

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

THE POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS
OF IBN BĀJJAH'S *GOVERNANCE OF
THE SOLITARY (TADBĪR AL-MUTAWĀḤḤID)*

Rima Pavalko, Doctor of Philosophy, 2008

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A first impression might lead one to characterize the *Governance of the Solitary*, the most famous treatise by the medieval Arabic-Islamic philosopher Ibn Bājjah, as favoring radical individualism, and thus as breaking with the political orientation of ancient philosophy. In fact, the treatise returns to the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle, reaffirming the ancient principle that the human being is by nature political and that the highest life for the city and the individual is the same, the life of virtue pursued for the sake of happiness. For Ibn Bājjah, the highest goal intended for human beings by nature is political, namely, the perfect virtuous city.

In the absence of the city oriented toward perfect virtue, the philosopher may find it necessary to lead a life of isolation. According to Ibn Bājjah, this solitary life seeks to preserve on behalf of the city the possibility of its deliverance from imperfection by pursuing the highest goal of the individual human being, namely, the attainment of conjunction with the divine intellect. By means of this intermediary goal, the solitary aims to deliver knowledge of perfect virtue to the city that is needed to bring about political happiness. Ibn Bājjah's account of the solitary shows that the philosopher does not abandon the city by pursuing philosophy in isolation, but in fact the isolated philosopher embodies the hope of bringing about the city's perfection.

Practically speaking, this dissertation seeks to establish the second and third parts of the *Governance* as elaborations on the political teaching begun in the first part. To remain true to the author's intent, I argue that one cannot bypass Ibn Bājjah's concern for the perfect virtuous city in Part I, in order to present his teaching on governance as culminating in the life of the solitary described in Part III. The following study aims to take into account the treatise as a whole and to discuss it as faithful as possible to the original Arabic text.

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OF IBN BĀJJAḤ'S *GOVERNANCE OF THE SOLITARY*
(*TADBĪR AL-MUTAWĀḤḤID*)

by

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To Wayne and Grace with love

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INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHY OF IBN BĀJJAH

Ibn Bājjah's full name in Arabic is *Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Yahya Ibn al-Ṣā'igh al-Tūjībī Ibn Bājjah*. He was a celebrated medieval philosopher from Spain renowned for original works in philosophy as well as the natural sciences and the arts. He is among those in the West who continued the work of recovering the ancient writings of Plato and Aristotle begun by Muslim predecessors in the East. Ibn Bājjah would later come to be known among Latin scholars as "Avempace."

Historical accounts indicate that Ibn Bājjah was born in Saragossa, Spain somewhere towards the end of the eleventh century. He lived in Fez, Morocco at the time of his death in AD 1138 or 1139, a death supposedly hastened by a poisoned fruit.¹ He was appointed vizier around AD 1110 to the local governor Abū Bakr Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ṣaḥrāwī, known as Ibn Tīfalwīt, soon after the Almoravid dynasty defeated the Banū Hūd in Saragossa. He later served as vizier for about twenty years, probably in Seville, to Yaḥyā Ibn Abī Bakr, the grandson of the founder of the Almoravid dynasty, Yūsuf Ibn Tāshufīn.² It is reported that Ibn Bājjah authored numerous treatises on a variety of subjects in his lifetime, although few manuscripts remain.

¹ D. M. Dunlop, s.v. "Ibn Bāddja" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-), 728.

² Steven Harvey, "The Place of the Philosopher in the City According to Ibn Bājjah," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Charles Butterworth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1992), 205-206.

Among Ibn Bājjah's extant works, the short treatise titled *Governance of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid*), thought to have been written circa 1100,³ is the only one that treats overtly political themes.⁴ The purpose of this dissertation is to establish the political foundations of this treatise. I argue that the problem of the solitary presented in the treatise cannot be understood in isolation from the problem of the perfect virtuous city, the absence of which necessitates the discussion of governance with respect to the solitary life. I find the treatise primarily oriented around the question of what enables the best governance of the city, not what constitutes the best life for the individual, the title of the treatise notwithstanding. To the extent that governance of the city takes precedence over that of the solitary, the treatise should be categorized and read as a work in political science. This argument is detailed below in the latter part of the introduction.

To resume the biographical account of Ibn Bājjah, much of what scholars today know about him from medieval and modern sources was compiled by the scholar D. M. Dunlop in an article published in 1957.⁵ A revised version of Dunlop's biography later appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.⁶ More recently, a short biography of Ibn Bājjah was published by Thérèse-Anne Druart in 1992.⁷ That same year, a short biography was

³ Thérèse-Anne Druart, s.v. "Ibn Bajja (Avempace)," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Medieval Philosophers*, vol. 115, edited by Jeremiah Hackett (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1992), 246. Some scholars date the *Governance* as a work written closer to the end of Ibn Bājjah's life. Cf. *Mu'allafāt Ibn Bājjah (The Works of Ibn Bājjah)*, edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Alawī' (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 157-166.

⁴ See M. S. H. al-Ma'sumī, "Ibn Bājjah" in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, edited by M. M. Sharif, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963-66), 522.

⁵ D. M. Dunlop, "Remarks on the Life and Works of Ibn Bājjah (Avempace)," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 2, edited by Z. V. Togan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1957), 188-196. See also D. M. Dunlop, "The Dīwān Attributed to Ibn Bājjah (Avempace)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 14 (1952): 463-477.

⁶ Dunlop, 728-729.

⁷ Druart, 246-247.

included in an article on the *Governance* published by Steven Harvey.⁸ An open-access source online covering the life and works of Ibn Bājja, written by Josep Puig Montada for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, is the most comprehensive biographical source to date.⁹ The most recent biography in Spanish was written by Joaquín Lomba and José Miguel Puerta Vílchez in *Enciclopedia de al-Andalus*.¹⁰

Among medieval accounts, there are contemporaries of Ibn Bājja as well as later medieval scholars who report on his life, including his companion and scribe Abū al-Ḥasan Ibn al-Imām, his adversary Faṭḥ Ibn Khāqān, and the historians al-Qiftī, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah, Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Khallikān, and al-Maqqarī.¹¹ Other important figures who mention Ibn Bājja by name and reflect on his political thought are the medieval philosophers Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd (Averroës), Maimonides, and Ibn Khaldūn.

The sum of biographical accounts indicates that Ibn Bājja led anything but the isolated life. In his biographical account, Steven Harvey points out: “Far from living the life of the solitary, the *mutawahhid*, Ibn Bājja appears to have partaken of society to the fullest; far from eschewing the imperfect city, Ibn Bājja helped administer it.”¹²

Accounts of his travels place Ibn Bājja in Seville and Granada, Spain and later in parts of North Africa. He served as vizier to the Almoravid court in Saragossa and then likely in Seville. In his lifetime, he was twice jailed for political reasons by Almoravid rulers;

⁸ See Harvey, 202-206.

⁹ Josep Puig Montada, “Ibn Bajja,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2007 Edition)*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2007/entries/ibn-bajja/>>.

¹⁰ Joaquín Lomba and José Miguel Puerta Vílchez, “Ibn Bājja,” *Enciclopedia de al-Andalus*. I, 624-63. Cited by Miquel Forcada, “Ibn Bājja and the Classification of the Sciences in al-Andalus,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 16.2 (2006): 295 n.23.

¹¹ See Harvey, 202 n. 7 for citations to the biographical accounts of Ibn Bājja by these medieval historians.

¹² See Harvey, 206.

he nearly lost his life on the first occasion.¹³

His close friend Ibn al-Imām attests to Ibn Bājjah’s erudition and his merit as a writer as follows:

In penetration of mind and acuteness of investigation into these exalted, noble and abstruse ideas (sc. of philosophy) he was the wonder of his age and the portent in the sky of his time....He was among the greatest investigators of his time, most of whom did not attempt to record any of their thoughts, and he was their superior in investigation and naturally more penetrating in making distinctions.¹⁴

The medieval philosopher Ibn Ṭufayl, on the other hand, who also recognizes the excellent contributions to philosophy by Ibn Bājjah, points to his learned predecessor’s reputation for worldliness in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*:

There was none among [his generation of Andalusian philosophers] of a finer genius, of a greater understanding, or of a truer insight than Abū Bakr Ibn al-Ṣā’igh [Avempace]. 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.¹⁵

All told, Ibn Bājjah’s chosen themes in the *Governance* stand in contrast with his penchant for public service and his alleged immoderate way of life. This indicates that he was undoubtedly a contentious and enigmatic figure in his day. And so his treatise on the solitary is a must-read for anyone seeking an introduction to this “turbulent genius.”¹⁶

¹³ See Dunlop (1957), 193-194.

¹⁴ See D. M. Dunlop, “Philosophical Predecessors and Contemporaries of Ibn Bājjah,” *Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955): 100.

¹⁵ Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ben Yaqdhān*, ed. Léon Gauthier (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1936), 12. See also “Ibn Ṭufayl: *Ḥayy the Son of Yaqzan*,” translated by George N. Atiyeh, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (hereafter cited as *MPP*), ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 139.

¹⁶ See Dunlop (1957), 196.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HIS WORKS

Ibn Bājjah's personal reputation for worldliness contrasts dramatically with his literary output. His extant manuscripts indicate that he was a profound thinker. Numerous treatises and commentaries are attributed to him on such varied topics as philosophy, mathematics, logic, astronomy, physics, and medicine, as well as music and poetry.¹⁷ One of the foremost medieval philosophers in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, Ibn Bājjah is among those credited with returning philosophic inquiry to the West, especially the recovery of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, as well as the transmission from East to West of the Arabic-Islamic tradition of political philosophy founded by Alfarabi.¹⁸ The historian and biographer Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah attributes over twenty works to Ibn Bājjah, few of which remain, among them original philosophical treatises and commentaries on Aristotle's and Alfarabi's writings in the natural sciences.¹⁹ His arch-enemy Ibn Khāqān, whose biography is the longest medieval source on Ibn Bājjah in which he is accused of heresy, at the same time notes the extent of Ibn Bājjah's devotion to studying the sciences.²⁰

The *Governance* is the only extant political treatise by Ibn Bājjah, for which two Arabic manuscripts remain, as described below. There are three complete Arabic editions of the treatise, based mainly on one of these manuscripts, along with translations of the

¹⁷ Dunlop, 728.

¹⁸ See Dunlop (1955): 100. Dunlop translates the introductory remarks attributed to Ibn al-Imām in MS. Pococke 206, fols. 3b-4a, who indicates that his friend Ibn Bājjah strove to revive interest in "philosophical books" circulating in Spain that had been "composed in the East" as well as "books of the ancients and others."

¹⁹ Ibn Abī 'Uṣaybi'ah, *Kitāb 'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-A'ribbā'*, edited by August Müller, 2 (Cairo, 1882), 62-64.

²⁰ Faḥ Ibn Khāqān, *Qalā'id al-'Iqyān* (Būlāq AH, 1284), 298-304. Cited by Harvey, 202 n. 7. See also Dunlop (1957), 190.

treatise into a number of foreign languages. These editions and translations are also detailed below. The principal works by Ibn Bājjah that have aided scholars in explaining the teaching in the *Governance* on the conjunction of the human intellect with divine being include his *Risālat al-Widā'* (*Letter of Farewell*),²¹ *Ittiṣāl al-'Aql bi al-Insān* (*Conjunction of the Intellect with the Human Being*),²² and *Kitāb al-Nafs* (*Book on the Soul*).²³ Other writings of interest include his commentaries on Alfarabi's logical writings.²⁴ Finally, one important work in philosophy, which has only recently begun to receive attention, is his short work on Alfarabi's *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* (the latter is not extant). The work appears in an article published by Shlomo Pines in 1979,²⁵ and was later included in a volume of Ibn Bājjah's unpublished philosophical texts edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Alawī'.²⁶

Ibn Bājjah's *Governance of the Solitary* is an important philosophical treatise that immediately drew scholarly attention with its first full edition in 1946. There are now several editions of the treatise available in Arabic as well as translations in a number of foreign languages. For the dissertation, I relied mainly on Majid Fakhry's revised Arabic

²¹ Ibn Bājjah (Avempace). *Opera Metaphysica (Rasā'il Ibn Bājjah al-Ilāhiyyah)*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Majid Fakhry. (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1968), 113-143.

²² Fakhry (1968), 153-173.

²³ Ibn Bājjah, *Kitāb al-Nafs (On the Soul)*, edited by Muhammad Saghīr Ḥasan al-Ma'sūmī (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'ilmī al-'arabī, 1960).

²⁴ Ibn Bājjah, *Ta'ālīq Ibn Bājjah 'alā Maṭīq al-Fārābī*, edited by Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1994).

²⁵ See Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, edited by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82-83. Cited by Harvey, 225 n. 56.

²⁶ Ibn Bājjah, *Rasā'il Falsafīyyah li-Abī Bakr Ibn Bājjah, Nuṣūṣ Falsafīyyah ghair Manshūrah (Philosophical Letters of Ibn Bājjah: Unpublished Philosophic Texts)*, edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Alawī' (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1983), 197-202.

edition as the basic text, which numbers about sixty pages.²⁷ Fakhry published this edition in 1968 in *Opera Metaphysica*, a volume of works he identifies as the metaphysical writings of Ibn Bājjah. The first full-length Arabic edition that appeared in 1946, accompanied by a Spanish translation, was published by Miguel Asín Palacios.²⁸ Prior to this, D. M. Dunlop published an Arabic edition and an English translation of the first two parts of the treatise in 1945.²⁹ A third Arabic edition was published by Ma'an Ziyadah in 1978, which collates variant readings in the footnotes of the previous editions by Asín Palacios and Fakhry.³⁰ There is also a centuries-old abridged translation of the treatise in Hebrew prepared in 1349 by Moses of Narbonne that has been used on occasion to resolve discrepancies in the manuscript. The Narboni paraphrase appears in his commentary on Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, later published by David Herzog in 1895.³¹ Also available is an old French translation of the treatise published by Salomon Munk in 1859, which renders Narboni's paraphrase.³² In addition to the Spanish translation by Asín Palacios is the newest one in Spanish published by Joaquín Lomba in 2006.³³ The first full-length Italian translation published side-by-side with the text in

²⁷ Fakhry (1968), 37-96. Translations based on this edition in the dissertation are cited by Fakhry's page and line number(s).

