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IN MEMORIAM

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL
VICTOR DANNER
MEMORIAL LECTURE

**IBN TUFAYL'S PHILOSOPHICAL
NOVEL *HAYY IBN YAQZAN***

**AND THE QUEST FOR
ENLIGHTENMENT IN
CLASSICAL ISLAM**

SEBASTIAN GÜNTHER

UNIVERSITY OF
GÖTTINGEN

April 15, 2014 at 7:15pm
University Club, President's Room

In Honor of a Dedicated and Beloved Scholar and Mentor,
Professor Victor Danner

It has now become a cherished custom to publish the Victor Danner Memorial lecture delivered each year. This year we are publishing the lecture “Ibn Tufayl’s Philosophical Novel Hayy b. Yaqzan and the Quest for Enlightenment in Classical Islam” given by the twelfth Danner lecturer Prof. Sebastian Günther of the University of Göttingen, Germany. The thoughtful and stimulating lecture generated quite a bit of discussion among the audience members and encouraged all to reflect on the importance of Ibn Tufayl’s seminal work and its enduring legacy, not only in the field of Islamic Studies but also in the larger fields of world philosophy and literature. Many lingered after the talk to enjoy the refreshments and continue their conversation with Prof. Günther.

If you were able to physically attend the lecture, you will welcome this published version as a memento of the event and the opportunity to continue to reflect on some of the issues that were raised during the question-and-answer session. If you were not able to attend yourself, I hope you will appreciate the publication of the revised content of that lecture and get a sense of the intellectual richness that many of us were privileged to enjoy that evening.

As you well know, academically important events of this sort that are such a beneficial and significant component of our students’ overall education and of the life of the department and the university are in need of continuous replenishment of the resources that sustain them. The Danner Lecture fund is greatly in need of your financial support to be able to continue into the future. As a well-wisher and friend of NELC who wishes to guarantee its prosperity and well-being in the coming years, please do consider donating generously specifically to the Danner fund and/or to the NELC IU foundation account.

On behalf of the NELC faculty and students, I thank you in advance for your help during this critical period.

Warm regards,
Asma Afsaruddin
Chair and Professor
NELC

Abstract

The quest for knowledge and human perfection is one of the most stimulating characteristics of classical Muslim scholarship. It has found its literary expression in a remarkable and quite diverse body of medieval Arabic writings on philosophy, theology, history, and mysticism. In this literature, one book stands out for its particularly imaginative approach and its powerful language: the allegorical-philosophical novel *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (or *Alive, Son of Awake*, as the Arabic title of this book can be rendered into English), written in Islamic Spain by the distinguished Muslim thinker Ibn Tufayl (1110–1185 CE). This narrative tells the intriguing story of a boy who grows up on a remote island, alone and without contact to human civilization, and who finds God solely through intellectual endeavor.

This lecture is devoted to Ibn Tufayl's coming-of-age story, one of the most creative works of Islam's classical intellectual heritage. It will explore this work in its historical and intellectual contexts, examining closely its Muslim predecessors and its reception in Islamic lands and in medieval Christian Europe and, in the process, will inquire into the perceptions of classical Muslim thinkers concerning the power and the freedom of the human intellect in seeking human growth, happiness, and salvation.

Ibn Tufayl's Philosophical Novel
Hayy ibn Yaqzan
and the Quest for Enlightenment
in Classical Islam

Sebastian Günther
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The Twelfth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture
Indiana University
April 16, 2013

حيّ ابن يقظان : في أسرار الحكمة المشرقيّة

Ibn Tufayl's Philosophical Novel *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and the Quest for Enlightenment in Classical Islam

Hayy ibn Yaqzan, or Alive, Son of Awake, as the Arabic title of this book can be rendered into English, is the protagonist of one of the most fascinating novels of the classical Islamic intellectual heritage. This story was written in the 12th century CE in al-Andalus, Islamic Spain, by the distinguished Muslim thinker Ibn Tufayl (1110-1185 CE). It is the highly intriguing account of a boy who grows up on a remote island, alone and without contact with human civilization, and finds God solely through intellectual endeavor.

1 The Author: Ibn Tufayl

Little is known about the life of Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Tufayl. He was born some time around the year 1110 near the city known today as Guadix in the northeastern part of Granada, a province ruled at that time by the Muslim Berber dynasty of the Almoravids (1046-1147). Ibn Tufayl was of Arab descent.

He most likely studied in Seville and Cordoba, two intellectual strongholds on the Iberian Peninsula. It was there, in Islamic Spain, that Ibn Tufayl acquired knowledge of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, physics, and other natural sciences, as well as of poetry. After completing his studies, Ibn Tufayl settled initially in Granada as a physician. The Iberian Peninsula and large parts of the Maghreb were in these days dominated by the Almohad

dynasty (1147-1269). Their ruler in Ibn Tufayl's time, Caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (r. 1163-1184), was an enlightened sovereign and very much interested in Greek philosophy. He made Ibn Tufayl his court physician and general advisor in the Moroccan city of Marrakech, where Ibn Tufayl became an influential intellectual. Ibn Tufayl died in Morocco in 1185. Thanks to the early translations of his famous novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, into European languages, Ibn Tufayl was well known in medieval Christian Europe as well.¹

2 The Novel: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

2.1 It is all in the name: *Alive, Son of Awake*

Ibn Tufayl wrote many works, all but one of which have been lost. The only book in his scholarly and literary oeuvre that survived is the philosophical-allegorical novel *Hayy ibn Yaqzan: Fi asrar al-hikma al-mashriqiyya*. This book was written between 1177 and 1182, and today is justifiably considered one of the most remarkable works of the classical intellectual heritage of Islam.

The book's title beautifully expresses the essence and vision of this narrative. It does so, however, not without evoking a number of intriguing reflections. The main title, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is the name of the novel's protagonist; it translates into English, as mentioned above, as *Alive, Son of Awake*. The Arabic word *hayy* means, on the one hand, "the living" or "the spirited one" in the sense of an individual. As a

1 On the life and work of Ibn Tufayl, see Lenn E. Goodman, "Ibn Tufayl," in: Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 313-329; and Josef P. Montada, "Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bājja and Ibn Tufayl," in: Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 155-179.

collective noun, on the other hand, it refers in classic Arabic also to the “core bond” and thus the “life source” of a tribe or clan. In this regard, it is a designation for “life” in the best sense of the word and may also be understood as a synonym for “people” or “humanity” in general.



