

## Chapter 27: Ibn Tufail

By Bakhtyar Husain Siddiqi

### Life And Works

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tufail (Latin, Abubacer), the first great leader of philosophical thought in the Muwahbid Spain, was born in the first decade of sixth/twelfth century, at Guadix, in the province of Granada. He belonged to the prominent Arab tribe of Qais. Al-Marrakushi traces his education to Ibn Bajjah, which in view of Ibn Tufail's denial of acquaintance with him, is incorrect.<sup>1</sup>

He started his career as a practising physician in Granada and through his fame in the profession became secretary to the governor of the province. Later, in 549/1154, he became Private Secretary to the Governor of Ceuta and Tangier, a son of 'Abd al-Mu'min, the first Muwahhid ruler of Spain who captured Morocco in 542/1147.

Finally, he rose to the eminent position of the physician and Qadi of the Court and vizier<sup>2</sup> to the Muwahhid Caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (r. 558/1163–580/1184), whose personal interest in philosophy and liberal patronage turned his Court into a galaxy of leaders of philosophical thought and scientific method and made Spain, what R. Briffault calls, “the cradle of the rebirth of Europe.”<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Tufail enjoyed enormous influence with Caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf, and it was he who introduced Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) to him. On the express desire of the Caliph, he advised Ibn Bajjah to annotate the works of Aristotle, a task that had been taken up zealously by Ibn Bajjah but had remained unfinished to the time of his death.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Tufail resigned his position as Court physician in 578/1182 due to old age and recommended Ibn Rushd to his patron as his successor. He, however, continued to retain Abu Ya'qub's esteem and after his death (in 580/1184) gained the favour of his son Abu Yusuf al-Mansur (580/1184–595/1199). He died at Morocco in 581/1185–86. Al-Mansur himself attended his obsequies.

Ibn Tufail was an illustrious physician, philosopher, mathematician, and poet of the Muwahhid Spain, but unfortunately very little is known about his works. Ibn Khatib attributes two treatises on medicine to him. Al-Bitruji (his pupil) and Ibn Rushd credit him with “original astronomical ideas.” Al-Bitruji offers a refutation of Ptolemy's theory of epicycles and eccentric circles which in the preface to his *Kitab al-Hai'ah* he acknowledges to be a contribution of his teacher Ibn Tufail.[5](#)

Quoting Ibn Rushd, Ibn Abi Usaibi'ah attributes *Fi al-Buqa' al-Maskunah w-al-Ghair al-Maskunah* to Ibn Tufail, but in Ibn Rushd's own account no such reference is traceable.[6](#) Al-Marrakushi, the historian, claims to have seen the original manuscript of one of his treatises on the science of divinity.[7](#) Miguel Casiri (1122/1710–1205/1790) names two extant works: *Risalah Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and *Asrar al-Hikmah al-Mashriqiyyah*, the latter in manuscript form.[8](#) The preface to the *Asrar* discloses that the treatise is only a part of the *Risalah Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, the full title of which is *Risalah Hayy Bin Yaqzan fi Asrar al-Hikmat al-Mashriqiyyah*. [9](#)

## Creed Of The Muwahhids

The foundation of the Muwahhid dynasty is associated with the name of Ibn Tumart (d. c. 524/1130), a politico-religious leader who claimed to be the Mahdi. He introduced in the West orthodox scholasticism of al-Ghazali and exhorted people to observe the Zahirite *Fiqh*. During his travels he met 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Qumi (d. 558/1163), a potter's son, and made him his disciple and successor in his puritanical movement. He raised the banner of revolt against the corrupt Murabit rulers of Spain, but success ultimately fell to the lot of 'Abd al-Mu'min, who took Oran, Tlemcen, Fez, Sale, Ceuta and in 542/1147 became the first Muwahhid ruler of Morocco. He was succeeded by Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (d. 580/1184) and then by Abu Yusuf al-Mansur (d. 595/1199) on whose Courts the two great luminaries Ibn Tufail and Ibn Rushd, shed imperishable luster. [10](#)

The Muwahhids professed to be Ghazalians. They were noted for their puritanical belief in the unity of God. Anthropomorphic notions were an anathema to them. Secondly, inspired by Ibn Tumart, they stood for the strict observance of the exoteric aspect of religion. The Zahirite *Fiqh* constituted the Muwahhid State religion. Thirdly, as a legacy of Ibn Bajjah, they regarded philosophy as a species of esoteric truth reserved for the enlightened few. The masses, being incapable of pure knowledge, should not be taught more than the literal sense of the colourful eschatology of the Qur'an. [11](#)

Needless to say, the mental equipment of Ibn Tufail is largely provided by the official religion of the Muwahhids, and his *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is but a defence of the attitude of the Muwahhids both towards people and philosophers. [12](#)

## Hayy Bin Yaqzan

## Summary

The treatise dramatically opens with the spontaneous birth of Hayy in an uninhabited island, followed by a popular legend about his being thrown to this desolate place by the sister of a certain king, in order to keep her marriage with Yaqzan a secret. Unalloyed by social conventions, he is nourished there by a roe and taught by natural reason or common sense, which, though really very uncommon, equips him with inductive intellect to probe into the secret of things.

