

CHAPTER 1

The File of Illuminationist Philosophy and the Purpose of Writing *Ḥayy*

THE LEGEND OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

Ibn Ṭufayl opens the introduction to his philosophical story by saying that he has been asked by a noble friend to reveal to him what could be revealed of the secrets of Eastern philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*)¹ mentioned by the Head of the Wise ‘Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā.² Ibn Sīnā enjoyed a bad reputation or was, at best, ignored in the Western part of the Islamic state.³ Ibn Sab‘īn, for example, considers him an “intentionally misleading sophist,”⁴ and, like Suhrawardī in the East, claims that he, not Ibn Sīnā, was the first to unfold the secrets of illuminationist philosophy, which had been employed by the ancients before logic and dialectic were invented.⁵ Despite the fact that Suhrawardī shows more respect for Ibn Sīnā than Ibn Sab‘īn, his position toward him in relation to illuminationist philosophy is in essence not different from that of Ibn Sab‘īn. Suhrawardī says: “You should know that the great sages ... such as the father of the sages Hermes⁶ and, before him, Agathadaemon and also Phythagoras and Empedocles and the majestically great philosopher Plato were greater in measure and nobler in significance than all those who excelled from among the Islamic logicians ... For even as they elaborated and elucidated, much of the thought of the Ancients remained hidden from their sight.”⁷

Ibn Ṭufayl states that the philosophy that had reached Andalusia in the books of Aristotle and Fārābī, and in Ibn Sīnā’s *Shifā’*,⁸ which agrees almost completely with the works of Aristotle, is not sufficient for the needs of the seeker of illuminationist philosophy.⁹ He also refers to Ibn Sīnā’s statement, at the beginning of *Shifā’*, that truth is beyond this work, and urges the seeker to look for it in his book on Eastern philosophy.¹⁰ Indeed, this seems to be confirmed by Ibn Sīnā in a passage from the Prologue to *Shifā’* quoted by Dimitri Gutas: “I also wrote a book other than these two [the *Shifā’* and the *Lawāḥiq* (*Appendices*)], in which I presented philosophy as it is naturally [perceived]

and as required by an unbiased view which neither takes into account in [this book on Eastern philosophy] the views of colleagues in the discipline, nor takes precautions here against creating schisms among them as is done elsewhere; this is my book on Eastern philosophy. But as for the present book [the *Shifāʾ*], it is more elaborate and more accommodating to my Peripatetic colleagues. Whoever wants the truth [stated] without indirection, he should seek the former book [on Eastern philosophy]; whoever wants the truth [stated] in a way which is somewhat conciliatory to colleagues, elaborates a lot, and alludes [*talwīh*] to things which, had they been perceived, there would have been no need for the other book, then he should read the present book [the *Shifāʾ*].”¹¹

Gutas claims that Ibn Ṭufayl misinterprets this passage to create “the fiction of an esoteric and exoteric Avicenna”¹² by identifying the exoteric Ibn Sīnā with *Shifāʾ*’ and the esoteric Ibn Sīnā with *Ishārāt* and the allegory of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*.¹³ He makes reference to the passage in which Ibn Ṭufayl says that “Avicenna stated explicitly that in his opinion the truth is something else [*al-ḥaqq ʾindahu ghayru dhālika*], that he wrote the *Shifāʾ*’ according to the doctrine of the Peripatetics only, and that ‘whoever wants the truth without indirection should seek’ his book on Eastern philosophy.”¹⁴ He then argues that Ibn Sīnā nowhere stated explicitly that the truth is something else, and that the distinction that he draws between the two works is one of style and is not based on a difference in doctrine.¹⁵

Like Gutas, George Ṭarābīshī claims that Ibn Ṭufayl invented the legend of Ibn Sīnā’s esotericism to draw attention to his own work. Ibn Sīnā sought to advance with rather than beyond Peripatetic philosophy. And even if he wished to go beyond Peripateticism, he would then be attempting the impossible because he would have to transcend the epistemological limits of his time. This was impossible for him, however, due to the entanglement between Peripateticism and Neoplatonism and the presence of *Uthūlūjīya*, a work that belonged to Plotinus and that was mistakenly attributed to Aristotle.¹⁶ “Like Fārābī who was caught in this entanglement in his attempt to establish an agreement between Aristotle and Plato, Ibn Sīnā also and each time he thought he could release himself from Peripatetic gravitation would emerge from Aristotle’s circle only to enter Plotinus’s.”¹⁷ Ibn Ṭufayl, adds Tarabishi, composed his work within this context of the presence of *Uthūlūjīya*, making his own solemn contribution to the evolution of the legend of the philosophy of illumination. In the West, he played the role that Suhrawardī played in the East in cultivating and controlling the fiction of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy of illumination, whose control is still effective in the present days.¹⁸

Thus, Gutas and Tarabishi share the opinion that Ibn Sīnā was not a mystic and that the philosophy of illumination, which is attributed to him, is a fiction that was invented by Ibn Ṭufayl, followed by a host of mystifiers from medieval to contemporary times, who tend to confuse themselves and their readers by reading texts as they are reflected, in a state of misrepresentation, in the mirrors

of other texts.¹⁹ More specifically, they claim that the distinction mentioned by Ibn Sīnā in the Prologue to *Shifā'* does not designate a difference in doctrine but only in style. Thus, when Ibn Ṭufayl says that Ibn Sīnā stated explicitly that the “truth is something else,” his intention is to misrepresent and misinterpret the latter’s words. Let me quote the passage from Ibn Ṭufayl’s introduction in Gutas’s translation to see whether it is possible to think that Gutas and Tarabishi could be accused of the very misinterpretation that they charge Ibn Ṭufayl with: “As for the books of Aristotle, Avicenna undertook in the *Shifā'* to interpret their contents, proceeding according to Aristotle’s doctrine and following the method of his philosophy. But in the beginning of the book, Avicenna *stated explicitly* that *in his opinion the truth is something else* [*al-ḥaqq 'indahū ghayru dhālika*], that he wrote the *Shifā'* according to the doctrine of the Peripatetics only, and that ‘whoever wants the truth without indirection should seek’ his book on Eastern philosophy.”²⁰

