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Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale



Synopsis

The Arabic philosophical fable *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* is a classic of medieval Islamic philosophy. Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185), the Andalusian philosopher, tells of a child raised by a doe on an equatorial island who grows up to discover the truth about the world and his own place in it, unaided—but also unimpeded—by society, language, or tradition. Hayy's discoveries about God, nature, and man challenge the values of the culture in which the tale was written as well as those of every contemporary society. Goodman's commentary places *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* in its historical and philosophical context. The volume features a new preface and index, and an updated bibliography.

“One of the most remarkable books of the Middle Ages.” —*Times Literary Supplement*

“An enchanting and puzzling story. . . . The book transcends all historical and cultural environments to settle upon the questions of human life that perpetually intrigue men.” —*Middle East Journal*

“Goodman has done a service to the modern English reader by providing a readable translation of a philosophically significant allegory.” —*Philosophy East and West*

“Add[s] bright new pieces to an Islamic mosaic whose general shape is already known.” —*American Historical Review*

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Lenn E. Goodman is Professor of Philosophy and Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Vanderbilt University. His many books include *The Case of the Animals vs. Man before the King of Jinn*.

Traditionally much importance is attached to Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and his commentaries on Aristotle. And yet brilliant as Ibn Rushd was, he was not a creative writer. And yet his teacher, Ibn Tufayl, was a fine novelist, and way ahead of his time. *HAYY IBN YAQDHAN* is definitely one of the most interesting books to have fallen into my hands during my life span. On the other hand, the canon of Spanish literature seen in the anthologies reflects sheer ignorance, or far worse, an agenda of distortion. Spanish literature did not begin with the jarchas and the *Cantar del Mio Cid* as we are led to believe. It began with brilliant and sophisticated works like *HAYY IBN YAQDHAN*, written not in Castilian, but in Arabic. The present translation into modern English is clear and most readable. The abundant notes and commentaries included in the volume are for the most part quite valuable. Let us shed our thick skins of ethnocentrism and literary stupidity and turn to this true gem of Medieval Spanish literature (although much of it sounds more modern than medieval).

This book is great for anyone interested in natural philosophy (the Islamic tradition is also often neglected). It's well written and has a great and detailed introduction on many philosophical themes touched in the book. Would also recommend to any science fiction lovers, because beneath the philosophy is simply a great story!

For a layperson with some interest in philosophy I stumbled across this book while going through Muslim Spain's history. An effective read requires some basic understanding of philosophy but it is beautifully written and very well referenced.

Spirituality married with science.....superb!

Wonderful story from which I'm sure many movies have been inspired such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Jungle Book*, and some of my students said it was similar to *The Tempest* as well.

The medieval Arab book "Hayy ibn Yaqzan" is a long forgotten philosophical novel from the so-called "Golden Age" of Islamic Spain. It was written by the philosopher Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Tufayl (known in the West as Abubacer), who served as an adviser and physician to the Spanish Almohad sultan. The story in his short novel seeks to reconcile the mystical philosophy of Avicenna (ibn Sina) and the philosophical mysticism of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and the Sufis. It tells the tale of a child raised by animals on a remote and isolated island and his gradual recognition of philosophical and mystical truths as he passes through his life. The book is of interest not just because of its interesting philosophical and religious ideas, but because of the influence it would later have in Europe during the "Enlightenment". It has been suggested that assorted literary and philosophical figures from Daniel Defoe to John Locke were familiar with the book (which was translated into Latin, English, and other European languages) and borrowed from the ideas found in it. I would also add that Professor Goodman's introduction and footnotes are extensive and very informative. He places the book in its historical and intellectual context. The translation itself is clear and easy to read. For anyone interested in medieval Islamic philosophy or just an interesting and thought provoking read, this book is certainly worth the time.

