

Ibn Khaldun: Scientific Instruction as Prolonging the Polity's Life

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Abstract

At a time when various forces threaten the continued life of democracy, Ibn Khaldun's writings on education offer renewed importance to building longer lasting political regimes. In this paper, I argue that Ibn Khaldun views education as a crucial element for prolonging the polity and postponing the inevitable fall of dynasties. In the first chapter, I open with a discussion that situates his views within three broad debates in the literature: the first on Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*'s normative or descriptive nature; the second on its pessimistic or optimistic vision of human history; and the third on the role of statecraft. The second chapter identifies education as a crucial element for realizing the state's ultimate objective: securing the context necessary for achieving human perfection. It also shows how scientific instruction strengthens the political well-being of the state by educating future leaders as well as perfecting the intellectual and moral character of the polity. In the third chapter, I conclude with a discussion of the ideal instructor and Ibn Khaldun's proposed teaching pedagogy. My investigation has the potential to stimulate new dialogues between Islamic and Western political thought and contribute towards expanding the political options available to Muslims within their own heritage. Ultimately, I contribute to the de-parochialization of western-dominated political theory by seriously contextualizing Ibn Khaldun within the Islamic tradition.

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Introduction

Hailed as “one of the fathers, of modern cultural history and social science,”¹ Ibn Khaldun is credited with writing “undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time and place.”² His most famous work is the *Muqaddima* (“The Prolegomena” published in 1377 AD) where he proposes a new science of culture as an auxiliary for historiography. In it, he demonstrates how the transition from primitive to advanced culture is the primary impetus for the cyclical rise and fall of states. He famously claims that “as a rule, no dynasty lasts beyond the life (span) of three generations”³ and adds: “If the time is up, (the end of the dynasty) cannot be postponed for a single hour, no more than it can be accelerated.” Interpreting his bleak portrayal of human history, the dominant view in Western scholarship sees Ibn Khaldun as simply a fatalistic describer of the mechanistic workings of human societies who offers no legitimate hope of righting mankind and altering history.

In this paper, I argue that Ibn Khaldun, despite painting this unwelcoming picture of human reality, tries to show how humans might intervene to guide the process of their society’s development. To make this argument, I focus on his views on scientific instruction,⁴ which encompass his perspective on the ultimate aims of statecraft (the imperative to advance the crafts and sciences). By exploring scientific instruction, I demonstrate the normative dimensions of the *Muqaddima*, provide support for an optimistic reading of his new science, and offer insights on

¹ Muhsin Mahdi, "Ibn Khaldun" in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Edited by David L. Sills (New York, The MacMillan Co., 1968), Vol. 7, pp. 56.

² See Arnold Toynbee 1956:372. See also *History of the philosophy of history* by Robert Flint for similar praising

³ *Al-Muqaddima*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (3 vols., New York, 1958), Vol. 1, ch. 3, Section 12, p. 343. Henceforth, references will cite chapter, section and page number (but not volume) as follows: *M* 3.12: 343.

⁴ The term ‘scientific’ refers to all academic disciplines including the traditional sciences on the one hand and the rational sciences on the other.

the primacy of human agency in prolonging the dynasty's life. Ultimately, I argue that Ibn Khaldun views scientific instruction as a crucial element for prolonging the polity and postponing the inevitable fall of dynasties.

The first chapter opens with a summary of Ibn Khaldun's new science. Afterwards, it situates this science within three broad debates in the literature: the first on the *Muqaddima*'s normative or descriptive nature; the second on its pessimistic or optimistic vision of human history; and the third on the role of statecraft. Finally, this chapter presents the literature on Ibn Khaldun's conception of education and in the process, identifies a gap in the scholarship on relating these views to his broader political theory. I use these views on scientific instruction to comment on the three broad debates in the literature.

The second chapter demonstrates how instruction and politics both mutually support the growth of the other. It first discusses how the good state facilitates the quest for human perfection by providing the context necessary for the sciences and crafts (which includes scientific instruction) to develop. Then, it explains how instruction strengthens the political well-being of the state by educating future leaders as well as perfecting the intellectual and moral character of the polity. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates the imperial importance of scientific education for a well-functioning polity.

Finally, the third chapter explores the proper teaching pedagogy of the ideal instructor that is necessary for effective education. First, it demonstrates why scientific instruction—and by extension, the scientific instructor—is the noblest type of instruction/instructor. Then, it presents three ways in which instruction leads to intellectual and scientific perfection. Afterwards, it shows how given the diversity in intellectual capability, the scientific instructor must maximize each students' intellectual potential. In explaining how, it discusses four fundamental principles

of Ibn Khaldun's proposed teaching pedagogy: first, gradualism; second, flexibility; third, dialogue; and fourth, leniency. In the end, this chapter sheds light on Ibn Khaldun's realistic approach to education and thereby, demonstrates his attempt to ensure not only the permanency of effective education despite changing conditions but also its continued positive influence on the state's political well-being.

The methodology employed is borrowed from Kathryn Leigh Jenco's work in the emerging field of comparative political theory.⁵ In consonance with her "methods-centered approach to cross-cultural engagement," the paper contributes to the de-parochialization of western-dominated political theory by contextualizing Ibn Khaldun seriously within his Islamic tradition.⁶ In this regard, the paper attempts to interpret Ibn Khaldun within his Arabic and Islamic epistemic context whenever possible by defining his concepts and explaining his problems according to his tradition's independent epistemology.⁷ By using this approach, I provide a more faithful account of Ibn Khaldun's writings.

⁵ See "'What Does Heaven Ever Say?' A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-cultural Engagement" and "Recentering Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality" both by Kathryn Leigh Jenco

⁶ For example, it would be extremely problematic to interpret Ibn Khaldun as one would Montesquieu without first situating his thought within the Islamic worldview, which is separated temporally and epistemically from its Western counterpart.

⁷ See as examples "Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Mysticism" by See "Ibn Khaldun's understanding of Civilizations and the Dilemmas of Islam and the West Today" by Akhbar Ahmed. P. 25 See also "Theorizing from Within: Ibn Khaldun and His Political Culture" by Lawrence Rosen. P.596, Syed Hossein Nasr "Conditions for Meaningful Comparative Philosophy." See note 18

Chapter 1: Defining the Scope

The first section of this chapter opens with a discussion of the various historiographical errors that Ibn Khaldun identifies as the cause for corrupting history. It then demonstrates how his proposed “new science of culture” mitigates these errors by providing “a sound yardstick with the help of which historians may find the path of truth and correctness where their reports are concerned.”⁸ Finally, it explores two of Ibn Khaldun’s ‘first-principles’ that form the essence of culture and the foundation of his new science before exploring its essential properties.

Exploring whether Ibn Khaldun is simply a fatalistic describer of the mechanistic workings of human societies, or whether he tries to show how humans might intervene to guide the process of their society’s development, the second section situates Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* within three debates in the academic literature: the first on the *Muqaddima*’s normative or descriptive nature; the second on its pessimistic or optimistic vision of human history; and the third on the role of statecraft. This paper will contribute to the literature by demonstrating the normative dimensions of the *Muqaddima*, providing support for an optimistic reading of the new science, and offering insights on the primacy of human agency in “good” governance.

The third section of this chapter begins with exploring where Ibn Khaldun treats education throughout the *Muqaddima*. To demonstrate the lack of scholarship on how these views influence the political functioning of society, it presents the academic literature on his conception of education, which corresponds to three broad categories: (1) literature on the history of Muslim Middle Eastern education; (2) literature demonstrating the overlap of his

⁸ *M*, preliminary remarks: 91.

pedagogical principles with modern educational strategies; and (3) literature explaining the sociological and psychological principles underpinning his pedagogy. This paper will address this gap in the literature by showing how Ibn Khaldun's views of education and politics mutually influence one another. Ultimately, it will argue that his conception of education is a crucial element for prolonging the polity and postponing the inevitable fall of dynasties.

Ibn Khaldun's "New Science of Culture":

Ibn Khaldun is most recognized for his *Muqaddima* (Prolegomena) to his seven-volume *Kitab al-Ibar* (The Book of Instructive Lessons)⁹ where he proposes a 'new science of culture' for effective historiography that is subsequently demonstrated in the *Kitab al-Ibar*.¹⁰ The new science emerges in response to historians who "were all tradition-bound and dull of nature and intelligence" for merely imitating those who came before.¹¹ They reported "historical information about" a particular dynasty and took "care to preserve it as it had been passed on down to them, be it imaginary or true."¹² Oblivious to the innerworkings of history, "they disregarded the changes in conditions and in the customs of nations and races that the passing of time had brought about"¹³ and as a result, did not authenticate any historical material. Their biggest neglect was the failure to rationally investigate "why the various dynasties brought pressures to bear upon each other and why they succeeded each other."¹⁴ In short, they failed to

⁹ See chapter 2 of "The Political Aspects of Ibn Khaldun's Study of Culture and History" by El-Rayes for an extensive analysis of the full title *Kitāb al- 'Ibar wa dīwān al-mubtada' wa al-khabar fī ayyām al- 'arab wa al- 'ajam wa al-barbar wa man 'āsarāhum min dhawī al-sultān al-akbar*

¹⁰ See Mushin Mahdi, Charles Butterworth, and Aziz Azmeh

¹¹ *M*, Forward: 9.

¹² *M*, Forward:9

¹³ *M*, Forward: 9

¹⁴ *M*, Forward: 10

rationally inquire into “the how and why of events” and understand the philosophic questions about the causes and reasons for historical change.¹⁵

Faulting various historians who overstated the number of Israelites in Moses army during their exodus from Egypt, Ibn Khaldun illustrates how failure to rationally inquire into “the nature of things” can cause historiographical exaggeration. He mentions Al-Mas’udi and many other historians who had reported that the number of Israelite soldiers in the Sinai desert between Egypt and Syria turned out to be 600,000 or more. For Ibn Khaldun, however, such a large number is rationally improbable based on the principle that “every realm may have as large a militia as it can hold and support, but no more.”¹⁶ This entails having sufficient land, foodstuff including animals, and workers for providing equipment and clothing.¹⁷ However, Egypt and Syria could not possibly support such a large number given “the situation at the present day,” and therefore the report is—at the very least—questionable. He further adds that in observing the conditions of warfare and battle formation, “an army of this size cannot march or fight as a unit” because “the whole available territory would be too small for it.”¹⁸ Ibn Khaldun provides three additional counter-arguments all based on “comparisons with observable present-day and well-known nearby facts” to show these “reports to be untrue” and therefore demonstrates the importance of rational inquiry for determining the veracity of historical narrations.

The objective of Ibn Khaldun’s new science of culture is to mitigate historiographical errors by providing “a sound yardstick with the help of which historians may find the path of truth and correctness where their reports are concerned.”¹⁹ To authenticate historical material, the

¹⁵ *M*, Forward: 6

¹⁶ *M*, Introduction: 16

¹⁷ See El-Rayes, p. 140

¹⁸ *M*, Introduction: 16

¹⁹ *M*, preliminary remarks: 77

new science differentiates “right from wrong in historical information on the grounds of (inherent) possibility or absurdity.”²⁰ Its subject is human culture because for Ibn Khaldun, any study of history “is information about human social organization, which itself is identical with world culture.”²¹ To determine the boundaries of the rationally possible, the new science distinguishes between three categories within the cultural domain: “the conditions that attach themselves to the essence of culture as required by its very nature; the things that are accidental (to culture) and cannot be counted on; and the things that cannot possibly attach themselves to it.”²² The first category refers to the fundamental substance of an object that defines its identity. For example, the essence of a triangle is a shape with three sides since any increase in the number of sides changes its identity. The second category refers to essential properties and nonessential properties; the former are qualities that are necessarily associated with the object’s essence and the latter are qualities that are *not* necessarily associated with its essence. An essential property of all triangles is that the sum of its angles is 180 degrees, whereas a nonessential property is its color or size, all of which can change without affecting its identity. Finally, the third refers to qualities that cannot be associated with the object because they do not rationally pertain. A triangle cannot be delicious or seductive because such qualities are not descriptively appropriate to its essence.

Ibn Khaldun identifies two ‘first-principles’ that form the essence of culture: first, humans are political by nature and second, different environments influence the human body and character distinctively.²³ The primary reason behind the first claim is that societies are necessary

²⁰ *M*, preliminary remarks: 77

²¹ *M*, preliminary remarks: 71

²² *M*, preliminary remarks: 77

²³ See Stephen Frederic Dale, “Ibn Khaldun: The Last Greek and the First Annaliste Historian,”

for the most basic human subsistence. In the first paragraph of the first prefatory statement, Ibn Khaldun writes:

“Human social organization is something necessary. The philosophers expressed this fact by saying: "Man is `political' by nature." That is, he cannot do without the social organization for which the philosophers use the technical term "town" (polis).”²⁴

‘Political’ here refers to the natural need for others because “the power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain (the food) he needs, and does not provide him with as much food as he requires to live.”²⁵ In addition, “each individual needs the help of his fellow beings for his defense.”²⁶ To acquire sufficient food and defense needed for survival, humans are dependent upon some form of social organization; for that reason, they are naturally political beings. However, Ibn Khaldun is aware that different peoples possess different ideas of social organization. To account for these variances, he introduces a second principle that different environments influence the human body and character differently. This is best illustrated in his famous dichotomy of the primitive Bedouins—which refers not just to nomadic desert dwellers, but also an intermediate group of herders and grazers who don’t live in towns or cities—on the one hand and civilized urbanites living in luxury on the other hand. According to Ibn Khaldun, the harsh environment of the former influences their social organization structure and explains why it differs from that of civilized culture. Ultimately, it demonstrates how the form of social organization depends upon the natural environment. These two principles outline the basic cultural similarities and differences across societies that all historians should be aware of and serve as the foundation for the new science .

²⁴ *M*, 1:1: 89

²⁵ *M*, 1:1: 89

²⁶ *M*, 1:1: 90

In addition to the two ‘first-principles,’ the essential properties of culture, as Stephen Frederick Dale writes, are “royal authority, government, occupations, crafts, and sciences.”²⁷ Of paramount importance to Ibn Khaldun is the state, which “constitutes the *form* of the world, and of culture, which, in turn, together with the subjects, cities, and all other things, constitute the *matter* of (state and royal regime).”²⁸ The state is needed to restrain aggressive tendencies and reconcile conflict that otherwise would lead to the dissolution of society. This is because “aggressiveness and injustice are in the animal nature of man” and will become manifest without a powerful restraining influence and neutral arbiter. Thus, “royal authority is a natural *quality* of man which is absolutely necessary to mankind” [italics added].²⁹

Three Major Debates in the Academic Literature:

In the academic literature on Ibn Khaldun’s new science of culture are three broad debates that the paper will contribute towards: the first on the *Muqaddima*’s normative or descriptive nature; the second on its pessimistic or optimistic vision of human history; and the third on the role of statecraft. Regarding the first debate, H.A.R. Gibb³⁰ and Briton Cooper Busch³¹ both argue that Ibn Khaldun’s theory on the rise and fall of civilizations is a descriptive account of the march of history with no normative implications. According to both, the new science uncovers history’s internal logic but does not propose any normative solution to its cyclical teleology. Its ultimate aim is an empirical study of the “political, social, and economic factors underlying the establishment of political units and the evolution of the State”³² through

²⁷ See Stephen Frederic Dale, “Ibn Khaldun: The Last Greek and the First Annaliste Historian,” p. 436

²⁸ *M*, 4:17: 291

²⁹ *M*, 1:1: 92

³⁰ H.A.R. Gibb, “The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory”

³¹ Briton Cooper Busch, “Divine Intervention in the "Muqaddimah" of Ibn Khaldūn”

³² H.A.R. Gibb, “The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory,” p. 25

the famous dichotomy of primitive culture (*ʿumran badawi*) on the one hand and civilized culture (*ʿumran hadhari*) on the other. The new science conveys a realistic account of historical processes, beginning with primitive societies, who when equipped with a strong ‘group feeling’ (*asabiya*) or social cohesion, advance beyond their tribal confines and ultimately establish a powerful state. Developing urban attributes and sedentary culture, the state eventually loses its group feeling vigor when luxury sets in, opting to chase a hedonistic life of self-indulgence over serving the group’s well-being.³³ At this stage, society degenerates, the dynasty weakens, and “the whole edifice topples, to be replaced eventually by another non-sedentary society from without.”³⁴ Never putting “forward suggestions for the reform of the institutions which he describes so minutely, nor considering the possibility that they may be modified as the result of human effort and thought,” Ibn Khaldun, as Gibb writes, “accepts the facts as they are and presents the cycle of states and dynasties as an inevitable and almost mechanical process.”³⁵ Far removed from any normative enterprise, the new science—perhaps to its detriment—depicts what *is* and never what *ought* to be.