Gutas renders *ṣarraḥa* as “stated explicitly,” which is a valid interpretation except that at least two other scholars do not use it. Lenn Goodman employs “admits” and Simon Ockley has it (simply) as “says.”²¹ As for *al-ḥaqq 'indahū ghayru dhālika*, that is rendered by Gutas as “in his opinion the truth is something else,” which is again a valid interpretation, except that Goodman uses the words “the truth for him is something quite different,” and Ockley uses “the Truth was in his opinion different.” From “says” to “admits” to “stated explicitly,” and from “different” to “quite different” to “something else,” something is lost along the way, and that is Ibn Ṭufayl’s simple statement. Ibn Ṭufayl is making the straightforward statement that Ibn Sīnā says that the truth in *Shifā'* is different from the truth that is to be found in his book on Eastern philosophy. And this is exactly and simply what Ibn Sīnā says, as we can see from the first part of the passage from the Prologue to *Shifā'*: “I wrote a book different from (*ghayru*) these two [*Shifā'* and *Lawāḥiq*] in which I presented philosophy as it is in itself and as required by an unbiased view which neither considers the side of colleagues in the discipline nor takes precautions against those who create schisms against them. This is my book on Eastern philosophy.”²² In the remainder of the passage, Ibn Sīnā explains in what sense the book on Eastern philosophy is different from, or, as Gutas puts it, “other than” *Shifā'*. It is different because the truth that it contains is presented as it is in itself, whereas the truth in *Shifā'* is Peripatetic. This is what Ibn Sīnā says, and it is also what Ibn Ṭufayl repeats.

To say, with Gutas, that Ibn Sīnā “is not talking about a difference in doctrine but one in style,” as well as that Ibn Ṭufayl created this fiction of difference in doctrine to win authority for his own mystical epistemology, is to oversimplify Ibn Sīnā’s meaning and misinterpret Ibn Ṭufayl’s. Surely, Ibn Sīnā wants something more than just a formal difference or a difference in style, even if this does not amount to a strict difference in doctrine or whatever other difference Gutas has in mind.²³

EASTERN AND WESTERN SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHY

In *Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*,²⁴ Tarabishi argues against Jabiri's thesis according to which two main intellectual traditions ruled over the Arabic medieval mind: the Eastern tradition, championed by Ibn Sīnā, and the Western tradition, which included the three Andalusian philosophers: Ibn Bājjā, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd.²⁵ Jabiri affiliates the views of the Western philosophers with a school of logic that stood in contrast to the views of the members of the Eastern school, who advocated esoteric and illuminationist stands. Tarabishi indicates that to support his view that the three Andalusian thinkers were united in their rationalistic stand, Jabiri states that he searched for but could not find one word by Ibn Rushd against Ibn Bājjā or Ibn Ṭufayl.²⁶ Now Tarabishi hurries to connect what Jabiri disconnected by connecting what he had previously disconnected: "In writing the history of the philosophy of Andalusia Ibn Ṭufayl does not disconnect himself from the philosophy of the East. On the contrary, he establishes his relationship with it in terms of continuity, and invests his efforts in presenting his personal attempt, as this is manifested in *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*, under the banner of the Eastern philosophy which is attributed to the Head of the Wise, Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā."²⁷ This is a strange statement from one who says that Ibn Sīnā's presence in *Ḥayy* is significant in name but not in actual fact.²⁸ As for Jabiri's claim that Ibn Rushd never said a word against Ibn Bājjā or Ibn Ṭufayl, Tarabishi finds it easy to bring not one but many words of Ibn Rushd against Ibn Bājjā. When it comes to Ibn Ṭufayl, he takes the reader on a long tour, with useful (but still not to the point) analysis of the poverty of philosophy in Andalusia. Only toward the end of his discussion does he attempt to say something that seems to be relevant to the point. There, he cites Ibn Rushd's famous statement in *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* that "truth does not contradict truth,"²⁹ and says that this statement could be an appropriate title for Ibn Ṭufayl's story. But then he insists that the aim of Ibn Ṭufayl's work is the opposite of Ibn Rushd's. Whereas Ibn Rushd attempts to show that only experts in logical interpretation are capable of harmonizing philosophy and religion, Ibn Ṭufayl attempts to show that only gnostics are capable of accomplishing this mission. Now Tarabishi draws our attention to Ibn Ṭufayl's reservation in the introduction to *Ḥayy* against the experts in logical consideration and his claim that their rational deliberation does not come close to the knowledge that is attained through vision and that cannot be committed to writing. He also sees in the concluding passage of Ibn Ṭufayl's book an allusion to the person of Ibn Rushd:

This is ... the story of Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān, brought in a manner of discourse not contained in books or ordinary speeches. It contains hidden knowledge received only by those who know God especially ... In following this [course of open presentation] we broke the habit of our righteous ancestors in their unwillingness to expose [the mystery]. *What made it easy for us to tear the*

