

Ibn Khaldun's Fourteenth Century Views on Bureaucracy

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Introduction

Adam Smith observed in his *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 that kings—or in my terminology the early bureaucratic leaders—existed already in “that rude state of society which precedes the extension of commerce and the improvement of manufactures” (Smith 1976: 907). Max Weber considered bureaucracy a necessary precondition for the development of society (Mieczkowski 1984: 105-06; Zinam 1984: 77-78) providing the element of functional organization and purpose. However, since power corrupts, it comes as no surprise that even the early bureaucratic leaders developed some dysfunctional traits, that corruption all too frequently became the prevalent mode of operation, and that the benign functional bureaucratic organizations, or “borgs,” became in many cases transformed into “dysborgs,” or the dysfunctional bureaucratic organizations. An analysis of dysborgs and of some of their implications is offered in Mieczkowski and Zinam, *Bureaucracy, Ideology, Technology: Quality of Life East and West* (1984), and the terminology that is used in the present essay to interpret historical views, with their original concepts, will be from the Mieczkowski and Zinam book.

Because the rudimentary bureaucratic organization developed early, some astute observers found already in remote times that bureaucracy is not always benign. It was, therefore, with great interest that I discovered one such observer who had been neglected by Western historians of economic thought, except for a footnote and a bare small-print mention in Joseph Schumpeter's *History of Economic Analysis* (1954: 136, 788), a footnote in Colin Clark's *Conditions of Economic Progress* (1957: 6), and a footnote in Barry Gordon's *Economic Analysis Before Adam Smith* (1957: 121). The writer in question was an Arab historian and philosopher, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), who covered many topics of interest to economists, and who in some respects was ahead of the founder of the science of economics, Adam Smith. Such occasional

superiority is perhaps understandable when one recognizes that Ibn Khaldun benefited from the rich intellectual tradition of the medieval Arab and Persian (Ibn Khaldun 1958: III, 311-15) world, with scholars of the stature of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Nasir Tusi, Nasr Farabi, Al-Ghazali, Al-Dawwani, and others who carried on the Greek tradition of intellectual inquiry. Ibn Khaldun benefited also from the – not always, since he spent 21 months in the prison of the ruler of Fez in Morocco, and encountered other perils connected with service to royal bureaucrats (see Rosenthal's introduction to Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, xlvii, l-lliii), protective and appreciative attitude of several khalifs, the top bureaucrats of the Arab world, who quite eagerly sought his services, demonstrating in this way their appreciation of scholarship and intellect, and thus indicating the at least partly "borg-like," or functional, character of their administrations.

The purpose of the present paper is to acquaint the reader with Ibn Khaldun's description of functional bureaucratic organizations, or borgs, with his perceptive and surprisingly modern analysis of dysfunctional bureaucratic organizations, or dysborgs, and to describe the dysborgian dynamics as found in Ibn Khaldun's writings. The paper will attempt to compare the findings of Ibn Khaldun with some modern economic concepts, to compare them with the findings of Adam Smith, and to put Ibn Khaldun in an historical perspective and give him recognition that is his due but that has been very slow in coming.

Ibn Khaldun as a Scholar

Ibn Khaldun's colorful and well-traveled life has been described in many sources (e.g., by his translator, Franz Rosenthal, in Ibn Khaldun 1958: I; in the abridged edition of Ibn Khaldun 1967; in Simon 1978; in Baali and Wardi 1981; and most extensively in Enan 1941). Combined with a life-long habit of learning, stimulating intellectual environment from early youth on in his native Tunisia that the time was a center of learning, with travels that took him from Morocco and Spain through Tunis and Cairo to Mecca and Damascus, and with the above-mentioned intellectual heritage, Ibn Khaldun was in position to develop his empirical-historical approach (Spengler 1964: 286) with its rational argument, free of moral value judgments (Andic 1965: 42) that did not clash with his deep religious feelings. In his analysis of economic relations he was helped by the ideology of his environment:

From the outset, Islam has a more favorable opinion of economic life than Medieval Christianity. Trade has ever been an occupation "pleasing Allah," and also the theoretical [inquiry into economics] started much earlier in Islamic literature than in the European (Desomogyi 1965:1).

His tribal perspective and city experience, combined with historical studies, gave him a dynamic panorama of social change that he used effectively in his writings on population, the phases in the development of the state, and the role of taxation in public finance and economic development. He is usually described as an historian and a philosopher, but he was also a political scientist, a sociologist, and an early economist. As the latter, he expounded on a labor theory of value (or at least on the role of labor in determining relative prices), but discussed also the rent of land; he observed the division of labor, absolute advantage, general equilibrium, some macroeconomic relations explained later by John Keynes, and conspicuous consumption on which Thorstein Veblen expanded so brilliantly; he described what we know now as the (Arthur) Laffer curve, and he talked about the role of education—what we call now investment in human capital; he may be—with some exaggeration—called the first supply-side economist; he espoused consumer sovereignty, was liberal, laissez-faire, and gave a hint of the invisible hand of Adam Smith (in addition to the benevolent invisible hand of Allah—see Baali and Wardi 1981:24), while also describing want-creation well before John Galbraith did so; he was opposed to socialized production before Friedrich von Hayek, he included services in his concept of national income (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 316-17, 336-38, 368-405; Nashat 1945: 20), thus proving himself on that count ahead of Adam Smith (Nashat 1945: 14, 16), and he gave an intimation of the modern concept of appropriate technology (Nashat 1945: 11). He was against monopoly (in royal hands), showed the merits of the free market, (Nashat 1945: 17), and divided wants into necessities, amenities, luxuries, and extravagances (Nashat 1945: 56-57), with—as mentioned above—an early intimation of conspicuous consumption.