Gibb and Busch categorize Ibn Khaldun’s bleak depictions of human reality as an utterly fatalistic, materialistic, and pessimistic vision of the world. Doomed to inevitable cycles of appearance and disappearance, humanity has no capability for possible reform and altering history’s course. As Busch writes: ““Pessimistic” is an appealing label for such a view, for Ibn Khaldun openly acknowledges no saving factor which may preserve a society from its ultimate extinction.”³⁶ With no call for positive action, the *Muqaddima* diminishes the power of human

³³ Briton Cooper Busch, ““Divine Intervention in the "Muqaddimah" of Ibn Khaldūn,” p. 319

³⁴ Briton Cooper Busch, ““Divine Intervention in the "Muqaddimah" of Ibn Khaldūn,” p. 319

³⁵ H.A.R Gibb, “The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory,” p. 27

³⁶ Briton Cooper Busch, “Divine Intervention in the "Muqaddimah" of Ibn Khaldūn,” p. 319-20

agency to affect change and instead, “invites a stoical repose.”³⁷ Another scholar who shares the same viewpoint, Hayden White states: “In Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history there is no progress that is not temporary, no enlightenment that is not revelation, no human accomplishment which does not have at its base mechanical chance; there is only the enervating Lucretian rise and fall out of the void and back again.”³⁸ For Busch, the only hope is instances of ‘divine intervention’ where God sends prophets to revive religion that galvanize people around an unbreakable group feeling and break the inevitable rhythms of history—in clear reference to the rapid political expansion of Islam. Gibb somewhat similarly argues that failure to substantively uphold the religious law (Shari’a), according to Ibn Khaldun, are the cause for the current course of history, but given that mankind will never follow the Shari’a, “it is condemned to an empty and unending cycle of rise and fall.”³⁹ In this light, the new science is extremely pessimistic and offers no legitimate hope of righting mankind and altering history.

On the other side of the debate are thinkers such as Lenn Evan Goodman,⁴⁰ Malik Mufti,⁴¹ Muhsin Mahdi,⁴² and James Morris who all argue that Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* is normative with a cautious optimism that can potentially stave off civilizational degeneration and prolong the dynasty’s life. Directly challenging Gibb and Busch, Goodman writes that “we should be suspicious of the notion that nothing more is intended than a realistic (i.e. critical) account of events or situations, and doubly suspicious of the suggestion that what we have received is purely descriptive rather than normative or at a level of generality so removed from

³⁷ Hayden V. White, “Ibn Khaldun in World Philosophy of History: Review Article,” p. 111

³⁸ Hayden V. White, “Ibn Khaldun in World Philosophy of History: Review Article,” p. 111

³⁹ H.A.R Gibb, “The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn's Political Theory,” p. 31

⁴⁰ See Lenn Evan Goodman’s article “Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides”

⁴¹ See Malik Mufti’s article “Jihad as Statecraft: Ibn Khaldun on the Conduct of War and Empire”

⁴² See See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* as well as the two articles each entitled “Ibn Khaldun” in *History of Muslim Philosophy*

the metaphysical as to satisfy the dictates of a rigid empiricism.”⁴³ For him, the new science is far beyond just an objective account of the preconditions for social and political organizations. Indeed, “his willing concessions to "realism" never bring him to the point of confessing all values and ideals to be nugatory or subjective; rather he never ceases to believe (and to act on the belief) that men are (and should be) judged by standards which it is at best unrealistic to expect they can live up to.”⁴⁴ According to Ibn Khaldun, the normative standard by which humanity is measured by is its ability to realize human perfection and develop their ability to think. By extension, as Morris writes, the normative aim of the new science is “the effective reform of contemporary education, culture, and religion in directions that would better encourage the ultimate human perfection of true scientific, philosophic knowing.”⁴⁵ Mufti reiterates this point when he says, “the fundamental purpose of politics for Ibn Khaldun is to advance culture” because “advanced culture or civilization (*hadara*) provides the context in which human beings can realize their distinctive potential: the cultivation of ‘sciences and crafts.’”⁴⁶ For Ibn Khaldun, therefore, the *Muqaddima* does not merely describe the historical process of rise and fall but rather formulates a normative teleology where the successful state *ought to* advance culture and secure the conditions needed to perfect the human intellect.

Within this scholarly camp, Ibn Khaldun’s new science in its normative dimensions assumes room for positive change beyond pessimistic fatalism and determinism. Indeed, “he was not a determinist” because—as Mahdi notes—“he did not believe...that all human decisions are determined by objected circumstances. He believed that disciplined reflection could reveal

⁴³ Lenn Evan Goodman, “Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides,” p. 250

⁴⁴ Lenn Evan Goodman, “Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides,” p. 269

⁴⁵ James Winston Morris, “An Arab" Machiavelli"?: Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun's Critique of Sufism,” p. 242

⁴⁶ Malik Mufti, “Jihad as Statecraft: Ibn Khaldun on the Conduct of War and Empire,” p. 386

certain tendencies and regularities in social development.”⁴⁷ The role of human agency in affecting historical change appears countless times in the new science. Mahdi add: “Only history can teach the man of action how others have acted in particular circumstances, the choices they made, their success or failure” and “whether particular choices and decisions were good or bad, well- or ill-done.”⁴⁸ By examining the internal workings of history, the new science thus provides a practical handbook on what not do in the future and therefore is an attempt to interfere in postponing the ‘inevitable’ decline and prolonging civilizational prosperity—not in radically upending the cyclical nature of history. For Mahdi, it ultimately intends to guide future statesmen towards the political good and thereby, to escape the ‘fatalistic’ ending of state degeneration. Mufti affirms this point: “Ibn Khaldun’s historical investigations seem rather to lead to an appreciation of what the proper combination of good law and good statecraft can achieve and therefore is “far from resignation” but instead “hopeful.”⁴⁹

This brings us to the third and final theme that the paper will explore: the role of statecraft. As mentioned previously, Mahdi comments that the “end of the science of culture is to assist in the preparation of the history useful for the statesman.”⁵⁰ Unlike the Machiavellian, technocratic pursuit that esteems effective maintenance of power above achieving any normative end, the task of the statesman—as Morris writes— “involves far more than the outward passing forms of power” but encompasses a deliberate end towards “the ultimate human perfection of true scientific, philosophic knowing.” The end to which the community is guided must be the development of the intellect, the cultivation of which “results from that ability to think which

⁴⁷ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, p. 293

⁴⁸ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, p. 294-95

⁴⁹ Malik Mufti, “Jihad as Statecraft: Ibn Khaldun on the Conduct of War and Empire,” p. 410

⁵⁰ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, p. 289

distinguishes man from the other animals and exalts him as a thinking being over all other creatures.”⁵¹ To realize the human potential for perfection, statecraft must advance culture by securing the conditions necessary for intellectual development.⁵² This includes providing the requisite material for economic prosperity and strong defensive institutions. Consequently, a normatively worse state is one that less effectively satisfies these conditions and thus, fails to provide the context needed to advance the sciences. Regardless of its longevity and ability to maintain power, the state and therefore the statesman will never be successful according to Ibn Khaldun if its primary function is not in the direction of developing culture. In examining Ibn Khaldun’s views on education, this paper will demonstrate the normative dimensions of the *Muqaddima*, provide support for an optimistic reading of the new science, and offer insights on “good” governance and the role of the statesman.

Reviewing the Literature on Ibn Khaldun’s Conception of Education:

Dispersed throughout Ibn Khaldun’s sections on political leadership, crafts, religion, and the sciences are scattered references to the theme of instruction. It is briefly introduced in the letter of Tahir b. al-Husayn to his son 'Abdallah b. Tahir, which discusses “all (important) political problems as handled by the religious law and all problems of power politics that he would have to know in his government and administration.”⁵³ The father orders his son to learn “from men of experience and intelligence who are understanding and wise”⁵⁴ and “from the affairs of the world that you are able to observe personally” as well as “from the persons in authority and in positions of leadership who lived before your time in past centuries and among

⁵¹ *M*, preface: 84

⁵² Malik Mufti, “Jihad as Statecraft: Ibn Khaldun on the Conduct of War and Empire,” p. 386

⁵³ *M*. 3:50: 139

⁵⁴ *M*. 3:50: 148

nations that disappeared.”⁵⁵ Apart from this passage linking successful political leadership to education, however, the concept is never systematically re-engaged in the remainder of the chapter. It appears more substantively in chapter five’s treatment of the crafts where Ibn Khaldun devotes a small section to instruction. He writes in it: “the crafts require teachers”⁵⁶ because “the transmission of things one has observed with one’s own eyes is something more comprehensive and complete than the transmission of information and things one has learned about.”⁵⁷ Craft education thus *should* revolve around emulation and being in the presence of the instructor such that “the skill a student acquires in a craft, and the habit he attains, [directly] correspond to the quality of instruction and the habit of the teacher.”⁵⁸ After connecting teaching with the development of the crafts, however, he does not resume this conversation until chapter six where he discusses the various kinds of traditional and rational sciences as well as their methods of instruction.⁵⁹ In this chapter, he substantively treats instruction because “the ideas developed by Ibn Khaldun on teaching belong to his encyclopedic presentation of the sciences. This opens with a theory of knowledge and a general presentation of the socio-historical and epistemological bases of scientific development.”⁶⁰ Here he “outlines the aims of education, the curriculum and the skills of teaching and also provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of Islamic knowledge.”⁶¹

I separate the academic literature discussing Ibn Khaldun’s conception of instruction into three broad categories according to content: (1) literature on the history of Muslim Middle Eastern education; (2) literature demonstrating the overlap of his pedagogical principles with

⁵⁵ *M.* 3:50: 154

⁵⁶ *M.* 5:15: 346

⁵⁷ *M.* 5:15: 346

⁵⁸ *M.* 5:15: 346

⁵⁹ See Chapter Six heading of *Al-Muqaddima*

⁶⁰ Abdesselam Cheddadi, “Ibn Khaldun’s concept of education in the ‘*Muqaddima*,” p. 5

⁶¹ Mark Halstead, “An Islamic concept of education,” p. 521

modern educational strategies; and (3) literature explaining the sociological and psychological principles underpinning his pedagogy. The first body of literature uses Ibn Khaldun's commentary on instruction as historical material for compiling a history of Muslim educational practices.⁶² Mark Halstead, Abdul Latif Tibawi, and Jonathan Porter Berkey lay out the breadth of scholarship on educational issues during "the high period of Islamic civilization" from Ibn Khaldun to Nasir al-Din Tusi, Ibn Miskawayh, and Al-Ghazali.⁶³ Praising Ibn Khaldun's educational contributions, Tibawi writes: "nothing of substance has been added to the philosophy of education as al-Ghazali left it...but with the notable exception of Ibn Khaldun's contributions."⁶⁴ Semaan similarly echoes this praise in his article "Education in Islam, from the Jahiliyyah to Ibn Khaldun" where he implies that Ibn Khaldun's writings were amongst the last major contributions to education before the decline of the Islamic tradition. Though praising his proposed pedagogical principles and instructional strategies, this literature does not substantively analyze Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of education.

The goal of this literature is to contextualize Ibn Khaldun and illustrate the personalized and informal nature of education in Islamic history. Berkey argues that "the personal connection—the educational model relying not simply on close study of a text, but on intensive, personal interaction with a shaykh—has always been central to Islamic education."⁶⁵ To substantiate his argument, he refers to Ibn Khaldun's commentary on how scientific learning reemerged in northwest Africa through the "personal efforts of individual scholars who traveled to the Muslim East" and "not through the reception of unknown or forgotten texts."⁶⁶ Avner

⁶² See Abdul Latif Tibawi in "Golden Age," and "Philosophy of Muslim Education;" Semaan in "Education in Islam, from the Jahiliyyah to Ibn Khaldun"; and Giladi in "Individualism and conformity in medieval Islamic educational thought: some notes with special reference to elementary education"

⁶³ Mark Halstead, "An Islamic concept of education," p. 521

⁶⁴ Abdul Latif Tibawi, "Philosophy of Muslim education," p. 86

⁶⁵ Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 21

⁶⁶ Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 21

Giladi similarly argues that “personal guidance and intensive, close relationships between educator and trainee were regarded as an essential part of the educational process”⁶⁷ and cites Ibn Khaldun’s emphasis on accompanying and imitating the lifestyle of teachers. Abdesselam Cheddadi takes it step further by arguing that Ibn Khaldun’s scattered references to instruction reflect the informal state of the educational system. He writes: “Ibn Khaldun makes no use of a general concept in speaking of education. This is all the more surprising as he accustoms us elsewhere to a systematic approach to the main phenomena of life in society. However, upon closer view we discover that this ambiguity and these lacunae in fact reflect the state of the Muslim system of education.”⁶⁸ Though important for understanding the historical context of Muslim education, this literature does not engage Ibn Khaldun’s educational strategies. The existing literature under this category is thus useful for my research only in contextualizing Ibn Khaldun’s educational thought.

The second category demonstrates how Ibn Khaldun’s teaching pedagogy overlaps with modern educational strategies. As Abu Sayf writes, “those who discovered him were surprised to find in him the father of the philosophers of history, and admired the man they found to be the precursor of many modern theories.”⁶⁹ According to Sayyari, both Ibn Khaldun and modern educators emphasize teaching in gradual stages, “abhor coercion in education,” and develop “the interest of the pupil in the craft that he is studying.”⁷⁰ Ziauddin Ahmad makes the case that Ibn Khaldun’s educational thought “resembles the educational idea of the great American philosopher” John Dewey. Like Sayyari, he argues that both propose a gradual method of

⁶⁷ Avner Giladi, “Individualism and conformity in medieval Islamic educational thought: some notes with special reference to elementary education,” p. 99

⁶⁸ Abdesselam Cheddadi, “Ibn Khaldun's concept of education in the 'Muqaddima,’” p. 1

⁶⁹ Abu-Sayf, “Ibn-Khaldun, Society and Education,” p. 149

⁷⁰ Sayyari, “Ibn Khaldoun: theories on education with reflections on problem-based learning strategies,” p. 97 (from abstract)

teaching, emphasize critical thinking and problem solving above memorization, and argue against the use of punishment. This body of literature is not directly relevant to my research except for its summarization of Ibn Khaldun's pedagogy.

The third category situates Ibn Khaldun's treatment of education within a sociological analysis of civilization. According to Hadi Sharifi, Ibn Khaldun's "thoughts on society and culture concern us in so far as they present the social principles and foundations which underlie his notion and concept of education."⁷¹ Cheddadi affirms that "Ibn Khaldun approaches education neither as a philosopher, a religious thinker, a moralist nor as a jurist—the four approaches adopted by Muslim thinkers who considered the phenomenon of education—but as a sociologist and historian." This literature aims at uncovering the "forms, aims and content of education as well as curriculum and its structure"⁷² by analyzing: (1) "the relation of sciences and teaching to society" and (2) "the impact of society on sciences and crafts and their growth."⁷³ However, the literature does not go beyond vapid points that state the obvious, as Siraje Abdallah Ssekamanya comments: "man's ability to think is the most important element in a civilization" but "since man is essentially ignorant, and only becomes learned through acquiring knowledge, it goes without saying that civilization and education are inseparable."⁷⁴ Good instruction is imperative for civilizational growth because, according to Abu-Sayf, instruction is "essential in the formation of the individual" and "the individual is the simplest cell that constitutes society." He argues that education "reflects upon societies and determines greatly the direction and the magnitude of the differences between them."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Hadi Sharifi, "Ibn Khaldun's thoughts in the context of the Sociology of Education," p. 4

⁷² Hadi Sharifi, "Ibn Khaldun's thoughts in the context of the Sociology of Education," p. 4

⁷³ Hadi Sharifi, "Ibn Khaldun's thoughts in the context of the Sociology of Education," p. 4

⁷⁴ Siraje Abdallah Ssekamanya, "Ibn Khaldun on the role of knowledge, skills and values in the rise and fall of civilizations : implications for muslim educators in the 21st century," p. 29

⁷⁵ Abu-Sayf, "Ibn-Khaldun, Society and Education," p. 146

The literature also examines how the level of civilization influences the intensity of education. Sharifi argues that “human learning in general and human intelligence are influenced to a considerable extent by social climate.” He adds: “any difference as regards to the scope and intensity, and content of learning” can be “traced back to social and cultural differences and not to any plausible differences as regard to human nature and reality.”⁷⁶ As Muhsin Mahdi briefly suggests, the state must consequently ensure “the possibility of leisure, the continuity of a civilized tradition, the social demand for the services of the learned, and the appreciation and encouragement of the rulers of their profession as expressed in their generosity in establishing schools and founding endowments to maintain them”⁷⁷ in order to improve education. The third frame is most relevant to my research because it situates scientific instruction within Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical teleology of states and civilizations. However, given its sociological bent, this literature neglects analyzing the political implications of scientific instruction. It fails to adequately explore how Ibn Khaldun’s model of education encompasses his perspective on the ultimate aims of statecraft. The paper will redress this gap by examining how Ibn Khaldun’s views of education can prolong the polity and postpone the inevitable fall of dynasties. To do so, it first explores the relationship between politics and education—the subject-matter of the next chapter.

⁷⁶ Hadi Sharifi, “Ibn Khaldun's thoughts in the context of the Sociology of Education,” p. 15

⁷⁷ Mushin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*, p.222.

Chapter 2: Politics and Instruction

This chapter explores the relationship between politics and instruction in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*. The first section briefly explains the influence of Ibn Khaldun's teacher Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Abili on Ibn Khaldun's rationalist approach to writing the *Muqaddima*. Afterwards, I discuss their divergent perspectives on the shift in the 14th century Muslim world from informalized education to institutionalized madrasas. I argue that Ibn Khaldun's position on this topic is ambiguous because he criticizes instructors who teach in institutionalized madrasas on the one hand yet has personally taught at numerous state-controlled colleges on the other. Investigating Ibn Khaldun's relationship with state-controlled madrasas raises a more fundamental question: what should be the state's role in education?