Unlike the lower animals, he becomes conscious of his being naked and unarmed with physical weapons of defence. He reflects over the situation and covers the lower parts of his body with leaves. He arms himself with a stick, and thus comes to realize the superiority of his hands over the feet of animals. The death of the mother-roe leads him to the discovery of the animal soul which uses the body as an instrument, like the stick in his hands, shares light and warmth with fire, and thus bears resemblance to the heavenly bodies.

He then turns to the analysis of the phenomena of nature, compares the objects around him, and discriminates between them, and classifies them into minerals, plants, and animals. Observation shows him that body is a common factor in all the objects, but they belong to different classes because of the functions peculiar to them. This leads him to assume a specific form or soul for each class of objects.

But the soul being imperceptible, his dialectical ingenuity at last brings him to the idea of an ultimate, eternal, incorporeal, and necessary Being which is the efficient cause of the peculiar behaviour of bodies. This makes him conscious of his own immaterial essence; and acting upon a three-point code of ascetic discipline which will be explained later, he is finally absorbed in the unrestrained contemplation of the Ultimate Being.

At this stage, Asal, a contemplative and meditative soul, from the neighbouring inhabited island appears on the scene in quest of attaining perfection in solitude. He informs Hayy, the child of nature, about the Qur'anic conceptions of God, His angels, prophets, the Day of Judgment, etc., which he by his self-developed intellect immediately recognizes as truths. He, however, in the first instance, fails to see the wisdom implicit in the figurative languages of the Qur'an about God and the hereafter, and in the permission that it gives one to lead a worldly life – a permission which is likely to turn one away from the truth.

Full of ambition and hope, he sets out in the company of Asal to the said inhabited island ruled by Salaman and begins to reform its convention-ridden people. He endeavours hard to enlighten the masses through pure concepts, but, in the end, finds these concepts far above their heads. He then realizes the wisdom of the Prophet in giving them sensuous forms instead of full light, returns to his lonely island, and is absorbed in contemplation.

## Sources

*Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is a unique creation of Ibn Tufail's mystico–philosophical thought. Nevertheless, the idea of this romance is not entirely new. Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), among his predecessors, had written a mystic allegory of the same title. But the comparison ends here. Ibn Sina's dramatized tale narrates how one day he, with a few companions, went out for a ramble in the vicinity of a town and chanced to meet an old man, Hayy bin Yaqzan, and requested him to be permitted to accompany him in his unending journeys. But the old man replied that that was not possible for Ibn Sina, because of his companions whom he could not leave.

In this allegory Ibn Sina himself represents the rational soul, the companions the various senses, and the old man, Hayy bin Yaqzan, the active intellect.<sup>13</sup> “With Ibn Sina,” thus, “the character of Hai [Hayy] represents the Superhuman Spirit, but the hero of Ibn Tufail's romance seems to be the personification of the natural spirit of Mankind illuminated from above; and that Spirit must be in accordance with the Soul of Muhammed when rightly understood, whose utterances are to be interpreted allegorically.”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the names of Salaman and Asal, the other two characters of Ibn Tufail's romance, are not new in the philosophical literature. These, too, have been borrowed from Ibn Sina's tale of *Salaman wa Absal*, of which we know only through Tusi's paraphrase in his commentary on *Isharat*.

The story relates how Absal, the younger brother of Salaman, was obliged to proceed to war in order to avoid the immoral designs of the latter's wife, but was deserted by the army through her machinations and his wounded body was carried away by a gazelle to a place of safety. On returning home, he raised a strong army and regained the lost kingdom for Salaman, whose wife becoming desperate poisoned him to death.

The sorrow–stricken Salaman lost heart and became a hermit. A mystic trance, at last, revealed to him that his own wife was the cause of the catastrophe, and he killed her and all her accomplices.<sup>15</sup> Salaman, in this tale, represents the rational soul, Absal the theoretical reason, and Salaman's wife, the passion–worshipping body.

