

Reciprocal Epistemic Failure in Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*: Extending Fricker's Hermeneutical Injustice to the Responsibility of the Knower

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Abstract: The epilogue of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* has recently been read as a portrait of epistemic injustice, with Ḥayy cast as the victim of a society that rejects his testimony on account of his foreignness. This article argues that the reading is untenable and that its correction yields a more interesting result. The narrative does not show Ḥayy being rejected: he is brought to the island by a respected figure, received with honour, and heard attentively; what defeats him is not prejudice against his identity but the incapacity of his audience and, decisively, it is Ḥayy himself who withdraws, apologises to the people of Salāmān, counsels them to hold fast to the literal Law, and returns to his island. The tale is therefore not a critique of epistemic exclusion but an endorsement of it, and it belongs to the tradition of epistemic elitism running from al-Fārābī through Ibn Bājjā to Ibn Rushd. Applying Miranda Fricker's categories, the article shows that Ḥayy's case satisfies none of the conditions for systematic testimonial injustice, since he belongs to no stereotyped social type, and that the hermeneutical lacuna in the story lies with the community rather than with him. Rather than abandoning Fricker, the article proposes an extension: what the tale exhibits is *reciprocal epistemic failure*, a community deprived of the interpretive resources by which the philosopher's testimony could be received, and a philosopher who declines the responsibility of supplying them. Drawing on Medina and Pohlhaus, the article argues that Fricker's framework, which analyses the victim, requires supplementation by an account of the epistemic responsibility of the privileged knower. Ibn Ṭufayl, read against himself, supplies the case that demands it.

Keywords: Ibn Ṭufayl; epistemic injustice; hermeneutical marginalization; epistemic elitism; Islamic philosophy.

1. Introduction

Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* is read almost universally for its first four-fifths the ascent of a child raised by a gazelle from bare sense perception to the unmediated vision of the divine and almost never for its last. The neglect is understandable, for the ascent is the book's philosophical glory: a sustained demonstration that unaided reason, given time and solitude, can climb from the dissection of a dead doe to the contemplation of the Necessary Existent. Yet it is the ending, not the ascent, that houses the book's hardest problem. Ḥayy, having attained a knowledge of God without prophecy, without community, and without so much as a language, is at last brought to an inhabited island; he attempts to teach what he has seen; he fails; and he goes home.¹ The question the tale leaves on the reader's desk is deceptively simple. What are we to make of that failure and on whom, if anyone, does it reflect?

A recent line of interpretation, prominent in Indonesian scholarship on Islamic philosophy, gives a confident answer. The failure, on this reading, is a case of *epistemic injustice* in Miranda Fricker's sense: the islanders reject Ḥayy's testimony because of a prejudice against his identity as an outsider, and the epilogue is therefore to be prized as an early, almost premonitory, literary diagnosis of the wrong done to knowers who fall outside a community's recognised sources of authority.² The appeal of the reading is obvious. It enlists a twelfth-century Andalusian tale in one of the liveliest debates in contemporary epistemology; it casts the lone rational knower as a sympathetic victim; and it flatters the modern intuition that exclusion is always, and only, something done to the excluded. The reading is attractive. It is also, this article will argue, mistaken and mistaken in a way that does not merely miss the text but inverts it.³

The narrative does not describe an outsider met with suspicion. Ḥayy arrives in the company of Absāl, a man of standing among his own people who has sought him out, learned from him, and taught him language; he is received with the courtesy owed to a guest of rank; his hearers listen.⁴ What defeats him is not prejudice but incomprehension a gap not of goodwill but of capacity. And the decisive fact, the one the epistemic-injustice reading cannot absorb, is that *Ḥayy withdraws of his own accord*. He concludes that the great majority of human beings are not constituted for the philosophical path; he apologises to them for having tried to lead them onto it; he counsels them to hold fast to the literal Law and its observances; and he returns to his island with Absāl to live out his days in contemplation.⁶ This is not the

¹ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman, Updated (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 158.

² Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

³ Nadja Germann, "Philosophizing without Philosophy?: On the Concept of Philosophy in Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 75, no. 2 (2008): 271–301.

⁴ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān: A Philosophical Tale*, 158–61 (the meeting with Absāl, the acquisition of language, and the recognition that the two hold the same truth under different descriptions).

⁵ Ibn Ṭufayl, 160–161. (Absāl warns that the mission may fail; the two nevertheless sail to the inhabited island, where Ḥayy begins to teach the circle of notables gathered around Salāmān).

⁶ Ibn Ṭufayl, 163–64. The failure is attributed to what Goodman renders as an "inborn infirmity" in the hearers, and the narrator adds that any attempt to set them a higher task was bound to fail; the recoil is directed at the ideas, not at Ḥayy's person or origin.

story of a silenced victim. It is the story of a philosopher who *endorses* epistemic exclusion, and endorses it as wisdom.⁷

Recognising as much places Ibn Ṭufayl where the history of ideas has always placed him: within the epistemic elitism of Andalusian *falsafa*. Ibn Bājja had taught that the true philosopher in an imperfect city is a *nābit*, a weed sprung up where it was not sown, whose task is not to reform the polity but to govern himself in solitude apart from it.⁸ Ibn Rushd, writing a generation after Ibn Ṭufayl, would divide humankind into those who reason by demonstration, those persuaded by dialectic, and those reachable only through rhetoric and image, and would expressly forbid the communication of demonstrative interpretation to the last and largest class, on the ground that it would corrode the faith by which they live.⁹ The epilogue of *Ḥayy* is that doctrine cast as narrative: a controlled experiment in what happens when demonstrative truth is offered, undisguised, to those built to receive only its images.

