



Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*: The Natural Progression of the Mind and Intellectual Elitism

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Abstract

This paper argues that *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, the allegorical fable by Ibn Tufayl, provides a rational defense for monotheistic religions by emphasizing that the human mind can realize the absolute reality of existence through its dependence on itself without the influence of society, scriptures, or prophets. From this position, Ibn Tufayl engaged in a viral debate among Muslim thinkers – and Andalusian thinkers in general – at that time. That is, does revelation provide the only path to grasp the ultimate truth of our existence? Ibn Tufayl, among others, argued that both revelation and the human mind are paths to realizing the ultimate truth. To do that, Ibn Tufayl argued that human reasoning leads to the same core position of monotheistic religions; the claim that only one God created everything. However, despite Ibn Tufayl's defense of monotheism, his concept of the natural progression of the mind toward truth is problematic. His view implies that only a few people have the natural intellectual capacity to grasp the ultimate truth by depending on their minds, which introduces the problem of intellectual elitism. Finally, this paper offers ways to overcome the challenge Ibn Tufayl's view faces. In its methodology, this paper relies on critical examination of primary and secondary sources relevant to Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*.

Keywords: Ibn Tufayl, Natural progression of the mind, Unity of the truth, *Kashf*, Intellectual elitism.

Ibn Tufayl's Background.

Little is known about Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad Ibn Tufayl Al-Qaisi Al-Andalusi (1105-1185), also known as Ibn Tufayl. He was a philosopher, physician, and author from Andalusia. Born in Guadix, Spain, his name tells us he was descended from the well-known Arabian tribe of Qais. Ibn Tufayl also served as a minister to the governor of Granada and other members of the Almohad dynasty, eventually becoming the vizier and chief royal physician to the Almohad Sultan Abu Yaqub Yusuf, who was also an intellectual and surrounded himself with scholars and their books (El-Rouayheb & Schmidtke, 2017: 243). Ibn Tufayl introduced Averroes to the Sultan, who asked Averroes major philosophical questions (Davidson, 1992), such as whether the physical world (matter) is eternal or created (Al-Marrakushi, 1847:172-175). Fortunately, the enlightened Sultan seemed satisfied enough with Averroes' answer to appoint him as his new physician to succeed Ibn Tufayl. Ibn Tufayl passed away in Marrakesh in 1185.

In the preface of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*,¹ Ibn Tufayl presents his views on the works of several prominent Muslim philosophers that he studied and was influenced by, including philosopher

¹ Ibn Tufayl's allegorical fable captured the significant interest of Jewish and Christian scholars in Europe. Recent studies in comparative literature have highlighted the possibility that renowned polymaths like Albertus Magnus



and astronomer Ibn Bajjah (1085-1138), Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037), the Aristotelian philosopher Al-Farabi (Alpharabius, 872-950), and the theologian and mystic Al-Ghazali (1058-1111). Regarding Al-Ghazali, Ibn Tufayl criticizes his emphasis on religious doctrine and traditional teachings, which, in his view, restricts the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Ibn Tufayl argues that a more empirical and rational approach is necessary for a deeper understanding of the world. Regarding Avicenna and Farabi, Ibn Tufayl acknowledges their contributions to philosophy and science but suggests that their ideas are incomplete. He argues that their reliance on reason and logic alone cannot provide a complete understanding of reality. Instead, Ibn Tufayl proposes a more holistic approach integrating rational inquiry with spiritual contemplation. Regarding Ibn Bajjah, Ibn Tufayl praises his views on the nature of the soul and his emphasis on introspection and self-discovery. Ibn Tufayl suggests that Ibn Bajjah's ideas can help individuals better understand themselves and the world around them.²

Overall, Ibn Tufayl's views on these philosophers are complex and nuanced. While he acknowledges their contributions to philosophy and science, he also critiques their limitations and advocates for a more comprehensive approach to knowledge and truth. Despite authoring medicine, astronomy, and poetry textbooks, he is primarily recognized for his fable *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

The Unity of the Truth: Reconciling Philosophy and Religion.