He is considered to be the Islamic version of Nicolo Machiavelli in terms of his highly realistic treatment of social affairs, combined with—in contrast to the Italian sage—an acknowledgment of the validity and importance of idealism and the normative posture (Baali and Wardi 1981: 21; Enan 1941: 168-82). He provided excellent dynamic analysis of the phases in the decline of urban (meaning advanced above nomadism) culture; he recognized taxation as the main source of state revenue in contrast to the earlier stress on revenue from royal estates (cf. the excellent article by Andic 1965).

In contrast to the neglect by the historians of economic thought, Ibn Khaldun is better known to historians and sociologists in the West, while being very familiar to social scientists in the Near East. George Sarton mentioned Ibn Khaldun in his *A Guide to the History of Science* (1952: 28, 29). A Polish nineteenth-century sociologist, Ludwig Gumplowicz (1926: 125, 126), described Ibn Khaldun as “a historian and political scientist” with “such deep insight into the social nature of the state” in the fourteenth century as those that were made in Europe only in the nineteenth century. He extolled Ibn

Khaldun's realistic views and findings, and "...correct observation of the political and social state of affairs, and a sober and objective conclusion drawn from it..." (Gumplowicz 1926: 126).

Arnold Toynbee, in his *A Study of History*, evaluated the overall achievements of Ibn Khaldun in terms of utmost praise: Ibn Khaldun's contribution was to him "undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in anyone time or place" (Toynbee 1934: III, 322, cited also in Spengler 1964: 269n4). He was "...an Arabic genius who achieved... a life-work... which can bear comparison with the work of a Thucydides or a Machiavelli for both breadth and profundity of vision as well as for sheer intellectual power" (Toynbee 1934: III, 321). Given such high praise from a foremost cultural authority, the economists' neglect of Ibn Khaldun can be attributed only to Western cultural ethnocentrism, now slowly being eroded by the increasing awareness of contributions from East Asia as well as from the Near East. It may be hoped that Ibn Khaldun will not be omitted in the future from textbooks on the history of economic doctrines.

However, Toynbee was mistaken on one point: He characterized Ibn Khaldun as "the sole point of light in his quarter of the firmament" in contrast to Thucydides and Machiavelli and Clarendon who were "all brilliant representatives of brilliant times and places" (Toynbee 1934: III, 321). Toynbee reinforced this incorrect assessment by writing that, "In his chosen field of intellectual activity [Ibn Khaldun] appears to have been inspired by no predecessors and to have found no kindred souls among his contemporaries and to have kindled no answering spark of inspiration in any successors..." (Toynbee 1934: III, 322).

Franz Rosenthal, a recognized authority on Muslim culture and the able and careful translator and editor of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, referred to sometimes as *The Prolegomena*, noted early that Ibn Khaldun carefully listed his teachers and their fate (Rosenthal 1937: 34). He remarked later that "At least one original Muslim thinker, Abn Bakr ar-Razi, was convinced that the history of true philosophy was a continuous building upon the foundations laid by former generations of philosophers..." (Rosenthal 1947: 68). This indicates a keen awareness of the debt to the precursors, and possibly teachers, of whom the Arab world provided, as George Sarton shows (1952: 28, 29), many. The latter writer, after providing a list of some, added that "The list of Moorish scientists and scholars is a very long one" (Sarton 1952: 29). Ibn Khaldun is no exception to the rule that everyone stands on the shoulders of preceding generations, and that in the sense of our dependence on them, there is no such thing as "a self-made man," be he Andrew Carnegie or Ibn Khaldun.

Drawing obviously on personal experience, Ibn Khaldun stressed the importance of personal contacts between scholars:

A scholar's education is greatly improved by traveling in quest of knowledge and meeting the authoritative teachers (of his time). The reason for

this is that 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. The only difference here is that habits acquired through personal contact with a teacher are more strongly and firmly rooted. Thus, the greater the number of authoritative teachers, the more deeply rooted is the habit one acquires (Ibn Khaldun 1958: III, 308-08).

According to Ibn Khaldun, in order to avoid terminological confusion "the only way" for a budding scholar is to seek "personal contact with teachers" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: III, 308). It seems to the present writer that the mark of a scholar is his recognition of his own intellectual indebtedness to others, and Ibn Khaldun clearly passed that test. Toynbee seems to have made a mistake in his, rather curious, judgment about the intellectual isolation of Ibn Khaldun.

However, the lack of disciples of Ibn Khaldun, indicated by Toynbee, is a fact. It may be at least partly attributable to the religious bureaucracy of Islam that disagreed with some of Ibn Khaldun's ideas, such as separation of idealism and realism, or with his attacks on the "schizoid thought-style" of the orthodox Muslim historians who mixed up the Prophet's normative pronouncements and the "Muhammadan Traditions" with historical descriptions and analysis (Baali and Wardi 1981: 21).

Ibn Khaldun unhesitatingly refers to the Prophet Muhammad's saying that he was sent for the purpose of teaching religion rather than the affairs of this world. Here, Ibn Khaldun appears distinctly to differentiate religious from secular affairs. This, of course, runs contrary to the spirit of Islam as defined by its orthodox followers. Islam is a politico-religious system, and the Traditions of Muhammad deal with secular as well as with religious affairs. The orthodox jurists and the carriers of the Muhammadan traditions are accustomed to view social phenomena in the light of the Prophet's teachings. They tend, therefore to condemn any custom, or any phenomenon, for that matter, that differs from the Muhammadan pattern regardless of variables of time or space. . . . At the time of Ibn Khaldun, which was one of the darkest periods in the history of Islam, the Muslim Traditionalists attributed the decline of Islamic society mainly to its deviation from the original ideals of Islam. Ibn Khaldun bitterly attacked this sort of idealistic orientation or sacred thought-style and considered it a sort of hypocrisy. To him, truly pious men are those who retire from this world and sincerely worship Allah in devoted seclusion; they are the real "inheritors of the prophet." The jurists and the Traditionalists, on the other hand, do nothing of the sort; they are religious men only in appearance and

pretension. Ibn Khaldun views the Traditions of the Prophet in a way that distinguishes him from almost all other Muslim writers (Baali and Wardi 1981: 25).