The established scholarship has largely seen this. Goodman's introduction, Sami Hawi's study, Taneli Kukkonen's monograph, and the essays gathered by Lawrence Conrad all read the ending as an assertion about the limits of the many rather than as a protest against an injustice done to the one.¹⁰ What none of them undertakes and this is the gap the present article means to fill is to ask whether the conceptual apparatus of contemporary social epistemology can be brought to bear on the ending at all; and if it can, to ask the more awkward question of *on whom* its categories actually fall. The Indonesian reading answered the first question with an unexamined yes and the second by pointing, without argument, at the community. Both answers, this article contends, are wrong; and correcting them turns out to be more fruitful than the original reading would have been had it been right.

The article accordingly organises itself around three questions. First, what does the epilogue actually narrate, and at what precise points does the standard reading part company with the text? Second, does Ḥayy's case satisfy Fricker's own definitional conditions for testimonial or for hermeneutical injustice the conditions she is at pains to specify and to delimit? Third, if it does not, does it follow that Fricker's framework is simply inapplicable here, or does the case instead expose something the framework itself has left underdeveloped?

The answers, stated in advance, are these. The epilogue narrates a withdrawal, not an expulsion. Ḥayy's case fails Fricker's conditions, and fails them decisively: he belongs to no stereotyped social type, suffers no systematic identity prejudice, and wants for none of the resources by which he might interpret his own experience. But the failure is instructive rather than merely negative, because what the tale finally exhibits is *reciprocal epistemic failure* a

⁷ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, 165–66. Ḥayy concludes that the many can attain no more than literal adherence to the Law, excuses himself to them, counsels them to persevere as they were, and departs with Absāl for his island, where the two serve God until death.

⁸ Ibn Bājja, "Tadbīr Al-Mutawahhīd (The Governance of the Solitary)," in *Rasā'il Ibn Bājja Al-Ilāhiyya*, ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1968). on the philosopher as *nābit*, a plant grown wild in unsuitable soil, see Taneli Kukkonen, *Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason* (London: Oneworld, 2014), chap. 5.

⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise, Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, trans. Charles E Butterworth (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 16–18.

¹⁰ Lenn Evan Goodman, "Introduction," in *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, ed. Lenn Evan Goodman, Updated (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 12–20.; Sami S Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism: A Philosophic Study of Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Bin Yaqzān* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 220.; Taneli Kukkonen, *Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason* (London: Oneworld, 2014), chap. 6.; Lawrence I Conrad, ed., *The World of Ibn Ṭufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

community deprived of the interpretive resources by which philosophical testimony might be received, and a knower who possesses those resources declines the labour of supplying them. Fricker's framework, built around the figure of the victim, requires supplementation by an account of the epistemic responsibility of the privileged knower an account that José Medina¹¹ and Gaile Pohlhaus¹² have begun to construct, and that Ibn Ṭufayl's tale, read against the grain of its own commitments, positively demands. An earlier version of this study promised to extend Fricker's theory to a non-Western context. That promise is kept here not by applying her categories to Ḥayy, but by showing where they run out, and by building, on the far side of that limit, the account the tale requires.

2. Methods

This is a study in philosophical interpretation, and it proceeds by close reading and conceptual analysis. Three methodological commitments require statement, since an earlier version of this study left all three implicit.

A single reference translation is used throughout: Lenn Goodman's, which is the standard in the scholarship.¹³ Earlier work on this topic has moved among four different translations without stating why, a practice that makes any close reading unauditable, since translators differ precisely at the points where interpretation turns. Where the argument here depends on wording, the Arabic of Gauthier's critical edition is consulted. Page references are given for every narrative event on which the argument relies; the inhabited-island episode on which this article turns occupies pages 158 to 166 of Goodman's translation, and the reader is invited to check the reading against it.

Can a fictional character suffer injustice? The question is not idle, since Fricker's theory concerns real persons in real social structures. The answer adopted here is that *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* is a philosophical thought experiment Ibn Ṭufayl designed it as one, isolating a mind from language and society precisely in order to see what unaided reason can reach and that thought experiments are legitimate objects of philosophical assessment.¹⁴ What is assessed is therefore not a wrong done to a person but a *structure* that the tale exhibits and that Ibn Ṭufayl endorses. The distinction matters, and it disciplines what may be claimed.¹⁵

The study follows Gadamer in treating understanding as the negotiation of historical distance rather than its abolition,¹⁶ but constrains this by Skinner's stricture that a thinker may not be credited with a doctrine he could not have recognised as his own.¹⁷ Fricker's vocabulary is therefore used as an analytical instrument brought *to* the text, not as a doctrine discovered

¹¹ José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27–55.

¹² Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance," *Hypatia* 27, no. 4 (2012): 715–35.

¹³ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān A Philos. Tale*; used throughout as the single reference translation. Where the argument turns on wording, the Arabic L'eon Gauthier, ed., *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936).

¹⁴ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān A Philos. Tale*, 16–20.