Opinions differed about the purpose of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Ibn Tufayl presents the idea that an individual can become a skilled philosopher and mystic without any assistance from other humans.³ According to Peter Adamson (forthcoming), the story can be interpreted as a compelling argument against *taqlid* (or blindly accepting a belief in authority). By portraying a plausible narrative, Ibn Tufayl demonstrates that it is possible to attain wisdom without relying on authority or other human beings. Moreover, Sebastian Guenther (2018:251) points out that Ibn Tufayl seeks to show humanity capable of developing and elevating in isolation from revelation and social education and preferring a life of free instinct over social life. On the other hand, Hasse (2007:155) made the point that the story aims to explain the idea that humans can spontaneously generate (i.e., self-generation). While Majid Fakhri (2004:364) argues that Ibn Tufayl's goal in *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* is to demonstrate the agreement between human wisdom and religion.

The idea of the "unity of truth" is one of the most critical issues that occupied the minds of Islamic philosophers, from Al-Kindi to the Islamic West/*Maghreb* philosophers.⁴ Does religion lead to the ultimate truth? Does relying on human reasoning alone lead to the ultimate truth? If the answer is yes to both questions, how can religious truth be reconciled with human/rational truth?⁵ This debate raised many problems for some Muslim philosophers. For example, Al-Ghazali's campaign against the philosophers, specifically Al-Farabi and Avicenna, shows that not everyone agrees on the idea of the unity of the truth.⁶ Unlike the philosophers who supported the idea of the unity of the truth, Al-Ghazali's view was that relying

(1200-1280), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Voltaire (1694-1778), Rousseau (1712-1778), and Diderot (1713-1784) were acquainted with and appreciated Ibn Tufayl's literary contribution. For more discussion, see Attar (2007, p. xii).

² For a more detailed discussion on Ibn Tufayl's view on the works of prominent Muslim philosophers, see Goodman (2009, pp. 95-102).

³ Ben-Zaker points out that the story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan inspired debates about autodidacticism in a range of historical fields from classical Islamic philosophy through Renaissance humanism and the European Enlightenment. For more discussion, see Ben-Zaker (2011).

⁴ For more discussion on the idea of "unity of truth" in Al-Kindi's philosophy, see Adamson (2018, pp. 26-32).

⁵ Amber Haque points out that writings of early Muslims scholars was blended with Islamic philosophy and religious ideas. See Haque (2004, pp. 357-77).

⁶ For more discussion on Al-Ghazali's critique of Al-Farabi and Avicenna, see Al-Ghazali, 2002.



merely on human reasoning does not necessarily lead to grasping the ultimate truth of our existence (Adamson, 2018:149).

On the other hand, the philosophers of the Islamic West/*Maghreb* were more interested in the idea of the unity of truth, “so it is natural to see a smooth sequence of three major Muslim philosophers in Spain: Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, and Averroes” (Adamson, 2018:172). One reason behind this interest in reconciling religious traditions with human reasoning might be that the Iberian Peninsula was a society that embraced all the Abrahamic religions, and Muslim philosophers were in constant contact with Christian and Jewish thinkers (Ben-Zaken, 2011). For this reason, philosophers like Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, and Averroes devoted a considerable part of their work to the idea of the unity of the truth to show that human reasoning leads to the same core position of Abrahamic religions, the claim that there is only one God who created everything.⁷

The Story of *Hayy Ibn Yaqazan*.

Ibn Tufayl begins his fable by describing a far-off equatorial island that is uninhabited and lies near a more extensive, inhabited island ruled by a possessive king. The king's sister, disobeying him, secretly marries someone named Yaqzan and gives birth to a son named Hayy.⁸ Fearing for her child's safety, she places him on a raft, which drifts to the smaller island. It also should be noted that Ibn Tufayl gives another account of how Hayy was born. Hayy is born by a spontaneous generation with no mother or father in this alternative account.⁹ The two beginnings meet in one line of events when a doe finds the infant near the shore and adopts him.

Through the story, Ibn Tufayl outlines Hayy's mind's progression in seven stages, each lasting seven years, representing human growth.¹⁰ The first stage, covering birth to age seven, is characterized by dependence on the doe for survival. Hayy was lucky because “the doe that cared for him was richly pastured, so she was fat and had plenty of milk to give the baby the best possible nourishment,” and when the doe is away from him, “...he would cry if she were late, and then she would come rushing back” (Goodman, 2009:109). At this point, it should be noted that Hayy does not have a developed sense of ‘self’ that is separate from the parent. However, Hayy notices that he is different from the other deer, lacking fur for warmth and antlers for defense.

