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REVIEW ESSAY

THE AIMS AND ETHICS OF SCHOLARLY WRITING: REFLECTIONS FROM IBN KHALDŪN'S MUQADDIMAH (VI:33)

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ABSTRACT

This essay provides a critical analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's perspectives on the aims and purposes of scholarly composition as articulated in the *Muqaddimah*. For Ibn Khaldūn, writing transcended mere technical execution; it represented the highest form of scholarly communication, preserving knowledge across generations and ensuring that science and learning benefit those “who are absent and live at a later time.” Accordingly, he delineated seven legitimate aims of composition, from the creation of new sciences to the judicious abridgement of extensive works. These aims, he contended, protect scholarship from distortion, plagiarism, and superficial repetition, while affirming its status as a trust (*amānah*) to be fulfilled with integrity in the service of truth and future generations. This essay contextualises these reflections within the intellectual milieu of the fourteenth century, characterised by the

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proliferation of commentaries and indiscriminate abridgements. It demonstrates how Ibn Khaldūn’s critique addressed the risks of stagnation in scholarship. It highlights the continued relevance of his insights to contemporary academic discourse, including the pressures of “publish or perish” and issues of academic integrity. In this way, the essay affirms Ibn Khaldūn’s enduring contribution to authentic scholarship and to an ethical conception of authorship, which remains essential to both the Islamic intellectual tradition and the broader endeavour of civilisation-building.

KEYWORDS: Scholarly writing, Responsible authorship, Academic integrity, Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Authorship has consistently served as a measure of scholarly integrity. In both Ibn Khaldūn’s era and the present, the act of writing is imbued with significant responsibility. For Ibn Khaldūn, literary composition was not merely a technical task but constituted the highest form of human communication. Unlike speech, which disappears once uttered, writing preserves knowledge beyond the author’s mind and renders it accessible to others, including those separated by time and place. He further asserts that writing is a noble pursuit, as it conveys the most elevated aspects of human thought—namely, science and knowledge. Consequently, scholars are obliged to record their insights in written form so that “all those who are absent and live at a later time may have the benefit of them.” Those who undertake this task are recognised as authors, and their works persist across regions and eras.² From this standpoint, it is the scholar’s duty to preserve knowledge with clarity, originality, and honesty.

² Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958), 3:282.

The issues identified by Ibn Khaldūn remain highly pertinent. Contemporary academia faces the pressures of “publish or perish,” which frequently prioritises quantity over quality. Plagiarism, including the unethical appropriation of student theses and the proliferation of repetitive or derivative publications, undermines the fundamental purpose of scholarship and erodes trust within academic institutions. The practices Ibn Khaldūn criticised in the fourteenth century—such as superficial abridgements, self-serving authorship, and works that contribute little to the advancement of knowledge—are mirrored in current debates on academic integrity. His reflections emphasise that the ethics of writing concern not only form but also substance, determining whether scholarship advances truth, originality, and civilisation, or devolves into a pursuit of reputation characterised by ostentation (*riyā’*), pride (*kibr*), and conceit.³

Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), one of the most original minds in the Islamic intellectual tradition, offers a systematic reflection on the aims, methods, and ethical considerations of scholarly composition. In *the Muqaddimah* (The Introduction),⁴ composed in 1377 as the opening volume of his *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, he devotes a significant section in Chapter VI that reads: “*The Purpose That Must Be Kept in Mind in Literary Composition and That Alone Are to Be Considered Valid.*”⁵ His observations reveal the intellectual standards expected of scholars and highlight the moral imperatives underpinning authorship and transmission of knowledge.

This essay analyses Ibn Khaldūn’s perspectives on the

³ In Islamic ethics, *riyā’* (ostentation) refers to performing deeds for the sake of human recognition rather than divine approval, while *kibr* (pride) denotes arrogance and self-exaltation. Both are condemned in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. The Qur’ān warns against arrogance (*kibr*), and Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: “He who has in his heart an atom’s weight of pride (*kibr*) will not enter Paradise” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Īmān*, 147). The Prophet ﷺ also warned: “Verily, what I fear most for you after me is ostentation (*riyā’*) and hidden lusts.” Additionally, Sunan Ibn Mājah records: “Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of Allah the Almighty, but only to gain some worldly benefit, he will never taste the fragrance of Paradise.”