*veil and divulge the secret is the emergence of corrupt views that have been concocted by [the minds of] the philodoxers³⁰ of this era who spread them in the land and caused a considerable harm to the weak-minded, who have abandoned the tradition of the prophets. We feared for them [and wished to protect them] against imitating the light-headed and the ignorant in considering these views as the secrets hidden from those who are not worthy of them, since this only makes them all the more interested in adhering to them. Thus we saw it fitting to allow them a fleeting [moment of] allusion to the mystery of mysteries in the hope that this will draw them toward realization (*taḥqīq*) away from the way [of the misleading]. Nevertheless, we have not spared these few leaves, which are invested with secrets, a thin veil and a light covering, easily pierced by those who are worthy and too thick to penetrate it.³¹*

Tarabishi detects in the emphasized words in this passage an allusion to Ibn Rushd. He also cites another passage in which Ibn Ṭufayl interrupts the narrative to register his fiercest criticism against extreme rationalists, and experiences a temptation to see Ibn Rushd as the target of this criticism.³² The passage in question is an especially important one and I will attend to it later in this book. For now, it suffices to say that it consists of what seems to be Ibn Ṭufayl's straight depreciation of the rational faculty and a clear declaration of its limitations in relation to comprehending divine truths by employing categories that pertain to the sensible world.³³ And indeed, it seems tempting to read this passage in the light of Tarabishi's interpretation and as indicating a rebellion against rationalism and Ibn Rushd as its chief representative. However, I will attempt to show that Tarabishi's reading must be limited due to his failure to grasp the true nature of Ibn Ṭufayl's "rebellion" against rationalism and his burning desire to freeze the relationship between him and Ibn Rushd.

The weakness of Tarabishi's view becomes apparent upon examining his (mis)interpretation of the third and last indication that he detects for an irreconcilable tension between the two Andalusian philosophers. This occurs in a statement in which Ibn Ṭufayl answers his reader's wish that he introduces the science of mystical visions in the way of rational consideration, and explains that this "can be set down in books and mastered by means of expressions. However, it is rarer than red sulphur, particularly in the region where we live. For it is so extraordinary that only some individuals grasp a slight portion of it here and there. And whoever has grasped something of it does not talk about it except in symbols (*ramzan*).³⁴ For the community of pristine religion (*al-ḥanīfiyya*) and the genuine Sacred Law forbid one to delve into it and warn against this."³⁵ Tarabishi completely ignores Ibn Ṭufayl's affirmation that, although it is very rarely done, introducing the science of mystical visions in the way of rational consideration is still possible, and he freezes on his warning that the Law forbids one to delve into this matter. He then contrasts this with Ibn Rushd's insistence that it is not only allowed but even obligatory for the possessor of knowledge to interpret the Law,³⁶ and comes out with a

judgment that is not only based on absence of evidence but that also frustrates the evidence that there is.

A serious examination of Ibn Rushd's view on the subject of the interpretation of the Law reveals how close it is to Ibn Ṭufayl's. Let me begin with a passage from Ibn Rushd's *Incoherence of the Incoherence*: "And this is the meaning of the ancient philosophers, when they say that God is the totality of the existents and that He is the agent. And therefore the chiefs of the Ṣūfīs say: *Not-He is but-He*. But all this is the knowledge of those who are steadfast in their knowledge, and this must not be written down and must not be an obligation of faith, and therefore it is not taught by the Divine Law. And one who mentions this truth where it should not be mentioned sins, and one who withholds it from those to whom it should be told sins too."³⁷ Although Ibn Rushd was reluctant to write down philosophical solutions to problems that pertain to religion, especially the problem of the relationship between God and the world, he thought that such solutions could be provided in philosophy books.³⁸ Those solutions, however, must be examined only by true philosophers, who possess the exclusive right to interpret them. This right depends on the philosophers' competence in demonstrative reasoning, which competence renders them capable of deciphering the inner meanings of Scripture. These meanings should not be revealed to the dialectical (theological) and rhetorical classes of people, whose work generates doubt, dissension, and strife in the community of believers.³⁹ In the same vein, Ḥayy came to realize that "there were men appointed to every work, and that every one was best capable of doing that unto which he was appointed by nature."⁴⁰ Accordingly, Ibn Ṭufayl makes his hero leave in peace Salāmān and his companions, who possessed a natural aversion to contemplation, and live in peace with Absāl, who "used to make a deeper search into the inside of things and was more inclined to study mystical meanings (*bāṭin*) and interpretations."⁴¹

In the passage quoted above from *Incoherence of Incoherence*, Ibn Rushd makes an implicit reference to the distinction between divine and human knowledge. The words "those who are steadfast in knowledge" occur in Q 3:7: "But no one knows its true interpretation except God and those who are steadfast in knowledge." The ancients, by whom he means Aristotle in particular, are included among those who are steadfast in knowledge and also the chiefs of the Ṣūfīs. Hence, I think that for Ibn Rushd, knowledge is of two sorts: rationalistic knowledge, which is with the ancients, and mystical knowledge, which is with the Ṣūfīs. Moreover, Ibn Rushd says that the ancients' grasp of the notion that God is one with his creatures is identical with what the Ṣūfīs think. He insists, however, that this is something that must not be put in writing, and to mention it to those who are unfit to hear it is unlawful. At the same time, this knowledge should not be kept from those who are worthy of hearing it. And this is exactly the mission that Ibn Ṭufayl sets out to accomplish and which he describes in the passage that I quoted above from the conclusion of his work. It is interesting

that the meaning of Ibn Rushd's words, as well as Ibn Ṭufayl's, is to be found in a famous passage attributed to Aristotle: "Aristotle was reproached by Plato for revealing whatever wisdom he committed to his books. He apologized by saying: 'As for the sons of wisdom and its inheritors they will not besmirch it. As for its enemies and those who have no interest in it, they will not obtain it due to their ignorance of what it contains. Although I have disclosed this wisdom, I have strongly fortified its walls so that the light-headed and the ignorant may not climb them and put their hands on it.'"⁴²

