

Beyond Modernity: The Moral Economy of Ibn Khaldun¹

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Abstract

The idea of a moral economy has gained salience in the 21st century. It has been used by economists, political scientists, and to a lesser extent, scholars of religion, for alternative values of money, exchange, debt, poverty, and prosperity. As an actual moral economy seems elusive in the presence of a dominant capitalist market, this essay reflects on the work of Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, the 14th-century historian and philosopher. Ibn Khaldun's reflections on the different ways in which individuals seek a livelihood (*ma'āsh*) reveal systematic and also ethical considerations. The essay examines some key terms which he uses to understand human sustenance and ethical reflections on various crafts. His 'moral economy' combines economic considerations with divine beneficence, rational thought, and ethical purpose.

Keywords: Moral economy, Ibn Khaldun, Islamic moral economy, moral ethics, *Muqaddimah*

Introduction

E.P. Thompson uses the term 'moral economy' to refer to English bread riots and other protests during the 18th century. He argues that the protests were not merely a 'spasmodic' outburst of the poor, but were motivated by values and agreed-upon practices:

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It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community (Thompson 1971:78).

In the new economy, the ‘natural price’ of all items was left to the forces of supply and demand. Even in critical times such as famine and war, there should be no intervention to control staple food prices to guarantee life (Smith 1976; Graeber 2001:10).

Scholars have found the concept of a moral economy helpful in reflecting on alternative values and moral practices (Keane 2021; Tripp 2006). However, the term has been used in different ways, ranging from resistance to capitalism, to a revision of values in capitalist markets. Moreover, there is a widespread sentiment that moral economies cannot be sustained in a world dominated by capitalist markets. In this essay, I accept the difficulty of maintaining alternative moral economies in the contemporary world, but do not concede that they are impossible. Instead, the challenge lies in asking different questions about valuation and exchange. I argue that such new questions may come from a closer interrogation of concepts and ideas from theoretical reflections in the past. To this end, I offer an analysis of Ibn Khaldun’s account of an ‘economy’ in his well-known *Muqaddimah*, which has been celebrated as a philosophy and sociology of history. His analysis of the sources of livelihood (*fī al-ma‘āsh wa wujūhuh*) offers a rich account of human economies. He presents a historical and sociological analysis in which he inserts an ethical set of questions and aspirations. The balance between history and ethics in his work offers a different way of thinking about a moral economy.

On Moral Economy

Since Thompson, at least three different trends can be identified for the use of the term ‘moral economy’. The first values the term for a continuing resistance to a capitalist market economy. The second identifies a moral economy as a distinctive form of exchange through which values are created and displayed, while a third finds a moral economy in the revision of capitalism.

The idea of the moral economy as a form of resistance to new market practices is evident in the analysis of Thompson. David Scott develops it further in his work on peasant economies of South-East Asia, which were disrupted by the colonial state and its economic practices (Scott 1976). Both Marc Edelman and Didier Fassin have revisited the work of Thompson and Scott, arguing that the value of ‘moral economy’ as a term cannot be separated from the imposition of capitalist markets in the contemporary world (Edelman 2005, 2012; Fassin 2009:1266). They have shown its continuing relevance for describing and analyzing forms of resistance mobilized against capitalist practices in the 21st century. In a detailed study of Muslim activists, Charles Tripp has also argued for an Islamic moral economy that resists capitalism (Tripp 2006).

Implicit in this use of the term ‘moral economy’ is a reference to distinctive beliefs and practices of valuation and exchange. Even though he does not use the term, the work of Marcel Mauss may be regarded as a precursor in identifying a moral economy as a set of economic practices and values in cultures and traditions. He has identified the widespread presence of gift economies before the introduction of capitalist markets (Mauss 2002:9, 60, 69, 75, 90, 92). Mauss’ ideas on gift economies have since permeated the literature on moral economies. Scott, for example, argues that the moral economy of the peasantry was a gift economy supported by an uncompromising ‘subsistence ethic’ (Scott 1976:vii). David Graeber has gone further in developing Mauss’ idea of the gift economy to reflect on forms of social indebtedness. He has argued that the valuation of goods and services has been constructed through three forms of exchange in human history: Gifts, market exchange, and communal sharing. In each of these, values of debt and obligations are differently constructed (Graeber 2014:98). In Graeber’s general vision of debt in human history, religion becomes a site of debt: ‘All religions...are simply ways of recognizing our mutual dependence on one another, a dependence that affects us in a million ways that we are never entirely aware of’ (Graeber 2014:70). This total vision of religion as debt suggests that moral economies of religion are different forms of debt economies.