²⁸ Ibn Bājjah, *El Régimen del Solitario*, edited and translated by Miguel Asín Palacios, (Madrid-Granada, 1946).

²⁹ D. M. Dunlop, "Ibn Bājjah's *Tadbīru'l-Mutawaḥḥid* (Rule of the Solitary)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1945): 61-81.

³⁰ Ibn Bājjah, *Kitāb Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid li-Ibn Bājjah al-Andalusī*, edited Ma'an Ziyadah, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1978).

³¹ David Herzog, *Die Abhandlung des Abu Bekr Ibn al-Saig "Vom Verhalten des Einsiedlers" nach Mose Narboni's Auszug* (Berlin, 1896).

³² S. Munk, "Des Principaux Philosophes Arabes et De Leurs Doctrines" in *Mélanges de Philosophie Juive et Arabe*, (Paris, 1859), 307-458.

³³ Ibn Bājjah, *El Régimen del Solitario*, translated by Joaquín Lomba (Madrid: Trotta, 1997).

Arabic was published by Massimo Campanini and Augusto Illuminati in 2002.³⁴

No full-length translation of the *Governance* has appeared in English, although an unpublished working translation was prepared by Ma'an Ziyadah for his master's thesis at McGill University in 1968.³⁵ A readily available translation by Lawrence Berman of select passages from the treatise is in the *Medieval Political Philosophy* reader.³⁶ Berman's partial translation is based on the Arabic edition by Asín Palacios. The only other English translation is the one already mentioned by Dunlop of the first two parts of the treatise.

In the dissertation, all material quoted from the treatise is based on unpublished English translations of the Fakhry edition. For Parts I and II, I relied on a working translation by Charles Butterworth, and for Part III, I translated my own material. All translated material is cited with reference to the corresponding page and line numbers in Fakhry's Arabic edition. Alternate readings of words and phrases in Fakhry's edition are indicated in the footnotes of the dissertation. To clarify matters in the Fakhry edition, I consulted the Arabic editions of Miguel Asín Palacios, Ma'an Ziyādah, and D. M. Dunlop. My efforts have also been aided by a copy of the original manuscript provided by Thérèse-Anne Druart. Finally, I have referred at times to the unpublished English translation of the manuscript by Ziyādah, the excerpts translated by Berman, and Dunlop's translation of the first two parts of the treatise.

³⁴ Avempace, *Il Regime del Solitario*, translated by Massimo Campanini and Augusto Illuminati (Milan: RCS Libri S.p.A., 2002).

³⁵ Ma'an Ziyādah, "Ibn Bajja's Book *Tadbīr al-Mutawahhīd*" (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1968).

³⁶ "Avempace: *Governance of the Solitary*," translated by Lawrence Berman, in *MPP*, 122-133.

MANUSCRIPTS OF THE *GOVERNANCE*

All modern Arabic editions of the *Governance* are based on the unvocalized and unpunctuated handwritten manuscript, Pococke 206, located in Oxford University's Bodleian Library, which contains some thirty titles. The manuscript is dated *circa* AD 1100 and was prepared by a copyist, who claims to have transcribed it from an original written by Ibn al-Imām, the companion of Ibn Bājjah.³⁷ Extant manuscripts reveal that the treatise has come down to us largely fragmented and perhaps incomplete. Some pages of the Oxford manuscript are marred by illegible and missing words that cause any edition or translation based on it to be less than definitive. An abbreviated version of the *Governance* is contained in the manuscript Akhlāq 290 located in Cairo, Egypt in the National Library and Archives (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah).³⁸

Another important manuscript containing works by Ibn Bājjah is Ahlwardt 5060, which was originally located in the Berlin National Library in Germany.³⁹ This manuscript has only recently resurfaced after disappearing at the end of World War II. It is reported to be in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, Poland.⁴⁰ It is said to contain twenty-two treatises,⁴¹ some of which also appear in the Pococke 206 manuscript. There is another manuscript in Saragossa, Spain in the Escorial Library, Derenbourg 612, which contains mainly commentaries on the logical works of Alfarabi.⁴² Other manuscripts of

³⁷ Josep Puig Montada, "Ibn Bajja," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2007 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2007/entries/ibn-bajja/>>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For the contents of this treatise, see Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss der Arabischen Handschriften der Königl. Bibliothek zu Berlin*, iv (1892), 396-99. Cited in Dunlop, 728.

⁴⁰ Montada, op. cit.

⁴¹ See Lomba (1997), 22.

⁴² Hartwig Derenbourg, *Les Manuscrits Arabes de l'Escorial, Publications de l'École des Langues Orientales Vivantes*, II^e série, vol. X (Paris, 1884), 419-23. Cited in Dunlop, 728.

Ibn Bājjah’s works include Tashkent 2385, located in the Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, as well as two in Turkey, İsmail Saib I 1696 in the Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Kütüphanesi in Ankara and Hacı Mahmud 5683 in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul.⁴³

FEATURES OF THE OXFORD MANUSCRIPT

The Oxford manuscript contains many works by Ibn Bājjah in Arabic, including *Letter of Farewell*, *Conjunction of the Intellect with the Human Being*, and *Book on the Soul*.⁴⁴ There are titles in large script indicating the beginning of each new treatise or a new part of a treatise. In the case of the *Governance*, the Arabic word “*faṣl*” (chapter) in large script appears in the middle of the text, especially in Part III, to indicate a break in the discussion. The 222 folios in the manuscript have been numbered by hand in the upper-left corner. The *Governance* is one of the final works in the manuscript. The portion of the manuscript containing the text of the *Governance* runs from 165a to 182b.

In the Oxford manuscript, the treatise consists of three consecutive parts. The first part runs from 165a to 167a. It is introduced by the following header in large script in the middle of the first page: “*Wa min kalāmih raḍīh Allah ‘anhi fī tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid*” (“From what was said, may God be pleased with him, about the governance of the solitary”). The second part is not titled, but is marked near the bottom of 167v by the header *faṣl* in large script. It runs from 167a to 168a. The third part of the treatise is entitled “*Al-qawl fī al-ṣuwar al-rūḥānniyyah*” (“Discourse on the Spiritual Forms”). It runs from the top of 168b to the

⁴³ For reference to the Tashkent manuscript, see Druart, 247. References to the manuscripts in the Turkish libraries appear in an unpublished bibliography drafted by Steven Harvey supplied by T.-A. Druart.

⁴⁴ For the contents of Ibn Bājjah’s extant manuscripts, see Jamāl al-Dīn al-‘Alawī’ (1983), 41-113. For the Oxford manuscript, al-‘Alawī’ identifies 47 titles, among them treatises, personal letters, and parts of works not extant in their entirety (see 48-72).

middle of 182b and is the longest part of the treatise. It is subdivided into seventeen unequal chapters, each identified by the subheader *faṣl*.

OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT IN *GOVERNANCE OF THE SOLITARY*

One of the first questions that comes to mind when one begins to study the *Governance* is how to make sense of it as a whole. As it has come down to us, the treatise is divided into three seemingly disparate parts. Part I presents the meaning of governance, a discussion of household governance, a description of the virtuous city, and an introduction to the idea of solitary governance. Thus, it is the more overtly political part of the treatise. Part II concerns human actions, which identifies them as the only actions that generate from rational opinion in the soul. Part III is ostensibly a discourse on spiritual forms that culminates in the explanation of why isolation is not contrary to the political nature of the human being. I argue that the last two parts are essentially political and are deeply rooted in the political discussion of the first part of the treatise. That is, the treatise is a sustained discussion on the act of governing as it relates to human beings in its two most politically salient forms: (i) the virtuous city that governs on behalf of a select group of human beings; (ii) the solitary in the imperfect cities who governs only himself. According to Ibn Bājjah, these two senses of governance are the most important ones in human life, which pursue in the truest way the goal sought by all human beings, namely, the attainment of complete happiness.

The following outline breaks the treatise into three parts as indicated in the manuscript and duplicated in Fakhry's edition of the *Governance*. I further divide Parts I and II into sections and the seventeen chapters of Part III into groups, using my own titles for

these sections and groups to signal how the argument unfolds in the treatise. Part II is given a title not original to the treatise.

Outline of the *Governance of the Solitary*

I. Part I: On the Governance of the Solitary (Fakhry 37.1-44.9)

Sections 1-3: On Governance (37.1-39.9)

Section 4: Governance of the Household (39.9-41.2)

Section 5: The Virtuous City (41.3-42.2)

Section 6: The Decline of the Virtuous City (42.2-42.8)

Sections 6 (concluded), 7 and 8: On Solitary Governance (42.8-44.9)

II. Part II: On Human Actions (45.1-48.18)

Section 1: The Human as a Living Being (45.1-45.10)

Section 2: Corporeal, Human, and Bestial Actions (45.11-47.17)

Section 3: Rational Soul and Bestial Soul (47.18-48.12)

Section 4: Summary of Actions of the Human Being (48.13-48.18)

III. Part III: Discourse on the Spiritual Forms (49.1-96.6)

Chapters 1-2: On Spiritual Forms (49.1-57.19)

Chapters 3-8: Particular Spiritual Forms in Human Actions of Particular Origin (58.1-71.6)

Chapters 9-13: Particular Spiritual Forms in Human Actions of Universal Origin (71.7-86.16)

Chapter 14: Spiritual Forms Informed Not by Sense or Nature, but by Thought or the Active Intellect (86.17-89.20)

Chapters 15-17: The Solitary and the Spiritual Forms (90.1-96.6)

THESIS: THE *GOVERNANCE OF THE SOLITARY* AS POLITICAL SCIENCE

Contemporary scholarship on the *Governance* is prone to underestimate or deny the centrality of its political teaching on the virtuous city. In defense of those who would read it as a work in metaphysics or mysticism, the text does treat us to an extensive discussion of spiritual forms in Part III. This discussion peaks at a breath-taking height in its consideration of the possibility of conjunction of the human intellect with divine being. Some readers are inclined to interpret this metaphysical account near the end of the treatise as the whole of the teaching on governance. But there is ample evidence that Ibn Bājjah treats the city as a concern as equally important as that of the solitary. That is to say, true governance of the city and that of the solitary are presented as part of one continuous inquiry.

Among those inclined to see the text as a work in political science, no one has presented a comprehensive reading of its three parts. In an article that comes closest to treating Ibn Bājjah's text as a work in political philosophy, Steven Harvey nevertheless bypasses the importance of its discussion on the virtuous city.⁴⁵ Harvey claims: "Nor is he interested, at least not in the *Governance*, in discussing the perfect or virtuous city (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), although he is careful to convey to the reader the wondrous nature of this city, and perhaps therewith the extreme unlikelihood of its realization..." (207). In

⁴⁵ Harvey expresses considerable doubt that the treatise is a work in political philosophy. His list of reasons contra its inclusion reads as follows: "On the surface, despite its inclusion in the standard sourcebook on medieval political philosophy, Ibn Bājjah's *Governance of the Solitary* hardly seems to be a work on political philosophy. There is no discussion of the various kinds of political regimes and rulerships, no discussion or classification of laws, no discussion of the proper aim or purpose of the city, and little discussion of what constitutes a virtuous regime. There are no directives for rulers, legislators, or even simple citizens. Questions concerning the relation between the divine law and the *nomoi*, the place of religion in the city, and the nature of prophecy, so fundamental to medieval Islamic political thought, are simply not raised" (206-207). My dissertation seeks to establish the political nature of Ibn Bājjah's treatise on the basis of the fundamental questions about governance he does raise and respond to in the treatise. I do believe that the treatise discusses the proper aim of the city as well as what constitutes a virtuous regime. As for the question of prophecy, see Ibn Bājjah's remarks on divine inspirations (52.14-53.12).

his book, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, E. I. J. Rosenthal avoids a lengthy discussion of Parts II and III for the following reason: “A discussion of Ibn Bājjah’s epistemology and psychology—in itself of the greatest importance for the *mutawahhid*—would lead us too far from our immediate subject, his attitude to politics.”⁴⁶ In response, Steven Harvey, who skips over Part I in his article, asserts: “My claim is just the opposite: study of Ibn Bājjah’s epistemology will help us understand his attitude to politics” (212 n.26). While I agree that a study of Parts II and III are essential to understanding Ibn Bājjah’s politics, I think he primarily intends these parts as political inquiries, not epistemological or psychological ones.⁴⁷ That is to say, the treatise does not speak about the solitary acquiring knowledge of the divine for the sake of attaining happiness only as a solitary, but rather the importance of this goal is to deliver to the city knowledge of “true opinion” (*ra’y sādīq* [42.14]) to bring about the city’s correct governance and, thereby, the complete happiness of its inhabitants (see 43.10-12, 62.8-11, 75.1-4, 80.3-6).