The bureaucratic self-interest of the Islamic religious hierarchy prompted a rejection of Ibn Khaldun's ideas. One can imagine the strong warnings from the imamate issued to scholars who followed him in time, not to in any way propagate his ideas. Lack of their translation into Western languages until the nineteenth century (see Rosenthal's introduction to Ibn Khaldun 1958: c-cix) contributed additionally to depriving Ibn Khaldun's thoughts of influence on the generations that followed him. And so it may be that the bureaucrats had their ultimate, four-centuries-long revenge on him.

Borgs in Ibn Khaldun

Bureaucracy, as in the Weberian analysis, organizes human effort in a system of planning, personnel management, government administration, administration of enterprises, etc. Bureaucrats are defined here as including private-sector decision makers, and especially those who have control over personnel decisions. Such a definition makes inter-systemic comparisons possible, as done in the Mieczkowski and Zinam book of 1984 (for definitions, see Mieczkowski 1984: 103-05). In the fourteenth century the ultimate bureaucratic power was vested in the king, who governed directly and through his officials. Hence Ibn Khaldun's references to royal status are taken here as synonymous to references to the early bureaucratic organization.

Like Max Weber, Ibn Khaldun regarded the royal bureaucracy as functional: ". . .the real meaning of royal authority is that it is a form of organization necessary to mankind" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 385), and "human organization is something necessary" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 137). He developed the concept of *asabiyah*, or group cohesion, that created the justification for royal authority. The need for such cohesion derives from the rigors of tribal desert existence, and is expanded to include developed societies.

When mankind has achieved social organization . . . and when civilization in the world has thus become a fact, people need someone to exercise a restraining influence [against] the aggressiveness of human beings toward each other. . . . The person who exercises a restraining influence . . . must be one of themselves. He must dominate them and have power and authority over them, so that no one of them will be able to attack another. This is the meaning of royal authority. . . . absolutely necessary to mankind (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 91-92).

Royal authority and power can be attained only through group acquiescence and group feeling (*asabiyah*), but when a dynasty is firmly established it can dispense with such feeling (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 313-17). However, "Good rulership is equivalent to mildness" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 383), and absence of it may lead to disobedience and downfall of royal authority (Rabi 1967: 59, 63-69), in close parallel to the Confucian doctrine of the "Mandate of Heaven" (Mieczkowski 1984: 180). "If the ruler continues to keep a forceful grip on his subjects, group feeling will be destroyed. . . The fence (which protects the dynasty) is torn down. . ." (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 383). This seems to agree with the ruling of Prophet Muhammad on opposition against "evil activities" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 324).

The choice of the leader, the founder of a dynasty, depends on his good qualities and on his possession of the group feeling. Ibn Khaldun listed some of those good qualities, among them tolerance, faithful fulfillment of obligations, respect for scholars and teachers, observation of things to be done and not to be done, fairness, attentiveness to the complaints of supplicants, and avoidance of fraud, cunning deceit, and of not fulfilling one's obligation. Absence of these characteristics – or the existence of dysborgs – brings about absence of royal authority (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 292-93).

Ibn Khaldun approves of rulers who move with, rather than those who resist, the social dialectic. He dislikes the ruler whose intelligence is higher than average. A highly intelligent ruler may see things in their final realities or according to their logical consequences and then may impose his profound conclusions on subjects who are unable to understand them. Therefore, a good ruler should be of average intelligence in order to understand his subjects and to make himself understood by them (Baali and Wardi 1981: 52-53).

The mildness that is characteristic of good rulership defines a moderate monarchy (Simon 1978: 145; cf. Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 382-85), and by intimation an enlightened one. A successful monarchy brings about emulation of the ruler in behavior, opinions, morality, and in the economic sphere in consumption, even if such imitation and conformity may adversely affect the quality of life of the population (Simon 1978: 147). In the interpretation of Ibn Khaldun by a German scholar:

The positive effects which the existence of a powerful state can have on its inhabitants are to be found primarily in the economic sphere. The state brings about the thriving of civilization and of the arts and sciences. Arts and sciences do not develop until people have ceased to worry about the necessities of life; the products are abundant because of the advanced development of the state. Only then does man have the possibility to occupy himself with things that are not directly

connected with the preservation of his physical existence, because then he has the leisure for it; people can show interest only in the arts and sciences that make life more beautiful and luxurious when they experience the height of cultural development. The greater the prosperity of a state, and this depends on the number of its inhabitants, the higher will be the development of its arts, handicrafts, and sciences, which bring about more demand for them with respect to quantity as well as quality. [Shades of Say's law of the markets!—BM] The size of a state, its extension, and its power depends on the number of those who support it and are loyal (Simon 1978: 147-48).

The dynamics of primitive societies, with their strong *asabiyah* feelings, produce benign borgs: “. . . it is difficult among [primitive] people to find despotic or unjust rulers.” The leader “usually leads his people toward goals they want, not the ones he himself wants. . . .there is no class exploitation or social injustice. . . .” (Baali and Wardi 1981: 35). It may be that the primitive, tribal desert society is a trifle idealized, but there is a strong conviction here that its bureaucratic organization is functional, borg-like.

