

# Ibn Ṭufayl's Critique of Politics

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**I**bn Sīnā (d. 1037) occupies a privileged status in Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*. Of the thinkers Ibn Ṭufayl mentions in the introduction to his epistle, Ibn Sīnā alone escapes without criticism. Ibn Ṭufayl even alleges to have composed the epistle upon a request to explicate the “mysteries [*asrār*] of eastern wisdom mentioned by the prince of philosophers, Ibn Sīnā.”<sup>1</sup> However, insofar as there is any ‘mystery’ or ‘secret’ here, it is that—as the pre-eminent historian of Arabic philosophy Dimitri Gutas observes—“of the three works by Ibn Sīnā which were written during the period of his career when he decided to call his philosophy Eastern (418/1027–422/1031). . . none was available in Andalus to Ibn Ṭufayl.”<sup>2</sup> And substantively, Ibn

- 1 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, 3–4. References are to the standard Arabic edition: *Ḥayy ben Yaqdhān: roman philosophique d'Ibn Thofail*, texte arabe avec les variantes des manuscrits et de plusieurs éditions et traduction française, par Léon Gauthier, 2e édition, revue, augmentée et complètement remaniée (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1936). Lenn E. Goodman's recently updated translation contains Gauthier's pagination in the margins: Lenn E. Goodman, trans. *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān: A Philosophical Tale* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Ibn Sīnā also begins his *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* with the trope that someone demanded he write it down. See the standard critical edition, Ibn Sīnā, *Risālāt Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* in *Traité Mystiques*, ed. M. A. F. Mehren (Leiden: Brill, 1889–99), part 1, 1–22. An English translation is available in Corbin, *Avicenna*, 137–150. All translations from the Arabic are my own.
- 2 Dimitri Gutas, “Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy,” *Oriens* 34 (1994): 222–241, 228–229. *The Easterners* was destroyed in the eleventh century and *Fair Judgment* lost, while Ibn Sīnā's marginalia to Aristotle's *De Anima* were transcribed too far from Andalus and circulated too late for Ibn Ṭufayl to have seen them. While his access to “the *asrār* of Eastern wisdom” is implausible on empirical grounds, Ibn Ṭufayl knew other works by Ibn Sīnā, including *Remarks and Admonitions* and *The Book of Healing* (from the prologue to which Gutas suggests Ibn Ṭufayl borrowed the phrase “Eastern wisdom”). On the controversy surrounding Ibn Sīnā's “Eastern/‘Oriental’ wisdom/philosophy,” see Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Philadelphia: University

Ṭufayl's 'retelling' departs from Ibn Sīnā's epistemology, particularly in the elevation of visionary mystical experience to the same level as logic.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl might declare that his allegory reveals Ibn Sīnā's eastern philosophy and its inner truths, but he neither had access to the texts which ostensibly contain them nor is the philosophical system that he presents the same as Ibn Sīnā's.

And yet, much of the ink spilled on Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory and on its relationship to Ibn Sīnā has been narrowly driven by the introduction's "hints" and "secrets." In the process, a different link that Ibn Ṭufayl provides to Ibn Sīnā tends either to be effaced by sensationalist (and Orientalist) talk of mystical secrets; or where it is noted, it tends to be eclipsed by Ibn Ṭufayl's fiction of an esoteric truth. This other link is one that Ibn Ṭufayl directly suggests when he hails Ibn Sīnā in his story. He introduces and concludes his allegory with the names of all three of Ibn Sīnā's characters: it is "the story of Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān, Absāl, and Salāmān, who were given their names by the sheikh Ibn Sīnā himself."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān* is the title of one of Ibn Sīnā's own allegories; and in addition to the titular Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān, Ibn Ṭufayl's two other named characters are Absāl and Salāmān—the title of yet another of Ibn Sīnā's allegories and the names of its main characters. Both the title of the work and the introduction itself point to these two works by Ibn Sīnā.

Ibn Ṭufayl bills his *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān* as the story of Ibn Sīnā's three characters, but he may or may not have known these other texts. Because his allegory is very different from Ibn Sīnā's two stories, Gutas and J. C. Bürgel suggest that Ibn Ṭufayl might not have known either text, though Gutas also notes that he might have known Ibn

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of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 173 as well as 154, and the harsh overview in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 43–72 and 115–130.

3 Gutas, "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā," 241. Gutas notes that Ibn Ṭufayl adopts Ibn Sīnā's philosophy on becoming near to God, and modifies it in response to al-Ghazālī's theological objections and against his elevation of mystics above philosophers.

4 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*, 20.

Sinā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*, based on a paraphrase.<sup>5</sup> Even so, that the stories are different says very little about what Ibn Ṭufayl had access to; he does not claim to be summarizing or replicating Ibn Sinā's stories, only borrowing their characters' names. Regardless, there is some reason to think Ibn Ṭufayl might have known *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*, including the paraphrase that Gutas identifies, as well as the allegory's presence among Ibn Ṭufayl's contemporaries, namely Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1164). Furthermore, Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Sinā both use the motifs of a nursing wild animal and of spontaneous birth, which suggests that he was familiar with at least a portion of the story of *Absāl and Salāmān*, not just the names.<sup>6</sup> At the most basic level, as a literary work, Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory is a creative appropriation that interweaves Absāl and Salāmān into *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*; by creating namesakes, Ibn Ṭufayl invites us to read his allegory in relation to the characters in Ibn Sinā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān* and *Absāl and Salāmān*.

The characters are an alternate path to the relation between Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Sinā. In order to explore this relation, I compare the allegories' depictions of political relations and constructions of political values, in order to bring the three allegories to bear on themes important to political theory and practice. Approaching the allegories as *narrations of politics* provides a window into their constructions of the norms of political life, even where the authors may have other purposes (such as explaining the human faculties and their operations, the structure of the universe, different kinds of knowledge, or who can attain knowledge of God and how). The allegories depict their characters as ethical beings engaged in politics. Through the characters' actions, traits, motivations, and development,

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5 Gutas, "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sinā," 229, 234; J. C. Bürgel, "Ibn Ṭufayl and His *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*: A Turning Point in Arabic Philosophical Writing," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 830–848.

6 Sarah Stroumsa, "Avicenna's Philosophical Stories: Aristotle's *Poetics* Reinterpreted," *Arabica* 39 (1992): 183–206, 187.

the allegories contain implicit assumptions about how people live with or without each other, as well as people's values and habits.

The political relations marshaled in Ibn Sīnā's two stories are reducible to an either/or. *Either* agreement and harmony are realized as the ideal and norm of interpersonal life, *or* they break down and things fall apart. Meanwhile, the construction of politics in Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* breaks down assumptions fundamental to Ibn Sīnā's two allegories and to this polarization between total agreement and absolute tragedy. Indeed, it is the way in which Ibn Ṭufayl builds his case *against* mass politics that demands special attention. His *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, I argue, shows that political ideals can themselves be tragic and self-subversive, and this is an ever-present possibility in politics.

My first aim is to elaborate on the allegories' differing portrayals of politics. Second, I map out the contours of the ethical values implicit in Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory, namely how ideals and obligations fall into internal contradiction, and how their proliferation leads them into opposition with each other. My reading locates disagreement at the foundation of political life in Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory, where unrelenting commitments to association, hospitality, friendship, and care of others can bring about negative consequences, including the very opposites of these commitments' aims. Through moments of antinomy in his story, where the principles of political and ethical action contradict one another or otherwise fail, Ibn Ṭufayl turns Ibn Sīnā's allegories on their head. In the final section, I bring Ibn Ṭufayl's critiques to weigh on assumptions about political harmony and disagreement in political theory.