To bypass any parts of the treatise in order to single out one strand of the discussion, rather than treating all three parts as integral to Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of governance, is to miss the central problem of the treatise: the tension between the public and the private life of the philosopher. The problem of the *Governance* is how to reconcile the human being as a citizen, who partakes in the life of the city as one part among many, versus the human being as a solitary, a self-sufficient being with the potential to conjoin with the divine and thus transcend life in the city altogether. Ibn

⁴⁶ See E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 168.

⁴⁷ See Ibn Bājjah’s statements in Part III about the solitary life and political science (75.1-4 and 90.22-91.3).

Bājjah appears to resolve this problem by equating complete happiness in the perfect city with living the life of the most virtuous human being. In all other cities, meaning all existing cities, this tension remains a permanent feature and necessitates consideration of a way of life for the individual that does not depend on the city to attain a limited form of happiness. More importantly, the life of the solitary embodies the hope of complete happiness for the city as a whole.

REPLY TO SCHOLARLY OPINION

To consider one scholarly opinion that categorically denies the political orientation of the treatise, Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts: “The...*Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid* (*Regimen of the Solitary*), far from being a political treatise, deals in reality with man’s inner being.”⁴⁸ While I do not quarrel so much with the idea that the book is about “man’s inner being,” I find it impossible to read the treatise and not find overwhelming evidence of the political foundations that provide the context for Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of being, inner as well as outer, human as well as divine.

The suggestion that a treatise dealing “in reality with man’s inner being” must be “far from a political treatise” overlooks the very attempt by Ibn Bājjah to study the solitary life of the philosopher *within* the context of the city, rather than in the abstract without reference to how the world is politically ordered or how this order shapes the human soul. The political order referred to most in the treatise is the city, though at one point he does refer to “a nation” (*ummah*; 43.12). By and large, human life for Ibn Bājjah is conducted in the city. The life of the solitary is no exception, as he maintains

⁴⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Mystical philosophy in Islam,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6, edited by E. Craig (New York: Routledge, 1998), 618. Retrieved March 03, 2008. URL=<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H004.htm>.

throughout the treatise, but especially in Part I, where he indicates that governance of the life of the solitary relates to the political art (*al-ṣinā'ah al-madaniyyah* [44.8-9]), and again in Part III, where he says that the goals of the solitary life in the virtuous city have been summarized in political science (*al-'ilm al-madanī* [75.1-5]).

The strongest evidence that Ibn Bājjah intends for the solitary to be a way of life conducted in the city appears in another work by him, the *Letter of Farewell*, written to his friend Ibn al-Imām, in which our author explicitly states that conjunction with the intellect must take place within a well-ordered city: “It is evident that this goal is intended by nature with respect to us. But inasmuch as that comes about only by political association, people are arranged according to their ranks so the city will be perfected by them and this goal become completed.” (Fakhry 139.19-21). At no point does Ibn Bājjah put this political necessity aside to consider man’s “inner being” minus external considerations—unlike Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, nowhere does Ibn Bājjah’s treatise discuss the solitary retreating to an island to pursue a contemplative life higher than the one that exists in cities, disengaged from civilization and indifferent to material needs.⁴⁹

It is no easy task to explain what role the philosopher should play in the city and how that role should be executed, so that the city is receptive to the philosopher’s teaching on governance without compromising the life of the city or the philosopher. While the philosopher seeks to order the city in accordance with true opinion and correct action that are intended to lead others to the attainment of happiness by means of virtue, all cities but the perfect one fail to recognize the benefits of this governance and to adopt the philosopher’s way of life. Ibn Bājjah responds to this perennial problem by giving the

⁴⁹ Cf. Gauthier (1936), 154-155 (English translation, *MPP* 160-161).

philosopher recourse to a sedentary life, which allows him to continue as a philosopher in the city, albeit without the compulsory duty to practice his science of governance as a political art. This is the life of the solitary, which is superior to the alternative ways of life in the imperfect cities in spite of its isolation. While incomplete, insofar as the complete happiness of the solitary requires the existence of the virtuous city, the solitary life is superior to other ways of life insofar as it holds out the promise of learning what is needed to bring correct governance to the city.

Let us now delve into the *Governance* to show why the above description of Ibn Bājjah's work as dealing "with man's inner being" and thus as non-political is problematic. Again, Ibn Bājjah's text explicitly deals with governance of the life of the solitary,⁵⁰ a life that is spoken about in the treatise only relative to the absence of the perfect city (44.4). He says that the solitary life is neither natural nor best for the human being. In other words, those individuals who seek the "very best existence" for themselves, despite living in imperfect cities that do not share this goal, make up Ibn Bājjah's intended audience. The governance of the solitary is a teaching for philosophers:

In this discussion, we ourselves are intent upon the governance of this solitary human being. It is evident that a matter external to nature has become appended to him. So we will speak about how he governs himself so that he might obtain the very best existence, just as the physician speaks about how the isolated human being in these cities is to govern himself so that he is healthy.... (43.15-17)

At the end of the treatise, he affirms the political teaching of Plato and Aristotle that "the human being is political (*madanī*, i.e., "city-like") by nature" and that "[i]t has been explained in political science (*al-'ilm al-madanī*) that isolation is wholly evil" (91.1-2).

⁵⁰ This intention is stated twice in the treatise. See 43.15 and 56.22.

But then he insists with respect to isolation that “this is what is so by essence; accidentally, it is good, as that occurs with most of what is according to nature” (91.2-3). He gives the example that the medicinal properties of something not normally part of a healthy diet, such as opium, taken when the body is diseased and under “unnatural conditions,” can prove beneficial, although it is never supposed to be the body’s main nourishment (91.4-7). Likewise, isolation can be a useful remedy to begin restoring “the natural state of the soul,” i.e., to remove the unnatural matter that has been appended to it, which inhibits perfection of the human intellect (91.10). We see that Ibn Bājjah raises the idea of isolation to restore the soul to the intellectual health intended for it by nature. But this soul health is not a goal assumed by most inhabitants of the imperfect cities, which is to say that isolation is not a remedy prescribed for anyone in the city except the solitary seeking the “very best existence.”

Why is isolation prescribed for the solitary at all? Does this mean that Ibn Bājjah rejects the idea of a political role for the philosopher in all imperfect cities? Or is isolation a necessary, albeit undesirable, means to something important to the city? To answer these questions, we must examine what prompts the need for isolation from others in the first place. Ibn Bājjah indicates that “it is necessary for [the solitary] to befriend people in the sciences. However, people in the sciences are few in some ways of life and are many in some, so that it happens in some of them that they have disappeared” (90.18-19). If the sciences cannot be pursued among friends, “the solitary is obliged in some ways of life to isolate from people altogether as much as he can. So that he will not have close contact with them except in necessary matters, or to the extent that is necessary, or he will emigrate to the ways of life in which the sciences exist, if they are to be found” (90.20-22).

Ibn Bājjah sounds a cautionary note to signal that there will be people in the city unfriendly to the pursuit of philosophy, and so the solitary must take care not to philosophize openly and tempt his own demise. For Ibn Bājjah, the death of the solitary brought about by the city would signal the end to philosophic activity in the city, the one thing most needful to bring about virtue in it. More will be said about the political role of the solitary in bringing about virtue in the city below.

Before we get to that, let us explore further what Ibn Bājjah means by isolation. One could argue that he does not advocate that the solitary abandon the city altogether—the advice to “emigrate to the ways of life in which the sciences exist” is sufficiently ambiguous that it may mean complete isolation from others within one’s own city or emigration to another. That is to say, this advice does not have to mean that the solitary quit political life altogether. Ibn Bājjah recognizes that the way of life of the sciences is dependent on the surrounding city in order for the solitary to meet bodily needs, let alone to generate new “people in the sciences” to preserve philosophy as a way of life. So while the individual’s political nature may be in conflict with his intellectual nature in the imperfect city hostile to philosophy, Ibn Bājjah does not attempt to resolve this tension by depicting the solitary as capable of living without the city. Indeed, there is no cure for the conflict between the city and the solitary, only the opiate of isolation to mitigate the potentially destructive outcome of this tension.

To convey the inescapable burden of isolation imposed on the solitary vis-à-vis the non-philosophic city, Ibn Bājjah refers to those who have opinions contrary to those cherished by the city as “weeds,” a term also used by Alfarabi in *The Political Regime*.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Alfarabi, *Political Regime (Kitāb Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah)*, edited by Fauzi Najjar (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq Publishers, 1993), 87.5-7 and 104.7-107.19.

Whereas Alfarabi's weed refers to a variety of people in the virtuous city who take issue with the city's opinions, only one sort of whom seems to be truly philosophic, Ibn Bājjah speaks only of weeds in the imperfect cities—a perfect city by definition would have no weeds in it (43.1). He characterizes his weeds as “those who happen upon a true opinion that is not in that city or is contrary to the one believed in it” (42.14-15). Further on he explains that “[t]his name is transferred to them from the plant sprouting on its own among the crops” (42.18) whose presence signifies that the perfect city “has become sick, its affairs have disintegrated, and it has become other than perfect” (43.2-3). All is not lost for these weeds, nor for the city they inhabit. For Ibn Bājjah suggests that the weeds could be a catalyst for the perfect city arising (43.4). While he does not lay out the terms for the generation of the perfect city, it is nonetheless significant that he discusses the rise of the perfect city at all. This shows that he does not advocate isolation for the health of the solitary alone, but in order to hold on to the possibility of perfection for the city. To reiterate, it seems that Ibn Bājjah reserves his deepest despair not for the imperfect cities in which weeds emerge spontaneously, but tacitly for the city in which these entirely fail to sprout, that is, the city altogether devoid of philosophy. By way of example, then, Ibn Bājjah's treatise demonstrates that the philosophic life must take the idea of perfecting the city as seriously as conjunction with the divine, in order for the city and the philosopher to work together toward the highest human good, i.e., complete happiness.

To deny the treatise its political orientation neglects another important feature of Ibn Bājjah's treatise, namely, its frequent references to the political philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Alfarabi. We could go so far as to say that Ibn Bājjah writes the *Governance* as a postscript to the tradition of philosophy founded by Plato, based on a

key passage in the beginning of the *Governance*: “Plato has already explained what pertains to governance of cities in the *Republic* and explained what correctness is with respect to it and how error attaches to it. Now to trouble oneself with speaking about what has been said and judged is superfluous, ignorant, or bad” (39.7-9). That the discussion of cities by no means ends with this statement indicates that Ibn Bājjah is not entirely satisfied with the discussion of cities in the *Republic*. The following paragraph tries to suggest where Ibn Bājjah’s dissatisfaction lies and, in response, what his unique contribution to the discussion of city governance is.

Like his predecessors, Ibn Bājjah affirms that the best life for a human being is in the city that is virtuous, in which “affection (*al-maḥabba*) is wide-spread among the citizens” (41.4). What more does he reveal in the treatise about the perfectly ordered city? The nearest thing to a definition occurs in a passage Ibn Bājjah presents as a paraphrase of Aristotle:

It is evident that in the perfect virtuous city, every human being is given the best of what he is prepared for. All of its opinions are true, and there is no false opinion in it. Its actions alone are unqualifiedly virtuous....These matters have been summarily treated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. (41.17-42.2)

Given the absence of “the perfect virtuous city,” Ibn Bājjah considers what it would take to generate it out of the imperfect cities. The starting point for his answer is the life of the isolated solitary. The end point is agreement by the city on the true opinion of this extraordinary human being:

Correct governance is only the governance of the isolated individual, whether it is a single isolated individual or more than one, as long as a nation or a city does not agree upon their opinion. (43.10-12)

It is this agreement that Ibn Bājjah puts forth as essential to the city’s perfection, rather

than rulership of the city by the philosopher-king suggested by Socrates in the *Republic* (473d).⁵² Ibn Bājjah does not specify that the best regime for the governance of cities is a monarchy. That is to say, the superior life of the solitary is not intended as the salvation of the city. Rather, the solitary life is the exemplary life of one individual who seeks to deliver to the city the true opinion its inhabitants need to govern their individual souls correctly for the sake of living well in common.

By way of summarizing, let me contrast my reading of the *Governance* to that of two contemporary scholars disposed to see it as a work in political science. First, contrary to Steven Harvey, I do not see Ibn Bājjah as having a “sole concern” for ““true governance,”” which Harvey equates with “the self-governance of the solitary individual in an imperfect city.”⁵³ Instead, I read the treatise as maintaining two concomitant concerns with respect to true governance. Ibn Bājjah seeks to harmonize what is conducive to a healthy city with that of a healthy individual by focusing the discussion of governance on the basic ingredients of health common to both, namely, true opinion and correct action. Second, while the treatise certainly has its quirks, I do not agree with Michael Kochin that its philosophy is so at odds with itself that it represents a “general denigration of political life”⁵⁴ and a kind of “anti-political philosophy.”⁵⁵ To my mind, these statements deprive the uninitiated of an impartial reading of Ibn Bājjah’s text.

Together, Harvey’s and Kochin’s characterizations of the treatise seem poised to

⁵² Standard Stephanus pagination is used for all citations from the Platonic dialogues. All quotations from the *Republic* are taken from *The Republic of Plato*, translated by Allan Bloom, 2nd edition (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

⁵³ See Harvey, 209.

⁵⁴ See Michael S. Kochin, “Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60.3 (1999), 402.