⁴ All references to the *Muqaddimah* in this essay are to the English translation by Franz Rosenthal, published in three volumes by Pantheon Books in 1958.

⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:281-288.

purposes of scholarly writing⁶ with particular attention to the seven aims he identified as constituting legitimate composition. This discussion elucidates his commitment to the systematic organisation of knowledge, the advancement of intellectual inquiry, and the moral responsibility of scholars to make substantive contributions. Additionally, the essay demonstrates the continued relevance of his insights for contemporary conceptions of academic integrity and the responsible transmission of knowledge, situating these within the broader ethical context of Islamic civilisation and intellectual culture.

2. IBN KHALDŪN IN CONTEXT: INTELLECTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand Ibn Khaldūn's reflections on the aims and purpose of scholarly writing, it is essential to situate them within the intellectual and cultural environment of his time. Born in Tunis in 1332, Ibn Khaldūn lived through a period of political turbulence and intellectual transition in the Maghrib and the broader Islamic world. The fourteenth century was marked by dynastic instability, recurrent warfare, and shifting centres of power between North Africa, Andalusia, and the Mamlūk Sultanate in Egypt. These upheavals profoundly shaped his life and thought. Ibn Khaldūn served in various courts as a diplomat, judge, and scholar, while repeatedly experiencing exile, suspicion, and shifting patronage. Against this backdrop, Ibn Khaldūn developed a keen awareness of the rise and decline of civilisations, a theme that would become central to his *Muqaddimah*.

The intellectual climate he inherited was equally complex. By Ibn Khaldūn's time, many of the classical disciplines of Islamic scholarship had reached full maturity. The sciences of jurisprudence

⁶ Rosenthal translates Ibn Khaldūn's expression as "literary composition" (*Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:281 ff.). The Arabic manuscripts use terms such as *ta'lif* (authorship, composition) or *taṣnīf* (classification, scholarly writing), though the exact wording in this passage differs slightly across editions. Given the chapter's focus on the sciences (*'ulūm*) and the responsibilities of scholars, "scholarly writing" is adopted here as a more fitting translation than "literary composition," which in modern English tends to suggest belles-lettres rather than scientific or academic works.

(*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafah*), and grammar (*naḥw*) had been refined and developed over centuries of rigorous debate. Yet this very maturity introduced new challenges. Knowledge was increasingly transmitted through layers of commentaries, super-commentaries, and abridgements, a phenomenon often described as “commentary culture.” While such works were intended to clarify and preserve earlier texts, they frequently multiplied complexity and fostered a sense of intellectual stagnation. For Ibn Khaldūn, the proliferation of glosses and summaries often obscured, rather than illuminated the essence of a discipline.⁷

Within this context, Ibn Khaldūn’s focus on the ethics and objectives of scholarly composition acquires particular significance. He maintained that scholarship should not be limited to the transmission of inherited materials but must involve critical and responsible engagement with the tradition and its texts. He criticised scholars who pursued prestige by making superficial alterations to earlier works, cautioning that such practices undermine the integrity of knowledge. Instead, he advocated for originality, clarity, and moral responsibility in authorship—standards that he systematically articulated in his discussion of the valid aims of scholarly writing.

The *Muqaddimah* itself exemplifies his reformist intent. In it, Ibn Khaldūn not only surveyed the sciences of his time but also proposed a new “science of civilisation” (*ilm al-‘umrān*) to explain the social, economic, and political dynamics of human history. His methodological emphasis on causation, social structures, and patterns of rise and decline marked a radical departure from traditional chronicle writing. This spirit of critical innovation is inseparable from his reflections on composition. Hence, the *Muqaddimah* itself embodies the very qualities he advocates—systematic organisation, clarity of purpose, critical engagement with sources, and a strong sense