Taking us back to the specifics of religious values and practices, Webb Keane offers a semiotic approach to religion and moral economies that include gift economies of exchange, but are not limited to them. Moral economies were informed by ‘transcendental sources of value and divine modes of agency or causation’ (Keane 2021:7). Economic values and practices

emerged from beliefs in transcendent beings, values of subsistence and sustenance, varied relations to the world, and boundary-making practices. Keane regards the benefit of studying religious moral economies as an explicit articulation of values. However, he concludes his analysis by arguing that such religious moral economies are left with limited choices in the contemporary world: Exit, transformation, interpretation, or accommodation (Keane 2021: 15). While Keane makes space for a more general approach to religious moral economies, he eventually concedes that they face difficult choices in contemporary times.

The term ‘moral economy’ has also appeared in reappraisals of capitalism. Thompson accepts that capitalism might be regarded as a moral economy (Thompson 1991:270). More generally, the moral economy of capitalism has been endorsed for its freedom and its social embeddedness. William Booth argues for the value of capitalism’s moral economy in the freedom it upholds for the entrepreneur. He claims that alternative moral economies are prone to compromise such a valuable foundation (Booth 1994). Supporting capitalism differently, some turn to Adam Smith’s theory of public sentiments as the moral foundation for a capitalist economy. Markets are driven by acts of approbation and disapprobation that are deeply embedded in society (McRorie 2015; Berry 2010; Bonefeld 2013). The term ‘moral economy’ has also been used to refer to a necessary revision of capitalism. Leading this approach, Samuel Bowles has used the term to criticize the vision of the maximizing *homo economicus* within capitalist theory. Drawing on the results of behavioral sciences, he has argued that humans are much more altruistic than assumed in capitalist models. When given opportunities, humans do not always pursue self-interest, but are willing to help others. Based on such revisions, state policies can and should be changed (Bowles 2016).

I have identified the diverse ways in which the term ‘moral economy’ has been invoked: Resistance to capitalism, alternative models of values and practices, and alternative values for the modern market. One dominant idea that emerges from the literature is that a moral economy is no longer a working set of practices guided by alternative values. At best, it is a form of continued resistance to capitalism or a set of economic values and practices that belong to the past. This theoretical direction of the eclipse of moral economies is confirmed in the study of what may be called ‘the moral economy of Islam in contemporary times’.

Islam and Contemporary Moral Economies

Studies of Islam and the economy have not generally used the term. However, the analysis of values, beliefs, and practices inspired by Islam may be discussed under the broad umbrella of a moral economy. I have identified three main sites of research in contemporary times: The history of *waqf* during colonialism, the development of Islamic economics in post-colonialism, and the revival of charity studies in the last few decades. These studies represent the destruction of the moral economy of Islam and failed aspirations to revive it since the last quarter of the 20th century.

When colonizing empires set their eyes on Muslim territories in the 19th century, *waqf*-endowed lands represented a significant obstacle to global capitalist markets. As goods that stood outside economic circulation to some extent, *waqfs* were regarded as inefficient, idle, and unproductive capital (Powers 1989). In different parts of the world, *waqfs* were targeted for reform, colonization, and later postcolonial nationalization. For the colonial and postcolonial states, *waqfs* represented goods that could not be valued for exchange in the market. Their ownership in the hands of God commanded a moral economy of exchange that evaded the all-powerful market of colonial, modernizing states (Kogelman 2002; Powers 1989; Nasution 2002; Moumtaz 2021).