Ibn Ṭufayl urges his readers who want the truth without obfuscation to seek Eastern philosophy and search for it assiduously. This is despite his saying that readers who seek the truth without obfuscation should turn to Ibn Sīnā's book on Eastern philosophy. This does not prove that Ibn Ṭufayl is the inventor of a legend, nor even that his words betray an unaware confession that the book on Eastern philosophy does not exist. On the contrary, Ibn Ṭufayl's seemingly inconsistent statements are in harmony with his main position, as it is stated by means of another two seemingly inconsistent statements. He affirms in one statement that although this is very rarely done, it is possible to provide an account of the science of mystical visions in books according to the way of the people of consideration,⁴³ and in the other that "as for your inquiry concerning what the people of vision (*mushāhada*) witness and concerning the tastes (*adhwāq*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*) [that they experience] in the state of sainthood (*walāya*), this is something the truth of which cannot, in itself, be *stated* (*ithbātuhu*) in a book. As one goes about stating it, either in speech or in writing, its truth is *altered* (*istaḥālat*) and it joins the theoretical part, which is other than it."⁴⁴

The emphasis here is on two concepts: "stated" and "altered." Stating (*ithbāt*) in Islamic theological and mystical traditions is associated with unification (*tawḥīd*) and being (*wujūd*). One cannot make a true statement about something unless it is one thing; otherwise, it will not be a statement about *it*. And one cannot make a true statement about something that does not exist because a statement about something that does not exist is a statement about nothing.⁴⁵ What the people of vision witness can be stated, but the moment that it is stated, its truth is altered. Hence, a statement about what they witness is a statement about a state (*ḥāl*) that is altered the moment that it is stated; is a statement about something that is limitless.⁴⁶ Ibn Ṭufayl says that, although this is very rarely done, it is still possible to provide an account of the science of (mystical) visions in writing and according to the way of the people of consideration. Is this not inconsistent with his previous statement? Not if his account is presented as consisting of stating that a true statement of what the people of the science of mystical visions witness cannot be made. We can summarize this point by saying that Ibn Ṭufayl makes a distinction between a statement *of* what the people of vision witness and a statement *about* what they witness. As it turns out, the latter but not the former can be put in writing. Ibn Ṭufayl's book may be considered as an example of a statement *about* what a possessor

of vision, Ḥayy Ibn Yaḳzān, witnessed, for Ḥayy witnessed what “no eye has seen or ear heard, nor has it occurred to the heart of man.”⁴⁷

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE: THE HEART AND
THE VOICE OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

The term “file,” which appears in the title of this chapter, occurs in the opening chapter of Tarabishi’s book.⁴⁸ As I have pointed out, Tarabishi wrote his book in response to Jabiri, who charged Ibn Sīnā with inventing the illuminationist thought that “killed reason and logic in the Arabic consciousness for many centuries.”⁴⁹ According to Jabiri, Ibn Sīnā’s illuminationism contributed a great deal to drawing Islamic thought away from a state of openness to rationalism, promoted by Kindī and the Mu‘tazilite theologians, to a murky and self-destructive irrationalism, promoted by Ghazālī and Suhrawardī.⁵⁰ Thus, if Muslims wish to reestablish what Ibn Sīnā disconnected, they must detach themselves from him and adhere to Ibn Rushd’s rationalism.⁵¹ This is the background to Tarabishi’s reopening of the illuminationist file. Unfortunately, no sooner had he opened the file than he began to close it by attempting to convince us that the only secret about the philosophy of illumination is that it had no secret about it.⁵² But he does not forget in the attempt to point at a conspiracy contrived by the person of Ibn Ṭufayl, the inventor of the fiction of illuminationist philosophy, and also to convince us not how bad Ibn Sīnā must have been, but how he, and many an Islamic philosopher, must have been irrelevant. They were just pawns that made moves according to the plan set by their master, Aristotle.⁵³

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī presents a picture of Aristotle that seems to be different: Aristotle was used in the Islamic intellectual tradition, as he was used in other intellectual traditions, to satisfy its cultural needs and the necessities of its historical circumstances.⁵⁴ In light of this understanding, Badawī seeks to dispel the ambiguity surrounding the attribution of *Uthūlūjīya* to Aristotle. He says that even if the Arabs had known the true identity of the writer of *Uthūlūjīya* or suspected its attribution to Aristotle, they would still have attributed it to him.⁵⁵

In *al-Aflātūniyya al-Muḥdatha ‘inda al-‘Arab*, Badawī describes the attribution of *Uthūlūjīya* to Aristotle as a “lucky mistake.” Had the real author of *Uthūlūjīya* been known, it would not have received the attention that it deserved and would have met the destiny that befell Plato’s genuine writings.⁵⁶ What he says in this work, as well as in *Aristotle Among the Arabs* (cited hereafter as AA), seems inconsistent with what he says in his introduction to *The Platonic Spiritual Forms* (cited hereafter as PS). There, he elaborates on the doubts that Islamic philosophers, Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā in particular, had about the attribution of *Uthūlūjīya* to Aristotle.⁵⁷ Ibn Sīnā confessed his doubts in *Letter to al-Kiyā* by saying that *Uthūlūjīya* is somewhat suspect (*mu‘an*).⁵⁸ In *al-Jam‘*, Fārābī mentions the contradiction between what is discussed in *Uthūlūjīya* in relation to the spiritual forms (*ṣuwar rūḥāniyya*) and Aristotle’s stated position against the possibility of their existence. However, he dismisses the possibility that

