

Chapter 26: Ibn Bajjah

By Muhammad Saghir Hasan al-Ma'sumi

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Sa'igh, known as Ibn Bajjah or Avempace (d. 533/1138), hailed from the family *al-Tujib* and is, therefore, also known as *al-Tujibi*. Ibn Bajjah was born at Saragossa towards the end of the fifth/eleventh century, and prospered there. We have no knowledge of his early life, nor have we any idea of the teachers under whom he completed his studies. However, this much is clear that he finished his academic career at Saragossa, for when he travelled to Granada he was already an accomplished scholar of Arabic language and literature and claimed to be well versed in twelve sciences.

This is evident from the incident that occurred in the mosque of Granada as recorded by al-Suyuti: "One day Ibn Bajjah entered the mosque (*jami'ah*) of Granada. He saw a grammarian giving lessons on grammar to the students sitting around him. Seeing a stranger so close to them, the young students addressed Ibn Bajjah, rather by way of mockery: 'What does the jurist carry? What science has he excelled in, and what views does he hold?' 'Look here,' replied Ibn Bajjah, 'I am carrying twelve thousand dinar under my armpit.'

He thereupon showed them twelve valuable pearls of exquisite beauty each of the value of one thousand dinar. 'I have,' added Ibn Bajjah, 'gathered experience in twelve sciences, and mostly in the science of 'Arabiyyah which you are discussing. In my opinion you belong to such and such a group.' He then mentioned their lineage. The young students in their utter surprise begged his forgiveness."¹

Historians are unanimous in regarding him as a man of vast knowledge and eminence in various sciences. Fath ibn Khaqan, who has charged Ibn Bajjah of heresy and has bitterly criticized his character in his *Qala'id al-'Iqyan*,² also admits his vast knowledge and finds no fault with his intellectual excellence. On account of his wealth of information in literature, grammar, and ancient philosophy, he has been compared by his contemporaries with *al-Shaikh al-Ra'is* Ibn Sina.³

Due to his growing fame, Abu Bakr Sahrawi, Governor of Saragossa, appointed him as his vizier. But when Saragossa fell into the hands of Alphonso I, King of Aragon, in 512/1118, Ibn Bajjah had already

left the city and reached Seville via Valencia, settled there, and adopted the profession of a medical practitioner. Later on, he left for Granada, where occurred the incident referred to above. He then journeyed to north–west Africa.

On his arrival at Shatibah, Ibn Bajjah was imprisoned by Amir Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Yisuf ibn Tashifin most probably on the charge of heresy, as Fath ibn Khaqan has it. But as Renan opines,⁴ he was set free, probably on the recommendation of his own disciple, father of the famous Spanish philosopher Ibn Rushd.

Later on, when Ibn Bajjah reached Fez, he entered the Court of the Governor, Abu Bakr Yahya ibn Yusuf ibn Tashifin, and rose to the rank of a vizier by dint of his ability and rare scholarship. He held this post for twenty years.

This was the time of great troubles and turmoils in the history of Spain and north–west Africa. The governors of towns and cities proclaimed their independence. Lawlessness and chaos prevailed all over the country. The rival groups and personalities accused one another of heresy to gain supremacy and to win the favour of the people. The enemies of Ibn Bajjah had already declared him a heretic and tried several times to kill him. But all their efforts proved a failure. Ibn Zuhr, the famous physician of the time, however, succeeded in killing him by poison during Ramadan 533/1138 at Fez, where he was buried by the side of Ibn al'Arabi the younger.

His Predecessors

There is no doubt that philosophy entered Spain after the third/ninth century. Some of the ancient manuscript copies of *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* available in Europe are ascribed to Maslamah ibn Abmad al-Majriti.⁵ Maslamah was a great mathematician in Spain. He flourished during the reign of Hakam II and died in 598/1003. ⁶ Among his disciples, Ibn al-Safa, Zahrawi, Karmani, and Abu Muslim 'Umar ibn Abmad ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami were famous for mathematical sciences.

Karmani and Ibn Khaldun were also known as philosophers. Ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami hailed from Seville and died in 449/1054. ⁷ Karmani, whose full name is Abu al-Hakam 'Amr ibn 'Abd al-Rabman ibn Ahmad ibn 'Ali, hailed from Cordova, journeyed to the Eastern countries and studied medicine and arithmetic at Harran. On his return to Spain he settled at Saragossa. According to the statement of Qadi Sa'id⁸ and Maqqari,⁹ he was the first man who took the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* to Spain. Karmani died at Saragossa in 450/1063.

But philosophy had entered Spain long before the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* were introduced in that region. Muhammad ibn 'Abdun al-Jabali¹⁰ travelled to the East in 347/952, studied logic with Abu Sulaim Muhammad ibn Tahir ibn Bahrain al-Sijistani, and returned to Spain in 360/965. Similarly, Ahmad and 'Umar, the two sons of Yunus al-Barrani, entered Baghdad in 330/935, studied sciences with Thabit ibn Sinan ibn Thabit ibn Qurrah, and after a considerable period returned to Spain in 351/956. ¹¹

This is evident that philosophy was imported into the West from the East and that in the fourth/ tenth century Spanish students studied mathematics, *Hadith*, *Tafsir*, and *Fiqh* as well as logic and other philosophical sciences at Baghdad, Basrah, Damascus, and Egypt. But from the end of the fourth/tenth century, when philosophy and logic were condemned in Spain and the advocates of these sciences were persecuted, the common people stopped favouring these sciences as far down as the fifth and sixth/eleventh and twelfth centuries. This was the reason why Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Tufail, and Ibn Ruahd had to face persecution, imprisonment, and condemnation. Very few people in those days dared deal with rational sciences.