Figure 1: The first two pages of a manuscript containing the text of Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 04807-001.

In a religious-philosophical sense, the name Hayy, “Alive,” resonates with a concept found both in the Quran and in Arabic-Islamic philosophy. It holds that, while human life is an expression of the perfection of God, who has revealed his essence in Creation, the ideal of a “complete” or even “perfect” human being cannot come to fruition unless an individual’s actions are linked to his or her God-given human mind.² This close connection of intellect, 2 *Al-Hayy*, “the [Ever] Living One,” is one of the Quranic epithets of God (Quran 2:255, 3:2, 20:111, 25:58, 40:65). It is also one of the ninety-nine “beautiful names” of God, the *asma’ Allah al-husna*. The idea that God is the focal point of all life and existence is expressed in the Quran most

knowledge, and the rationality of action as characteristics of the perfect human being has special significance not only for the Muslim philosophers, but also in a narrower religious context, as the unfolding story of Ibn Tufayl's book so impressively illustrates. The sobriquet Ibn Yaqzan, "Son of Awake," alludes furthermore to the idea that this individual is a product of pure intelligence, i.e., of the form of divine existence which knows neither sleep nor inattentiveness. "Son of Awake" thus echoes the Neo-Platonic view of the emanating intellect, as was held and further developed by influential Muslim thinkers such as al-Farabi in the 10th century, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in the 11th century, and other Muslim philosophers of later generations. According to the views of these scholars, structures and forms that can be grasped by the mind can be traced back to a metaphysical source. They can be perceived as emanations from God, The Creator. When seen from this perspective, some modern scholars have taken the name Ibn Yaqzan, "Son of Awake," to express a representation or even personification of the "active intellect."³

clearly in the so-called throne verse, which reads: "Allah—there is no god except Him—is the Living One, the All-sustainer. Neither drowsiness befalls Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes. His seat embraces the heavens and the earth, and He is not wearied by their preservation, and He is the All-exalted, the All-supreme. (Q 2:255)." Quotations from the Quran in this article are based on *The Qur'an: A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

3 It was Aristotle (384–322 BCE) who suggested that the intellect, like everything else, must have two parts: one analogous to *matter* and another analogous to *form*. The first of these he called "the passive intellect;" the second "the active intellect;" cf., for example, his *De Anima* ("On the Soul"), David W. Hamlyn (tr.), *Aristotle's De Anima, Books II and III with Certain Passages from Book I, translated with introduction and notes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, III:5, p. 60.

Interpreting the title of this book is further complicated by the fact that the book's subtitle permits of two different readings, both of which are meaningful. One is *Fi asrar al-hikma al-mashriqiyya*, which would be rendered as "On the Secrets of Oriental Wisdom (or: Wisdom of the East)." With this translation, we would understand the author Ibn Tufayl to be making explicit reference to the long tradition of Oriental epistemologies, which are sometimes associated with the Latin expression *ex oriente lux* or "Light (meaning Wisdom) comes from the East."

The other reading, *Fi asrar al-hikma al-mushriqiyya* (a difference of only one vowel) would translate to "On the Secrets of the Enlightening Wisdom (or: Illuminating Philosophy)." This translation calls to mind the metaphor of light, which is alluded to repeatedly in the novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Light as a metaphor for divine wisdom was significant not only to Aristotle (384-322 BCE), but also to several very influential Muslim philosophers, theologians and mystics, including Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1153-1191), and, in later times, Mulla Sadra (1572-1640). Hence, if we interpret this expression as *al-hikma al-mushriqiyya*, meaning "enlightening wisdom" or "illuminating philosophy," then the idea of intellectual growth and the possibility of finding God through rational contemplation, as Ibn Tufayl's protagonist does, would be clearly articulated in the book's title.⁴

4 For the two possible readings of the subtitle, see also A.-M. Goichon, "Hayy b. Yaqzān," in: Bernard Lewis et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, vol. 3, Leiden: Brill, 1971, pp. 330-334, esp. 330. Grammatically speaking, however, the reading "*mushriqiyya*" seems to be less likely. According to the rules of classical Arabic, the so-called *nisba* endings, which form denominal adjectives that indicate belonging or relationship (as the expression in question here does), are usually derived from nouns (such as *mashriq*), but not from participles (such as *mushriq*). See, for example, Wolfdietrich Fischer, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic*,

2.2 Content and Structure

The protagonist in Ibn Tufayl's novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is a boy who grows up and lives alone on a desert island in the Indian Ocean. Hayy thus embodies a sort of prototype Robinson Crusoe to the extent that he is utterly self-reliant and far removed from other human beings and civilization. This is not to imply, however, that Ibn Tufayl's book is merely a robinsonade in Islamic guise, i.e., a tale of great adventures on a tropical island. On the contrary, Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is the story of someone who persistently strives to acquire knowledge. In fact, without the aid of divine revelation or prophecy, but relying instead only on his acute powers of observation in his

Third Revised Edition, transl. from the German by Jonathan Rodgers, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2002, esp. pp. 72-74 (§ 116).

There exist several English translations of Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. I have made use in this study of the translation by Lenn Evan Goodman (tr.), *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, translated, with introduction and notes, New York: Twayne, 1972. Page numbers in the main text of the article refer to this translation. The original Arabic text is included, for example, in: Léon Gauthier (tr.), *Ibn Tufayl. Risālat Hayy ibn Yaqzān: roman philosophique d'Ibn Tufayl*, Texte Arabe et Traduction Français, Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1936 [Repr. in: Fuat Sezgin (ed.), *Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Sciences*, Frankfurt/Main, 1999.]. Detailed studies on the structure and contents of Ibn Tufayl's book were offered by George F. Hourani, "The Principal Subject of Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzān," in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15.1 (1956), pp. 40-46; and by Sami S. Hawi, "Ibn Tufayl's Appraisal of His Predecessors and Their Influence on His Thought," in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976), pp. 89-121. Most useful is the volume of collected studies by Lawrence I. Conrad (ed.), *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*, Leiden: Brill, 1996; and Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. See now also Salma Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), *Classical Arabic Stories*, New York: Columbia, 2010, pp. 2, 27-29, 293-304 (with passages of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* in English translation).

purposeful exploration of nature and his capacity for intellectual abstraction, in a gradual process of cognition Hayy ibn Yaqzan, finally, at the age of fifty, finds God. Particularly notable in this regard is the fact that Hayy's intellectual abstraction is not rooted in any human language: Hayy did not know "how to speak," as we read in the novel (p. 149); rather, he learned a human language only as an adult after he met a visitor, from a neighboring atoll, to his island. Let us now turn to the story of this masterpiece of Arabic literature.