Aristotle was involved in self-contradiction and rejects the doubts about his authorship of *Uthūlūjiya*.⁵⁹ In his attempt to establish harmony between Aristotle and Plato, he resorts to interpreting those things concerning which the two philosophers seem to be in disagreement but are found to be in total agreement when their views are examined at a deeper level. Badawi thinks that the harmony that Fārābī endeavored to establish rendered Plato's figure overshadowed by Aristotle's light, and the outcome was very unfortunate. Islamic thinkers in the fourth and fifth centuries became convinced that the reconciliation between the two philosophers was unattainable. Their preference for Aristotle over Plato was a result of a natural disposition for accumulation, articulation, and prying for details as well as spiritual barrenness and the lack of originality and creativity of the thinkers of those times.⁶⁰

It is interesting how the opposing trends of Hegelianism and Existentialism are at work in Badawi's interpretation of the reception of Aristotle in the Islamic intellectual tradition. In PS, he speaks about a factual or natural necessity that committed Muslims, as a class of human intellectuals driven by the force of historical circumstances, to a certain conduct—namely, preferring Aristotle over Plato. In AA, however, he speaks about exactly the opposite case. As a matter of fact, he mentions something about the necessities of historical circumstances. However, these necessities are presented as coinciding with, rather than driving, the game that Islamic *individuals* played in their overlooking of a historical fact—namely, that *Uthūlūjiya* belonged ultimately to Plotinus's *Enneads*. Looking deeper, however, we might detect in what Badawi says in PS a sort of methodological confirmation of what he says in AA. In my opinion, PS is a very important work, especially in relation to the affinity between Suhrawardī's school of illumination and Ibn al-'Arabī's thought, and deserves a thorough examination. Here, it suffices to point out that this work had been written sometime in the thirteenth century by an anonymous author in whose writing style Badawi finds clear Hegelianistic as well as Existentialistic elements,⁶¹ but who represents an independent Platonism, different from the Platonism of Suhrawardī's school of illumination or that of the Neoplatonists. Despite the fact that Badawi emphasizes the strong resemblance between our anonymous author and Ibn al-'Arabī, he sees him as an original Platonic thinker who should not be considered as strictly belonging to this (Suhrawardian) or that (Akhbarian) school of thought.⁶² From what Badawi says, it becomes clear that he considers PS as the evidence for Plato's emergence in the Islamic intellectual tradition and, with him, the Islamic thinker as the *individual* that he mentions in AA.

It is interesting that in an intellectual tradition in which naming was almost equal to existence, the ultimate author of *Uthūlūjiya*, Plotinus, was not known by his real name, only as al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī.⁶³ I find myself in agreement with the general thrust of Badawi's view in AA that the mystery of mystifying Plotinus's name lies in a certain interest that Islamic philosophers had in keeping the name of *Uthūlūjiya* separated from the name of its author, and that this interest is related to reconciling religion and philosophy. It was important

for Islamic philosophers to attribute the work to Aristotle because Aristotle was the voice that spoke for philosophy. Aristotle was the voice that spoke for Islamic philosophy, but he was not its heart. As it stands, this statement seems to be inconsistent with a host of scholarly conventions that emphasize the many titles of honor that Aristotle had received in the Islamic philosophical tradition, the massive amount of praise that Islamic philosophers had allocated to him, and the great number of statements expressing admiration of the man's special capacities.⁶⁴ Add to this the fact that a considerable part of the work by those philosophers consists of commentaries on Aristotle's writings. It is hard to see, therefore, how Aristotle can be considered anything less than the heart of Islamic philosophy or its uncontested master, as Tarabishi surmises.

Islamic philosophers made, in my opinion, an important distinction between human wisdom (*hikma*), Aristotle being its chief representative, and another sort of wisdom, which may be called "divine wisdom." Even Ibn Rushd, who no doubt was the staunchest admirer of Aristotle, saw in his philosophy the culmination of human wisdom. The following passage, which seems to provide evidence to the contrary, only supports this view: "Praised He Who has allocated human perfection to him. People toil and after a prolonged time and much hardship are able to conceive what is easily conceived by him. What is conceived easily in others differs from what is conceived as such in him. This is why doubts occur to interpreters concerning his statements, only to find out after a long time that what he had said was sound and that the rational consideration of others was lacking in comparison with his. Due to this divine capacity that was found in him, he became the founder of wisdom (*hikma*) and the one who completed it. This is something that is rarely found in any art so that [it is even more out of the ordinary to find it happening in] this great art [of philosophy]."⁶⁵