⁵⁵ See Kochin, 407. But compare note 42, in which Kochin refers to “his [Ibn Bājjah’s] *political philosophy*” (italics added).

depict Ibn Bājjah as opposed to the politically oriented tradition of philosophy established by Plato, Aristotle, and Alfarabi. As such, they impede the treatise from taking its rightful place in the history of political philosophy. It is misleading to suggest that Ibn Bājjah does not take the political role of the philosopher as seriously as his predecessors. It makes more sense to read him as a defender of the Platonic tradition, who engages in dialogue with the earlier philosophers, because he wishes to supplement their philosophy with something he finds omitted, or to emphasize some part of their philosophy especially relevant to his own community. If nothing else, Ibn Bājjah reveals through the idea of the solitary the need for the philosopher to accommodate himself to the predominant way of life in the city, so the city and the solitary can cooperate on achieving what is good for both.

As one probes deeper into this treatise, one comes to appreciate over time that the ongoing disagreement among scholars about how to categorize the *Governance* is in fact a measure of its success: to present a teaching that speaks to the common concerns of individuals regarding what is the best life. That the treatise has captured the attention of scholars in a wide range of academic disciplines is precisely on account of its treatment of perennial questions that matter greatly to individuals as human beings and as citizens. Inasmuch as it is a teaching about the private life of the solitary, the text is also a much broader discussion of the relationship between the individual and the city. The ability to discuss this relationship so as to raise concern for the welfare of both without taking either one any less seriously is no mean achievement of the discussion in Ibn Bājjah's treatise.

INTERPRETIVE METHOD

This dissertation aims first and foremost to provide a comprehensive reading of Ibn Bājjah's important treatise as a work in political science. To my mind, the purpose of his discussion of solitary governance is essentially political, namely, to bring about correct governance in the imperfect cities in accord with true opinion. Simply put, in the possibility of the solitary's conjunction with the divine inheres the possibility of the perfect virtuous city.

There are two reasons that a comprehensive examination of the treatise is needed. First, to the best of my knowledge, no study of its contribution to the history of political philosophy has been attempted, although Ibn Bājjah has been credited with helping to revive ancient Greek philosophy in the Western world, especially in Spain, and is counted among only a handful of philosophers in Arab-Islamic history who commented on Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, the *Governance* presumes first-hand knowledge of many works by Plato and Aristotle. Thus, the treatment of political questions in the treatise that are familiar to readers of Plato and Aristotle is key to understanding Ibn Bājjah's reputation as a preserver of ancient Greek philosophy. Second, the interest generated by Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary, among such iconic figures as Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd, Maimonides, and Ibn Khaldūn, compels one to undertake a close reading of the treatise to see why these philosophic masters regarded this teaching as ground-breaking for philosophy.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For example, Ibn Rushd says that the teaching on solitary governance is original to Ibn Bājjah. See *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni*, edited and translated by Kalman P. Bland (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, 1982), 147 (English translation, 109). Cited by Harvey, 210 n. 22 and 228 n. 64.

Another objective is that of establishing the political foundations of the treatise by means of a close reading of Ibn Bājja's dense, seemingly disorganized, and most elliptical prose. This close reading aims to establish the text's political teaching by careful interpretation of it that remains as faithful to the original Arabic text as possible. To this end, each chapter consists of a thorough discussion of one or more sections of Part I, the overtly political part that runs from pages 37 to 44 in Fakhry's Arabic edition. In the course of five chapters, the dissertation covers nearly every line of Part I. As such, the chapters provide a reading of Parts II and III from the perspective of the political questions raised in the first part. In particular, the pivotal discourse on spiritual forms in Part III is treated as an elaboration on the first part of the treatise, insofar as it lays out the "very best existence" for the solitary human being, the point at which the discussion of governance in Part I breaks off.

The two-step close-reading approach used in the following study begins by taking what is said by the author literally at first, in order to clarify what is being argued. That this study takes the *Governance* literally is evidenced by quoting extensively from the treatise to establish the proximity of what is claimed in the dissertation to what exists in the original. It also outlines the political teaching in Part I over the course of five chapters, following as close to the original order that ideas are presented as possible, knowing that the reader has something to learn not only from the substance of the discussion but from its formal aspects as well.

The second step is to explore the limitations of the literal reading, that is, to point out where the text does not make sense, where it contradicts itself, where the explanation is only partial, or where it is allusive or deliberately ambiguous, in order to justify

probing for hidden meaning not present on the surface. As noted above, Ibn Bājjah's writing is opaque, so there is much work to be done at the second level of interpretation, in order to piece together an understanding of the text as a whole. Almost no one would disagree that Ibn Bājjah has done much to make his text inaccessible to all but the most assiduous reader. Yet it goes without saying that any interpretation of the text should seek to understand it on its own terms, however difficult that may be, rather than introducing ideas extraneous to the text under the presumption that it must be amended in order to be fully coherent.

In sum, it is hoped that transparency in the interpretive methods used in this study of the *Governance* will allow the first-time reader to get closer to the text than has been possible before, by rendering it more accessible than it first appears otherwise. At the same time, this study seeks to arm the critical reader, especially one following along in the original Arabic, with ample citations from the *Governance*, in order to facilitate comparison of the claims made here so as to enable one in the process of reading this study to decide for oneself what the teaching of the treatise is.

COMMENT ON IBN BĀJJAH'S WRITING STYLE

As already mentioned, Ibn Bājjah's prose in Arabic is challenging. The temptation to skip over parts of the treatise to glean what one can from the segments that interest one most is all too present. To be sure, the treatise barely makes sense the first time one reads it through, although it must be said that increasing clarity is rewarded by multiple readings. In particular, one must overcome the "exceedingly unworldly" quality evoked by the discussions on governance, the perfect city, the weeds, the solitary, human actions, and

spiritual forms, if one is to appreciate its political teaching.⁵⁷ Add to this unworldly aspect Ibn Bājjah’s parsimonious writing style that requires one to treat every word as precisely chosen and every line as fraught with meaning. That his explanations are few and far between means that the reader must keep a vigilant lookout for hints scattered throughout the treatise that illuminate ideas presented elsewhere, as well as clues from the author on how to make sense of the treatise as a whole. Ibn Bājjah assures us early on in the treatise that what he has written is not superfluous, ignorant, or evil. This means he intends for the discussion to be coherent and for readers to find it useful.

What’s more, as Ibn Bājjah seeks to articulate the concept of governance in his text, he also tries to convey the limitations on human knowledge to do so precisely. The writing in the treatise reflects this short-coming in various ways. As it has come down to us, the text seems to hang together loosely. Philosophers as renowned as Ibn Tufayl⁵⁸ and Ibn Rushd⁵⁹ lament the difficult exposition of the treatise and even considered it to be incomplete. In addition, periodic digressions remind us that governance is hardly a simple and straight-forward subject to circumscribe. In short, there are many hurdles along the way to understanding a subject as significant as governance and Ibn Bājjah’s elusive text at first seems to offer little assistance. One might see it as fruitless in any other circumstance to labor through a discussion on ordering presented so crudely. Yet the text

⁵⁷ See “Introduction,” *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, 4.

⁵⁸ See Gauthier (1936), 12-13 (English translation, *MPP* 139): “The greatest part of his extant writings are in an imperfect state and incomplete, such as *On the Soul* and the *Governance of the Solitary*, as well as his books on logic and physics. As for his finished works, they include only concise books and hastily written treatises. He himself declared this when he mentioned that the idea he meant to demonstrate in his treatise *On Conjunction* cannot be clearly understood without hard struggle and great effort, that the order of his explanations, in some places, is not the best, and that he was inclined to change them, had time permitted him to do so.”

⁵⁹ In *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect*, Ibn Rushd says that Ibn Bājjah’s intention in the *Governance* is “difficult to understand” (147). Cited by Harvey, 210 n. 22.

is not without design. It is as if Ibn Bājīah has taken Aristotle to heart, who admonishes us, in the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to lower our expectations for precision when investigating political matters:

So one ought to be content...to point out the truth roughly and in outline, and when speaking about things that are so for the most part, and reasoning from such things of that sort, to reach conclusions that are also of that sort. And it is necessary also to take each of the things that are said in the same way, for it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with admits. (1094b18-27)⁶⁰

Ibn Bājīah, like Aristotle, presumes that the right-minded person will connect the dots so long as he finds a general pattern of truth in what is presented. While difficult at times to read and interpret, the treatise is not impenetrable. Accordingly, one's first impression of it should not serve as the final judgment of its worth. Though many times it comes up short by way of explanation and detail, we can show that the treatise stays on message for the most part and admits of adequate precision in its discussion of governance.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The dissertation consists of five chapters, a conclusion, and a select bibliography. Roughly speaking, there are three main ideas that I attempt to address in the dissertation, based on the main topics discussed in Ibn Bājīah's treatise. In Chapters 1 and 2, I investigate what he says governance is and the hierarchy he establishes among the different sorts of governance. In Chapters 3 and 4, I look at what the perfect virtuous city is and, in light of it, what constitutes the imperfect city. Finally, in Chapter 5, I analyze the life of the solitary, again in light of what we learn about the perfect virtuous city. A

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Joe Sachs (Newburport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002).

more detailed description of the contents of each chapter is given below.

The chapter titles and the segments of the treatise covered in each is as follows:

Chapter 1: On Governance
(Part I, sections 1-3)

Chapter 2: Governance of the Household
(Part I, section 4)

Chapter 3: Ibn Bājjah’s Virtuous City
(Part I, section 5, and Part II)

Chapter 4: The Decline of the Virtuous City
(Part I, sections 6 and 7, Part II, and Part III)

Chapter 5: On Solitary Governance
(Part I, sections 6-8, and Part III)

Chapter 1, “On Governance,” begins by answering the question, what justifies translating *tadbīr* as “governance”? As Ibn Bājjah states explicitly in section two of Part I, the idea of *tadbīr* applies generally to all the human arts summarized in political science, and when it is spoken of particularly, it applies to the governance of cities (38.5-6). The chapter goes on to differentiate between human and divine governance and to establish that the qualities of correctness and error “adhere to [governance] necessarily” (39.5). The chapter covers sections one through three of Part I in depth.

Chapter 2, “Governance of the Household,” is a reading of Ibn Bājjah’s teaching on household governance in the fourth section of Part I. This brief discussion treats only what is essential to appreciate the political nature of household governance, that is, its relation to the governance of the city. Otherwise, Ibn Bājjah’s household is featureless—nothing is said about family life or other types of human relations one would normally find in a discussion on the household. Ibn Bājjah does not abolish family life, as Socrates

does in Book Five of the *Republic*, but nor does he concede that it contributes anything essential to the city's governance, as Aristotle does in Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The chapter ends by indicating that the discussion of human governance is a part of the discussions of both the governance of the city and the human being.

Chapter 3, "Ibn Bājjah's Virtuous City," is a curious discussion of the virtuous city that begins from the perspective of what cannot exist in it. Even more curious is what these things are—the art of medicine and the art of judging. These arts are treated as preventing the perfection of the city, reminiscent of Socrates' discussion of these same arts in Book Three of the *Republic*. Ultimately, we learn that what "the perfect virtuous city" must have are true opinion and virtuous action (41.17-18). The chapter covers the fifth section of Part I and looks into the discussion of human actions in Part II.

Chapter 4, "The Decline of the Virtuous City," deflates whatever optimism is shown for the perfection of the city in section five by introducing the idea of false opinion. This chapter covers the first few lines of section six and section seven, where the issue of falsehood arises, as well as what is said later about falsehood in Part III. The chapter also completes the discussion of Part II by elaborating on human versus bestial action with respect to the question of evil.

Chapter 5, "On Solitary Governance," explains Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary's way of life in the imperfect cities. In the imperfect cities, the political role of the philosopher is not to govern actively, but to pursue the learning that is needed for the true governance of both himself and the city. This chapter covers sections six through eight of Part I and the discussion in Part III of spiritual forms as they bear on the life of the solitary.

CHAPTER 1

ON GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION

Given the importance Ibn Bājjah attaches to the idea of *tadbīr* in his treatise, it is surprising how little attention it has received to date from scholars who have written on the *Governance of the Solitary*. While he is far better known for his teaching on the solitary, the highest human type in the imperfect cities, it is his teaching on *tadbīr* that truly frames the discussion in his treatise and connects its various parts together. While some may find his attention to *tadbīr* unusual, there is precedence in medieval philosophy for its application to political matters as it is used here.¹

To flesh out Ibn Bājjah's understanding of governance as carefully as possible, this chapter will examine the instances in which the word *tadbīr* appears in the treatise. There is no need to go outside the text to explicate his understanding of the term *tadbīr* or its applications, for these two things are adequately described in Part I. While the word *tadbīr* can be applied to various things, Ibn Bājjah intends for one case in which it is used, namely, with respect to human actions, to inform its meaning in all other cases. It is

¹ For instance, *tadbīr* is used by Alfarabi in contexts similar to ones in this treatise. See especially Alfarabi's extended discussion of *tadbīr* in the *Book of Religion* that is most relevant to the discussion in this chapter (61.18-66.13 in the Arabic edition by Mushin Mahdi). Also see references to *tadbīr* in the *Selected Aphorism* (pp. 39.13, 40.9 and 12, 41.3, 42.13, 47.11, 76.3-8 and 99.6) and *Political Regime* (p. 84.6 and 12) in the Arabic editions by Fauzi Najjar.

on account of his intention to associate *tadbīr* almost exclusively with the human being, and hence to dissociate it from divine being, that Ibn Bājjah’s idea of *tadbīr* may be considered controversial. Similarly, it is with respect to this intention that the translation of *tadbīr* as “governance” can ultimately be defended, i.e., that the goal to which all human activity should be directed is not simply to secure happiness for oneself, but to bring about the best governed city.

