



CIVILIZATION AND RELIGION AN EXAMINATION OF WRITINGS ON ISLAMIC ETHICS

Ahmed Mohammed Salim ●

1

1/1 – It is generally recognized in our Arab Islamic culture that Ibn Khaldun (732-808 AH) was the founder of *‘ilm al ‘umran* (the science of economics/civilization) and its principal theorist in the context of the global cultural heritage. However, the question we would like to consider here is: Was Ibn Khaldun ahead of his time in his study of civilization and the role religion plays in it? In this connection we should perhaps bear in mind that, while *‘umran* – or civilization - is a topic that fits into the categories not only of Islamic ethics but also of politics, Ibn Khaldun sought to draw a distinction between *‘ilm al ‘umran*, on the one hand, and ethics and politics on the other. This was because “the science of politics is designed to manage the household or city in a way that complies with the demands of morality and wisdom, so that the public can adopt a way [of behaviour] that will preserve and sustain [its] quality [of life]. This is totally incompatible with the goals of *‘ilm al ‘umran*;

● Professor of Islamic Philosophy and Arab Thought at the Faculty of Arts – Tanta University.



since politics aims to show what ought to be, while *'ilm al 'umran* studies [situations] as they [actually] are.”¹

The same distinction applies to all books on ethics and politics written by al Farabi (d. 339 AH), Abu'l Hasan al 'Ameri (d. 381 AH), Ibn Miskawaih (d. 421 AH) and other Muslim ethical philosophers.

In his thesis on Ibn Khaldun Taha Hussein stresses that he was ahead of his time in dealing with the question of civilization within the framework of Muslim philosophical attitudes to the views of Plato and Aristotle. Taha Hussein also noted that all the Abbasid viziers in the third century were from Persia and brought their own customs and traditions to the Court. Some of the Persians Arabised well-known Persian proverbs and sayings in works such as the *Rasa'il (Letters)* of Ibn al Muqaffa ' (died 757 CE), and *Al Taj (The Crown)* and *Akhlaq al Muluk (The Morality of Kings)*. The spread of Persian political attitudes was not limited to the Muslim East but extended to the whole of the Islamic world as far as Spain.² Consequently, Taha Hussein maintains that Ibn Khaldun did not acquire his views on social politics out of thin air and that they were not the inspired product of a monumental genius.

Ibn Khaldun recognized that *Siraj al Muluk (The Lantern of Kings)* by Abu Bakr al Tartushi (died 520 AH) was the nearest thing to his own *Muqaddimah (Prolegomenon)*, since some of its chapters are similar to the chapters of the *Muqaddimah* (such as al Tartushi's comments on the qualities of good governance, the precepts that should be observed by rulers when administering their subjects' affairs, and his description of royal rankings and government positions, the state's finances and armed forces and the day-to-day running of the government). At the same time, however, Ibn Khaldun denies that al Tartushi made a genuine contribution in those fields and observes that he failed to hit the target, approach issues in a meaningful way or cite relevant evidence. Instead, he merely “assigned

1 Mohammed 'Abed al Jabri: *Al 'Asabiyyah wa'l Dawlah, Ma'alim Nadhariyyah Khalduniyyah fi'l Tarikh al Islami*, Markaz Dirasat al Wahdah al 'Arabiyyah, Beirut, 1990, p. 106.

2 Taha Hussein: *Falsafat Ibn Khaldun al Ijtima'iyyah*: translated by Mohammed 'Abdullah 'Anan, Dar al Kutub al Misriyyah, 2nd impression, 2006, pp. 54-55.

the issue a category and talked about it with great verbosity...He quoted from Persian and Indian sages and other eminent persons, but he did get down to the nub of the matter or produce actual proofs. Rather, he copied and compiled [from other sources] in the manner of a sermoniser, as if he was floating above the subject, so that he failed to get to grips with it or achieve his objective...”¹

In our view, Ibn Khaldun’s view of *Siraj al Muluk* as a book containing opinions and ideas about civilization is equally applicable to all other works with titles such as “*Mirrors of Princes*”, “*Advice to Kings*” or “*Royal Etiquette*”. In fact, every book of this kind contains piecemeal and random observations about civilization, the administration of state affairs and the practice of governance. Generally speaking, however, none of them sets out a theory of civilization in the way that Ibn Khaldun did, “because he [i.e. Ibn Khaldun] adopted a different approach all of his own which aimed to study phenomena as they are and depended for its results upon established proof, not persuasion through rhetoric”.²

If we want to understand the Muslim philosophers’ piecemeal approach to the question of civilization – and their reluctance to adopt a holistic, “Ibn Khaldunist style” view of it – perhaps we could consider Ibn Miskawaih’s view that “philosophers have not considered the development of the temporal world, because it is in the same class as the development of the physical [human] body, and when they looked at the superiority of the spirit over the body, they saw that [the former] had another world [within it], along with a beauty befitting that world, and [associated] creativity, sciences and courses of action that were harder and more gruelling than the ventures and hazards of the temporal world... Consequently they concerned themselves with the superior and better sphere.”³

1 Ibn Khaldun: *Al Muqaddimah*, edited by ‘Ali ‘Abdel Wahid al Wafi, al Hay’ah al ‘Aamah al Misriyyah li’l Kitab, Maktabat al Usrah, 2006, Part 1, p. 355.

2 Al Jabri (see above), pp. 106-107.

3 Ibn Miskawaih and al Tawhidi: *al Hawamil wa’l Shawamil*, edited by Ahmed Amin and Al Sayyid Ahmed Saqr, al Hay’ah al ‘Aamah al Misriyyah li’l Kitab, Maktabat al Usrah, 2009, p. 238.



1/2 – This leads us to the question: What is *‘umran* (civilization)? And what is *din* (religion)? And what are the limits of religion’s impact on the development of civilization? And how have books on Islamic ethics tackled the question of civilization and religion’s role in creating it? And, moreover, how have those books dealt with the relationship between civilization and the state? We need to answer all these questions - in the light of al Farabi’s, al ‘Ameri’s and Ibn Miskawaih’s writings on ethical philosophy, then in the way they are dealt with in books on Arab Islamic ethics, where we shall take al Mawardi as our model.