2.3 Preface: The Origin of Life

In the preface, Ibn Tufayl sets out the academic framework of his novel. He names a number of Muslim scholars whose religious-philosophical views he studied. He mentions the names of philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Bajja (1095-1138), who were well known in Europe at that time, as well as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, probably the most important Islamic theologian and mystic of the day. Although their individual approaches to knowledge acquisition and learning significantly differ, these scholars – including Ibn Tufayl – have two important characteristics in common: First, there is the fascination of these Muslim scholars with fundamental philosophical concepts of knowledge and the influence exerted by the writings of Plato and Aristotle on this topic; and second, it is striking to note the vital role that the relationship between philosophy and religion plays in their deliberations on the human capacities manifested in the search for and acquisition of knowledge.

Following this rather theoretical preface, Ibn Tufayl relates the first fascinating details of the unusual circumstances of the birth of his literary figure, Hayy ibn Yaqzan. He reports, for example, that Hayy lived on a deserted island with a temperate climate near the equator,

somewhere in the Indian Ocean. The reader's attention is quickly engrossed as the author then relates two different versions of how Hayy was born. The first story of Hayy's origins is quite fascinating. It claims that Hayy was born on the island with no human involvement. According to this account, it all began when a bit of clay started to ferment. Heat joined with cold, and damp with dryness. These natural processes caused bubbles to form in the clay, which in turn created a space for the soul, which "emanates continuously from God – glory be to Him" (p. 107). Out of these compounds of fermenting clay and God-sent soul, Hayy, the human being, came into existence in a kind of mystical spontaneous creation. (This image of a human being formed of clay parallels the idea of Adam in the Bible, the first human, who came to life with neither parents nor past.) From the clay, a blood-clot then formed. The blood-clot became an embryo that grew to be a person – just as described in Quranic accounts of the origin of life.⁵

The second story, however, relates that the sister of a tyrannical king bore a son as the fruit of a forbidden love affair with Yaqzan, a man from the neighboring kingdom. Fearing the rage of her hard-hearted brother and king, the princess entrusted the fate of the newborn to God and put the suckling babe out to sea in a well-sealed box. The box with the infant eventually washed up on a deserted island – a literary motif that evidently alludes to the Biblical/Quranic story of the baby Moses.⁶

5 "Certainly We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him a drop of [seminal] fluid [lodged] in a secure abode. Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators!" (Q 23:12-14).

6 Cf. *The Bible*, Exodus 2:1-10. The passage in the Quran 20:36-39 reads as follows: "God said, 'Moses, your request is granted. Indeed We showed you favor before. We inspired your mother, saying, *Put your child into the*

2.4 Main Section: Human Growth and the Search for Knowledge

The two different stories of Hayy's birth both lead to a single continuation of the tale in the main part of the novel. Here, Hayy's life is described as developing in a series of stages, each seven years in length.

FIRST STAGE: A gazelle finds the baby Hayy, suckles him, cares for him and raises him as her own offspring. Living with the gazelle and the other animals on the island, Hayy becomes acquainted with basic feelings such as affection and warmth as well as unhappiness, shame, and sorrow. He also learns how to do certain things necessary for survival in the wilderness, for example, how to find his own food and to defend himself. At the age of seven, he finally becomes aware that he is not an animal, or at least that he is quite different from "other animals."

SECOND STAGE: The second phase of Hayy's life encompasses two seven-year stages, continuing until he is twenty-one years old. Hayy now realizes that, unlike the animals, he is naked and defenseless; so he begins covering himself in leaves and feathers and learns to make use of his physical advantages, such as the ability to walk upright. Hayy also starts to make conscious use of his mind. Through observation, experimentation and analogical reasoning, he considerably increases his knowledge of the world he lives in. He discovers, for example, that he can alter and adapt some of the things he finds in nature. He also learns how to control fire and how to build a protective shelter.

When the gazelle, his beloved "mother," dies, he is filled with pain and grief. He decides to cut the gazelle open to try and find out

*chest, then place him in the river. Let the river wash him on to its bank, and he will be taken in by an enemy of Mine and his." I showered you with My love and planned that you should be reared under My watchful eye." See also Gürbüz Deniz, "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan and its Qur'anic References," in: *Journal of Islamic Research* 1.2 (2008), pp. 33-50, esp. pp. 38-39 ("Allusion to the Story of Moses").*

why she has stopped moving. He finds the creature's heart which, he surmises, is where life is located. He opens the heart and finds that one of its chambers is filled with blood, and the other is empty. He concludes that the vital force of his mother, the gazelle, must have resided within this now-empty chamber. For Hayy, this explains the gazelle's death. He recognizes that the dead body is but an empty hull, worth nothing without that "breath" that had previously animated it. Hence, his feelings of love for his mother are no longer fixed on the lifeless body of the gazelle, but only on the "being which had departed" from the heart (p. 115), that is, the soul which outlives death. Hayy thus comprehends the finite nature of material existence and the immortality of the soul, which goes on living even after the body dies. Through these contemplations, the pain, which he had suffered upon the death of the gazelle, has become bearable, so that he can now bury her. Hence, Hayy learns what is to be done with a dead body from watching a raven that killed another raven in battle and then covered it up with earth.⁷

THIRD STAGE: In the third period, up to age twenty-eight, Hayy

7 With the literary image of a human learning from a raven how to bury a dead body, Ibn Tufayl recalls the archetypal conflict between Abel (Habil) and Cain (Qabil), the Biblical "hostile brothers," mentioned in Q 5:31 as "the two sons of Adam." According to the Islamic tradition, it was Cain who learned from a raven (which buried its dead mate in the ground) that he must 'let go' of his dead brother Abel and bury him. Cf. Sebastian Günther, "Hostile brothers in transformation. An archetypal conflict figuring in classical and modern Arabic literature," in: Angelika Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach*, Beirut/ Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1999, pp. 309-336; and the augmented German version of this study, "Kain und Abel, »die Feindlichen Brüder«: Archetyp und literarisches Motiv in der arabisch-islamischen Kultur," in: Annette Zgoll, Reinhard F. Kratz, *Arbeit am Mythos*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 273-295, esp. pp. 281-282.

becomes acquainted with the laws of causality. He recognizes that every circumstance and every occurrence has a cause and an effect. His observation of the sky, together with the realization that the celestial bodies are in regular motion along fixed courses, leads Hayy to philosophical reflection. He deems the heavenly bodies to be made of light. From this, he concludes that they must have been created from an even stronger light and that this source of light may well be the origin of all things. From this point on, Hayy begins to differentiate individuals by type, material objects by form and effects by cause.