Among the predecessors of Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Hazm deserves special attention. Ibn Hazm occupies a very high place in theology and other religious sciences. His *Kitab al-Fasl fi al-Milal w-al-Nihal* is unique in that he has recorded the creeds and doctrines of the Christians, Jews, and others without displaying any prejudice. But in the domain of philosophy he has never been mentioned by any Spanish scholar side by side with the philosophers. Maqqari records: [12](#) “Ibn Habban and others say, Ibn Hazm was a man of *Hadlth*, jurisprudence, and polemics. He wrote many books on logic and philosophy in which he did not escape errors.”

[His Contemporaries](#)

For throwing light on the contemporary thinkers of Ibn Bajjah we have no earlier authority than his own disciple Ibn al-Imam, through whom we have received information about his writings. Al-Wazir Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn al-Imam, a devoted disciple of Ibn Bajjah, preserved the latter's writings in an anthology to which he added an introduction of his own. That Ibn Bajjah was very fond of this disciple, a vizier, is apparent from the preamble of his letters addressed to him which are available in the said anthology as preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. [13](#)

In his introduction to the anthology, Ibn al-Imam says: “... the philosophical books were current in Spanish cities in the time of al-Hakam II (350/961–366/976), who had imported the rare works composed in the East and had got them made clear. He (Ibn Bajjah) transcribed the books of the ancients and others and carried on his investigation into these works. The way had not been opened to any investigator before him (Ibn Bajjah). Nor had anything except errors and alterations been recorded concerning these sciences of the ancients.

A number of errors for example, were committed by Ibn Hazm, who was one of the most exalted investigators of his time, while most of them had not ventured even to record their thoughts. Ibn Bajjah was superior to Ibn Hazm in investigation, and more penetrating in making distinctions. The ways of investigation in these sciences were opened only to this scholar (Ibn Bajjah) and to Malik ibn Wuhaib of Seville, both of whom were contemporaries. But except for a short account of the principles of logic nothing was recorded by Malik.

Then he gave up investigating these sciences and speaking about them openly, because of the attempts

made on his life due to his discussing philosophical sciences, and due to the fact that he aimed at victory in all his conferences on scientific subjects. He turned to the religious sciences and became one of the leaders in them; but the light of philosophical knowledge did not shine upon his mind, nor did he record in philosophy anything of a private nature which could be found after his death.

As for Abu Bakr (may Allah show him mercy) his superior nature stirred him not to give up investigating into, inferring from, and reading all that had left its real impression on his mind on various occasions in the changing conditions of his time.”

The words of Ibn al-Imam are quite clearly appreciative of the merits of the contemporary Malik, and of predecessors like Ibn Hazm. Ibn al-Imam's praise of his teacher has been shared by a number of historians. Ibn Tufail, the famous author of the well-known philosophical romance, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, and a younger contemporary of Ibn Bajjah, singles out Ibn Bajjah in the introduction to his immortal romance, and describes him as follows: “But none of them possessed a more penetrative mind, a more accurate view or a more truthful insight than Abu Bakr ibn al-Sa'igh.”

Al-Shaqandi (d. 629/1231), in his famous letter in which he enumerates the achievements of the Spanish Muslims as against the Africans, challenges the latter by saying: “Have you anybody among yourselves like Ibn Bajjah in music and philosophy?”¹⁴ Maqqari records the following statement: “As for the works on music, the book of Ibn Bajjah of Granada is sufficient by itself. He occupies in the West the place of Abu Nasr al-Farabi in the East “¹⁵

Another contemporary of Ibn Bajjah was al-Amir al-Muqtadir ibn Hud, who reigned over Saragossa (438/1046–474/1081). He has been mentioned by al-Shaqandi, who addresses the Africans in these words: “Have you any king expert in mathematics and philosophy like al-Muqtadir ibn Hud, the ruler of Saragossa?”¹⁶ His son al-Mu'tamin (d. 474/1085) was a patron of rational sciences.”¹⁷

Works

We give below a list of Ibn Bajjah's works:

1. The Bodleian MS., Arabic Pococke, No. 206, contains 222 folios.¹⁸ It was written in Rabi' II 547/1152 at Qus. This MS. lacks the treatise on medicine, and *Risalat al-Wada'*.
2. The Berlin MS. No. 5060 (vide Ahlwardt : Catalogue), lost during World War II.
3. The Escorial MS. No. 612. It contains only those treatises which Ibn Bajjah wrote as commentaries on the treatises of al-Farabi on logic. It was written at Seville in 667/1307.
4. The Khediviah MS. *Akhlaq* No. 290. It has been published by Dr. Omar Farrukh in his *Ibn Bajjah w-al-Falsafah al-Maghribiyyah*. On comparison it has been established that this is an abridgment of *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid*—abridgment in the sense that it omits the greater part of the text but retains the very

words of the original writer.

5. Brockelmann states that the Berlin Library possesses a unique ode of Ibn Bajjah entitled *Tardiyyah*.

6 Works edited by Asin Palacios with their Spanish translation and necessary notes. (i) *Kitab al-Nabat, al-Andalus*, Vol. V, 1940; (ii) *Risalah Ittisal al-'Aql bi al-Insan, al-Andalus*, Vol. VII, 1942; (iii) *Risalah al-Wada', al-Andalus*, Vol. VIII, 1943; (iv) *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid* entitled *El Regimen Del Solitario*, 1946.