¹⁵ Martha C Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 291.

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 306.

¹⁷ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53.

in it. Ibn Ṭufayl did not have a theory of hermeneutical injustice; the question is whether we can use one to describe what he shows us, and whether what he shows us obliges us to revise it.

The procedure has four steps: establish what the epilogue narrates; test Fricker's conditions against it; consider and eliminate rival explanations of Ḥayy's failure; and, on the basis of what survives, propose the extension.

3. Results and Discussion

What the Epilogue Actually Narrates

Everything in the dispute turns on the sequence of events in the epilogue, and the standard reading misreads that sequence at three connected points. Set them side by side with the text and the interpretation does not survive.

First, Ḥayy is not received with suspicion. He arrives under the sponsorship of Absāl, who had crossed to the uninhabited island in search of solitary devotion, discovered Ḥayy there, taught him speech, and come to recognise that the two of them hold, under different descriptions, one and the same truth.¹⁸ When they sail together to the inhabited island, Salāmān and his people receive Ḥayy not as a suspect intruder but as a visitor of standing, vouched for by one of their own. There is, in the whole episode, no scene of stigmatisation no moment in which Ḥayy's origins are held against him, no imputation of unreliability grounded in who or what he is, no suggestion that a man reared by a gazelle must for that reason be discounted. The epistemic-injustice reading needs such a scene; the text does not supply one; and so the reading supplies it by inference from the outcome. Because Ḥayy is not believed, it is assumed that he must have been disbelieved *for who he was*. But that is precisely the inference the text blocks.

Second, what defeats Ḥayy is incomprehension, not refusal. He begins by teaching openly, and his hearers a circle of notables assembled by Absāl begin by attending in good faith. It is only as he leads them upward, past the literal surface of the Law toward the demonstrative truths he had reached in solitude, that they draw back.¹⁹ Here the wording of the text is decisive, and it has been consistently overlooked. Ibn Ṭufayl reports that the people recoiled at the very point where Ḥayy rose above the literal, or touched on matters against which they were already prejudiced.²⁰ The prejudice is real; but its object must be observed with care. It is directed at the *ideas* at doctrines that unsettle a settled and comfortable piety and not at Ḥayy's person, his origin, or the manner of his upbringing. Nowhere does the narrator report that his word was discounted because of who he was. On the contrary, Ibn Ṭufayl insists that these were men who loved the good and sincerely wished for the truth, and that what defeated them was a constitutional incapacity, which Goodman renders as an *inborn infirmity*.²¹ Any attempt to set them a task above their nature, the narrator adds, was bound to end as this one did.²²

This distinction prejudice against a proposition as against prejudice against a person is not a fine point but the very hinge on which Fricker's account of testimonial injustice turns,

¹⁸ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān A Philos. Tale*, 158–61.

¹⁹ Ibn Ṭufayl, 163–64.

²⁰ Ibn Ṭufayl, 164.

²¹ Ibn Ṭufayl, 163.

²² Ibn Ṭufayl, 164.

and the text falls unambiguously on the side that is fatal to the standard reading. A hearer who rejects a claim because the claim disturbs him has not thereby wronged the speaker in Fricker's sense; he has merely been closed-minded, and closed-mindedness about a doctrine is an intellectual failing, not a testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice requires that the *speaker* be downgraded as a knower, and downgraded *because* he is taken to belong to a discredited social kind.²³ The islanders' resistance is aimed the other way: at the content of the message, never at the standing of the messenger.

Third, and decisively, Ḥayy withdraws. The turning point of the episode is not an expulsion but recognition, and it is Ḥayy's recognition, not the communities. He concludes that he had erred in addressing the many at all; that the literal precepts of the Law and its prescribed rituals are exactly proportioned to their capacities; and that to draw them beyond those precepts is not to liberate them but to cut them loose from the only footing they can keep. He therefore returns to them, *apologises*, retracts what he had tried to teach, and urges them to remain as they had been. He then departs with Absāl for the uninhabited island, where the two live in contemplation until death.²⁴

A story in which the philosopher apologises to the community for the offence of having tried to teach it is not, by any natural construction, a story about the community's injustice to the philosopher. It may be many other things a defence of the Law, a counsel of prudence, an elegy for the solitary mind but a complaint of epistemic injustice suffered by Ḥayy it cannot be, for the simple reason that the tale's own protagonist reaches the opposite verdict and acts on it. Whatever wrong there is in the vicinity, the person who most emphatically does not allege it is Ḥayy himself.

Ibn Ṭufayl and the Elitism of Andalusian *Falsafa*

The epilogue becomes fully intelligible only when it is set back into the tradition from which it grew, and it is here that the earlier literature in this reading has been most conspicuously silent. Ibn Ṭufayl did not invent the thought that philosophical truth is unsafe in the hands of the many. He inherited it, refined it, and dramatised it; and the drama loses its point the moment it is severed from the doctrine it enacts.

The lineage runs back, through the Arabic Platonists, to the *Republic* to the philosopher who returns to the cave and is met not with gratitude but with hostility, and to the conviction that the light which frees the one may blind the many who are unaccustomed to it. Al-Fārābī had given this inheritance its most systematic Islamic form. In his account of the virtuous city, the founding philosopher-prophet is precisely the figure who can translate demonstrative truth into the images and symbols by which a whole people can be governed; religion, on this view, is philosophy's truth rendered into figure for those who cannot receive it bare.²⁵ The task of the excellent ruler is not to hand the multitude naked demonstrations but to clothe them to govern, that is, through likeness and symbol, because the multitude apprehends the highest things only through their images.