FOURTH STAGE: In the fourth phase of his life, up to the age of thirty-five, Hayy develops his epistemological capabilities. He now observes the cosmos and the stars purposefully and devotes his attention to questions about the composition and finite nature of space. His contemplations on the structure of the cosmos and on astronomical questions bring him to fundamental metaphysical queries, which lead him to the insight that the universe must have an omnipotent Creator.

FIFTH STAGE: The fifth phase, extending up to age fifty, ultimately describes Hayy's religious awakening, a process which is divided into three steps: The first step concerns material things and the task of securing bare survival. The second step involves the awareness that there are perceptible forms beyond those in the immediate environment, and that events in this life have connections with another world. The result of this learning process is the conclusion that everything must have been created and animated by a higher or divine force. This leads Hayy to develop a kind of contextual or social behavior, which encompasses the veneration of God. The third step relates to a meditative approach to – and mystical immersion in – the dispositions of the Creator. Once he has gone through all of these meditative steps, Hayy is able to lay aside all worldly activities and

dedicate himself wholly to God. The vision of God comes to him as the highest level of awareness. He now comprehends that this highest stage incorporates knowledge pertaining to the attributes of the Creator.

SIXTH STAGE: The peak of this cycle of development is reached when Hayy is fifty years old. The protagonist, Alive, Son of Awake, at last sees that which “no eye has seen or ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart [i.e. mind] of man to conceive” (p. 149). In the original Arabic text, this sentence is presented as a quotation from the Prophet Muhammad, which has been authenticated several times in the standard collections of the prophetic traditions, the Hadith literature.⁸

It is particularly interesting to note that the words presented in Ibn Tufayl’s text as a quotation from the Prophet Muhammad are identical to a passage in The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (Bible, 1 Corinthians 2:9).⁹ In this letter, Paul imparts the knowledge

8 “[The companion of the Prophet] Abu Hurayra (603-681) reported that the Messenger of God stated: ‘God proclaimed: I prepared for my righteous servants what *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.*’ Abu Hurayra said: ‘Read [and verify], if you so desire: ‘No soul knows what [joy] is kept kept hidden [in store] for them [as a reward for what they have done]’ (Q 32:17).

Cf. Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad ibn Isma‘il al-Bukhari (810-870), *al-Jami al-musnad al-sahih al-mukhtasar min umur rasul Allah wa-sunanihi wa-ayyamihi*, ed. Muhammad Zuhayr ibn Nasir al-Nasir, 9 vols., Medina: Tawq al-Najah, 1422 H/2001, vol. 9, p. 144 (*hadith* no. 4779). The tradition is also reported in *hadith* nos. 3224, 4780 and 7498.

9 The related passage in the *New Testament*, 1 Corinthians 2:1-10, reads: “And I [Paul], brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ... That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our

of God's mysterious truth and wisdom to the Corinthians. It is, however – as stated in the Bible – “not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world” (1 Corinthians 2:6). As in the Biblical sense and in the understanding of the Islamic tradition as well, for Ibn Tufayl these are insights into God's plan which had been hidden from ordinary humans – a plan God had devised long before he created the world and with which he lets humankind share in his glory.

Overwhelmed by this experience of the divine, Hayy now chooses to dedicate himself entirely to the contemplation of God and never again to leave this state of beatitude. Thus Hayy arrives at an abstract-mystical understanding of God that is not connected with any particular religion or act of worship.

2.5 Epilogue: The Quest for Truth

Hayy now has perfected his cognitive abilities. At the point when the protagonist of the novel has achieved a state of complete beatitude, the reader may expect that the story has come to its conclusion. However, Ibn Tufayl follows up the tale with an epilogue. Here, the author reports that Hayy has come into contact with other people and with civilization. He relates that one day a man named Absal journeyed from a neighboring atoll to Hayy's island. The reason for Absal's trip was, as the reader learns, that he was at odds with his friend Salaman over a number of fundamental religious

glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man*, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (quoted from *The Bible, King James Version* ([italics in the text by S.G.]).

questions. Therefore, Absal sought solitude and peace in which to find a more comprehensive understanding of God. He believed that there must be some deeper meaning in religion, something more than he had come to know through the formalized practice of faith on his home island. His companion Salaman, by contrast, was satisfied with the manifest content and conventions of religion.

When Absal encounters Hayy on his desert island, he teaches Hayy human language. This, in turn, enables the two men to communicate verbally and exchange their thoughts on philosophical issues. Hayy soon learns that he is in agreement with Absal on the important questions that have occupied him for such a long time. These concern first and foremost the belief in the existence of an omnipotent creator, in the intellectual capacity of humans to discern the structure of the world and of the universe, as well as to understand the place and the destiny of humans within this system. However, where Hayy had arrived at “pure truth” through a kind of inner reflection, combined with an independent assessment of the properties, dispositions, and forces in the world around him (and of his own actions within that world), Absal and the people on the neighboring island had come to very similar insights with the help of a prophet and the revelations he had shared with them, including all the instructions, images, and symbols involved in the communication of divine revelation.

Absal and Hayy now travel together to the neighboring island, on which Salaman has since become king. When Hayy meets Salaman and the people in his kingdom, Hayy tries “to teach this group and explain some of his profound wisdom to them” (p. 163), by untiringly describing the comprehensive awareness of God and of the world which he had achieved. Yet, although the people are pleased by the glad tidings in his message, and in spite of their longing for truth,

they are frightened by Hayy's explicit expressions of divine insight. It becomes clear that the majority of the people are not receptive to the complex imagery in Hayy's explanations about religion, nor are they capable of understanding its deeper meanings. They soon turn away from Hayy and dedicate themselves anew to the strictly literal and simple understanding of their religious teachings and traditional duties that had been communicated to them by their prophet.