Elaborating on the allegories' implicit political theories can help us disentangle some small pieces of the two philosophers' skeins. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the two allegories invites reflection on fundamental questions at the center of how politics operates and how one's behaviors and ethics toward others can require, facilitate, or oppose the relationship one needs with oneself. By presenting seemingly universal values and ideals like friendship

and hospitality, the allegories' portrayals of specific political scenarios allow us to reconsider these values and to regard differently the work that they perform. When they show these ideals doing unexpected work, such texts demand that we reflect on these values, not in terms of the inherent desirability, universality, or value of time-honored ideals, but with regard to their inner workings, semiotic structures, and internal operations. In this sense, the apparently casual use of politics in all three allegories leads me to inquire into how ordinary values and their attendant practices are produced, and in turn, what they can produce. More specifically, Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory allows us to engage with how these political values work—or as may be case, how they stop working.

### 1. Summaries of the Three Allegories

#### *IBN SĪNĀ'S ḤĀYY IBN YAQZĀN*

Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān appears in Ibn Sīnā's allegory as a wise and vigorous old man. Ibn Sīnā's unnamed narrator (hereafter "Narrator") meets Ḥayy while traveling to a foreign land with three unnamed companions, who represent mendacity, violence, and licentiousness, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Ḥayy reveals that he, too, has been traveling. He warns the Narrator that his three companions are evil and have negative effects on him. The Narrator agrees with Ḥayy's assessment. At the Narrator's insistence, Ḥayy describes his journey across the East and the West. The "West" is the material world, while the "East" is the world of Forms. The area in the middle is where the Active Intellect, represented by Ḥayy, meets rational thought, the Narrator. After completing his topographical sketch of the universe, Ḥayy describes the One King (i.e., God) and how one catches glimpses of Him through contemplation.<sup>8</sup> Ḥayy's final words are, "Were it not the case that I become dearer to Him by speaking to you of Him and in admonishing you, I would have been too busy with

7 Ibn Sīnā *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 4–6.

8 *Ibid.*, 18–21.

[contemplating] Him to speak to you. You will follow me to Him if you wish. Peace.”<sup>9</sup>

*IBN SĪNĀ’S ABSĀL AND SALĀMĀN*

Absāl and Salāmān also have an allegory of their own. While the text of this allegory has been lost, a summary appears in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 1274) commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* [Pointers and reminders, or more commonly, Remarks and admonitions].<sup>10</sup> Al-Ṭūsī writes that Absāl was the brother of a king named Salāmān. Salāmān’s wife desired Absāl and concocts a devious plan to sleep with him. She talks her husband into marrying Absāl to her sister, tells her sister to share him with her, and then takes her sister’s place in bed on the wedding night. The room is dark, but a bolt of lightning reveals to Absāl his sister-in-law’s face. To her chagrin, he spurns her. In order to give matters time to settle down, Absāl leaves to conquer territories on land and sea, east and west, expanding his brother’s kingdom. When he returns, his sister-in-law tries to embrace him, and he rebuffs her again. Enemies attack the kingdom soon after, and Salāmān entrusts Absāl with fighting them. The wife bribes the armies to abandon Absāl, which they promptly do. He is left for dead at the battle, but a wild animal nurses him back to health. While Salāmān is mourning his brother, enemies surround him. Absāl returns to his brother and defeats them all, restoring the kingdom to health. The wife then bribes Absāl’s cook and his caretaker to poison him, and so he dies. Salāmān secludes himself from matters of governance and appeals to God, who reveals to him all that happened. Salāmān feeds his brother’s three murderers poison, and they die.

*IBN ṬUFAYL’S ḤAYY IBN YAQZĀN, ABSĀL, AND SALĀMĀN*

Ibn Ṭufayl’s version is by now well known, thanks to a long and robust history of western translations and commentaries dating

9 Ibid., 22.

10 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, with a commentary by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (Tehran: Daftar Nashr al-Kitāb – Ārmān, 1982), 3:367–369.

back to the seventeenth century. It takes place on an uninhabited island, where a gazelle finds Ḥayy as an infant and raises him. Upon her death, he dissects her in order to remove the cause of her immobility. While probing her heart, Ḥayy comes to the conclusion that her soul has departed.<sup>11</sup> This realization initiates his journey toward contemplating the truth of being.<sup>12</sup> Though he had spent time in his youth caring for animals and plants, he soon learns to scorn the baseness of corporeality and to disavow the passions, including compassion. By the age of fifty, he finally becomes capable of beholding the divine. Fearing for his soul if he should die while not in the thralls of this spectacular ecstasy, Ḥayy becomes weary of this world and desirous of the hereafter; he makes every effort to elongate that rapturous state.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the devout Absāl lives on a nearby inhabited island, and is a friend of its also devout leader, Salāmān. The two men hold different ethical views of the good life: Absāl believes in hermetic seclusion, and Salāmān in the need to conform and always be with others in order to keep doubts and temptation at bay. Having heard about a nearby island, Absāl sails off his native island in order to find his coveted seclusion. He is shipwrecked on the island of Ḥayy, who has never met another human. Absāl teaches Ḥayy language, and Ḥayy imparts the truths of being to Absāl. They find that Absāl's religion uses symbols to convey what Ḥayy discovered through contemplation.<sup>14</sup> Ḥayy and Absāl are driven by pity and desire to visit Absāl's island, in order to teach its inhabitants the truth and give them salvation. Once there, the people flock to Ḥayy. However, they misuse the tools of logic he gives them, and the moment his teachings go beyond the apparent, they become confused. Their initial awe and reverence toward Ḥayy turn into bitterness and hate, though they conceal this on account of their friendship with Absāl and the dictates of hospitality. Ḥayy

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11 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 26–45.

12 Ibid., 47–118.

13 Ibid., 119–135.

14 Ibid., 136–147.

becomes convinced that the majority of people can never attain proper understanding. He apologizes for all he said, affirms the islanders' teachings, and returns with Absāl to his island. The two friends worship together as master and disciple, until their deaths.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. "In Essence, an Epistemological Tale . . ."

It is important to distinguish my approach to the allegories as literary texts that depict politics from an approach in which they are regarded exclusively as symbols or representations of 'truth,' metaphysics, epistemology, or psychology. This distinction is particularly appropriate because Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory is sometimes considered "in essence, an epistemological tale" about how one can grasp the structure of the universe and attain knowledge of God, the afterlife, and the soul's immortality through reason and intuition alone.<sup>16</sup> I do not dispute that this is one of the layers of the allegory, and a very important layer too. In practice, however, narrowly fixating on the correspondence of a literary text to a philosophical system would require that one consider pieces of these three allegories relevant only insofar as they signify some philosophical tenet or principle. It is as though one is putting together a jigsaw puzzle, and knows that the 'final' picture is the philosopher's epistemology, cosmology, psychology, or metaphysics. Upon trying to put the picture together, however, some pieces will not fit together neatly, and many other pieces will be left over. These 'excess' pieces represent the allegory's literary character, namely its representations and mobilization of ethical life and the political domain.

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15 Ibid., 147–155.

16 The most powerful statement of this position is Gutas, "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā," 231–232 and 239–240. Gutas writes, "Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy b. Yaqzan* is, in essence, an epistemological tale" (235); and again in his "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *BJMES* 29, no. 1 (May 2002): 5–25: "Ibn Ṭufayl's philosophical romance is about the *philosophus autodidactus*, an epistemological tale. . ." (23).