Ibn Bājjā sharpened the inheritance in a bleaker direction. Where al-Fārābī's philosopher governs, Ibn Bājjā's merely survives. In the *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid* he argues that in the imperfect cities that actually exist, the philosopher is a *nābit* a spontaneous growth, a

²³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 27–29, 35.

²⁴ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān A Philos. Tale*, 166.

²⁵ al-Fārābī, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 15–17.

plant sprung up in soil that was never prepared for it and that his wisdom lies not in the doomed labour of reforming his city but in the interior governance by which he keeps himself whole in its midst.²⁶ The philosopher's proper relation to the imperfect community is not engagement but a disciplined withdrawal of the self, a solitude maintained even in the crowd. One hardly needs to strain to hear, in this counsel, the score for Ḥayy's final act.

Ibn Rushd, a generation after Ibn Ṭufayl and in the same Andalusian milieu, would state the doctrine at its most explicit and most juridical. The *Faṣl al-Maqāl* divides humankind into three classes by the kind of assent of which each is capable: the people of demonstration (*ahl al-burhān*), who reason to the truth; the people of dialectic (*ahl al-jadal*), who are moved by probable argument; and the people of rhetoric (*ahl al-khiṭāba*), the overwhelming majority, who are reached only through persuasion and image.²⁷ From this division Ibn Rushd draws a prohibition, not merely a description: the demonstrative interpretation of scripture must *not* be divulged to those capable only of rhetoric, because to unsettle the literal sense on which their faith rests, without supplying the demonstrative sense they cannot grasp, is to take from them what sustains them and to leave them with nothing. Publicising philosophy among the many is, for Ibn Rushd, not enlightenment but harm.

Underlying all three is a single structural commitment the Arabic tradition had made its own: the distinction between the outer, literal sense of revelation (*ẓāhir*) and its inner, demonstrative sense (*bāṭin*), together with the corollary that the two are addressed to two different kinds of human being. The Law speaks to everyone in its outer sense; its inner sense is the possession of the few. Ibn Ṭufayl's whole plot is built on this scaffolding, for Ḥayy has reached the *bāṭin* with no help from the *ẓāhir* at all, and his failure on the island is the failure of the inner sense to find purchase where only the outer had ever taken root.

Read against this background, the epilogue of *Ḥayy* ceases to look like a lament and reveals itself as a *demonstration* a proof, conducted in narrative rather than in syllogism, of a doctrine the tradition already held. The doctrine is that philosophical truth cannot be delivered to the many undisguised, and that the attempt to deliver it injures rather than frees them. Ḥayy's public teaching is the experiment; the hearers' recoil is the result; and Ḥayy's apology and retreat are the conclusion drawn from the result. What Ibn Rushd would later argue in the register of law, Ibn Ṭufayl had already shown in the register of story. Kukkonen²⁸ reads the ending in substantially these terms, and Hawi, though warmer toward Ḥayy's mysticism than toward his politics, does not dissent.²⁹

This is the point at which the standard reading collapses, and it collapses from both ends at once. Ḥayy is not the victim of epistemic exclusion; within the economy of the tale, Ḥayy is its *theorist* the one character who articulates, endorses, and enacts the principle that the many are to be left with the literal Law. And Ibn Ṭufayl is not criticising the exclusion he depicts; he is commending it, and commending it as the mature judgement of a mind that has seen as far as a mind can see. To read the epilogue as a protest against epistemic injustice is thus to convict its author of meaning the reverse of what, on every other page and by every

²⁶ Ibn Bājja, "Tadbīr Al-Mutawahhīd (The Governance of the Solitary)," chap. 5.

²⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise, Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, 27.

²⁸ Kukkonen, *Ibn Ṭufayl: Living the Life of Reason*. chap. 6, reading the ending as an assertion about the limits of the many rather than a complaint on Ḥayy's behalf.

²⁹ Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism: A Philosophic Study of Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Bin Yaqzān*, 220.

historical measure, he plainly meant. The interpretive cost is not a detail mislaid but the whole architecture of the tale stood on its head.³⁰

Does Ḥayy's Case Meet Fricker's Conditions?

It might be granted that Ibn Ṭufayl endorses the exclusion and yet insisted that the exclusion is unjust for all that the author's approval is beside the point, and that Fricker's apparatus still lets us name a wrong he failed to see. The objection deserves a full hearing. It does not survive one, because the wrong Fricker names has definitional conditions, and Ḥayy's case meets none of them.