Lisan al ‘Arab (the most famous dictionary of the Arabic language, compiled by Ibn Manzur in the 13th century CE) lists numerous definitions of *‘umran* including, among others: “age; life; restoration; and building” and it quotes from the following verse from the Holy Qur’an which includes the word “*ista‘marakum*” (made you dwell/settled you, which comes from the same root as *‘umran*): “...He brought you into being from out of the earth and He made you dwell/settled you in it...” (i.e. He allowed you to develop/civilize it and derive your strength from it).¹ Ibn Khaldun defines *‘umran* as “dwelling together in a town or city or a person’s relationship with [his] associate; people satisfying their needs according to their natural disposition to co-operate in their daily lives.”²

“*Din*” – commonly translated into English as “religion” - is defined as: “custom and affair” while “*danahu*” (from the same root) means “he humiliated and rejected him”. “*Din*” also means “obedience”.

2

2/1 – The books on ethical philosophy by al Farabi, Ibn Miskawaih and al ‘Ameri can be seen as representing different branches of a common philosophical tree. All these philosophers were inspired by Plato and Aristotle and their approach is based first and foremost upon the intellect and reason. Their interest in civilization and its relationship with religion is driven by ethical motives and their works show that they all agree that

¹ Ibn Mandhur: *Lisan al ‘Arab* (*‘a – m – r*); electronic version.

² Al Jabri: *Al ‘Asabiyyah wa’l Dawlah*, p. 143.

the purpose of human civilization is to achieve happiness and “*kamal*”, (“completion” or “perfection”). They recognize that man is incapable of attaining any form of “perfection” on his own and without the assistance of numerous other people, and they also recognize that every human being has a natural disposition (and, by virtue of that disposition, a duty) to establish ties with a human being (or beings) other than himself. This is something that applies to all human beings. Furthermore, in order to attain this “perfection”, every individual needs to exist in proximity to other people and engage in social intercourse with them.¹ Hence when al Farabi speaks of the need for society, or engaging in social intercourse, he sees it as a means, not an end – that is, as a means to achieve the moral goal of “perfection” and happiness in this world and the next. In this way he “put ethics before politics, or rather, [this was how he envisaged] *al Madinah al Fadilah* (the Virtuous City).”²

Al ‘Ameri saw human society as existing in order to satisfy a need, because in his view no-one can satisfy his needs by himself without seeking the assistance of others, and the purpose of society is to promote happiness and a state of well-being. He maintained that “*is‘ad*” (creating happiness) [involves] the ruler instilling a desire in his subject for what makes him happy. This [entails] inducing the subject to work towards the goal that the political system has established; the goal is a state of well-being for every individual insofar as he is capable of [attaining] it...”³

Ibn Miskawaih, who was influenced particularly by Plato’s views, observed that there must be co-operation between individual members of society so that they can reap the benefits – whether it be driven by the intellect, rage or sensual desire – and so that the community can enjoy the pleasure of living together and attain happiness.⁴ This is because man is

1 Al Farabi: *Tahsil al Sa‘adah*, edited by Ja‘far Aal Yasin, Dar al Andalus, Beirut, 2nd impression, 1983, p. 61.

2 Ahmed Subhi: *Al Falsafah al Akhlaqiyyah fi’l Fikr al Islami*, Dar al Ma‘aref, Cairo, 1983 edition, p. 13.

3 Al ‘Ameri: *Al Sa‘adah wa’l Is‘ad*, edited by Ahmed ‘Abdel Halim ‘Atiyah, Dar al Thaqafah li’l Nashr wa’l Tawzi’, Cairo, 1991, p. 230.

4 Najj al Takriti: *Al Falsafah al Akhlaqiyyah al Aflatuniyyah ‘inda Mufakkiri’l Islam*, Dar al Andalus, Beirut, 2nd impression, 1982, p. 348.



by nature a communal being and does not live alone or in isolation as birds and wild animals do. As far as the latter are concerned, they are content to live with the facilities and sources of livelihood which Allah has granted them in order to serve their interests. Man, on the other hand, is naked and powerless and can only find sustenance or serve his interests through co-operation and association with other people. And that co-operation and association with others is civilization.¹

Miskawaih attributes the emergence of civilization to need and expediency, because “one of them [i.e. a single person] on his own is powerless to obtain all his [needs] by himself”. Thus necessity leads disparate people to come together and live in harmony as if they were a single person. It is this same factor that unites a person’s different organs and body parts in a single action which benefits him.²

So ethical philosophy sees the attainment of human “perfection” and happiness as being the moral purpose of civilization. At the same time, however, its focus is upon satisfying human society’s essential needs and producing benefits for all its individual members. Hence the books that have been written on this subject predate Ibn Khaldun in their observations on satisfying human needs. However, for them the primary goal was the achievement of happiness as a human moral value, while Ibn Khaldun saw the aim of civilization as “satisfying the need for food, since [an individual] human being is incapable of meeting his need for food by himself”.³

In al Farabi’s view, people co-operate first and foremost in order to satisfy their lives’ desires and acquire that “perfection” which man’s natural disposition was created to achieve. However, Ibn Khaldun does not recognize this ideal “perfection” endorsed by al Farabi, since in his opinion people co-operate mainly in order to obtain food, and also to defend themselves against wild animals and attacks by other humans.

1 Ibn Miskawaih and al Tawhidi: *al Hawamil wa’l Shawamil*, p. 236.

2 Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq wa Tathir al A’raq*, edited with a commentary by Ibn al Khatib, al Matba’ah al Misriyyah, undated, p. 149.

3 Ibn Khaldun: *Al Muqaddimah*, Part 1, p. 340.

So al Farabi does not attach huge importance to the material aspect of people's lives. In fact, he probably regards the material element as the means to enabling people to attain their non-material goals – that is, the absolute “perfection” which leads to happiness. In al Farabi's view happiness is to be found through the power of reason, and this can only be acquired through reflection and thought. Ibn Khaldun, on the other hand, sees the material side as being a more important element in human society than the non-material side, and sees the happiness produced through satisfying man's material demands as being greater than the happiness resulting from a person being immersed in abstract thought. Indeed, he states clearly that some ordinary people and “practical thinkers” may be materially more amply provided for and happier than “the people of knowledge and logic”.¹ However, according to 'Ali al Wardi, when Ibn Khaldun read al Farabi's *Al Madinah al Fadilah* he was impressed by what he had to say about man's need for civilization in order to satisfy his needs and achieve “perfection”.