7 Works edited by Dr. M. Saghir Hasan al-Ma'sumi: (i) *Kitab al-Nafs* with notes and introduction in Arabic, *Majallah al-Majma' al-'Ilm al-'Arabi*, Damascus; 1958; (ii) *Risalah al-Ghayah al-Insaniyyah* entitled *Ibn Bajjah on Human End*, with English translation, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. II, 1957.

Philosophy

Ibn Bajjah was skilled both in the theory and practice of the mathematical sciences, particularly astronomy and music, adept in medicine, and devoted to speculative studies like logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. In de Boer's opinion, he conforms entirely to al-Farabi in his logical writings and generally agrees with him even in his physical and metaphysical doctrines.¹⁹ Let us examine how far this statement is correct in the light of the writings of Ibn Bajjah that have come down to us.

Ibn Bajjah has undoubtedly relied in philosophy and logic on the works of al-Farabi, but it is obvious that he has made considerable additions to them. Again, he has adopted an entirely different method of philosophical investigation. Unlike al-Farabi, he deals with the problems on the basis of reason alone.

He admires the philosophy of Aristotle on which he has founded his own system. But, he says, for understanding the speculative method of Aristotle it is of utmost importance to understand, first of all, his philosophy .correctly. That is why Ibn Bajjah wrote his commentaries on the works of Aristotle. These commentaries bear clear evidence that he studied the texts of Aristotle very carefully. As in Aristotle's philosophy, Ibn Bajjah has based his metaphysics and psychology on physics, and that is why his writings abound in discourses on physics.

Matter And Form

De Boer writes: "Ibn Bajjah starts with the assumption that matter cannot exist without some form, while form may exist by itself, without matter." But this is erroneous. According to Ibn Bajjah, matter can exist without form. He argues that if matter is not formless then it will be divided. into "matter" and "form," and this will go on *ad infinitum*.²⁰ Ibn Bajjah claims that the "First Form" is an abstract form which exists in matter that is said to have no form.

Aristotle defines matter as what receives form and is in a way universal. His matter in this sense differs

from the matter of Plato who, though agreeing with the above definition, maintains that form in itself is real and needs nothing to bring it into existence. The aim of Aristotle is not only to state that matter and form are dependent upon each other but also to distinguish the particular form of a species from that of another species. The form of a plant is different, for example, from the form of an animal, and the form of an inanimate object differs from the form of a plant, and so on.

In the writings of Ibn Bajjah the word *form* has been used to convey several different meanings: soul, figure, power, meaning, concept. In his opinion the form of a body has three stages: (1) the general spirit or the intellectual form, (2) the particular spiritual form, and (3) the physical form.

He has divided the spiritual form into the following types: –

1. The forms of circular bodies have only this much connection with matter that they make the material intelligibles perfect.
2. The material intelligibles which exist in matter.
3. Those forms which exist in the faculties of the soul – common sense, imaginative faculty, memory, etc., and are the *via media* between spiritual forms and material intelligibles.

Those forms which are related to the active intellect are called by Ibn Bajjah general spiritual forms, and those which are related to the common sense are called particular spiritual forms. This distinction has been maintained because the general spiritual forms have only one relation and that with the recipient, whereas the particular spiritual forms have two relations – one particular with the sensible, and the other general with the percipient.

A man, for example, recalls the form of the Taj Mahal; this form is not different from the form of the actual Taj Mahal when it is before the eyes – this form has, besides the aforementioned particular relation, a relation with the general body of percipients, since there are many individuals who enjoy the sight of the Taj Mahal.

Psychology

Ibn Bajjah, like Aristotle, bases his psychology on physics. He begins his discussion of the soul with its definition by stating that bodies, natural or artificial, are composed of matter and form, their form being the permanent acquisition or the entelechy of the body. Entelechy is of various kinds: it belongs either to those existents that perform their function without being essentially moved, or to those that move or act while they are being acted upon.

A body of this latter type is composed of both mover and moved, whereas the artificial body has its mover outside. Now, the form that supplies the entelechy of a natural body is called the soul. The soul is, therefore, defined as the first entelechy in a natural, organized body which is either nutritive, sensitive, or imaginative.

The ancient philosophers who preceded Aristotle had confined their study to the human soul alone and regarded the study of the animal soul as a part of natural science. *Soul* is an equivocal term, because it is not homogeneous in nature. If it were so, its functions would have likewise been homogeneous. It actually functions heterogeneously: nutritively, sensitively, imaginatively, or rationally.

Since every transitory being has to perform a particular function in virtue of which it stands as a part of the universe, the nutritive faculty has two ends, namely, growth and reproduction. This faculty does not only provide substances which are needed for the upkeep of the body, but also a surplus which is employed for the growth and development of the body. But when the growth is completed, the surplus is used for reproduction in those bodies that are reproductive.

The faculty of reproduction is to be distinguished from the nutritive faculty which acts on food and makes it a part of the body. This faculty is the "Actual Intellect" which changes a potential species into the body of an actual species. Those bodies that are not reproductive depend for the preservation of their species upon spontaneous generation. The reproductive faculty is the end of the faculty of growth and perishes only in old age when the nutritive faculty is left alone.

Sense-perception is either actual or potential. What is potential can become actual only when it is changed by something else. It, therefore, requires a mover to change it. This mover is the sensible, the moved being the sense-organ.

The sensibles or the natural accidents are of two kinds: either they are particular to the natural bodies or common to the natural and the artificial bodies; and they are, again, either mover or moved. They are always moved towards the species, since a mover causes motion in them only in so far as they are particular species, and not because they possess matter.

Every sentient body is composite and is the result of a mixture of different elements. This mixture is produced by innate heat and gives rise, for example, to condensation and rarefaction, as of odours, flavours, and colours. But besides these material states, there arise certain other states such as reproduction and spontaneous generation which are caused by the intellect or some other mover.