For Fricker, *testimonial injustice* is not the bare fact that someone's word is doubted. Doubt as such is ubiquitous and often warranted; what makes doubt an injustice is its source. Testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer, moved by *identity prejudice*, gives a speaker less credibility than his word deserves a prejudice, that is, that attaches to the speaker as a supposed member of a *social type* and operates through *identity power* in the shared social imagination.³¹ And the injustice that most concerns Fricker is not the one-off misfire but the *systematic* case: the prejudice that tracks its bearer across the many theatres of social life economic, legal, political, professional, educational so that the credibility deficit suffered in one is of a piece with the disadvantage suffered in the rest.³² Fricker is explicit that this systematic variety is her target, and she deliberately sets aside the merely *incidental* credibility deficit, the local misjudgement answering to no standing prejudice, as falling outside the theory.³³

Ḥayy satisfies none of these conditions, and the first failure is the most basic. He belongs to no social type. He is, by the express design of the tale, the only one of his kind a singular experiment, a mind grown in isolation with no fellows and no forebears. There is no class of island-reared solitaries against which the people of Salāmān carry a stereotype, no established image of "his sort" for a prejudice to fasten on, because there is no sort. Identity prejudice presupposes an identity that is socially typed and negatively charged; Ḥayy's identity is unique, and a unique identity is, in the relevant sense, no identity at all. There is accordingly nothing for identity power to transmit and no collective imaginary in which such a prejudice could reside.

Nor is there systematicity, and here the absence is total rather than partial. Ḥayy is not disadvantaged in the island's courts, its markets, its households, or its councils; the question of his standing in those arenas never so much as arises, because he passes through the community as a guest and departs. There is no web of mutually reinforcing disadvantage of the kind Fricker's systematic injustice requires no pattern to which a single credibility deficit could belong. If Ḥayy's word is discounted at all, and it is not clear that it is discounted rather than simply not understood, the discounting is at most *incidental*: a local failure of uptake tied to no durable prejudice. And the incidental case is exactly what Fricker excludes from the

³⁰ Murad Idris, "Producing Islamic Philosophy: The Life and Afterlives of Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān in Global History, 1882–1947," *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 382–403; George F Hourani, "The Principal Subject of Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (1956): 40–46; Maribel Fierro, "Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān: An Almohad Reading," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 4 (2020): 385–405.

³¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 27–29.

³² Fricker, 17, 28.

³³ Fricker, 27.

scope of her theory. To bring Ḥayy under the concept, one would have to enlarge the concept until it named any occasion on which anyone is not believed at which point it would name nothing in particular and do no work at all.

An earlier version of this study asserted that the islanders “doubted his authority because of his foreign identity.” No sentence of the text sustains the claim. What the text furnishes is a prejudice against the *doctrines*, explicitly so described,³⁴ set beside a repeated insistence that the hearers were well-disposed men undone by an incapacity they had not chosen.³⁵ The earlier assertion is, moreover, circular in its very structure: the only evidence offered that identity caused the rejection is the fact of the rejection itself. From “they did not accept him” it infers “they rejected him for who he was,” and then offers the rejection as proof of the prejudice it had assumed. A causal claim cannot be validated by the effect it was invoked to explain.

It is worth registering what a genuine case would have looked like, since the contrast sharpens the point. Had Ibn Ṭufayl written that the notables dismissed Ḥayy's teaching *because* it issued from a man reared by animals had he shown them accepting the very same doctrine from Absāl's mouth while refusing it from Ḥayy's then Fricker's apparatus would apply, and would apply with real illumination. That is the counterfactual the standard reading needs and the text withholds. Ibn Ṭufayl wrote nothing of the kind. The tale as we have it is not, at bottom, a story about a credibility deficit at all; it is a story about a capacity deficit, and the two are not to be confused.

Where the Hermeneutical Lacuna Actually Lies

The case for *hermeneutical* injustice looks stronger than the case for testimonial injustice, and it is here, if anywhere, that the truth of the matter is finally to be located though not at all where the standard reading places it. Fricker's second category concerns not credibility but intelligibility, and intelligibility is exactly what breaks down on the island. The question is whose intelligibility, and at whose cost.

Hermeneutical injustice, for Fricker, requires two things. It requires a *hermeneutical lacuna*: a gap in the collective interpretive resources such that some significant region of a person's experience cannot be rendered intelligible, to others or even to himself, for want of the concepts that would make sense of it.³⁶ And it requires that this lacuna be no accident of intellectual history but the product of *hermeneutical marginalisation*: the exclusion of the sufferer's group from equal participation in the practices by which social meanings are generated, so that their experience goes unconceptualised because they were kept from the table where concepts are made.³⁷ Both elements are needed; a mere gap in understanding, unattached to any marginalisation, is not yet an injustice.

Two corrections follow directly, and the first, though terminological, matters. Hermeneutical injustice is *not* an extension, intensification, or aggravated form of testimonial injustice, as the earlier version of this study supposed. For Fricker the two are distinct in kind, not in degree: testimonial injustice damages a person in his capacity as a *giver of knowledge*, by deflating the credibility of what he says; hermeneutical injustice damages him in his

³⁴ Fricker, 163.

³⁵ Fricker, 164.

³⁶ Fricker, 175.

³⁷ Fricker, 155.

capacity as a *subject of social understanding*, by denying him the concepts in which his experience could be grasped.³⁸ To treat the second as a stronger dose of the first is to lose precisely the distinction that gives Fricker's taxonomy its analytic power.