Notwithstanding the similarity of names and the episode of the gazelle, the basic theme of both the treatises is intrinsically different. With Ibn Sina the main object is to show how personal afflictions (he himself was a prisoner in the dungeon of a fortress while writing the allegory) invoke divine grace and cause the purification of the soul but the object of Ibn Tufail is nothing less than to dramatize the development of theoretical reason from the gross sense–perception to the beatific vision of God.<sup>16</sup>

By far the most marked, deep, and saturating influence, which seems to have coloured the basic structure of Ibn Tufail's romance, is that of Ibn Bajjah, his arch–rationalist predecessor. His lonely, metaphysically minded Hayy is only an extreme form of the “solitary man” of Ibn Bajjah's *Tadbir al–Mutawahhid*. Nevertheless, in spite of his recognition of the necessity of solitude for the improvement of

theoretical reason, Ibn Tufail feels rather unhappy over Ibn Bajjah's one-sided emphasis on the role of reason in arriving at the ultimate truth. Somewhat sympathetically he complains of the "incompleteness" of Ibn Bajjah's *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid*.<sup>17</sup>

It is to the desire of removing this incompleteness that Ibn Tufail's *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* owes its origin. And it is the influence of Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and perhaps also of Suhrawardi Maqtul, his Persian contemporary that made him supplement reason with ecstasy in its flight to the celestial world.

Of Hayy's birth in an uninhabited island, Ibn Tufail relates two versions. The scientific version of his spontaneous birth, he owes entirely to Ibn Sina.<sup>18</sup> The legendary version is traced by Gracia Gomez ("Comparative Study of Ibn Tufail and Baltazar Gracian," Madrid, 1926) to *Dhu al-Qarnain wa Qissat al-Sanam w-al-Malak wa Bintuhu*, a Greek tale translated into Arabic by Hunain ibn Ishaq.

The tale narrates how, under royal displeasure, the daughter of a king threw away her natural daughter from the son of her father's vizier, in the sea, the surging waves of which landed her in an uninhabited island where she was nourished by a roe. She grew up into a beautiful damsel; later, Alexander the Great chanced to meet her in the island of Oreon.<sup>19</sup> That the life of Hayy resembles that of the damsel in its initial stages, there can be no doubt, but the resemblance ends there. Besides, the aforesaid Greek tale does not seem to be the only source of this legend. Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar has lately traced the threads of the fable to the Persian tale of *Musa-o Dara-o Nimrud*.<sup>20</sup>

The romantic frame of *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is by no means original. It is of Alexandrian origin; it may have even a Persian strain. Nevertheless, it is Ibn Tufail who changes a simple tale into a romance of a unique philosophical significance. It is the philosophical acumen rather than the poetic imagination that marks the treatise with novelty and makes it to be "one of the most original books of the Middle Ages."<sup>21</sup>

## Object of the Treatise

As al-Marrakushi, the historian, has said, *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is a treatise which aims at giving a scientific explanation of the beginning of human life on earth.<sup>22</sup> As a prelude to the story of *Hayy Bin Yaqzan*, it is related that the moderate climate of the uninhabited island, coupled with a fair proportion of the elements, led to the spontaneous birth of the first man, who found the stick a successful weapon in the struggle for existence, and thereby got the conviction of his own superiority over other animals. But actually this beginning is meant merely to provide a background for showing the development of inductive intellect, independently of any social influence whatsoever.

Contradicting al-Marrakushi's position, but in complete agreement with de Boer, Dr. Muhammad Ghallab<sup>23</sup> rightly contends that the treatise essentially aims at showing that the individual man left to himself is able, with the resources of nature alone and without any help from society, to advance to and reach the ultimate truth, provided he has the necessary aptitude for doing so.

The truth of the Qur'an and the Hadith is open to pure intellectual apprehension, but it has to be guarded

against the illiterate masses whose business it is not to think but to believe and obey. In fact, this view is an echo of Ibn Bajjah's position, which later came to be regarded as the proper official attitude under the Muwahhids.

Muhammad Yunus Farangi Mahalli<sup>24</sup> points to a still higher aim implicit in the treatise. Religion is as much essential for a progressive society as are philosophy and mysticism – a thesis which is brilliantly exemplified by the co-operation of the three dramatic characters: Hayy, the philosopher; Asal, the mystic; and Salaman, the theologian. The underlying aim is not only to show that philosophy is at one with religion properly understood, but that both the exoteric and the esoteric aspects of religion and philosophy are expressions of the same eternal truth revealed to individuals according to their intellectual capabilities.

Philosophically speaking, the treatise is a brilliant exposition of Ibn Tufail's theory of knowledge, which seeks to harmonize Aristotle with the Neo-Platonists on the one hand, and al-Ghazali with Ibn Bajjah on the other. Al-Ghazali was dogmatically critical of Aristotelian rationalism, but Ibn Bajjah was Aristotelian through and through. Ibn Tufail, following the middle course, bridged the gulf between the two.