⁷ Ibn Khaldūn develops this concern further in two subsequent chapters of the *Muqaddimah*, where he warns that the proliferation of derivative works risks stifling genuine learning: Section 34, “The Great Number of Scholarly Works (Available) is an Obstacle on the Path to Attaining Scholarship,” and Section 35, “The Great Number of Brief Handbooks (Available) on Scholarly Subjects is Detrimental to (the Process of) Instruction.” See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:288–291.

of the scholar's ethical obligations.⁸

His reflections also align with the broader ethical vision of the Islamic intellectual tradition, which regards the preservation and transmission of knowledge as both a moral responsibility and a trust (*amānah*) for the societies and future generations. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is understood as a divine gift and a sacred trust, and scholars are described as heirs of the prophets (*warathat al-anbiyā'*). Ibn Khaldūn's insistence that authors avoid plagiarism, distortion, and unnecessary verbosity reflects this deeply moral conception of scholarship. By enumerating the legitimate aims of scholarly writing, he sought to reorient his peers toward practices that would renew the life of the intellect and protect it from decline. His reflections on scholarly composition are vital and integral to his broader vision for intellectual and civilisational revival. By framing authorship as an act of service to *'ilm* and moral responsibility to societies and future generations, Ibn Khaldūn challenges the complacency of his contemporaries and offers a timeless standard for integrity in

⁸ The *Muqaddimah* was composed in the span of five months during Ibn Khaldūn's self-imposed retreat at Qal'at Ibn Salāmah, a fortress near Tilmisan in present-day Algeria. His "Introduction" is poised and lucid, carefully outlining how he intends to approach his subject. In the Preface, Ibn Khaldūn begins, following the conventions of classical Islamic scholarship, with an invocation of God before turning to the subject that most captured his attention: history, which he acknowledges as a difficult field. He identifies the deficiencies he perceived in the works of earlier historians, noting their tendency to transmit reports uncritically or to neglect essential aspects of explanation. Against this backdrop, he sets out the objectives of his own work and explains the distinctive method he intends to adopt. He outlines not only his critical approach to sources, highlighting the gaps, errors, and distortions he sought to correct, but also the principles by which he organised his materials. His arrangement of chapters, while orderly, departed in significant ways from customary methods, signalling his effort to establish a more rigorous framework for historical inquiry. Ibn Khaldūn further clarifies that he divided his work into an "*Introduction and Three Books*", each devoted to a different dimension of his comprehensive study. Having carefully reviewed his work before presenting it to the judgment of scholars and statesmen, he closes his Preface with words of humility, entrusting his endeavour to God's guidance and expressing his hope that it might prove beneficial. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 1:6–14.

scholarship.

3. WRITING AND THE COMMUNICATION OF HUMAN THOUGHT

Ibn Khaldūn does not begin his reflections on scholarly composition by immediately listing its aims. Instead, he opens with a more fundamental question: what is writing, and why does it matter for the communication of knowledge? In his view, writing represents the second stage of human communication, following speech. While speech enables the exchange of ideas among those present, writing preserves those same thoughts for people who are absent or who live long after the author. It is this permanence that makes writing indispensable to scholarship.

For Ibn Khaldūn, the noblest function of writing lies in its role as a vehicle for the sciences (*‘ulūm*). He notes that scholars imparted their thoughts and wisdom by writing them “so that all those who are absent and live at a later time may have the benefit of them.” In this way, writing transforms knowledge into a civilisational resource. It ensures that what might otherwise remain fleeting reflections or oral exchanges becomes part of a shared intellectual heritage. Everywhere in the world, he observes, written works are numerous and passed down among all peoples and in all ages.

By commencing his discussion of composition in this manner, Ibn Khaldūn emphasises the civilisational significance of authorship. Writing is not merely the act of recording words; it constitutes a trust (*amānah*). Once a thought is committed to writing, it becomes part of a transmission chain that influences how future generations comprehend a subject. This responsibility is substantial, as distortion, plagiarism, or careless repetition not only impact the present but also compromise the intellectual legacy of civilisation.