2/2 – One significant area of interest in the writings of these philosophers is the moral relationship between individual members of society. Both al 'Ameri and Miskawaih focused upon the importance of establishing ties of comradeship and affection between members of the community as a strong force for stability and “civilizational cohesion”. Al 'Ameri quotes Plato's observation that “it is the king's duty to direct his attention to spreading comradeship and harmony between the people of the city, since every city in which there is no comradeship or harmony between its people will be devoid of light, orderliness, permanence and vigour. The main factor leading to comradeship is social intercourse - examples of social intercourse include eating and drinking together. The second factor is intermarriage for the sake of procreation, and the third factor is (charity) and benevolence.”²

Al 'Ameri stresses the importance of charity in strengthening bonds between people and characterises it as effort and sacrifice for the sake

¹ 'Ali al Wardi: *Mantiq Ibn Khaldun*, Dar al Kunuz al Adabiyah, Beirut, 4th impression, 1994.

² Al 'Ameri: *Al Sa'adah wa'l Is'ad*, p. 273.



of others: “Every individual member of the city must understand that nobody should limit their solicitude or their wealth to their own families and offspring. He has an obligation to ensure that whatever he needs for himself, his family or his offspring is also available for others ... The people of the city need to work together on essential matters, as well as on useful matters, so that they will become as a single body. If one of them suffers pain, the other will also suffer pain.”¹

At the same time, al ‘Ameri describes the causes of disunity and conflict that weaken the structure of civilization in the city. He maintains that they are to be found in differences “between sects, disputes, competitiveness in amassing wealth, mutual boasting and ‘*asabiyyah* (tribalism and partisanship)”.²

Notice that al ‘Ameri differs from Ibn Khaldun when defining the negative part played by religion and ‘*asabiyyah* in causing the disintegration of civilization – that is to say, the destruction of unity caused by the spread of religious sectarianism and mutual partisan/tribal vituperation. In his view, when people follow the Sunnah and the Shariah this creates a strong bond between individuals. Moreover, he maintains that the way to prevent sectarian disputes is for “people not to be left to abandon the explicit [meaning of] the Sunnah [in favour of] a kind of *ta’wil* (esoteric interpretation), and for anyone who [seeks to] engage in objectionable *ta’wil* to be subjected to a kind of punishment. And if he is not deterred [by this], he should be exiled from the country before he corrupts others. And if exile is not considered appropriate he should be imprisoned.”³

Miskawaih stresses that human society is founded upon love, because the whole system of existence, well-being and probity depends upon it and in his view love is a product of man’s naturally sociable inclination: “This is because man is sociable by nature; he is not savage and he does not shy away from other people. It should be recognized that natural human

1 Ibid. p. 273.

2 Ibid. pp. 273-274.

3 Ibid. pp. 273-274.

sociability is something we should aspire to and acquire from other members of our [human] race... Because it is the starting point of all [forms of] love”.¹

Miskawaih describes the positive part religion and the Shariah have to play in laying the foundations of love and sociability between individuals. Religion established the Shariah and the good conduct and practice which bring people together. And the Shariah has made it incumbent upon people to meet five times every day in their mosques – an act which has enabled them to develop a natural social relationship. Furthermore, it has required the people of the city and their families to meet once a week on a specific day in a mosque capable of accommodating them (i.e. the Friday Prayer), and it has also obliged the people of the city to meet their fellow men from the surrounding villages and hamlets twice a year at the Eid prayer ground so that they can renew their sense of community and mutual affection on an institutional basis. And in addition to all this, it also requires them to perform the Hajj once in a lifetime – at an unspecified time and date - when they will come together on the Holy Ground in Makkah and enjoy the natural pleasure of each other’s company and the benefits such a meeting will bring, while renewing their mutual love of the Shariah and glorifying Allah for the Guidance He has granted them.²

In this situation, it is the duty of the person in charge of the city’s affairs to spread goodwill and love between its inhabitants. However, in Miskawaih’s opinion this has to be on the basis of reason and religious faith: “This required unity and this desired love can only be achieved on the basis of correct opinions produced by sound minds and strong beliefs, which [in turn] can only exist through [the agency of] religions which seek the Face of Allah, Glory be to Him”.³

2/3 – If Ibn Khaldun believed that a state and governance are the tangible manifestations of civilization and that civilization preserves and sustains them, philosophical wisdom should dictate that they cannot be

¹ Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq wa Tathir al A'raq*, p. 153.

² Ibid. p. 154.

³ Ibid. p. 145.



separated from each other. A state without civilization is inconceivable, while civilization without a state and governance is impossible.¹ This is why ethical philosophers talk about “*dawlat al madinah*” (“the city-state”) and how it is established, since it is the instrument which preserves civilization and realises the goals of happiness.

In *Al Madinah al Fadilah (The Virtuous City)* al Farabi sees the establishment of civilization in his city as being produced through a linkage between the religious dimension and the political and ethical dimensions. In that book there are twenty-five chapters about Allah and His attributes, the fact that all creatures owe their origin to Him, the “ranks of existence”, the human psyche, and revelation and visions. These are all concepts that are an integral part of the structure of the Virtuous City and show us that religion has a fundamental role in the creation of that city. Then in Chapter Twenty-Six he asserts that human communities see happiness and “perfection” as their goal. Of these human communities some are “perfect”, or “complete”, while others are “imperfect”, or “incomplete”. There are three categories of “completeness”. The “major” category is the entire world community; the “medium” category is the community of a nation in part of the globe; and the “lesser” category is the community of a city in part of a nation. The “incomplete” category includes the communities living in a village, a hamlet, a street or a house.