As soon as the process of mixture begins, the form begins to be received. Motion and reception of form take place simultaneously; and when the soul attains perfection, the reception of form is completed, matter and form, thus, becoming a single whole. When form is separated from matter, it exists actually as abstracted from matter, but is not the same as it is when it is in matter – and this is possible only if it now exists as an idea in the mind.

Sensation is, therefore, transitory. But how can a separate form be transitory, since transitoriness is only due to matter? The answer is this. The term "matter" is used for "psychical faculty" and "corporeal faculty" equivocally, and it means only the receptivity of form through which a body that has the faculty of sensitivity becomes sentient. The faculty of sense-perception is, therefore, a capacity in the sense-organ that becomes a form of the thing perceived.

But a further question arises: If perception is a form in matter, how can matter actually exist when it is not so informed? The answer is given as follows: "That 'apprehensions' are in a substratum and are identical with it, is clear, or else 'an apprehension' would not be a particular. But it does not follow from this that form cannot exist apart from-matter since the matter of 'apprehension' is the receptivity of the forms of the apprehensibles only, and is called matter *per prius*, while the matter of the 'apprehensible' is called *per posterius*."

Psychical perception is of two kinds: sensation and imagination. As said before, sensation is by nature prior to imagination, for which it supplies the matter. In short, sensation is a capacity of the body which is acted upon by the sensible. Since movements are many, sensations are also many; and because the sensibles are either general or particular, sensations are also general or particular.

The five senses -- sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch are five faculties of a single sense, viz., the common sense. Common sense plays the role of matter through which the forms of things become perceptible. It is through common sense that a man judges and distinguishes different states of the perceptible and realizes that every particle of an apple, for example, possesses taste, smell, colour, warmth, or cold. For this faculty preserves the impressions of the sensibles which enable the senses to apprehend the sensibles. The common sense is the entelechy of the whole body and is, therefore, called the soul. This faculty also supplies matter for the faculty of imagination.

Defined as the first entelechy of the organized imaginative body, the imaginative faculty is preceded by sensation which supplies material to it. Sensation and imagination have, therefore, been described as two kinds of the perception of the soul. But the difference between the two is obvious inasmuch as sensation is particular and imagination general. The imaginative faculty culminates in the reasoning faculty through which one man expresses himself to another, and achieves as well as imparts knowledge.

The appetitive soul consists of three faculties: (1) The imaginative appetence through which progeny are reared, individuals are moved to their dwellings, and have affection, love, and the like. (2) The intermediate appetence through which there is desire for food, housing, arts and crafts. (3) The appetence that makes speech and, through that, teaching possible and, unlike the other two, is peculiar to man.

The appetitive soul is applied to these three faculties *per prius et per posterius*. Every animal possesses the intermediate appetence by which it inclines to nutrition. Some animals do not possess the imaginative yearning. The yearning of intermediate appetence precedes by nature the imaginative appetences. The one thing that is clear is that every man has two faculties -- the appetitive and the rational -- and these precede others by nature.

The appetitive soul desires a perpetual object or an object in so far as it is perpetual. This desire is called pleasure, and the absence of desire is dullness, pain, and the like. Action is caused by desire, and

perpetuity is caused by the faculties. Desire is not distinctive of man. Anyone who does an action induced by desire is regarded to have done an action based on animality. It is obvious that when a man acts in this manner, he does it not because he is possessed of ideas. He attains perpetuity only to the extent to which he is possessed of them.

Though devoid of eternity, the appetitive soul has a strong desire for eternity. It loves only the intermediate imaginary form and the imaginary form. These are the only two forms which are perpetually loved by the appetitive soul. But since forms are many, the appetitive soul hesitates to make an attempt to realize them.

Again, the appetitive soul seeks the service of nature, and suffers from pain and laziness when nature does not co-operate with it. As nature is not simple, it is not always in one and the same state. It is due to nature that an animal needs rest, and it is due to the appetitive soul that it feels dissatisfied with it when prolonged.

But these two forms (i. e., the intermediate imaginary form and the imaginary form) are transitory, not eternal. Hence the appetitive soul does not achieve eternity but that which represents it, and what represents it is not difficult to estimate, for individuals as individuals think that they achieve eternity through perfection and perfection through the attainment of power and freedom.

Hence arises the power and freedom of those despots who hold sway over large areas of the world. Their unlimited power, abundant wealth, and unbridled activities, however, bring them no benefit, for most of them die of hunger and in utter regret for losing what they possessed. They are overtaken by fatigue and distress in dealing with the appetitive soul. In their hearts there survives the memory of their past and they feel regret and remorse.

When this occurs to the class of despots, what will be the fate of those who are lower in rank? This is as it should be, because the anxiety of their appetitive soul is to collect what is not to be collected and achieve what is not to be achieved. The animals which have no reason do not suffer from this kind of remorse, for their appetitive soul has no ambition and they have no memory of their past whims. They suffer only from natural calamities such as old age, which is the lot of every natural organism.

The imaginative faculty in man is the faculty through which he receives impressions of the sensibles and presents them before himself in imagination after their disappearance. This function of the imaginative faculty takes place both in our waking life and in sleep. This faculty also composes forms of the objects of imagination never sensed before. Sometimes it imagines and composes something which is not an individual but something applicable to a whole class.

At the final stage of imagination appears the intellect, and the rational faculty starts functioning; and we find in ourselves something which distinguishes us from other animals that obtain nutrition and possess sense-organs. Man finds in himself, for example, some objects of knowledge (concepts) containing the distinction between good and evil, useful and harmful. He also finds in himself things which he considers

to be definitely true, things which are merely conjectural, and things which are false. These known objects in the soul are called *logos*.