From seven to fourteen, Hayy becomes more independent and self-aware during the second stage. At this point, “he got a fine covering that not only kept him warm but also so terrified the animals that not one of them would fight with him or get in his way” (Goodman, 2009:111). He creates clothing to cover his nakedness and learns to make weapons to protect himself, which sets him apart from the deer and causes them to fear him. It seems that the roughness of the wild shaped Hayy to the point that he now cares for his ageing doe parent instead of being cared for. It should also be noted that at this stage, Hayy has developed a sense of ‘self’ in which he is more independent from his doe parent.

Nevertheless, it was a matter of time until “all her movements and bodily functions came to a standstill. When the boy saw her in such a state, he was beside himself with grief He tried

⁷ In the “Decisive Treatise”, Averroes argues that philosophical truth and religious truth are not in contradiction. See, Campanini (2017).

⁸ It should be noted that “Hayy Ibn Yaqazan” in Arabic means “Living son of wakeful” which shows that Ibn Tufayl uses allegory not only with the events of the story but even with the names of its characters.

⁹ In his forthcoming work, Peter Adamson discusses why would Ibn Tufayl offer two beginnings to the story of Hayy ibn Yaqazan.

¹⁰ Herbert Davidson argues that studying the human intellect and its ability to grow played a major role in the views of Al-Farabi and Avicenna. See Davidson (1992, pp. 3-6).



to call with the call she always answered, shouted as loud as he could, but saw not the faintest flicker of life” (Goodman, 2009:111). Until this moment, Hayy depends on observing the physical world through his five senses as the only source of knowledge. However, the idea of the doe being dead seemed to open Hayy’s eyes to something beyond physical existence, which is all he knows. After desperate attempts to revive her, Hayy realizes that his parent, the doe, was more than a physical presence.

During the third stage, his teenage years, Hayy develops a more spiritual side and experiences visions of the soul. He begins to develop more sophisticated reasoning that goes beyond direct sensory experiences, such as his attempt to link the doe’s death with fire:

A fire broke out one day by friction in a bed of reeds. When Hayy first saw it the sight terrified him. He had never seen anything like it ... His new infatuation with fire, based on its power and all its beneficial effects, gave him the notion that what had abandoned his doe-mother’s heart was of the same or similar substance. This supposition was reinforced by his observation that body heat in animals was constant if they were alive, but that they grew cold after death. Besides he felt quite a bit of heat in his own breast. (Goodman, 2009:115-16)

This intellectual ability that Hayy exhibits when he tries to figure out the cause of death by finding a connection between warmth and life is quite complicated. It should also be noted that Hayy transitioned from relying on sensory observation to reasoning as the source of knowledge without help from parents, revelation, or society. This shows a degree of progression in Hayy’s mind compared to his earlier stages, a step forward for Ibn Tufayl to support his core claim in the story that the human mind can naturally progress toward the ultimate truth of reality.

In the fourth stage, Hayy experiences a sense of wonder and discovers new opportunities. He is now 21 years old and has developed practical skills such as making his own clothes and shoes, farming, and keeping livestock. He has also learned about the natural world through dissection and observation of other animals. However, this stage is also marked by philosophical questioning and seeking answers about the nature of life. As Hayy delves further into his observations, he notices that the physical body of a deceased animal lacks this essence, and its actions cease. So, “when his thinking had risen to this level, and the sensory world had been left behind to some extent Hayy felt alien and alone” (Goodman, 2009: 126). This realization leads him to understand that the essence he had observed is not merely the result of the body’s organization but something immaterial and distinct—the soul. Hayy’s discovery of the soul through his observations of various beings demonstrates his innate capacity for deep contemplation and his ability to conclude the nature of existence through empirical observation and introspection. Once again, Hayy seems to be able to naturally progress toward the ultimate truth of reality as he grows up.

In the fifth stage, Hayy is 28 years old and uses his human reason to find answers to questions about the physical world. He realizes that reason has its limitations and begins to contemplate classical arguments for the existence of God: “the acts emerging from forms did not really arise in them, but all the actions attributed to them were brought about through them by another Being” (Goodman, 2009:127). Hayy moves from thinking about God as a Creator and Cause to considering His attributes, such as goodness and mercy. “Hayy found in himself a burning desire to know Him more fully. But having as yet not left the sensory world, he tried to find this Cause among the objects of his senses” (Goodman, 2009:128). Although reason can help him understand God to a certain extent, he feels that there is still something missing, something that reason alone cannot fully provide access to.