To answer that question, the second section of this chapter outlines the state's role in education according to Ibn Khaldun. I open with a discussion on the centrality of the state for human existence before describing its ultimate goal as contributing towards realizing society's normative vision for perfecting the intellect in its rational and spiritual dimensions (which Ibn Khaldun refers to as the "complete existence"). For the state to realize its fundamental purpose, I explore two central qualities that it must possess. First, it must be characterized by sedentary culture and economic prosperity. Second, it must be both stable and robust to allow for the diversification of the crafts (which includes instruction). This section concludes that the good state must provide financial support for (1) the preservation of the sciences and (2) the establishment of institutions and scholars within them in order to advance the sciences.

The third section shows how instruction must contribute towards upholding the state just as the state contributes towards maintaining a strong teaching tradition. I explore two ways that instruction contributes towards political well-being. The first is through educating future political leaders and consequently, perfecting state leadership. The second is through establishing the moral and intellectual virtues within citizens who consequently and at the very least, should not harm the polity.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how instruction and politics both mutually support the growth of the other. On the one hand, the good state facilitates the quest for human perfection by providing the context necessary for the sciences and crafts (which includes scientific instruction) to develop. This point demonstrates Ibn Khaldun's normative vision of politics where the state *should* secure the conditions necessary for achieving human perfection. On the other hand, instruction strengthens the political well-being of the state by educating future leaders as well as perfecting the intellectual and moral character of the polity. This point demonstrates the role education plays according to Ibn Khaldun in ensuring the maintenance of the good state. Accordingly, I argue that education is a crucial component that can interfere in the march of history and ultimately, prolong the polity's life and postpone the inevitable fall of dynasties.

The Influence of al-Abili on Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun devotes much of his autobiography⁷⁸ to discussing his education and the personalities of his teachers.⁷⁹ He considers his father his first teacher who exposed him to

⁷⁸ Published by Muhammad Tawit at-Tanji under the title *at-Tarif bi-Ibn Khaldun wa-rhilatuhu gharban wa-sharqan* [biography of Ibn Khaldun and Report on his Travel(s) in the West and in the East],

⁷⁹ M, Translator's introduction, p.xxxviii

Sufism, taught him to recite the Quran by heart, and encouraged him to think independently.⁸⁰

He also mentions how he traveled to study under various scholars where he learned Maliki jurisprudence, received several *ijazaath* (certificates of completion) to teach law and language, and studied the rational sciences. He “used every opportunity that offered itself to study with fellow scholars”⁸¹ and was never confined to a single institution. He always “had the freedom to choose any teacher who would take him...these teachers created, in a sense, his academic ancestry, a line of references who could vouch for Ibn Khaldun’s remarkable grasp of Islamic *fiqh* or jurisprudence.”⁸²

One of the most influential scholars on Ibn Khaldun’s intellectual development was “his principal teacher, Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Abili, the grand master of the rational sciences.”⁸³ He was known for possessing an encyclopedic knowledge, but he also specialized in logic, mathematics, and metaphysics. He was intimately aware of the scholarly opinions of the famed Ibn Rushd (Averroes).⁸⁴ Al-Abili educated Ibn Khaldun in several of the sciences. He taught him *Takhliis al-Muhassal*, a work of Islamic theology by Umar ibn al-Khatib al-Razi, and the commentary of it by the Persian philosopher Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. His choice to teach Ibn Rushd and al-Tusi’s commentary on al-Razi demonstrates his affinity towards rationalism, an epistemology that heavily influenced Ibn Khaldun’s writing of the *Muqaddima*.⁸⁵

Al-Abili encouraged Ibn Khaldun to travel throughout North Africa, learn from several instructors, and never limit himself to one school or scholar. As Rosenthal says, “from his

⁸⁰ See Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.44 and Syed Farid Alatas, *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 3

⁸¹ M, Translator’s introduction, p.xliii

⁸² Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.44

⁸³ Syed Farid Alatas, *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 3

⁸⁴ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.45

⁸⁵ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.45. See also *Ibn Khaldun: The Mediterranean in the 14th Century*, vol. II, *Exhibition Catalogue*, (2006), 66.

seventeenth year onwards, his schooling could hardly be called formal or continuous.”⁸⁶ Based on these experiences, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes in the *Muqaddima* that it is better “to travel, to meet the masters and study under their personal direction” as opposed to studying under one scholar. On traveling for knowledge, al-Abili agrees with Ibn Khaldun, but he takes it a step further when he problematizes learning from institutionalized madrasas and state-controlled colleges (which were becoming prevalent during Ibn Khaldun’s early life).⁸⁷ Quoting al-Abili’s comments against politically controlled education, the historian al-Maqqari says:

“In madrasas, according to al-Abili, ‘students are attracted by the scholarships and material benefits offered there and go to the teachers designated by the government to govern and teach in these madrasas, or to the teachers who have agreed to subject themselves to the authorities. This separated the students from [those other] teachers who represent true science and who have not been appointed to the madrasas, for if they have been appointed they would have refused, and had they accepted it would not be to fulfill the role demanded of the others.’”⁸⁸

The madrasas, al-Abili goes on to say, were established “to promote a specific point of view that supported those who financed them and those in power.”⁸⁹ His comments point to an important question regarding the state’s involvement in education. Critical of political restrictions that privilege one academic perspective, he condemns the institutionalization of education under state authority. He also denounces instructors who accept positions in those state-controlled madrasas. According to al-Abili, they cannot be “true” scholars of the sciences because (1) they must

⁸⁶ M, translator’s introduction, p. xliii

⁸⁷ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.46

⁸⁸ Al-Maqqari, *Nafh al tib min gusn al-Andalus al-ratib*, Ihsan Abbas, (ed.), 8 vols. (Beirut, 1968), vol. V, 275-76. Taken from Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.46

⁸⁹ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.46

follow the state-sanctioned restrictions on the types of research permitted and (2) they show that they value the pursuit of wealth and prestige over scientific development. By accepting that position, they merely pay ‘lip service’ to ‘real’ intellectual development in order to make a living.

Despite the straightforward disdain his teacher expresses against state-colleges, Ibn Khaldun’s position is comparatively more ambiguous. On the one hand, he criticizes in the *Muqaddima* instructors who teach in institutionalized madrasas as ‘weak, indigent, and rootless.’⁹⁰ He says regarding them: “Many weak professional men and artisans who work for a living aspire to positions for which they are not fit but which they believe to be within their reach.”⁹¹ It is clear from this text that Ibn Khaldun disapproves of the instructors the madrasas attract. His criticism of education in state-colleges is consistent with his proposal that students should leave the confines of the classroom to travel and learn from various scholars (as mentioned previously). Institutionalized madrasas in this regard are—at the very least—deficient from the ideal education that Ibn Khaldun envisions.

On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun personally taught at numerous state-colleges that he had (or seemed to had) criticized in the *Muqaddima*. In his book *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt*, Walter Fischel describes Ibn Khaldun’s first position as a professor for the Qamhiya Madrasah (college) that the famous Sultan Salah ad-Din established and the Turkish Mamluk dynasty preserved. In his inaugural lecture, “he gave a historical survey of the spread and expansion of Islam, the glory of Egypt and its rulers; he praised the Turkish Mamluk dynasty and especially Barquq [the Sultan at the time], who ‘had honored me despite the inadequacy of my person, and who has

⁹⁰ *M*, introduction, 59

⁹¹ *Ibid*

magnified my ability.”⁹² Ibn Khaldun’s inaugural address praising the political leadership at face value exemplifies what his teacher al-Abili disdained about the madrasas, namely, the privileging of a specific “scholarly” perspective that supports those in power. In fact, flattering the state remained a constant staple of Ibn Khaldun’s speeches as he moved to different teaching positions in al-Barquqiya and Sarghitmishiya Madrasah. Upon accepting every post, he would begin his inaugural lecture with “the usual praise of his protector, Barquq.”⁹³ Thus, it appears that Ibn Khaldun’s involvement in the madrasahs contradicts his comments criticizing instructors who teach in state-controlled colleges. Can Ibn Khaldun’s disapproval of madrasas be reconciled with his decision to teach in them?

One reasonable interpretation is that Ibn Khaldun’s criticism of madrasa instructors is a reproach not against the existence of state-controlled schools but rather certain types of ‘teachers’ who are not capable of scientific instruction. He describes them as people driven by a simple ambition to make a living and not towards perfecting knowledge. They “are misled by their desires, a rope which often slips from their hands and precipitates them into the abyss of ruinous perdition. They do not realize that what they desire is impossible for men like them to attain. They do not realize that they are professional men and artisans who work for a living.”⁹⁴ For Ibn Khaldun, these instructors do not represent the true teacher of the sciences—a position of high and noble regard. It is not to say that all teachers in state-controlled schools are “weak, indigent, and rootless,”⁹⁵ but that institutionalized and funded education attracts individuals who are concerned only with making a living and thus, eventually do a disservice to the sciences.

⁹² See Walter Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt*, p.26-7. Also see *Ta’rif*, pp.279-285 for the full text of Ibn Khaldun’s inaugural lecture

⁹³ See Walter Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt*, p.27

⁹⁴ *M*, introduction, 59

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

Consequently, Ibn Khaldun's involvement in these schools may not be contradictory to his criticism but perhaps necessary if he wants to reform the system. The same reasoning can be used to justify his praise for the political leaders. Though this may simply have been a convention expected of any scholar beginning a paid position provided by the ruler, Ibn Khaldun's overt praise for the state can also be understood as a tactful way to avoid accusations of criticizing the government. In his writings, he does question the rulers for staffing first-rate positions in madrasas with second-rate scholars, but by praising his benefactors publicly, Ibn Khaldun can escape the state's radar and engage in gradual reform of education. Participating in the madrasahs therefore does not necessarily imply wholesale endorsement but could indicate a desire for reform. Chapter three of this paper will demonstrate how Ibn Khaldun proposes a new teaching pedagogy to remedy these problems with the madrasah.

This discussion over Ibn Khaldun's relationship with state-controlled madrasas raises two important questions on politics' role in education. First, what does a "complete" education require from the state according to Ibn Khaldun? Second, what are the limits of the state's involvement without corrupting education and privileging one point of view? The next section will examine these two questions by exploring the relationship between politics and instruction in the *Muqaddima*.

Politics in Scientific Pursuit

The birth and subsequent growth of the sciences entails the establishment of a polity, for without it, humans "would be unable to have a complete existence."⁹⁶ "When mankind has achieved social organization...and when civilization in the world has thus become a fact, people

⁹⁶ *M* 6.3: 417

need someone to exercise a restraining influence and keep them apart.”⁹⁷ The state satisfies the most basic human needs for food, shelter, and defense by protecting the community against internal and external aggression. Ibn Khaldun describes the state’s responsibility as “concerned with the administration of home or city in accordance with ethical and philosophical requirements, for the purpose of directing the mass toward a behavior that will result in the preservation and permanence of the (human) species.”⁹⁸ When politics manages the affairs of the city with the aim of preserving the community, it fulfills its central function of ultimately restraining the “aggressiveness and injustice” found “in the animal nature of man.”⁹⁹

In addition to securing the necessities for basic human subsistence, the state is also entrusted with a higher order: to contribute towards realizing society’s normative vision for the “complete existence.” In the preceding quote, Ibn Khaldun qualifies the possible methods of political administration with the phrase “in accordance with ethical and philosophical requirements.” Though he does not detail the content of these ethical requirements here, he mentions in a different section that all forms of politics are (or should be) concerned with the “general (public) interest.” They differ only in prioritizing whether these interests should supersede the interests of the ruler.¹⁰⁰ In any case, it is only when the ruler “has become acquainted with what is good for” the people that they “are obliged to submit to” the state “in view of the reward they expect from” him.¹⁰¹ Political administration for Ibn Khaldun therefore requires some consideration for the public interest and good.

⁹⁷ *M.1.* 1st prefatory statement: 91

⁹⁸ *M.* preliminary remarks: 78

⁹⁹ *M.1.* 1st prefatory statement: 88

¹⁰⁰ See *M.3.50*: 137-39

¹⁰¹ See *M.3.50*: 137-38

The greatest good for the people, according to Ibn Khaldun, is the development of their intellect. In numerous iterations, he alludes to perfecting the intellect in its rational and spiritual dimensions to achieve a “complete existence.”¹⁰² He states: “God distinguished man from all the other animals by an ability to think which He made the beginning of human perfection and the end of man's noble superiority over existing things.”¹⁰³ The intellect is therefore the defining faculty that constitutes the essence of man. It separates humanity from other creatures on the one hand as well as more intelligent humans from the less on the other. This is because the extent of its development as well as its ability “to establish an orderly causal chain” indicates the level of humanity within a person. “Some people are able to establish a causal nexus for two or three levels. Some are not able to go beyond that. Others may reach five or six. Their humanity, consequently, is, higher.”¹⁰⁴ On this point, I agree with Ibn Khaldun that intellectual capability should theoretically determine a hierarchy with the most superior being the most intelligent, but practically, it is difficult—if not impossible—to measure people’s intelligence and thereby, construct such a hierarchy.

Nevertheless, given that politics is concerned with the public good and the greatest good is the development of the intellect, the state by logical extension *should* contribute towards perfecting the intellect. One way to measure intellectual development at the societal level is its contributions towards the sciences and crafts. This is because when intellectual development becomes a fact in society, it leads to the advancement of the sciences and crafts. Ibn Khaldun

¹⁰² This view contrasts with the modern Western liberal perspective, which separates the pursuit of “the good life” from the state. Politics is responsible only for regulating human interaction and ensuring respectful cooperation. Thus, the state is indifferent to which type of “good life” citizens pursue. In contrast, Ibn Khaldun offers a different perspective on the government’s role in “the good life.” Here the state is fully invested in helping its citizens achieve human perfection, although its degree of involvement is contestable and remains unclear from this claim itself. This topic is beyond the scope of this paper but does provide interesting material for further research: to what degree does Ibn Khaldun’s theory on politics’ role in “the good life” overlap with modern Western liberal ideas of politics.

¹⁰³ See *M* 6.1: 411. The point is reiterated in *M* 1.Preface: 84; 6.16: 77; 6.22: 137

¹⁰⁴ *M*.6.2: 416

says: “man is distinguished from the other living beings by certain qualities peculiar to him, namely: (1) the sciences and crafts which result from that ability to think.”¹⁰⁵ In another place, he writes: “the crafts and sciences are the result of man's ability to think, through which he is distinguished from the animals.”¹⁰⁶ Using the sciences as a measure, the previous proposition about the state contributing towards developing the intellect can thus be modified to: the state *should* facilitate the quest for human perfection by providing the context necessary for the sciences and crafts to develop.¹⁰⁷ This entails advancing culture and achieving civilization since “the sciences are numerous only where civilization is large and sedentary culture highly developed.”¹⁰⁸

The responsibility Ibn Khaldun places on the state to assist in scientific development and knowledge discovery is illustrated in his critique of the righteous Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab. During his conquest when the Muslim army came upon some Persian books, ‘Umar ordered his military general to throw them into the sea remarking that “if these books included guidance, know that Allah [God] has given us a better guidance. And if they contained deviation, then may Allah protect us.” Reacting to this behavior, Ibn Khaldun wistfully inquires:

“Where are the sciences of the Persians that 'Umar ordered wiped out at the time of the conquest! Where are the sciences of the Chaldaeans, the Syrians, and the Babylonians, and the scholarly products and results that were theirs! Where are the sciences of the Copts, their predecessors! The sciences of only one nation, the Greek, have come down

¹⁰⁵ *M.* Introduction: 84

¹⁰⁶ *M.* 5.16: 347

¹⁰⁷ See Malik Mufti, “Jihad as Statecraft: Ibn Khaldun on the Conduct of War and Empire,” p. 387, Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (Chicago, 1964), p. 173; Lenn Evan Goodman, ‘Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 92 (2) (1972), pp. 250–70, p. 252; James W. Morris, ‘An Arab Machiavelli?: Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun's Critique of Sufism’

¹⁰⁸ *M.* 6.8: 434

to us, because they were translated through al-Ma'mun's efforts. (His efforts in this direction) were successful, because he had many translators at his disposal and spent much money in this connection.”¹⁰⁹

Here Ibn Khaldun critiques the Caliph for destroying the Persian sciences and holds him accountable for the loss of valuable knowledge. As the quote demonstrates, this same critique also extends beyond the particular decision of ‘Umar and includes the behavior of other political leaders who have allowed the destruction of knowledge from the “numerous sages among the nations of mankind.” From this critique, Ibn Khaldun seems to implicitly suggest that the state at the very least should not allow for the destruction of any knowledge and therefore demonstrates the value that the state should place on the sciences.

Such a state must develop past primitive culture (*badawi*)—concerned only with securing the necessities for survival—to civilized culture (*hadhari*)—concerned with securing luxuries.¹¹⁰ Ibn Khaldun underscores the importance of the state for civilized culture when he writes, “[the] dynasty and royal authority constitute the form of the world and of civilization [culture], which, in turn, together with the subjects, cities, and all other things, constitute the matter of (dynasty and royal authority).”¹¹¹ Since civilized “culture in cities comes from the dynasties” and “is firmly rooted when the dynasty is continuous and firmly rooted,”¹¹² the advancement of culture requires a robust and stable state because it provides the requisite time period for the diversification of the crafts to become firmly rooted. Ibn Khaldun illustrates this relationship between the development of civilized (sedentary) culture and a durable ruling polity when

¹⁰⁹ *M.* preliminary remarks: 78

¹¹⁰ See p.100 of *Society, State, and Urbanism* by Fuad Baali for a list of the differences between civilized and Bedouin lifestyles. Also, see *M.* 4.17: “Sedentary culture is a condition that is the result of custom and goes beyond the necessary conditions of civilization.”