The second correction is substantive, and it turns the standard picture inside out. In the epilogue the hermeneutical lacuna is real; but it lies *with the community, not with Ḥayy*. Ḥayy is not the one short of resources for interpreting his experience he understands what he has undergone with a completeness the islanders cannot begin to approach; his whole ascent has been the acquisition of exactly those resources. What is missing is on the other side. It is the people of Salāmān who possess no concepts adequate to receive what he offers, no interpretive frame within which his demonstrative vision could take on meaning for them. When he speaks of the Necessary Existent, they hear words for which they hold no answering conceptions; the gap is theirs, and the tale is candid about it. Indeed the narrative insists on the asymmetry: it is always Ḥayy who must descend to their level, never they who might ascend to his, and the descent finds no ledge on which to rest, because the resources that would receive it were never there to begin with.

But now the decisive question: is that lacuna an *injustice* done to the community? On Fricker's own terms it is not and this is where her framework, faithfully applied, runs out. Their lack of concepts does not arise from any marginalisation they have suffered at the hands of a dominant group that shut them out of the making of meaning. It arises, on Ibn Ṭufayl's explicit account, from two sources that are the opposite of marginalisation: from the natural constitution of the many, who are simply not built for demonstration, and from a Law that has, quite deliberately and for their good, addressed them in images and precepts rather than in proofs. The many have not been excluded from the workshop of meaning; they have been provided with the only meanings they can use. A community that lacks demonstrative concepts because it was fashioned for images, and served by a Law that respects the fashioning, is not the victim of a hermeneutical injustice in Fricker's sense. It suffers a lacuna without suffering the marginalisation that would make the lacuna a wrong.

So the community labours under a genuine hermeneutical lacuna, and yet no one, on Fricker's definition, has committed a hermeneutical injustice against it. Here the framework does not so much fail as reach its edge. It was built to analyse a lacuna that flows from marginalisation, and it has nothing to say about a lacuna that flows from constitution and from a benevolent pedagogy of images. That silence is not a defect to be papered over; it is the finding. For the tale sets before us a lacuna that is nobody's crime and yet somebody's responsibility and the question of whose responsibility it is takes us beyond anything Fricker's categories, trained wholly on the wronged, are equipped to answer. It is to that question, and to the extension it forces, that the argument now turns.

Reciprocal Epistemic Failure: A Proposed Extension

The extension proposed here is this. Fricker's theory is built around the *victim*: it asks what is done to the knower who is wronged. What Ibn Ṭufayl's tale demands is the complementary question *what does the knower who is not wronged owe?* and to that question Fricker's framework, as it stands, returns no answer.

³⁸ Fricker, 152.

Recent work has begun to supply one. José Medina argues that epistemic responsibility falls asymmetrically on the epistemically privileged, and that the vices of the powerful arrogance, laziness, closed-mindedness are themselves epistemic wrongs.³⁹ Gaile Pohlhaus has named *willful hermeneutical ignorance* as the refusal of the dominant to take up the interpretive resources that would make another's experience intelligible.⁴⁰ Kristie Dotson's *contributory injustice* names the wrong of persisting in a defective interpretive scheme when a better one is available.⁴¹

Ḥayy's case is a mirror-image of these. He does not refuse to *take up* the interpretive resources of the many; he refuses to *supply* his own. Having judged the many incapable, he does not attempt translation, does not seek a symbolic idiom, does not and this is the significant omission considering whether the failure might lie in his teaching rather than in their capacity. He tries once, concludes that the fault is in them, and leaves. The tale therefore exhibits what may be called *hermeneutical withholding*: the epistemically privileged knower, faced with a community that lacks the resources to receive him, declines the labour of building them, and retires.

The result is *reciprocal epistemic failure*. On one side, a community without the interpretive means to receive philosophical testimony a genuine lacuna, whatever its cause. On the other, a knower who possesses the means and withholds them, and who moreover theorises the withholding as wisdom. Neither party is simply a victim, and neither is simply at fault. Yet the symmetry is only apparent, for the two failures are not on a par: the community's lacuna is a misfortune, something that has befallen it, whereas the knower's withholding is a choice, something he does and it is the choice, not the misfortune, that a theory of epistemic responsibility must chiefly reckon with. Fricker's categories illuminate the first side and are silent about the second; the tale obliges us to build out the second, and it is in that building-out, rather than in any application of her categories to Ḥayy, that this study's contribution lies.⁴²

One consequence deserves emphasis, because it is the reverse of what the standard reading supposed. If the analysis above is right, then the party in whom we should be interested is not Ḥayy but *Salāmān's people* and the epistemic wrong in the vicinity is not one they commit but one that is committed in their regard, by a philosopher who has judged them beyond help without seriously testing the judgement.

It may be objected that this asks too much of Ḥayy. He is, after all, a man raised by a gazelle, without language until Absāl taught him; to demand of him a pedagogy is to demand what he cannot give. The objection has force, and it should be granted but granting it relocates failure rather than dissolving it. If Ḥayy personally could not translate, the question becomes why Ibn Ṭufayl arranges the narrative so that no one else attempts it either. Absāl, who has language, has the Law, and has crossed between the two worlds, is uniquely positioned to serve as the translator the situation requires. He does not. He follows Ḥayy into retirement.

³⁹ Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, 27.

⁴⁰ Pohlhaus Jr., "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance," 722.

⁴¹ Kristie Dotson, "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression," *Frontiers* 33, no. 1 (2012): 24–47.

⁴² Pohlhaus Jr., "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance," 9.