In the sixth stage, Hayy realizes at age 35 the importance of emotions and seeks wisdom beyond reason. He learns to love God and develops a passion for Him, a departure from the rationalist point of view that often neglects or views emotions as an encumbrance. Hayy's contemplation and introspection lead him to understand the nature of God more:

For he saw that if he assumed that the universe had come to be in time, *ex nihilo*, then the necessary consequence would be that it could not have come into existence by itself, but must have had a Maker to give it being. This Maker could not be perceptible to the senses, for it could be apprehended by sense perception, then it would be a material body, and thus part of the world, itself in time and in need of a cause. If this second cause were physical, it would need a third ... and so *ad infinitum* – which is absurd. Thus the world must have a non-corporeal Cause. Since He is not a physical being, there is no way of perceiving Him through the senses, as the five senses can grasp only physical objects and their attributes. (Goodman, 2009:131)

Hayy recognizes that his understanding of God as an uncaused, non-physical, eternally existing being could not have come from the human senses, which can only grasp what is physical and contingent. Hayy is taking another step toward the ultimate truth of reality – knowing God, but something seems to prevent him from grasping the whole truth.

In the seventh and final stage, Ibn Tufayl describes how Hayy moves from acquiring knowledge through reasoning and reflection to attaining knowledge through the direct experience of God. This new step that Hayy takes toward the truth requires relentless efforts, and “he disciplined himself and practiced endurance until sometimes days could pass without moving or eating” (Goodman, 2009:148). Ibn Tufayl proceeds and describes this journey of Hayy as if “Hayy had “died” to himself, and to every other self” and the result of this mystical journey, “he had witnessed his vision and seen nothing in all existence but the everliving ONE” (Goodman, 2009:150). This direct experience of the divine is known in Sufi traditions as *Kashf* (in Arabic, unveiling or spiritual unveiling).¹¹ It denotes the direct experience or perception of divine truths and realities beyond ordinary human perception. *Kashf* is often associated with mystical experiences and insights that allow Sufis to gain deep spiritual understanding and connection with the Divine. It is considered a form of intuitive knowledge or direct revelation that transcends rational understanding. Sufis believe that *kashf* is a gift from God and can be attained through spiritual practices, such as meditation, contemplation, and adherence to spiritual disciplines under the guidance of a qualified spiritual teacher. *Kashf* plays a significant role in Sufi spirituality and the path toward spiritual enlightenment and union with the Divine.

Ibn Tufayl employs a captivating analogy to help readers understand this mystic experience:

Imagine a child, growing up in a certain city, born blind, but otherwise intelligent and well endowed, with a sound memory and apt mind. Through his remaining channels of perception he will get to know the people as well as all sorts of animals and objects, and the streets and alleys, houses and markets – eventually well enough to walk through the city without a guide, recognizing at once everyone he meets. But colors, and colors alone, he will know only by descriptive explanations and ostensive definitions. Suppose after he had come this far, his eyesight were restored and he could see. He would walk all through the town finding nothing in contradiction to what he had believed, nor would anything look wrong. The

¹¹ See for example, "Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah" (The Epistle of Imam al-Qushayri (2020)). This influential Sufi treatise explores various aspects of Sufism, including the stages of spiritual development and the several types of spiritual unveiling experienced by Sufis. "Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah" (The Meccan Revelations) by Ibn Arabi delves into numerous topics related to Sufism (see Lewisohn, 1999), including the concept of *kashf* and the different states of spiritual unveiling.



colors he encountered would conform to the guidelines that had been sketched out for him. Still there would be two great changes, the second dependent on the first: first the daybreak on a new visual world, and second, his great joy. (Goodman, 2009:97)

Two things should be noted in Ibn Tufayl's example in symbolically explaining direct experience (or *Kashf*) to the Divine. First, it suggests that this direct experience does not contradict the previous knowledge that one has about God, such as acknowledging his attributes. Second, such a direct experience joyfully overweighs any other rational knowledge about God.