A significant aspiration for a moral economy of Islam may be identified in Islamic economics. Formulated by scholars closely aligned with Islamist movements, Islamic economics proposed a distinctive economic theory and practice for Muslims in the cold war context. As in politics, Islamic economists argued that the values of Islam could become the basis for an alternative economy. However, a robust debate among critics, supporters, and observers has concluded that such aspirations reveal inconsistencies, inefficiencies, contradictions, and nostalgia (Kuran 1986, 1989; Weiss 2002:161, 179). Of all the practices promoted in Islamic economics, only its financial instruments seem to have been successful in the modern market (Tripp 2006; Maurer 2005). This success demonstrates the power of the capitalist market to colonize and incorporate alternative economies².

² Charles Tripp has offered a comprehensive review of the deliberation of an alternative moral economy of Islam among modern public intellectuals from the 19th to the 21st century. Tripp argues that through a new conceptualization of society and self, such intellectuals produced a contemporary articulation of politics and

The third site of a moral economy inspired by Islam can be identified in the analysis of development and charity projects founded since the 1970s (Sadouni 2008; LeBlanc 2020; Clark 2004; Benthall 1999). Studies on these movements have generally found that they succumb to a dominant instrumentalist and maximizing ethic. Using social movement theory, Jeanine Clark has closely examined the development projects of Islamists in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen. She found that they primarily serve the middle classes in which they are founded (Clark 2004). Mona Atia comes to a similar conclusion in her study of the charitable projects in Egypt that have increased significantly in recent years. She argues that they transformed charity in Egypt into current development projects, infused with neoliberal values and practices (Atia 2013). In a study of charitable giving in Egypt, Amira Mittermier's thesis stands out as an exception to the rule. Charitable projects in Egypt are not at all concerned about social and economic effects. Devoted to God, they articulate an ethic of giving that lies entirely outside any form of circulation in this world (Mittermaier 2019). In general, the analyses of charitable projects point to the dominance of the global market and its ethics. Philanthropic projects are either subjected to development and commercial objectives, or they preserve themselves from any economic engagement.

In this brief review, I have shown that studies on what may be called 'the moral economy of Islam' seem to point to its failure or accommodation with dominant market practices. All aspirations of morality seem unable to create an alternative moral economy. The *waqf* succumbed to the onslaught of colonialism and its expanding market economy, while Islamic economics and charitable projects did not escape the dominant ethics of maximization or class interests. These studies seem to confirm the tendency to see a moral economy as an aspiration or a set of values and practices that belong to the past.

economics. While espousing alternative ideas, however, they were locked in modernity's embrace: 'The imaginative and social power concentrated in the particular conceptions of society, state and economy were so great that it helped shape the Islamist responses themselves, sometimes in ways which were both implicitly and explicitly linked to a global capitalist system and infused with some of the values underpinning it' (Tripp 2006:196).

Moral Economy of Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun's reflection on 'economy' offers a different set of questions on values, practices, and judgments on economic behavior. In Book Five of his *Muqaddimah* (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:445-493), he discusses 'aspects of making a living, such as profit and the crafts and the conditions that occur in this connection'. This historical and social account of the economy relies on a model that can be traced to Muslim jurists, ethical theorists, and philosophers. Jurists deliberated over fair and practical forms of contracts, ethical theorists reflected on the values that are conducive to happiness in this world and the next, and philosophers argued on the appropriate place of ethics in society (Islahi 2022; El-Sheikh 2008; Farahat 2021; Bouhafa 2021). The distinction of Ibn Khaldun's work lies in his ability to present a short and comprehensive model of the 'pursuit of livelihood' that combines a historical and sociological vision with an ethical one.

Two central but interrelated sections guide Ibn Khaldun's presentation. The first is a discussion of two key terms, *rizq* (*sustenance*) and *kasb* (*acquisition*). *Rizq* refers to the guaranteed sustenance from God, while *kasb* points to the limits and possibilities of human action. The second section in Ibn Khaldun's work is a presentation of various professions through which humans have pursued livelihood (*ma'āsh*). In this essay, I focus on his discussion of trading and craftsmanship to bring out his socio-historical and ethical analysis.