In al Farabi’s view “the optimum good and the ultimate ‘completeness’, or ‘perfection’, is achieved in a city rather than in a community that is ‘lower’ than it... A city whose community comes together to co-operate in things through which it will attain happiness is in fact ‘*Al Madinah al Fadilah*’ (‘The Virtuous City’), while a nation whose cities co-operate to attain happiness is ‘*Al Ummah al Fadilah*’ (‘The Virtuous Nation’). Similarly, ‘*Al Ma’murah al Fadilah*’ (‘The Virtuous World’) exists if the nations within it co-operate in order to attain happiness”.²

While happiness is the goal in al Farabi’s “Virtuous City”, al ‘Ameri divides cities on the basis of moral values. For him, civilization is important

1 Al Jabri: *Al ‘Asabiyyah wa’l Dawlah*, p. 109.

2 Al Farabi: *Al Madinah al Fadilah*, p. 124.

as a condition for enabling human society to exist. Quoting Plato on the different kinds of cities he says: “The virtuous city is the one in which the people of virtue dominate. There are also ignoble cities in which the dominant people are the ones who indulge in the animal pleasures of eating, drinking and women; and there are wise cities in which the people of wisdom dominate; and there are ignorant cities in which the population do not have much knowledge of the worthy sciences”.¹

In his examination of different types of cities and civilizations, Ibn Miskawaih observes that there are cities that are “*amarah*” (characterised by growth and development) and cities which are “*kharab*” (in a state of ruinous desolation), and that “a growing and developing city owes its condition to the existence of a large number of helpers and the spread of justice among them through the power of the ruler who regulates their affairs. He preserves their status and protects them from disasters. By ‘large number of helpers’ I mean co-operation and intentions to perform many actions; some of these are necessary to sustain life, some are useful for ensuring good living conditions and some are useful for embellishing life. However, if a city lacks one of these three features, it will be “*kharab*”; if it lacks two of them – I mean good living conditions and embellishment of life – it will be in an extreme state of “*kharab*”, because a dearth of the things that are necessary to sustain life belongs to the domain of ascetics who do not develop the world and cannot be counted among the builders and civilizers”.²

2/4 – As the character of the king/chief is the central character of the city-state, great care is taken to shape it and define its functions, because he is the noblest person in the city and the people round him are assigned their status according to their positions in the nobility rankings. Al Farabi stipulates that the leadership should go to the person who has an actual natural disposition to assume it. His rule should be the noblest of rules and the conditions governing it are: that he should be sound in body, have good understanding and imagination, have a good memory, be

¹ Al ‘Ameri: *Al Sa’adah wa’l Is’ad*, p. 287.

² Ibn Miskawaih and al Tawhidi: *al Hawamil wa’l Shawamil*, pp. 236-237.



astute and articulate, have a love of knowledge and learning, be moderate in his eating and sexual habits, be able to exercise discretion, not be overly attached to dirhams, dinars and other worldly possessions, love justice and those who enforce it, hate injustice and tyranny, be resolute, respect the Law, be good at drawing correct conclusions, have a good understanding of reality and be physically steadfast when waging war.¹

Al ‘Ameri endorses the principle of leadership, because most people recognize duty and obligation but are not led to it voluntarily. Hence it is necessary to have a ruler to rule those who will not be led to assume their obligations through gentle persuasion, but need to be compelled to do so by force.²

Al Farabi maintained that if the qualities described above do not all exist in one person, the leadership can be in the hands of more than one individual. Al ‘Ameri rejects this and maintains that al Farabi’s position “makes no sense and it is not permissible for there to be more than one. Leadership [requires a person with] opinions and a person who has no opinion is not fit for leadership”.³

Al ‘Ameri’s and Ibn Miskawaih’s descriptions of kingship were based on the old Persian traditions and they saw the relationship between a king and his subject as a paternal one or as similar to the relationship between the head and the body – in the sense that it should be able to institute reforms and change in society. Thus part of the king’s role was “to promote friendship and harmony between the people of the city and protect them from schism and disintegration. The way to achieve friendship and harmony is through good comradeship, good social relations, rejecting envy and competitiveness, and avoiding disputes and conflicts”.⁴

2/5 – Conversely, when the bonds of affection and comradeship between the individual members of a single society begin to break down,

¹ Al Farabi: *Al Madinah al Fadilah*, pp. 127-130.

² Al ‘Ameri: *Al Sa’adah wa’l Is’ad*, p. 237.

³ Ibid. p. 242.

⁴ Ibid. p. 248.

justice must be reinforced in order to restore the balance between them. According to Miskawaih: “It can almost reach the point where the affection between ruler and ruled, and rich and poor is threatened by recriminations and censure because of dissension, and because everyone expects to be remunerated by someone else if he does not find remuneration by himself. Consequently, they distrust each other’s intentions. This leads to dilatoriness [due to a lack of commitment], then mutual recrimination. This [in turn] brings to an end the demand for justice, as well as everyone’s sense of satisfaction with regard to what they feel they are entitled to receive from others...”¹

Al ‘Ameri agrees with al Farabi’s view that a ruler must be just and cites the Prophet’s Hadiths enjoining the virtues of justice and equity, such as: “The best of Allah’s servants is a just, gentle imam, and the worst of Allah’s servants is in the class of a despotic, uncouth imam”, and “The just shall be in *minbars* (pulpits) of light on the Day of Rising”. In al ‘Ameri’s opinion a king’s most important tasks are *‘amarah* (building and development; in this sense with the connotation of promoting prosperity) and defence. “Defence is through the intellect and *‘amarah* is through justice”.² Ibn Miskawaih points out that justice is not just an aspect of virtue, but virtue in its entirety, while injustice is not just an aspect of vice but vice in its entirety. Moreover, “It is through justice that cities develop [and prosper] and it is through injustice that cities fall into desolation and ruin”.³ He supports his statement by observing that Islam and the Shariah enjoin justice and class it as a fundamental element of the Faith.

Since security is one of the essential conditions for human civilization to prosper, the king must of necessity maintain security. This is because a lack of security leads to turmoil. Kings have an obligation to “protect and guard – to protect against wilful enemies and to guard by exposing trouble-makers and intimidating rebel insurgents”.⁴

¹ Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq wa Tathir al A’raq*, pp. 156-157.

² Al ‘Ameri: *Al Sa’adah wa’l Is’ad*, p. 250.

³ Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq wa Tathir al A’raq*, p. 127.