In summary, the progression of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's mind starts when he begins to experience the world through his senses, then moves on to rational perception, using human reasoning to understand his observations. This leads to intellectual reflection, where he contemplates the nature of existence and the purpose of life. As he deepens his understanding, he gains intuitive knowledge and connects with divine reality, culminating in a mystical union with the ultimate truth. In this state, he experiences profound unity and transcendence. Through these stages, Hayy's mind undergoes a remarkable journey from observation to enlightenment, highlighting the human potential for profound understanding and connection with reality. This provides a rational defense for monotheistic religions by showing that Hayy's mind can realize the absolute reality of existence through its dependence on itself without the influence of society, parents, or religious traditions. However, Ibn Tufayl's view is problematic as it implies that not everyone has the natural intellectual capacity to grasp the ultimate truth by depending on their minds.

Intellectual Elitism.

The events of the story of Hayy do not end when he realizes the ultimate truth of reality. The story has a significant turning point when Absal, from a neighbouring civilized island, visits Hayy's island. Two characters are introduced in the story, and Ibn Tufayl describes them as "two young men of ability and high principle, one named Absal and the other Salaman" (Goodman, 2009:156). According to Ibn Tufayl, Absal, and Salaman accepted and practiced their religion together, but there was an essential difference between them. On the one hand, Absal was more concerned with the spiritual aspect of religion, such as being eager to discover spiritual values and allegorical interpretation. On the other hand, Salaman was more anxious to preserve the literal and less interested in seeking subtle intentions.

Absal's visit to Hayy's island initiates both characters' profound intellectual and spiritual journey. It was almost impossible for them to communicate at the first meeting since Hayy had never met a human. Nevertheless, Absal wanted to teach Hayy language so he could know more about his life on the island; thus, "Absal began teaching him to talk, at first by pointing at some basic objects and pronouncing their names over and over ... Then he progressed with him, little by little and step by step until in no time Hayy could speak" (Goodman, 2009: 160). Absal becomes intrigued by the unique way of life and wisdom exhibited by Hayy. Upon meeting Hayy, Absal observes his deep understanding of reality and the natural world. Hayy, in turn, recognizes Absal's potential as a student and begins to share his knowledge and insights with him. Hayy teaches Absal about rational perception, the nature of existence, and the path to spiritual enlightenment. Absal, as a visitor to the island, brings his own perspectives, questions, and experiences from the outside world. This stimulates further philosophical discussions and intellectual exchange between the two characters. They engage in deep contemplation, questioning established beliefs and seeking a deeper understanding of the nature of existence.



This meeting between Absal and Hayy helps Ibn Tufayl defend one of the story's primary goals: to show that both religion and human wisdom are two paths to the same destination (see section 1.1). Both Hayy and Absal have many questions to ask:

Absal then plied him with questions about himself and how he had come to the island ... He told all about his life and the growth of his awareness, culminating in contact with the divine. Hearing Hayy's description of the beings which are divorced from the sense-world and conscious of the Truth – glory be to Him – his description of the truth Himself, by all His lovely attributes, and his description, as best he could, of joys of those who reach Him and the agonies of those veiled from Him, Absal had no doubt that all the traditions of his religion about God, His angels, bibles and prophets, Judgement Day, Heaven and Hell were symbolic representations of these things that Hayy Ibn Yaqazan had seen for himself. (Goodman, 2009:160)

Hayy's path to the truth (human wisdom) is one way to realize the ultimate reality of existence. Moreover, this path does not rely on revelation or education from parents or society. Hayy reached this level of realization by merely depending on human reasoning (see Section 2).

Hayy's path is not the only way to know God. When Hayy heard Absal description of his religion, "Hayy understood all this and found none of it in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernal vantage point ... He held himself responsible to practice these things in obedience to the command of one whose truthfulness he could not doubt" (Goodman, 2009:161). As a result, Hayy recognized that Absal's religion was a valid message sent by God since the description matched Hayy's own experience of knowing God.

As Absal learns from Hayy, his worldview expands, and he undergoes a transformative process. He starts questioning his previous assumptions, broadening his intellectual horizons, and deepening his spiritual understanding. Through his interactions with Hayy, Absal experiences personal growth and attains a higher level of enlightenment. The encounter between Absal and Hayy also highlights the significance of human connection and knowledge exchange. It emphasizes intellectual and spiritual guidance's transformative power from a wise mentor like Hayy. Overall, the connection between Hayy and Absal supports Ibn Tufayl's aim to show that Hayy's rational understanding of the natural world and his mystical experiences align with the teachings of the revealed scriptures. This demonstrates the compatibility and convergence of reason and revelation, supporting that both sources can lead to a unified understanding of truth.