The tendency to read the allegories strictly for various philosophical doctrines within the horizons of epistemology, psychology, or metaphysics has not emerged arbitrarily; the allegories themselves accommodate this reading, as do the philosophers' claims about why they use the allegorical form.<sup>17</sup> It is certainly true that Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* allegorizes his metaphysical system and describes how one attains knowledge of God with the help of a guide, which Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory also does. And Ibn Sīnā's *Absāl and Salāmān*, like Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, can be read as an allegory for psychological anatomy, depicting how different human faculties or parts interact (following al-Ṭūsī's interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's allegory).<sup>18</sup> Each of Ibn Sīnā's characters would be seen as

- 17 Ibn Ṭufayl claims that he uses allegory because mere words cannot convey the truth, and those who have attempted this have fallen into egregious error, delusion, and self-deifying blasphemies. Meanwhile, both of Ibn Sīnā's allegories can be seen as anthropomorphizing human faculties (*Absāl and Salāmān*) or spatializing knowledge and describing someone's journey to these "places" (*Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*). On theories for why Ibn Sīnā uses allegory, see the review and her own argument in Stroumsa, "Avicenna's Stories," 183–184, 188, 192, and 202–205, as well as Ibn Sīnā's commentaries in his *Book of Healing*, his references to the stories such as *Remarks and Admonitions'* reference to *Absāl and Salāmān* (3:374), and Gutas, *Avicenna*, 302–307.
- 18 According to al-Ṭūsī, *Salāmān* represents the rational soul; *Absāl* the theoretical and acquired intellect; the queen the body's corporeal faculty; her sister the practical intellect; the armies the sensible, imaginative, and visionary faculties; the cook the appetitive faculty; and the caretaker the vengeful spirited faculty. Al-Ṭūsī interprets the armies' betrayal of *Absāl* as those faculties succumbing to "languor because the theoretical intellect did not keep an eye on them." The cook and caretaker acting in collusion with the queen against *Absāl* represents the intellect fading in old age as the corporeal faculty increases the appetitive and spirited faculties' needs. The rational soul finally establishes control by slaying the bodily, appetitive, and spirited faculties (albeit after they murdered the theoretical-acquired intellect). The allegory thus has a happy ending because the soul chooses contemplation and frees itself from the physical world, bodily desires, and political power. Alternatively, the story has been read as a tragedy. *Absāl* is murdered. *Salāmān* is completely alone, everyone dear to him killed. He was haplessly passive for too long, and the two brothers did not work together to restore order as the wife/desire ruled from the shadows. The psychological moral, which the allegory indicates through repeated failure, is

personifying a different faculty, while Ibn Ṭufayl would be either presenting his characters as having some dominant faculty that rules over the others, or showing how those faculties come into conflict.

But that is not all the allegories do. This mode of interpretation whereby one mines the text for philosophical equivalences unduly eradicates the literary character of allegories and effaces the dramatic differences among them. Indeed, equating the literary themes of each allegory to various pieces of its author's philosophic system tends to yield only very broad philosophic correspondences among them.<sup>19</sup> The search for one-to-one correspondences to a philosophical system cannot exhaust the allegories' meanings.

Both philosophers depict politics in their allegories. In each of the allegories, neither the central nor the marginal figures' politics and ethics can be comprehensively or immediately derived from the texts' metaphysics, epistemology, or psychology. For example, even as Salāmān's wife in Ibn Sīnā's version may indeed represent the corporeal faculty, her role is deeply gendered and her behavior is consistently unethical in very specific ways: she connives to have sex with her brother-in-law, resorts to bribery, and murders a family member. Ibn Sīnā could have written her differently and still yielded the same general condemnation of corporeality and desire. In the same vein, Ibn Ṭufayl's conscientious islanders, who are also presented as being under the sway of worldly desire and corporeality, at no point accept or give any bribes, never mind attempt to harm

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that the different parts of the soul must work in harmony under the leadership of the intellect. For variations on the first interpretation, see al-Ṭūṣī 3:369 and Corbin, *Avicenna*, 223–227. For a discussion of the second interpretation, see Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy*, 94–96; and Alfred L. Ivry, “The Utilization of Allegory in Islamic Philosophy,” in *Interpretation & Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. Jon Whitman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 153–180, esp. 159–161. Note that both interpretations reduce the allegory to the psyche, and give no account of its politics.

19 Alfred Ivry and Sarah Stroumsa each make a similar point about Ibn Sīnā's allegories. See Ivry, “Utilization of Allegory,” 159 and Stroumsa, “Avicenna's Philosophical Stories.”

anyone. Similarly, while Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy and Narrator meet as tourists in an abstract, apolitical space that sits between the worlds of thought and action, Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy travels with Absāl from his previously uninhabited and pre-political island to a thoroughly social one.

The allegories not only portray political action, but also have implications for politics. Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy considers his task successfully completed simply by revealing his philosophical and theological truths to the Narrator, but Ibn Ṭufayl's character makes the islanders' understanding and agreement with him the criteria for his success. Ḥayy finally sees his attempts to engage with them as a waste of time because they are not high enough on the cosmic totem pole. If Ibn Ṭufayl's Absāl is the analogue to Ibn Sīnā's Narrator, then Ibn Ṭufayl's addition of 'deficient' islanders completely reorients the terms on which the two Ḥayys are successful. He makes the philosopher's engagement with others dependent on their ability to accept his teachings. We have then, in Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory, a philosopher who avows that his philosophy is the same as Ibn Sīnā's "secret" one and advances a very similar philosophical system, but presents in non-philosophic terms a vision of politics and ethics radically different from those in Ibn Sīnā's allegories.

Indeed, the most blatant differences among the allegories are in the ways they take recourse in politics and ethics. The dramatic differences in the allegories' ethical principles and orientation toward political community are encapsulated in three relations. First, how each of Ibn Sīnā's and Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayys approaches his task of imparting philosophical knowledge of the divine indicates two polar opposite ethical and pedagogical positions. Second, while Salāmān is a political leader in both allegories, his relationship to community is also the polar opposite in the two tales: Ibn Ṭufayl portrays him as a dogmatic, staunch believer in being with others, while he is oblivious to his surroundings in Ibn Sīnā's tale and secludes himself on three different occasions, including the finale's "triumph" of reason. The third significant variation emerges across the allegories' marginal or

ordinary people: the cook, caretaker, and armies are easily bribed, while the islanders treat Ḥayy based on particular principles, even as Ibn Ṭufayl's 'hero' claims that they are deficient and incapable of understanding. The differences among the two Ḥayy's, the two Salāmān's, and two sets of unnamed common folk are not reducible to metaphysics and epistemology. Restricting the final discussion to these three juxtapositions, I draw out the critical implications of the different politics and ethics for the schemas and ideals they perform or call into question.

Other scholars have recognized the importance of politics for the allegories, particularly for Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. Michael S. Kochin, for example, provocatively argues that Ḥayy's failure to convince the islanders of the truth and his inability to deploy rhetoric and images to persuade them, together with earlier subtleties in the text, indicate that Ibn Ṭufayl intended to construct Ḥayy as a failed philosopher-king.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Samar Attar reads Ibn Ṭufayl and Ḥayy as figures of modern toleration and cosmopolitanism, who, she argues, are partly responsible for the spread of ideas of toleration in Europe; although I do not share Attar's convictions, she is right to highlight the importance of political relations and values for the allegory.<sup>21</sup> Most recently, Khalil M. Habib critiques Attar's thesis that Ibn Ṭufayl teaches cosmopolitanism, and argues instead that Ibn Ṭufayl is showing the limitations of cosmopolitanism to ultimately celebrate a "qualified cosmopolitanism." He, too, imputes "tolerance" to Ḥayy and asserts that Ibn Ṭufayl "believes that a genuinely enlightened individual is 'cosmopolitan,' that is, free from parochial prejudices and in a sense at home in all cities."<sup>22</sup>

20 Michael S. Kochin, "Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 3 (1999): 399–416.

21 Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (New York: Lexington, 2007).

22 Khalil M. Habib, "Ibn Tufayl's Critique of Cosmopolitanism in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan*," in *Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Globalization: Citizens Without States*, ed. Lee Trepanier and Khalil M. Habib (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 97–115.

My approach agrees with these studies' alertness to politics, most notably the importance they give to questions of getting along (or failing to), mutual understanding (or misunderstanding), and to the relationship of failure to ethical obligations. I depart from them by not prioritizing Ḥayy as a hero or protagonist, and by reading the text outside the bounds of authorial intention.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the various structures of politics that I analyze in the allegories are necessarily *relational* and *perspectival*, which first demands that one consider politics and political values from the perspectives of all the allegories' characters.

