

# War & Peace & War

The Life Cycles of Imperial Nations,  
Chapters 4-6  
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## Chapter 4

Asabiya in the Desert

# Khaldun Discovers the Key to History

- Ibn Khaldun was a young scion of a prominent family. The concept of asabiya was his most important contribution to our understanding of human history

# The Concept of Collective Solidarity: Asabiya as defined by Ibn Khaldun

- Nomads conquer territories and their leaders establish a new dynasty. At first the new rulers retain their tribal virtues and solidarity, but soon they seek to concentrate all authority in their own hands. Increasingly they rule through a bureaucracy of clients - often foreigners. As their former supporters lose their military virtues there is an increasing use of mercenaries, and soldiers come to be more important than civilians. Luxury corrupts ethical life, and the population decreases. Rising expenditure demands higher taxes, which discourage production and eventually result in lower revenues.

- The ruler and his clients become isolated from the groups that originally brought them to power. Such a process of decline is taken to last about one hundred and twenty years. Religion can influence the nature of such a model; when asabiya is reinforced by religion its strength is multiplied, and great empires can be founded. Religion can also reinforce the cohesion of an established state.
- DRW: but the more general definition of asabiya or collective solidarity is needed !!

# Chapter 5

## The Myth of Self-Interest

- The capacity to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of common good is the necessary condition for cooperation. Without it concerted collective action is impossible
- To ancient thinkers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, and Khaldun: cooperation provided the basis of social life

- Niccolo Machiavelli, a political philosopher and a statesman famously asked whether for a ruler “it is better to be loved than feared, or reverse”
- As the modern period unfolded his “self-interest-axiom” gained ground in the thinking of social scientists such as Hobbes, Hume, and Mandeville.
- During the 20th century the ideas of Mandeville, Smith, and many others have been developed and systematized into what is now known as “the theory of rational choice”

- The theory states that agents (people) behave in such a way as to maximize their “utility function”
- Utility function could be almost anything
- The agent then should perform the action that yields the greatest payoff. Hence maximizing utility.
- Agents that maximize their utility function are “rational”
- At the same time that the social scientists were perfecting the theory of rational choice, biologists were doing the same for the theory of evolution by natural selection, reaching very similar conclusions Ibn Khaldun

- DRW – but you leave off the important parts of the chapter that begin on p. 112 and constitute its main points, such as:
- “There is, however, one area where the rational choice theory fails utterly – in explaining why people cooperate”
- And so forth, for the next 25 pages, which contain some of the central arguments of the book.
- These need to be summarized – end of DRW comment

# Chapter 6

## Born to be Wolves

### The Origins of Rome

- This chapter traces the rise of Rome, from the modest beginnings in the 7th century B.C. to its peak of power in the 2nd century A.D.
- (DRW – yes, but it also contains general principles that Turchin wants to illustrate – you need to locate and summarize them too, not just give the history!)
- Rome had 2 distinct frontiers, one after another. The geography of Italy and the kinds of peoples who inhabited it in the early Iron Age explain much about Rome's formation

- The rise of Rome was a result of the pressures from the Etruscan-Latin frontier.
- Troubles began w/the revolt of a part of aristocracy against the last king of Rome, Tarquin the Proud. Unrest was growing between the commoners and the aristocrats
- As a result of population growth during the 6th century, the scarcity of land and oppression by wealthy creditors resulted in the loss of support among the commoners for the policies of the ruling class

- As a result of epidemics, famines, and ceaseless warfare, the population declined, freeing land for the landless. Wealth inequality decreased, around 500 B.C. the social system returned to an equilibrium
- Intrusion of the Gauls into Italy was the decisive factor in the rise of Rome. 1st immediate factor was the sack of Rome, then when the Roman society was confronted w/ ferocious scalp-collecting howling savages internal divisions between orders somehow lost their urgency and people who were directly exposed to the Gallic threat joined the Roman empire almost voluntarily

- They would have preferred to keep their independence, but when given a choice between whom to submit to-civilizational aliens or civilizationally more familiar Rome- they eventually opted for Rome
- two factors explain the rise the high degree of asabiya and the remarkable openness of the Romans to the incorporation for other peoples, often recent enemies. Both factors are necessary for building a world empire