¹¹¹ *M.* 4.17: 291

¹¹² *M.* 4.17: 286. Also, For more on the importance of the state, see Muhsin Mahdi and Malik Mufti

discussing Yemen. He writes: “The customs of sedentary culture became likewise firmly rooted in the Yemen, because the Arabs ruled continuously in the Yemen for thousands of years, ever since the time of the Amalekites and the Tubba's who were succeeded by the rule of the Mudar.”¹¹³ The state with a civilized culture therefore must be durable and firmly rooted.

In addition to durability, one of the primary characteristic of a state with civilized culture is economic prosperity.¹¹⁴ A surplus of wealth provides the possibility for leisure time and allows individuals to fully dedicate their time and labor to other ends beyond merely securing the necessities for existence. This brings us to a discussion of one of the central mechanisms by which economic surplus is secured and leisure time afforded: the development of simple crafts that are “prior to and older than sedentary life.”¹¹⁵ These crafts include “agriculture, architecture, tailoring, carpentry, and weaving.”¹¹⁶ During the early stages of society (primitive culture), they are concerned only “with the necessary in food, clothing, and mode of dwelling, and to the other necessary conditions and customs”¹¹⁷ and as a result, “are neither perfect nor well developed. They exist only in as much as they are needed, since all of them are means to an end and are not intended for their own sake.”¹¹⁸ With the passing of time and development of culture, these simple crafts are refined as “men learn to improve the methods of production”¹¹⁹ and lead to an

¹¹³ M, 4.17: 288

¹¹⁴ See Malik Mufti

¹¹⁵ M: 5.23: 357

¹¹⁶ M: 5.22: 355. The object of agriculture is to obtain food, and therefore it is “the oldest of all crafts, in as much as it provides the food that is the main factor in perfecting human life, since man can exist without anything else but not without food.” The object of architecture is the construction of homes for shelter against inclement weather, wild animals, and the aggression of humans. Tailoring, carpentry, and weaving also have as their object the protection of humanity. Carpentry is the craft concerned with using wood as fuel for fire, as supports for buildings, and as tools for protection. Weaving and tailoring are designed to produce clothing that shelters the human from the harshness of the weather. “One manages to keep warm by using woven material as protective cover against both heat and cold.” See section 3.5.23, 24, 26 for Ibn Khaldun’s explanation of these particular crafts.

¹¹⁷ M 1.2:

¹¹⁸ M: 5.16: 348

¹¹⁹ Mushin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*, p.221.

economic surplus. They thus eventually produce two key byproducts both of which are directly necessary for advancing culture: (1) expendable wealth and (2) leisure time.

The availability of excess wealth and time brings about an increased demand for luxury. This is illustrated in Ibn Khaldun's statement: "when the city is organized and the (available) labor increases and pays for the necessities and is more than enough (for the inhabitants), the surplus is spent on luxuries."¹²⁰ The new demand for luxury spawns the "refinement and development" of several added crafts—which will now be referred to as the 'developed crafts'—each "perfected with every finesse...as luxury-customs and conditions demand."¹²¹ But beyond the satisfaction of luxury—and indeed loftier—is the pursuit of knowledge and the development of the speculative intellect. He writes in a different section: "When civilized people have more labor available than they need for mere subsistence, such (surplus) labor is used for activities over and above making a living. These activities are man's prerogative. They are the sciences." The quote demonstrates how scholarship requires a civilization that possesses a resource surplus and enjoys luxuries because scholars can fully devote their time towards research if they are no longer distracted with making a living. The quote thus establishes how the possibility of leisure gained from an economic surplus is necessary for scholarship. It follows therefore that the refinement of the crafts, economic prosperity, and ultimately the advancement of culture are important conditions that must characterize the "complete" state, for without them, the sciences cannot develop.

Among the developed crafts is scientific instruction. Regarding this point, Ibn Khaldun devotes an entire section to explaining why "scientific instruction is a craft."¹²² He uses as

¹²⁰ M. 5.16: 347

¹²¹ M. 5.16: 348

¹²² M. 6.7: 426

evidence “the differences in technical terminologies” that instructors use to teach the sciences.¹²³ Though the sciences taught are “one and the same,” instructors like all craftsmen¹²⁴ employ different educational strategies and methods in accordance with their personalities. Since scientific instruction is therefore a craft, its existence, like the other developed crafts, “depends on the greater or lesser extent of civilization in the cities and on the sedentary culture and luxury they enjoy.”¹²⁵ By logical extension, it follows that the state should secure the conditions necessary for the development of scientific instruction as it does the advancement of the developed crafts. This conclusion, however, presupposes that scientific instruction is equivalent to the other developed crafts from the state’s perspective, but this is not the case. Scientific instruction contributes to intellectual and scientific growth more than other crafts. In fact, without instruction, man would remain perpetually confined to a natural state of ignorance.¹²⁶ He writes: “man is essentially ignorant, and becomes learned through acquiring (knowledge).”¹²⁷ In his first condition before complete bodily development, he is simply matter. With the passing of time, his corporeal existence naturally matures and reaches perfection, but his intellectual perfection requires external guidance. Man’s “nature and essence reveal to us” not only his “essential ignorance” but also, and more importantly, “the acquired (character of the) knowledge that man possesses.”¹²⁸ According to Ibn Khaldun, the primary, if not only, method of advancing beyond the nescient tabula rasa is through education. This is why he chronologically positions

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ See section 1 of chapter 3 in this paper for a larger discussion on this topic

¹²⁵ M. 6.8: 434

¹²⁶ *Al-Muqaddima* 3.6.6: , Ibn Khaldun mentions the task of perfecting the body first before working on the intellect. He quotes a passage from the Quran demonstrating the perfection of the body first, which of course includes the intellect (mind and heart) as a prerequisite for the perfection of existence (i.e. the internal state). Hence, the external precedes the internal. He writes, “He [God] let him acquire knowledge he did not yet possess, after he had been a clot of blood and a lump of flesh.”

¹²⁷ *Al-Muqaddima* 3.6.6:

¹²⁸ *Al-Muqaddima* 3.6.6:

the section on scientific instruction immediately after the section explaining man's natural state of ignorance.¹²⁹ Scientific instruction is also required for inculcating scientific habits and training scholars for scientific research. Highlighting the important function of instruction to the sciences, he writes: "a tradition of famous teachers with regard to instruction in any science or craft, is acknowledged (to be necessary) by the people of every region and generation (race)."¹³⁰ Given that every science possesses a tradition of teachers, the relationship between science and instruction is a relationship of dependency whereby the advancement of the sciences is dependent on instruction. Scientific instruction should therefore be accorded a higher status for its direct function in contributing towards scientific growth unlike any one craft.

From that preceding proposition, it follows that the state should be more concerned with cultivating instruction than the other developed crafts. This is illustrated in the following passage where Ibn Khaldun discusses the reasons why scientific instruction persisted in Cairo "for many thousands of years." He points to the actions of the "Turkish Emirs under the Turkish dynasty"¹³¹ and says:

"They built a great many colleges, hermitages, and monasteries, and endowed them with mortmain endowments that yielded income. They saw to it that their children would participate in these endowments, either as administrators or by having some other share in them. (This was their intention) in addition to the fact that they were inclined to do good deeds and hoped for (a heavenly) reward for their aspirations and actions. As a consequence, mortmain endowments became numerous, and the income and profit (from

¹²⁹ The section is titled "scientific instruction is a craft." 3.6.7

¹³⁰ M. 6.7: 426

¹³¹ M. 6.8: 435

them) increased. Students and teachers increased in numbers, because a large number of stipends became available from the endowments.”¹³²

At face value, this passage describes the state of affairs under the Turkish Emirs to explain why “science and scientific instruction exist in Cairo.”¹³³ Because of his normative preoccupation with intellectual and scientific advancement, Ibn Khaldun appreciates the Emirs’ support of scientific instruction and learning. He talks about them funding the construction of scholarly institutions and providing endowments to support scholars working in them. The Emirs were doubly concerned with (1) the physical existence of schools as well as (2) the production of scholarship within those schools. Their actions towards cultivating the sciences lead Ibn Khaldun to state: “people traveled to Egypt from the `Iraq and the Maghrib in quest of knowledge” because “the sciences were very much in demand and greatly cultivated there.” Through their efforts, Egypt became the center of learning and attracted students of knowledge to flock there. The Emirs’ behavior thus ultimately benefited the well-being of the polity.

The Emirs’ supporting behavior towards the sciences is reminiscent of Ibn Khaldun’s portrayal of the Caliph al-Ma’mun. As quoted previously, he says: “the sciences of only one nation, the Greek, have come down to us, because they were translated through al-Ma'mun's efforts. (His efforts in this direction) were successful, because he had many translators at his disposal and spent much money in this connection.”¹³⁴ Here he lauds the efforts of the Caliph al-Ma'mun (813-833 AD) who facilitated the translation of the Greek sciences into Arabic. In another section, he applauds al-Ma’mun for establishing astronomical observatories to verify and build upon the astronomy of antiquity. Emphasizing his political support for astronomy, Ibn

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ *M.* preliminary remarks: 78

Khaldun writes: “when al-Ma'mun died, the institution of astronomical observation was lost and neglected.”¹³⁵ Based upon Ibn Khaldun's two references above, al-Ma'mun generally (1) ensured the preservation of knowledge from conquered peoples and (2) built institutions for higher learning and scientific advancement. In both places, Ibn Khaldun seems to praise al-Ma'mun for his political and financial support for scientific development. In fact, in the introduction, Ibn Khaldun writes about “al-Ma'mun's excellence and affability”¹³⁶ and defends him from allegations of excessively drinking wine. He says:

“How does all this accord with al-Ma'mun's well-known religion and learning, with his imitation of the way of life of his forefathers, the right-guided ('Abbasid) caliphs, with his adoption of the way of life of those pillars of Islam, the (first) four caliphs, with his respect for the religious scholars, or his observance in his prayers and legal practice of the norms established by God!”¹³⁷

In the context of his abundant praise of al-Ma'mun for advancing the sciences and his critique of the Caliph 'Umar for destroying the Persian books (mentioned previously), it is reasonable to assume that al-Ma'mun's behavior towards the sciences is emblematic of the “complete” statesman according to Ibn Khaldun. Like al-Ma'mun, the Turkish Emirs similarly represent a model for how political leaders can encourage intellectual development. Taken together, such a statesman should provide financial support for (1) the preservation of the sciences and (2) the establishment of institutions and scholars within them in order to advance the sciences.¹³⁸ In summary, as Muhsin Mahdi writes: the state must secure “the possibility of leisure, the

¹³⁵ *M.* 6.21:

¹³⁶ *M.* introduction: 37

¹³⁷ *M.* introduction: 38

¹³⁸ It should be noted that Ibn Khaldun's critique of the second righteous Caliph does not entail total disregard for his religious reign in the same way that his specific approval of al-Ma'mun's attitude towards scientific preservation does not elicit wholesale support for the Mihnah (trial) where the Caliph violently persecuted any religious scholar resisting the Mu'tazili rationalist school of Islamic theology.

continuity of a civilized tradition, the social demand for the services of the learned, and the appreciation and encouragement of the rulers of their profession as expressed in their generosity in establishing schools and founding endowments to maintain them.”¹³⁹ Accordingly, the state’s role in education is only to provide the context necessary for the development of the sciences and thus, should not be involved in any aspect of education outside of the financial.

The Political Benefits of Instruction

The relationship between politics and instruction consists not only of the state securing the conditions necessary for a flourishing teaching tradition but also of instruction in strengthening and perfecting the state. This section will explore two ways that instruction contributes towards political well-being. The first is by educating future political leaders and thereby, perfecting the character of the state. Ibn Khaldun identifies three core components of political education for the statesman to rule successfully: (1) religion; (2) history; (3) and the practical sciences. The letter of Tahir b. al-Husayn addressed to his son 'Abdallah b. Tahir comments upon all three components by discussing “all (important) political problems as handled by the religious law and all problems of power politics that he would have to know in his government and administration” and thus, will serve as the primary material of this section’s analysis. The second way that instruction contributes towards perfecting the state is by establishing the moral and intellectual virtues in society. To support this claim, this section analyzes Ibn Khaldun’s assertion that children poorly instructed develop habits harmful to society. In other words, good education should produce citizens who at the very least do not harm the polity.

¹³⁹ Mushin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*, p.222.

I. *Political Education: Practical or Theoretical Knowledge?*

The central emphasis in political education is learning the practical administration of the city. Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between politicians and scholars when he argues that “scholars are, of all people, those least familiar with the ways of politics.”¹⁴⁰ This is because scholars are accustomed to perceiving reality in generalities whereas politicians are accustomed to considering the particulars. Scholars “are used to mental speculation and to a searching study of ideas which they abstract from the sensibilia and conceive in their minds as general universals, so that they may be applicable to some matter in general but not to any particular matter, individual, race, nation, or group of people.”¹⁴¹ Their process of thinking is as follows: they first examine all the external objects that are perceivable by any of the five sense (the primary intelligibilia). They then abstract from the differences of each individual object until they arrive at their most general shared characteristics (the genus). For example, “from the individual specimens of man, the picture of the species to which all the individual specimens conform is abstracted. Then, man (the human species) is compared with the animals, and the picture of the genus to which both men and animals conform is abstracted.”¹⁴² These categories (the second intelligibilia) are intellectual ideas “remote from the [primary] sensibilia”¹⁴³ and arrived at through logic. Since the intellect perceives these second intelligibilia through abstraction, they are removed from the particular worldly contingencies and accidents that they have in actual existence. Thus, “it is possible that material things contain something that does not admit of (logical) conclusions and contradicts them, when one looks for unequivocal conformity (between

¹⁴⁰ M. 6.41: 308

¹⁴¹ M. 6.41: 308-09

¹⁴² M. 6.22: 138

¹⁴³ M. 6.41: 310

them and the facts of the outside world).”¹⁴⁴ It is thus probable that scholars will commit many errors in the political sphere because “when they look at politics, they press (their observations) into the mold of their views and their way of making deductions.” Consequently, they will overlook important political differences that do not conform to their universal ideas (because of accident and contingency). On the other hand, politicians know “the facts of the outside world and the conditions attaching to and depending on (politics).” They are habitually trained to consider “every matter as it is, and to judging every kind of situation and every type of individual by its particular (circumstances).”¹⁴⁵ They are not preoccupied with abstract theories like the scholars and therefore, avoid mistakes resulting from generalizations.

Ibn Khaldun’s distinction between scholars and politicians recalls the old debate in political philosophy between the platonic philosopher-king on the one hand and the Machiavellian political practitioner on the other. On one side, the Platonic and Neo-Platonic schools of philosophy beginning with Plato and extending up and through al-Farabi argue that the best form of government is when philosophers rule because of their moral and intellectual superiority.¹⁴⁶ As Plato writes: “until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide...cities will have no rest from evils...there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other city.”¹⁴⁷ Even the Ismaili Fatimid rulers in Egypt (909-1171) believed scholars—albeit religious and not philosophic—should be political statesmen. Like the Platonic school, they equated just rule with ‘secret knowledge’ hidden from the masses that only

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ M. 6.41: 310

¹⁴⁶ See Plato’s concept of the philosopher king is his book, “*The Republic*,” 5:473d and al-Farabi’s concept of the philosopher prophet ruler *Ketāb al-sīyāsa al-madaniya*, ed. F. Najjar as *Al-Farabi’s The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-Madaniya Also Known as the Treatise on the Principles of Beings)*, Beirut, 1964; part. tr. by F. Najjar in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, New York, 1963.

¹⁴⁷ Republic, book V, 473c

the imams possessed.¹⁴⁸ On the other side of the debate, Machiavelli argues that the legitimacy of rulers is not based on moral or intellectual superiority but the acquisition and maintenance of power (virtu). As he writes, “A prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only upholds those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that rank.”¹⁴⁹ Power defines political activity, and the effective statesmen must understand its use and application. Accordingly, they master the art of politics not to guide people towards the normative good but only to protect the state’s existence.

According to Ibn Khaldun, neither the philosopher-king nor the Machiavellian statesman are practical models for political leadership because on the one hand, theoretical philosophy cannot accurately predict politics since it constantly fluctuates and on the other hand, obsession over preserving power without philosophical direction cannot lead to human perfection. The complete statesmen for Ibn Khaldun are a combination of both models. On the one hand, they are an “average person of a healthy disposition and a mediocre intelligence” like the Machiavellian statesman. They consider all “the facts of the world” before making a political decision because they “has not got the mind for (such speculation) and does not think of it...most of his speculation stops at matters perceivable by the senses, and he does not go beyond them in his mind.”¹⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldun likens the statesman to a swimmer who stays near the shore where safety lies and refuses to venture out (as scholars do) to explore the middle of the ocean. On the other hand, the statesmen also receive guidance from scholars regarding the normative ends of politics,

¹⁴⁸ See *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times* by Allen James Fromherz. p.49

¹⁴⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 12

¹⁵⁰ M. 6.41: 310

an idea more closely resembling the Platonic philosopher-king than the Machiavellian statesman. To achieve the ultimate purpose of politics—which is to provide the context necessary for realizing human perfection—the political leader must “consult frequently with jurists” for advice and “learn from men of experience and intelligence who are understanding and wise.”¹⁵¹ Hence, they must solicit help from scholars who understand the truth and know the causes of things. As demonstrated, Ibn Khaldun’s model of the complete statesman is a moderate balance between the philosopher-king and the Machiavellian statesman. In noting the inadequacy of a scholarly intellect for political leadership and arguing that the statesman must be intellectually removed from philosophical intellectual habits to be capable of practicing politics, Ibn Khaldun also implies that there should be a fundamental difference between the education of politicians and the education of scholars. This dichotomy in education raises two central questions that this section will answer: (1) what components constitute political education and (2) how does it positively influence the functioning of the state?