As a rationalist he sides with Ibn Bajjah against al-Ghazali and qualifies mysticism with rationalism; as a mystic he sides with al-Ghazali against Ibn Bajjah and qualifies rationalism with mysticism. Ecstasy is the highest form of knowledge, but the path leading to such knowledge is paved with the improvement of reason, followed by the purification of the soul through ascetic practices.

The methods of al-Ghazali and Ibn Tufail are both partially the same, but, unlike the former, the latter's ecstasy is marked by a Neo-Platonic strain. Al-Ghazali, true to his theologico-mystical position, takes ecstasy as the means to see God, but to Ibn Tufail, the philosopher, the beatific vision reveals the active intellect and the Neo-Platonic chain of causes reaching down to the elements and back to itself.

## Doctrines

### World

Is the world eternal, or created by God at will out of sheer nothingness? This is one of the most challenging problems of Muslim philosophy. Ibn Tufail, quite in keeping with his dialectical ingenuity, faces it squarely in the manner of Kant. Unlike his predecessors, he does not subscribe to any of the rival doctrines, nor does he make any attempt to reconcile them. On the other hand, he subjects both the Aristotelian and the theological positions to scathing criticism.

The eternity of the world involves the concept of infinite existence which is no less impossible than the notion of infinite extension. Such an existence cannot be free from created accidents and as such cannot precede them in point of time; and that which cannot exist before the created accidents must itself be created in time. Similarly, the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* does not survive his scrutiny. Like al-Ghazali,

he points out that the notion of existence after non-existence is unintelligible without supposing the priority of time over the world; but time itself is an inseparable accident of the world, and so its being prior to the world is ruled out. Again, the created must needs have a Creator. Why then did the Creator create the world now and not before? Was it due to something that happened to Him? Obviously not, for nothing existed before Him to make anything happen to Him. Should it be attributed to a change in His nature? But what was there to bring about this change? [25](#)

Consequently, Ibn Tufail accepts neither the eternity nor temporal creation of the world. This antinomy clearly anticipates the Kantian position that reason has its own limits and that its arguments lead to a maze of contradictions.

## God

Both eternity of the world and its *creatio ex nihilo* equally and inevitably lead to the existence of an eternal, incorporeal Necessary Being.[26](#) The creation of the world in time presupposes a Creator, for the world cannot exist by itself. Again, the Creator must, of necessity, be immaterial, for matter being an accident of the world is itself subject to creation by a Creator. On the other hand, regarding God as material would lead to an infinite regress which is absurd.

The world, therefore, must necessarily have a Creator that has no bodily substance. And since He is immaterial, it follows that we cannot apprehend Him by any of our senses or even by imagination; for imagination represents nothing except the sensuous forms of things in their physical absence.

The eternity of the world implies the eternity of its motion as well; and motion, as held by Aristotle, requires a mover or an efficient cause. If this efficient cause is a body, its power must be finite and consequently incapable of producing an infinite effect. The efficient cause of eternal motion must, therefore, be immaterial. It must neither be associated with matter nor separated from it, nor within it nor without it; for union and separation, inclusion and exclusion are the properties of matter, and the efficient cause, by its very nature, is absolutely free from it.

However, a question is posed here. God and the world both being eternal, how could the former be the cause of the latter? Following Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufail makes a distinction between eternity in essence and that in time, and holds that God does precede the world in point of essence, and not in respect of time. Take an example. If you have a body in your fist and move your hand, the body, no doubt, will move with the movement of the hand, yet its motion will be subject to the motion of the hand. The motion of the latter proceeds from its essence, that of the former is borrowed from the latter,[27](#) though in point of time neither precedes the other.

As to the world becoming co-eternal with God, he maintains in a mystic strain that the world is not something other than God. Interpreting the divine essence in terms of light, the essential nature of which is perpetual illumination and manifestation, as held by al-Ghazali, he conceives of the world as the

manifestation of God's own essence and the shadow of His own light that has no temporal beginning or end. It is not subject to annihilation as the belief in the Day of Judgment tends to suggest. Its corruption consists in its transformation into another form rather than in its complete annihilation. The world must continue in one form or another, for its annihilation is inconsistent with the supreme mystic truth that the nature of divine essence is perpetual illumination and manifestation.[28](#)

## Light Cosmology

In full agreement with Ibn Sina and other predecessors, Ibn Tufail accepts the principle that from one nothing can proceed except one. The manifestation of the existing plurality from unity is explained in the monotonous Neo-Platonic fashion, as successive stages of emanation proceeding from the divine light. The process, in principle, resembles the successive reflection of solar light in looking-glasses. The light of the sun falling on a looking-glass and from there passing into another, and so on, gives an appearance of plurality.

