one hand, the Quranic verse (30) of Surat Erooin spells out this way the relation between Al-Fitrah state and the religion of Islam: "So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: establish God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought)..." On the other, the Hadith: "Every infant is born in the natural state. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Heathern" equates the Muslim state of the human being with his natural state (Al-Fitrah). Accordingly, the human being is a Muslim at birth. It appears from the **second** meaning of Al-Fitrah given **here** that it has certain dialectical dimensions (Good/Bad).
- (9) It is assumed in this article that Ibn Khaldun saw a significant correlation between Al-Fitrah state and the primitive/bedouin state of the human individual as well as that of the collectivity. Consequently, Ibn Khaldun's admiration of the Bedouins becomes understandable.
- (10) Positivist modern social scientists may cite this case as an example of **Ibn Khaldun's subjectivity** and value judgement in his study of social human phenomena.
- (11) In spite of its dualistic nature, Human Nature (type II) is still considered by Ibn Khaldun as belonging, as Al-Fitrah State (types I), to the range of Human Nature's Goodness. Since types I and II are **not** over dominated by animalistic/materialistic inclinations and greeds which are the criteria set by Ibn Khaldun for the ugly **evilish** Human Nature (type III) that will be discussed later. Furthermore, from an Islamic point of view (which Ibn Khaldun is certainly influenced by) it is through a good balanced human duality (staying in the middle of extremes (al wassata) that **Man** can be at **his best**. It will be shown **particularly** at the end of this study how important the concept of a dualist Human Nature in understanding human behavior and history dynamics.
- (12) This human state (where the good overpowers somewhat the bad) is a positive conflict resolution of man's dualistic nature: which enables man eventually to be a **builder** rather than a destructive being. And this is basic for civilization's rise and continuous advancement. But **contradictions** within **Man's** Nature remain a prerequisite for the individual as well as human history dynamics.
- (13) K. Lorenz and S. Freud are among the well known ones.
- (14) The *Muqaddimah*, p. 46. Unlike Lorenz who saw **aggression** as a general feature of Human Nature, Ibn Khaldun linked it specifically to the animal side of **Man's** Nature. For him, thus, Human Nature has **two** dimensions (the animalistic and the human sides) while for Lorenz it is unidimensional (animalistic).
- (15) Ibn Khaldun's position on the forces of **human progress** appears not to go along with the modern materialistic vision which correlates progress mainly with materialistic achievements. This vision of Ibn Khaldun is in line with the "new outlook" on Development in some parts and circles of today's world. The increasing emphasis on Human Development (instead of only Economic Development) is a trend which seems to be close to Ibn Khaldun's implicit perception of human

- progress and evolution. In other words, the author of **Muqaddimah**'s severe criticism of materialistic progress (when it is **not** balanced by **humanistic** spiritual values) underlines Ibn Khaldun's great concern for the **quality** (maintaining the good Human Nature) of human advancement.
- (16) Read especially "Bedouins are closer to being good than sedentary people" in **Muqaddimah** p. 94.
 - (17) **Muqaddimah** p. 289. By today's scientific criteria this is a **moral** judgement on Ibn Khaldun's part. But morality's erosion among Western modern social scientists can be traced to **two** principal factors: 1) the modern **ethic** of science that separates science from morality; 2) the spread of the notion of **relativity** particularly among contemporary anthropologists and sociologists who have made immoral the whole issue of morality that distinguish between bad and good. See the implications of "La theorie de la morale immorale" in the book: **Le controle social du crime**, Maurice Cusson, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1983, P. 97.
 - (18) In Al-Fitrah state, though dialectical in nature (good and bad), goodness in Man appears to have more chance to win. This is a good reason for Ibn Khaldun to favor it.
 - (19) "Man is a child of the customs and the things he has become used to" in **Ibid.** p. 95. He also sees Human Nature as a changing phenomenon (type I to type III) in response to external conditions.
 - (20) While Ibn Khaldun articulates very well the forces leading to civilization's **rise and fall** (as seen in table I) materialistic civilization's **dead end** is supported by Islam's view that none and nothing is eternal in this universe: "Everything on this earth is bound to perish" **The Koran**: Surat 55, verse 26.
 - (21) This is in contrast with the view that claims that Ibn Khaldun restricted the negative effect of luxury and materialism on civilization to the ruling classes (kings and entourage) and **not** to the general population. See Shrait's: "**Ibn Khaldun's moralist thought**", cit. p. 285-86.
 - (22) **Muqaddimah** p. 288. Ibn Khaldun's description of those correlates of sedentary civilization is remarkably true of today's advanced (sedentary) societies. Thus, civilizations/societies fall is not caused only by internal or external revolutions and attacks but also those internal psychological deterioration
 - (23) **Muqaddimah** p. 286. This quotation has a lot to offer for the construction of a Khaldunian theory of **crime and deviance**. In spite of this, it is still a **neglected** area of Ibn Khaldun's thought.
 - (24) **Muqaddimah** p. 280. Religion's (Islam) role is **twofold** according to Ibn Khaldun: 1) it helps strengthen Al Assabia and 2) it allows Human Nature to be in a **good** state.
 - (25) Ibn Khaldun appears to believe that these dimensions can be **fruitfully** cultivated for Man's betterment when he is **not** dominated by materialism. See chapt. 6 of the **Muqaddimah** cit. beginning p. 333.
 - (26) Hight mentions Montaigne's explanation of this Western attitude (considering Man as a **beast**): "It is safer to leave the reins of our conduct in the hand of Nature than keep them in our own", p. 34 In **Man's Unconquered Mind**.
 - (27) E. Morin: **Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine**, (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1973) p. 22. See in particular chapt. 2: L'hypercomplexe.

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