Hayy is forced to recognize that the people, with very few exceptions, prefer the trivialities of everyday life. They strive for material riches and sensuous pleasures in this life and remain devoted to their sectarian notions of God, rather than seeking an understanding of God that is deepened by rational thought. Hayy therefore abandons the hope of changing the people and decides to return with Absal to his deserted island where they can spend the rest of their days in seclusion and in mystical contemplation of God. The main part of the novel closes with the sentence: "Thus they served God on the island until man's certain fate overtook them" (p. 165).

2.6 The Author's Conclusion: Seeking an Understanding of the Divine

At the end of the novel, the author addresses the reader directly. He explicitly notes – like the Apostle Paul in the Bible, 1 Corinthians – that his story belongs to "a hidden branch of study" (p. 165), which will be grasped only by those who have a real understanding of God. With his book, the author says, he has for the first time lifted the "veil" (p. 165) that has hidden this knowledge. The reason for doing so, Ibn Tufayl writes, is that wrong opinions and corruption had gained the upper hand in society, so that many weak people were rejecting the authority of the Prophet and were instead following "the ways of fools" (p. 165). Thus, it was better, as Ibn

Tufayl concludes, to “afford them a fleeting glimpse of the mysteries to draw them to true understanding and turn them away from the other, false way” (pp. 165-166). Nonetheless, Ibn Tufayl also remarks that he hopes his treatise will “excite desire” in his readers to take themselves on an intellectual journey through which they, too, can strive towards the “secret” and achieve “knowledge of Him” (p. 166). This fascinating concluding passage reads in the original as follows:

هذا - أهدنا الله وإياك بروح منه - ما كان من نياحي بن يقظان وأبسال وسالمان وقد اشتمل على حظاً من الكلام لا يوجد في كتاب ولا يُسمع في معتاد خطاب ، وهو من العلم المكنون الذي لا يقبله إلا أهل المعرفة بالله ، ولا يجمله إلا أهل العزة بالله . وقد خالفنا فيه طريق السلف الصالح في الضمانة به والشع عليه إلا أن الذي سهّل علينا إفشاء هذا السرّ وفتح الحجاب ، ما ظهر في زماننا من آراء فاسده نبعت بها متفلسفة العصر وصرحت بما ، حجج انتشرت في البلدان وعمّ ضررها وخشينا على الضعفاء الذين أطرحوا تقليد الأنبياء صلوات الله عليهم ، وأرادوا تقليد السفهاء والأغبياء أن يظنوا أن تلك الآراء هي الأسرار المضمون بما على غير أهلها ، فيزيد بذلك جهيم فيها وولعهم فيها . فرأينا أن نلمح إليهم بظرف من سرّ الأسرار لنجذبهم إلى جانب التحقيق ، ثمّ نصّحهم عن ذلك الطريق . ولم نخلّ مع ذلك ما أودعناه هذه الأوراق البسيطة من الأسرار عن حجاب رقيق وستر لطيف يتنهك سريعاً لمن هو أهله ، ويتكاثف لمن لا يستحقّ تجاوزته حتّى لا يتعداه .

And this – may God give you spirit to strengthen you – is the story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Absal and Salaman. It takes up a line of discourse not found in books or heard in the usual sort of speeches. It belongs to a hidden branch of study received only by those who are aware of God and unknown to those who know Him not. In treating of this openly I have broken the precedent of our righteous ancestors, who were sparing to the point of [stinginess] in speaking of it. What made it easy for me to strip off the veil of secrecy and divulge this mystery was the great number of corrupt ideas that have sprouted up and are being openly spread by the self-styled philosophers of today,

so widely that they have covered the land and caused universal damage. Fearing that the weak-minded, who throw over the authority of prophets to ape the ways of fools, might mistake these notions for the esoteric doctrines which must be kept secret from those unfit to know them, and thus be all the more enticed to embrace them, I decided to afford them a fleeting glimpse of the mystery of mysteries to draw them to true understanding and turn them away from this other, false way.

Nonetheless, I have not left the secrets set down in these few pages entirely without a veil – a sheer one, easily pierced by those fit to do so, but capable of growing so thick to those unworthy of passing beyond that they will never breach it.¹⁰

Thus Ibn Tufayl makes it very clear that, for him, “truth is something that exists outside of the purview of the text. The text functions as a type of indirect communication. The role of the text is not to confine Truth, but to open it up to the reader’s gaze,” as A.W. Hughes noted.¹⁰

3 Philosophical Tales in Literary History: Models and Responses to Ibn Tufayl’s Work

3.1 Predecessors and Contemporaries

The idea of an autodidactic, rational way of religious learning eventually leading to belief in and vision of God, communicated in the literary form of a philosophical-allegorical novel, was not entirely new in the history of Arabic literature and Islamic thought at the time.

10 Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 60.

Among Ibn Tufayl's predecessors and intellectual mentors from the 11th century, the most important was Ibn Sina (Avicenna), a physician, philosopher and polymath who wrote a trilogy of mystical tales or recitals in Arabic in which he "recaptures his spiritual autobiography in the form of symbols."¹¹ This trilogy consists of the short but highly original epistle [Risalat] Hayy ibn Yaqzan ("Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan"), the Risalat al-Tayr ("Recital of the Bird"), and the treatise Salaman wa-Absal ("Salaman and Absal").¹² It is the first text of Ibn

11 Henri Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. Willard R. Trask, New York: Pantheon, 1960, p. xi (introduction). This book was originally published in French as *Avicenne et le recit visionnaire*, 2 vols., Teheran and Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1954.

12 Ibn Sina, "Hayy ibn Yaqzan," in: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan li-Ibn Sina wa-Ibn Tufayl wa-al-Suhrawardi*, ed. Ahmad Amin, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, [1959], pp. 43-53; see also Corbin, *Avicenna* 183. The story of Salaman and Absal exists in two versions: one by Ibn Sina, in which Absal and Salaman typify the pair of terrestrial angels (or intellectual powers) mentioned in his *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, thus "defining the virtual angelicity of the human soul, and thereby its true nature and vocation." Avicenna's *Recital of Salaman and Absal* has come down to us only in the form of a summary, included by the famous Shi'i philosopher and natural scientist Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 672/1274) in his commentary on one of Ibn Sina's works (Corbin, *Avicenna* 19 and 44). The other, hermetic version was rendered by the celebrated translator Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 260/873) from a (hitherto unidentified) Greek original. For the Arabic text of the latter, see Fuat Sezgin, *Abu 'Ali al-Husain ibn 'Abdallah Ibn Sina: Philosophical Treatises*, Frankfurt: Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science (*Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 42), 1999, pp. 167-180; and for questions relating to these two versions see Corbin, *Avicenna* 204-217. For Ibn Sina's *Risalat al-Tayr* ("Epistle of the Bird"), known also as *Risala Marmuza* ("Mysterious Epistle") see also <http://alkashkul.wordpress.com/2012/06/03/allegorical-epistle-avicenna-3/> (accessed: 13 Dec. 2013).