Ibn Khaldun begins with a verse from the Qur'an, which declares that humans are dependent creatures, with only God being free of needs and wants (Qur'an 47:38). God granted humans what they needed: 'He created for you everything that is in the heavens and on earth. He subjected the sun and the moon to you. He subjected the sea to you. He subjected the firmament to you. He subjected the animals to you' (Qur'an 45:13). In these opening remarks, Ibn Khaldun declares that God provides for humans (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:245). He offers two terms to explain the economic implications of this relationship between humans and God. *Rizq* refers to what has been given to humans 'without effort' to satisfy their 'needs and benefits' (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246). It is a guaranteed subsistence for all creatures without exception, including those that may be deemed iniquitous. According to Ibn Khaldun, 'God sustains him who acquires property wrongfully, and also the evildoer, the believer as well as the unbeliever' (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246). He re-

jects a Mu‘tazilite theological view that associates *rizq* only with just and proper forms of acquiring sustenance. This theological move allows Ibn Khaldun to include in his presentation all forms of acquiring sustenance by which humans live, not only those deemed suitable or informed by religious values (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246). He differs in this regard from jurists and ethicists like al-Ghazālī, who focuses on just and proper forms of gaining a livelihood (al-Ghazālī 1356:754).

In addition to *rizq*, Ibn Khaldun uses *kasb* to represent what humans strive for. This term echoes Asharite theology on human agency and responsibility of acts (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246-247). If *rizq* refers to human needs and benefits (*ḥājāt* and *manāfi*), *kasb* refers to ways of acquiring goods beyond these (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246). More-over, *kasb* is associated with human labor: ‘[K]now that what benefits the human and what he acquires of goods... is the value of his labour’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:247). Sometimes, labor is evident, as in shoemaking and woodwork. In agriculture, according to Ibn Khaldun, the labor involved is not so easily identified. However, in general, all the ‘benefits and acquisitions of humans or most of them are human labour values’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:247).

As a product of labor, *kasb* contributes to deep divisions among humans. Those who enjoy authority and hegemony (*jāh*) acquire the labor of others. Ibn Khaldun focuses on the prominent possessors of *jāh*, such as political rulers, traders, and scholars, although he also alludes to a wider distribution of *jāh* at every level of human association (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:261). People with less or no *jāh* are willing to serve those who have it. In effect, states Ibn Khaldun, the possessors of *jāh* acquire the labor of those below them in social or economic rank: ‘[F]armers and traders rush to them while they sit in their home without moving an inch, meanwhile their wealth grows, and their acquisition (*kasb*) rises, and their riches are consolidated without effort’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:260).

Ibn Khaldun sees more than mere power in *jāh*. Its presence indicates the ‘wisdom of God for his creation through which its livelihood is organised, its needs facilitated and its survival guaranteed’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:261). *Jāh* is essential for cooperation in a society where some are willing to do the bidding of others. Sometimes, *jāh* is exerted by force, but it also comes from the perception of perfection (*kamāl*), enjoyed by those in power or those who regard themselves as the best in society. A feeling of self-worth attracts those who do not have *jāh* to support them with labor. When those with *jāh* lose

confidence in themselves, they lose their wealth, as people do not turn over their labor to them.

Ibn Khaldun does not always maintain a strict separation between *rizq* and *kasb*. In an interesting example of inheritance, he shows the close relationship between the two. As property, inheritance ‘is *kasb* for the deceased and not *rizq*...but for the inheritors, it is *rizq* when they benefit from it’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:246). Human effort and benefit are at play in identifying goods as *rizq* or *kasb*. Their meaning changes in relation to the person who receives, acquires, or uses the goods for sustenance. Thus, while stressing the difference, Ibn Khaldun recognizes the inter-relationship between the *rizq* that one gets from God and potentially other benefactors, and *kasb* acquired by human effort.

The pursuit of livelihood, then, is constructed on the two concepts of *rizq* and *kasb*. The former represents provisions promised by God, but may also be generally identified as sustenance acquired without effort. *Kasb*, on the other hand, represents the human acquisition of sustenance. Its primary source is human labor, which is deeply woven into the fabric of a society of great diversity and inequality. Ibn Khaldun offers a vision of life held together by beneficence, authority, and labor.