Ibn Rushd says that Aristotle was the person who founded and completed wisdom. Surely, Aristotle was not the founder of (divine) wisdom if Plato, Aristotle's teacher, is to be reckoned a revered, wise person and to receive in the Islamic tradition the special title of honor: "Divine Plato." Ibn Rushd, the interpreter of Plato's *Republic*, must be acting, therefore, according to the distinction between two sorts of philosophy: philosophy as a (superior) human profession and philosophy as a divine one. Similar to the passage quoted above, the following passage also creates the impression that Aristotle is being divinized, when he is actually being humanized to the utmost degree of (human) perfection: "How wonderful this man must be and how distinguished is his mental capacity (*fitraithi*) from the mental capacities of the rest of humans. It is as if divine providence has fashioned him for their sake, so that they may witness the highest perfection in the human species."⁶⁶ Tarabishi states that Ibn Rushd's attempt to purify the Peripatetic doctrine from the faults of Greek and Arabic interpreters and restore orthodox Aristotelianism failed due to the confusion caused by the introduction of Neoplatonism and the lack of more effective critical and methodological scientific tools. He adds that Ibn Rushd

succeeded only in establishing Aristotelianism as the subject matter of a sort of religious worship because “Aristotle was for him not only the divine Aristotle as the ancients called him, but the human creature that divine providence had chosen as the materialization of the symbol of perfection as well.”⁶⁷ The truth is that Aristotle was for Ibn Rushd, as well as for the rest of Islamic philosophers, the symbol of the perfection of the wisdom that I sorted as human and that Ibn Rushd, like other philosophers, was fully aware of the existence of another sort of wisdom that had a different nature, as the passage I quoted above from the Thirteenth Discussion of the *Incoherence of Incoherence* shows clearly.⁶⁸ In this passage, Ibn Rushd says that Aristotle and the chiefs of the Ṣūfīs possessed sound understanding of the sense in which God should be depicted as identical with his created existence. Aristotle and the Ṣūfīs are described by him as steadfast in knowledge, a description that Q 3:7 provides for those who have the capacity to interpret correctly God’s verses, especially verses that are not of well-established meaning (*mutashābihāt*). Similarly, Ibn Rushd says in *al-Athār al-Ulwiyya* that interpreters of Aristotle raise doubts concerning the meanings of his words, only to come to realize after the passage of time that his opinion was the correct one all along. The analogy that has been drawn here might seem as if lending support to the view that Ibn Rushd sought to establish Aristotelianism as an object of religious worship. However, the account of what Ibn Rushd is trying to do goes far beyond and much deeper than the oversimplified account that Tarabishi provides. Ibn Rushd is sowing the seeds of his complementarity thesis, which establishes a synthesis between religion and philosophy. To do this, he first will have to make al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī (Plotinus) leave his body (Aristotle)⁶⁹ one last time and not return therein. This act of restoration or abstracting the original from the mixed is what constitutes the heart and the very definition of philosophical interpretation for Ibn Rushd. Something very similar to that must be accomplished to restore the divine religious from the mixed Qur’ānic verses, as I will explain after citing the following passage from Ibn Rushd’s *Kashf*:

The party from the public that considers the Law to be in opposition to philosophy should know that it is not in opposition to it. Also those who associate themselves with philosophy and consider it in opposition to the Law should know that it is not in opposition to it. Each party must know that it has not discerned the true essence of religion and philosophy. An opinion concerning the Law that is in opposition to philosophy is either an innovation that is not in accord with the principles of the Law or a faulty opinion in philosophy based on a false interpretation of it. This is why we found it incumbent upon us to define in this book the principles of the Law. For when its principles are traced back to their origins, they will be found in full agreement with philosophy, not with what is [falsely] interpreted in it. So also concerning the opinion that considers philosophy in opposition to the Law; it should be known that the reason for it is that comprehensive knowledge of both philosophy and the Law is lacking.⁷⁰

Ibn Rushd employs the term “interpretation” (*ta’wīl*) in its Qur’ānic sense. Q 3:7 distinguishes between true and false interpretations. Misinterpretation arises because of verses that are not of well-established meaning (*mutashābihāt*), in contrast to verses that are of well-established meaning (*muḥkamāt*) usually understood by the commentators as related to the categorical orders of the Law.⁷¹ Those whose hearts are twisted interpret falsely those verses to disseminate dissension (*fitna*) in the community.⁷² Likewise, some philodoxers interpret Aristotle falsely to prove that his philosophy is in contradiction with the Law. To establish harmony between religion and philosophy, the foundation of both must be revealed, and this is the task that Ibn Rushd assigns for those who are firmly established in knowledge (*rāsikhūn fi al-‘ilm*). It is here that a possible connection can be found between Ibn Rushd and mystical thought, as I find it difficult to believe that his mention of the ancients and the Ṣūfīs in the same breath and in the context of discussing a major problem—namely, the problem of the unity of being—is accidental. Ibn Rushd saw the task of the philosophers mainly as performing an act of interpretation (*ta’wīl*), which in Arabic means bringing back a thing or a meaning to its original or first (*awwal*) state. This is also the task that the Ṣūfīs, and especially Ibn al-‘Arabī, thought lies at the heart of mystical occupation.

Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy* can be presented alongside this line of interpretation. This becomes clear toward the concluding part of the book. Not far from the island where Ḥayy Ibn Yaḳzān was born, there was another island inhabited by a religious community (*milla*). Salāmān and Absāl were born and raised in this community. They were faithful in the service of their community and observed the ordinances of its Law. The main distinguishing factor between them was that Absāl inclined toward mystical interpretation whereas Salāmān adhered to the outward meanings of the Law.⁷³ By means of his natural capacity for interpretation, and thanks to his encounter and spiritual association with Ḥayy, Absāl was able to realize that “all those things which are contained in the Law of God . . . were resemblances of what Hai Ebn Yokdhan had seen; and the eyes of his understanding were opened, and he found that the original and the copy did exactly agree together. And the ways of mystical interpretation were easy to him.”⁷⁴ A perfect harmony was established between the man of (mystical) visions (Ḥayy) and the man of esoteric interpretation (Absāl). Failing to appreciate the real condition of the members of Absāl’s community, and mistakenly thinking that they all possessed his mental capacities (*fiṭar*),⁷⁵ Ḥayy felt encouraged to reveal the secrets of his visionary wisdom, only to be gravely disappointed and run the risk of losing his life. Once he realized that “there were men appointed to every work, and that every one was best capable of doing that unto which he was appointed by nature,”⁷⁶ he turned to Salāmān’s companions, apologized to them, and acquitted himself of what he had previously said. He also informed them that his eyes were opened and he was able to see what they had been able to see right from the start. Moreover, he urged them to adhere to the ordinances of

the Law and to believe in those verses whose meanings are not well established and accept them without argument.⁷⁷