WHY TRANSLATE *TADBĪR* AS “GOVERNANCE”

It may be said that *tadbīr* is no more an exclusively political term in Arabic than governance is in English. Ibn Bājjah readily acknowledges that it can be understood in Arabic as having “many senses” (37.1) that are “equivocal” or “ambiguous” (38.14-15). This is because *tadbīr* can be applied in an array of cases—inanimate, animal, human, or divine in origin, thus making it a difficult concept to define. Yet the discussion in Part I quickly narrows things down to a particular sense of *tadbīr* unmistakably political in nature. Ibn Bājjah opts to pursue an understanding motivated by the utility of *tadbīr* for his primary investigation in Part I—the way opinions and actions of human beings are ordered with respect to the virtuous city. Simply put, his efforts in Part I are focused on investigating the highest form of *tadbīr* that exists in the human world.

If we are truly to learn anything from Ibn Bājjah about what *tadbīr* is, then we must trace the usages of it in Part I carefully. Since Ibn Bājjah insists on using the same word to indicate that *tadbīr* is said of many things, the same English word must translate a number of ideas in the treatise associated with *tadbīr*. These ideas are, in their order of appearance: cities (*tadbīr al-mudun* [38.6]); the household (*tadbīr al-manzil* [38.8]); war

(*tadbīr al-ḥarb* [38.9]); the divinity of the world (*tadbīr al-ilāh al-'ālam* [38.10]); the human being (*tadbīr al-insān* [40.9]); the individual (*tadbīr al-mufrad* [43.11]); and this solitary human being (*tadbīr hādhā al-insān al-mutawaḥḥid* [43.15]). To be sure, there is considerable difficulty in finding one word in English that fits every one of these uses of *tadbīr* in the treatise. Suitable choices usually translate one sense of *tadbīr* into English well, but prove less fitting for other instances. So while we aim to isolate the thing that Ibn Bājjah sees in common in cities, the divine, the household, and the solitary, as far as *tadbīr* is concerned, the English word chosen inevitably reveals a preference for one of its applications. For the translator, the objective is to decide which use among these the author himself considers most important.

In order to explain how one gets from *tadbīr* in Arabic to “governance” in English via Part I of the treatise, it may help to explain at the same time why other English words that come to mind are less than adequate for rendering *tadbīr*. The following list displays the variety of English terms that scholars have chosen to render *tadbīr* in the treatise’s title, *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid*:

- (i) *Régime of the Solitary* (Munk, Ziyadah)
- (ii) *Conduct of the Solitary* (Fakhry)
- (iii) *Regimen* (Spanish, *Régimen*) *of the Solitary* (Asin Palacios, Lomba Fuentes, Nasr)
- (iv) *Rule of the Solitary* (Dunlop)
- (v) *Governance of the Solitary* (Berman, Harvey, Kochin).

There are essentially two reasons for choosing “governance” from among the possible choices listed here, based on what is said in the context of the treatise.

As for the first reason, we are told at the beginning of the treatise that all forms of

tadbīr are related to “*tartīb*” (ordering [37.2]). Both *tadbīr* and *tartīb* in Arabic are verbal nouns that imply an ongoing rather than a completed action.² Ibn Bājjah specifically says that *tadbīr* connotes a series of actions aimed at an intended goal, not some action that is completed at once and for its own sake (37.2-3). So whatever word is used in English, it must convey the sense of ordering a series of actions toward a goal that points beyond the completion of any one of those actions. And so, while the political overtones are helpful, we rule out “regime” as a translation for *tadbīr*, since it does not convey the sense of ongoing activity that the verbal noun *tadbīr* or *tartīb* presupposes.

A second reason influencing the decision of how to translate *tadbīr* is what Ibn Bājjah says is its goal or goals with respect to human life. We are led to believe at first that the most important concerns for human beings related to *tadbīr* are the city and the household:

The most pre-eminent of the matters said to be *tadbīr* is *tadbīr* of cities and *tadbīr* of the household. Still, *tadbīr* is applied less to the latter, to the point that *tadbīr* of the household is said metaphorically and in a restricted sense. (38.7-9)

Later, we discover that *tadbīr* is a means not to the goal of perfecting the city or the household, but perfecting the city or attaining “the natural end of the human being”:

Moreover, the perfection of the household is not among matters sought after for their own sake. What is wanted from it is perfecting the city or the natural end of the human being. (40.7-9)

² See W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd edition (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1996), 110. The word *tadbīr* is known grammatically as a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) in Arabic. It is derived from a simple transitive verb (root: d-b-r) meaning “to organize or arrange someone or something.” The form of this verb *tadbīr* is based on implies making or causing someone to do the action of organizing. Often this derived form takes on the added sense of doing something repeatedly or on a large scale. Thus the verbal noun acts much like a gerund (a noun ending in *-ing* in English) and indicates doing something continuously.

This is one of the earliest indications in the treatise that Ibn Bājjah intends to inquire into the city and the individual as concomitant goals of the human being, i.e., as “matters sought after for their own sake,” to which the perfection of the household is a means.

Thus, in finding the right word to translate *tadbīr*, we must decide what relationship the *tadbīr* of the city has to that of the individual, since no single word conveys ordering in both cases perfectly. That is to say, one must decide either to privilege the perfect city as the primary goal in human life and read *tadbīr* as “rule” or “governance,” or find the goal of the solitary’s perfection superior to the goal of the city with respect to *tadbīr*, and thus translate it as “conduct” or “regimen.”

In the perfect city, the goal of the human being and that of the city are the same, namely, the attainment of happiness by means of living virtuously. It is the existence of the imperfect cities that necessitates discussion of the life of the solitary as pursuing a goal other than that of the city. The goals of human beings in the imperfect cities, Ibn Bājjah tells us in Part III, are only means in the perfect city:

If a human being is part of a city, then the goal of all of his actions is the city. That is so if he is in the virtuous city only. As for the remaining four cities and what is composed of them, their inhabitants are estranged (*tuqṣīhi*) from them by another goal, whose pleasure they prefer. Therefore, the preparatory things in the virtuous city are goals in the others. (62.8-11)

Again, only in the virtuous city do human beings act in a way that their goal and the city’s goal are one. That is, any goal that seeks to benefit only one human being is inferior to the goal that benefits humans collectively in the city. Ibn Bājjah is emphatic here that no exception is made for the goal of the solitary. The solitary’s end is pursued for the sake of the political goal of the virtuous city.

The end that the governance of the solitary aims at, according to Ibn Bājjah, is conjunction of the human intellect with the divine, in consequence of which one satisfies the desire to know things as they really are:

If he achieved the ultimate goal, and that because he intellects the simple substantial intellects..., then he would be on account of that one of those intellects (*'uqūl*) and it would be true about him that he is divine only. The mortal sensible characteristics and the refined spiritual characteristics would be removed from him. The description of simply divine befits him. (79.18-80.2)

Whereas Ibn Bājjah refers to the end of the human being as “ultimate happiness” (*al-sa'ādah al-quṣwā* [55.17]) and “the ultimate goal” (*al-ghāyah al-quṣwā* [79.18]), he does not say that the goal of conjunction is sufficient to bring about perfect or complete happiness, i.e., that the solitary is the perfect way of life: “If it were possible for those who are happy to exist in these [imperfect] cities, they would have only the happiness of the isolated individual” (43.9-10). The achievement of the goal of conjunction with the divinity is not sufficient for the complete happiness of even the most extraordinary human being. This is because the goal that remains for the solitary to achieve to be completely happy, the virtuous city, is not a goal that the solitary can achieve alone:

All of these [characteristics] might come to be for the solitary without the perfect city. By means of the first two ranks [corporeal and particular spiritual] he cannot be a part of this [perfect] city nor its goal nor its agent nor its preserver. By means of the third [rank], he might not be part of this city, but rather its ultimate goal. For he cannot be its preserver nor its agent while he is a solitary. (80.3-6)

In so saying, Ibn Bājjah presents the political goal as even more remote than conjunction, insofar as it is a goal for the sake of which many human beings must cooperate for it to be realized. If Ibn Bājjah intended the goal of perfecting the individual to be prior to the

goal of the city, then there would be no reason to raise the issue of isolation. That isolation presents a problem is because the human being does not exist by nature for the sake of his own perfection, but rather whose cooperation is needed for the sake of bringing about the highest goal of the human being, the perfect virtuous city.

To translate *tadbīr* looking to the order that exists between the city and the individual, we find that perfecting the city is prior to that of the individual by nature. The goal of the solitary is among the “preparatory things” in the virtuous city; it does not qualify as the highest goal of all the actions of the human being. The goal of all the actions of the human being ought to be the virtuous city (62.8-9). To speak of *tadbīr* as “conduct” or “regimen” stresses, I believe, the ordering of only an individual life that washes away any larger political significance such ordering has for the city. Among the best choices of English words to convey the meaning of *tadbīr* with respect to ordering matters in political life in general and the city in particular, we usually think of “ruling” or “governing.” We opt for “governance” as it leaves no doubt about the intimate relationship intended in the treatise between *tadbīr* and the city and, by implication, the political orientation intended for the discussion of the solitary. It also preserves the possibility of guiding the city from the sidelines, rather than ruling it directly. In English, “governance” is even more commonly used with respect to political actions, so that we elicit the same confusion Ibn Bājjah points to in personifying the divine being as “the governor of the world” (*mudabbir al-‘ālam*) (37.5) or in speaking of “the divine’s governance of the world” (*tadbīr al-ilāh al-‘ālam*) that we encounter below, if governance is primarily meant to be a human concern.

TADBĪR AS AN UTTERANCE

The opening lines of the *Governance* offer the most general definition of *tadbīr* in the treatise without reference to any of its many senses or applications. The first section of Part I ends with a refinement of this definition as Ibn Bājjah unravels the sources of popular confusion regarding the proper usage of the word. The purpose of the subsequent discussion in sections two and three of Part I is to provide further clarity about the meaning and the proper applications of *tadbīr*.

Let us concentrate on the discussion of *tadbīr* in the first section of Part I. The treatise opens abruptly, declaring that *tadbīr* is an “utterance...spoken of in many senses” which “[t]he grammarians have enumerated” (37.1). Ibn Bājjah lures the reader in with this opening statement and quickly proceeds to complicate matters. In the end, he leaves us wondering whether we have learned anything new or conclusive about our subject. So let us carefully take apart the introduction to understand what he means by utterance, why he consults the Arab grammarians first and foremost, and what the “many senses” of *tadbīr* might be.

A seemingly natural place to begin investigating a term is to consult grammarians about its meaning. Referring to *tadbīr* as an “utterance” (*lafz*),³ Ibn Bājjah launches the investigation of governance as a grammatical inquiry in a manner imitative of the Arab grammarians he is referring to. Making it out to be an utterance, i.e., something present in everyday language emphasizes, however, the familiar or non-expert understanding of *tadbīr*. Indeed, identifying it as an “utterance” is strange, for it begs the question: why is it not referred to as a “word” (*kalimah*) or a “noun” (*ism*) here, if this is supposed to be a

³ Cf. Alfarabi’s discussion of the origin of a nation’s utterances in *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-Hurūf*). Part II, chapter XX, in *Alfarabi: Political Writings*, translated by Charles Butterworth (forthcoming, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

grammatical inquiry? In all likelihood, Ibn Bājjah wishes to emphasize that he is investigating the idea of *tadbīr* as it exists in day-to-day speech and *not* as it is known by the grammarians. He seeks to clarify the idea of *tadbīr* not as it has taken shape in his own mind or the minds of grammarians, but uses as the starting point of his inquiry the way *tadbīr* is understood by ordinary speakers of the language and how this ordinary speech deviates from the correct meaning of *tadbīr* that he intends. Ibn Bājjah seeks to define what *tadbīr* means according to its relation to the human being broadly understood—the one being alone who can be said to “utter” what is *tadbīr*. The label “utterance” thus marks *tadbīr* as having a place in speech that points beyond its grammatical significance to its nature as an idea ripe for philosophical investigation.

One should point out that Ibn Bājjah’s discussion about a matter of common speech does not speak in a common way. While he categorizes *tadbīr* as a common “utterance,” this discussion does not make itself accessible to the general public. Ibn Bājjah does not follow the example of Plato, whose inquiries into common opinion are lively and conversational using words and constructions that draw the ordinary reader in. For instance, Book I of Plato’s *Republic* is anchored in an understanding of justice dramatized by the quarrelsome Thrasymachus, which we learn from Glaucon in Book II is the same opinion shared by the many (358a-d).⁴ That Ibn Bājjah immediately refers to the learned opinion of Arab grammarians suggests that his teaching about governance is not directed to the many, but to those who would think to consult the opinion of grammarians first on such matters. It is the learned Arabic reader that Ibn Bājjah commands to sit up and pay attention.

⁴ All material cited from Plato’s *Republic* in the dissertation is taken from *The Republic of Plato*, translated with an interpretive essay by Allan Bloom, 2nd edition (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

IBN BĀJJAH CONTRA THE GRAMMARIANS

Following the opening line of the treatise that identifies *tadbīr* as an utterance, Ibn Bājjah indicates that public misunderstanding about the idea of *tadbīr* is symptomatic of the grammarians' teachings on *tadbīr*, that their discussions of *tadbīr* are the source of public error. From the mouths of the grammarians emerges what is said about *tadbīr* “[i]n general”:

In general, it usually signifies ordering actions towards an intended goal. Therefore, they do not apply it to one who does a single action by which a particular goal is intended. For one who believes that the action is single does not apply “governance” to it, whereas one who believes it is multiple and takes it insofar as it has an ordering calls that ordering “governance.” Therefore, they apply “governor of the world” to the divinity. (37.2-5)

It is the grammarians' application of *tadbīr* to the divinity that Ibn Bājjah especially takes issue with in the first three sections of Part I. We will take this issue up shortly.