II. The Three Components of Political Education:

The letter of Tahir b. al-Husayn, al-Ma'mun's general, addressed to his son 'Abdallah b. Tahir when he was appointed governor of al-Raqqah highlights three important components that should comprise political education. The first is instruction in the religious law; the second is examining history as well as learning from current political leaders; and the third is knowledge of the different branches of rule and the proper course of leading in each. Regarding the statesman’s religious education, Ibn Khaldun describes the letter as “advice concerning all religious and ethical matters. (He discussed) all (important) political problems as handled by the

¹⁵¹ M. 3:50: 147-48

religious law.”¹⁵² Every paragraph in the letter exhorts ‘Abdallah to develop an Islamic personality and follow the divine legislation. In one place, Tahir reminds ‘Abdallah that “whatever you do, you should do for God and in God, and hope for a reward.”¹⁵³ In another place, he commands his son to “apply the punishments that God has ordained for criminals, according to their station and according to what they deserve.”¹⁵⁴ He also says:

“Then, let this be followed by adopting the ways of the Messenger of God, by constant application of his qualities, and by imitation of the pious ancient Muslims after him. If you have a task before you, let yourself be helped in doing it by asking God whether you should do it or not, by fearing Him, by applying what God has revealed in His Book with regard to things to be done and things not to be done, the things that are permitted and the things that are forbidden, and by taking as your guide the directions contained in the traditions of the Messenger of God. Act, then, as you owe it to God to act.”¹⁵⁵

Under the reign of most Muslim Caliphs, politicians exhorting other political leaders to develop an Islamic personality and obey the divine law are to be expected. However, this letter was written during the Caliphate of al-Ma’mun, who is famed for criticizing literal obedience to the divine law and supporting the use of unaided reason for understanding theology and religious legislation governing social affairs. Despite his defiant stance towards observing the letter of the religious law, he nonetheless “ordered the letter to be sent to all officials in the various regions, so that they might use it as a model and act accordingly.”¹⁵⁶ His actions here raise an important question: given the countless exhortations to follow the divine law in Tahir’s letter, why did al-

¹⁵² M. 3.50. 139

¹⁵³ M. 3.50. 147

¹⁵⁴ M. 3.50. 144

¹⁵⁵ M. 3.50. 141

¹⁵⁶ M. 3.50. 156

Ma'mun approve its circulation? The question is further complicated since the family of Tahir also heavily supported al-Ma'mun's religious agenda of privileging reason as the final arbiter.¹⁵⁷ As Gutas states, they had always played an important role "in early 'Abbasid history both in furthering and executing the policies of those members of the 'Abbasid house."¹⁵⁸ Though no one can claim with certainty that Tahir believed in the Mu'tazili school (the rationalist trend in Islam that al-Ma'mun promoted), he nevertheless helped create "a cultural and ideological climate" favorable towards al-Ma'mun's religious policies.¹⁵⁹ Given (1) the Caliph al-Ma'mun's personal approval of Tahir's letter and (2) Tahir's support for the Caliph's sanctioning of the Mu'tazili school as the official state doctrine and persecution of those who disagreed, the letter's emphasis on obedience to the religious law seems unusual. Why would supporters of the Mu'tazili school write and approve of a letter calling on statesmen to follow the religious law governing social affairs when according to their theology, reason has the ultimate authority in the political sphere? The answer is straightforward; Tahir and al-Ma'mun saw a rational reason for obeying Islamic law in the political sphere. I argue that the letter's injunction to obey divine law can be explained using Ibn Khaldun's rational argument for why religion—especially Islam—is political useful. To make this argument, I will first explore his discussion on religion and politics.

Ibn Khaldun argues that political authority requires group feeling (*asabiyya*), which refers to tightly knit bonds of solidarity that exist between closely connected members of one group. It is a powerful force for political association. Ibn Khaldun writes:

¹⁵⁷ C.E. Bosworth, "The Tahirids and Arabic Culture," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 1969, vol. 14, pp.45-79

¹⁵⁸ See Simitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 98

¹⁵⁹ See Simitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 98

“Leadership exists only through superiority, and superiority only through group feeling. Leadership over people, therefore, must, of necessity, derive from a group feeling that is superior to each individual group feeling. Each individual group feeling that becomes aware of the superiority of the group feeling of the leader is ready to obey and follow (that leader).”¹⁶⁰

Ibn Khaldun here argues that any political leader must utilize *asabiyya* to gain legitimacy from his people as someone worthy of their loyalty and obedience. Possessing the most political talent alone is not sufficient for obtaining leadership or power; rather, it requires enjoying a shared, ascriptive connection with the people, and this is only achieved through group feeling.

In the Arab context, the strongest *asabiyya* that led to political unity and military strength was their shared religious attachment towards Islam. Ibn Khaldun illustrates Islam’s power for political association by depicting its influence on the Arabs:

“Their individual aspirations rarely coincide. But when there is religion (among them) through prophecy or sainthood, then they have some restraining influence in themselves. The qualities of haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and to unite (as a social organization). This is achieved by the common religion they now have. It causes rudeness and pride to disappear and exercises a restraining influence on their mutual envy and jealousy. When there is a prophet or saint among them, who calls upon them to fulfill the commands of God and rids them of blameworthy qualities and causes them to adopt praiseworthy ones, and who has them concentrate all their strength in order to make the truth prevail, they become fully united (as a social organization) and obtain superiority and royal authority.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ *M.* 2:11: 269

¹⁶¹ *M.* 2.26. 305-06

Here, Ibn Khaldun describes two ways that Islam promoted unity among the Arabs. On the one hand, its restraining influence mitigated those human qualities that are detrimental to the integrity of the community (like jealousy or envy). On the other hand, its communitarian message privileged the well-being of the believers above individual ambitions. Coupled with the collective religious obligation to spread the truth, Islam created an unbreakable group feeling (*asabiyya*) that transformed the Arabs from disparate tribes constantly engaged in petty squabbles to a strong, unified community that ultimately became a world power. It was the primary impetus that led to rapid expansion, state development, and dynastic growth. Ibn Khaldun highlights here Islam's political utility in creating an *asabiyya* that led to unprecedented political success.

Ibn Khaldun's argument for Islam's political utility is as follows: (1) political leaders must understand and identify with the group feeling to successfully rule; (2) the strongest *asabiyya* in the Muslim world is their shared religious attachment towards Islam; (3) therefore, the political leader must understand and identify with Islam. Ibn Khaldun reiterates this conclusion when he explains the difference between the religious and rational political regimes. When political rule is based upon divinely revealed religious law, religion plays a central role in politics. On the other hand, when the source of legislation is reason, it would seem that religious law has no role in politics. However, Ibn Khaldun argues that the "the political norms here are a mixture of religious laws and ethical rules, norms that are natural in social organization together with a certain necessary concern for strength and group feeling."¹⁶² Thus, even in rational politics, religious law has a role—albeit limited. Though reason remains the primary source of legislation, Muslim rulers in this regime should still rule "in accordance with the requirements of

¹⁶² M 3.50. 139

the Muslim religious law, as much as they are able to” so that they can identify with and preserve the group feeling. In other words, the leader out of concern for group feeling must apply laws in accordance with religious law, especially when they do not contradict reason.

Ibn Khaldun’s rational reasoning for Islam’s political utility offers a guiding framework for understanding Tahir’s letter. Many of Tahir’s exhortations to ‘Abdallah stem from its potential to create a powerful *asabiyya*. He tells his son: “when people notice your (religious attitude) they will have respect for your rule and reverence for your government. They will be friendly to you and trust in your justice.” In another place, he says: “have a good opinion of God, and your subjects will cause you no trouble.” Tahir connects the political leader’s zealotry for religion with receiving greater public support, but to have its effect, the people must notice his religiosity. The first quote is a conditional statement where receiving public respect depends upon visibly displaying his concern for religion. This is why Tahir not only commands the “unfailing fulfillment of the duty of the five daily prayers that God has imposed upon you” but also, “let people come to you to pray together with you, and perform (the prayers at the proper times) with all their rites.” These religious exhortations suggest a concern with garnering political support through *asabiyya* and therefore align with Ibn Khaldun’s views on the political utility of Islam.

It is important to note that most of the letter emphasizes developing an Islamic personality over applying the Islamic political code. This is because Islamic law in general is more concerned with building a personal relationship with God rather than exacting political laws.¹⁶³ But in addition to that, Tahir’s emphasis on an inward journey towards inculcating a

¹⁶³ In every on book Islamic jurisprudence, the author begins discussing the five pillars of Islam, all of which relate to the individual’s relationship with God. Afterwards, he discusses the individual’s relationship with his family. At the end, he briefly comments on his relationship with the political community.

virtuous life reflects the Mutazila privileging of reason above revealed political law. Even when Tahir orders his son to apply the religious penal laws, he qualifies it to ensure reason operates as the final executive. He says: “apply the punishments that God has ordained for criminals, according to their station and according to what they deserve.” The two qualifications “according to their station” and “according to what they deserve” are two conditions that allow reason to assess the criminal (his social status, mental state, criminal history) and whether he deserves the punishment. These two conditions allow space for reason to operate and therefore make the implementation of divine penal law flexible. Thus, Tahir commanding his son to execute the divine law demonstrates that the statesman must use the authority he gains through *asabiyya* to rationally legislate and guide the people towards the political good.

The preceding discussion sheds light on why political leaders must be educated in religion. Since they must align their political agenda and methods of rule according to popular beliefs as much as possible, they must learn about *asabiyya*, its function in governance, and how to use it for political advancement. In the context of the Muslim empire, this means learning Islam, inculcating its virtues, and practicing what it mandates at the personal level. The statesman must also learn about the religious law and the customs of the people. His education should not only demonstrate how to develop an Islamic personality but in the context of politics, how to protect and mobilize the group feeling to achieve the political good. This is the first component of political education that Ibn Khaldun refers to.

The second component of political education found in Tahir’s letter is history. Tahir says: “Learn from the affairs of the world that you are able to observe personally, and from the persons in authority and in positions of leadership who lived before your time in past centuries and

among nations that disappeared.”¹⁶⁴ Studying history offers lessons for statecraft because “the causes of action, and the reasons for the policies upon which action is based, remain constant or did not vary significantly from one age to another or from one people to another.”¹⁶⁵ By examining the actions of previous political leaders, the statesman learns lessons on how to administer the community’s affairs. In addition, the study of history provides rulers with political experience, a central component of good statecraft. Tahir highlights the importance of political experience when he orders his son to “employ for them [the people] understanding, skilled, and *experienced* men, who have theoretical knowledge of, and are able to act with, political wisdom and moderation” [italics added]. Here, Tahir underscores the importance of possessing political experience for statecraft by describing the good statesman as experienced. In another place, he says: “Learn from men of *experience* and intelligence who are understanding and wise” [italics added]. At this point, the focus switches to the good instructor who, like the statesman, must also have political experience. The meaning of political experience here refers not only to personal experience but also experience derived from studying political history. Thus, teaching practical lessons about statecraft through studying history equips the statesman with political experience and thereby, makes history a central component of political education.

The political value of studying history is one of the fundamental reasons Ibn Khaldun wrote the *Muqaddima* and his *Book of Lessons and Archive of Early and Subsequent History, Dealing with the Political Events Concerning the Arabs, Non-Arabs, and Berbers, and the Supreme Rulers Who Were Contemporary with Them*. In the title of his second work, Ibn Khaldun’s use of the word “Ibar” (translated as ‘Lessons’) captures how studying history is politically useful. According to Lane’s *Lexicon*, the definition of Ibar is to penetrate from the

¹⁶⁴ M. 3:50. 154

¹⁶⁵ See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*, p.70

outside to the inside of a thing.¹⁶⁶ In the context of history, it suggests delving beneath the surface of the particular events to extract timeless principles.¹⁶⁷ The imagery evoked here matches the distinction Ibn Khaldun makes in the *Muqaddima* between external and internal history. The first is “no more than information about political events, dynasties, and occurrences of the remote past, elegantly presented and spiced with proverbs.”¹⁶⁸ The second, on the other hand, is the “explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events” and “therefore is firmly rooted in philosophy.”¹⁶⁹ The latter describes the subject-matter of the *Muqaddima* and is also the only type that is politically useful because it provides enduring lessons for politicians. Moreover, in his title, he qualifies the term ‘history’ to ‘dealing with political events,’ suggesting that his derived general laws have political value. Accordingly, the *Book of Ibar* becomes more than just a general work of history but rather scholarship that instructs political statesmen. Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* and *Book of Ibar* are therefore examples of the types of historiographical scholarship future statesmen should study.

The political imperative of studying history maintains the distinction between scholars and politicians. According to Aristotle, history is a practical and not theoretical science because it collects and examines what constantly changes (i.e. human events) for the purpose of deliberation. Though it does overlap with philosophy as far as it identifies universal laws, it does not speculate about the “good life” nor its subsequent corollary questions. Instead, it provides a framework to prudently navigate the world. Accordingly, the statesman’s education revolves around the practical and not the theoretical or philosophical. As Mushin Mahdi writes: “history, which supplies the data of experience, is, therefore, also an instrument of prudence, and as such

¹⁶⁶ See Lane’s *Lexicon* (II), p. 1988-1991

¹⁶⁷ See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*, p.64-68

¹⁶⁸ M. Forward, 6

¹⁶⁹ M. Forward, 6

useful for statesmen and political orators.”¹⁷⁰ Studying history therefore maintains the distinction between scholar and politician.

The third component of political education that Tahir’s letter to his son ‘Abdallah references is learning about the political, economic, and military systems. The future statesmen should understand how the state functions and what its division of offices are. Thus, Tahir orders his son to understand “the administration of [the people’s] affairs.” This includes “the land tax” because “it maintains the subjects,” setting “up houses for Muslims who are ill, to shelter them,” establishing “the office of judge” to apply the legal punishment, and supervising “the registers and contracts of the soldiers.”¹⁷¹ These subjects roughly correspond to political science, economics, community health, law, and military leadership respectively. They all are concerned with understanding the current context and directing man accordingly towards achieving his true end. In summary, political instructors are responsible for producing good statesmen that can lead and grow the polity. The three components of political education, namely religion, history, and the practical sciences, demonstrate how instruction benefits politics by strengthening the state and therefore, offer an additional reason for why the state should provide the context necessary for realizing a strong teaching tradition.

III. Establishing the Moral and Intellectual Fabric of Society

In addition to political education, Ibn Khaldun also demonstrates how elementary instruction establishes not only the moral and intellectual fabric of society but also the very character of the state. “The reason for this is that the things one is taught in one's youth take root

¹⁷⁰ See Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*, p.139

¹⁷¹ *M.* 3:50: 150-51

more deeply (than anything else).”¹⁷² A child raised with justice and dignity will likely reflect those characteristics as an adult. In contrast, harmful habits developed early can corrupt societal norms and destroy civic virtue. For example, children reared with injustice and brute force develop an “outward behavior [that] differs from what they are thinking, because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth).”¹⁷³ As a result, they learn the art of ‘deceit and trickery’ until it corrupts their nature, drains their energy, and corrodes their moral character. “They lose the quality that goes with social and political organization and makes people human, namely, (the desire to) protect and defend themselves and their homes, and they become dependent on others. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities.”¹⁷⁴ Their cowardice and hypocrisy weakens the entire social and political edifice because of their inability to confidently exercise autonomous judgement. Corruption at the individual level thus erodes the fabric of society, which if not mended, will ultimately harm the political reality.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates how instruction and politics are both mutually necessary for the well-being of the other. On the one hand, the ultimate purpose of the good state is to facilitate the quest for human perfection and thus, should provide the context necessary for a strong teaching tradition to develop. This point demonstrates Ibn Khaldun’s normative vision of politics. On the other hand, instruction strengthens politics by educating future leaders as well as perfecting the intellectual and moral character of the polity. This point demonstrates the role education plays in ensuring the maintenance of the good state. It shows how education is a crucial component that can prolong the polity’s life and postpone the inevitable fall of dynasties.

¹⁷² *M* .6.38: 300-01

¹⁷³ *M* .6.39: 305

¹⁷⁴ *M* .6.39: 305

Ultimately, it reflects Ibn Khaldun's cautiously optimistic outlook based on the power of human agency to affect change and thereby, preserve the well-being of the polity. Tracing these concentric circles helps explain why Ibn Khaldun is concerned with instruction in the *Muqaddima*. By underscoring the mutual necessity of education for a well-functioning state, he also raises important questions about who the instructors should be. What qualities *should* they have and what methodologies must they employ? The next chapter will explore how Ibn Khaldun answers these questions.