From this perspective, Ibn Khaldūn’s emphasis on the aims of composition becomes more comprehensible. If writing is the vehicle through which knowledge persists, it must be protected from misuse and corruption. Works that fail to contribute new insights, merely repeat content without clarity, or appropriate the efforts of others,

undermine the fundamental purpose of scholarly writing. Consequently, Ibn Khaldūn maintains that scholars must write with originality, structure, and integrity. For him, effective authorship is not solely a matter of style or technique but constitutes a moral obligation to convey truth with rigour and discipline. He subsequently delineates the seven valid aims of scholarly composition, effectively presenting a taxonomy of authorship. Having established the significance of writing for the sciences, he addresses a practical question: under what circumstances does a scholarly work merit composition?

4. THE SEVEN AIMS OF SCHOLARLY WRITING

If writing is a trust that preserves the sciences over time, then not all forms of authorship are warranted. Ibn Khaldūn contends that scholars must clarify their intentions and write only when their work genuinely advances or elucidates knowledge. Authorship should address genuine epistemic needs and ensure the responsible preservation and transmission of knowledge. Accordingly, he identifies seven aims that, in his view, constitute legitimate authorship. These aims are not arbitrary; instead, they reflect his conviction that writing must create, clarify, correct, or preserve knowledge in ways that benefit both contemporaries and future generations. These aims encompass the founding of new sciences as well as essential tasks such as organising existing material, integrating dispersed problems, and producing careful abridgements.

4.1 The Invention of a New Science

Ibn Khaldūn begins with what he regards as the highest aim of authorship: the invention of a new science or the systematic organisation of an existing field. Such a contribution, he argues, secures knowledge for future generations by giving it clarity, order, and coherence. To establish a discipline requires originality of thought and rigour of method, with problems clearly defined and material arranged into distinct chapters and sections.

As an example, Ibn Khaldūn points to the emergence of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Before Imām al-Shāfi‘ī’s *al-Risālah* in the late second/eighth century, legal discussions were scattered across collections of *ḥadīth* and juristic opinion. By systematising these into a coherent science of legal theory, al-Shāfi‘ī laid down a foundation later refined by Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurists. For Ibn Khaldūn, this illustrates how a discipline is born when scattered insights (or materials) are drawn into an ordered whole. This opening aim reflects his conviction that scholarship must be constructive and enduring. In modern terms, it speaks to the responsibility of scholars to define their fields with clarity so that inquiry may continue to grow upon firm foundations.

4.2 The Interpretation of Difficult Works

The second aim of scholarly writing, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the interpretation and clarification of earlier works that are difficult to understand. He explains that “God may open understanding of them [difficult subjects] to him [the scholar]. He will then wish to communicate his knowledge to someone else who may perhaps have difficulties with (the same problems), so that all those who are worthy may have the benefit of [his knowledge].”⁹

In this way, the scholar does not merely echo previous ideas but acts as an interpreter, rendering dense or abstruse works accessible to a broader circle of readers. A classic example is the long tradition of commentaries and glosses on Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, whose compressed arguments required careful exposition. Similarly, in Islamic jurisprudence and grammar, foundational texts often attracted explanatory works that allowed students to follow subtle reasoning step by step.

The relevance of this aim remains clear today. Much of academic work still revolves around interpreting dense or specialised texts, whether classical writings or complex theoretical works in modern disciplines. Commentaries, explanatory studies, and translations continue to play a vital role in making knowledge

⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:285.

accessible to broader audiences. By emphasising this aim, Ibn Khaldūn acknowledges that scholarship involves not only invention but also interpretation. From this point, he moves to a third legitimate purpose of writing: the correction of earlier mistakes.

4.3 The Correction of Errors in Earlier Works

Another valid aim of scholarly writing, Ibn Khaldūn notes, is to correct inaccuracies or mistakes that may be found in the works of even the most renowned and authoritative scholars. Since knowledge, once written, is transmitted across generations, it becomes incumbent upon the later scholar, provided he has clear and indisputable proof, to identify and rectify such errors. His duty, Ibn Khaldūn insists, is not merely to recognise the mistake privately but to record his discovery in writing, so that others may learn from his explanation and avoid perpetuating error.