⁴ Al ‘Ameri: *Al Sa’adah wa’l Is’ad*, pp. 249-250.



Miskawaih's view of a virtuous king is that, "if he provides security for [his] flock, spreads justice, expands development, protects women, defends the territory, opposes injustice and provides people with what they want for their welfare and daily lives, he will have acted rightly towards every one of his subjects"¹.

2/6 – If religion helps lay the foundations of love and justice in human society and plays a part in developing the city-state, are these the only roles it has to play in building civilization?

We find that al Farabi bases his city on metaphysical creedal principles and believes that "everything philosophy offers [man] in the form of reason (or lack of it), religion offers him in the form of imagination. And everything that philosophy offers in the form of certain proofs, religion offers in the form of conviction".²

Al 'Ameri maintains that the first duty of a "*malik*" (king) is to establish the religion, because Allah created kings to carry out His Will: "The first duty of a king is to establish the religion ... and ensure that his subjects follow it. All goodness [- in whatever form -] is [to be found] in obedience to Allah, Glory be to Him. Anushirwan said that a king's mainstay is the Faith and that a weak religion means a weak king".³

So religion helps bring human society together, while accepting obedience to One God helps unite the individual members of human society into a single community.

In Miskawaih's view, the Caliph is the man who defends the Faith, while "the person responsible for upholding the Sunnah and safeguarding the Shariah's other functions ... is the Imam. His job is to perform the role of king. In the old days the only person called a '*malik*' was the man who defended the Faith and upheld its status, commands and prohibitions. Anyone who failed in this respect ... was not [considered] qualified to hold the title of '*malik*', because the Faith is a Divine condition which

¹ Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq wa Tathir al A'raq*, p. 132.

² Al Farabi: *Tahsil al Sa'adah*, pp. 90-91.

³ Al 'Ameri: *Al Sa'adah wa'l Is'ad*, p. 249.

leads people voluntarily to the ultimate happiness, and the ‘*malik*’ is the guardian of that Divine condition”.¹ Hence, failure to observe the *hudud* (boundaries) of the religion causes the mainstays of society to break down, and if the “*malik*” abandons his responsibility, “the state of the Faith will change and people will find themselves free to indulge in their baser instincts. And they will find many are prepared to help them to do so. Happiness becomes its opposite and conflict and mutual hatred arise between the [people]. And this leads to disunity, disintegration and the collapse of the system demanded by the Lawgiver [i.e. Allah] ...”².

Hence books on ethics and morality highlight the role of religion in society by showing that it helps establish law, order and unity between individual members of the community while reinforcing the foundations of both governance and civilization (*‘umran*). This was stressed by Ibn Khaldun when he noted that “religion established the body politic through the Shariah and its provisions, which serve the interests of civilization both overtly and covertly. [On the other hand,] competitiveness and mutual envy between the *‘ahl al ‘asabiyyah* (people who put tribal and clan loyalties above loyalty to the community as a whole) will cause religion to lose its character...”³

2/7 – Ibn Miskawaih maintains that affluence and the arts are conducive to a thriving civilization and that “developing the earth” applies not only to livelihood but also to the quality of life and well-being. In his view these things can only be achieved by taking risks and being prepared to face adversity and undergo frightening situations. If people are only interested in satisfying their greed, and if they lose their curiosity and sense of wonderment about life and just follow established routines, they will all end up by becoming “ascetics”. (In other words, they will no longer enjoy the pleasures and benefits of civilization.) And if they do, this will mean an end to the “good life” and they will find themselves living in squalor like the inhabitants of small impoverished villages or the people who live in tents and shacks.

¹ Ibn Miskawaih: *Tahdhib al Akhlaq*, p. 154.

² Ibid. p. 105.

³ Ibn Khaldun: *Al Muqaddimah*, Part, p. 518.



This is the situation that is described as “*kharab al mudun*” (“urban ruin and desolation”)¹.

2/8 – Suggesting how it would be possible to create a perfect world, Miskawaih stipulates three conditions:

Firstly, cultivating the land, growing crops and making the most of the earth’s potential and resources. This would include using the metals and minerals found on or in it such as stone and iron to make tools for ploughing and grinding grain, and irrigating the soil with water from the springs and rivers.

Secondly, having armed forces equipped with weapons to repel enemies of the kind we have described so that the people can enjoy a secure livelihood. The army would be supported by artisans and craftsmen who would equip their horses and manufacture their defensive weapons.

Thirdly, having the facilities to transport goods and people from one country to another, whether overland or by sea.

The “good life” is conditional upon these three elements, which will be fulfilled by people with the necessary knowledge and skills to supply them².

3

3/1 – We find a distinctly different approach to Arab-Islamic ethics and morality in *Adab al Dunya wa’l Din (The Ethics of Religion and This World)* by al Mawardi (died 450 AH), which draws its inspiration from the ancient Arab heritage and the Islamic religious tradition of the Book and the Sunnah. It is different from most of al Mawardi’s other books on “Mirrors for Princes”, in which the theories on political administration are of Persian origin.

¹ Ibn Miskawaih and al Tawhidi: *al Hawamil wa’l Shawamil*, p. 237.

² Ibid. p. 237.

In *Adab al Dunya wa'l Din* much of al Mawardi's focus is on human civilization and the role of religion in shaping it. He sees that Allah with His power and wisdom "created man with His planning and organisation, and established his natural disposition with His evaluation. Among the subtlest things He planned and organised, and the most wondrous things He determined, was His creation of mankind in a state of need and powerlessness so that He would be Unique in being free from need, and the Only Being with power, and thus through His power make us feel that He is [the] Creator, and teach us – through His freedom from need – that He is the Sustainer. So we submit to Him in obedience, voluntarily and in awe"¹.

Thus al Mawardi shows how man's need is linked to the absolute power of Allah and explains this on the basis of Qur'anic *ayat* (verses): "Man's nature is such that his power exists within the context of his own kind, and seeking help [from Allah] is a necessary attribute of his nature and an innate feature which exists within his essential self. Hence the Most High said: 'And man was created weak'. So Allah the Most High singled man out as a creature with many needs. His powerlessness is [in fact] a blessing to him and an act of kindness towards him, [designed to ensure] that the ignominy of need and the humiliation of powerlessness prevent him from [exercising] the oppression of one who is free from need and exercises [his] power unjustly. This is because oppression is [a characteristic] firmly embedded in man's nature[and emerges] if he has no needs, and injustice takes possession of him if he has power. Allah the Most High declared this of him when He said: 'No, [but] indeed man transgresses, because he sees himself as self-sufficient'"².