Chapter 3: The Ideal Instructor

This chapter explores the proper teaching pedagogy of the ideal instructor that is necessary for ensuring the continuity of good education and therefore, prolonging the life of the political regime. In the first section of this chapter, I explore why scientific instruction is the noblest kind of instruction and consequently, why the scientific instructor is the most superior of instructors. First, I define Ibn Khaldun's use of the term "instruction" and identify its ultimate goal as perfecting the ability to think. I then demonstrate how different types of instruction (based on subject) improve different components of the intellect. I conclude by arguing that scientific instruction is the noblest type of instruction because it improves the noblest component of the intellect—namely the speculative intellect—and therefore, the scientific instructor is the noblest.

In the second section of this paper, I argue for primacy of the ideal instructor by exploring the relationship between scientific instruction on the one hand and intellectual growth as well as scientific advancement on the other. I identify three ways in which instruction leads to intellectual and scientific perfection: (1) through time reduction; (2) through habit cultivation; and (3) through scientific preservation. Finally, I examine how the nature of scientific instruction, its degree of importance, and thus the status of the ideal instructor varies according to the traditional sciences on the one hand and rational sciences on the other.

In the third section of this chapter, my discussion centers on the practical teaching methods of the ideal instructor that are necessary for prolonging the polity's life. First, I demonstrate how scientific instruction according to Ibn Khaldun influences students differently

and therefore, establishes a hierarchy based on their intellectual capability. Given this hierarchy, I argue that the ideal instructor should identify each person's strengths and maximize their intellectual potential. Afterwards, I move to a discussion on Ibn Khaldun's proposed teaching pedagogy and investigate its four fundamental principles: first, gradualism; second, flexibility; third, dialogue; and fourth, leniency. (1) Gradualism aims at habit cultivation and is a lengthy process consisting of iterations. (2) Flexibility entails that the instructor considers each student's receptivity and modulates his approach accordingly. (3) Dialogue describes the communication between the instructor and his students and measures not only the pupil's understanding of the material and his ability to critically evaluate information but also ensures that the teacher is constantly aware of how the student is doing. (4) Finally, leniency entails avoiding excessively punishing the student because that will destroy the child's fortitude. It suggests that the instructor maintain a balance between excessive severity on the one hand and excessive kindness on the other.

I argue that this teaching pedagogy privileges the ideal instructors' human agency because they cannot resort to a formula but must adjust according to external factors to maximize their students' intellectual potentials. I conclude that in perfecting each student's potential, establishing a hierarchy based on intelligence, and assigning each person to a career most suitable to their nature, the ideal instructor contributes towards establishing a well-ordered polity. Ibn Khaldun's realistic approach to instruction ensures the continuity of good education and therefore, helps prolong the dynasty's duration beyond its four cycles.

Privileging ‘Scientific Instruction’

Ibn Khaldun uses two phrases when discussing educational instruction in chapter six: (1) ‘instruction’ and (2) ‘scientific instruction.’ The first is an encompassing term that refers to all types of instruction. It denotes “instruction in the crafts, sciences, and religious matters”¹⁷⁵ as well as cultural mores and social knowledge. All these types aim at improving the intellect, the defining characteristic of humanity, which “distinguishes man from the other animals and exalts him as a thinking being over all creatures.”¹⁷⁶ In the natural hierarchy of living beings, Ibn Khaldun describes the most developed of plants as remarkably similar to the most primitive of animals; the highest of animals to the lowest of humans; and the highest of humans to the lowest of angels.¹⁷⁷ The intellect is part of the angelic realm, whose essence is “pure perception and absolute intellection.” Though physically composed of animalistic corporeality, the most noble human, Ibn Khaldun argues, is one who perfects his ‘rational power’ and achieves scientific perception. Since the ultimate end of instruction is to improve the intellect, it follows that all types of instruction are therefore noble.

Instruction improves the human ability to think by facilitating the acquisition of knowledge. Before birth, humans are simply matter, which develops in the womb until it reaches physical perfection. Ibn Khaldun calls this growth “innate” because it happens naturally and not through human action. Intellectual growth, on the other hand, “comes to him (only) after the

¹⁷⁵ M. 2.6: 259

¹⁷⁶ M. Preliminary Remarks, p.84

¹⁷⁷ A concept referred to in the Sufi tradition as “Ittisal.” See Miya Syrier, “Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Mysticism,” p.281. See also M. 1.6th prefatory discussion: p.137. “One should then look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progressed, in an ingenious, gradual manner, to plants and animals... The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and, in a gradual process of creation, it finally leads to man, who is able to think and to reflect... Above the soul there must exist something else that gives the soul the power of perception and motion, and that is also connected with it. Its essence should be pure perception and absolute intellection. This is the world of the angels.”

animality in him has reached perfection.”¹⁷⁸ Unlike the body’s growth, it does not occur naturally but requires human action for development. Ibn Khaldun illustrates this distinction between the body and the intellect when he writes: “Man's nature and essence reveal to us the essential ignorance and acquired (character of the) knowledge that man possesses.”¹⁷⁹ Here, the phrase ‘essential ignorance’ points to humanity’s beginning as matter with a deficient intellect. The word ‘acquired’ indicates that humans do not naturally possess knowledge but must obtain it. In this quote, Ibn Khaldun characterizes humans as essentially ignorant because even though they possess intellects in their first condition, they must expend energy towards developing it. To transcend the natural state of ignorance, expending energy entails receiving instruction in the form of imitation, lectures, and books. Thus, instruction is necessary for intellectual growth because it facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and ultimately improves the human ability to think.

Though the ultimate aim for all instruction is intellectual development, Ibn Khaldun nevertheless constructs a hierarchy of types of instruction (based on subjects) according to which kind of intellect they develop. However, to understand this hierarchy requires first understanding the different types of intellect. Ibn Khaldun divides the intellect into three components: the first and most basic is the “discerning intellect,” which uses sense perception to make sense of basic natural and arbitrary orders. It allows man to “obtain the things that are useful for him and his livelihood, and repels the things that are harmful to him.”¹⁸⁰ The second is the “experiential intellect,” which “mostly conveys apperceptions, which are obtained one by one through experience.”¹⁸¹ It primarily teaches living beings the proper rules of conduct and appropriate

¹⁷⁸ M. 6.6: 425

¹⁷⁹ M. 6.6: 424

¹⁸⁰ M. 6.1: 413

¹⁸¹ Ibid

methods for leadership. Finally, the third and noblest is the “speculative intellect,” which advances complex, hypothetical propositions of causality and correlation.¹⁸² “It shows nexuses between causes and things caused, combinations of some parts of creation with others, and transformations of some existent things into others, in a pattern that is both remarkable and endless.”¹⁸³

Each of these three components have a specific type of instruction aimed at developing it. Relating to the first, instruction of the basic crafts advances the discerning intellect because it teaches humans how to act based on the natural and arbitrary orders in order to sustain a primitive existence. For example, architecture teachers instruct their students on how to build basic shelters that protect the inhabitants from intemperate weather. Based on a basic understanding of the natural order, they begin with teaching how to construct the foundation, then the wall, and then the roof. Ibn Khaldun illustrates this natural order when he writes:

“For instance, if a man thinks of bringing into existence a roof to shelter him, he will progress in his mind (from the roof) to the wall supporting the roof, and then to the foundation upon which the wall stands. Here, his thinking will end, and he will then start to work on the foundation, then (go on to) the wall, and then (to) the roof, with which his action will end.”¹⁸⁴

Instruction of the necessary crafts teaches students how to first recognize the basic natural order and then act accordingly. It thus develops their discerning intellect.

Concerning the second component, instruction of cultural mores and social norms improve the experimental intellect. This is why Ibn Khaldun says, “He who does not acquire the

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ *M.* 6th prefatory statement: p.137

¹⁸⁴ *M.* 6.2: 414-15

manners needed in dealing with human beings from his parents -which includes teachers and elders - and does not learn these things from them, has to fall back upon learning them with the help of nature from the events that happen in the course of time.” Here, Ibn Khaldun demonstrates how instruction teaches students without experience the norms of social interaction. Though students can experientially learn this knowledge over time, instruction reduces the time needed. By extension, it also teaches students how to recognize and derive lessons from future experiences. For these two reasons, instruction of social norms develops the experimental intellect.

Finally, regarding the third and noblest component, instruction of the sciences—which refers to the traditional sciences (e.g. jurisprudence etc....) and rational sciences (e.g. physics and philosophy etc....)—improves the speculative intellect. The sciences, which come into existence through this intellect, compartmentalize reality into various subjects for studying the reasons and causes of things. Since the speculative intellect lies at the root of all philosophizing and scientific understanding, teaching the sciences must necessarily improve this intellect. This is because it enables the student “to comprehend all the basic principles of that particular science, to become acquainted with its problems, and to evolve the details of it from its principles.”¹⁸⁵ In developing the speculative intellect, scientific instruction allows man to acquire “the perception of existence as it is, with its various genera, differences, reasons, and causes...achieves perfection in his reality, and becomes pure intellect and perceptive soul.”¹⁸⁶ Scientific instruction thus represents the surest mode for realizing humanity’s potential for perfection and consequently, is the noblest type of instruction. It also follows that the noblest instructor is the scientific instructor.

¹⁸⁵ M. 6.7: 426

¹⁸⁶M 6.1: 413

The Primacy of the Scientific Instructor

I. The Role of Scientific Instruction in Intellectual Growth and Scientific Advancement

Ibn Khaldun defines the term ‘scientific instruction’ as teaching the traditional and rational sciences. The adjective “scientific” influences the meaning of the term ‘instruction’ in two ways: first, it limits instruction’s educational content to the sciences and second, it scientizes the teaching process. Regarding the former, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that the ultimate aim of scientific instruction is to disseminate *scientific* thought and cultivate the speculative intellect. He illustrates its necessity for cultivating the sciences when he writes: “There has been no continuous tradition of scientific instruction in Fez. Therefore, it has been difficult for the people of Fez to obtain the scientific habit and skill.”¹⁸⁷ Here, the absence of scientific instruction in Fez led to difficulty in cultivating the intellectual habits and skills necessary for pursuing the sciences. If the absence of scientific instruction caused scientific decline in Fez, it follows that the sciences need scientific instruction to flourish. As for scientizing the teaching process, Ibn Khaldun views instruction as itself a *science* composed of theory and praxis. Just like any discipline, it is based on rigorous experimentation and consists of complex correlational conclusions. I will discuss Ibn Khaldun’s conception of teaching pedagogy in the third section of this chapter.

When considering scientific instruction in relation to intellectual development, an important question that arises is: how does scientific instruction facilitate intellectual growth and scientific advancement? I identify three ways that the text indirectly references: first, through time reduction; second, through habit cultivation; and third, through scientific preservation. Regarding the first, Ibn Khaldun argues that instruction effectively reduces the time otherwise

¹⁸⁷ M. 6.7: 429

needed for acquiring knowledge when he writes: “God made it easy for many human beings to obtain this (social knowledge) in a time shorter than the time required to obtain it through experience, if they will follow the experience of their fathers, teachers, and elders, learn from them, and accept their instruction.”¹⁸⁸ In this quote, he asserts that though people can learn social knowledge from their experience, this process takes longer than learning from teachers. This is because the function of instruction is to ease learning and thereby, reduce the time necessary to acquire knowledge. The phrase “God made it easy” describes teaching as one of God’s favors to humanity. By associating God with education, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes the nobility of instruction for facilitating learning because without it, acquiring knowledge is difficult and limited. In another passage, he illustrates the purpose of instruction again when he criticizes the use of brief handbooks on scholarly subjects as detrimental to instruction. He says: “The intention was to make it easy for students to acquire expert knowledge (of scholarly subjects), but the result is that it has become (more) difficult for them, because they are prevented from acquiring useful and firmly established habits.”¹⁸⁹ The argument he presents here is as follows: (1) instruction must simplify knowledge acquisition; (2) using brief handbooks complicates knowledge acquisition and makes learning longer and more difficult; (3) therefore, using brief handbooks are detrimental to instruction. His criticism is based on his earlier assertion that instruction must facilitate learning and in the process, reduce the amount of time to acquire knowledge.

As for the second way, Ibn Khaldun argues that imitating a scholar through personal contact is the best way for developing scientific habits. He writes: “Habits acquired through

¹⁸⁸ M. 6.3: 418

¹⁸⁹ M. 6.35: 291

personal contact with a teacher are more strongly and firmly rooted”¹⁹⁰ because “the transmission of things one has observed with one's own eyes is something more comprehensive and complete than the transmission of information and things one has learned about.”¹⁹¹ “Personal contact” here refers to *Suhbah*, the Islamic educational model that consists of accompanying authoritative teachers to observe and imitate their lifestyle.¹⁹² Though initially used only for religious instruction, this model was later applied also to non-religious pursuits and became the dominant form of instruction in the fourteenth century. Especially regarding learning the crafts, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes personal contact with teachers because “a habit that is the result of (personal observation) is more perfect and more firmly rooted than a habit that is the result of information.”¹⁹³ The same applies to scientific instruction. This is why he writes: “Human beings obtain their knowledge and character qualities and all their opinions and virtues either through study, instruction, and lectures, or through imitation of a teacher and personal contact with him.”

Since students learn best through observation, this entails that instructors should illustrate the knowledge they teach. *Suhbah* therefore requires that instructors demonstrate their knowledge to their students. In the teaching of the crafts, for example, instructors impart not only theoretical knowledge on how to perform their respective craft but also, and more importantly, demonstrate how to actualize theory into practice. From this, it follows that only imparting theoretical knowledge is not sufficient for good instruction (*Suhbah*). This aligns with what we mentioned previously, namely that scientific instruction requires skills not only in understanding

¹⁹⁰ *M.* 6.40: 307

¹⁹¹ *M.* 5.15: 346

¹⁹² George Makdisi and Jonathan Porter Berkey discuss the concept of *Suhbah* in great detail. See *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* and *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*.

¹⁹³ *M.* 5.15: 346

the science but also in pedagogically teaching it (this entails practical demonstration). It is for this reason that Ibn Khaldun categorizes scientific instruction as a craft because teaching has no exact, universal method. He writes: “The fact that scientific instruction is a craft is also shown by the differences in technical terminologies. Every famous authority has his own technical terminology for scientific instruction, as is the case with all crafts.”¹⁹⁴ Technical terminology refers to teaching methods, and since they are dependent on the teacher, they vary considerably among different teachers. In contrast, the sciences are not contingent on the teacher because they are universal. Ibn Khaldun is thus suggesting here that instructors must be craftsmen and practically demonstrate their subject in order to effectively cultivate scientific habits in their students.

This argument is reinforced when Ibn Khaldun uses the word ‘teacher’ and not ‘scholar’ to refer to the instructor and thereby, distinguishes between them. His statements that draw attention to this distinction are numerous, such as: “A *scholar's* education is greatly improved by traveling in quest of knowledge and meeting the authoritative *teachers* (of his time)” as well as his saying: “The greater the number of authoritative *teachers* (shaykhs), the more deeply rooted is the habit one acquires” (italics added).¹⁹⁵ In statements where Ibn Khaldun does mention the ‘scholar,’ he also mentions the ‘teacher.’ Thus, he says: “Meeting *scholars* and having many authoritative *teachers* (shaykhs),” and in another place: “Through meeting authoritative *teachers* (shaykhs) and having contact with (*scholarly*) personalities” (italics added).¹⁹⁶ In making this distinction, Ibn Khaldun suggests that not all scholars are teachers. This is because some scholars are not skilled in scientific instruction and therefore, are not qualified to teach. Nevertheless,

¹⁹⁴ M. 6.7: 426

¹⁹⁵ M. 6.40: 307-08

¹⁹⁶ M. 6.40: 308

teachers of scientific habits can be scholars, which is why Ibn Khaldun writes that scientific habits “belongs solely and exclusively to the scholar or the person well versed in scientific disciplines.” The ideal scientific instructors therefore are either scholars or people well versed in the scientific discipline in addition to craftsmen.

From this discussion, Ibn Khaldun seems to suggest one of two reasons why scholars should master scientific instruction. On the one hand, scholars with only scientific knowledge but limited understanding of pedagogy are in fact deficient in their theoretical understanding of the sciences. This is because theoretical knowledge cannot be complete without instruction because the latter will inevitably uncover new insights that would have been overlooked. This is why Ibn Khaldun writes: “When scientific picture has been established in the mind (of one person) through these (efforts), it must, of necessity, be communicated to someone else, either through instruction or through discussion, in order to polish the mind by trying to show its soundness.”¹⁹⁷ Accordingly, engaging in scientific instruction is useful for strengthening ones ideas and achieving complete theoretical knowledge of the science. On the other hand, scholars can gain from scientific instruction essential skills beyond only perfecting theoretical knowledge. Since the theoretical is abstracted from the particulars, it will not entail, for example, knowledge on how to actualize theory into reality. Accordingly, scientific instruction is not only a function for achieving theoretical knowledge as the first reason holds but also provides a different type of knowledge (practical virtue).