Logos is in the first instance related to the potential rational faculty, the function of which is to receive the objects of knowledge. This is so because in the earlier stages man is devoid of them and receives them only at a later stage. The term “logos” is applicable to the objects of knowledge after they become potentially receptive, and also when they actually exist and are expressed through words.

These objects of knowledge (concepts) which exist in potentiality and become actual in rationality, when considered in relation to the objects which they signify, constitute their knowledge since they are known through and recognized by them. When they are considered in so far as they are perceived by the imaginative faculty and are applied to the contents derived from them, they are called intelligibles;—but when they are considered in so far as they are perceived by the rational faculty which completes them and brings them from potentiality into actuality, they are called mind or the intellect.

There are various grades of knowledge, the first of which is the knowledge of a particularly specified object. This primarily comes into being by achieving the apprehension of the particular in the imaginative faculty in a general way only, i.e., it cannot be imagined specifically. Nor can any quality of the same be described. But it is distinguished in a general way without attending to any one of its qualities. This is the weakest knowledge of an object and resembles the imagination of an animal.

Again, when the state of the particular is possible in the imaginative faculty, man advances to this particular with its detailed characteristics, which help him to recognize it to be the same at different times. He distinguishes Zaid, for example, as tall, fair, delicate, and considers all these descriptions in his imagination as though they were related numerically to one individual.

Some people, however, think that sometimes words lead to absurdity for they introduce multiplicity where there is only unity: for example, the particular which is described by the words “tall,” “fair,” and so on, is not more than one. However, this is the way in which man achieves the knowledge of individuals in so far as they are definite and particular. Since the qualities through which the particular individuals are known as described above are accidents attached to different individuals, there is no resemblance between any two individuals. Tallness in Zaid, for example, is not exactly the same as tallness in Bakr.

When the objects of imagination are obtained in the imaginative faculty, the rational faculty looks at them through its insight, and realizes the universal meanings. Through these universal meanings the rational faculty imagines and distinguishes the nature of every imagined object. And when the words indicating the universal meanings are mentioned, the rational faculty distinguishes them, presents them before the mind, and apprehends them. All this occurs in more ways than one.

1. The rational faculty presents universal meanings before the mind, and apprehends them as true of the imagined individuals signified by them. Through insight the rational faculty sees the universal meanings in the individuals. In this sense this faculty distinguishes universal meanings from one another in the

manner described above.

2. According to another method, the rational faculty distinguishes these universal meanings perfectly, but when it sees them through its insight and presents them to the soul well arranged, it sees them through its insight in the imaginative faculty which also acts upon them, and makes them resemble the universal meaning and imparts to them forms which are common to more than one, but not to all individuals to which the meaning is applicable.

The sculptor represents the form of a horse in stone, or a painter draws the form of a horse on the surface of a board, but this representation is imperfect, for it represents and reproduces the form of a horse that *obtains nutrition*, and *neighs*. But all that is represented thus is not common to all horses. The imaginative faculty represents things which are limited in respect of age, size, etc. The image of a horse is not common to the full-grown horse, the young horse, and the colt. Its image is common only to the horses of that particular size or age which the imaginative faculty represents.

As soon as the rational faculty makes distinctions of universal meanings, and presents them to the mind to look more closely into them through its insight, the latter looks into them through the image which the imaginative faculty represents. The rational faculty distinguishes whether the image is perfect or not perfect, common or not common. Without any difficulty it thinks of the intelligible meanings.

In this way the universal meanings are apprehended by artists and most scientists. When the artisan, for example, thinks how to make an article, he presents the image of the particular article to his imaginative faculty, and prepares his plan to make it. Similarly, when a scientist looks into the objects of knowledge to know their nature and give their description, he presents their images to his imaginative faculty.

These are two methods by which the imaginative faculty serves the rational faculty by presenting to the latter the phantoms of an object, either the phantoms of the individual object itself or those of its image, which represents the universal meaning, as mentioned above. The rational faculty imparts universal descriptions to the objects of imagination. Whoever exerts the rational faculty to act on the objects obtained in the imaginative faculty sees the confirmation of what has been mentioned and sees through his rational faculty the divine gift flowing over the faculty. This is just like a person who sees by the faculty of seeing the light of the sun through the light of the sun.

The immediate cause of the apprehension of intelligibles and the activity of the rational faculty in actuality is a gift which is like the light of the sun through which one realizes and sees the creation of God so clearly that one becomes a believer in Him, His angels, books, messengers, and the next world, enjoys certain belief, and remembers God while standing, sitting, and lying. Every thought is obtained through this gift which is no other than man's connection with the active intellect.

Thus, it may be concluded that Ibn Bajjah starts describing "Aristotelian Psychology" and in the end arrives at the position of Ibn Sina and also of al-Ghazali, whose name he mentions with respect and reverence.

Intellect And Knowledge

According to Ibn Bajjah, the intellect is the most important part of man. In his opinion correct knowledge is obtained through the intellect which alone enables us to attain prosperity and to build character. Something has already been said about the source of the intellect and its working. The following extracts will, however, throw some further light on the matter:

“It is necessary for man to see through his own insight the contents of the imaginative faculty, just as he sees the individual objects with his eyes and distinguishes them fully. He is sure to find that those individual objects are repeatedly impressed upon the imaginative faculty. Many imaginable objects have one or more than one individual in the imaginative faculty. They also possess the accidents attached to these individuals, viz., measure, colour, knowledge, health, sickness, motion, time, space, and other categories.