Once we move to the developed, urban society, we find several conditions that govern the functional bureaucratic organization of the imamate: (1) knowledge, rather than blind acceptance of tradition, (2) probity, (3) competence in juridical opinions and judicial acts, in diplomacy, war, and in attending to political and administrative duties, and (4) freedom of the senses and limbs from physical or intellectual incapacity (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 394-96; a tribal origin was also included among the conditions). The qualities expected by Ibn Khaldun of the borgs were, therefore, high, and it seems consequently reasonable that the Ibn Khaldun could not help but notice the shortcomings of the actual bureaucratic operation. That would explain his discussion of dysborgs, taken up below.

And finally, there exists a mutually supportive relationship between the state and the bureaucracy:

The more powerful the state, the more efficient its bureaucracy and its encouragement of economic activity, the speedier its economic growth and therefore the development of civilizations and its manifold institutions. In its turn, the more economically prosperous the society, the greater is the strength and power of the state. The power of the state and economic prosperity are intimately related (Andic 1965: 40-41).

A virtuous circle emerges from such a relationship, unfortunately not by any means permanent because Ibn Khaldun's dynamics leads eventually to a decline indicated in the following section. However, as long as functional bureaucratic organizations are preserved, they provide the organizational structure and leadership to protect humanity (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 328-39; Ibn Khaldun 1967: 356-57).

Ibn Khaldun and the Emergence of Dysborgs

My focus in Mieczkowski (1984) was on the dysfunctional bureaucratic organizations, East and West, North and South, in government, the private sector, the not-for-profit enterprises, and among the latter especially in higher education. It was, therefore, with a sense of pleasurable affinity that I later discovered in Ibn Khaldun a fraternal spirit of surprising antiquity and impressive insight. His echoing voice was an encouragement and an inspiration, and the present essay is my way of trying to repay my debt to him and help correct the Western tradition of self-preoccupation with Western culture.

Since Ibn Khaldun has been already measured here against Adam Smith, it may be useful to indicate that Adam Smith made two references to dysborg-like behavior. He drew a causal connection between vanity and extravagance, and allowed that in a commercially developed country the sovereign “naturally spends a great part of his revenue in purchasing. . . luxuries” (Smith 1976: 908). Smith’s attitude is transparent from the terms he used: “costly trinkets,” “frivolous passions,” “pleasures [which] debilitate very much the defensive power of the state” (Smith 1976: 908-09). Secondly, he referred to “kings and ministers” as “themselves always, and without any exception, the greatest spendthrifts in the society” (Smith 1976: 346), and mentioned “publick extravagance of government” (Smith 1976: 343). Within his framework and extolled “frugality and good conduct” (Smith 1976: 342) as the source of the wealth of nations, these were not actions and characteristics conducive to economic betterment. But these observations did not go very far, perhaps because Smith never rubbed elbows with royal bureaucrats (even if he traveled in Europe with a young Duke of Buccleuch, nephew of Charles Townsend, Chancellor of the Exchequer, notorious for his duty on tea—see Bell 1953: 161-62), and certainly because his life travels outside his native Scotland were restricted to Oxford (1740-46), Geneva, Toulouse and Paris (1764-66), and London (1766, 1773, plus occasional trips there after 1776). Compared with the wide-ranging peregrinations of Ibn Khaldun that spanned three continents, Smith’s travels, though they inspired him by exposure to the physiocratic thought, seem paltry. They did not allow the Scottish pioneer economist to observe the bureaucracy of the government in action. In this respect Ibn Khaldun, Smith’s Arab predecessor, had a distinct advantage.

Ibn Khaldun noticed that one kind of politics is:

. . . concerned with the interest of the ruler and how he can maintain his rule through the forceful use of power. The general (public) interest is, here, secondary. This is the type of politics practiced by all rulers, whether they are Muslim or unbelievers (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 138-39).

He added that “Government decisions are, as a rule, unjust. . .” (Ibn Khaldun

1958: II, 285), and again, "The decisions of the ruler will . . . , as a rule, deviate from what is right" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 385), and that, while the government protects the people from external aggression and maintains internal law and order, it does not protect the people from "injustice as comes from the ruler himself" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 262; see also Simon 1978: 145-46).

In this recognition, Ibn Khaldun used the authority of Prophet Muhammad who "censured royal authority and its representatives." The Prophet did it when such authority was achieved "through worthless means" and when it employed "human beings for indulgence in (selfish) purposes and desires." Muhammad knew "that, as prophet and king, he would have nothing to do with anything worthless" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 415, 416, 417). As noted by two authors: "The Prophet did not disparage or condemn kingship as such; he rather condemned its usual by-products: injustice, luxury, and the like" (Baali and Wardi 1981: 23). This is probably why Ibn Khaldun decided that "(The exercise of) political power is not a natural way of making a living" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 316).

Thus armed against clerical criticism, Ibn Khaldun proceeded to outline his approach to dysborgs. He noted that the power of a dynasty—in my terminology—bureaucratic organization "depends on the numerical strength of its supporters" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 330-32), or on the protective strata of the bureaucracy, described by me at length (Mieczkowski 1984).

The leader, whose positive attributes were outlined in the preceding section, was now described somewhat differently:

He is singled out as leader of all the various group feelings, because he is superior to all the others by birth. When he is out for (the position of leadership), he is too proud to let others share in his leadership and control over (the people) or to let them participate in it, because the qualities of haughtiness and pride are innate in animal nature. Thus, he develops the quality of egotism which is innate in human beings. . . . Thus, the aspirations of the various group feelings are blunted. People become tame and do not aspire to share with the leader in the exercise of control. Their group feeling is forced to refrain (from such aspirations). The leader takes charge all by himself, as far as possible. Eventually, he leaves no part in the power of anyone else. He thus claims all the glory for himself and does not permit the people to share in it (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 337).