For Ibn Khaldūn, this corrective role is not incidental but integral to the preservation of sound knowledge. The principle resonates strongly with scholarly practice today. Peer review, editorial oversight, and the production of critical editions are all driven by the same conviction that knowledge must not be left to error. In an era of digital information where inaccuracies can circulate globally within moments, his insistence on correction as a scholarly duty remains as urgent as ever.

4.4 The Completion of an Incomplete Discipline

The fourth valid aim of authorship, as Ibn Khaldūn explains, arises when a discipline remains incomplete. “A particular discipline may be incomplete, [with] certain problems or details indicated by the division of the subject of the discipline requiring treatment. The scholar who becomes aware of the fact will want to supply these lacking problems, in order to perfect the discipline by having all its problems and details treated and leaving no room for deficiency in it.”¹⁰ Here, the scholar’s

¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:285-286.

role is not to invent something entirely new, but to perceive gaps in an existing discipline and complete it so that it reaches maturity. In doing so, he strengthens the coherence of the subject and ensures that later generations inherit a discipline free from serious omissions.

Islamic intellectual history provides many illustrations of this task. Jurists expanded legal theory to address novel cases not treated by earlier manuals, while grammarians elaborated on points of syntax that earlier works had left underdeveloped. In philosophy and medicine, too, later scholars often perfected disciplines by supplying missing discussions, thereby transforming what might otherwise have remained partial into a complete science. For modern readers, this resonates with the continuing need to refine disciplines as knowledge advances. Academic fields today still evolve through the sustained work of scholars who identify blind spots, incorporate new perspectives, and fill in neglected areas. Ibn Khaldūn reminds us that this effort is not peripheral but central to the health of the present and future scholarship.

4.5 The Reorganisation of a Subject (Within a Discipline)

A further aim of scholarly writing, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the reorganisation of a subject (*mawḍūʿ*) whose problems may have been treated without proper order. As he explains:

“The problems of a particular science may have been treated without the proper arrangement into chapters and without order. The scholar who becomes aware of that (situation) will arrange and improve on the problems and put every problem in the chapter where it belongs.”¹¹

This task of rearranging and systematising ensures that issues are classified under their appropriate headings, eliminating disorder and aiding both teaching and comprehension. Without such an order, even sound knowledge risks remaining scattered and confusing to the

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:286.

student. Ibn Khaldūn illustrates this with jurisprudence. In the *Mudawwanah* and the *‘Utbīyyah*, problems of law were often placed under unsuitable headings, obscuring their proper context. Later jurists, such as Ibn Abī Zayd, undertook the effort of restructuring *Mudawwanah* (the *‘Utbīyyah* remained unimproved), thereby clarifying the material and making the discipline more coherent and pedagogically effective.

In modern scholarship, this aim remains vital. From the compilation of encyclopaedias and reference works, to the structuring of curricula and taxonomies, the reorganisation of knowledge within subjects makes it possible for scholars and students alike to engage with material in a more systematic and intelligible way.

4.6 The Organisation of Scattered Problems into a New Discipline

Ibn Khaldūn identifies another legitimate aim of composition in the reorganisation of dispersed issues into a unified body of knowledge. At times, individual questions or problems are addressed in isolation, appearing across various works without coherence. A discerning scholar may perceive the connections between them and gather these scattered elements into a new, self-contained discipline. In doing so, he creates order where there was fragmentation, giving later students a clear structure in which to pursue study.

This, Ibn Khaldūn notes, represents a creative moment in the development of knowledge: when a keen mind discerns underlying unity and redefines the intellectual map of the sciences. Such acts of consolidation do not merely serve convenience; they mark turning points in scholarly history, opening new paths of inquiry and enabling subsequent generations to advance learning with greater clarity.

For example, Ibn Khaldūn notes how the science of literary criticism (*bayān*) emerged in this way. Problems of style, eloquence, and expression were originally discussed within grammar, rhetoric, and poetry, but were only later collected into a distinct discipline with its own principles and framework.

In modern contexts, a similar pattern can be observed. The rise of the computer science discipline, for instance, is crystallised out of

mathematics, engineering, and logic into an autonomous discipline with its own distinct identity. Thus, for Ibn Khaldūn, scholarly creativity is not confined only to preserving or correcting knowledge; it also extends to the generation of new sciences through the careful reorganisation and integration of scattered problems and insights.