### 3. The Pedagogical Ethics of Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān

Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān teaches philosophy. The act of teaching, by definition, presupposes a pedagogical object, and the interactions between teacher and student necessarily perform particular ethics and politics. As I show in this section, although Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Ṭufayl may at first appear to dramatize Ḥayy in the same way, their respective 'lecturer' approaches and responds to his 'students' in opposite ways. The two allegories show Ḥayy orienting himself and interacting with others in different ways. The differences between the two are of consequence for political theory. In particular, each Ḥayy places his need to care (*ʿīṭināʿ*) for his soul at the center of his ethics, but the intersections of this care with care of others presents radically different paths.

Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān* is, for the most part, Ḥayy's monologue as he recounts his "journey" through metaphysics in metaphorical terms. The few interruptions are the Narrator's questions and reactions, which Ḥayy takes in stride. The Narrator, in many ways, is the archetype of the eager and attentive student who admires his teacher. For example, when he first asks Ḥayy to explain the sciences and their mysteries, namely physiognomy (i.e.,

23 In each case, Ḥayy is a hero of some sort who points to an ideal state, be it a failed hero (Kochin), a perfect hero (Attar), or a qualifiedly cautious hero (Habib).

the art of determining the inner truth based on surface appearances), the Narrator sees that Ḥayy's explanation of this science is exactly right, which makes him "judge Ḥayy positively, with the utmost awe [*qadayt lahu ākhir al-ʿujb*]." <sup>24</sup> When Ḥayy uses this science to show the Narrator that his three companions are, at their core, mendacity, violence, and licentiousness, respectively, the Narrator finds himself rushing to accept and believe these claims. His observation and experience confirm Ḥayy's claims, showing that some days he had the upper hand over them, and other days they did over him. Thanks to Ḥayy's lessons, the Narrator prays to God that he maintain "good neighborliness [*ḥusna mujāwaratih*] with these companions [*rifqa*] until the time of parting [*firqa*]." <sup>25</sup>

The only other interruptions in the monologue are the Narrator's four questions. The last of these occurs in the first third of the allegory; the remaining two-thirds are a monologue. The Narrator eagerly asks Ḥayy to narrate his journey; to say everything he knows about the various climes; to elaborate on a holy spring he had mentioned; and finally, to enrich him with knowledge of the Occident. <sup>26</sup> At each interval, Ḥayy obliges without much comment, simply disseminating knowledge to the Narrator.

Ibn Ṭufayl's version of Ḥayy's meeting with a stranger muddles the order and multiplies the meetings. Ḥayy instructs both Absāl and the islanders. Furthermore, in neither of these two cases is it the disciple who approaches the master: when Absāl first sees Ḥayy, Absāl runs away and Ḥayy gives chase. It is then Ḥayy who approaches Absāl, his curiosity at seeing a human for the first time driving him to sneak up on the visitor. After teaching Ḥayy how to speak, Absāl asks Ḥayy about his life, much like the Narrator does with Ḥayy in Ibn Sīnā's version. Whereas Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy expressed metaphysics and epistemology through the metaphor of travel, this later Ḥayy directly describes metaphysics and epistemology, and

24 Ibn Sīnā, *Risālāt Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 3.

25 Ibid., 6–7.

26 Ibid., 7, and 8, respectively.

Absāl determines religion to be an exoteric version of Ḥayy's teachings. Their relationship is one of exchange: language for knowledge, food for company, philosophy for theology, and life story for life story. Each affirms what the other knows: Absāl determines that Ḥayy's descriptions are the esoteric doctrines of his religion, and Ḥayy that Absāl's prophet was authentic and his religion is a series of exoteric symbols for metaphysical and theological truth. Mirroring the Narrator rather than Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān, Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy feels himself attracted to a foreigner, but unlike Ibn Sīnā's one-sided teacher–student relationship, Ḥayy both teaches and learns from Absāl. Absāl's reaction to Ḥayy, like the Narrator's awe for Ḥayy, is to “look upon him with exaltation and reverence [*naẓar ilā Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān bi-ʿayn al-taʿẓīm wa-l-tawqīr*].”<sup>27</sup> In both cases, Ḥayy is portrayed as the object of admiration by the kind of disciple who is able to share in his proper understanding.

Ibn Ṭufayl adds an extra lesson in Ḥayy's instruction of the islanders. Ḥayy and Absāl's decision to visit Absāl's island suggests a proselytizing zeal to show the natives that their religion is only technically correct, an exoteric image that they practice incorrectly. The decision is founded on an inconsistency in Ḥayy's attitude and an elision of the ethics guiding his behavior. Earlier in his life, he had attempted to imitate the celestial bodies. This imitation entailed a desire to care for his island's plants and animals:

He made it his duty [*alzam nafṣah*] to remove any need, disease, harm, or impediment whenever he saw any plant or animal suffering from one, when it was in his power to do so. When his gaze fell upon a plant whose access to the sun had been blocked, one tangled with and causing harm to another, or one dying from thirst, he removed the barrier [to the sun], disentangled the plants such that their separation did not hurt the aggressor, and quenched [its thirst] with water as often as

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<sup>27</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān*, 144–145.

he could. When his gaze fell upon an animal that had fallen to a predator, become entangled in a knot, been pierced with a thorn, had something harmful fall in its eyes or ears, or was aggrieved with thirst or hunger, he took it upon himself to remove all of these things with all his effort, and fed and watered the animal. When his gaze fell upon one of the plants' and animals' sources of water and its flow had become obstructed with fallen rocks or a collapsed cliff, he would remove all these [obstructions]. He continued to devote all his efforts to this form of imitation [of celestial bodies] until his proficiency was at its peak.<sup>28</sup>

Soon after, Ḥayy recognizes that his care of the plants and animals was a decidedly bad thing. He realizes that he must eradicate all traces of his physical existence to truly save his soul, but caring for animals and plants must make use of corporeal faculties. The contradiction became obvious to Ḥayy, and so he

set about purging himself of corporeal attributes. He had already purged many of them with the advanced exercises through which he had approached becoming similar to heavenly bodies. However, he had retained many remnants of them [the corporeal attributes], for example through his circular motions; and through his care [*al-i'tinā'*] for the affairs of animals and plants, his compassion [*rahma*] for them, and his solicitude [*al-tahammum*; concern, care] when removing their impediments. For these, too, are derivative of corporeal qualities; he could not have seen them in the first place without faculties that are corporeal, and laboring for their sake [makes use of] corporeal faculties, too. He

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28 Ibid., 114–115.



set about purging himself of all this, for it was wholly unsuited to the condition which he now sought.<sup>29</sup>

Ḥayy's journey toward becoming closer to God demanded that he completely end all attempts to alleviate others' pain and difficulties. He disavows tending to the affairs of others and acting on his mercy and concern for them. While God is the Compassionate (al-Raḥmān), he provides for his creation because he is not corporeal; Ḥayy's embodiment renders his attempts to compassionately provide for his neighbors subversive of his devotion. He learned that action oriented toward this world is bad for his soul. His rejection is not directed toward the animals and plants as such, but toward the corporeal foundations necessary for his pity and compassion, that is, toward the actions necessary to recognize others' weakness and also to help them, as both require that one make use of his existence as an embodied being. The rejection is of all corporeal habits *tout court*, that is, of the somatic preconditions and the means through which Ḥayy would have to act on compassion and practice any kind of care for similarly embodied others.

When Ḥayy meets Absāl, he is moved only by genuine curiosity, not by a desire to help his strange visitor. Curiosity drives Ḥayy to tell his story and hear Absāl's. Meanwhile, it is pity (*shafaqa*) and desire (*tama*<sup>c</sup>; covetousness) that drive Ḥayy to save the islanders.<sup>30</sup> The transition from pedagogy to politics is presented as the consequence of two errors on Ḥayy's part. As Ibn Ṭufayl explains, with some heavy-handed foreshadowing:

What had misled him in this was his presumption that all people were possessed of a superior innate disposition [*fiṭra*], penetrating minds, and resolute spirits. He did not realize that they suffered from stupidity and deficiency, ill-formed opinions and a weak will, and that

29 Ibid., 119. Earlier, Ḥayy attempted to distance himself from his bodily senses by "spinning around himself" to the point of fainting (116).