Whereas the grammarians are certainly regarded as having an authoritative opinion on the meaning of words in Arabic, Ibn Bājjah astutely avoids questioning their authority openly. Nonetheless, he does not intend for them to have the final say on a matter of speech he finds critical, though no one knows why just yet. While among grammarians *tadbīr* is described as having many senses, the meaning of it in his investigation is whittled down to a particular context. Ibn Bājjah presents *tadbīr* in a way that reflects the primary orientation of his thinking toward matters concerning human beings. While this is not controversial in itself, his discussion also aims to set a standard for authenticating *all* that others have said about *tadbīr*, in particular, to discredit its application to the divinity. He seeks to establish the truest meaning of *tadbīr* relative to human beings in order to establish a definitive order among its many senses.

In other words, we are not interested in studying *tadbīr* as the grammarians do, as a word with many senses that can be enumerated; that fact alone does not warrant nor demand critical attention. Rather, the purpose of this inquiry is to arrive at *the* sense that renders it a human concern and to rank all other senses accordingly. Ibn Bājjah begins with, but ultimately rejects, the learned opinion of the grammarians, who have documented its many meanings, but have not asked whether these meanings are true and why they matter with respect to human life. Since *tadbīr* has not been understood all that well by these authorities of the language, who hold the divine sense of *tadbīr* to be most important, their opinions concerning *tadbīr* must be discredited to make room for a new understanding that the many ought to consider authoritative instead.

Consequently, it is not wearisome for Ibn Bājjah to examine *tadbīr* anew. He shortcuts the opinion of the many and consults the opinion of the grammarians in order to elevate more quickly the sense of *tadbīr* that ought to matter most to us as human beings. In the end, he seeks to establish the ordering of all human forms of *tadbīr* to indicate how we should pursue *tadbīr* for the sake of human happiness.

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

To understand what the definition of governance should be and how to explain its “many senses,” let us return to the opening statement. Ibn Bājjah says that governance “usually signifies ordering actions towards an intended goal” and is not applied to “one who does a single action by which a particular goal is intended” (37.2-3). As mentioned above, the notion of governance and the inseparable idea of ordering (*tartīb*) combine to impart the sense of an unique, ongoing activity. Consequently, it makes no sense to call

an activity “governance” whose goal has already been realized. It is also presumptive to equate the word with an activity that humans can only suppose has something in common with the way human beings order things. To speak truly about governance, what one says has to accord with an ordering of actions it is possible for humans to know about.

As abruptly as it opened, the introductory discussion ends with this unexpected statement, the first to mention one of the many senses of governance: “Therefore, they apply ‘governor of the world’ [*mudabbir al-‘ālam*] to the divinity [*al-ilāh*]” (37.5). Ibn Bājjah points to the divine sense of governance first and foremost, rather than one related to human things, to indicate why both the grammarians and the many take governance seriously. As we will discover, Ibn Bājjah insists that the attribution of “governor of the world” to the divinity can only be metaphorical, meaning that governance cannot be attributed to the divinity as it is attributed to human beings. The relationship of a human governor to the city is simply not the same as the divinity to the world.

GOVERNANCE IN POTENTIALITY

Following this brief introduction, which puts forth a working definition of governance according to what is said about it in general, Ibn Bājjah rapidly moves on to categorize matters with respect to governance in an effort to suggest why referring to the divinity as “governor of the world” is problematic. To explore the idea of “the governor of the world,” he divides governance into potential versus actual, a division that appears in Book IX of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1045b-1052a). He later divides governance into the categories of prior versus subsequent, a division that is discussed in Book XII of Aristotle’s *Categories* (14a-14b). While he immediately makes much of the first division,

he says nothing explicit about the latter until the very end of section one.

Ibn Bājjah indicates that, for the many, the “utterance ‘governance’ more often and more usually signifies what is potential” (37.6). Potential governance refers to a form of governance that has not been “generated” (*mutakawwin* [37.11]). Contrary to the attribution of governor to the divinity, Ibn Bājjah counters that “if the ordering is about matters in potentiality, that only has to do with what pertains to thought; for this is particularly characteristic of thinking and can exist only in it” (37.7-8). Consequently, such an ordering “can exist for none but the human being” (37.8-9). That is, what can be said about governance in potentiality amounts to what can be fathomed by human thought, i.e., what can be known about governance relying only on unassisted human reason. Ibn Bājjah argues that the many cannot be right in applying governor to the divinity, at least with respect to matters in potentiality, since humans cannot reasonably know if, let alone what, the divinity thinks.

Moreover, Ibn Bājjah insists, governance in its many senses must admit to being ordered in terms of “prior and subsequent” (37.9-10). That governance “more often and more usually” applies to human governance means that divine governance is not really its primary sense among the many. For this reason, Ibn Bājjah claims, in contradiction to the opinion of the grammarians, who would apply “governor of the world to the divinity,” that “what is said to be ‘governor’ (*mudabbir*) is only in comparison to him [the human being]” (37.9). With respect to matters in potentiality, Ibn Bājjah means for humans to assume responsibility for thinking through the problem of governance for themselves, rather than speculating about what the divinity has in store for us as governor of the world.

To summarize the opening of the treatise, the first sense of *tadbīr* Ibn Bājjah takes up is that of the divinity as governor of the world. He reasons that the divinity can qualify as governor only in comparison to the thinking human being, for matters in potentiality are those that exist solely in the human mind. The term “governor” refers only metaphorically to the divinity, or any other being to whom the name is applied, whose thoughts are not directly revealed to humans. With regard to governance in actuality, the only other way that humans can speak about matters related to governance, and what Ibn Bājjah says about the divinity in this respect, things become more complicated and will be discussed below.

Before moving on to discuss what is actual with respect to governance and whether humans share anything in common with the divinity as far as ordering matters in actuality is concerned, we should take a moment to understand more fully the distinction between what is potential and what is actual. This distinction is not clarified in the treatise. However, Ibn Bājjah’s teaching does seem to borrow heavily from Aristotle’s teleological view of potentiality and actuality in Book IX of the *Metaphysics*. There are two statements in Aristotle’s work that explain the distinction best, one concerning actuality (*energeia*) versus what exists potentially (*dunamei* [1048a31-1048b3]), and another concerning what comes to exist actually (*entelecheia*) as a result of human thought and will (1049a5-1049a18). We learn from Aristotle that things existing potentially in thought have yet to achieve their natural end. Things with potential have the latent possibility, power, or capacity to change or be changed into what is the full existence of these things, but this state has not been realized. On the other hand, that which is actual is represented by two different words in Greek, *energeia* and *entelecheia*, the former sometimes translated as

“being-at-work” and the latter as “being-at-an-end.” Together the Greek terms imply that the being that is actual has reached its completion or perfection and is actively at work maintaining itself in its perfection. Accordingly, one modern translator of Aristotle renders the word “*entelecheia*” as “being-at-work-staying-itself.”⁵ Thus, potential matters exist in a perpetual state of becoming something else, while actual beings exist in a state of working to maintain what they truly are according to their nature.

GOVERNANCE IN ACTUALITY

While it “more often and more usually” signifies what is potential, we discover that governance has something important to do with what is actual. Section two opens with the provocative line, “‘Governance’ may be said with respect to bringing this ordering into being insofar as it is generated” (37.11). The phrase “insofar as it is generated” immediately complicates the study of governance as it applies to matters in actuality, since it is strange to speak of a point in time at which governance is generated. Yet it is necessary to begin this way if we are to speak of governance in actuality.

Putting aside this awkward beginning, Ibn Bājjah indicates that governance in actuality is an order present in the natural universe. Whereas matters in potentiality with respect to governance were said to concern human thought, we will learn that generated matters concerning governance in actuality “more often” and “more apparently” relate to human actions (37.12). The question that concerns us now is whether the principle of generating with respect to governance should be said of all beings capable of ordering

⁵ Sachs, *Physics*, 15: “In the central books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle captures the heart of the meaning of being in a cluster of words and phrases that are the most powerful expressions of his thinking. The usual translation of them not only fall flat but miss the central point: that the thinghood (*ousia*) of a thing is what it keeps on being in order to be at all (*to ti ēn einai*), and must be a being-at-work (*energeia*) so that it may achieve and sustain its being-at-work-staying-itself (*entelecheia*).”

actions in actuality, or only living beings also capable of reason, which rules out all creatures except humans. In other words, are human beings ranked prior to all other beings with respect to governance in actuality as they are with respect to matters in potentiality?

Ibn Bājjah begins by inquiring into the governance generated by living creatures with respect to matters in actuality. To short-cut the discussion, he quickly separates human beings from all other animals. He refers to the latter as “*ghair al-nāṭiq*,” which literally means “non-speaking,” but is more often translated as “non-rational,” insofar as speech is linked with logic (37.12). Ibn Bājjah’s answer to the question that we raise here—whether humans and animals can be said to generate order in the same manner—is argued on the basis of what concerns living creatures “more often” and “more apparently.” Just as with matters in potentiality, then, Ibn Bājjah relies on the sense of governance given priority in common speech in order to establish the opinion that governance in actuality is primarily concerned with humans. We can certainly see that the actions of other animals have order similar to our own. So it makes sense to compare humans and animals on the basis of their actions. Still, “[w]ith respect to human actions, [governance] is [said] more often and more apparently while with respect to the actions of non-rational animals it is [said] less” (37.12). Just as we observe that the actions of other animals have order similar to our own, it should be just as apparent that the ordering generated by human beings is unique and distinct from that of other animals, because of the faculty of reason that humans rely on to generate governance.

Ibn Bājjah impresses upon the reader that there is something paramount about the ordering produced by way of human actions that makes it more worthy of the name “governance” than how animals go about things. He weighs the frequency in speech with

which human actions are said to be governance, and the fact that governing is an action more often observed in humans, to suggest that governance distinguishes humans from other animals in the same way that speech does.⁶ Thus the name “governance” is equivocal when applied to anything non-human, as happens in the case above with the divinity: governance may be said of both humans and animals, yet human actions with respect to governance is the primary sense of governance of matters in actuality. Anyone with eyes to see what is apparently so may be counted on to reach the same conclusion. Overall, Ibn Bājjah believes in the natural superiority of human actions to those of irrational animals, an opinion developed at length in Part II of the treatise and treated later in Chapters 3 and 4.

To pause a moment to reflect on the argument in the treatise so far, we said that Ibn Bājjah is interested in determining the most important sense of governance that will determine its meaning and establish the relative importance of other senses. That is, all other senses will constitute governance only in comparison to this primary sense. The foundation on which Ibn Bājjah builds his case for how to rank the senses of governance is most interesting. He adheres closely to what the many already appear to know about governance, relying on what is said most often or what seems most obvious as the basis for his hierarchy. He engages common opinion in order to refine the understanding of the many, rather than dismissing it outright as uninformed. He insists that the superiority of human ordering among the many senses of governance is already reflected in the speech of the many, if one considers the frequency with which governance is said with respect to the human being. The point he is driving at is that the many are already persuaded that

⁶ Aristotle identifies speech in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as the unique “work” of the human being (1098a4).

governance is primarily a political concept that concerns the way humans generate order in the world, whether it is related to organizing matters in potentiality or in actuality, even though governance happens to be spoken about in many non-human, and especially divine, senses. It would seem that very little needs to be said to cause the many to concede this, other than to remind them of a few obvious points. The argument privileging a political reading of governance as its primary sense gains momentum in the discussion that follows.

GOVERNANCE IN GENERAL AND IN PARTICULAR

When governance is said with respect to human actions, Ibn Bājījah informs us that it may be spoken of in general and in particular. It seems that for every general class of thing, there are particulars into which it can be subdivided. For example, we may speak of all human actions in general, but in particular governance is “almost never said” about actions with respect to manual crafts, such as shoemaking or weaving (38.3-4).⁷ Rather, it is said “more often and more usually” with respect to arts that involve extensive thought and deliberation, such as “is said of ordering matters of war” (38.2-3) These faculties may likewise be spoken of in general and in particular; in general, insofar as we speak of “all the actions comprised by the arts called faculties” that “have been summarized in political science,” and in particular when speaking “with respect to the governance of cities” (38.5-6).

We note that this is the first indication that Ibn Bājījah intends his study of governance to be a part of political science (*al-‘ilm al-madanī*).⁸ Indeed, all matters

⁷ Shoemaking and weaving are also mentioned at 60.6.

⁸ See other mentions of political science at 57.2, 60.12, 75.3-4 and 6, 90.22 and 91.2.

concerning human faculties are a part of political science. One might ask, why does he introduce the subject of political science now? Apparently, the focus here on matters in actuality links governance to political science, which is to say that Ibn Bājjah conceives of political science, at least within the confines of this treatise, as something concerned with action more so than with thought. He indicates that governance, insofar as it is said of all human actions comprising arts generated by human faculties, is properly categorized as a topic in political science. We learn that political science is concerned with both human actions in general and governing cities in particular. Adding things up, based on what has just been said, the particular question in political science with respect to governance is how to order human beings in their lesser arts by means of the overarching art of governance that intends the common good of the city.

We have now been introduced to a basic concern of political science with respect to cities at a key juncture in the discussion. With the first mention of political science, there is a greater sense in the treatise that governance is no ordinary utterance in the Arabic language, but something that bears fundamentally on the life of every human being. This is corroborated by the discussion that follows.