Sina's trilogy in particular, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (comprising 10 pages in print), which inspired Ibn Tufayl to write a book of his own on this topic – for which he even adopted the title from his predecessor's work. Ibn Sina wrote his *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* probably in 1023 CE, when he was in prison. In Ibn Sina's novel, the soul on its search for knowledge encounters at some point a sage named Hayy. The sage teaches the soul, which originally belonged to the immaterial world, how to protect itself from the dangers of the material world. In using rationality and logic, the soul eventually overcomes the darkness of this world and finds its way to "the light," i.e., the source of all life and existence. Although the contents and the plots of Ibn Sina's and Ibn Tufayl's narratives significantly differ, the two accounts have, in addition to the title, two major characteristics in common. First, they both have a very poetic way of expressing the human desire to acquire knowledge and to learn, and second, they both stress the active, autodidactic aspect of learning and human growth.¹³

The protagonists of Ibn Sina's third work of the trilogy, *Salaman and Absal*, also appear prominently in Ibn Tufayl's novel. However, unlike Ibn Sina, who made abstract-mystical figures the main characters in his *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, Ibn Tufayl placed the development and cognitive process of a human being in the foreground of his work. Indeed, Ibn Tufayl's protagonist is a human individual whose character traits and thirst for knowledge the readers of this novel can readily identify with.

Apart from Ibn Tufayl, the plot and characters of Ibn Sina's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* also constituted the basis for a philosophical poem written in Hebrew. This poem, entitled *Hay ben Meqitz*, was composed by Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), a distinguished

13 For more on Ibn Sina's account, cf. furthermore Goichon, "Hayy b. Yakzān" (see note 5), esp. pp. 330-333.

Spanish-Jewish man of letters, philosophical theologian and natural scientist, who greatly admired the Arabic-Islamic culture and thought that he encountered in Andalusia, where he grew up.¹⁴

Interestingly, there is yet another famous Muslim philosopher and mystic, the aforementioned Najm al-Din al-Suhrawardi, known as the “Master of Illumination,” who was inspired by Ibn Sina’s trilogy. Al-Suhrawardi’s work is entitled *Qissat al-ghurba al-gharbiyya* (“Tale of Occidental Exile”), known also as *Risala fi Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (“Treatise on Hayy ibn Yaqzan”). Al-Suhrawardi composed this work on the theme of an allegorical journey because, as he noted at the beginning of the treatise:

I was struck by the fact that, although it (i.e. Ibn Sina’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*) contained [many] marvels of spiritual words and profound allusions, it was devoid of intimations to indicate the greatest stage, which is the ‘great calamity’ [Q 79:34] that is stored away in divine books, deposed in the philosophers’ symbols and hidden in the tale of Salaman and Absal put together by the author of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; that is, the mystery upon which the stages of the adherence to Sufism and the apocalypics are based.¹⁵

14 Hughes, *The Texture* 21-23; see also Jayyusi, *Classical Arabic Stories* 35, n. 47.

15 Transl. W. M. Thackston, *The Mythical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi*, London: The Octagon Press, pp. 100-108, esp. p. 100 (slightly adjusted). For an edition of the original Arabic text, see Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, *Qissat al-Ghurba al-gharbiyya*, in: Henry Corbin (ed.), *Shihaboddin Yaha Sohravardi, Œuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques*, Teheran and Paris: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie, 1977, pp. 274-297; and in: Amin (ed.), *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (see note 14), pp. 122-127. A German translation of the treatise is included in: Bettina Löber, *Das Rauschen der Flügel Gabriels. Drei Erzählungen des „Meisters der Erleuchtung“ Suhrawardi*, Birnbach: Rosenkreuz Verlag, 2006, pp. 128-134.

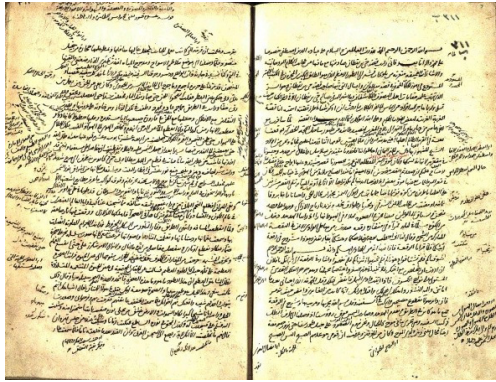


Figure 3: The first two pages of a manuscript containing Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi's *Qissat al-ghurba al-gharbiyya* ("Tale of Occidental Exile"), ms. Istanbul, Ragip Pasha 01480-010.

Notably, in al-Suhrawardi's tale, the Lands of the Occident represent the Realm of Matter (and darkness), while the East stands for the Sublime World (and light).

3.2 Reception among Muslim Writers

One of the major Arab recipients of Ibn Tufayl's work was Ibn Rushd (Latinized: Averroes, 1126-1198), the well-known Spanish Arab philosopher, legal scholar and medical doctor of the 12th century and proponent of a rational approach to faith and religion. Ibn Rushd wrote a commentary on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.¹⁶

¹⁶ Concerning Ibn Rushd's commentary on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, see R. Arnaldez, "Ibn Rushd," in Bernard Lewis et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, vol. 3., Leiden: Brill, 1971, pp. 909-920, esp. p. 911. On Ibn Tufayl's acquaintance and reception of Ibn Sina's ideas (esp. from the latter's work *The Healing, al-Shifa'*), see Dimitri Gutas, "Ibn Tufayl on Ibn Sinā's Eastern Philosophy," in: *Oriens* 34 (1994), pp. 222-241; Sami S. Hawi, "Ibn Tufayl's Appraisal of His Predecessors and Their Influence on His Thought," in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976), pp. 89-121. On the controversial question of whether Ibn Tufayl's work can be called "allegorical" or

Apart from Ibn Rushd in the Western part of the Islamic empire, in the East it was the great Persian poet and mystic Nur al-Din Jami (1441-1492) who revived, in his mystical poem *Salaman and Absal*, the ideas and the literary motif of *Salaman and Absal* already employed by Ibn Tufayl and by his predecessor Ibn Sina. Jami developed the motif further while he emphasized the role of human beings in the world and the mystery of faith as such.¹⁷