All these are the reflections of the light of the sun, and yet they are neither the sun, nor the looking-glasses, nor anything different from both. The plurality of reflected light is lost into the unity of the sun when we look to their source, but reappears when we look to the looking-glasses in which the light is reflected. The same is true of the primal light and its manifestation in the cosmos.[29](#)

## Epistemology

The soul, in its first state, is not a *tabula rasa*, or a blank slate. The image of God is implicit in it from the very beginning, but, in order to make it explicit, we need to start with a clean mind, with neither bias, nor prejudice. Freedom from social prejudices and prepossessions as a primary condition of all knowledge is precisely the idea behind Hayy's spontaneous birth in an uninhabited island.

This being achieved, experience, intellection, and ecstasy play their respective roles freely in giving a clear vision of the truth inherent in the soul. Not mere discipline of spirit, but the education of the senses and the intellect, too, is essential for such a vision. The harmony of experience with reason (Kant), on the one hand, and that of reason with intuition (Bergson and Iqbal), on the other, constitutes the very essence of Ibn Tufail's epistemology.

Experience is a process of knowing the environment through the senses. The sense-organs owe their respective functions to the animal soul with its seat in the heart; from there the confused manifold of sense-data reaches the brain which spreads it all over the body through the nerve-paths. It is transmitted through the same paths to the brain, where it is organized into a perceptive whole.

Observation gives us knowledge about bodies which the inductive intellect, with its instruments of comparison and discrimination, classifies into minerals, plants, and animals. Each of these classes of bodies exhibits certain specific functions, which lead us to postulate specific forms or souls (like Aristotle) as the cause of the functions peculiar to the bodies of different classes. Such a hypothesis, however, is

untenable on inductive grounds, for the supposed form or soul is not open to direct observation. Actions, no doubt, appear to be issuing from a certain body; in reality, they are caused neither by the body, nor by the soul in a body, but by some cause external to it and that cause is God as indicated before.<sup>30</sup>

Ibn Tufail also knows the limitations of his newly discovered method. Following al-Ghazali<sup>31</sup> and anticipating Hume, he sees no power in the cause which may necessarily produce the effect as it does. Hume's empiricism ends in scepticism, but the mystic in Ibn Tufail makes him see that the bond of causality is an act of synthesis which he ascribes to God, but which Kant attributes to the *a priori* form of understanding.

Ibn Tufail is at once a forerunner of Bacon, Hume, and Kant. He anticipated the inductive method of modern science; perceived the inability of theoretical reason to solve the puzzle of the eternity and temporal creation of the world, and that of the inductive intellect to establish a necessary connection between cause and effect; and finally cleared the clouds of scepticism by declaring with Ghazali that the bond of causality is a synthetic act of God.

After educating the senses and the intellect and noticing the limitations of both, Ibn Tufail finally turns to the discipline of the spirit, leading to ecstasy, the highest source of knowledge. In this state, truth is no longer obtained through a process of deduction or induction, but is perceived directly and intuitively by the light within. The soul becomes conscious of itself and experiences "what the eye hath never seen, nor ear ever heard, nor the heart (mind) of any man ever conceived."<sup>32</sup>

The state of ecstasy is ineffable and indescribable, for the scope of words is restricted to what can be seen, heard, or conceived. Divine essence, being pure light, is perceived only by the light within, which comes into its own through the proper education of the senses, intellect, and spirit. The knowledge of essence, therefore, is itself essence. Essence and its vision are identical.<sup>33</sup>

## Ethics

Not earthly felicity, nor even divine vicegerency, but complete union with God is the *summum bonum* of ethics. Its realization, after the improvement of inductive and deductive intellect, finally depends upon a three-point code of spiritual discipline, which, according to de Boer, has a "Pythagorean appearance."<sup>34</sup> Man is a curious mixture of body, animal soul, and immaterial essence, and, thus, at once resembles animals, celestial bodies, and God. His spiritual ascent, therefore, consists in satisfying all the three aspects of his nature, by imitating the actions of animals, heavenly bodies, and God.

As to the first imitation, it is binding upon him to provide his body with bare means of sustenance and protect it against inclement weather and wild animals, with the sole intention of preserving the animal soul. The second imitation demands of him cleanliness in dress and body, kindness to animate and inanimate objects, contemplation of the divine essence and revolving round one's own essence in ecstasy. (Ibn Tufail seems to believe that the celestial bodies possess animal soul and are absorbed in

the unrestrained contemplation of God.)

Lastly, he must equip himself with the positive and negative attributes of God, viz., knowledge, power, wisdom, freedom from corporeality, etc. Discharging one's obligation to oneself, others, and God, is, in brief, one of the essentials of spiritual discipline.<sup>35</sup> The last obligation is an end-in-itself, the first two lead to its realization in the beatific vision, where vision at once becomes identical with the divine essence.