Having realized all this, a man sees through his insight that the rational faculty looks into the objects of imagination and apprehends their common characteristic, i. e., the differentia which distinguishes them from the objects of sense, differentia by virtue of which they are considered to be individuals and distinguished as intelligible objects. One should also realize that these differentiae are discerned by the rational faculty through the divine gift which flows over them in the same way as the objects of sight become manifest to the perceiving mind through the light of the sun that falls on them, without which light they would remain completely invisible.

Through the same gift the whole is distinguished from its parts and is judged to be greater than the parts. Again, numbers considered to be numerals are declared by this gift as different and many when investigation into God's creation – the creatures of heaven and earth, night and day, messengers, revelation, dreams, and what the soothsayer's tongue utters – is repeated so much that man comprehends them through the imaginative faculty, and the rational faculty sees through its insight in a pure, simple, and peculiar way the existence of objects which are neither conceived by thought nor perceived by the senses. Its outlook becomes widened, and it desires to know the causes of those creatures which become intelligible.

The rational faculty does not know the objects of knowledge adequately unless it knows them through four causes – form, matter, agent, and purpose. It is necessary to know all these causes in respect of the objects which inevitably possess them.

Man is by nature inclined to investigate and know all these causes. His inquiry covers in the first instance the four causes of the objects of sense-perception. This is quite evident with respect to the objects of art as well as those of nature. He is all the more interested in knowing the causes of the intelligible objects, for this investigation is considered to be sublime, high, and useful. Finally, it is through investigation of causes that man reaches the belief in God, His angels, books, messengers, and the life hereafter.”

“Look,” says Ibn Bajjah, “into the wonders that lie between the intellect and the faculty of imagination through your penetrative soul. You can see with certainty that the intellect derives from the imaginative faculty the objects of knowledge called the intelligibles, and offers to the imaginative faculty a number of other objects of knowledge.

Take, for example, the moral and artistic ideals, or those objects of knowledge which are either the events that might take place and are available in the imaginative faculty before their occurrence, or the events that have not occurred but have found their way into the imaginative faculty not through the sense-organs but rather through the intellect as in the case of true dreams.

The most astonishing thing concerning the imaginative faculty is that which relates to revelation and soothsaying. It is clear in these cases that what the intellect offers to the human imagination does not proceed from the intellect itself, nor is acted upon by the intellect, but arises in imagination through an agent who has known it beforehand, and is able to create it.

It is God who causes by His will the mover of the active spheres to act upon the passive spheres as He likes. When, for example, He intends to make manifest what will occur in the universe, He first of all sends the knowledge to angels and through them to the human intellect. This knowledge comes to man in accordance with his capacity for receiving it. This is evident in most cases of God's virtuous servants whom He has shown the right path and who are sincere to Him, particularly the apostles to whom He makes manifest through His angels in waking life or dream the wonderful events that are going to happen in the universe.

“God, the Almighty, makes manifest to His existing beings and creatures both knowledge and deed. Every being receives these from Him according to its rank in the perfection of existence: the intellects receive from Him knowledge according to their positions, and spheres receive from Him figures and physical forms according to their ranks and positions. Every celestial body possesses intellect and a soul through which it performs particular actions which are perceived by way of imagination such as the imagination of transference from an imaginary place which continues to exist.

Due to this individually perceptible particular transference there arise particular actions which are perceived by the bodies that come into being and pass away. This is most manifest in the sun and the moon from among the celestial bodies. It is through this intellect that a man knows sciences which are revealed to him from God, things that are intelligible, the particular events which are to take place in the present and the future, as well as the events that happened in the past. This is the knowledge of the unseen of which God informs His chosen servants through His angels.”

Ibn Bajjah further elucidates the nature of human knowledge and the stages thereof when he says: “Knowledge in man means his seeing the existents together with their perfect existence in his intellect through the insight of his soul which is a gift of God. This gift of God is of different grades in different men, the greatest insight being that of prophets who perfectly know Him and His creatures, and enjoy

that sublime knowledge in their own souls through their excellent insights without learning and without making any effort to learn.

The highest knowledge is that of God Himself and His angels down to the knowledge of what particular events have taken place and will take place in this universe – knowledge gained through the insight of their hearts, without the use of the eyes.

In a lower rank than that of the prophets are the friends of God who possess excellent nature through which they derive from the prophets that which enables them to attain to the knowledge of God and the knowledge of His angels, books, apostles, the Last Day, and the highest blessing, which they continue to attest by the insight they enjoy in accordance with the different degrees of the divine gift they receive. These sincere men also receive a little bit of the knowledge of the unseen in their dreams. The friends of God include the Companions of the Prophet.

After them come a number of men whom God has favoured with insight through which they realize with certainty the reality of everything till stage by stage they attain to sure knowledge of God, His angels, books, apostles, and the Last Day. They realize through their insight that they have become pure and have achieved perfection or the highest blessing, which is continuity without destruction, honour without disgrace, and richness without fear of poverty. These people who include Aristotle are very few in number.”

Ibn Bajjah believes in the plurality of intellects and refers to the first intellect and the secondary intellects. In his opinion, the human intellect is the intellect remotest from the first intellect. He further explains the grades of the intellect by saying that some intellects have been directly derived from the first intellect, and some others are derived from other intellects, the relation of what has been derived to that from which derivation has been made being the same as the relation of the light of the sun which is inside the house to that of the sun which is in the courtyard of the house.

Knowledge of the nature of existents which the intellect possesses is of two kinds: (1) that which is intelligible but cannot be invented, and (2) that which is intelligible and can be invented. The intellect itself is also of two kinds: (i) theoretical intellect through which man understands things which he cannot bring into being, and (ii) practical intellect through which he conceives artificial beings which he can invent.