Ḥayy urged Salāmān's companions to stay within the limits of the well-established ordinances of the Law because he realized that going beyond these limits will expose them to the dangers of false interpretations, which are introduced by those whose hearts are twisted and who seek to disseminate dissension in the community. It is here that Ibn Ṭufayl sees the danger of the false philosophers, the false interpreters, who produce what they introduce as the secrets that are to be withheld from those who are not worthy of them and, by means of that, increase people's desire to obtain them. According to Lawrence Conrad, Ibn Ṭufayl's attempt to counter this danger was one of the main reasons for writing *Ḥayy*. I will discuss his as well as the views of others on the purpose of writing *Ḥayy* next.

THE PURPOSE OF WRITING *HAYY*

Léon Gauthier argues that Ibn Ṭufayl's primary goal is to demonstrate the harmony between religion and philosophy: Ibn Ṭufayl composed his work following an impeccable, logical plan,⁷⁸ which advanced carefully and step by step toward a concluding section that deals with the problem of the harmony between religion and philosophy. This section must therefore be essential to the work, and the problem of the harmony between religion and philosophy must be its main subject.⁷⁹

George Hourani argues that the most important parts of Ibn Ṭufayl's work are those that deal with the reasoning that led Ḥayy to achieve the highest stage of mystical unity with God. His argument against Gauthier rests first on denying the assumption that the concluding part of a work must be its most important part and that it necessarily defines its subject. Second, he argues that the question of the agreement between religion and philosophy does not receive serious attention in the work, and that Ibn Ṭufayl fails to do what Ibn Rushd, for example, succeeded in doing in *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*—namely, present a well-fashioned argument that compares religious and philosophical thought. As a matter of fact, the sections that deal with the relation between religion and philosophy could be pruned out without seriously damaging the work.⁸⁰

In criticizing the view that *Ḥayy* consists of a flawless and carefully carried out logical plan, Conrad registers the following inconsistencies in the work: (1) At the beginning of his work, Ibn Ṭufayl says that no beasts of prey were to be found on the island. Later, however, he says that Ḥayy came to the help of animals that had been brought down by a beast of prey. (2) The reference to how the mother-gazelle laid Ḥayy in the feathered ark supports the account of the child's human origin against the account of his spontaneous generation, although this incident occurs after the merging of the two accounts. (3) Although Ḥayy is totally isolated from humans, Ibn Ṭufayl endows him with

the awareness of the demands that his body makes on him, which distract him from contemplating God, the Necessary-of-Existence. His commitment to the requirements of Absāl's religion raises some awkward problems. For how shall he pay almsgiving (*zakāt*) or perform fasting (*ṣiyām*) when he owns no possessions and is already fasting in the most rigorous way? And how can he perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) from his isolated island where ships never visit? (4) Ibn Ṭufayl says in the introduction of his book that he wrote it in response to a request made by a friend who wished to learn some of the secrets of Eastern philosophy, whereas in the conclusion, he says that he wrote the book to rebut the views of the pseudo-philosophers.⁸¹

An answer to (1) can be provided by referring to what Goodman says in relation to a certain intellectual experiment that Ibn Ṭufayl conducts in his book. The experiment teaches us that if an individual is raised away from society, which is full of harmful imbalances, into a well-established natural environment, in which equilibrium and stability prevail, this individual will grow up free of deficiencies. The experiment must be conducted in a fit and balanced environment. This is why it is important, for example, to provide food in abundance so that the mother-gazelle may find pastures in bounty for her milk to be in abundance and feed Ḥayy.⁸² A crucial item in the list that Goodman provides for the experiment to work is the absence of beasts of prey. Now Goodman says that Ibn Ṭufayl recognizes the danger of giving Ḥayy everything. For example, despite the existence of food, Ḥayy must endeavor to find it; and although there are no beasts of prey, there are still some animals that compete with Ḥayy on having it.⁸³ Presence and absence, therefore, work together in establishing a balanced environment that not only provides for the development of the subject of the experiment but also induces him to improve his potentials. This is why the existence of beasts of prey becomes important as a challenge for Ḥayy to overcome. Another balance that Ibn Ṭufayl attempts to maintain throughout the whole work is between the implications of the traditionalistic and the naturalistic views of man's origin. The existence of beasts of prey is important because it confirms the traditionalistic account. This account is based upon religious principles, since the story of man's control over beasts of prey is a story that religion teaches. It is also a story that natural evolution confirms. What Conrad considers as a contradiction only confirms the fact that Ibn Ṭufayl is working according to a careful, logical plan and is not proceeding randomly.

In response to (2), Conrad must be reminded that although Ibn Ṭufayl says right before the mention of the feathers in the ark that the two accounts of Ḥayy's birth are united,⁸⁴ the unity in question is not one that excludes difference. An exclusive unity would be ineffective in actively combining two accounts that complement rather than exclude each other.