4.7 The Abridgement of Voluminous or Lengthy Scholarly Works

The final aim of scholarly composition, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the abridgement (*mukhtaṣar*) of extensive works. Knowledge is sometimes preserved in lengthy treatises that, while comprehensive, may overwhelm students or hinder accessibility. In such cases, it becomes a service to distil the material into a more concise form, provided this is done without distortion or loss of meaning. Abridgement, then, is not about carelessly cutting down a text but about retaining its essential insights while removing excessive detail or repetition.

For Ibn Khaldūn, this function reflects the scholar's responsibility to facilitate learning for others. While some will study comprehensive works, many benefit from carefully produced summaries that make the essential points more accessible. The Islamic tradition itself abounds with such examples. Al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* inspired numerous abridgements, the most famous being Ibn al-Jawzī's *Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* and its later condensation *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* by Ibn Qudāmah. Similarly, in jurisprudence, almost every major *madhhab* (school of law) produced authoritative *mukhtaṣarāt* to provide students and jurists with concise guides that captured the essence of longer, more complex manuals.

In contemporary contexts, the same principle underlies the production of reliable handbooks, textbooks, or encyclopaedic summaries that condense vast bodies of scholarship into accessible formats. From student companions to digital knowledge repositories, abridgement remains an enduring way for scholars to fulfil their task: transmitting knowledge faithfully while ensuring a wider audience can grasp it.

The seven aims articulated by Ibn Khaldūn are not merely

theoretical ideals but serve as practical standards. Their significance is particularly evident in his own authorship of the *Muqaddimah*. This work not only theorises about the purpose and ethics of writing but also exemplifies these principles in practice.

5. THE WRITING OF THE *MUQADDIMAH*: ORIGINALITY AND THE ETHICS OF COMPOSITION

Ibn Khaldūn not only identifies the legitimate aims of writing; he also *practices* them, offering his own work as evidence that meaningful authorship is possible even in times of civilisational uncertainty. His commitment to organising scattered insights, clarifying inherited knowledge, and proposing new frameworks reflects a deep confidence in the power of the written word to guide, reform, and renew. He is not content to follow others; he assumes the risk of originality and the accountability that comes with it.

The originality of the *Muqaddimah* lies not only in its content but in its deliberate break with uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*). Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes his method from that of earlier historians and philosophers, whom he faults for either failing to verify their sources or repeating ideas without testing them against observable realities. His critique of historical writing is especially pointed, as he censures credulity, the absence of methodological discipline, and a failure to distinguish surface appearances from underlying causal patterns.¹² The *Muqaddimah* is therefore both a *meta-history* and a bold experiment in reframing the terms of scholarly inquiry. In doing so, Ibn Khaldūn implicitly fulfils the first and highest of his seven authorial aims: the creation of a new discipline (*ilm al-‘umrān*) that reorganises knowledge on more rigorous foundations.

His self-awareness as an author, attuned to both the purpose and the consequences of writing, is evident throughout the text. The *Muqaddimah* not only introduces his philosophy of history but it also surveys other sciences such as logic, theology, jurisprudence, and

¹² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal. See his “(Foreword)”, 1:6-10, and the “Introduction”, 1:15-68.

grammar. This synoptic vision exposes the fragmentation of knowledge in his time while seeking to reintegrate the sciences within a unified civilisational framework. In this sense, he also fulfils the sixth aim of scholarly composition, which is the gathering of scattered problems into a coherent discipline. The *Muqaddimah* thus brings together insights from history, social and political thought, economic behaviour, education, and the study of environment and climate (ecology) into a single reflective structure that anticipates many themes of later social science.

Other aims from his sevenfold taxonomy are likewise evident. His reinterpretation of historical reports and legal reasoning, guided by critical scrutiny and attention to causes, advances the objective of *correcting* earlier errors. His reordering of historical narrative by causal patterns rather than mere chronology advances the aim of *reorganising* a subject whose prior treatment lacked method. Even in style, the *Muqaddimah* alternates between compressed summaries and more expansive discussion, at times emphasising the value of a later *abridgement* (*mukhtaṣar*), a subtle nod to yet another of his valid aims of authorship.