The second central section in Ibn Khaldun’s presentation covers the different ways or professions (*turuq*) through which humans acquire a livelihood. He first introduces the idea of natural (*ṭabī‘ī*) and unnatural (*ghayr ṭabī‘ī*) ways of acquiring a livelihood. The natural professions are agriculture, trade, and crafts (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:250). He regards agriculture as natural because it emerged early in human history, although it is not as highly developed as other professions (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:268). In contrast, making a living while looking for buried treasure or selling fraudulent information that promises such riches, is unnatural. Such practices are irrational, based on false promises and dubious methods (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:254). Serving others, to take another example, is not a natural form of acquiring a livelihood, since it does not suit a genuinely virtuous life (*muruwwah*) (Ibn Khaldūn 2005: 251). As a way of collecting taxes and revenue, politics is not a natural profession, according to Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:250). Elsewhere in his book he describes the negative effect of excessive taxes that inevitably leads to the destruction of human social life (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:250). Exacting taxes are counterproductive in the evolution of a state.

Using the criterion ‘natural’ (*tabi‘r*) to discuss these professions, Ibn Khaldun continues an Islamic tradition that builds on Aristotle and Plato on the nature of objects, from things to humans (Pingree & Nomanul Haq 2009; Nuri 2018). In Book Six of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun discusses the human capacity to perceive the nature of things (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:58-101). He states that humans have the unique ability to organize their world (*tartīb*), unlike animals who can only know the world through their senses (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:339). This potential of humans to act upon the world in a systemic, rational way provides Ibn Khaldun with a foundation for studying professions. He thus deliberates on their persistence over time and their rational organization. Applying the concept of nature to human actions, he thus offers what, in modern times may be called a ‘sociological’ or ‘historical’ account.

In addition to this ‘natural’ analysis, Ibn Khaldun also subjects the professions to an ethical analysis. According to him, trade is a natural profession, but hazardous to the ethical development of the self, while craftsmanship offers a more promising path to human fulfilment. In both cases, he balances a ‘natural’ analysis with an ethical evaluation. With regard to trading, he first tells us that it was a natural way of acquiring a livelihood. In this case, ‘natural’ refers to the fact that it was ubiquitous among humans. Trade is defined by the supply and demand of goods, buying them at a certain price and selling them at a higher price. One of the ways that traders might benefit from price differences is to engage in long-distance trade (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:270). Like many jurists, Ibn Khaldun believes that prices of goods should not be set by anyone (Ibn Taymīya 1982:47; Sabra 2003:81). Persistently low prices hurt society and trading. However, Ibn Khaldun concedes that an exception should be made for food prices. It is more ‘praiseworthy’, he states, for ‘setting prices for goods on which many are dependent’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:275).

In addition to this analysis of trade as a natural human activity, Ibn Khaldūn goes on to evaluate trading for its effect on the ethical development of the individual (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:278-279). He states that traders are invariably involved with ‘cunning, wrangling, exaggeration, [and] excessive argumentation’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:278). Those who cannot save themselves from the ill effects of trading, should not engage in it (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:277). Someone who has inherited money, should rather employ an agent to trade on her behalf (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:279). Ibn Khaldun, thus, describes trading as a natural profession, following the logic of supply and demand. Then he applies an ethical evaluation on the profession of trading.

In his analysis of crafts (*ṣanāʿi*), Ibn Khaldun does not exhibit the same degree of fear for ethical development. He begins with a natural analysis of crafts which includes a discussion on their growth and development in the evolution of civilization (*ʿumrān*). He divides crafts into the ‘necessary’ (*ḍarūrī*) that appeared early in human history and the ‘perfected’ (*kamālī*) at a later stage of civilization. Among the necessary crafts are agriculture, building, and woodworking, while the refined and perfected crafts are writing, music, and arithmetic (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:291, 328). Ibn Khaldun observes that the growth and development of crafts are subject to supply and demand (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:287). In his well-known theory of civilization, he regards the state as the most significant market through which demand for crafts is created: ‘*al-Dawlat hiya al-sūq al-aʿẓam*’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:286).

As with trading, he proceeds to discuss the ethical value of craftsmanship. As product of labor and knowledge, crafts facilitate the formation of a human disposition (*malaka*). Under the guidance of a teacher, this *malaka* is ‘acquired by usage and repetition until its form (*ṣūra*) is acquired’ (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:280). A craft begins with materiality and takes on its highest form in intellectual perfection:

[T]he rational animal (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*) is realized from a potential (*quwwa*), and its transformation from potentiality to actuality (*fiʿl*) comes from the renewal of sciences and its conceptualization (*idrākāt*). Starting with the sensory, much is gained by intellectual powers until it becomes, in reality, pure intellect. Thus, the self becomes a spiritual essence and attains its true potential (Ibn Khaldūn 2005:332).