Perfection of the practical intellect lies in man's understanding artificial objects and bringing them into being in accordance with his own intention. These are invented only through the organs of the human body, either by the movement of the organs without any implement from outside, or by moving the organs which in their turn move some external instruments. This happens when the artificial objects are accomplished by the human volition.

Human organs are moved *per se*, but when an artificial object is made, they are moved by the human volition at first in the mind, and then the object is produced outside the mind in accordance with the

image formed in the mind before the organs bring it into being. This image is a phantom in the imaginative faculty of the soul and is general. This image disappears from the soul which obtains another image, and the process continues.

Whenever man intends to make a certain object, he forms an image in the imaginative faculty. Then he can see by his insight that another faculty of the soul abstracts this image in the imaginative faculty and transfers it from one state to another until its existence is accomplished in the soul, and then he sets the organs into motion to bring the object into being. This faculty which understands and abstracts in imagination is called the practical intellect. When in the imaginative faculty the practical intellect primarily abstracts the image of the artificial object according to a particular form and size, the moving faculty moves the organs to invent the object.

The intellect is, therefore, the first maker of the object, and not the organs which are moved by the soul, nor indeed the faculty which moves the organs. It is clear that the power of organs is not primarily found in nature but is caused to come into being by the faculty of the intellect which causes it to appear in imagination, and only then the organs cause the objects to be made through volition.

The imaginative faculty seeks the help of sense-perception at the time of inventing the object to present it to the faculty which has moved the organs, and to enable the intellect to compare and see whether the imagined object belongs to sense-perception in the same way as it belongs to the imaginative faculty.

The intellect has two functions to perform; (1) to present to the faculty of imagination the image of the object to be created, and (2) to have the object made outside the soul by moving the organs of the individual's body.

According to Ibn Bajjah, the human intellect by degrees achieves nearness to the first intellect in two ways: (1) by achieving knowledge based on proof, in which case the highest intellect is realized as form; and (2) by achieving knowledge without learning or making an effort to acquire it. This second method is that of the Sufis, notably of al-Ghazali; it enables one to gain the knowledge of God.

From this it is clear that though Ibn Bajjah has emphasized the speculative method, he does not condemn the mystic method, as some Europeans would have us believe.[21](#)

God, The Fountain-Head Of Knowledge

With regard to the divine gift through which the rational faculty discerns the differentiae, one man excels another, and that in accordance with the capacity that God has given him. But these two gifts are innate, not acquired. The capacities and gifts which are acquired are next to the innate ones and they are acquired by doing, under the guidance of the prophets, what pleases God. Man, therefore, should respond to the Holy Prophet's call and do what he urges him to do.

He can, thus, see through the insight of his heart the nature of every creature, its origin, and its final

destination. He can know in the same way that God is a necessary being *per se*, is alone, has no associates, and is the creator of everything; that everything besides Him is contingent and has emanated from His perfect essence: that His self-knowledge implies His knowledge of all objects; and that His knowledge of objects is the cause of their coming into being.

To reduce the number of stages to achieve nearness to God, Ibn Bajjah advises us to do three things : (1) charge our tongues to rememembr God and glorify Him, (2) charge our organs to act in accordance with the insight of the heart, and (3) avoid what makes us indifferent to the remembrance of God or turns our hearts away from Him. These have to be followed continuously for the whole of one's life.

Political Philosophy

Ibn Bajjah wrote a number of small treatises on the administration of the House-State and the administration of the City-State, but the only available book on the subject is *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid* (Regime of the Solitary). As is clear from this book, Ibn Bajjah agrees to a great extent with the political theory of al-Farabi. He has, for example, accepted al-Farabi's division of the State into perfect and imperfect. He also agrees with al-Farabi in holding that different individuals of a nation possess different dispositions—some of them like to rule, and some others like to be ruled.[22](#)

But Ibn Bajjah adds to the system of al-Farabi when he exhorts that the solitary man (*mutawahhid* or the penetrative philosopher) should keep aloof from the people in certain circumstances. Even though avoidance of people is in itself undesirable, it is necessary in the endeavour to achieve perfection. He also advises him that he should meet the community only on a few inevitable occasions for a short time, and that he should migrate to those countries where he finds knowledge, migration being perfectly permissible under the laws of the science of politics.[23](#)

In his *Risalat al-Wada`* Ibn Bajjah has given two alternative functions of the State: (1) to estimate the deeds of the subjects in order to guide them to reach their intended goals and not any other ends. This function can be best performed in the ideal State by a sovereign ruler. (2) The alternative function is to devise means for the achievement of particular ends just as a rider as a preliminary exercise acquires control over the bridle in order to become an expert in riding. This is the function of the administrators of those States which are not ideal. In this case the ruler is called the chief (*ra'is*). The chief enforces in the State a traditional system for the subjects' execution of all actions.

In the system of al-Farabi, as well as in that of Ibn Bajjah, the constitution is to be framed by the Head of the State, who has been equated by al-Farabi with a prophet or Imam. Ibn Bajjah does not mention this identity in so many words but he indirectly agrees with al-Farabi when he declares that “human perfection cannot be attained but through that which the apostles bring from God the Exalted (i, e., the divine Law or *Shari`ah*). Those who follow God's guidance cannot be led astray.”[24](#) It is, therefore, too sweeping a statement to say, “He (Ibn Bajjah) ignores the political relevance of the divine Law (*Shari`ah*) and its educative value for man as a citizen.”[25](#)

Ethics

Ibn Bajjah divides actions into animal and human. The former are due to natural needs and are human as well as animal. Eating, for example, is animal in so far as it is done to fulfil need and desire, and human in so far as it is done to preserve strength and life in order to achieve spiritual blessings.