30 Ibid., 147.

they are like cattle, but further astray still. *When his pity for people intensified [ishtadd ishfāquh ‘alā l-nās], and he desired that their salvation be by his hand [ṭami‘ an takūn najātahum ‘alā yadayhi], his intention to reach them came into being, to explain and reveal the truth. . .*<sup>31</sup>

Ibn Ṭufayl presents Ḥayy’s first error as his overestimation of the capacities of men generally. It seems difficult for Ḥayy to have avoided this error, given his inexperience. When Ḥayy concludes that the world of men is naturally hierarchical

[H]e understood the ranks of people. He saw that each group was happy with its own: they deified their passion, worshiped the objects of their desires, and exhausted all their energies in collecting the rubble of the earth; accumulation distracted them until they went to their graves. Sermons do not succeed with them, nor [does] a good word work on them. [Learning] dialectics only increases their stubbornness [*iṣrār*; insistence, rigidity].<sup>32</sup>

His brief encounter with other people teaches him that “the majority of people are at the rank of irrational animals,” and the islanders’ principles suit them because they cannot do better.<sup>33</sup> The masses require the rules, principles, and habits mandated by their lawgiver–prophet’s religion because of their natural deficiencies; their deeply entrenched habits and opinions bring them as close as they can get to virtue and knowledge of God. Ḥayy thus left the island with Absāl. For the two friends, the fault was in the islanders’ natures and in their habits.

31 Ibid., emphasis added. Literally, “That which had caused him to fall into that [*wa-kāna al-ladhī awqā‘ahu fī dhālik*] . . .” Ibn Ṭufayl had previously introduced another of Ḥayy’s presumptions with almost identical phrasing: “That which caused him to fall into this opinion [*wa-l-ladhī awqā‘ahu fī hādha al-ra’y*]” (38). This other was the moment when Ḥayy believed he could save his dead mother–gazelle if he found and fixed the ‘hurt’ inside her, which led him to dissect her.

32 Ibid., 151.

33 Ibid.

The second misjudgment is actually a regression. Ḥayy gives in to his feelings of pity and *therefore* attempts to take care of others. By adopting this stance, Ḥayy effectively forgets one of the main lessons from his fifty-year stoic journey into the invention of the soul: compassion (*raḥma*) toward the things of this world distracts from devotion to God. Unlike God, man's capacity to experience and act on such emotions only affirms the body, and the body must be discarded in the pursuit of salvation and taking care of one's soul.<sup>34</sup> Like King Salāmān's weakness for his wife and her henchmen in Ibn Sīnā's allegory, Ḥayy's political turn suggests the subtle ease with which reason and piety can fall prey to corporeality and good intentions. Ibn Ṭufayl's elision shows Ḥayy thrown back to older emotions and an ethic he had long since recanted, namely care for others out of pity and desire. In going to the island, he violates a lesson he had previously learned; by acting on pity once again, he regressed. Ibn Ṭufayl hints at this through literary repetition: when Ḥayy discusses his intention to travel and save the islanders with his companion, Absāl quickly overcomes his initial hesitation about the islanders' deficient natures because "Absāl, too, desired [*tami'a*] that God rightly guide a group of his acquaintances by his hand [*'alā yadayhi*]."<sup>35</sup>

When he returns to his own island, Ḥayy is once again guided by an ethic of caring for himself. His companionship with Absāl has as its exclusive purpose their shared worship and contemplation of the divine. Each cares for himself, and each does so with the other.

34 One might object that this is not at all a shift in Ḥayy's behavior because the two different objects of Ḥayy's pity make all the difference. Early in his life, he pitied irrational animals and plants, and in going to the island, he pitied rational human beings. This would indeed resolve the tension *if* Ḥayy had specifically rejected caring for animals and plants because of some attribute specific to them, or if he had made an allowance for saving human beings because he thought they were rational or exceptional in some other way. He does neither of these. When he stops caring for plants and animals, Ḥayy rejects all corporeality, and an attempt to save the souls of others would still momentarily require and make use of his own corporeality.

35 Ibid., 148.

Ibn Ṭufayl shows how a politics of compassion can interrupt the network of care it seeks to engender and maintain: compassion can subvert one's ability to care for himself, of others' abilities to care for themselves, and most importantly, subvert itself. Ḥayy intended his compassion to improve the islanders' situation, but it made them worse off, which produced more compassion still, as Ḥayy's insistent proselytizing suggests. Compassion presupposes amicability but can produce resentment and condescension on both sides, to which Ibn Ṭufayl attests with Ḥayy's explanation of where most people fit in the world and the islanders' own reaction to Ḥayy's incessant preaching.

Just as their care for the self is an ethical stance, Ḥayy and Absāl are guided by a specific ethic when they travel to the island. The desire to care for and remake others is the core of ethics at this point. The significance of this ethical stance comes to light when contrasted to the ethical stance of Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy. This other Ḥayy ends his conversation with the Narrator with the following words: "Were it not the case that I become dearer to Him [*lawlā ta'azza bi-ya ilayhi*] by speaking to you of Him and in admonishing [*munabbihan*; alerting, reminding] you, I would have been too busy with [contemplating] Him to speak to you. You will follow me to Him if you wish. Peace." This Ḥayy contemplates God because that is how one takes care of one's soul. He allowed his contemplation to be interrupted in order to admonish, alert, or remind (*tanbīh*) the Narrator of the King, to show him how to care for himself. He does so not out of any concern for this stranger, but because speaking to others of God makes one dearer to God and brings him closer to God. One becomes closer to God *regardless* of the interlocutor's response. The Narrator might understand and follow, or he might not.

Ḥayy expresses a profound indifference to what the Narrator might choose to do precisely because what matters to him is his own relationship to God. His relationship to the Narrator and the Narrator's relationship to God are wholly incidental. There is a great deal of openness to Ibn Sīnā's ethical position, one that encourages

speaking to others for one's own sake. One must care for one's soul, which entails a limited care of others that is satisfied by telling them about God when they ask. In turn, this makes one dearer to God and so *is* caring for oneself. The key is one's relationship to God and how one tends to one's soul in terms of others. By speaking to others of God and guiding them through the philosophical theology of the world, one's care of others is care for oneself. As such, it takes a certain kind of person to be able to care for oneself and invite others to do the same; instead of the Narrator's three flawed companions, Ḥayy represents someone able to instill the necessary care in others.

Ibn Sīnā places an absolute premium on caring for others by speaking to them of God. It is part of caring for oneself, and so is something that only the one who knows how to care for himself can do. Ibn Ṭufayl radically separates the two forms of care. Each must care for himself. To be able to care for oneself, one must recognize *which* others one is able to care for, that is, one who will be able to care for himself. The similarity he posits between the majority of men and irrational animals is not simply a polemic, but complements this point. Ḥayy extended himself quite far in his solicitude and care for animals, but they were unable to care for themselves or for others. Caring for others and speaking to them of God is not part of caring for oneself; caring for others is contingent upon their ability to care for themselves. If they are unable to do it right, then they have effectively distracted the speaker from being able to care for himself without any benefit. The islanders' inability or refusal to agree with Ḥayy means for Ibn Ṭufayl that Ḥayy wasted time better spent caring for himself; if caring for others can be counted as part of caring for oneself—as in Ḥayy's education of Absāl—the other must demonstrate clear signs of caring for himself.

This question of care and ability also accounts for the odd way in which Ḥayy leaves, that is, why he lies to the islanders and affirms their teachings even though he believes they are incorrect. Ḥayy could have simply slipped away by night, faked his death, remained there and practiced his philosophy in secret, or told them that they

are at the level of irrational animals and gone away. The distinction between Ḥayy's success with Absāl and his failure with the islanders brings this point out nicely: not caring for others by speaking to them of God is a passive form of caring for them, and inversely, a passive care for others entails not caring for them actively, by remaining silent and leaving them to their own. One's neglect of others is the best care one can give; like Ibn Ṭufayl's apology in his introduction, one must not speak the truth to others *for their own sake*.