In linking man to his nature and his status as a social being by considering him in relation to his Creator – i.e. Allah, the Most High – (thereby showing that need is a sign of his recognition of the Divinity and that man's poverty is an indication of his need for the Infinitely Wealthy, Glory be to Him), al Mawardi is looking at human civilization

¹ Al Mawardi (Abu'l Hasan): *Adab al Dunya wa'l Din*, edited by Mustafa al Saqa, al Hay'ah al 'Aammah li Qusur al Thaqafah, Cairo, 2004, p. 116.

² Ibid. p. 116.



and the temporal world within the context of their relationship to the next world. What he is in fact saying is that Allah has linked man's need and powerlessness in this world, which is the "*Dar al Taklif*" - or "House of Obligation to carry out Allah's Commands" - to his destiny in the next world, which is the "*Dar li'l Jaza*", or "House of Requital". Therefore man needs to direct some of his attention to the affairs of this world so that he can equip himself for the next. The Messenger (PBUH) said: "The best of you is not the one who abandons this world for [the sake of] the next, or the next world for [the sake of] this one. But the best of you is the one who takes from this and from this".¹ Therefore when the Book and the Sunnah stress the need to take one's portion from this world, this is an incentive to develop human civilization and play an active part in the life of this world.

Al Mawardi asserts that the need for human beings to come together as a social group is a divinely-ordained Law based upon the law of differences between human beings in terms of their wealth or poverty, as expressed in the Qur'anic *ayats*: "[And Allah has preferred some of you above others in wealth](#)" and "[... but they will not cease to differ. Except whom your Lord has given mercy, and for that He created them](#)".

In al Mawardi's view "This world has never been a place designed to bring happiness to all its people, nor a place where one should shun all those upon it, because shunning all of them [leads to] ruin, while trying to make them all happy [leads to] corruption and depravity. It is because of the differences between them that people work together, help each other and co-operate. If all were equal, nobody would find a way to seek the help of another. And as we have described, people have needs and are powerless, so they would suffer loss and destruction. However, when there are differences between them they come together to co-operate and work together to satisfy their needs"².

While al Mawardi reveals the incentives for civilization in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, he also sees that working for the benefit of civilization and the material world serves the interest of religion, while perverting

¹ Ibid. pp. 117-118.

² Ibid. p. 119.

civilization and the material world corrupts religion: “In a sound, healthy world all its people are sound and healthy because they enjoy security and faith [plays an important part in their lives], but a corrupt, depraved world corrupts all of its people because they enjoy little security and their faith is weak... There is nothing more beneficial than the things that strengthen people’s faith and give them security, while there is nothing more harmful than the things that weaken their faith and undermine their security”¹.

3/2 – As sound, healthy civilization is important for both the world and the Faith, al Mawardi examines the factors that are conducive to a healthy society and civilization and enable it to live in order and harmony. At the same time, he seeks to identify the factors that are beneficial to man, (such as a leader who recognizes he has a mission to spread the benefits of civilization and acts accordingly). He concludes that the well-being of the world depends upon certain specific principles: a religion that is followed [by the people], a powerful ruler, universal justice, security for all, continuous prosperity and hope for the future.

1 – A religion that is followed by the people: Al Mawardi regards religion as one of the main factors for ensuring the well-being of the world and human civilization. It alone serves the interest of the next world and its significance is that “diverts people from their baser desires and turns hearts away from wilfulness, so that it is able to subjugate innermost thoughts, control consciences, and monitor psyches in their solitude and advise them in adversity. These things are impossible in the absence of religion, and people can only enjoy well-being when they are present”².

2 – A powerful ruler, or strong authority: Because people have a tendency to disagree and engage in disputes with one another, “their affairs need to be entrusted to the authority of a ruler who will oversee them, [under whom] people will be guided to obey him and whose policies will inspire them. He should be skilled in [gaining the] obedience [of his subjects] and a competent political operator. Above all, he must be true to the [principles upon which] kingdoms have been founded and [their]

¹ Ibid. p. 119.

² Ibid. p. 120.



subjects and interests are managed, because he is the ‘camel’s halter’ that leads to truth and justice and ensures the well-being of the people”.¹ He is the strong authority; it is through fear of him that the different trends [in society] become united and it is through awe of him that disparate hearts are brought together, while through his overwhelming power [would-be] despotic hands are restrained. In al Mawardi’s view, fear of authority is a stronger force than reason or religion, and he cites various Hadiths of the Prophet on the importance of a just ruler.

In carrying out his duties the ruler of the *Ummah* (Islamic Nation/ Community) has several responsibilities that are related to religion. They include: “(1) – Safeguarding the Faith from attempts to pervert it, while enjoining [his subjects] to act on its [precepts]. (2) – Defending the *Ummah* against an enemy of the Faith or anyone who abuses life or property. (3) – Developing the territories [under his rule] by working for their welfare and improving their roads. (4) – Treating the funds under his control in accordance with the recognized practices of the Faith without mishandling the way in which they are taken and given. (5) – Dispensing justice in a fair and equitable manner. (6) Enforcing “*hudud*” (divinely ordained punishments) on those who merit them without being either too harsh or too lenient. (7) – When choosing men to act on matters on his behalf, he should ensure that they are qualified to carry out their duties competently and honestly.”²

3 – Universal justice: The soundness of the ruling authority and the development of the territories (under its command) are dependent upon justice. Universal justice “calls for unity and induces obedience. It enables the country to be developed, wealth to increase and procreation to flourish. It provides security for the ruling authority. Injustice and oppression is the quickest way to destroy the land and corrupt people’s consciences, because it knows no limits...”³

¹ Al Mawardi: *Tashil al Nadhar wa Ta’jil al Dhafar*, edited by Ridwan al Sayyid, Dar al ‘Uloom, Beirut, 1st impression, 1987, p. 97.