This tendency is observed also among modern dysborgs, including those on the campuses (Mieczkowski 1984: 246-94 and *passim*). Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's assertion that "the (royal authority), by its very nature, must claim all glory for itself" is echoed by the practice of modern dysborgs. And again, "royal authority by its very nature requires luxury" and the drive towards it leads the

rulers to appropriate their subjects' property for themselves or for "their own children and supporters" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 340), which brings us back to the protective strata. Ibn Khaldun's disapproval of luxury was even stronger than Smith's because of his bedouin tribal perspective and his conviction that luxury played a vicious role in the dynamics of the society (see next section). Furthermore,

luxury corrupts the character. (Through luxury), the soul acquires diverse kinds of evil and sophisticated customs. . . people lose the good qualities that were the sign and indication of (their qualification for) royal authority. They adopt the contrary bad qualities (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 341).

In the short-run, to be sure, luxury produces population growth, expands the protective strata, and strengthens the royal bureaucracy (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 351-53). However, its long-run effects are ruinous.

Ibn Khaldun's stress that royal authority, by its very nature, required "tranquillity and quiet" (Ibn Khaldun 1959: I, 336, 341), interpreted by Charles Issawi (1950: 120-21) as "docility and inaction," parallels, but is not synonymous with, my observation on bureaucratic stonewalling and coverups (Mieczkowski 1984: 123-25, 136-38). This, according to Ibn Khaldun, weakens the protective and defensive ability of the bureaucrats and their protective strata, produces "softness," and eliminates the "desert toughness" and "the quality of bravery." Senility sets in (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 286-87, 341-43, 458).

Ibn Khaldun expounded more on the protective strata:

. . . a ruler can achieve power only with the help of his own people. They are his group and his helpers in his enterprise. He uses them to fight against those who revolt against his dynasty. It is they with whom he fills the administrative offices, whom he appoints as *wazirs* and tax collectors. They help him to achieve superiority. They participate in the government. They share in all his other important affairs (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 372).

Protective strata of the ruler can change in their composition, but their functions remain the same. The ruler singles out their members:

for preference and many honors. He distributes among them . . . (property) . . . He confers upon them the most important administrative positions, such as the offices of *wazir*, general, and tax collector, as well as royal titles. . . (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 373). The protective strata of "clients and followers" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 276, 277): acquire nobility by being rooted in their client relationship, and by their service. . .

They have “house” and prestige by being firmly rooted in their client relationship with a particular dynasty and by being its faithful followers (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 277).

That the services of the protective strata do not come free, or even cheap, is conformed again by the observation that “at the beginning of the dynasty” their members get “the revenues which they would like to have. . . . They can put pressure on him, and he needs them” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 97). However, once the ruler establishes himself firmly in power, he is in position to curtail the incomes of the wider protective strata and to reward his closer associates, or “entourage and retinue,” or the protective strata proper (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 328). “As a consequence, the men of [the ruler’s] entourage and retinue. . . all become more important and their positions expand. They acquire property and enrich themselves” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 97-98).

Thus, in the final analysis, it pays to be near the source of the ultimate power in the bureaucratic pecking order. “. . . ranks are useful in securing property” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 328), so that their self-interest encourages people to try to climb higher on the bureaucratic pyramid. After all, “rank means power” and “If the rank in question is influential, the profit accruing from it is correspondingly great” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 329, 330). We have, therefore, discovered the bureaucratic incentives, summed up in a line from a poem cited by Ibn Khaldun: “The soul is ambitious, if it is given the opportunity” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 102). But Ibn Khaldun provides us also with an insight into the mode of bureaucratic selection, reminiscent of the contemporary bureaucracies East and West. Since,

. . . one’s happiness and welfare are intimately connected with the acquisition of (rank), it will be realized that it is a very great and important favor to give away or grant a rank to someone, and that the person who gives it away is a very great benefactor. He gives it only to people under his control. Thus, giving (rank) away (shows) influence and power. Consequently, a person who seeks and desires rank must be obsequious and use flattery, as powerful men and rulers require. Otherwise, it will be impossible for him to obtain any (rank). Therefore, we have stated that obsequiousness and flattery are the reasons why a person may be able to obtain a rank that produces happiness and profit, and that most wealthy and happy people have the quality (of obsequiousness and use flattery) (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 330-31).

Obsequiousness and flattery—called by my favorite Boston novelist, George Higgins, “groveling around and kissing. . .” (Higgins 1983: 229)—are stressed by Ibn Khaldun as a prerequisite for successful bureaucratic career, available also to commoners:

Now, when the dynasty continues and royal authority flourishes, those who go into the service of the ruler, who try to approach him with advice, or who are accepted as followers by him because of their capability in many of his important affairs, will be equal in rank in his eyes. Many common people will make efforts to approach the ruler with zealous counsel and come close to him through all kinds of services. For this purpose, such people make much use of obsequiousness and flattery toward the ruler, his entourage, and his family, so that eventually they will be firmly entrenched and the ruler will give them a place in the total (picture) of his (administration). Thus, they obtain a large share of happiness and are accepted among the people of the dynasty (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 333).

An ominous personal element was added to his analysis, perhaps partly from Ibn Khaldun's own experience:

It should be known that it is difficult and impossible to escape (from official life) after having once been in it. . . . If the person who intends to escape is one of the ruler's inner circle and entourage, or one of the dignitaries in his dynasty, he rarely is given the opportunity to do so. The reason is, in the first place, that rulers consider their people and entourage, and, indeed, all their subjects as slaves familiar with their thoughts and sentiments. Therefore, they are not disposed to loosen the bonds of servitude binding the person (who may have the desire to escape). They want to avoid the chance that someone (outside) might come to know (their secrets) and their circumstances (through that person), and they are averse to letting him become the servant of others (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 99-100).