I contend that Ibn Khaldun agrees with the second reason for encouraging scholars to master scientific instruction based on our earlier discussion distinguishing between scholars and politicians. There, he argues that though theoretical and practical knowledge are both equally

¹⁹⁷ M. 6.33: 281

important, they operate in separate domains. We saw how the complete statesman is separate from the complete philosopher because the former is accustomed to perceiving reality in generalities whereas the latter is accustomed to considering the particulars. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun employs a comparable division between scientific instruction and scholarship as equally important though offering different types of knowledge. However, unlike his stark contrast between the philosopher and the statesman, the division between teachers and scholars admits of considerable overlap. Hence, the ideal scientific instructors can be both scholars as well as craftsmen.

Accordingly, when the instructors know their respective scientific subjects as well as the craft of instruction, they best cultivate habits in their students through *Suhbah*. These scientific habits in the student “enable its possessor to comprehend all the basic principles of that particular science, to become acquainted with its problems, and to evolve the details of it from its principles.”¹⁹⁸ Indeed, scientific habits refer to a mode of thinking so deeply imbedded in the student’s psyche that its accompanied skillset becomes second nature (a habit). Through *Suhbah*, the student thus develops scientific habits and improves his ability to think.

Finally, the third reason for why scientific instruction is necessary for intellectual improvement and scientific advancement is that it preserves scientific developments from past nations. It does so through two ways: first, verbal expression and second, written communication. Regarding the latter, Ibn Khaldun writes: “Scholars take care to deposit all their scientific thoughts in books by means of writing, so that all those who are absent and live at a later time may have the benefit of them.”¹⁹⁹ Ibn Khaldun uses the word “scholars” and not teachers here to emphasize the role writing plays in scholarly advancement. In describing how

¹⁹⁸ M 6.7: 426

¹⁹⁹ M. 6.33: 282

these texts benefit “those” who succeed the authors, Ibn Khaldun stresses the importance of studying past thinkers and learning from their works. The general word “those” suggests that scholars and students alike can benefit from these works.

Ibn Khaldun does not limit past thinkers only to Muslims since “each discipline had its authorities to whom one referred” that predates Islam.²⁰⁰ For example, the originators and authorities of Greek peripatetic philosophy “who presented the problems connected with them, wrote books on them as (the subject of) a systematic science, and penned the arguments in favor of them, as far as we presently know, was Aristotle the Macedonian, from Macedonia in Byzantine territory, a pupil of Plato and the teacher of Alexander.”²⁰¹ In this passage, Ibn Khaldun seems to encourage Muslim students who study philosophy to read Aristotle. Already, we have seen in another passage Ibn Khaldun criticize the Caliph ‘Umar for destroying pre-Islamic, scientific texts. Taken together, both passages shed light on Ibn Khaldun’s interest in discovering and building upon past advancements in the rational sciences. He elaborates on this point by distinguishing between the traditional and rational sciences: “All the pre-Islamic sciences concerned with religious groups are to be discarded, and their discussion is forbidden” since Islam has abrogated their law.²⁰² Accordingly, Muslims should not study the traditional sciences of other religions because Islamic law supersedes them. This prohibition concerns only the traditional sciences since they “differ as the result of differences in religious laws.” As for the rational sciences, they “do not show (such) differences” because “they have developed uniformly, as required by the very nature of thinking.”²⁰³ These sciences advanced as each nation learned the scientific discoveries from previous civilizations and built upon them. Thus, studying

²⁰⁰ M. 6.9: 439

²⁰¹ M. 6.30: 249

²⁰² M. 6.9: 438

²⁰³ M. 6.33: 282

these older texts that preserve past knowledge are crucial for the advancement of the rational sciences. Moreover, in learning this information, students in the process develop their intellect. This is the third way that Ibn Khaldun alludes to in the *Muqaddima* for explaining how scientific instruction facilitates intellectual growth and scientific advancement. In demonstrating the imperative for instruction, Ibn Khaldun by extension privileges the ideal scientific instructors who are responsible for educating the polity.

II. Scientific Instruction: Distinguishing between the Traditional and Rational Sciences

The nature of scientific instruction, its degree of importance, and consequently the status of scientific instructors differs according to traditional and rational scholarship. Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between them when he writes: “It should be known that the sciences with which people concern themselves in cities and which they acquire and pass on through instruction, are of two kinds: one that is natural to man and to which he is guided by his own ability to think, and a traditional kind that he learns from those who invented it.”²⁰⁴ The epistemology of the traditional sciences is divine scripture since “there is no place for the intellect in them, save that the intellect may be used in connection with them to relate problems of detail with basic principles.”²⁰⁵ Accordingly, these sciences can only be acquired through instruction “from those who invented them.” Teaching is the only method for learning the traditional sciences and therefore, the instructor is fully responsible for preserving divine law.

When discussing the role of reason in the traditional sciences, Ibn Khaldun recognizes its limitations in comprehending metaphysics. He writes: “As a rule, man is able only to comprehend the causes that are natural and obvious and that present themselves to our perception

²⁰⁴ M. 6.9: 436

²⁰⁵ Ibid

in an orderly and well-arranged manner, because nature is encompassed by the soul and on a lower level than it.”²⁰⁶ Ibn Khaldun restricts reason to understanding physical realities that are observable through perception. The human intellect cannot encompass the realm outside of that domain nor its relation to the physical world.²⁰⁷

Ibn Khaldun’s criticism of speculative theology (Kalām) for trying to rationally explain metaphysics illustrates the restrictions he places on reason. He begins his entire discussion with “the wisdom of the Lawgiver (Muhammad) when he forbade (us) to speculate about causes and to stop with them”²⁰⁸ before subsequently criticizing Kalām for relying too heavily upon reason to explain metaphysical causes. The primary purpose of Kalām was to dispute innovation in the core Islamic beliefs. The arguments of the early Mutakallimūn (theologians) were sufficient for this purpose, but they were not based on demonstrative logic “because the scholars (of al-Ash'ari's time) were simple and the science of logic which probes arguments and examines syllogisms had not yet made its appearance in Islam.”²⁰⁹ The problem arose, however, when the Mutakallimūn studied logic under the pretext that “logic was merely a norm and yardstick for arguments and served to probe the arguments of the (philosophical sciences) as well as (those of) all other (disciplines).”²¹⁰ Such a perspective led them to meddle with philosophical works and confuse “the subjects of the two disciplines (theology and philosophy).” Kalām is “concerned

²⁰⁶ M. 6.14: 35

²⁰⁷ See M. 6.4:420 Ibn Khaldun summarizes reason’s limitations when he writes: “We do not find any clearer proof than this for (the existence) of the spiritual world. Thus, we have a general knowledge of it, but no particulars. The metaphysicians make conjectures about details concerning the essences of the spiritual world and their order. They call these essences “intellects.” However, none of it is certain, because the conditions of logical argumentation as established in logic do not apply to it. One of these conditions is that the propositions of the argument must be primary and essential, but the spiritual essences are of an unknown essentiality. Thus, logical argumentation cannot be applied to them. Our only means of perceiving something of the details of these worlds are what we may glean from matters of religious law, as explained and established by religious faith.”

²⁰⁸ M. 6.14: 35. This injunction is understood by the majority of scholars to refer to speculation about the primary cause, God, Himself and not all causes.

²⁰⁹ M. 6.14: 51

²¹⁰ Ibid

with the existents, in so far as they serve as argument for Him who causes existence” whereas philosophy “studies existence as such and what it requires for its essence.”²¹¹ The first premise in Kalām affirms the existence of God, the articles of faith, and the primacy of scriptural texts because the objective of the entire discipline is to logically defend the articles of orthodox faith against innovation to an audience that takes these first premises as true. In contrast, philosophy takes no conclusion as its first premise but rather begins with indisputable, self-evident truths in the physical domain. It then proceeds through logic to establish broader claims and takes reason as its sole reference. The role that reason plays in both is therefore different and as such, the two domains should not be confused. Moreover, since the rules of logic are derived from observing physical existence, they are not applicable when explaining God and His attributes. Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun criticizes Kalām because “the two approaches have been mixed up by recent scholars” such that “the problems of theology have been confused with those of philosophy.”²¹²

The cautious approach that Ibn Khaldun adopts when discussing the role of reason in the traditional sciences changes when he discusses its role in the rational sciences. In the latter, the intellect is a “correct scale” and “its indications are completely certain and in no way wrong.”²¹³ The intellect is the primary source of understanding the causes of things within the physical realm, but when it transcends these boundaries and enters the metaphysical, then it leads to confusion. Thus, Ibn Khaldun writes:

“Causes continue to follow upon causes in an ascending order, until they reach the Causer of causes, Him who brings them into existence and creates them, Praised be He, there is no God but Him. In the process, the causes multiply and widen in extent

²¹¹ M. 6.14: 53

²¹² M. 6.14: 53

²¹³ M. 6.14: 34

vertically and horizontally. The intellect becomes confused in the attempt to perceive and enumerate them.”

Not only criticizing many of the Mutakallimūn but also some philosophers (like Ibn Sina) who blurred the lines between the rational and traditional sciences, Ibn Khaldun argues for a strict separation between the two; the former depends entirely on the intellect and the latter on scripture. This distinction influences his understanding of instruction because the existence of the traditional sciences depends upon instruction since the intellect has no place in them whereas the existence of the rational sciences does not. Accordingly, the scientific instructor is more necessary for the traditional than the rational sciences. Nevertheless, advancement in the rational sciences requires instruction because it is not possible in one person’s lifespan to understand one scientific subject without the help of a teacher. For each subject to advance, it requires that students learn the subject from a teacher first before devoting their remaining life to its development. In conclusion, scientific instruction and therefore, scientific instructors for the traditional sciences is more necessary than for its rational counterpart, though it nonetheless remains essential for the latter’s future advancement as well. Having sketched the importance of scientific instruction to intellectual growth and political well-being, the paper moves to exploring the nature of “good” instruction. What is the teaching pedagogy of the ideal instructor?

The Teaching Pedagogy of the Ideal Instructor

I. Three Categories of Students

I identify three categories of students described in the *Muqaddima*: elementary pupils, medium-level pupils, and advanced pupils. His statements that draw attention to this division are numerous, such as: “It should be known that instructing children in the Qur'an is a symbol of

Islam”²¹⁴ and his saying: “[The student] must study carefully the words of the abridgment, which are complicated to understand because they are crowded with ideas”²¹⁵ as well as his statement: “A scholar's education is greatly improved by traveling in quest of knowledge.”²¹⁶ The first quote concerns instruction of elementary pupils, the second concerns instruction of medium-level students, and the third concerns instruction of advanced students. From these student-types, elementary pupils are the most inferior, advanced students the most superior, and medium students in between according to intellectual capability. Moreover, within each category is another hierarchy based on intelligence. It should be noted however that these categories are not rigid but fluid; the brightest students in each ascend to the next category as they learn more.

Since elementary students have limited exposure to scientific education and thus, have not developed scholarly habits, scientific instruction influences them the most. This is because “the things one is taught in one's youth take root more deeply (than anything else). They are the basis of all later (knowledge). The first impression the heart receives is, in a way, the foundation of (all scholarly) habits.”²¹⁷ During this time, children easily accept whatever information instructors wish them to accept. Hence, teachers must guard the beginning of their education with vigilance and carefully deliberate upon the best teaching pedagogy, for the harms of faulty education are more significant for elementary students. In search of an effective approach, Ibn Khaldun assesses the different methods Muslim cities employ in teaching children. He begins with the Maghrib but finds its approach inadequate because of its excessive focus on Qu’ran orthography. He writes: “[They] do not bring up any other subjects in their classes, such as traditions, jurisprudence, poetry, or Arabic philology, until the pupil is skilled in (the Qur'an),”

²¹⁴ M. 6:38: 300

²¹⁵ M. 6.35: 291

²¹⁶ M. 6.40: 307

²¹⁷ M. 6.38: 301

but since “as a rule, no (scholarly) habit can originate from the (study of the) Qur'an, because no human being can produce anything like it,”²¹⁸ the Maghribi students are incapable of mastering the sciences. He then examines the Andalusian method known for its varied curriculum in poetry, composition, and Arabic philology but deems it deficient for “not stressing [the] teaching of the Qur'an more than the other subjects.” He writes: “They were less proficient in all the other (religious) sciences, because they were little familiar with study of the Qur'an and the traditions that are the basis and foundation of the (religious) sciences.”²¹⁹ Taken together, the Maghribi and Andalusian methods represent opposite poles. On the one side, the former overemphasizes the Qu'ran to the detriment of developing scientific habits whereas on the other side, the latter cultivates these habits but underemphasizes the Qu'ran.

To reconcile these two poles, Ibn Khaldun discusses the proposed teaching method of the famous Sunni scholar Abu Bakr b. al-'Arabi. He says: “Judge Abu Bakr b. al-'Arabi made a remarkable statement about instruction, which retains (the best of) the old, and presents (some good) new features.”²²⁰ The “old” refers to accepted customs that give “preference to the teaching of the Qur'an” with the “desire for the blessing and reward (in the other world).”²²¹ Without undermining these customs, al-'Arabi argues that children should first be instructed in poetry, Arabic philology, and arithmetic before being instructed in the Qur'an “because with his (previous) preparation, it will be easy for him.”²²² Then “the student should study successively the principles of Islam, the principles of jurisprudence, disputation, and then the Prophetic traditions and the sciences connected with them.”²²³ Ibn Khaldun praises this teaching method

²¹⁸ M. 6.38: 303

²¹⁹ M. 6.38: 303

²²⁰ M. 6.38: 303-04

²²¹ M. 6.38: 304

²²² Ibid

²²³ Ibid

because beginning with poetry, Arabic philology, and arithmetic provides the best foundation for acquiring scientific habits. Poetry deals with expressing ideas through speech, philology deals with “knowledge of the rules and forms of this habit,”²²⁴ and arithmetic deals with “(theoretical mathematical) proofs rather than (practical) calculation.”²²⁵ This grouping of subjects introduces the mind to theoretical thinking (arithmetic) and cultivates the ability to articulate thoughts (poetry and philology), two important foundations for higher understanding. Critiquing those who neglect this teaching method, Ibn Khaldun quotes al-‘Arabi saying: “How thoughtless are our compatriots in that they teach children the Qur'an when they are first starting out. They read things they do not understand and work hard at something that is not as important for them as other matters.”²²⁶ Here, he emphasizes the importance of understanding beyond rote memorization. Without previous education in poetry, philology, and arithmetic, children will not understand the educational merits of studying the Qu’ran, and therefore, instruction will not increase comprehension, improve the intellect, or ultimately, help achieve human perfection.

As for medium-level students, scientific instruction takes on a different form based on their intellectual capability; they should be familiar with the foundational sciences and able to reason independently. Modeling how the good instructor teaches at this stage, Ibn Khaldun advises students confused by technical terminology to “leave all the technical procedures and take refuge in the realm of the natural ability to think given to you by nature! Let your speculation roam in it and let your mind freely delve in it, according to whatever you desire (to obtain) from it!”²²⁷ Acknowledging their intellectual abilities, Ibn Khaldun emboldens medium-level students to independently reason through their confusion whenever technical terminology

²²⁴ M. 6.49: 354

²²⁵ M. 6.19: 121

²²⁶ M. 6.38: 304

²²⁷ M. 6.36: 297

becomes unclear. Education at this stage thus entails empowering students to apply themselves without expecting the instructor to explain everything. The instructor should inspire confidence in the students' abilities to reason through problems on their own. Ibn Khaldun illustrates this point in the quote above by using motivating language; he praises the students' natural ability to think, inspires confidence in them, and exhorts them to explore their rational power by "setting foot in the places where the greatest thinkers before you did!"²²⁸ In contrast to primary instructors (of elementary pupils) who must explain all the basic sciences, the teachers here privilege independent learning and thus become guides who lead each student towards maximizing their natural potential. However, "not everyone is able to pass through all these stages quickly and to cut through all these veils easily during the (process of) instruction"²²⁹ because not every student possesses the same thinking ability. There exists an intellectual hierarchy where some students enjoy greater rational capabilities and therefore, are superior to others. Affirming this interpretation, Ibn Khaldun says: "Rarely do more than a few (individuals), who are guided by God, succeed in extricating themselves from this abyss."²³⁰ The brilliant pupil who overcomes all the confusion associated with mastering the sciences is therefore a rarity. Since every student possess different capabilities, it follows that the success of instruction is not according to results. Rather, the goal is to ensure that each realizes their own intellectual potential since not everyone can become scholars. Thus, scientific instruction at this stage should develop each student's potential and in the process, guide them to careers according to their strengths. Though Ibn Khaldun does not mention it, it seems that education can identify

²²⁸ M. 6.36: 297

²²⁹ Ibid

²³⁰ Ibid

which societal role best suits the students' nature wherein they can contribute most towards advancing their society.