The tale, that is, contains within itself the figure who could have discharged the responsibility, and it disposes of him which suggests that the withdrawal is not a regrettable necessity forced on Ḥayy by his upbringing, but a considered conclusion that Ibn Ṭufayl wishes his reader to reach.

Why should any of this matter beyond the interpretation of a single tale? Because the structure it exhibits is not confined to the twelfth century. Wherever a body of knowledge is held by a few who judge the many incapable of receiving it, the same question arises: is the incapacity a fact about the many, or an artefact of the few's refusal to translate? The judgement is self-sealing the untranslated remains unintelligible, and the unintelligibility is then cited as proof that translation was impossible. The lesson generalises to any archive of expertise scientific, legal, theological whose keepers mistake the difficulty of translation for the impossibility of it. Fricker has taught us to look for the wrong done to the knower who is not heard. The case of Ḥayy suggests that we should also look for the wrong done to the community that is never seriously addressed, and that the epistemically privileged do not discharge their obligations merely by declining to slander anyone. Reticence, too, can be a way of leaving people in the dark.

Answering al-Fārābī's Unasked Question

An earlier version of this study posed an excellent question and then let it drop. Al-Fārābī describes a virtuous city founded by a philosopher-prophet and thereafter governed, once its founder is gone, by jurists who preserve and apply his legislation. But al-Fārābī does not tell us what happens if, long after the legal tradition has settled into place, a *new* philosopher should arise within it a mind that reaches the founding truths afresh, by its own unaided ascent, and finds the city no longer expecting or equipped to receive them.⁴³ The question is a real one, and al-Fārābī's system leaves it open. Ibn Ṭufayl, it was suggested, might answer it. He does; and the answer can now be given in full.

The problem is one of succession, and it is sharper than it first appears. The founder's authority was self-authenticating; he *was* the source of the images in which the city's truth is clothed, and so his demonstrations and his laws were one seamless thing. The jurists who follow him inherit the images but not the vision; they conserve the *ẓāhir* without access to the *bāṭin*, and they are right to do so, for their office is preservation, not discovery. Into this settled arrangement the new philosopher intrudes as an anomaly the system did not plan for. He has the vision but not the office. He can see what the founder saw, but he has no authority to legislate, and the city has no vacancy for a second founder. What, then, is he to do with what he knows?

Ibn Ṭufayl's answer is unambiguous: the new philosopher must *withdraw*. The settled Law is not an error awaiting his correction; it is the very form in which the founding truth has been made available to those who could receive it in no other form. To disturb that form to peel back the image in search of the demonstration beneath is not to enrich the many but to rob them, for it takes away the image they can hold and offers in exchange a demonstration they cannot. The philosopher who arrives after the Law is therefore no reformer and no second prophet. He is a guest in a house not his own, and his whole duty, on Ibn Ṭufayl's telling, is to

⁴³ al-Fārābī, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, 15–17.

leave the household as he found it which is exactly what Ḥayy does when he apologises, counsels perseverance in the literal Law, and sails away.

This is a coherent answer, and it is worth noting that it is, in substance, Ibn Rushd's answer as well, though dressed in more juridical garments. Where Ibn Ṭufayl narrates the philosopher's tactful retreat, Ibn Rushd legislates it: the demonstrative sense is to be kept from those who live by the literal, and the scholar who possesses it is bound to silence before the multitude precisely in order to protect them.⁴⁴ The tale and the treatise converge on a single counsel of prudence that the gap between the few and the many is to be managed by the discretion of the few, and that discretion here means withholding.

And yet the answer, we would argue, is an evasion, however coherent, because it quietly assumes the very thing that most needs to be shown. It assumes that the many *cannot* be brought further that the ceiling of literal adherence is fixed by nature and not by pedagogy. Ḥayy tests that assumption exactly once, in a single ill-judged burst of open demonstration, and treats the resulting failure as a verdict on the hearers rather than on the method. But one failed attempt, conducted without art and abandoned without reflection, establishes nothing about what the many are capable of; it establishes only what *this* teaching, delivered *this* way, achieved on *this* occasion. A philosopher genuinely committed to the epistemic welfare of the community would have asked whether a different approach patient, gradual, working through the images rather than against them might have carried some of them further. He would, in short, have tried again, and tried differently.

That Ḥayy does not try again is, we suggest, the tale's deepest and least intended lesson. Ibn Ṭufayl means the withdrawal as wisdom; but he has constructed a case in which the withdrawal looks suspiciously like a conclusion reached too soon and defended too conveniently. The philosopher declares the many unteachable and thereby excuses himself from the labour of teaching them and the declaration, never seriously tested, becomes the warrant for the retreat it was meant to justify. Al-Fārābī's unasked question, then, receives from Ibn Ṭufayl an answer that is elegant, traditional, and, on inspection, question-begging. What the new philosopher owes the settled city is a question the tale raises with unusual clarity and answers with unusual haste.

Alternative Explanations Considered

A causal claim earns its keep only by eliminating its rivals, and the standard reading advances a causal claim of some strength: that Ḥayy fails *because his identity is foreign*. Set beside this claim are three rival explanations of the same failure, each consistent with the narrative and each, on examination, better supported by it. Where several explanations fit the evidence, the one that requires the most unsupported additions is the weakest; and identity prejudice, as we have seen, must be added to the text rather than read from it.