The two Muslim philosophers' radically opposing views on how one cares for oneself and what form of caring for others it entails has significant implications not just for fleshing out gaps in the fraught relationship of Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory to Ibn Sīnā, but also for understanding how different objects of care might be arranged more generally. One can enable, facilitate, or overcome the other. They can also be in tension with one another, or in radical opposition. For Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy, a passive form of caring for others is internal to caring for oneself; the priority of the self brackets active and purposeful care of others, and brackets the question of success.

It is here that Ibn Ṭufayl steps in with another reversal. Whereas Ḥayy's ethic when he visits the island is to care for himself by actively caring for others, by the end of the allegory, his return to this position fails. Ibn Ṭufayl introduces a third position. Caring for others is neither necessary nor incidental to caring for oneself, but opposed to it. It can get in the way, on account of the time and attention it demands, and also more fundamentally because of the fact of embodiment. Just as only some can take care of themselves, only some can be taken care of to the fullest. One does not have an obligation to actively care for others; if anything, one has an obligation to care for them by *not* caring for them. At the same time, the islanders' must cope with their inability to fully care for themselves, which Ibn Ṭufayl presents as a fusion of care of the self and others, namely explicit ethical dicta, association, and politics. When Ibn Ṭufayl juxtaposes these two separate forms and networks of care, their clash and dissolution shows how one's ability to care for

himself can become hostage to one's relations to others. In particular, Ḥayy's care for himself momentarily became contingent on the care he was able to successfully give others, even and especially when they prove to be unwilling objects of pedagogy. The privilege one gives to others, Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy warns, can insinuate itself into how one determines oneself, that is, one's identity, obligations, and work on himself.

#### 4. The Sociability of Salāmān

Ibn Ṭufayl introduces Absāl and Salāmān as friends and followers of the same faith. At times, they agree about their religion's laws, but the difference between their approaches and methods of interpretation is insurmountable. Absāl seeks the spiritual meanings in the esoteric whereas Salāmān is more concerned with the apparent. Their religion is amenable to both interpretations; some of its sayings induce its followers to seek salvation through isolation (*uzla*) and seclusion (*infirād*), while others induce them to community (*mu'āshara*) and association (*mulāzamat al-jamā'a*<sup>36</sup>). Absāl clings to isolation, Salāmān to association. The two men part because of this disagreement; Absāl seeks that which Salāmān forbade, withdrawal from men.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn Ṭufayl demonstrates by concrete example the way in which Salāmān made being together the normal mode of political life and associated it with legitimacy and salvation. He quickly moves on to explain that Salāmān "considered continuous association necessary [*kāna yarā mulāzamat al-jamā'a*] and forbade withdrawal from society. Ḥayy began to instruct them and transmit to them the

36 This phrase alludes to many Sunni *ḥadīth* that encourage political quietism and doctrinal conformity (*iltizām al-jamā'a*). Quietism and conformity here maintain a unitary community or "keeping to/continuous association." See A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, s.v., "l-z-m" (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 6:113–115.

37 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 136–137, 150.

secrets of wisdom.”<sup>38</sup> The demand that Ḥayy and the people engage with one another is a direct consequence of Salāmān’s dogmatic belief that association is an unconditional and absolute imperative for salvation, morally superior to isolation.

The opposition between this Salāmān and that of Ibn Sinā revolves around their socialities. Ibn Ṭufayl’s Salāmān is never seen alone, a total inversion of Ibn Sinā’s, who is a recluse, blind to the goings-on within his household and kingdom. In one sense, both are wholly dependent on others. The former requires the constant presence of others and the constant mutual affirmation of shared beliefs, and the latter needs others, particularly Absāl, to do things for him. Similarly, each of these leaders is inept at managing political intrigue. Ibn Ṭufayl’s Salāmān is conspicuously absent as tensions build between Ḥayy and the islanders, while it literally takes divine intervention for Ibn Sinā’s Salāmān to assert himself. While the brevity of al-Ṭūsī’s summary makes it difficult to say more about Ibn Sinā’s Salāmān, this comparison shows that associating with others is the primary trait of the Salāmān archetype. For both, caring for one’s soul is only possible insofar as one is in the care of others, under their watchful gaze.

This same impulse is played out by the Narrator in Ibn Sinā’s *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* after he discovers that his three companions have pernicious effects on him. Rather than abandoning them, the Narrator prays to God that he maintain “good neighborliness [*ḥusn mujāwaratih*] with these companions [*rifqa*] until the time of parting [*firqa*],” i.e., death.<sup>39</sup> While Salāmān would disapprove of the companions’ habits, he would laud Ḥayy’s recognition that dissociation is by no means an option and that neighborliness is a given.

By reversing the role and ethic that Salāmān plays in his allegory, Ibn Ṭufayl brings to light an antinomy within the definition of the human as associative—as articulated by Plato, Aristotle, and in the

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Sinā, *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 6–7.



Arabic context, by al-Fārābī in *Politics of the City* and *On Attaining Happiness*—taken to an extreme.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, association is superior to isolation. Salāmān’s interpretation of scripture demands it as a necessity for salvation. On the other, association can bring about, conceal, and heighten conflict. Salāmān proclaims that association and community are unconditionally better than isolation, and takes quietism and conformity as the necessary corollaries. One must always seek the company of others, for company “wards against disbelief [*al-wāswās*], removes transgressive doubts [*al-zunūn al-muṭarīda*] and protects against the devil’s temptations [*yuṣīdh min hamzāt al-shayṭān*].”<sup>41</sup> Always ready to creep into the hearts of men, one requires other people as a safeguard. Man is an animal of association for the sake of salvation. One must always be with others to remove doubt. However, the principle that one must be with others is self-subversive, for always being with certain others produces the very same doubts that their company is intended to remove. The antinomy intensifies: in Salāmān’s community, each must associate with *all* others—even when they question what must not be open to doubt.

Constant company also reveals fundamental disagreement about association itself, where heterogeneous elements appear from within the association. This very same sort of fundamental disagreement about how to live one’s life forms the insurmountable gulf between Absāl and Salāmān; the tension between the two was the first indication of association interrupting itself. Although Absāl left because he preferred isolation and not *because* of the disagreement,

40 For this idea that man is by innate disposition inclined toward association in al-Fārābī’s writings, see the discussion of association and neighborliness in al-Fārābī, *Kitāb taḥṣīl al-sāda* [On attaining happiness] in *al-A’māl al-falsafiyya* [Philosophical works], ed. Ja’far Āl Yāsīn (Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil, 1992), 1:119–197, 139, §16; translated as “The Attainment of Happiness” in *Alfarabi*, trans. Mahdi, 13–51, 23, §18 ll.9–14; and al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya* [Politics of the city; also Governance of the city] (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1994), 73.

41 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 137.

it was his belief in the superiority of isolation that caused the disagreement and then only incidentally led to its diffusion when he emigrated from the island. Optimism underlies the belief in the unconditional goodness of company, whether it is because of faith that it only brings good, that the good outweighs the bad, or that the potential conflicts and disagreements will somehow work themselves out. A decree for perpetual association demands that one continue to associate with others even when their beliefs are objectionable, even when what they say directly contradicts what is held dear and sacred, even when their teachings sow the very same seeds of doubt the optimist had believed would be prevented. Their objections, contradictions, and doubts undo the purpose of association.