Finally, the last form of scientific instruction is for advanced pupils who intellectually excelled at their subject and therefore, demonstrated their intellectual superiority over other students. At this stage, it consists of studying with multiple teachers to refine scientific habits with the aim of becoming authorities in their respective fields. Describing what their education entails, Ibn Khaldun writes: "A scholar's education is greatly improved by traveling in quest of knowledge and meeting the authoritative teachers (of his time)."²³¹ As discussed previously, the term 'scholar' indicates that the students already possess a comprehensive understanding of their respective sciences, but to advance beyond this level, they should travel to learn directly from different authorities. The phrase "authoritative teachers" suggests that these instructors are recognized in their field not only for their vast knowledge but also their teaching efficacy. With their students, they should explain all the complexities and obscurities and "leave nothing (that is) complicated, vague, or obscure, unexplained. He bares all the secrets (of the discipline) to him."²³² Studying with various authoritative teachers in this way, advanced students are exposed to different views and in the process, forced to formulate their own judgement for explaining complex scientific matters. "In addition, his habits will be strengthened through his intensive personal contact with teachers, when they are many and of various types."²³³ Ibn Khaldun supports traveling for education with the claim that "recourse to books alone is insufficient for the acquisition of a science."²³⁴ He emphasizes that it is better "to travel, to meet the masters and study under their personal direction" as opposed to studying under one scholar. This is why Ibn

²³¹ M. 6.40: 307

²³² M. 6.36: 292

²³³ M. 6.40: 308

²³⁴ Syed Farid Alatas, *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 3

Khaldun traveled throughout North Africa, learned from several instructors, and never limited himself to one school or scholar. As Rosenthal says, “from his seventeenth year onwards, his schooling could hardly be called formal or continuous.”²³⁵ As a result of this education, the advanced pupil “will improve the knowledge he has and be able to distinguish it from other (knowledge).”²³⁶

In conclusion, the division of students into three types demonstrates how scientific instruction varies according to intellectual capacity and should aim at maximizing each student’s individual potential. Moreover, it identifies which careers are appropriate for each student to best benefit society. Accordingly, the type of instructors and their teaching methodology will differ based on these divisions.

II. The Four Principles of Teaching

Ibn Khaldun provides a set of four principles necessary for effective instruction, all of which illustrate his pragmatic approach to education: first, gradualism; second, flexibility; third, dialogue; and fourth, leniency. Beginning with the first, gradualism is required because “teaching of scientific subjects to students is effective only when it proceeds gradually and little by little.”²³⁷ This is especially pertinent for habit cultivation, which needs consistent repetition over long durations of time. Since scientific instruction is primarily concerned with developing habits, and “as long as such a habit has not been obtained, skill in a particular discipline is not forthcoming,” then scientific instruction must proceed gradually. Describing how this steady process impacts the student, Ibn Khaldun writes: “His preparedness, then, keeps growing

²³⁵ M, translator’s introduction, p. xliii

²³⁶ M. 6.40: 308

²³⁷ M. 6.36: 292

gradually and little by little when he faces the problems of the discipline under consideration and has them repeated (to him) and advances from approximate understanding of them to a complete, higher knowledge.”²³⁸

To illustrate this gradualism, Ibn Khaldun divides scientific instruction into three distinct stages that when applied, effectively develop scholarly habits. In the first stage, the instructor summarily presents the principal problems of the subject. In the process, the student “acquires the habit of the science (he studies),” but it “will be an approximate and weak one. The most it can do is to enable the student to understand the discipline (he studies) and to know its problems.”²³⁹ In the second stage, the instructor explores some of its finer problems and nuances as well as “mentions to him the existing differences of opinion and the form these differences take.”²⁴⁰ Consequently, the student’s scientific habits are improved. Finally, in the third stage, the instructor details the entire subject leaving “nothing (that is) complicated, vague, or obscure, unexplained. He bares all the secrets (of the discipline) to him.”²⁴¹ At the end, the student, “when he finishes with the discipline, has acquired the habit of it.”

The threefold repetition process is the best teaching method for habit cultivation and is “the effective method of instruction.”²⁴² Without gradualism, instruction will overwhelm students having no prior familiarity with learning the sciences because it expects them to understand challenging concepts immediately. In another section, Ibn Khaldun illustrates this point when he argues that abridgements “makes difficulties for understanding” because they explain concisely all the methods and content of a discipline without any form of pedagogy.²⁴³ It

²³⁸ M. 6.36: 293

²³⁹ M. 6.36: 292

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² Ibid

²⁴³ M 6.35. 291

is for this reason that his teacher Ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Jayyani taught Ibn Khaldun the entire *Kitab al-Muttawa’* instead of a brief handbook on the basic jurisprudence of the Maliki school. He “thus studied the original rulings and opinions of Imam Malik, instead of the cropped and strategically edited version taught in most official madrasas.”²⁴⁴ If immediately introduced to complex material, pupils will either spend more time learning the science than necessary or become overwhelmed and leave scientific learning on account of its difficulty. To avoid either outcome, the three-stage model gradually presents information in order to ultimately ensure that students intellectually progress and acquire scientific habits according to their capabilities.

As for the second principle (flexibility), instructors must alter their teaching pedagogy according to the students’ receptivity. This requires first that “he observes the student’s intellectual potential and his preparedness for understanding the material that will come his way until the end of the discipline under consideration (is reached).”²⁴⁵ The word “observes” here suggests that instructors carefully monitor their students to assess their intellectual potential. In doing so, “the teacher should not ask more from a student than that he understand the book he is engaged in studying, in accordance with his class (age group) and his receptivity to instruction, whether he is at the start or at the end (of his studies).” Ibn Khaldun mentions two conditions that teachers must consider. The first is the class dynamic produced when different students interact with one another. Teachers must understand how class interaction influences student learning and what is best for intellectual growth. This requires knowing about student psychology, which brings us to the second condition Ibn Khaldun mentions: that instructors must assess each student’s receptivity to instruction. To do this, they must intimately know each student, how he learns best, and his intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Taken together, these two conditions

²⁴⁴ Allen James Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, p.49

²⁴⁵ M. 6.36: 292

concern student learning based on the classroom social dynamic on the one hand and the student's individual personality on the other. Only after this assessment can instructors begin to speculate about each student's intellectual potential in their classroom.

Through this careful observation of the classroom dynamic as well as each student's special learning strategies, instructors will find that each possesses a different intellectual capability. Referring to this diversity, Ibn Khaldun writes: "Some students can get through it [education] with less than that [three stages of instruction], depending on their natural dispositions and qualifications."²⁴⁶ This is because student's receptivity to instruction varies according to each's intellectual character, which is influenced both by their "natural disposition" and their acquired "qualifications" (the student's upbringing and previous education). The former is rooted in nature whereas the latter in nurture, both of which significantly vary from person to person. Given this diversity of student types, the instructor cannot impose a universal teaching methodology because some students will not benefit fully. Instead, the teaching methodology must change according to these differences, which entails that the instructor not only understand each student's needs but also the best way of teaching them. The instructors are thus like guides who alter their teaching style according to the situation. During times of difficulty, they comfort their students, clarify any confusion, and cultivate their confidence. When they are confused, the teachers' pace concomitantly slows. Yet at times of easy understanding, they quicken the pace, introduce more advanced material, and challenge their understanding. The instructors are therefore flexible when applying their teaching pedagogy.

Ibn Khaldun's illustrates this principle when he writes, "The great number of scholarly works available is an obstacle on the path to attaining scholarship."²⁴⁷ This is because the greater

²⁴⁶ M. 6.36: 292-93

²⁴⁷ M 6.34: 288

the number of works the students' must learn, the larger the "variety in technical terminology (needed for purposes) of instruction and the numerous (different) methods (used in those works)." To access any subject's literature, the student must know the differences in technical terminology and methods, but understanding all these scholarly works is not practical. Ibn Khaldun shows the impracticality of such a pursuit by listing the countless works of Maliki jurisprudence ranging from the famous "Mudawwanah, its legal commentaries, such as the books of Ibn Yunus, al-Lakhmi, and Ibn Bashir, and the notes and introductions (to it)" to all its sister works. To understand all these texts and their commentary, the student "must be able to distinguish between the Qayrawani method (of the Malikite school) and the methods of Cordovan, Baghdadi, and Egyptian (Malikites) and those of their more recent successors."²⁴⁸ In this example, Ibn Khaldun demonstrates how understanding every scholarly work under one subject is impractical, if not impossible. He is not arguing to restrict scholarship but rather in the realm of education, instructors should not teach every work. Instructors that focus on teaching the entire array of literature will lead the student away from actual participation in scholarship because there is always more literature to study. Thus, it is not practical and will become an obstacle to his intellectual growth. However, some students can study more scholarly works during their education than others. The instructors thus must modulate their teaching approach accordingly and through their flexibility, will ultimately strengthen each pupil's scientific habits and improves their intellectual ability to think.

It is important to emphasize that Ibn Khaldun's conception of differences based on both nature and nurture entails that this diversity is respected and incorporated in teaching pedagogy. However, this is not suggestive of radical equality such that teachers restrict the development of

²⁴⁸ M 6.34: 288-89

more talented students to uplift others. Rather, should a student be considered more gifted than his peers, the teacher should cultivate that skill by giving him special attention. Equalization of opportunities thus does not entail sameness but rather that each student possesses the necessary means to effectively realize their intellectual potential.

Regarding the third principle (dialogue), instructors must teach within a dialogical framework, which requires original student articulation of the subject matter. Dialogical processes measure not only pupil understanding of the material but also the ability to critically evaluate information through discussion. Ibn Khaldun writes: “Some students spend most of their lives attending scholarly sessions. Still, one finds them silent. They do not talk and do not discuss matters. More than is necessary, they are concerned with memorizing. Thus, they do not obtain much of a habit in the practice of science and scientific instruction.”²⁴⁹ Without communicating the acquired knowledge, students will not be able to fully comprehend the details of what they learned. Thus, they do not firmly develop scientific habits, but “they think that scientific habit is identical with memorized knowledge. But that is not so.”²⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldun writes later: “The easiest method of acquiring the scientific habit is through acquiring the ability to express oneself clearly in discussing and disputing scientific problems.”²⁵¹ He emphasizes here that teaching methodologies should require students express their thoughts. The quote mentions two forms of expressing oneself: discussion and disputation. The former ensures that students have a basic understanding of the material whereas the latter tests their critical thinking by forcing them to defend their views. Disputation thus comes after discussion and helps firmly solidify their knowledge.

²⁴⁹ M. 6.7: 429

²⁵⁰ M. 6.7: 430

²⁵¹ M. 6.7: 429

Dialogue that occurs between educators and pupils influences both parties. As Ibn Khaldun writes: “When scientific picture has been established in the mind (of one person) through these (efforts), it must, of necessity, be communicated to someone else, either through instruction or through discussion, in order to polish the mind by trying to show its soundness.”²⁵² He mentions communication “either through instruction or through discussion” as necessary in strengthening the ability to think. In the context of dialogue, this quote indicates on the one hand that students must engage in discussion to cultivate their intellect. But secondly and not so straightforward is that instruction also deepens the instructor’s comprehension. By presenting various methodologies and problems, the instructor explores different approaches to the material and over time, the details deeply settle into his soul and become second nature. Moreover, critical classroom discussions can generate fresh insight to solving problems or asking questions. As the educator incorporates these novel ideas into broader hypotheses, he relies on the classroom to test their general validity, gain new feedback, and improve accordingly.²⁵³ Dialogical instruction thus reciprocally and mutually benefits multiple actors and is therefore a model intended to maximize instructional value.

Finally, concerning the fourth principle (leniency), Ibn Khaldun writes: “Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children, because it belongs among (the things that make for a) bad habit.”²⁵⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, continuous harsh punishments destroy the children’s fortitude and cause harmful characteristics to develop. Additionally, they sap their confidence in knowledge acquisition until they eventually leave the pursuit of science altogether. “Thus, they fall short of

²⁵² M. 6.33: 281

²⁵³ See Abdesselam Cheddadi, “Education in Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddima,” p.6. The sciences’ “development requires them to be communicated to others.”

²⁵⁴ M. 6.39: 305

their potentialities and do not reach the limit of their humanity.”²⁵⁵ To avoid producing ignorant, useless youth and instead foster committed, upright students, the teacher should always tend towards punitive leniency, generally preferring clemency over brutality. Ibn Khaldun quotes Ar-Rashid saying: “Do not always be too lenient with him [the student], or he will get to like leisure and become used to it. As much as possible, correct him kindly and gently. If he does not want it that way, you must then use severity and harshness.”²⁵⁶ He urges the instructor here to begin with kindness in gently correcting the student, but if it does not work, the instructor should resort to severity. Though punishment is the last option, it nonetheless is needed for stubborn students who refuse to accept the teacher’s authority. The passage highlights an important balance that the instructor must maintain. On the one hand, he should not be overly lenient with obedient students because they “will get to like leisure.” On the other hand, he should not be overly severe to obstinate students because they will develop bad habits. In emphasizing this balance, Ibn Khaldun writes: “A teacher must not be too severe toward his pupil, nor a father toward his son, in educating them.”²⁵⁷ In another place, he quotes Abu Muhammad b. Abi Zayd on the laws governing teachers and pupils saying: “If children must be beaten, their educator must not strike them more than three times.”²⁵⁸ In both cases, Ibn Khaldun does not rule out using force in instruction but instead attempts to limit its use. He calls for a balance between severity and leniency, although with a preference for the latter in most cases. His position here highlights his realistic approach to “good’ instruction.

This framework highlights Ibn Khaldun’s philosophical pragmatism that accepts reality as it is. Though he expounds on the unchanging spirit of educational laws that serve to guide

²⁵⁵ Ibid

²⁵⁶ M. 6.39: 307

²⁵⁷ M. 6.39: 306

²⁵⁸ Ibid

every pedagogical model, he does not put forth a universal teaching method. Instead, he proposes a general outline that is adaptable to diverse situations based on differences among students, local customs, as well as accidental conditions that may arise. This framework privileges the human agency of the instructors because they cannot resort to a formula but must adjust according to external factors. Ibn Khaldun therefore places considerable responsibility on instructors to find creative ways to maximize their students' intellectual potential. In perfecting each student according to their capacity, education helps identify the career most suitable to their nature and intellectual ability. The following excerpt captures Ibn Khaldun's conception of filtering students according to intelligence:

“Therefore, teachers of the auxiliary sciences ought not to delve too deeply in them and increase the number of their problems. They must advise the student concerning their purpose and have him stop there. Those who have the mind to go more deeply (into them) and consider themselves capable and able to do so, may choose (such a course) for themselves. Everyone is successful at the things for which he was created.”²⁵⁹

The passage demonstrates the different levels of student potential. In perfecting each student's strength and establishing a hierarchy based on intelligence, education contributes towards establishing a well-ordered polity. Ibn Khaldun's realistic approach to pedagogy ensures the continuity of effective education and therefore, helps prolong the dynasty's duration.

²⁵⁹ M. 6.37: 300

Chapter 4: Conclusion

At a time when various forces threaten the continued life of democracy, Ibn Khaldun's writings on education offer renewed importance to building longer lasting political regimes. From the outset, his views on history seem to simply be a fatalistic description of the mechanistic workings of human societies. This cycle of the rise and fall of civilizations begins with the rapid growth of the first generation, which "retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert savagery;" reaches its peak in the second generation, which "changes from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury and plenty;" and rapidly declines in the third generation, which "has (completely) forgotten the period of desert life and toughness, as if it had never existed" and "becomes dependent on the dynasty and are like women and children who need to be defended (by someone else)."²⁶⁰ Another 'desert' group seizes power after the third generation and destroys the dynasty. Interpreting this depiction of the almost inevitable and mechanical cycle of states and dynasties, many Western scholars describe Ibn Khaldun as a pessimistic thinker who envisions no possibility for reform.

Despite this negative portrayal of human history, this paper argues that Ibn Khaldun tries to show how humans might intervene in the course of history to guide the process of their society's development. My analysis shows how he foresees the possibility for positive change beyond pessimistic fatalism and determinism and therefore, is cautiously optimistic in the potential to stave off civilizational degeneration and prolong the dynasty's life. Additionally, it demonstrates how Ibn Khaldun's science of history provides a practical, *educational* handbook

²⁶⁰ M. 3.12: 344-45

for political statesmen on what to do and not do in the future and therefore is an attempt to interfere in postponing the ‘inevitable’ decline of civilization.

In this paper, I focused on Ibn Khaldun’s conception of scientific instruction and argued that he views education as a crucial element for prolonging the polity and postponing the inevitable fall of dynasties. In chapter two, I demonstrated how instruction and politics both mutually support the growth of the other. On the one hand, the good state must facilitate the quest for human perfection by providing the context necessary for the sciences and crafts (which includes scientific instruction) to develop. This is because the fundamental purpose of politics is to contribute towards realizing society’s normative vision for the “complete existence,” namely, the development and perfection of the intellect. Since scientific instruction contributes to intellectual and scientific growth more than any other craft, the state *should* ensure the existence of a teaching tradition at the very least. On the other hand, after presenting the state’s role in scientific instruction, I explained how instruction strengthens the political well-being of the state by educating future leaders as well as perfecting the intellectual and moral character in the citizens. I maintain that the *Muqaddima* is written to educate future statesmen and therefore, represents one of Ibn Khaldun’s attempts at reforming society.

My discussion on Ibn Khaldun’s teaching pedagogy for the ideal instructors demonstrates his realistic approach to instruction. His pedagogy places considerable responsibility on instructors to find creative ways to maximize their students’ intellectual potentials. In doing so, Ibn Khaldun attempts to ensure not only the permanency of effective education despite changing conditions but also its continued positive influence on the state’s political well-being. Thus, his realistic approach to education illustrates his general optimism in reforming society and prolonging the dynasty’s duration. A shrewd diplomat, expansive scholar, and pragmatic

political theorist, Ibn Khaldun offers a realist picture of scientific instruction and through it, seeks to build longer lasting political regimes.

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