*****"Hayy had died to himself, and to every other self. He had witnessed his vision and seen nothing in all existence but the ever living One. ...His true self was the truth.. ." Ibn Tufayl Living, Son of Vigilant: Ibn Tufayl's thought can be explored through his only known work, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, "Living Son of the Vigilant," an extended philosophical treatise, exposed in charming literary narratives. It relates the story of human knowledge, encompassing all forms of knowledge and discovery as it rises from its initial natural awareness to a mystical experience of Almighty. The focal point of the story is that human reason, after its exposure to the encountered mundane experiences, could achieve scientific knowledge, independent of religion, society, or its rules and practices. The medieval author tries to demonstrate that, since people have different potentials and capacity for understanding, even with the help of different tools, it is not wise to convey the truth to people, for its conception, except through available means. While religious truth is one and the same as that of philosophy, the former is symbolically conveyed, in a suitable means for the multitude, while the latter is transmitted in its inner meanings, without any symbolism, the way to the highest form of human knowledge, mystical experience. Enjoy Hayy's Vigilance: Ibn Tufayl, a rational mystic, proposes that it still remained possible for a human to participate in a rational search for God. The story of Hayy, an individual human soul living on an equatorial island, advances issues of religious philosophical education that may echo Golding's Lord of the Flies. The philosophical tales of Ibn

Tufayl raised the ever struggling Islamic apologies, on the anti thesis of relevant intellectual and moral issues. These were then briefly exercised within the liberal Islamic tradition of Kalam, Islamic critical Logic of philosophic issues. The bearing of this on the system of the Muwahhids cannot be mistaken, a criticism of the finality of historical revelation, it is also a defense of the attitude of the Muwahhids toward both people and philosophers.

Hayy ibn Yaqzan: Being totally isolated from all developed modes of life, Hayy gradually grows moral awareness. He discovers desire, shame, jealousy, eagerness to possess and practical reasoning. With time and as his 'foster mother' gets old, he learns to love and realizes death as she passes away. To know is necessarily an obligation for Hayy ibn Yaqzan who desperately seeks to recognize his existence in time and locate his life in space. His search takes him through various domains of knowledge, from anatomy and physiology, to metaphysics and mysticism. Through reasoning, he arrives at the unity of existence and by himself discovers God. Imposing on himself ascetic conduct he uncovers the way to salvation and joyful happiness. At mid thirties of age, when he had never communicated with anyone else, he meets Absal; an anchorite, a refugee from a land of conventional true believers. Absal is a perfect model of a religious man, a zealot who has learnt many languages to gain mastery of scriptural exegesis. His first reaction is a deep sense of fear for his faith as he encounters an exotic being in Hayy. But his fears are dropped soon as he comes to know that Hayy does not have a clue to any language. In good faith, he tries to teach him to speak and communicate in order to make him aware of knowledge and religion. However, Absal soon discovers that Hayy is already aware of the 'truth'; which he to envision, his own intellect bears nothing except revealed symbols.

Erudite Competence: What makes the book so meaningful for the western reader is the interpreter's style, his introduction, Biography of Ibn Tufyl, and his thorough notes to clarify the text. Whereas, his translation removes the linguistic barriers, his commentary reduces the centuries of thought alienation between two immiscible cultures of east and west and offers consultative guidance to middle eastern students. Goodman's credentials made his professor suggest he translates this Philosophical romance. Goodman gratifying success in other challenging tasks may be rooted in his analytical talent, and persevering erudition, and expertise in history of Islamic philosophy, mastery of Eastern Languages, a travel into medieval times bringing to life, vividly those fine human thoughts.

F. Zimmermann, Oxford's Islamic philosopher, expresses the indebtedness of Islamic philosophy students to Goodman scholarship and continued efforts. Goodman's extensive historical competence, and insightful Rabbinic erudition has supported him in producing Rambam on Maimonides philosophy, in translation and commentary has equally allowed him enrich the curious reader on fascinating harmony of a genuine work of Islamic philosophy, sarcastic and yet rich in

symbolic reality.

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