Ibn Bajja Biography

Ibn Bajja

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Biography

Known in the Latin West as Avempace, the ill-fated philosopher Ibn Bajja remains somewhat mysterious. It is not known exactly when and where he was born, and there are gaps in his biography. He had an extensive knowledge of medicine and in 1109 became vizier or minister of Ibn Tafalwit, the Almoravid governor of Zaragoza. When he was sent as an ambassador to the Huds, they threw him into prison for several months. In 1118, after Ibn Tafalwit's death, he was again imprisoned. In 1135 he was engaged in study with the governor of Seville. He died in 1138 in Fez, Morocco, probably of poison.

Ibn Tufayl, another twelfth-century Spanish philosopher, explains why Ibn Bajja's thought is as elusive as its author: "There was none among [this generation of Spanish philosophers] of a finer genius, of a greater understanding, or of a truer insight than [Ibn Bajja]. Yet, the things of this world kept him busy until death overtook him before the treasures of his science could be brought to light and the secrets of his wisdom made available. The greatest part of his extant writings are in imperfect state and incomplete, such as *'Ilm al-Nafs* (On the Soul [circa 1100]) and *Tadbir al-Mutawahhid* (The Rule of the Solitary [circa 1100]), as well as his books on logic and physics. As for his finished works, they include only concise books and hastily written treatises." Ibn Bajja's fame rests on his position on the material intellect, which he construed as a disposition in the imaginative faculty of the soul. Yet Averroës, who at first followed him, later confessed that it was Ibn Bajja who misled him in his earlier interpretations of Aristotle on this point.

In political philosophy, probably because of the political upheavals of his time, Ibn Bajja does not describe the rule of the philosopher in the perfect state. Rather, he speaks of the role of the philosopher in a truly imperfect state and advises him to become a solitary.