Recall that Ibn Bājjah introduced a second category for sorting through the ambiguity surrounding the use of governance by the many, namely, prior versus subsequent. He returns to this division now to elaborate on the governance of cities. He states: “Some of what is said to be governance is prior as pertains to pre-eminence and perfection.” (38.6-7). Ibn Bājjah says that “the most pre-eminent of the matters said to be governance” is “governance of cities and governance of the household” (38.7-8). Since there cannot be two senses competing for the rank of “most pre-eminent,” he immediately

adds that “governance is applied less to the latter” and is said of it “metaphorically and in a restricted sense” (38.8-9). Household governance will undergo further scrutiny in the next chapter, as Ibn Bājjah explains its relationship to city governance in more detail in section four. As for what is said to be governance that is prior and pertains to perfection, we will have more to say about this in Chapter 3 on the perfect virtuous city.

As if to tie up all loose ends concerning what “is prior as pertains to pre-eminence and perfection,” Ibn Bājjah next makes the sweeping remark that “the governance of war and of all the rest are parts of these two kinds [i.e., governance of cities and governance of the household]” (38.9). He explicitly sets war aside as a subordinate sense of governance, while he is altogether silent about other competing senses of governance discussed above, namely, that of the divinity and animals. This suggests he has already set them aside as subordinate senses of governance in comparison to that of the city and the household. We thus draw the conclusion that there are exactly two senses of governance generated by humans he wishes to keep before us. And these are said to be prior as well as pre-eminent by the many, with city governance being the most pre-eminent without restriction and household governance being so only metaphorically.

THE DIVINITY’S GOVERNANCE OF THE WORLD

We are left with governance of the cities and governance of the household as the only remaining senses of governance that merit further examination. Or so we are led to believe. Ibn Bājjah unexpectedly interrupts his train of thought to return to the question raised earlier about applying “‘governor of the world’ [*mudabbir al-‘ālam*] to the divinity [*al-ilāh*]” (37.5). Here Ibn Bājjah introduces a slight variation on his earlier inquiry,

looking now into “[t]he divinity’s governance of the world” (*tadbīr al-ilāh al-‘ālam* [38.10]). What prompts him to raise the question of the divinity again here, but to alter it slightly? Recall that the issue of the divinity as governor, an attribution based only on supposition, is dismissed above with respect to matters in potentiality. The switch from *mudabbir al-ilāh* to *tadbīr al-ilāh* appears to coincide with the emphasis here on matters of governance in actuality said to be pre-eminent and perfect. It seems that Ibn Bājjah wishes to distance himself from referring to the divinity as governor, yet sees something sensible in speaking of the divinity’s governance of the world, as it does not personify the divinity. In other words, the world at large appears to be ordered and that order has to originate from somewhere. But there is no reason to think that the being who created that order is still managing things.

We are particularly concerned, then, with the extent to which it makes sense to speak of divine governance in the natural world. This time Ibn Bājjah, speaking in his own voice rather than expressing the opinion of the many, is determined to articulate the sense in which human and divine governance may be said to have anything in common:

The divinity’s governance of the world is governance only in another manner distantly linked to the meanings most closely similar to it [the divinity’s governance of the world]. This [the governance of cities⁹] is unqualified governance. It [the governance of cities] is the most pre-eminent because governance is said of it [the governance of cities] only because of the presumed likeness between it [the governance of cities] and the divinity’s, may He be exalted, bringing the world into existence. (38.10-12)

We begin to close in on the core of Ibn Bājjah’s disagreement with the understanding of the many concerning governance. To the many, the governance of cities is pre-eminent,

⁹ See 39.3: “As we have said, when governance is said without qualification, it signifies governance of cities.”

because it appears to be generated out of the order in the world set in motion by the divinity. Ibn Bājjah indicates that the pre-eminence of city governance is based strictly on supposition, that is, “only because of the presumed (*madhmūn*) likeness between it and the divinity’s...bringing the world into existence.” He holds this supposition to be inaccurate, i.e., he would not associate pre-eminence with city governance, since the intentions of the divinity concerning how things in the world ought to be governed are not known to human beings directly, but must be derived from how things appear to be ordered in the world. So the intentions of human beings with respect to governance cannot simply be derived from those of the divinity. In fact, the human governance of cities is at most “distantly linked” to the divinity’s governance of the world. Ibn Bājjah elaborates on this point in what follows.

Speaking more generally of the confusion in equating city and divine governance, which to him are hardly synonymous, Ibn Bājjah characterizes this as attempting to draw comparisons between things that are in truth incommensurable:

It is evident that this sort of equivocal nouns is of the sort most distant from synonyms, and it may be purely ambiguous. The multitude say it equivocally, while the philosophers say it in a purely ambiguous manner. Now they count it among the equivocal [nouns] only insofar as it is in a thing that is comparable to a[nother] thing; so we call it by the name of that thing. (38.12-16)

On the basis of a faulty analogy, the governance of cities is associated with the ordering of the world as a whole. To Ibn Bājjah, one cannot take for granted that all cities are governed in a manner that is true to the way the divinity intends for things to be ordered. While the philosophers are capable of seeing through this faulty analogy, the linking of these two senses of governance apparently means a great deal to the many, who are far

more likely to accept at face value that the two things *are* the same, insofar as they share the name “governance.” Thus, the many are disposed to revere the governors of cities as they would the divinity, instead of scrutinizing their actions as those of ordinary humans.

Ibn Bājjah insists that the name “governance” ought to be interpreted to mean something entirely different when applied to the divinity versus the human being, and herein lies the problem of the many, who speak of these senses of governance equivocally. In presuming that the governance of cities by humans is as pre-eminent as the divinity’s governance of the world, the many resolve an ambiguity that the philosophers seek to preserve. The ordinary speech of the many adopts a misleading, or equivocal, position on governance on account of claiming to know that which is based wholly on supposition. Those without sufficient time or interest to study governance are willing to make lofty claims about it, which in effect absolves those who actually govern of political accountability. The speech of philosophers, on the other hand, does not render true of humans what is true of the divinity. Rather, it maintains ambiguity about how the divinity’s governance of the world compares to that of the city, thereby reflecting the limits of human reason to know what the intentions of the divinity are concerning the governance of the world. This understanding puts the burden squarely on the shoulders of human beings to say what governance is and how to bring it about.

Ibn Bājjah argues above that all that pertains to the known world that is governed by humans does not automatically share in pre-eminence. He finds that the pre-eminence of governance is taken so far by the many that they seem to identify the divinity with governance itself, insofar as they consider the governance of the world to be something tantamount to being divine, that is, “masterful and precise.” He continues:

Therefore it is not correct for the multitude to use “governance” as a synonym for the divinity. For they say of the governance of the world that it is masterful and precise governance and what is akin to these utterances. Now these utterances imply the existence of correctness and of some other venerable guiding thing. For the multitude, correctness is like a genus for the precise and masterful act. An explanation of this belongs elsewhere. (38.16-39.2)¹⁰

Ibn Bājjah’s point here is not entirely clear, since he determines that the explanation “belongs elsewhere.” But it is clear that Ibn Bājjah does not accept the many applying “masterful” and “precise” to the governance of the world. At issue is what prior should mean with respect to governance. The many are inclined to see the governance of cities in the world as perfect *ipso facto*, because they are less concerned with speaking accurately about these matters and are disposed to think of their governors as agents of the divinity. Thus, they take correct governance for granted. Believing that the divinity’s governance of the world extends to all matters in actuality constitutes blind faith for Ibn Bājjah. Unlike the many, he presumes that humans who undertake the task of governing are not normally exceptional human beings. From here, one is led to question whether some additional, venerable guiding thing remains at work in the world, or whether ordinary humans are the sole source of ordering in it. As far as matters in actuality are concerned, then, Ibn Bājjah allows that what constitutes governance in the world is partly human and partly divine, but does not think these have to overlap. Whereas the divinity’s governance is prior with respect to pre-eminence and perfection, human governance only aspires to be such.

¹⁰ Cf. Alfarabi’s statement to the contrary in the *Book of Religion*: “[Political science] explains how revelation descends from Him level by level until it reaches the first ruler who thus governs the city or the nation and nations with what revelation from God, may He be exalted, brings, so that the first ruler’s governance also extends to every one of the divisions of the city in an orderly manner until it finally reaches the last divisions. It explains this in that God, may He be exalted, is also the governor of the virtuous city, just as He is the governor of the world, [65] and in that His, may He be exalted, governance of the world takes place in one way, whereas His governance of the virtuous city takes place in another way; there is, however, a relation between the two kinds of governing, and there is a relation between the parts of the world and the parts of the virtuous city or nation” (Butterworth, 112).

CORRECT AND ERRONEOUS GOVERNANCE

In his closing thoughts on the particular sense of governance with respect to cities, Ibn Bājja reasserts: “As we have said, when governance is said without qualification, it signifies governance of cities” (39.3). And now he adds that when it is said in a “restricted sense,” it is “divided into correctness and error” (39.4). This implies that all things associated with human governance admit of correct or erroneous governance. We will have more to say about this in the chapters to come, especially Chapter 5, which specifically deals with the question of the correct governance of the city.

In the meantime, we see that Ibn Bājja is still concerned with what is said by the many. While they suppose that correctness is a genus for precise and masterful governance, they also seem willing to deny that governance has anything to do with correctness, if we introduce its opposite, i.e., error: “It may be presumed that governance may be free of these two opposites” (39.4). But anyone engaging in a careful study of governance will admit “that these two opposites adhere to it necessarily” (39.5). He thinks anyone could be persuaded to adopt this opinion with just a little intellectual effort: “To ponder that is easy for anyone who has the slightest grasp of political philosophy” (39.5-6). And so as to leave no doubt of his final position regarding governance, Ibn Bājja recapitulates: “So the two sorts [the governance of cities and the household] that particularly characterize the noun ‘governance’ may be divided into correctness and error” (39.6-7).

The closing sentence leaves us with the impression that the difference between the ambiguous view of the philosophers and the equivocal opinion of the many hinges on the reluctance of the many to admit error as a component of governance. Ibn Bājja suggests

that this difference can be overcome by any amateur philosopher willing to think matters through. Indeed, the implication here is that the many thinking about governance in terms of what is correct and erroneous is essential for the good governance of cities.

At last, we begin to see why the divinity's relationship to governance has captured Ibn Bājjah's attention. Does governance admit of error or not? This depends on whether governance is something that humans bring about primarily by means of human thought and action or whether human governors are primarily agents of divine will. With the advent of revealed religion arises the need, so it seems, for a new teaching on governance that helps us find the correct way of speaking about generating order in political life. For Ibn Bājjah, the divinity's governance is distantly linked to ours and the two apparently share little in common beyond the name. He shows that humans are prone to credit the divinity with far more attention to and the possibility of far more involvement in political affairs than is good for cities.

The idea of the divinity governing human cities is not the image of the divinity Ibn Bājjah thinks is best. The highest principle of being for Ibn Bājjah is not analogous to a caregiver who concerns himself with creating one world order. Such an image of the divinity, however popular, stands in the way of individual cities being governed correctly. His basic message is clear: while the universe on the whole may be attributed to the work of the divinity, the governance of particular cities is primarily the work of human beings and, it goes without saying, the work of generating political order is inherently subject to error.

There is confusion, perhaps all too readily fueled by the Arab grammarians of Ibn Bājjah's time, about what rightly merits the utterance "*tadbīr*." The divinity's ordering of

the world by definition cannot be known or manipulated by human beings. An order that is divinely governed cannot be potential, as this only concerns human thought, nor actual in the way human beings generate order, given the possibility for error in all things in the world. So while governance can be said of the divinity in speech, divine governance does not really admit of the same qualities as human governance. Yet divine governance is an order that human governance can seek to emulate by adhering to what the divinity has chosen to reveal to us through the order of the natural world. This approach makes the most sense regarding the pre-existing order in the world attributed to the divinity.

To believe otherwise, that all human ordering shares in the divinity's pre-eminent and perfect ordering, directly leads to a fundamental political problem. To say that the city in which one lives is masterfully and precisely ordered implies that those who govern cities do not act out of free will, and thus nothing human governors do has to admit of correction. If one believes that any ordering of a city is pre-eminent, we no longer have grounds to speak of good versus bad governance. To whom or to what does one appeal in the event that one is wronged by the governors of the city, if all accept the claim of governors to be acting on behalf of the divinity? Whence does one draw the moral, not to say legal, authority to prosecute political misdeeds? It is difficult to imagine how the will to check political power will emerge among the many, who suffer the greatest in these circumstances, yet whose belief in the divinity seems to foster a deferential posture toward governing authority. According to Ibn Bājjah, the first step to delivering the many from believing in the infallibility of governors is to persuade them that the governance of cities has very little in common with the divinity's governance of the world.

In drawing attention to the problem of governance, Ibn Bājjah thus helps us to think about the problem of governance in the setting of a religiously-guided community, a setting different than the political community in ancient Greece characterized in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The immediacy of the divinity's governance of the world did not concern them in the way it does the medieval philosophers. For this reason, Ibn Bājjah credits Plato with a superior understanding of city governance (39.7-8) only after he ends his inquiry into divine governance. Nowhere does he refer to the Ancients in the opening discussion of governance that is dedicated to fleshing out the difference between human and divine governance. Apparently, Ibn Bājjah intends the discussion in sections one through three to be his own contribution, meaning that his treatment of governance introduces new questions to political philosophy culled from common opinions unique to his own time.