Such compulsive relationship was possible under the authoritarian rule of the Umayyads in Spain or of other absolute rulers observed by Ibn Khaldun. It is still possible under the totalitarian bureaucratic rule in communist countries where no gracious withdrawal from the ranks of the protective strata is allowed, strangely enough for the same bureaucratic reasons as indicated by Ibn Khaldun.

Such authoritarian attitudes of bureaucratic compulsion-submission have not been, of course, limited to medieval Arab or contemporary communist countries. In the Kingdom of Prussia prior to 1815 the ambitious royal leaders demanded more than loyalty from their bureaucrats – for them “Compliance with garrison standards was the ideal discipline in civil employment.” They expected “unquestioning submission to the service code and unconditional subservience to the machine of compulsion, directed by the autocratic commander in chief” (Rosenberg 1958: 90). That tradition was carried on under Otto von Bismarck and Adolf Hitler with admirable consistency and well-known

results. Times and countries may change, but the essence of autocratic bureaucratic systems remains the same. However, the personal element of bureaucratic existence under authoritarian rule had a strange twist:

The autocratic monarchs of Prussia could oust, banish, jail, or even put to death individual bureaucrats, but they were utterly helpless without the bureaucracy. In real life, therefore, leniency and sluggishness dominated. Rewards proved far more instrumental than penalties in producing the fact as well as the fiction of competent work and of compliance with royal orders. Hope as an incentive to effort, allied, in certain cases, with creative instincts, prevailed over fear. Paradoxically enough, the much talked about "superior efficiency" of the Prussian bureaucracy in the age of dynastic absolutism was at least as much due to the evasion of the disciplinary codes as to their actual enforcement (Rosenberg 1958: 100).

Again, in the timeless perspective, while autocracy can punish individual bureaucrats mercilessly, it has been obliged, nevertheless, to cultivate the class of bureaucrats as a whole, because it is also totally dependent on bureaucracy in order to enforce its wishes upon the society. That is why, given a more advanced society and vastly more ambitious goals (see Mieczkowski 1984: 131-44 and *passim*), communist bureaucracy is so much more expanded than the fourteenth-century Arab bureaucracy.

While Ibn Khaldun's discussion of the protective strata evokes some uncanny contemporary echoes, on one point he seemed unduly idealistic. To him,

a scholar who is deeply versed in his science, or a scribe who writes well, or a post who makes good poetry. . . They are not obsequious and do not flatter people of a higher station [and some] of them may even disdain to be obsequious to a ruler and consider such obsequiousness humiliating, abasing, and stupid. . . . He obtains no rank from members of the next higher class. . . He remains in a state of indigence and poverty. . . (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 331-32).

Mohammad Nashat, in his doctoral dissertation on Ibn Khaldun as a pioneer economist, paraphrased this as an explanation of the low level of incomes of "professors and teachers," in part as the result of their refusal "to have recourse to flattery of the powerful potentates in order to be patronized by them [because] they consider this as dishonorable" (Nashat 1945: 32). My own examples of the protective strata of the academic bureaucrats indicate that "powerful potentates" find enough individuals among "professors and teachers" to protect their self-interest (Mieczkowski 1984: 246-94). However, Ibn Khaldun might have regarded the denizens of the protective strata among scholars as unworthy of the qualifying phrase of individuals "deeply versed" in their science. After all,

it is the least interested and the least proficient members of the academia who become the self-selected members of the protective strata. They have the lowest opportunity cost of deviating from the academic pursuits and of devoting themselves instead to the assiduous stroking of the bureaucratic egos (see Mieczkowski 1984: 117-22, 276). According to Nashat's interpretation, what I call the protective strata, are recruited from those who use "flattery and submission; it is the lot of courtiers and not of able men. . . Thus, able [persons] are in general [kept] out of key positions which are [held] by courtiers of doubtful capacity. . . mere subservient followers. . ." (Nashat 1945: 45, 46, 98). If the class of courtiers is made to include some members of the academia, then this interpretation closely parallels the observations of the present writer.

The Dysborgian Dynamics

Ibn Khaldun included in his analysis a dynamic relationship between the demographic changes and the wealth of the society (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 351-53; Nashat 1945: 48-55), and a dynamic interpretation of the stages of a "dynasty." It is the latter that is relevant to the problem of bureaucracy.

Ibn Khaldun had an economic interpretation of history (Nashat 1945: 93-103), based on the presupposition of (1) the existence of historical laws, (2) governance of the society by the laws of social environment, and (3) predominance of economic factors in the social sphere (Nashat 1945: 93). The dialectics of social change are closely connected with the bureaucratic leadership of the king. In the primitive desert society the group solidarity of *asabiyah* prevails, with social justice, equality, and absence of luxury. However, *assabiyah* gives the basis for the rise of the leadership of a dynastic founder. Luxury makes its appearance among the elite, "jealousy and hostility may arise between the king and his former followers" (Baali and Wardi 1981: 52), a mercenary army, inferior to the former army of supporters based on *asabiyah*, makes its appearance, taxes have to be increasingly levied to finance the luxurious court living and the mercenaries, and that leads to the ruin of the society and to aggravated fiscal problems (see Andic 1965) in an escalation that brings about the ultimate downfall of the now senile dynasty and the founding of a new one (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 311-II, 231).

The last stage of the old dynasty is highlighted by the concentration of power in the hands of the king, a consequent loss of *asabiyah*, and an unwillingness of the subjects to defend the dynasty. The protective strata are weakened in their courage and resolve, and the bureaucratic state crumbles (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 339-43; Issawi 1950: 122-25). One may surmise that perhaps the protective strata may also decide to, in modern parlance, hedge their bets, as the result of which the strength of their protective service wanes.