I am afraid that point (3) is based on a misinterpretation. Living in isolation from human contact does not necessarily mean that Ḥayy is safe from the demands of his body. One might wonder why Conrad should consider this point

as raising awkward problems given his insistence that *Ḥayy* is a work that should be considered as a social act reflecting a broad continuum of socio-intellectual perspectives, and as he draws our attention to the significance of the social realities and concerns of intellectuals in a land fraught with serious social, political, and religious tensions.⁸⁵ Add to this his insistence that Ibn Ṭufayl was working in harmony with fundamental Muwaḥḥid doctrine and saw himself as fulfilling his socio-political responsibility, which goes along with knowledge.⁸⁶ Thus, Conrad insists that “neither Ḥayy nor Ibn Ṭufayl can be satisfied to ‘know’ in glorious isolation from the rest of mankind, much as Plato’s prisoner in the Allegory of the Cave, once he beholds the form of the Good, recognizes his responsibility to return to free the others, however unwilling they be to follow him.”⁸⁷ Conrad does not forget to mention that in his commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, Ibn Rushd indicated that the ideal conditions postulated by Plato for the philosopher-king had existed in al-Andalus under his patron, the Muwaḥḥid caliph Abū Ya‘qūb.⁸⁸ One might wonder how being aware of all these things, as well as the fact that Ibn Ṭufayl wrote his philosophical story a few years before his death and that the caliph participated in his funeral, which means that the work had enjoyed his approval, he failed to see that Ibn Ṭufayl’s mention of the formal commitment of the *ḥajj* in such an isolated setting should not be perceived as an anomaly. Indeed, it is intended to reveal two important political and mystical messages that have much in common, because the isolated island can be a symbol for both the isolated mystic and the isolated al-Andalus.

There can be no doubt that the example of the *ḥajj* enjoys a strong presence in Ibn Ṭufayl’s work; and in one case, Ḥayy is depicted as performing what can be seen as circumambulating his island, his Ka‘ba.⁸⁹ His performance was part of the second resemblance in which he imitated the movement of celestial spheres, which can be related to the fact that the seven circumambulations around the Ka‘ba presented a resemblance of the spheres of the celestial order. Let us also remember that Ibn Ṭufayl divides Ḥayy’s intellectual development into seven stages, which can be seen as activating Plato’s educational plan (in *Republic*) on the philosophical level and the religious plan, as seen through the mystic eye, on a spiritual level. It is hard to see how Conrad is not aware of all this and the impression is made that he is actually aware of much of it, only that he had made up his mind that reconciling religion and philosophy is not the problem that made Ibn Ṭufayl write *Ḥayy*.

Point (4) is inconsistent with what Conrad says: “It was an exceedingly common rhetorical device in medieval Arabic literature to begin one’s book or essay by addressing an unnamed colleague who has reputedly asked a question or raised a point for discussion.”⁹⁰ This takes us back to the question of the purpose of writing *Ḥayy*, as Conrad balances his criticism of Gauthier’s view by criticizing Hourani, who thinks that Ḥayy’s care for his soul rather than the relation between philosophy and religion is the central subject of Ibn Ṭufayl’s work.⁹¹ Conrad draws our attention to the significance of the social realities and

concerns of intellectuals in a land fraught with social, political, and religious tensions. The societal aspect cannot be ignored, and it is a mistake to assume that Ibn Ṭufayl's main concern was about the ascent of the self-taught philosopher to intellectual perfection.⁹² Conrad attempts to reduce the merits of the rationalistic aspect of Ḥayy's quest by emphasizing that the ultimate level of knowledge sought by Ḥayy belonged to a transcendent level of consciousness that cannot be reached "through intellectual speculation based on syllogistic deduction, postulation of premises, and the drawing of inferences."⁹³ Then he turns to the passage from the conclusion of the story, which mentions the pseudo-philosophers, and finds in this the answer to the question of why Ibn Ṭufayl wrote his story. "There would seem to be no doubt that this is the problem that compelled Ibn Ṭufayl to write," he says.⁹⁴ It is the exact formulation of this statement that is the key to understanding the limitation of Conrad's argument. A distinction must be made between "Why did Ibn Ṭufayl *write* Ḥayy?" and "Why did Ibn Ṭufayl write *Ḥayy*?"

The shift of emphasis might seem trivial but it is not, because it reveals the limitation of an analysis that tends to ignore the second and more important formulation of the question and, to the extent that it does provide an answer for it, it does so only accidentally. Rather than presenting *Ḥayy* as an attempt to reconcile philosophy and religion, as Gauthier claimed on the basis of textual analysis, or as an attempt to describe the ascent of the unaided intellect to the highest stages of wisdom, as Hourani claimed on the basis of what he considers as more comprehensive textual analysis, Conrad's view tends to present the text as a mere reflection of the world in which it was created and which could be substituted for any other creation. Although Conrad insists that the appearance of corrupt philosophers compelled Ibn Ṭufayl to write, he would not insist as strongly that this is what compelled him to write *Ḥayy*.

There can be no doubt that socio-political circumstances exerted a serious influence on Ibn Ṭufayl's work and the very setting that he selects for it—namely, an isolated island is a striking statement to this effect that is more telling than any other fact. Thus, he who argues, as Hourani does, that the account of the encounter with the human society occupied only a negligible part of the story must be wrong because the whole story of isolation is meaningless unless it is mirrored against this part. Hourani's view might still make some sense given that the ascent of the unaided intellect can be a valid description of one of the accounts of the story. However, this understanding must be qualified because Ibn Ṭufayl's attempt at reconciling religion and philosophy extends over the entire text and is not limited to its concluding part. I want to conclude this chapter with one final note concerning the identity of Ibn Ṭufayl's addressee. Conrad includes among these philosophers, simple believers, mystics, and several others. He does not mention one very important person: Ibn Ṭufayl or someone who is like his soul mate, his "noble brother."