Ibn Ṭufayl uses a philosopher to expose universal association as a realm of internal contradiction. Ibn Ṭufayl shows Ḥayy interrupting the normalcy and unity that the islanders represent, and though he reveals how universally inclusive association brings doubt upon association itself, the result is not violent. Meanwhile, Ibn Sīnā paints association as the sphere of cooperation and mutual benefit. The Narrator's three companions in his *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* are to be resisted, but the four men, this Ḥayy implies, will necessarily stay together and aim for good companionship. Sociability is an unquestioned norm in the allegory, so much so that one's aim is always harmony, even with those who might be harmful to oneself. Where harmonious unity is lacking, the result is tragedy, as represented by the queen's interruption of Salāmān's royal home and his unfortunate conclusion, left as he is with an empty household in a bloody Hamlet-esque ending. Ibn Ṭufayl's response against this either/or is to portray the philosopher and his friend going their own way. This departure does not arise out of the philosopher's perceived physical threat from the many, nor because the many fear the philosopher's truth. The philosopher leaves because he recognizes the need for each to take care of himself as best he can, a realization that is accompanied with a deep disdain for the common people's enslavement to their habits, passions, and practices. Ibn Ṭufayl shows that by the end of

their interactions, what links and finally separates the two groups is their mutual aversion toward one another.

### 5. The Political Ethics of the Ordinary

The third site of divergence between Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Ṭufayl is the common people. It is also the most directly political realm, the one in which each philosopher illustrates the inner workings of a community, its habits, and its governance. Neither philosopher paints a very positive picture of common people. The armies, cook, and caretaker in Ibn Sīnā's world betray their loyalty to Absāl when their queen bribes them with money. While al-Ṭūsī notes that the armies', cooks', and caretaker's betrayals are to be understood in analogy to Ibn Sīnā's Aristotelian psychology, these figures signify political beings even prior to signifying parts within the soul; precisely as political beings, Ibn Sīnā presents them as easily corrupted by money. The key difference between Ibn Sīnā's marginal figures and Ibn Ṭufayl's islanders is that the latter at no point behave in such an overtly corrupt fashion. Their primary fault is that their method of taking care of themselves is communal and materialistic. It is true that Ibn Ṭufayl describes the islanders as, like the majority of men, "deifying their passion, worshipping the objects of their desires, and exhausting all their energies in collecting the rubble of the earth," but this is obviously very different from accepting a monetary bribe to assassinate a superior and employer in cold blood. The difference between them is both in the degree of corruption and in the intentions behind their corrupt actions.

Unlike Ibn Sīnā's caricature of the many, as represented by the army, caretaker, and cook who were bribed to abandon and poison Absāl, Ibn Ṭufayl paints his marginal figures in a more positive light: their habits and opinions have ethical principles at their core. However, precisely because the many have these principles, his depiction represents a greater condemnation of the common people, for while Ibn Sīnā's masses might be supervised and corrected, Ibn Ṭufayl's have principles of their own but remain wholly unfit for the

truth. By giving a more elaborate discussion of the many and giving them the principled stance that they lack in Ibn Sīnā's version, Ibn Ṭufayl highlights the significance of their ethics for his allegory's political outcome.

When a stray ship brings Ḥayy and Absāl to Salāmān's island and they enter the city, "Absāl's friends gathered around him. He told them Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān's story. They flocked to Ḥayy with great enthusiasm and acclamation; they gathered around him, aggrandizing and glorifying him."<sup>42</sup> The islanders' reaction to Ḥayy is nearly identical to Absāl's, and like the Narrator's to Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān. The wise man is an object of admiration. As it turns out, however, engagement need not have positive consequences:

No sooner than Ḥayy ascended a little beyond the exoteric and undertook a description that ran contrary to what they had previously understood than they shrank away from him [*fa-jā'alū yanqabiḏūn* 'anhu], and became disgusted in their depths [*wa-tashma'izz nufūsum*] at what he presented to them.<sup>43</sup>

This shrinking away, withdrawing, becoming contracted (*inqabaḏa*) is distinct from what Salāmān forbade: isolation (*'uzla*). The people's withdrawal from Ḥayy should not be read as a rejection or reversal of Salāmān's ethical command for community, conformity, and quietism, even if *inqibāḏ* can denote "withdrawal from all men."<sup>44</sup> Shrinking away is directly linked to the islanders' immediate aversion, to recoiling and shuddering out of disgust [*ishmi'zāz*] at his unthinkable, objectionable, and borderline blasphemy. As such, it is purely reactionary and involuntary. And as much as they could, the islanders consciously attempt to abide by Salāmān's dictum:

They resented Ḥayy in their hearts [*yataṣakhkhaṭūnah fī qulūbihim*], but to his face, their outward performance

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42 Ibid., 149.

43 Ibid., 150.

44 Cf. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v., "q-b-d" 2482–2483.

showed approval [*al-riḍā*], in honor of his being a foreigner among them [*ikrāman li-ghurbatih fī-him*], and out of consideration for the rights of their friend, Absāl [*wa-murāʿat li-haqq ṣāhibihim A(b)sāl*].<sup>45</sup>

The islanders hid their distaste for Ḥayy and his teachings, not out of hypocrisy or malice. They were well-intentioned, but their aversion only increased with Ḥayy's continued unremitting and infuriatingly relentless efforts to correct them: "Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān continued to treat them with graciousness [*yastaltifuhum*] night and day, revealing to them the truth, hidden and apparent. But this only increased their disagreement and aversion."<sup>46</sup>

The islanders' situation underscores two tragic elements of political life. First, the intensification of disagreement overtakes what Neoplatonism posits as the fundamental agreement of all goods (good = true = beautiful, etc.). Goods can come into conflict, and ethical dicta will clash. Second, the islanders attempted to fulfill their many duties, but could not remain true to all. They were "lovers of the good and desirers of the truth," but this was to no avail, "because of their deficient natures."<sup>47</sup> Ḥayy, like Ibn Ṭufayl's authorial voice, "despaired of setting them aright. His plea for their acceptance was severed."<sup>48</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl and Ḥayy locate the problem in the inhabitants themselves, which allows for Ḥayy's discovery that upon close inspection, men are divided into ranks.<sup>49</sup>

However, there is more at work than epistemological status determining political rank. It is important that Ibn Ṭufayl never claims that the islanders could have tried harder, that they misinterpreted their ethical principles, consciously chose the lesser of two ethical systems, or believed themselves to be doing any wrong. They are unable to look beyond the conventions of their

45 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 150.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 150–151.

49 Ibid., 151.

opinions and habits, but they have opinions and habits. Through his positive description of the islanders' virtue and politeness, Ibn Ṭufayl emphasizes the difficulty inherent in what Ḥayy and Absāl achieved as well as the general futility of enlightening even the best of common people. Just as the good citizen and good man are in tension with each other under all but the best political conditions, for good citizens work toward the common good of the community while good men perform noble actions, the island's citizens work toward ideals that are at odds with the 'best' that is sought by Ḥayy and Absāl.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the three companions in Ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy*, the islanders are not reducible to vice, nor are they brilliantly capable and good virtuosos like Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy and Narrator. On the contrary, the islanders' position is particularly difficult and intractable *because of* their vigilance and affirmation of virtue; Ibn Ṭufayl's elaboration of Ibn Sīnā's allegories is not so black and white. It is precisely because they love the good and desire the true that the islanders find themselves in this irreducible conflict between equally binding laws. The islanders' attempts to follow their principles only show these principles' limitations and subvert their aims. Had they been purely good citizens, they would have removed Absāl and Ḥayy for the good of their community; had they been purely good men, they would have changed their beliefs. The tension between them and Ḥayy only reflects this deeper internal tension. While this last episode of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* depicts a political conflict between social opinion and philosophic truth, between the blindness of habit and the far gaze of pious wisdom, it does so in a manner similar to Salāmān's political theory of association, through antinomies within the islanders' two tacit ethical principles. Ibn Ṭufayl specifically singles out hospitality and friendship; the islanders' politeness takes the specific form of adhering to these dictates. Just as they are unable to look beyond the opinions and habits formed out of literal interpretations of their received religious traditions, the practices of

50 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1276b–1278c; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b–1131a.

friendship and hospitality are the manifestation of these opinions, traditions, and habits, and in turn, facilitate the habits' perpetuation.