## Philosophy and Religion

Philosophy is purely intellectual apprehension of truth in concepts and images which, by their very nature, are beyond the grasp of conventional modes of expression. Language is a product of the material needs of social environment and as such can lay its hand only on the phenomenal world. The celestial world, being abstract and immaterial, altogether eludes its grasp. Described in material symbols, it loses its essential nature, and occasions men to think of it other than what it really is. <sup>36</sup>

Why then does the Qur'an describe the divine world in parables and similitudes and thereby waive aside a clearer notion of it, and occasion men to fall into the grave error of attributing a corporeity to the essence of God, from which He is absolutely free? And why does not the Holy Book go further than the precepts and rites of worship, and give men leave to gather riches and allow them liberty in the matter of food, by which means they employ themselves in vain pursuits and turn away from the truth? Is it not the imperative need of the soul to free itself from earthly passions and chains before starting its journey towards heaven? Would not men lay aside worldly pursuits and follow the truth, if they were elevated to pure knowledge in order to understand things aright? <sup>37</sup>

Hayy's miserable failure to enlighten the masses by means of pure concepts clears the way to the answers to these questions. The Prophet acted wisely in giving the masses sensuous forms instead of full light, for they had no other way of salvation. Elevated to pure knowledge, they would waver and fall headlong and make a bad end.

Nevertheless, though Ibn Tufail voices the Muwahhid State policy of withholding the teaching of philosophy from the multitude, he clearly recognizes a class of gifted people who deserve philosophic instruction and to whom allegory is the best means of imparting knowledge and wisdom.

Religion is for the masses: but philosophy is a privilege of the gifted few. Their provinces should be scrupulously kept apart. Philosophy, no doubt, is at one with religion properly understood; both of them reach the same truth, but through different ways. They differ not only in their method and scope but also in the degree of the blessedness they confer on their devotees.<sup>38</sup>

Religion describes the divine world in terms of exoteric symbols. It abounds in similitudes, metaphors, and anthropomorphic notions, so that they might better accord with the people's understanding, fill their souls with desire, and attract them to virtue and morality. Philosophy, on the other hand, is a species of

esoteric truth. It seeks to interpret the material symbols of religion in terms of pure concepts and images culminating in a state where the divine essence and its knowledge become one.

Sense–perception, reason, and intuition are the bases of philosophical knowledge. Prophets too have intuitions; their main source of knowledge is revelation from God. The knowledge of the prophet is direct and personal, but that of the followers is constituted of testimony.

Philosophy is an exclusive affair of the individual; it presupposes a certain temperament and aptitude for enlightenment. Religion, on the contrary, is a social discipline. Its point of view is institutional, not individual. It aims, more or less, at a uniform betterment of the masses in general, ignoring the individual differences in ability and inner light.

Philosophy brings us face to face with reality. It demands unrestrained contemplation of truth, uninterrupted vision of the primal light, the source of all existence, by renouncing all worldly connections. Religion is not so exacting in its dictates. It decries asceticism in any and every sense of the word; for the generality of mankind, for whom it is primarily meant, are incapable of living up to this ideal. It, therefore, fixes the absolute minimum and then gives men leave to lead a worldly life, without, however, transgressing the limits thereto.

Thus, the philosopher, left to his inner light, is capable of attaining to supreme bliss. As to the masses, they should rest content with a second–rate salvation, beyond which, owing to their own limitations, they cannot rise. Later on this theory, under the influence of Ibn Rushd, armed the medieval European scholars in their struggle against the Church, with the doctrine of “two–fold truth,” John of Brescia and Siger of Brabant being two of its chief representatives.<sup>39</sup>

The story does not seem to end here; for the redeeming individualistic attitude of modern philosophy, an attitude that distinguishes it from both the medieval and the ancient outlook, also appears to be a characteristic deposit of the same theory.

## Influence

Of Ibn Tufail's works only *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is extant today. It is a short philosophical romance, but so great has been its influence on the succeeding generations in the West that it has come to be recognized as “one of the most remarkable books of the Middle Ages.”<sup>40</sup> In spirit, says Leon Gauthier, it resembles Arabian Nights; in method it is both philosophical and mystical.<sup>41</sup>

It combines pleasure with truth by calling imagination and intuition to the help of reason, and it is this peculiar appeal that has made it an embodiment of imperishable lustre and eternal freshness, and has caused its numerous editions and translations into Hebrew, Latin, English, Dutch, French, Spanish, German, and Russian.<sup>42</sup> Even today, the world's interest in it has not ceased. Ahmad Amin's recent critical Arabic edition (1371/1952), followed by its translations into Persian and Urdu within the same

decade, go far enough to prove that it has no less a hold over the modern world than it had over the medieval world.[43](#)

