Ibn ṬUfayl [addendum] Encyclopedia Article

Ibn ṬUfayl [addendum]

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There is indeed a rather pessimistic strand in Ibn Ṭufayl's philosophical novel. When Ḥayy travels to Absāl's island the former is an instant celebrity, but he discovers that the inhabitants are not interested in really coming close to the truth; they are only prepared to adhere to the symbols of their religion and have no interest in peering behind those symbols at the deeper truth they represent. When Ḥayy investigates the rules of religion he finds a good deal of discussion on matters for which he has no time at all, issues about money and possessions and other material topics. Ḥayy and Absāl eventually give up and return to Ḥayy's island where they can live in seclusion and avoid the infelicities of social life among a population unconcerned about spiritual truth. The implication is that religions such as Islam are built on solid principles, but most of their adherents never appreciate the nature of these principles—they remain at a more superficial level of understanding and merely carry out the rituals of the religion without investigating their roots. Ibn Ṭufayl's version of the story of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān is much more radical than that of his predecessor Ibn Sīnā, who hinted at the role of mystical knowledge but did not explicate its centrality in religion. Ibn Sīnā is guarded throughout his account, using allusion rather than direct argument to make his points. Ibn Ṭufayl writes with boldness and clarity and does not hesitate to present his highly critical analysis of traditional religion as it is normally understood.

See Also

Islamic Philosophy.

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