² Al Mawardi: *Adab al Dunya wa’l Din*, p. 123.

³ Ibid. p. 125.

4 – Security: Al Mawardi stresses that security plays an important role in helping human civilization to thrive and asserts that it is the ruler’s most vital function to ensure it. There must be “general security which inspires the people with confidence, [encourages] the spread of [new] initiatives, and provides peace of mind for the innocent and comfort for the weak. A person [living] in fear can know no rest, nor can a person [constantly] on his guard feel confidence ... because fear deters people from [fostering] their interests and restricts their [scope for] action ... If justice leads to security, oppression is one of the products of a lack of justice”¹.

5 – Prosperity (“*khisb al dar*”, literally, “fertility/abundance of the home”): By this expression, al Mawardi means a high standard of living and a comfortable life. The consequence of this is that “people’s [horizons] are widened and both rich and poor benefit. People are less inclined to be envious of each other ... They will be charitable and sociable in their mutual relations, and this is one of the main factors leading to sound and healthy worldly [affairs] and the proper regulation of people’s conditions. This is because prosperity leads to freedom from want, and freedom from want leads to good faith, trust and generosity”².

6 – Hope for the future: Al Mawardi believes that hope is the cornerstone of civilization, on the basis of the statement by the Prophet (PBUH) that “hope is a Mercy from Allah to my *Ummah*. Without it a planter would not plant a tree and a mother would not suckle her infant”. Hope, he says, encourages people to work for the sake of future generations, not just the present day. Without it, a person would only look to satisfy his daily needs and basic essentials and this would lead to desolation and ruin³.

3/3 – After pondering over how to set the world to rights, al Mawardi turns his attention to man himself, whose well-being he believes depends upon three conditions: a compliant spirit, communal harmony and sufficient material resources. Ridwan al Sayyid sums up his position as follows: “Al Mawardi believes that in any human group that has a degree

¹ Ibid. p. 128.

² Ibid. p. 129.

³ Ibid. pp. 130-131.



of sustainability and continuity there must be three elements: the physical element (the individual), the anthropological element (blood ties) between the individuals, and the material and economic element (the means needed in order to sustain a livelihood)”¹.

1 – A compliant spirit (*nafs muti’ah*): Al Mawardi uses this term because if it obeys its “owner” he possesses it, while if it disobeys him it possesses him. For a human being, there are two aspects to “*taa’ah*” (obedience/compliance).. The first of these is “*nus-h*” (literally “good counsel”) and the second is “*inqiyad*” (compliance/submission). It is “*nus-h*” when a person looks at things as they really are, so that he recognizes good conduct as good conduct and approves of it and recognizes transgression as transgression and disapproves of it².

2 – Communal harmony (*ulfah jami’ah*): This is the second condition of human and communal well-being. In al Mawardi’s view, harmony is not an innate instinct but the truest indicator of man’s ability to rise above his baser nature. The Prophet (PBUH) described a Believer as an “*ilf ma’luf*” (“familiar friend”) and said that *ulfah* (harmony/intimacy) is determined by five factors: *din* (religion), *nasab* (kinship), *musaharah* (relationship by marriage), *mawaddah* (love/friendship) and *birr* (kindness and charity)³.

A – *Din* (religion): Al Mawardi regards religion as *ulfah*’s prime contributory factor, but he also recognizes that it can cause disunity and disagreement. He states that religion “leads to mutual assistance and deters the severing of relations [between people]. The religiously observant may belong to different schools of thought and hold different opinions, and enmity and disagreements may arise – as happens between people who disagree over religion... When religion and society work together, this is the strongest cause of *ulfah*, while disagreements over [religion] are the strongest cause of disunity. If the followers of different religions and sects are equally matched, and no one party is stronger than the other, the enmity and hatred between them is greater, because enmity

¹ Ridwan al Sayyid: Introduction to al Mawardi’s *Tashil al Nadhar wa Ta’jil al Dhafar*, p. 10.

² Al Mawardi: *Adab al Dunya wa’l Din*, p. 132.

³ Ibid. p. 133 and Ridwan al Sayyid: Introduction to *Tashil al Nadhar*, p. 11.

due to disagreement is compounded by the mutual envy of equals and competitiveness between peers”¹.

B- *Nasab* (kinship): Kinship is *ulfah*'s second contributory factor. Kinship comprises the relationship between a parent and a child or a blood tie between one person and another, and these bonds create *ulfah*, because the mutual attachment felt by blood relations and the warm feelings engendered by their kinship ties lead to mutual support and affection between them and deter them from abandoning each other and drifting apart. This prevents strangers from imposing their sway over them. It is reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: “If blood relatives come in contact with each other they feel a mutual attachment”².

However, Ridwan al Sayyid observes: “Kinship may encounter obstacles which prevent *ulfah* and lead to estrangement which is incompatible with it. Thus he [i.e. al Mawardi] believes that if the clan forms the nucleus of a natural community, because of its rejectionist partisan tribalism it will be unable to reach the stage of [becoming] a ‘civil society’. Hence there must be an additional factor which enhances it and opens up broader horizons for it. Al Mawardi believes [that additional factor] is religion and he regards it not only as a fundamental principle, but – [when seen] within a social context – as a cause of *birr*”³.

C – *Musaharah* (relationship by marriage): This is *ulfah*'s third contributory factor. Here al Mawardi cites this *ayat* from the Holy Qur'an: “And of His signs is that He created from ourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy”, and adds: “The Arabs still have a tendency to gravitate towards the ‘distant’ [i.e. people who are not blood relatives] and enemies become reconciled through marriage relationships, with the result that aversion becomes congeniality and an enemy becomes a true friend. Marriage between two people can become *ulfah* between their two tribes and a faithful [mutual] commitment between their two clans”⁴.

1 Ibid. pp. 133-134.

2 Ibid. p. 134.

3 Ridwan al Sayyid: Introduction to *Tashil al Nadhar*, pp. 12-13.

4 Al Mawardi: *Adab al Dunya wa'l Din*, p. 139.



D – *Mawaddah* (love/friendship): This is *ulfah*'s fourth contributory factor. It generates sincerity and harmony and this in turn leads to loyalty and protectiveness. This is the highest class of *ulfah* and the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) established the ties of brotherhood between his Companions in order to reinforce the *ulfah* between them and strengthen the mutual support and assistance they extended to each other¹.