Thus far, there seems to be no problem with Hayy's path to spiritual enlightenment since Absal has the same intellectual capacity and potential as Hayy. However, one should ask: Does everyone have the same potential to follow such a path? Can the human mind progress to grasp the ultimate reality of existence? The short answer is NO. The problem can be seen in the last part of the story when Hayy decides to visit Absal's island and meet the people there. Although Hayy accepts Absal's religion, there are two things that he cannot see the wisdom behind. First, "Why did this prophet rely mostly on symbols to portray the divine world, instead of simply revealing the truth?" (Goodman, 2009:161). Second, "Why did he confine himself to these particular rituals and duties and allow the amassing of wealth and overindulgence in eating, leaving men idle to bust themselves with inane pastimes and neglect the Truth?" (Goodman, 2009:161).

The two questions occupied Hayy's mind before he visited Absal's island. This led Hayy to think more about the people of Absal's island and their intellectual abilities to comprehend the Truth. Hayy, in this contemplating process, thinks that if people understood things as they are, they would not need private properties, laws, or ownership of materials; instead, they would forget these inanities and seek the Truth. Ibn Tufayl here responds to Hayy's questions by



stating, “what made him think so was his naive belief that all men had outstanding character, brilliant minds and resolute spirits. He had no idea how stupid, inadequate, thoughtless, and weak-willed they are, like sheep gone astray, only worse” (Goodman, 2009:162). This gives us a glimpse of the problem of intellectual elitism. Ibn Tufayl’s view seems that not every mind can naturally progress toward the truth like Hayy’s. That is, not everyone has the intellectual capacity to follow the path of Hayy and Absal; people vary in mind, and only a few have that intellectual capacity by nature. Of course, this sort of concept of the natural progression of the mind towards the truth is problematic since it excludes many people from reaching such truth:

Absal informed Hayy that all men of this group approached nearest to intelligence and understanding. If Hayy were unable to teach them. It would be impossible for him to teach the masses ... Hayy found them delightful and continued his exposition of the truth, exoteric and esoteric, night and day. But the more he taught, the more aversion they felt, even though these men loved the good and sincerely yearned for the Truth. Their inborn infirmity would not allow them to seek Him as Hayy did, to grasp the true essence of His being and see Him on His own. (Goodman, 2009:163)

There are two things worth noting regarding Hayy’s visit to Absal’s island. First, there seems to be a clear case of classifying people concerning their intellectual abilities. This can be seen when Absal decides to let Hayy meet the most intelligent men on the island, but not all men, even though Hayy wants to teach them the Truth/God. Should not knowing God be accessible to everyone? Why should this wisdom be exclusive to the most intelligent? Even if it is the case that only extraordinary men can comprehend Hayy’s wisdom, other men, “the masses,” would not be blameworthy for not following God or the Truth’s path because they did not receive the God-given intellectual abilities that Absal’s friends possess. Teaching it to a specific group of people could be plausible if it were a matter that requires particular expertise. However, what Hayy is trying to teach those men should be accessible to all men.

Moreover, the intellectual abilities of those remarkable men that Absal gathered are not something they gained through studying or experience. It seems that it is acquired because of some inborn characteristics. This brings us back to Ibn Tufayl’s comment on Hayy’s two questions before visiting Absal’s island that Hayy had a naive belief that all men had outstanding characters, brilliant minds, and resolute spirits. This way of classifying people based on inborn intellectual abilities seems unjustified since the matter that Hayy wants to teach them is God, which should be accessible to all people.

Second, although Hayy taught the “smart ones” on the island, they did not appreciate his wisdom because “their inborn infirmity simply would not allow them to seek Him in His own terms” (Goodman, 2009:163). Now, even the smart men that Absal gathered could not absorb Hayy’s wisdom because they lacked an inborn brilliant mind, and “any attempt to impose a higher task on them was bound to fail” (Goodman, 2009:164). Hence, the enlightened path to the truth that Hayy is teaching does not only exclude “the masses” (or non-smart people). It seems that it also excludes Absal’s smart friends, including Salaman.