The treatise caught the attention of the Quakers,[44](#) and George Kieth, finding in it a support for “enthusiastic notions”[45](#) of the Society of Friends, translated it into English in 1085/1674. So tremendous and alarming was its influence or what Simon Ockley calls “bad use,” that he was obliged to devote a thirty–six–page appendix to his English version of the booklet (1120/1708), in order to refute Ibn Tufail's thesis that the individual man, left to his a priori inner light, can arrive at the ultimate truth.[46](#)

A Spanish writer, Gracian Baltasar's indebtedness to Ibn Tufail occupied the world's attention during the first four decades of the present century. According to L. Gauthier, the early life of Andrenio, the hero of Gracian Baltasar's *El Criticon* (Saragossa, 1062/1651), is a “manifest” and “undeniable imitation” of Hayy's legendary version of birth.[47](#) But G. Gomez, the Spanish critic, claims that the *El Criticon* is nearer to the Greek tale of *Dhu al-Qarnain wa Qissat al-Sanam w-al-Malak wa Bintuhu*, referred to earlier, than to the *Hayy Bin Yaqzan*.[48](#)

D. K. Petrof, the Russian Orientalist, too holds that Gracian Baltasar is an exception to Ibn Tufail's influence.[49](#) But L. Gauthier, in his latest version of the treatise (Beirut, 1355/1936), contradicts the position of Gomez and Petrof, and concludes that Gracian Baltasar is indebted to the Greek *Qissat al-Sanam* indirectly through the *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* of Ibn Tufail.[50](#)

The influence of the romantic frame of the treatise is also visible in *Menedez Pelyo*, *Pou*,[51](#) *Saif Bin dhi Yazan*, and *Tarzan*.[52](#) Even the Robinson Crusoe (1132/1719) of Daniel Defoe is no exception to its pervading influence, as proved by A. R. Pastor in his *Idea of Robinson Crusoe*.[53](#)

Of Ibn Tufail's pupils Abu Ishaq al-Bitruji and Abu al-Walid ibn Rushd stand far above the rest. He maintained his leadership in the sphere of astronomy through al-Bitruji[54](#) whose theory of “spiral motion” (*harkat laulabi*) marks the “culmination of the Muslim anti–Ptolemaic movement.”[55](#) In philosophy and medicine he dominated the scene in the person of Ibn Rushd,[56](#) whose rationalism “ran like wild fire in the schools of Europe” and ruled their minds for no less than three centuries.

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1. Hayy bin Yaqzan, ed. Ahmad Amin, Egypt, 1952, p. 62. All references are to this edition unless mentioned otherwise.
2. Leon Gauthier doubts that he really held this office, for only one text gives him this position and al-Bitruji, his pupil, calls him simply Qadi. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* Vol. II, p. 424.
3. *The Making of Humanity*, p. 188
4. Na'im al-Rahman, *Khilafat-i Muwahhidin* (Urdu translation of al-Marrakushi's *al-Mu'jab*), p. 240.
5. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II, p. 424.
6. A. S. Nadawi, *Hukama'-i Islam*, Vol. II, p. 42.
7. *Khilafat-i Muwahhidin*, p. 237.
8. MS. No. 669, Escorial; published Bulaq, 1882. Cf. Leon Gauthier. *Ibn Thofail*, pp. 32, 34.
9. Gauthier, op. cit., p. 33, footnote.
10. O'Leary, *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History*, pp. 246-50.
11. D. B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, pp. 251-54.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
13. S. M. Afnan, *Avicenna*, p. 198.
14. De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, p. 185
15. A. S. Nadawi, op. cit., p. 50.
16. Later on 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 898/1492) also adopted the names of Salaman and Absal as characters in one of his best known mystic poems (first edition by F. Falconer, London, 1267/1850; translated into English verse by Fitzgerald, 1267/1850, 1297/1879; literal translation along with Fitzgerald's versions by A. J. Arberry, Cambridge, 1376/1956). Salaman in this poem symbolically represents the rational soul, and Absal, his nurse and lover, the passion-worshipping body. Their close union is frowned on by Salaman's royal father and the two enter fire to put an end to their lives. But only Absal is consumed while Salaman remains unharmed, whose sorrow for Absal, in the end, gives way to celestial love for Venus.

The poem, as it is, is nearer in its aim and method to Ibn Sina's tale of Salaman wa Absal, rather than to Ibn Tufail's Hayy Bin Yaqzan.