E – *Birr* (kindness and charity): This is *ulfah*'s fifth contributory factor. *Birr* is something that is not dependent upon kinship or “virtual kinship”. Nor is it necessarily related to love or friendship. It is a purely social activity which is inspired by a recognition of necessity and championed by the *din*.² Al Mawardi maintains that *birr* imbues people's hearts with kindness and benevolence; hence Allah the Most High endorses it and compares it to *taqwa* (piety/devoutness), as in the *ayat*: “**And co-operate in *birr* and *taqwa***”, since *taqwa* earns a person the pleasure of Allah, while *birr* earns him the pleasure of his fellow men. And a person who combines the pleasure of Allah with the pleasure of his fellow men will have attained happiness³.

Al Mawardi maintains that there are two types of *birr*: *silah* and *ma'ruf*. *Silah* (literally “connection”) means donating money for worthy causes without expectation of recompense, and this leads to magnanimity and generosity of spirit and prevents a person from falling into niggardliness and arrogance.⁴ There are also two types of *ma'ruf* (literally “beneficence”): *ma'ruf* in word and *ma'ruf* in deed. *Ma'ruf* in word means courtesy in speech, having a sunny temperament and uttering expressions of warmth and affection. This in turn leads to good character and a gracious nature, though – like generosity - it should be kept within reasonable limits; otherwise people will find fault with it. *Ma'ruf* in deed, which means sacrificing time and effort to provide assistance to those in need and helping out in times of misfortune, engenders a desire for the welfare of

¹ Ibid. p. 146.

² Ridwan al Sayyid: Introduction to *Tashil al Nadhar*, p. 17.

³ Al Mawardi: *Adab al Dunya wa'l Din*, p. 168.

⁴ Ibid. p. 168.

others.¹ In his observations on *birr*, al Mawardi laid great stress on its Islamic roots and the role of religion in promoting it.

In his interpretation of al Mawardi's ideas Ridwan al Sayyid classes religion as being superior to all other *ulfah* elements, while recognizing that it can also be a cause of schism and fragmentation rather than a force for harmony and order in society. He also concedes that the human spirit may be reluctant to obey another human being and that the laws of *ulfah* – when seen in a communal context - are not the converse of disintegration and schism, but a means that allows a balance to be established so that man can coexist with them. At the same time, kinship is not only the product of blood ties and family relationships, but a means of confronting the “antithetical other”, and situations may arise that lead to recalcitrance and enmity. Indeed, the connections created by *musaharah* may break down, so that instead of ties we find estrangement and instead of *ulfah* we find hostility.

Relationships, ties, bonds, or whatever you choose to call them, are “social instruments” that enable the community to preserve its stability and continuity. In all these circumstances the factor that contributes most strongly to social harmony and order is a complex element that enables movement and change to take place. That element is religion².

3 – *Al maddah al kafiyyah* (sufficient material resources): In al Mawardi's view this is the third condition for mankind's well-being and the development of human civilization, and it is concerned with those things which enable man to acquire what he needs in his daily life. Man's material needs are a vital necessity, since “if material resources are lacking – and [man] needs these in order to sustain himself – his life will not continue and he will not [be able to] observe [his] religion. And if any [element] of those [needs] is lacking, he will become weak in spirit, deficient in his worldly [life], to the extent that he lacks the material [resources necessary] for it³. The means of acquiring sufficient material

¹ Ibid. pp. 184-185.

² Ridwan al Sayyid: Introduction to *Tashil al Nadhar*, pp. 20-21.

³ Al Mawardi: *Adab al Dunya wa'l Din*, p. 192.



resources for [day-to-day] life are various and comprise four aspects: water for agriculture, procreativity from livestock, profit through trade and earnings from *sina'ah* (crafts, professions or creative activity). Agriculture is the resource of settled people and the inhabitants of the towns and cities, and sustainable [agriculture] is of the widest benefit. [It is also the form of livelihood] with the greatest [number of] 'branches'. Regarding the second aspect - procreativity from livestock – this is the resource of the desert [nomads] and tent-dwellers, who have no permanent homes, territories or movable property and herd animals, which provide them with milk and transport. They wander from place to place, so they do not need to provide them with fodder. The third aspect – trade – is a by-product of agriculture and stock-breeding, while the fourth is *sina'ah*, which is related to the other three aspects we have mentioned. There are three categories of *sina'ah* – *sina'at al fikr* ('intellectual' *sina'ah*), *sina'at al 'amal* ('practical' *sina'ah*) and a class of *sina'ah* which is a combination of both the 'intellectual and the 'practical'"¹.

4

Finally, we may summarise our conclusions as follows:

- We can say that other books on *'umran* – including those with titles like “*Miraya al 'Umara'*” (“*Mirrors for Princes*”) and “*Nasa'ih al Muluk*” (“*Advice for Kings*”) – do not generally differ in spirit from the subject matter we have discussed in the above pages, though they may perhaps lay greater stress on the practical aspects of governance. However, in these books any mention of *'umran* has tended to occur incidentally in connection with the practice of politics.

- When writings on Islamic ethics have touched on the subject of *'umran*, they have approached it as a “value criterion” in a way that differs somewhat from the historical treatment of *'ilm al 'umran* as an academic discipline established by Ibn Khaldun. Instead, their focus has been on the influence of moral values on the development of civilization. This is something which Ibn Khaldun treats as a matter of minor significance,

¹ Ibid. pp. 192-198.

except where the consequences of justice and injustice and their effects on civilization are concerned.

– Islamic ethical writings on the subject of *'umran* have not attempted to consider it from the point of view of a comprehensive theory. Their piecemeal approach has varied from one philosopher to another and never rises to the level of a general theory like the one proposed by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*. However, it is certain that Ibn Khaldun was able to benefit from most previous books on ethics – and “Mirrors for Princes” – when devising his theory of *'umran*. However, he took a more profound approach in his study of history and the effects of the environment on customs and moral values.