In this way, the *Muqaddimah* functions not only as a theoretical treatise but also as a practical demonstration of responsible authorship, wherein the principles Ibn Khaldūn advocates are realised in his own work. This perspective underscores the ongoing relevance of his reflections, especially in contemporary discussions of academic integrity, originality, and the fundamental purpose of scholarship.

6. CONCLUSION

Ibn Khaldūn warns that the true purposes of authorship must remain central, as they distinguish genuine scholarship from distortion and deceit. Departing from these aims by superficially altering another's work, omitting material essential to a discipline, or filling pages with trivialities constitutes not innovation but arrogance and dishonesty. Notably, he cites Aristotle's dictum: "Everything else is either

superfluosness or greed.”¹³ This observation remains directly relevant to the persistent problem of scholarly malpractice, a challenge that continues to confront modern academia.

In an era when academic integrity faces increasing scrutiny due to issues such as plagiarism, replication, fabricated data, and the commodification of research outputs, Ibn Khaldūn’s words demonstrate that these crises are not unprecedented, though they may now occur on a larger scale. His emphasis on intention, epistemic rigour, and respect for knowledge as a sacred trust provides a compelling counterpoint to the instrumentalisation of scholarship for reputation, rankings, or profit. His closing reflections offer not only a taxonomy of authorial objectives but also an ethical charter, asserting that scholarship must serve truth rather than vanity, and that scholars must remain vigilant against the temptations of expedience.

For Ibn Khaldūn, writing entails a responsibility that extends into the future. Scholarly writing should not be regarded as merely technical or neutral; rather, it fundamentally shapes the preservation, interpretation, and trajectory of human knowledge. From this perspective, his conception of authorship remains a vital resource for reconsidering the aims and practices of scholarship across eras, offering both a critique of complacency and a model of integrity. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn’s assertion that authorship serves as both a safeguard against the loss and corruption of knowledge and as a trust essential to the cultivation of civilisation establishes a compelling standard for evaluating contemporary scholarly practice.

Ibn Khaldūn concludes his discussions with a humble prayer: “*We take refuge in God from doing what an intelligent person ought not to do. God guides us to the things that are most correct.*”¹⁴ Such conclusions, common in many classical works, serve as reminders that scholarship in the Islamic tradition was never severed from devotion to God. The pursuit of knowledge was regarded as a form of *‘ibādah*.

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:287. See further in Franz Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947), 64.

¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:287-288.

In contrast, much of contemporary authorship is shaped by competition, self-interest, and the pressures of academic metrics, often neglecting humility and self-reflection.

Given current debates on plagiarism, research misconduct, and the erosion of academic integrity, Ibn Khaldūn's closing words remain highly relevant. They emphasise that true scholarship must be grounded in sincerity, humility, and a sense of accountability before God. A true scholar writes not to display personal brilliance, but to serve a purpose greater than individual recognition. This spiritual dimension has largely receded in contemporary academic norms, where the focus on impact and innovation often overshadows sincerity and self-reflection. Reviving a culture of prayerful humility is not a romanticisation of the past, but a means of recovering a moral compass essential for preserving the integrity of Islamic learning and scholarly endeavour.

Finally, the *Muqaddimah* serves as a reminder that contemporary scholarship should be rooted in originality, clarity of purpose, humility, and a profound sense of accountability before God. Through its sophisticated intellectual contributions, ranging from methodological critique to disciplinary innovation, the *Muqaddimah* stands as both a constructive blueprint and a living testimony to responsible authorship. Ibn Khaldūn does not merely prescribe scholarly principles; he embodies them through the structure, objectives, and originality of his own work, as discussed earlier in this essay. In redefining the aims and ethics of scholarly composition, Ibn Khaldūn challenges scholars of every generation to consider not only *what* they are writing, but also *why*, for *whom*, and to *what* end. These questions remain highly relevant, especially as the production of knowledge accelerates while its ethical orientation, meaningful application, and civilisational significance are increasingly debated.