The first rival is the sheer difficulty of what Ḥayy is trying to convey. What he offers his hearers is not a doctrine among doctrines but the terminus of a lifetime's ascent the fruit of decades of solitary observation, inference, and contemplation, culminating in an unmediated vision of the Necessary Existent. To expect that such a terminus could be transmitted to an audience in a handful of public addresses is to expect the summit to be handed down without the climb. That the hearers fail to receive it is, on this explanation, no

⁴⁴ Ibn Rushd, *Decisive Treatise, Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, 16–18.

more mysterious than that untrained listeners should fail to follow a proof at the frontier of a science. No prejudice is needed to account for the failure; the difficulty of the matter accounts for it entirely, and the text gives us every reason to think the matter difficult.

The second rival is the natural incapacity of the hearers, and this is not a rival the interpreter is free to dismiss, for it is Ibn Ṭufayl's *own* explanation, stated plainly and more than once. The narrator tells us in his own voice that the many are constituted for no more than the literal Law, that the notables who heard Ḥayy were undone by an inborn infirmity, and that any attempt to lift them above their nature was bound to fail.⁴⁵ An interpretation that quietly sets aside the author's explicit and repeated account of his own narrative owes us a reason for the setting-aside, and the earlier version of this study offered none. One may, of course, disagree with Ibn Ṭufayl's elitist anthropology; but disagreeing with his explanation is not the same as showing that his narrative contains a different one. The text says the fault lies in the hearers' capacity; the burden falls on any reading that says otherwise.

The third rival is the one the text supports best of all and intends least the pedagogical failure of Ḥayy himself. Consider what manner of teacher he is. He has no experience of teaching, having lived his whole life alone; no acquaintance with the accommodations, the gradations, the strategic simplifications that instruction requires; and no conception whatever of the symbolic idiom in which the Law addresses the many, since he reached the truth without passing through that idiom at all. He is a man who has never once had to make himself understood to another mind, suddenly charged with making the hardest of truths understood to many minds unlike his own. That such a man should fail as a teacher is not a surprise demanding the postulation of prejudice in his audience; it is, on reflection, the most natural outcome the story could have. The failure is real, but its likeliest seat is the lectern, not the pew.

Set the four explanations side by side and the standard reading fares worst. The difficulty of the material, the capacity of the hearers, and the inexperience of the teacher are each attested or strongly implied by the text; identity prejudice is attested nowhere and must be imported to be found. Nor are the three rivals mutually exclusive indeed they compound, for a supremely difficult matter, delivered by an untrained teacher to an audience ill-suited to receive it, is over-determined for failure without any need to reach for a further cause. The methodological principle is elementary: do not multiply causes beyond necessity, and do not prefer the cause the evidence least supports.

The standard reading, in the end, is not merely unsupported by the text; it is the *least* well supported of the accounts available, and it is preferred only because it yields the morally satisfying picture of a victim wronged. But the satisfaction is purchased by misreading, and the misreading has a cost beyond exegesis. It directs our moral attention to the wrong party to Ḥayy, who needs no vindication, and away from Salāmān's people, whose predicament is the tale's genuine unfinished business. Once the identity-prejudice reading is set aside, the real question of the epilogue comes into view, and it is not "who wronged Ḥayy?" but "what was owed to the people he gave up on?"

⁴⁵ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān A Philos. Tale*, 163–64.

4. Conclusion

The epilogue of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* is not a portrait of epistemic injustice suffered by a philosopher at the hands of a prejudiced community. It narrates a philosopher who is received with honour, who fails to be understood, who concludes that the many cannot be brought further, who apologises for having tried, and who leaves. Ibn Ṭufayl endorses that conclusion, and in doing so he takes his place in the Andalusian tradition of epistemic elitism alongside Ibn Bājja and Ibn Rushd.

Miranda Fricker's categories do not fit Ḥayy: he belongs to no stereotyped social type, suffers no systematic identity prejudice, and possesses ample resources for interpreting his own experience. The hermeneutical lacuna in the tale lies with the community, not with him. But this is not a reason to discard Fricker. It is a reason to extend her. What the tale exhibits is *reciprocal epistemic failure*: on one side a community without the means to receive philosophical testimony; on the other a knower who possesses the means to supply them, withholds them, and theorises the withholding as prudence. Fricker's framework analyses the wronged; this case demands an account of the *responsibility of the knower* a demand that Medina, Pohlhaus, and Dotson have begun to answer, and to which Ibn Ṭufayl's tale supplies an unusually clean instance.

This research has several limitations. *First*, it works from a single translation, checked against the Arabic only at points where the argument turns; a fuller treatment would require sustained engagement with the Gauthier edition throughout. *Second*, the application of a contemporary social-epistemological vocabulary to a twelfth-century philosophical romance is an act of comparative interpretation, and although it has been disciplined here by an explicit account of the tale as a thought experiment, the risk of anachronism cannot be eliminated, only managed. *Third*, the notion of hermeneutical withholding is proposed rather than developed: its relation to Pohlhaus's wilful hermeneutical ignorance, and its place within the taxonomy of epistemic wrongs, would require a study of its own. *Fourth*, this article has said nothing about whether Ibn Ṭufayl's elitism is defensible on its own terms. It has shown that the elitism is there. Whether the many really cannot be taught and what the philosopher owes them if they can is the question the tale leaves us with, and it is not answered here.

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