Finally, Hayy could now answer the two questions that occupied his mind before visiting Absal’s island:

Hayy now understood the human condition. He saw that most men are no better than unreasoning animals, and realized that all wisdom and guidance, all that could possibly help them was contained already in the words of the prophets and the religious traditions. None of this could be different. There was nothing to be added. There is a man for every task and everyone belongs to the life for which he was created. (Goodman, 2009:164)



After being exposed to different people, Hayy now understands why God sent prophets with revelations, using symbolic language to describe heaven, hell, angels, etc. Hayy's questions are answered because now he knows that not all people can know the transcendent God directly. Hence, religious traditions, laws, and rituals are justified because Hayy understood that not all people have brilliant minds that can naturally progress to know the truth. Moreover, Hayy concluded that knowing God through religious traditions is sufficient for salvation for those who do not have the inborn abilities to know Him through human reasoning:

So Hayy went to Salaman and his friends and apologized, dissociating himself from what he had said. He told them that he had seen the light and realized that they were right. He urged them to hold fast to their observance of all the statutes that did not concern them, submissively to accept all the most problematical elements of the traditions ... He cautioned them most emphatically not to neglect religion or pursue the world as the vast majority of people do. (Goodman, 2009:165)

With this advice, Hayy looks very tolerant of those who lack the brilliant mind to know God (the Truth) through the natural progress of the human mind without depending on a particular religious tradition, like Salaman and his friends.

The concept of a natural progression of the mind that Ibn Tufayl offers is not problematic just because it excludes many people but because it shows that some people are incapable of realizing such truth by their nature. This means that no matter what efforts we put into reaching the truth, we would not grasp that truth as Hayy because we lack some inborn abilities to do so. This notion of natural progression then seems to be very elitist since only a few people, such as Hayy, can know God without depending on religious traditions, society, or revelation.

A Solution to the Problem of Intellectual Elitism.

Thus far, Hay Ibn Yaqazan's story offers a plausible defense for monotheistic religions by showing that human reasoning leads to the same core position of monotheistic religions. Ibn Tufayl aimed to show that the mind of the protagonist of the story could naturally progress to know God and his attributes, despite Hayy living in total isolation without society, revelation, or even parents. However, Ibn Tufayl's view is problematic since it suggests that people are different due to inborn intellectual abilities. Those innate intellectual differences created various levels of minds. For instance, some people, such as Hayy, naturally have brilliant minds, which can naturally progress to know God and his attributes without needing prophets, religion, or even society. On the other hand, some people, for example Salaman and his friends, are intelligent but less unique than the first group because they lack inborn intellectual abilities to grasp the ultimate truth. Nevertheless, religious traditions can help them to find salvation. Last, there is a group of people who lack both inborn intellectual abilities and intelligence; for instance, the masses on Absal's island seek basic living needs, such as food, shelter, and physical pleasures.

It should be noted that what distinguishes one group is not learning, experience, or some acquired wisdom but naturally given intellectual abilities. Consequently, no matter how hard the efforts are, one cannot progress to a higher level. For example, Salaman and his friends could not comprehend Hayy's wisdom and knowledge, even though "these were men who loved the good and sincerely yearned for the Truth" (Goodman, 2009:163). According to Ibn Tufayl, the reason for that is "their inborn infirmity simply would not allow them to seek Him as Hayy did to grasp the true essence of His being and see Him in His own terms" (Goodman, 2009:163).



This brings us to the last objective of this paper: can Ibn Tufayl's view overcome the problem of intellectual elitism? There might be a way of avoiding this obstacle with modifications to Ibn Tufayl's view. The notion of the natural progression of the mind needs to be explained more reasonably to do that. According to Ibn Tufayl's original view, one's inborn intellectual abilities prevent the mind from naturally progressing from one level to another. One way to modify his view is that we accept that minds differ in levels of progression to the truth. However, when achieving the necessary efforts, minds can progress and evolve from one level to another. Those necessary efforts could include education, experiences, strong will, good intentions, etc. In this new modification to Ibn Tufayl's view, we accept that people differ in minds with the ability to progress when necessary efforts are made. For example, if the "masses" on Absal's Island wanted to be wise and enlightened, they could learn and gain the required wisdom that puts them on the same intellectual level as Salaman and his intelligent friends. Similarly, Salaman and his friends could comprehend and accept Hayy's wisdom and knowledge if they pursued the same path as Hayy. This modification makes Ibn Tufayl's view more plausible since it helps us to avoid the problem of elitism. Moreover, it seems acceptable to some extent to classify people to diverse levels of progression if people can advance when the appropriate efforts are performed. In this way, unlike Ibn Tufayl's original view, people are not divided based on their inborn intellectual abilities that do not allow them to progress no matter how hard they try. An example may show that the modified view of Ibn Tufayl is both plausible and acceptable.