No less fascinating is *Al-Risala al-kamiliyya fi l-sira al-nabawiyya* (“The Treatise of Kamil on the Prophet’s Biography”) by ‘Ala’ al-Din Ibn al-Nafis (d. 687/1288),¹⁸ a brilliant physician and philosopher in Damascus and Cairo during the time of the Mamluks (1250-1517). Ibn al-Nafis wrote this book in direct response to Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy*

not, see Christoph Bürgel, “‘Symbols and Hints:’ Some Considerations concerning the Meaning of Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*,” in: Lawrence I. Conrad (ed.), *The World of Ibn Tufayl* (see note 6), pp. 114-132, esp. p. 132, and Lawrence I. Conrad, “Through the Thin Veil: On the Question of Communication and the Socialization of Knowledge in *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*,” in: Lawrence I. Conrad (ed.), *The World of Ibn Tufayl* (see note 6), pp. 238-266.

17 Edward Fitzgerald, *Salaman and Absal: An Allegory*, tr. from the Persian of Jami, London: Moring, 1904.

18 Ibn al-Nafis’ book describes, through the protagonist eyes, how Muslim society, and humankind in general, steadily move away from the moral principles and virtuous standards known from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and how humankind rapidly drifts towards a catastrophic end. Ibn al-Nafis’ book concludes with a powerful description of the collapse of the earth and of the universe. Interestingly, at the very end of the account, Ibn al-Nafis offers a science-oriented explanation of the Last Day which begins, in his depiction, with the healing of the universe and of the earth and their return to normal, enabling both the resuscitation of bodies and life in the hereafter. For Ibn al-Nafis’ treatise, which is known also as *Risalat Fadil ibn Natiq* (“The Book of Fadil ibn Natiq”), i.e., named for the narrator in the story, see *The Theologus Autodidactus of Ibn Al-Nafis (Ar-risāla al-kāmiliyya fi’s-sira an-nabawiyya)*, edited and with an introduction, translation and notes by Max Meyerhof and Joseph Schacht, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

ibn Yaqzan, as is clear from the fact that Ibn al-Nafis took both the core idea of a coming-of-age story and the main plot of Ibn Tufayl's novel as a model. Like in Ibn Tufayl's work, Ibn al-Nafis' protagonist, Kamil (whose name means "the Complete" or "the Perfect"), is a boy who was spontaneously generated and grows up on a deserted island. Similar to Ibn Tufayl's Hayy, Ibn al-Nafis' Kamil learns all by himself and eventually finds the Truth and God merely by observation and self-education, i.e., with no human teacher or contact to the outside world. Only at a more advanced age, when other humans accidentally arrive on his island, does Kamil encounter civilization. In contrast to Ibn Tufayl's philosophical-mystical account, however, Ibn al-Nafis' narrative is socio-theologically motivated.

3.3 Translations and the Reception in Europe

Ibn Tufayl's novel was a source of great fascination for Jewish and Christian scholars in Europe. Recent studies in comparative literature have noted that polymaths such as Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200-1280), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Voltaire (1694-1778), Rousseau (1712-1778) and Diderot (1713-1784) knew and appreciated Ibn Tufayl's work.¹⁹ The German writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) became acquainted with Ibn Tufayl's basic thesis through the Latin translation of the novel, entitled *Philosophus autodidactus*, as is indicated in his treatise *Ueber die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion* (English: *On the Origin of Revealed Religion*, 1763). Thus, it is highly likely that Ibn Tufayl's disquisition inspired Lessing to the thought that human beings can reach the apex of awareness only through their intellect and

¹⁹ Attar, *The Vital Roots* (see note 5), p. xii; Jameleddine Ben Abdeljelil und Viktoria Frysak (eds.), *Hayy Ibn Yaqhdhan: Ein muslimischer Inselroman von Ibn Tufail*, Wien: Viktoria, 2007, p. 141.

intuition, that is to say, regardless of the specifics of any particular religion, be it Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. For Lessing, whose lifelong study of Arab philosophy and culture had a profound impact on his theological thought (in particular on his concept of educating humanity, best evident in his famous dramatic poem, *Nathan The Wise*), this approach to knowledge and truth yielded the insightful conclusion that the “best of the revealed or positive religions” is that which “least hinders the good effects of natural religion.”²⁰

To further illustrate the long history of the reception of Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, it must be mentioned that this book, by a Muslim author, was translated into Hebrew very early on and was published in 1349 with a commentary by Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne (late 13th century-1370). The first Latin translation was completed in 1671 and was followed one year later by a Dutch translation, as well as two English translations shortly thereafter. The first two German translations were published in 1726 and 1783 respectively, followed by further renderings into Spanish, Russian, and other languages.

The English writer Daniel Defoe (ca. 1660–1731) was very probably inspired by Ibn Tufayl’s earlier novel and its hero, a kind of Robinson prototype, when he wrote his famous adventure book, *Robinson Crusoe*.²¹ (Interestingly enough, with his desert island

20 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Ueber die Entstehung der geoffenbarten Religion*, Paragraph 11; quoted according to Otto F. Best, “Noch einmal: Vernunft und Offenbarung. Überlegungen zu Lessings ‘Berührung’ mit der Tradition des mystischen Rationalismus,” in: *Lessing Yearbook* 12 (1980), pp. 123-156, esp. pp. 135-137.

21 This view of Ibn Tufayl’s influence on Defoe, widely held in European literary circles, was recently called into question by Fedwa Malti-Douglas. She bases her arguments on a monograph in Arabic, published in 1980 in Bagdad; cf. Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “*Hayy ibn Yaqzān* as Male Utopia,” in: Lawrence I. Conrad (ed.), *The World of Ibn Tufayl* (see note 6), pp. 52-68, esp. pp. 53-54.

tale Defoe is considered the originator of the genre of the novel in England).²² Another renowned novel with elements familiar from Ibn Tufayl's story is *The Jungle Book* (1894), written by the Indian-born English writer Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), a story that tells of a foundling child, Mowgli, who grows up in an Indian jungle without human contact. Reference must also be made to the probable link between Ibn Tufayl's book and the novel *Tarzan*, written in 1912 by the American author Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875-1959), and, finally, to the *Life of Pi*, published in 2001 by the French-Canadian writer Yann Martel (b. 1963). Interestingly, like in Ibn Tufayl's novel this 21st century fantasy adventure story explores the relativity of (religious) truth. It makes an Indian-born boy, due to his sincere "love of God," recognize the spiritual and ethical values of the three religions he explores – Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam – and thus leads him to embrace all three of them.²³

4 Conclusion

In his extraordinary Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, Ibn Tufayl makes impressive use of the power and rich imagery of the Arabic language. He develops a magnificent narrative that is exceptional both for its linguistic mastery and for

22 See Max Novak, "Defoe as an innovator of fictional form," in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 41-71, esp. p. 41. See also Michael Seidel, "Robinson Crusoe: Varieties of Fictional Experience," in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Daniel Defoe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008, pp. 182-199, esp. p. 186; and Jacqueline Dutton, "'Non-western' utopian traditions," in: Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 223-258, esp. p. 236.