Ibn Khaldun regards the formation of the self in craftsmanship through the transformation of objects (matter) into pure intellect. This vision of human perfection is identified in pursuit of a livelihood. While Ibn Khaldun considers trading potentially obstructive to this aspiration, crafts offer a more secure potential. While sustaining a livelihood, crafts also promise human becoming.

Conclusion

Thompson identifies the idea of a moral economy as an alternative economy, resistant to the capitalist market. Some scholars have regarded this essential feature of resistance as the only way that one may speak of a moral economy. However, others have tried to focus on different forms of exchange that characterize alternative moral economies. Gift economies seem to occupy a central place in this conception of moral economies. From Mauss to its universal elaboration by Graeber, gift economies represent distinctive moral economies. And yet, the idea that capitalist markets challenge such moral economies seems inescapable. One study after another concedes that moral economies are difficult to imagine in a world dominated and informed by capitalism. Moral economies seem to succumb to capitalist forms of exchange. There seems to be no escape from the universality of capitalist markets and their logic.

Given this hegemony, I argued for a closer look at pre-modern reflections on the ‘economy’ for a different perspective. Perhaps they may alert us to existing moral economies that we might be missing. To this end, I have presented Ibn Khaldun’s account of ‘economics’ in his well-known *Muqaddimah*. He offers two significant terms that inform the pursuit of a livelihood (*ma‘āsh*). The first is *rizq*, which represents an abundance of resources guaranteed by God. In a more general sense, it indicates a source of sustenance that guarantees life on earth (Reda 2018:96). Ibn Khaldun’s example of inheritance suggests its broader significance as gifts that are pervasive in society. All forms of goods that accrue to one may be regarded as *rizq*. These might be gifts or unexpected or even unjustified income.

The second term, *kasb*, speaks directly to human labor (*‘amal*) in pursuit of a livelihood. These two terms suggest that moral economies may, at one level, be analyzed for how goods are distributed in a society. In addition to being acquired through labor, capital, and exploitation, they may be obtained by accident or chance. Ibn Khaldun’s example of inheritance as *rizq* opens the door to think of unearned goods. *Rizq* is not necessarily unjustified, but it emphasizes that such income is not earned by those who enjoy or flaunt it.

Ibn Khaldun’s analysis seems to adopt two ways of thinking of *kasb*. On the one hand, *kasb* is subject to a natural analysis, which leads to historical and sociological reflections. He offers a dispassionate examination of

kasb that grows with civilization and is subject to supply and demand, and may collapse. On the other hand, as an outcome of human labor, *kasb* is also subject to ethical evaluation. The example of trading and craftsmanship shows Ibn Khaldun's critical analysis and appraisal of economic activities. His vision of human perfection recognizes an ethical possibility in economic practices. However, not all economic activities promise ethical fulfilment. In this second judgment, Ibn Khaldun shows us how to reflect on the moral standing of craft practices. Craftmanship is not only associated with values of good or evil, but with general objectives of human becoming.

Ibn Khaldun's approach to 'economy' may be valuable for thinking about how the term 'moral economy' has been used in scholarship. I would argue that the contemporary approaches from Thompson to the present assume that moral economies are informed by distinctive practices and values that may be traced to their respective cultures or religions. This deterministic approach to moral economies may be traced back to Max Weber's thesis on the protestant ethic and its impact on the rise of capitalism. According to this famous thesis, economies exhibit implicitly or explicitly underlying cultural or religious values. Ibn Khaldun's account offers an analysis of economics, which is subject to both historical and ethical analysis. In one sense, *rizq* and *kasb* converge to represent economic activities in general. They offer a vision of economics that is neither religious nor secular. He does not sacrifice either history/sociology or ethics in this analysis. Normative assumptions neither inform his analysis of what religious people should do, nor what they might do. At the same time, he does not fail to recognize the ethical potential of ways through which humans acquire a livelihood. With some imagination, his insights point us to rethinking moral economies in contemporary societies.

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