Suppose a father has three children: John is two years old, Sara is 7 years old, and William is 14 years old. The father acknowledges the intellectual differences between the three children. He knows that John has begun to understand and use simple words, follow simple instructions, and engage in basic problem-solving. These tasks that John is starting to achieve are simple for Sara and extremely easy for William. On the other hand, the father expects complex cognitive abilities from Sara, such as writing, reading, and mathematical abilities. Unlike John, the father expects Sara also to have some social skills, like interacting with different people and understanding the perspectives of others. Last, the father understands William develops a sense of identity, advances reasoning, explores his interests, and makes more independent decisions.

In such a case, the father accepts that his three children differ in their intellectual abilities based on age, learning, experiences, and so forth. It seems reasonable and acceptable to think that the father would assign them different tasks based on their abilities. For example, the father would expect John to name his family members correctly, telling them when he is hungry or sleepy, etc. Also, the father would expect Sara to use more complex language, such as writing her to-do list and reading short stories. Finally, the father would expect William to convince him to go to the beach for the summer vacation or travel abroad. The father seems to acknowledge the intellectual differences between his children and expects different outcomes from their abilities accordingly. In such a case, it seems both reasonable and acceptable for the father to classify his children in various levels based on their intellectual progression. This would not make the father's view elitist because this way of classifying his children does not suggest that one child will stick to the same intellectual abilities for a long time. When Sara achieves the necessary efforts within years, her mind can progress and evolve from one level to another. Sara would perform the same tasks that William achieved when he was her age. Therefore, what distinguishes the three children in performing different tasks is not their inborn abilities but their abilities gained through learning and experience.

Similarly, we can think of many scenarios in which we classify different people on various levels without suggesting that what distinguishes them is their inborn intellectual abilities. The same applies to politics, business, management, and education, where each level of people in these fields deals with issues and facts that might be restricted to other levels of people. Like the father's example, what determines the restrictions is not some inborn intellectual



abilities but their position in any institution that one gains through experience, learning, and other qualifications.

The example of the father and his three children resembles the modified view of Ibn Tufayl discussed above. To a certain degree, it can be deemed acceptable to categorize individuals into various levels of intellectual progress if they have the potential to advance through reasonable efforts. In contrast to Ibn Tufayl's original view, this approach does not divide people solely based on their innate intellectual abilities, which may hinder their intellectual progress regardless of their efforts.

Conclusion

This article argued that Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* presents a reasonable argument supporting monotheistic religions. It emphasizes that the human mind, independent of social influences, scriptures, or prophets, can comprehend the absolute reality of existence. This stance aligns with a significant debate prevalent among Muslim and Andalusian thinkers of the time: whether revelation is the sole means to grasp the ultimate truth of our existence. Ibn Tufayl and others contended that revelation and human reasoning lead to the realization of the ultimate truth, specifically the belief in a single God as the creator of all things. However, while Ibn Tufayl defends monotheism, his notion of the natural progression of the mind toward truth poses challenges. Ibn Tufayl's viewpoint implies that only a select few possess the innate intellectual capacity to comprehend the ultimate truth through their own minds. Finally, this article proposes strategies to overcome the challenges Ibn Tufayl's perspective poses.

Ibn Tufayl's philosophical-allegorical fable presents thought-provoking inquiries regarding the nature of knowledge, which remain relevant in contemporary discussions. This ongoing debate can be observed in various contemporary contexts, such as the response to Richard Dawkins' perspective that knowledge is derived solely from scientific inquiry and the ongoing dialogue with theistic philosophers who advocate for the significance of "personal explanation." The echoes of this centuries-old discourse can still be heard today as we grapple with defining the boundaries and sources of knowledge. Of course, answering these questions requires further study, which this paper does not address.

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