23 Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*, Toronto: Knopf, 2001.

its skillful use of the literary and religious heritage of the Arabs – and indeed of the peoples and cultures of the Mediterranean in general. With remarkable eloquence and literary sophistication, Ibn Tufayl demonstrates in his book the particularly close interaction of religion and literature in Islam during its classical period from the 9th to the 13th century. In addition, there are several more conclusions to be drawn. These concern the following:

First, in general terms, Ibn Tufayl's philosophical-allegorical work evokes compelling linguistic images concerning the relationships between humans and their environment on the one hand, and humans and their Creator on the other. In more particular terms, this novel offers unique insights into the cognitive abilities of human beings at the generally highly charged interface between faith and reason.

Second, one major objective of Ibn Tufayl's narrative is the depiction of an intellect-oriented pathway to knowledge. This rational approach to learning is expressly presented in the novel as equivalent and alternative to a purely empirical or tradition-centered process. For Ibn Tufayl, as for many classical Muslim thinkers, the human mind is God-given, as the Quran explicitly states.²⁴ Moreover, the human being is not only equipped for, and capable of, but in the Quranic sense virtually obligated to make active use of such learning aids and methods as deduction, rational reasoning, analysis, inquiry, and experimentation to achieve perfection. Interestingly, enough, Ibn Tufayl advocates this rational approach in the pursuit of both secular and religious learning. In

²⁴ Examples in this regard include such Quranic statements as: "In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day ... there are signs in all these for those who use their minds" (Q 2:164); "There truly are signs ... for those with understanding" (Q 3:190); and "Have these people ... not ... hearts to understand and ears to hear?" (Q 22:46).

doing so, he gives credence to the fact that, in Islam, an intelligent person has not only the ability, but also the religious duty to make comprehensive and purposeful use of his or her intellectual potential in order to strive toward a deeper understanding of God and, at the same time, to attain human perfection – and thus happiness. It is particularly noteworthy that, in Ibn Tufayl's view, these major goals can be achieved without prophets, and without revealed scripture or an established religion in the conventional sense. For Ibn Tufayl, human life and faith in God do not build on human-made dogmas, rituals, and the formalisms of religion. Rather, Ibn Tufayl's idea of human life and existence centers on the individual's abilities, and desire to grow and prosper, as much as it does on the individual's relationship with the Creator. Hayy thus finds his way to God without being, or becoming, a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim.

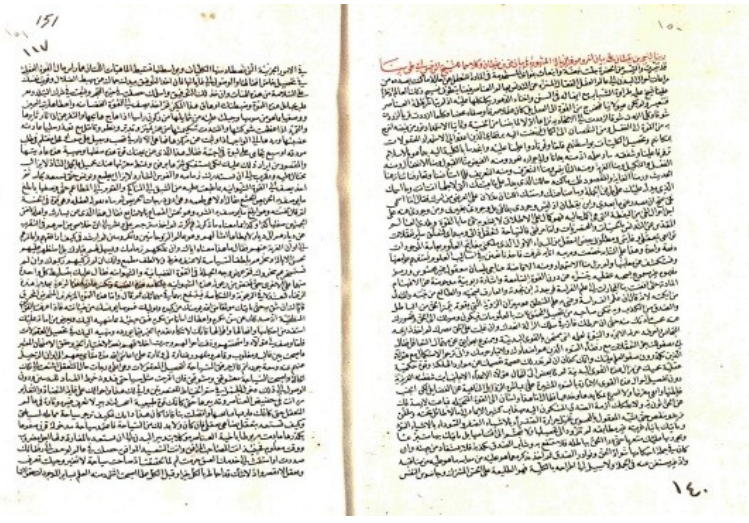


Figure 4: The first two pages of an Istanbul manuscript catalogued as *Sharh Qissat Hayy ibn Yaqzan* ("Explanation of the Story of Hayy ibn Yaqzan"), by Ibn Sina, ms. Ayasofya 04829-035.

Third, with this book Ibn Tufayl unequivocally criticizes Muslim society of his time. He rejects an understanding of Islam that reduces faith to a few religious doctrines and formalized activities of worship. In this respect, Ibn Tufayl clearly disagrees with certain influential conservative religious scholars and proponents of traditional Islam. One scholar he expressly criticizes is Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), the authoritative theologian and mystic of the 12th century. Al-Ghazali had argued against Aristotelian philosophy, declaring it irreconcilable with orthodox Islamic faith, and portraying it as a threat to Muslim piety. Also, al-Ghazali is known to have seen mysticism as the only righteous way to salvation and to the happiness which, in his view, is fully attainable only in the Next World. By contrast, Ibn Tufayl proclaims – in an almost humanistic manner – the possibility of an individualized and direct relationship between humans and God, one that is free of denominational regimentation and that, at the same time, enables humans to experience happiness in this life.

Fourth, in this tale, Ibn Tufayl develops a synthesis of rational and mystical principles. He underpins this alternative approach to human existence with numerous theological and literary references to Creation myths and to Biblical and Quranic parables and metaphors. Particularly interesting in this context is the fact that Ibn Tufayl's brilliant narrative, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, is a novel of education that has no educator in the conventional sense of the word. Thus, Ibn Tufayl emphasizes the power and sovereignty of the human intellect. At the same time he stresses – as did other classical Muslim scholars both before and after him – that for him, God alone is the principal and supreme teacher and educator of humankind.



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Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote *Ibn 'Ata 'Allah's Sufi Aphorisms* (1973); *Ibn 'Ata 'Allah: The Book of Wisdom*, (1978); and *The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction* (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews. One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: "As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur'an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example."