



The Discovery of Truth through Pure Intellect and Sense Perception: A Critical Study of Hayy Ibn e Yaqzan by Ibn e Tufail

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Abstract

The work of IbnTufail is a synthesis of all Muslim philosophy. In his work, he focused on the personal growth of the individual man and the ways to fulfill his personal fulfillment without the aid of revelation and society. Almost all philosophers agreed upon the idea that a man can recognize and discover “Truth “on the basis of sense perception and pure intellect. This paper is an attempt to explicit the importance of numerous features of IbnTufail’s work. The purpose of this paper is to see how IbnTufayl raised educational issues in his novel such as education, personal progress, how human development takes place, and how a person can achieve fulfillment.

The main source used in this paper is the original text of the book HayyIbnYaqzan translated by Simon Ockley and an article by GurbuzDeniz published in theJournalof Islamic Research

Keywords: *Ibn e Tufail, Reason, Philosophy, Spirituality, Kashf, Unity of the Truth*

Introduction:

IbnTufail (499\1005-581\1185) is a philosopher who sought to live by the understanding he acquired towards the end of his life. He tried to reconcile religion with metaphysics. He devoted himself to metaphysics (*al-ilm al-ilahi*). HayyIbnYaqzan is related to his experience of life. He points out the scholars of al-Andalus who only paid attention to logic, mathematics, and religious sciences. For IbnTufail, the above branches of knowledge are insufficient for a scholar. He was not completely satisfied with religious sciences. He innovated studies to accomplish an eminent rank in such sciences as astronomy, medicine, and philosophy.

IbnYaqzan is a philosophical fiction translated into Hebrew in the 14th century, Latin in the 17th century, English in 1674, and most European languages.

Literature Review

The story of HayyIbnYaqzanstartswith the introduction of the main character Hayy, who was born on a deserted island. That place was uninhabited by human beings. According to the philosophers, Hayy was born suddenly when the combination of the elements of nature reached its ideal state. The traditionalviewis that Hayy was the son of the king’s sister, who was married to her relative Yaqzan. She threw her baby in the desert in order to keep her marriage secret from her brother, who was the ruler of the neighboring island and did not find any suitable man for his sister. A deer who had lost his own baby heard the cries of Hayy. She let him take the milk and looked after him as her own son and saved him from harmful things. Hayy was about seven years old when the deer died. He covered his body with leaves after noticing that the animal’s body was covered with hair. After the deer’s death, the life of Hayy was changed from dependency to discovery.

After the deer’s death, Hayy tried to find out the nature of death. By the power of observation and understanding, he concluded that death is the result of the separation of body and spirit. With this understanding, he is no longer concerned about the body of the deer. He compares the things around him and sees the difference and classifies them into plants, minerals, and animals.

After learning about life, he passed through a fire, he noticed that fire is contrary to the other objects. All other objects move downwards and fire moves upwards, from this he concluded that

the essence of fire is different from the other objects of nature. He eagerly continued to explore the parts of nature. Organs, position, size number, and investigate all qualities which they share with each other.

Through persistent reasoning, he was able to know the general concepts of unity and multiplicity, cause and effect, matter and form, and earth and heaven. He established that there must be an eternal and necessary Being who is, Omnipotent, Perfect, Eternal, and the Creator of all creation. When Hayy was about thirty-five years old, he was certain about the existence of God. He really wanted to search the ways in which he could know more about Him.

He understood that this is not possible through the senses. He must have had knowledge about His spiritual experience. He found that if he followed his passions, he would lose his intuitive power. These results led him to concentrate his thoughts on God.

On the neighboring island, there lived two brothers, named Salman and Absal who love virtue and goodness. They both learned religion and were faithful to religious beliefs and practices. Absal needed solitude, whereas Salman practiced religion in order to spread the religion. He left his island to get the isolation and spent his time in praying the Absolute Truth.

Hayy never communicates with someone except himself. He saw Absal at the age of fifty. Absal was a “true believer” and had a command of different languages in order to learn the spiritual text. Absal was scared when he saw Hayy, a mysterious being. But his fears vanished soon as he knew that Hayy did not understand language. He tried to teach the language and communication in order to preach the religion. He discovered that Hayy already had the truth of revealed knowledge more than him.

They became very close to each other. Absal let him to his island to introduce the people and culture and reform them. Hayy strives hard to enlighten people through pure concepts. He found that it is very difficult to prove the concept to the masses because they are slaves of prejudices and are not able to go beyond their inclination and appetites. He recognizes that the wisdom of the Prophet given to the masses is in sensuous form except full light. Both men went back to their lonely world; Hayy became the teacher of Absal. They continued their spiritual searching till their ends. (Tufail)

Ibn Tufayl starts his book with a fictional question that is asked to him by someone who seems to have inquired about the philosophy of *Ishraq*. Then he says that he knew the truths through the intuition of the Sufis, which he will tell in his story. But the mystic language is inadequate to express the truths, he will express in philosophical language like Ibn Sina did in his *Hikmah al-Mashriqiyyah*. (Tufayl, 2001, p. 18) This work will henceforth be abbreviated as *Hayy*.

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is not merely a fiction-based novel but a scholarly investigation in a philosophical sense, which can be checked in every line of this story. Reasoning used in the novel demonstrates the complicated issues of Islamic philosophy.

Importance of the story writing:

An important reason for the fact that he expressed his philosophical and religious views in the way story is because it was really difficult to understand the abstract issues of metaphysics in other ways. He resorted to the method of “Qur’an” telling stories (qissah). As we all know, Hawi wrote, that a “tale arouses our interest and captures our imagination more readily than an essay.” (Sami, 1971, p. 196) Yet Ibn Tufail did not use any symbolic language regarding to the physical and sensual world. In his story, he discussed almost every existing thing from plants to the moon.

Philosophy is a subject that strives for the truth of things and Ibn Tufail gave systematic knowledge about physical and divine realms and presented his own views on them.

Discussion and Analysis:

The purpose of Ibn Tufail is to express the capacity of human intelligence. It is not only capable of discovering the physical sciences and nature of the soul, but also of seeing God, beyond this corruptible world, and attaching uniquely to Him. (Goichon, 1971, p. 334)

He expresses that his discovery is only possible only through an understanding of the esoteric aspect of the “Qur’an”. “The Sacred Book has two aspects: external\exoteric and internal\esoteric. (Hayy, p.89)

Embracing the exoteric meaning of the Book results in some people ending up with the knowledge of the corporeality of (God). And this may lead to some unpardonable ascriptions made to God and the Day of Judgment.” (Hayy, p.94) “Also sometimes there emerge certain problems of the facts that there exist some ambiguous and obscure parts in Sacred Book” (Hayy, p.93) “This is only natural because the exoteric meaning is for the multitudes. This language was employed because the multitude would not understand the esoteric meaning”. (Hayy, p.91)

Muslim and Western world have focused on two aspects of Ibn Tufail's work: the philosophical and scientific, which are taken as the main sources of this knowledge. “Apart from few references, we have not come across any detailed studies indicating the Qur’an as the source of both the fiction of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* and the idea therein”. (Deniz, p.35)

Concluding remarks:

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is a beautiful work of Ibn Tufail. Its importance lies in all areas of knowledge. The story *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* is related to physical and social sciences. It also covers the moral, ethical, and philosophical areas. It answers all philosophical issues related to either ontology or epistemology. Ibn Tufail places the work of rationalist philosophers with the mystic tendencies of Al-Ghazali. The “Qur’an” is the most significant, inspirational, and fundamental source of his ideas. We can say that his work is a synthesis of all previous philosophies.

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