In this fashion the dialectics of dynastic rise and fall are a historical necessity:

To Ibn Khaldun, the life cycle of a dynasty has the same inescapable stages as that of the individual. It has its birth, youth, old age, and death. An average dynasty normally contains four successive kings. The first one, the founder of the dynasty, has been able to found it mainly because he was just and had good character and leadership capability. His son, however, may imitate his father in only some of his good characteristics; as Ibn Khaldun says, an imitator can hardly equal the imitated. The following king, the third, is still less good in his imitation. The fourth is usually the last link of the chain. He enjoys a very high position, and he ignorantly attributes it to his pedigree. He has been accustomed since early childhood to see men around him blindly revering him and unhesitatingly obeying his whims. [Thus the protective strata weaken the resilience of rulers—B.M.] He does not realize that his authority has been established by his forefathers with strong *asabiyah* and good character, and he becomes careless about the necessary qualities of a good ruler. To use Pigors's terminology, his rule becomes "domination" instead of "leadership." This surely indicates the approaching death of his dynasty. The bad ruler, sooner or later, will be replaced by a good one, and the cycle begins anew (Baali and Wardi 1981: 52; see Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 353-46, 353-55).

The dialectics of this historical process are inescapable: "Ibn Khaldun proves to be a strict advocate of deterministic views; the laws of the development of human society which he has formulated are valid without exceptions" (Simon 1978: 149).

Thus a functional bureaucracy inevitably turns into a dysfunctional one and it eventually dissolves. The bureaucrats themselves participate in this process as mere actors, helpless in view of the power of social and economic forces:

In Ibn Khaldun's opinion, the ruler, however predominant his importance may be, ultimately plays an extremely unimportant role in the historical development. History is not made by great men; rather, it unfolds as a causal process, its unavoidable development is determined by the social situation and the structure of society. It is *asabiyah* that leads toward command and through which royal authority is attained, but unlimited royal authority neutralizes *asabiyah*, whose existence prevents autocratic command. Its decline means the declining support for his rule. However, his subjects imitate him as their example, reach a higher and higher stage of civilization, and at the same time they become submissive and servile. The high degree of civilization produces the inability to maintain it. According to Ibn Khaldun, in a certain

sense, progress is simultaneously recession; these are the dialectics of the endless cycle (Simon 1978: 150).

The cycles of Ibn Khaldun are not unlike those of Werner Sombart and Karl Marx, and are similar to those of Giuseppe Ferrari and Vilfredo Pareto with his ruling elites (Nashat 1945: 96-97). In his scheme—interpreted to suit my approach to bureaucracy—the leaders eventually become the dominators who subject their societies to their self-interested rule and lose the *asabiyah* of the Confucian Mandate of Heaven. The feeling of group solidarity is lost, the rulers become effeminate, the dynasty gets senile, and the state weakens sufficiently to collapse of its own. The subservience of the bootlicking supporters of the ruler is instrumental in weakening the fiber of the state: those who know their own value and have minds of their own, such as the true scholars, do not join the ranks of the protective strata, while by implication those whose ability concentrates on fawning and not much else do. The ruler is thus deprived of valuable potential supporters, and has to rely on paid mercenaries and ambitious grasping ciphers, and thus his position is substantially weakened. The ruler himself, the top bureaucrat that he is, is weakened presumably in mind, character, and body by his wallowing in unnecessary luxury that tends to escalate (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 338, 341). The ruler wastes the treasures accumulated by his ancestors “on pleasures and amusements” and on “(excessive) generosity to his inner circle” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 355).

Also, he acquires bad, low-class followers to whom he entrusts the most important matters (of state), which they are not qualified to handle by themselves, not knowing which of them they should tackle and which they should leave alone. (In addition), the ruler seeks to destroy the great clients of his people and followers of his predecessors. Thus, they come to hate him and conspire to refuse to support him. (Furthermore) he loses a number of soldiers by spending their allowances on his pleasures (instead of paying them) and by refusing them access to his person and not supervising them (properly). Thus, he ruins the foundations his ancestors had laid and tears down what they had built up. In this stage, the dynasty is seized by senility and the chronic disease from which it can hardly ever rid itself, for which it can find no cure, and, eventually, it is destroyed (Ibn Khaldun 1958: I, 355; see also II, 97-137).

At this stage the protective strata of “clients and followers” become functionally less dependable. “They begin to be no longer as sincerely loyal as their fathers and ancestors had been” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 98). This erosion causes a “great part of the edifice of glory [to crumble]” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 98). From which a lesson seems clear, that a governing bureaucrat should pay attention to secure permanent or at least the long-standing loyalty of his protective

strata. The presidents of colleges in the contemporary academia seem to have learned that lesson (see Mieczkowski 1984).

An author on the public finance of Ibn Khaldun assessed these dynamics from her point of view:

However, the rise of absolute political power without which economic prosperity cannot be reached, turns out to be also the cause of the decline of this prosperity and consequently of the state and the city. For, absolute power can be maintained by ever-increasing expenditure on a bureaucracy accustomed to a life of luxury; this requires an ever-increasing revenue; new taxes are levied, and the rates of old ones are raised to a point that discourages all economic activity. State incomes from taxes declines, [The state starts also competing with the private sector and ruins it.] (Andic 1965: 41).

The stage of senile decadence of the dynasty is characterized by injustices that erodes the support given to the ruler, by his seclusion, by division of the dynasty, and by its final dissolution. That crumbling down is not the result of a sudden onslaught of rivals or enemies, but rather of the internal dynamics of progressive weakening, and of the perseverance of the new leaders, hungry for power and unweakened by luxuries: "They have the desert attitude and are poor and indigent" (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 131). Into Ibn Khaldun's description of the transfer of power between dynasties can be imputed a weakening of the allegiance of the protective strata to the old dynasty and the transfer of that allegiance to the new dynasty, already supported by staunch partisans (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 130-35). As indicated already, the bureaucratic dynamics are reinforced by fiscal, economic, and demographic changes – not discussed here – all of them in a scheme that can be called "magnificent dynamics."