First, the islanders continued to be hospitable to Ḥayy “*in honor of his being a foreigner among them.*”<sup>51</sup> That Ḥayy was not one of them placed both positive and negative demands on the islanders' behavior, even though—or especially because—they were separated by a doctrinal conflict. He was a totally unexpected stranger. When such a stranger arrives, the dictates of hospitality are activated. The pervasiveness of treating the guest with grace is further suggested by the text's formulation of this phrase: *ikrāman li-*, which I translated as “in honor of,” but might also be rendered “in generosity toward,” and generosity [*ikrām*] is one of the tenets of hospitality, tied to the honor [*karāma*] of the host. The islanders attempted to give Ḥayy's condition its due, distant from his land and home, as they understood it. They gave him free rein in speaking and acted with polite kindness as they listened. The disagreement both parties secretly recognized could not come out into the open. The hospitality they pursued appears to have been absolute and unconditional: even when Ḥayy's incessant proselytizing speeches offended and aroused disgust in them, they persisted. But as they continued to persevere and he continued to preach, their resentment understandably grew, even as the hospitable should always be kind and graceful to the guest. The dictates of hospitality come into conflict with remaining true to the principles of association, faith, and hospitality itself. Hospitality demanded the outward performance of goodwill toward the guest; however, at the same time, it produced inward resentment, hatred, and a heightened possibility of conflict on one side, and provoked contempt on the other.

The other ethical force through which the islanders' demonstrated their politeness toward Ḥayy was friendship, or “*consideration [murāʿatan; care] for the rights of their friend, Absāl.*”<sup>52</sup> Absāl was one of them, a friend, even as their friendship with him was interrupted

51 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, 150, emphasis added.

52 Ibid., emphasis added.

by his emigration, and which had itself been an interruption of their principle of association. Upon his return, Absāl's friendship, like Ḥayy's foreignness, placed ethical demands on the islanders. Friendship's obligations operate as contagion: what friendship mandated to the islanders was not only toward Absāl, but also toward Ḥayy, the friend of the friend. The more friends one has, the more applications of the same general law. And the more friends one's friends have, the more demands one must abide by, the more people to treat categorically as friends. And more still, the islanders' practice of friendship does not recognize change; when friends change, as Absāl did after meeting Ḥayy and returning with him, it does not appear to have occurred to them that friendship and its demands *can* cease. This is but one way that opposition and antinomy would remain even if friendship's demands were not contagious and virulent, and even if friendship did not multiply toward eventual enmity and conflict with the friends of one's friends. This part of the islanders' ethical bind demanded friendship toward that which one finds disagreeable. It finally produced and concealed hatred and enmity.

Each of Salāmān's and the islanders' foundational political principles—association, hospitality, and friendship—undercuts itself through its own internal logic. These three ethical principles, in their demand that all must get along, brought about the opposite. Reading Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy* against Ibn Sīnā's allegories suggests that political life always contains the potential for tragic antinomy. The inhabitants of the island were caught in a *series* of antinomies. Whereas Ibn Sīnā correlates triumph with adherence to positive political principles and presents tragedy as the product of deviation from them, Ibn Ṭufayl shows how tragedy can come about through the very adherence to such principles. He invites us to see these antinomies as a necessary part of ethical life, to read his text as a political critique.



### Conclusion: Ibn Ṭufayl's Critiques in the Present

Taking Ibn Ṭufayl at his word, or at his title, and comparing his text to Ibn Sīnā's two allegories allows us three different perspectives on the allegory's final segment. The three ethical and political reversals of Ibn Sīnā's allegories in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* demonstrate an underappreciated aspect of Ibn Ṭufayl's story, namely that it contains not simply a disavowal but also robust critiques of political life. Ibn Ṭufayl's allegory takes up and reverses the central relationships, socialities, and assumptions about living with others in Ibn Sīnā's two allegories. By shifting the focus away from Ḥayy as a philosopher who is allegedly better than the many, one can better see him, Absāl, Salāmān, and the islanders as all engaged in politics. Ibn Ṭufayl presents contending ethics and perspectives in opposition to one another in his allegory and in contrast to those depicted in Ibn Sīnā's *Risālat Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* and *Absāl and Salāmān*. While Ibn Sīnā's depictions of ethics and politics are presumably positive, presuppose engagement, and present disagreement as a problem to be overcome, Ibn Ṭufayl's construction of politics undermines this framework. By opposing theory to practice, Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* implicitly critiques three elements: Ḥayy's turn from caring to himself to caring for others; Salāmān's elevation of association as the defining characteristic of human existence; and the islanders' political principles of absolute hospitality and friendship. Each of these, Ibn Ṭufayl's text shows, must be understood to have the capacity for self-subversion.

The importance of these critiques goes beyond Ibn Ṭufayl's text and its relationship to Ibn Sīnā, addressing themes central to political theory.<sup>53</sup> Ibn Ṭufayl's critiques speak to and challenge

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53 I do not focus on Ibn Ṭufayl's critiques in the name of greater inclusion for texts that belong to different 'traditions' or 'civilizations' (if we ascribe such identities to them). After all, studying "non-Western" authors in the name of universal inclusion would uncritically replay the islanders' demand for association, hospitality, and friendship. On identity politics and the study of "non-Western" texts, see Andrew March's insightful discussion of "comparative"

widely-held ideals, showing the practical limits of ideals like friendship and hospitality. When texts inside and outside the canon are approached as critiques of the present, our understanding of these texts is enriched; at the same time, they can challenge, unsettle, or otherwise force us to rethink the workings of deeply ingrained values. In this vein, I have attempted to show that Ibn Ṭufayl's divergences from Ibn Sinā's allegories are productive for understanding how the ideals they portray work—and how they stop working.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* shows that the privilege one gives to others, either as individuals or as communities other than one's own, can take different forms. Ḥayy's choice for actively caring for himself together with the one other member of his community comes after a significant disavowal of a particular kind of care for others, one that places the ability to transform them at the center of politics. Meanwhile, Ibn Sinā's far more open Ḥayy does not make one's ability to care for himself at all dependent on the acceptance others give one's political, theological, or ethical doctrines. Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy can be seen today as a warning that one should not let his ethics hinge on and become hostage to others' recognition and acquiescence.

Appeals to the worlds of Ibn Ṭufayl's Salāmān and Ibn Sinā's Narrator, where each must engage and be with others and where each takes care of himself by taking care of others, fall prey to the presumption that agreement is the original state of politics and disagreements exist in order to be surmounted. As Salāmān and

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political theory: "What Is Comparative Political Theory?" *Review of Politics* 71 (Fall 2009): 531–565; and in the same issue, Farah Godrej, "Response to 'What Is Comparative Political Theory?'" 567–582.

54 In this sense, I concur with Megan C. Thomas' cautionary note that if one looks to "non-Western" texts either to find 'truths' or values that are universal, or to show that 'their' values are different from 'ours,' there would be a striking structural affinity, and perhaps a historical connection, to the Orientalist search for universalism through 'Oriental' texts. My analysis and use of these texts is critical of such perspectives. See Megan C. Thomas, "Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory," *Review of Politics* 72, no. 4 (2010): 653–677.

Absāl show, agreement itself can be an object of disagreement, and demands for universal agreement by associating with others can, instead of fostering mutual understanding and respect, breed the very conflicts that the attempts to produce agreement seek to overcome.

Similarly, the islanders show that while universal hospitality and perpetual friendship may appear desirable and even necessary for a peaceful world, attempts to act on or realize them can have adverse practical consequences. Each principle tends to cover up the way it can bring out its opposite; they affirm what they deny, namely that ethical principles do not immediately lead to satisfactory outcomes for all. The hospitable host may become the least hospitable precisely *because* he attempts to be a kind, gracious, welcoming, and careful listener to his temporary guest, and it is hospitality itself that conjures this uncomfortable position. In the same way, friendship always contains the possibility of transforming into or calling up enmity, because the friend has friends of his own or because the friend may change.

If the majority of us are, as Ibn Ṭufayl suggests, closer to the islanders in that we value association and believe that our political and ethical principles point the way, it is particularly important to grapple not only with having to choose between different ideals when they come into conflict,<sup>55</sup> but also with how these very same principles can directly produce their opposites.\*

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55 See William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 2010): 385–411.

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