- [17.](#) We know of this book only through Moses of Narbonne's version in his Hebrew commentary on Hayy Bin. Yaqzan, 750/1349, the summary of which appears in M. Lutfi Jum`ah's *Tarikh Falsafat al-Islam*. Cf. also A. S. Nadawi. op. cit., Vol. 11, p. 30.
- [18.](#) Ibn Sina has advocated the same view in his *Shifa'*. Cf. also Jaihl al-Din Dawwani, *Akhlaq-i Jalali*, Lueknow, 1916, p. 41.
- [19.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, p. 13, footnote.
- [20.](#) *Zindah-i Bedar*, p. 13.
- [21.](#) G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Vol. II, p. 354.
- [22.](#) *Khilafat-i Muwahhidin*, p. 237.
- [23.](#) Article "Ibn Tufail," *Majallah Azhar*, 1361/1942.
- [24.](#) Article "Ibn Tufail",. *Ma`arif*, Azamgarh, January 1922, pp. 18-28
- [25.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, p.95.
- [26.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.
- [27.](#) *Ibid.*, p.98.
- [28.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- [29.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- [30.](#) *Ibid.*, p.92.
- [31.](#) Al-Ghazali "... goes to the extreme of intellectual scepticism, and, seven hundred years before Hume, he cuts the bond of causality with the edge of his dialectic and proclaims that we can know nothing of cause or effect, but simply that one thing follows another (D. B. Macdonald op. cit., p. 229).
- [32.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, p. 114.
- [33.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- [34.](#) De Boer, op.cit., p. 186.
- [35.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, pp. 107-113.
- [36.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- [37.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- [38.](#) Z.A.Siddiqi, *Falsafa-i Hayy Bin Yaqzan*, p. 103.
- [39.](#) F. Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 239.
- [40.](#) *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II, p. 425.
- [41.](#) Kamil Gilani, *Hayy Bin Yaqzan*, p. 106.
- [42.](#) The little masterpiece has a history of translations into European languages, spread over six centuries: Hebrew translation with a commentary and comparison with the *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid* of Ibn Bajjah by the Jew Moses Ibn Joshua of Narbonne, 750/1349; Latin, E. Pococke Jr., Oxford, 1082/1671; reprinted, Oxford, 1112/1700; oriental editions, at least four from Cairo and two from Constantinople, 1299/1881; English, G. Kieth, London, 1085/1674; G. Ashwell, London, 1098/1686; S. Ockley, London, 1120/1708, reprinted 1123/1711, 1144/1731, revised by E. A. Dyek, Cairo, 1323/1905; P. Bronnle, London, 1322/1904; revised with an Introduction by A. S. Fulton, London, 1325/1907, reprinted, London, 1328/1910, 1348/1929; Dutch, Bouwmeester, Amsterdam, 1083/1672, reprinted 1113/1701; German, .J. G. Pritius, Francfort, 1139/1726; J. G. Eichhorn, Berlin 1197/1782; Spanish, F. P. Biogues, Saragossa, 1318/1900, reprinted 1353/1934; Russian, J. Kuzmin, Leningrad, 1339/1920; French, L. Gauthier, Alger, 1318/1900, Paris, 1327/1909, and Beirut, 1355/1936, the only authentic and exhaustive critical estimate. (Brockelmann, Vol. I, p. 460, Supp. I, p. 831; George Sarton, op. cit., Vol. II, Part I, p. 355; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. II, p. 425).
- [43.](#) Arabic edition, Egypt, 1327/1909, Damascus, 1359/1940, with a commentary by Dr. J. Saliba and K. 'Awad, Ahmad Amin's critical Arabic edition along with Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi's treatises of the same title, has renewed world's interest in it. Arabic summary, K. Gilani, Egypt; Persian (on Ahmad Amin's lines), B. Z. Frouzanfar, Teheran, 1376/1956; Urdu, Z. A. Siddiqi, Aligarh, 1376/1955, with a separate exhaustive critical estimate, Aligarh, 1376/1956.
- [44.](#) A religious "Society of Friends," started by George Fox (1034/1624-1103/1691), with no formulated creed, liturgy,

priesthood, and outward sacrament. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. IX, p. 849.)

[45.](#) S. Ockley, *The Improvement of Human Reason*, p. 194.

[46.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 168.

[47.](#) Gauthier, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[48.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, p. 13.

[49.](#) G. Sarton, *op.cit.*, p.355.

[50.](#) Hayy Bin Yaqzan, p. 14, footnote.

[51.](#) *Ibid.*, pp.12, 14.

[52.](#) Kamil Gilani, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

[53.](#) A. R. Pastor, *Idea of Robinson Crusoe, Part I*, Wartford, 1930.

[54.](#) He refuted Ptolemy's theory of epicycles and eccentric circles and in the preface to his *Kitab al-Hai'ah* confesses that he is following the ideas of Ibn Tufail (L. Gauthier, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

[55.](#) G. Sarton, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

[56.](#) He was advised by Ibn Tufail with regard to his commentaries on Aristotle's works as well as his medical work *Kulliyat*. Cf. G. Sarton, *op. cit.*, p. 355

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