No great wonder then that Ibn Khaldun warned that injustice, including injustice in taxation, by monopoly, and by confiscation of property, brings about the ruin of civilization (Ibn Khaldun 1958: II, 103-11), and that injustice was forbidden by the Prophet. By strong implication he urged rulers to appoint able officials who would avoid inflicting injustices. One may wonder if Ibn Khaldun desired to prevent the fulfillment of his own dialectic inevitability.

Part of Ibn Khaldun's magnificent dynamics can be paraphrased in terms of bureaucratic self-interest as follows: A young dynasty, whether vying for power or already established as royalty, attracts supporters, because it promises rewards from the spoils that result from the overthrow of the old dynasty. Its attractiveness is great and hence the feeling of loyalty it inspires is strong, creating a sense of an all-around community of interests. The early stages of a newly established dynasty create additional bonds through rising wealth and incomes. But once the redistribution of income and wealth is by and large

accomplished, the attraction of the dynasty wanes. This process is aggravated by the fiscal stringency that follows the conspicuous consumption indulged in by the ruler and his supporters, and by the need to pay the new class of defenders of the dynasty with current remuneration, unlike the arrangement with the earlier payments to supporters that consisted, at least partly, in promises—whether of financial payments, offices, security, adventure, or a feeling of social belonging is a moot question. In consequence, the succor given by the protective strata diminishes, the dynasty is left with its defenses impaired, and a new royal line becomes more promising from the point of view of the protective strata. The latter are now recruited by the new aspirants for royal power partly from the disillusioned supporters of the old dynasty, and partly from ambitious new individuals who crave for bureaucratic positions. The stage is thus set for a change of the rulers.

A minor ingredient of these dynamics may be noted and updated: While the dynasties change, the composition of the protective strata is likely to be much less variable. In fact, some key members of the royal bureaucracy may be the same individuals and/or families under different dynastic rulers, not unlike the phenomenon of individual bureaucratic permanence under the communist bureaucracy, where the leaders, or the top bureaucrats, change from time to time, as in the Soviet Union or in Poland, while the mass of the bureaucrats remains the same in composition, attitudes, and—most importantly—in behavior (Mieczkowski 1984).

Charles Issawi, in his interpretation of the *Muqaddimah*, stressed the existence of bureaucracy and its different kinds (Issawi 1950: II, 46). Issawi emphasized also that the sovereign's power, the top bureaucratic power, "can be secured only with the help of the followers on whom the ruler relies to secure the acquiescence of his people. . ." (Issawi 1950: 108), which interpretation of Ibn Khaldun fully agrees with my own observations in my contribution to the Mieczkowski-Zinam 1984 book of bureaucracy. Without his protective strata the top bureaucrat, be he a king, the president of a corporation, or a dean in academia, cannot remain long in his position.

An Overview

Ibn Khaldun was uncommonly observant, analytical, and rational. His frequent references to religion did not steer him away from empiricism: he had a wealth of supporting documentation with which to bolster his argument. His normative views were distinct from his political observations, and on that ground he found himself at odds with the religious establishment (Baali and Wardi 1981: 21-28). Certainly, no reigning bureaucrat could with equanimity embrace Ibn Khaldun's views, which spelled certain eventual disaster for himself or for his followers.

His description of the bureaucrats, of their protective strata, and of bureaucratic dynamics was realistic and incisive. He perceived early the fawning subordination of the protective strata, the tendency toward bureaucratic decadence, the negative natural selection of the elite that follows the original true leader, the self-serving and grasping attitude of the bureaucrats. Many contemporary authors on bureaucracy could learn a lot from that sage (cf. mieczkowski 1984: 107, 292-93).

The integration of the observations on bureaucracy into a dynamic framework of change is particularly interesting. Inherent in it is the role of "undersaving due" to spending on ostentatious luxury caused by artificial want-creation; production under conditions of division of labor, with bureaucrats as one of the functional categories, and where the ambitious and the unscrupulous gain their absolute advantage in the bureaucratic order; the cycle of rising and then falling fiscal revenues during the dynastic cycle; and changes in the general prosperity of the country, exacerbated in their downward cycle by elimination of private competition and the establishment of monopolies by the ruler. Also inherent in the operation of bureaucracy was the meting out of injustices and creation of injuries that lead to the downfall of the dynastic power. One feels that Ibn Khaldun's warnings about injustice, however strong, were only half hearted, because in his scheme of things injustice followed from bureaucratic power and was intimately linked to the dialectic dynamics. Given the selfishness of human nature, observed after the regime consolidates its position of power, the warnings about injustice and its effects sound ineffectual: Dysborgs are going to prevail anyway.

Ibn Khaldun was a liberal thinker, in favor of laissez-faire, opposed to monopoly, and opposed to what we would now call socialized production on grounds of incentives (Nashat 1945: 88). He pointed to the destructive effects of heavy taxation by government bureaucrats, and he was in favor of private initiative that tends to decentralize decision making and to diminish the undesirable bureaucratic tendencies. He stressed the self-interest of the bureaucrats, as well as their self-seeking, contrasted as it were to the nomadic desert spirit of tribal community, his *asabiyah*. Holding the latter as the central piece of the spirit of mankind, he declared the right of the subjects to remove the dynastic rulers, the bureaucrats, who offended against that spirit. Yet, even though he pointed out some of the problems of mankind, he was optimistic about its overall progress, a secular upward trend of development, accompanied by distinct cyclical fluctuations. This would mean that, despite the tendency to develop dysfunctional bureaucratic organizations, the dynamics of change will result in eventual, gradual improvement. In the global context of East, West, North, and South comparative bureaucratic systems, the jury is still out on that promise.

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