Ibn Bajjah draws our attention to the active human faculties, as man is too dignified to be qualified with the passive faculties which are either material or animal. The human faculty of learning is a passive faculty, but it is so in a different sense. The active faculty intends to attain perfection only, and then it stops, as in the art through which a trade is accomplished. But the repetition of the art is exercised only through the appetitive soul and opinion.

What is done due to the appetitive soul is the action which is done by the agent for its own sake. And, what is done by opinion is the action which is done to gain some other end. The appetitive soul desires a perpetual object, the desire being called pleasure, and its absence dullness and pain. Anybody who performs an action in this way is regarded as having done an animal action.

Those who act through opinion act only in so far as they are men. Opinion either moves one to that which is essentially perpetual, or to that which is perpetual because it is abundant. If the action is perpetual due to abundance, then the end will take the place of the preliminary action. This end-seeking is either due to propensity only, in which case it is an animal action, or due to opinion which has an intended goal in the achievement of which lies its completion.

The end varies in accordance with the nature of the individuals; some people, for example, are born for shoe-making and others for other vocations. Ends serve one another mutually, and all of them lead to one and the same ultimate goal—the chief end. The chief man is naturally he who prepares himself to aim at the chief end, and those who are not prepared for it are subservient by nature. Some people are, therefore, naturally submissive and are ruled by others, and some possess authority by nature and rule others.

Opinion is sometimes right essentially. It is so when it desires the eternal. Sometimes it is right accidentally and not in its essence. The opinions of the shrewd and crafty, for example, are right in respect of the objects they have set up before them; but they are not right-in-themselves. These opinions are relatively right but not universally so.

Colocynth is useful for a man of phlegmatic disposition, but not for all. On the other hand, bread and meat are useful both naturally and universally. The opinion which is right relatively as much as generally is right absolutely. But sometimes what is relatively right is not so in general, and is, therefore, right in one respect and wrong in another.

To declare an action animal or human it is necessary to have speculation in addition to volition. Keeping

in view the nature of volition as well as speculation Ibn Bajjah divides the virtues into two types, the formal virtues and the speculative virtues. A formal virtue is innate without any trace of volition and speculation, such as the honesty of a dog, since it is impossible for a dog to be dishonest. This virtue has no value in man. The speculative virtue is based on free volition and speculation.

The action which is done for the sake of righteousness and not for fulfilling any natural desire is called divine and not human, since this is rare in man. Good, according to Ibn Bajjah, is existence, and evil is absence of existence. In other words, evil for him is really no evil.

Mysticism

Renan is right in his view that Ibn Bajjah has a leaning towards mysticism, but is certainly wrong in thinking that he attacks al-Ghazali for his insistence on intuition and Sufism. As a matter of fact, Ibn Bajjah admires al-Ghazali and declares that the latter's method enables one to achieve the knowledge of God, and that it is based on the teachings of the Holy Prophet.

The mystic receives a light in his heart. This light in the heart is a speculation through which the heart sees the intelligibles in the same way as a man sees the sunlit objects through eyesight; and through this apprehension of the intelligibles it sees all that which by implication precedes them or succeeds them.

Ibn Bajjah holds the friends of God (*awliya' Allah*) in high esteem and places them next only to the prophets. According to him, some people are dominated by corporeality only – they are the lowest in rank – and some are greatly dominated by a fine spirituality – this group is very rare, and to this group belong Uwais al-Qarani and Ibrahim ibn Adham.[26](#)

In his attitude towards God and His decree Ibn Bajjah comes close to declaring himself a fatalist. In one of the treatises he declares that if we were to refer to the decree of God and His power we would verily attain peace and comfort. All existing things are in His knowledge and He alone bestows good upon them. Since He knows everything essentially, He issues orders to an intermediary to invent a form like the one which is in His knowledge and to the recipient of forms to receive that form. This is the case concerning all existents, even concerning transitory matter and the human intellect.

In support of his view that God is the Ultimate Creator of all actions Ibn Bajjah refers to al-Ghazali's view, expressed at the end of his *Mishkat al-Anwar*, that the First Principle created agents as well as the objects of action to be acted upon; and he gets further support for this view from al-Farabi's observation, in *Uyun al-Masa'il*, that all are related to the First Principle in so far as the First is their creator.

Ibn Bajjah also states that Aristotle said in his *Physics* that the First Agent is the real agent and the near agent does not act but through the First. The First makes the near act and the object to be acted upon. The near is known to the majority of people as agent only in affairs that concern matter. The just king, for

example, deserves the ascription of justice, although he is distant in rank from him who is below him in the series of agents.

Whoever ascribes an action to a near agent is like the dog that bites the stone by which it is struck. But such ascription of action to the near agent is not possible in affairs which do not concern physical matters. The active intellect which surrounds the heavenly bodies is the near agent of all transitory particulars. But He who created both the active intellect and the heavenly bodies is the real eternal agent.

God causes the existence of a thing to continue without end after its physical non-existence. When an existent reaches its perfection, it ceases to remain in time (*zaman*) but exists eternally in the continuous flux of duration (*dahr*). Ibn Bajjah here reminds one of the Holy Prophet's saying: "Do not abuse *dahr* as *dahr* is Allah." So interpreted, the saying implies that the human intellect enjoys eternal continuity. In support of this interpretation of the word *dahr* Ibn Bajjah mentions his predecessors like al-Farabi and al-Ghazali.

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