To summarize what we ought to know about governance based on what is discussed above, there are five basic points concerning governance laid out in the first three sections of Part I: (1) that governance is an ordering toward an intended goal; (2) that this ordering exists more often in matters of potentiality than actuality; (3) that governance of actual matters more often and more apparently concerns human action than what pertains to the divinity or irrational animals; (4) that the governance of cities is presumed by the many to be pre-eminent, but in truth is only distantly related to the divinity's governance; and (5) that correctness and error adhere to governance necessarily.

CONCLUSION

What motivates Ibn Bājjah's inquiry into governance, which at first blush appears to mimic the Arab grammarians in its method of investigation? It becomes apparent that the governance of cities is an activity taken for granted, i.e., governance is not fully appreciated as an art. Essential to this political art is the shaping of opinions on behalf of the many for the sake of their common well-being. Everyone should be instructed in the opinion that correct governance is an art intended to produce the best life for inhabitants in the city. At the very least, we ought to be persuaded to look for an alternative to artless governors, who deny the distinction between correct and erroneous governance out of their own self-interest.

While correct governance is a subject that should concern the many, it typically remains the interest of the few. More than likely, the inattention to governance as a human art, especially in religiously-guided communities, is based on the presumption that the divinity has adequately provided for governance. On the contrary, we should believe that the divinity's intentions for any one particular city at any given time is nowhere spelled out in detail. The treatise seeks to make us aware that human beings must play a proactive role in filling in the details about the correct governance of cities, beginning with the scrutiny of opinions about matters related to governance. Thought and action must be artfully applied to motivate the many to act on behalf of the city, that is, within the boundaries set by what the governors determine is intended for the city by the divinity. In short, governance is a human art that should be undertaken by those equipped to instruct the many in what to do to perfect the governance of their cities in accordance with what is divinely permitted.

All in all, the discussion on governance above tries to make us aware that not every exercise of political power is artful and brings about the superior goal of the well-ordered city. Ibn Bājjah presents correct governance as artful insofar as it sets a standard for human action that always looks to the common good of the city and not only to benefit the one who governs. The many should resist diluting this standard by presuming that all instances of human governance in the cities are pre-eminent. Not all things done in the name of governing should be seen as perfect. More importantly, for correct governance to exist, as we have discovered in the course of this chapter, artful governors have to pay attention to the particular nature of a city and customize governance to its special features. Such governance should be directed at shaping sound opinions and correct actions conducive to happiness that befits the noblest part of the human being. More will be said about these matters in the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 2

GOVERNANCE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

INTRODUCTION

While we hear almost nothing about the governance of a city in the *Tadbīr*—Ibn Bājjah having summarily concluded that what pertains to correctness and error with respect to the governance of cities is accounted for in the *Republic*—it is then curious for our author to consult at some length the *Republic* and other sources on the subject of household governance. Plato says next to nothing in the *Republic* about household management,¹ and what he does say many, including Aristotle,² regard as subversive both of the household and the city. Among other things proposed in the *Republic*, Plato's account favoring the unconventional community of women and children, i.e., the abolition of the family,³ hardly makes sense for a religiously-guided community seeking to live by the intentions the divinity has set down for humans. Indeed, the Muslim holy book of the Quran abounds with traditional examples of family life.⁴ But in the *Republic*,

¹ See brief mentions of household management (*oikonomia*) in the *Republic* at 407b, 417a, 465c, and 498a.

² See Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by Carnes Lord (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1261a10-23 and 1263b29-35. Note that Aristotle's own regime proposed in Books 7 and 8 is no less problematic and shares striking similarities with Plato's city.

³ For the abolition of the household, see *Republic* 423e-424a, 449c, 450c, 451c-471e (first and second waves). Aristotle in the *Politics* debates whether Socrates meant to abolish the household for all citizens or only the ruling class at 1264a11-1264b5.

⁴ For example, there are repeated references to the family relations of Noah (Suras 11 and 23), Joseph (Sura

and all other dialogues in which he is the spokesman or appears to be, Socrates seems decidedly uninterested in the ways of the family and is certainly not portrayed as a family man himself.⁵ Many a modern scholar has suggested that the account of the city in the *Republic* is meant to be ironic,⁶ so we wonder why Ibn Bājjah takes Plato so seriously and makes him a spokesman for household governance, when it is patently absurd to do so. We are challenged throughout section four on household governance to overcome obstacles prior to benefiting from Ibn Bājjah’s political teaching, especially to trust his account of the relationship between the city and the household, the latter arguably being the primary seat of religious education. Thus, one goal of this chapter inevitably must be to explain, as best we can, how Ibn Bājjah read Plato’s *Republic* with respect to governance of the household. Another goal is to understand why Ibn Bājjah, in such a short philosophical treatise, undertakes the rare discussion of the household in the first place.

THE CASE FOR PHILOSOPHY IN THE RELIGIOUSLY-GUIDED COMMUNITY

To begin unraveling the perplexing statements made in this part of the *Tadbīr*, we start by noting that Ibn Bājjah is not the first medieval Islamic philosopher to show deep interest in Plato’s *Republic*.⁷ Yet we are surprised at his confident manner of

12), Moses (Suras 20, 27 and 28), and the Pharaoh (Sura 40).

⁵ What little that has been reflected of Socrates’ home life is found mainly in the writings of Plato (*Apology* 34d, *Crito* 54a-b, and *Phaedo* 60a) and Xenophon (*Symposium* 2.10 and *Memorabilia* 2.2.1-14). In the *Memorabilia* he is portrayed as concerned with the well-being of his family. But compare this to Socrates’ speech in the *Crito* on behalf of the Athenian laws.

⁶ For a review of the scholarly debate on Socrates’ radical proposals in Book V of the *Republic*, see Steven Forde, “Gender and Justice in Plato,” *American Political Science Review* 91:3 (1997): 657. For a more recent discussion of the *Republic* as “a cross between a standard and a cautionary tale,” see Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 13-14.

⁷ For example, Parens reads Alfarabi’s *Attainment of Happiness* as a commentary that “extrapolates from

recommending this radical work to members of a religiously-guided community. As noted in the previous chapter, Plato wrote about and for a completely different public, a city whose laws were not based on divine revelation. Plato took seriously the relationship of the gods to the city of Athens, devoting one dialogue entirely to the theme of piety as a virtue.⁸ However, the relationship of the gods to the city in ancient Greece was far less immediate. The intimate relationship between politics and religion that existed in Ibn Bājjah's time did not exist in Plato's. The conviction that there is divine governance in the world appears to be a new political phenomenon addressed by the medieval philosophers.

For Plato, what ought to guide the city in its governance was a paramount and permanent question. For those in the kind of cities Ibn Bājjah writes about, the answer is taken to be obvious: the city should be guided by the intention of the divinity as revealed to human beings and set down in writing for the city's perpetual governance. The objective of the city governed by sacred texts is to carry out the will of the divine, i.e., to live up to the standards for human action set forth in the sacred texts. Hence, the sacred texts of the religiously-guided community are taken to provide justification for the community's way of life and represent the ultimate source of authority in political matters. From the sacred texts are derived not only the terms for the community's public governance, but its private governance. That is, all human actions in the community are

insights that Plato developed in the *Republic*." See *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions*, 2.

⁸ See *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). See the *Euthyphro*, Socrates' inquiry into piety as a virtue, especially 11e-14d. Cf. his claim that his philosophy is in service to a god at *Apology* 29c-30b. Also, cf. the opening of the *Republic*, where Socrates recalls that he "went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon...to pray to the [foreign] goddess [Bendis]; and, at the same time, I wanted to observe how they would put on the festival" (327a). About the Piraeus and the goddess Bendis, see Bloom 441 n.3 and n.5.

judged according to what is permissible vis-à-vis the sacred texts. Hence, the intention of the divinity applies to political life as much as it does to household governance.

This leads us to the following question: why does Ibn Bājjah assert the need to return to Plato, if the sacred texts governing his own city already provide comprehensive guidance for the city? What is the need that remains in a religious community to study ancient philosophy with respect to its governance? For one thing, historical accounts predominate the sacred text of the Quran. This means that what has been set down must be interpreted, rather than taken literally, in order to offer guidance in situations unlike or unanticipated by the texts. That is, to read the texts literally is not enough to extract the intention of the divinity in order to govern the city day to day. To unpack the meaning of revelation and have it prove useful, the reader must be trained in more than exegesis.

If the sacred texts themselves do not equip one with all the necessary tools needed to understand how to guide the city in accordance with them, what more is needed? To govern the city intelligently, training in rational thinking required to resolve fundamental and complex political problems is needed to supplement the guidance provided in scripture. The ancient philosophy of Plato and Aristotle is an essential source for learning how to think critically about and respond prudently to political problems, those to which the teachings in the sacred texts must be adapted to govern the city properly. Thus, for persons charged with deliberating political issues on behalf of the religiously-guided community, an education in the critical thinking mastered by Plato and Aristotle is necessary to bridge the divide between the teachings in the sacred texts and the specific needs of everyday political life. All told, the reason for studying ancient philosophy in the religiously-guided community is to move the community to a more rational politics.

Among the aims of any city must be to preserve itself and to provide for the well-being of its citizens. In the context of the religiously-guided community, this means that certain rightly-held opinions be protected, without which the community would cease to exist. That is, it must preserve itself against the doubts of non-believers, who would argue against the veracity of the divine intentions that motivate the community's actions. Such a defense must be articulated rationally if it is to succeed; to ignore, mock, or respond dogmatically to those who would disagree with the community's way of life does not meet the challenge such disagreement presents. In pursuit of a rational defense of this community, Ibn Bājjah returns to the wisdom of the Ancients, which he insists is not incompatible with the truth found in revelation. Recourse to this pre-Islamic source of wisdom sends the community a tri-partite message: (i) that revelation, insofar as it must relate to human lives, must be informed by philosophical thought to be useful with respect to political matters; (ii) that only rationally defended opinions can bring about good governance in the city; and (iii) that Plato may have had a superior understanding of city governance despite the pagan audience he wrote for. The recourse to Plato, combined with Ibn Bājjah's practical silence about particular matters of religion in Part I, intimates that what was generally true in terms of governing had not changed fundamentally since Plato wrote, the advent of revealed religion notwithstanding. For this reason, the rational tools for addressing political problems in the world remained largely the same for Muslims as they had been for Athenians with regard to the governance of cities and, as we will see below, nearly the same with respect to governance of the household.

That Ibn Bājjah boldly invokes the help of Plato, he now assures us, is in no way intended to harm the city or to subvert its governance. Ibn Bājjah emphatically states that

what he says with respect to Plato is not meant to be “superfluous, ignorant, or bad” (39.9). But to seek answers outside the city’s generally accepted sources of truth is problematic. We are asked to give Plato the benefit of the doubt in helping Muslims find their way in the search for correct governance, even though he is not one of their own. To be sure, it will take a certain amount of sophistication to circumvent the ancient beliefs in many gods and associated practices of pagan worship that oppose the religion of the Muslim community, which explicitly regards such worship as ignorant. Ibn Bājjah succeeds in keeping ancient philosophy alive in the monotheistic city by remaining silent about these and other major pitfalls featured in ancient philosophy, while focusing on what Plato contributes to the general discussion of governance.

PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

At the end of section four in Part I, Ibn Bājjah identifies ancient philosophy as a better alternative to popular literature, which is unconsciously relied on by the many to close the gap left by the sacred texts regarding how to govern themselves. He casts popular literature, such as the fables in *Kalīla wa Dimna* (40.14), as misdirecting common opinion about matters of governance. As touched upon in the last chapter, popular opinions are not wholly reliable when it comes to learning how to speak about governance and the same holds now for the persuasive literature that informs common opinion. Ibn Bājjah’s criticism is that opinions about what human actions are permissible, as popularized in literature, are valued as authoritative without being subjected to scrutiny. Popular literature does not strictly concern itself with promoting actions on the basis that they are morally good, which for Ibn Bājjah is necessary if these actions are to

be rationally defensible. Nonetheless, such literature takes on the air of moral authority insofar as the many approve of it. As we will see in this chapter, popular literature shapes public opinion about the household, but it contributes to the transmission of opinions that fall short of representing truly good and useful opinions for the governance of the household. Consequently, Ibn Bājjah objects to popular sources of knowledge in order to reinforce the need to return to the philosophical wisdom of the Ancients, who treat the problem of action more critically.

HOW PLATO FIGURES INTO THE DISCUSSION OF THE HOUSEHOLD

While we tried to suggest above how Ibn Bājjah fulfills the promise that his discussion of governance is not harmful nor ignorant, how is what he says not also “superfluous”? Juxtaposing the tribute paid to Plato at the end of the previous section (“Plato has already explained what pertains to governance of cities in the *Republic* and explained what correctness is with respect to it and how error attaches to it” [39.7-8]) with the segue to this new section (“Now with respect to governance of the household...” [39.9]), we cannot help but see that Ibn Bājjah, while he believes Plato adequately explains what pertains to the governance of cities in the *Republic*, is less satisfied with what Plato wrote about the household. His own account of the household does not stop at paraphrasing Plato, but goes on to specify what a “deficient” or “sick” household is. Here Ibn Bājjah departs from language used by Plato to present his own understanding of what should be expected from household governance.

To be clear, the ideas Ibn Bājjah attributes to Plato with regard to household governance cannot be traced back to the *Republic* verbatim. At best, Ibn Bājjah’s account

serves as a guide, not a substitute, for studying Plato's philosophy. Throughout the *Governance*, we are put into a situation that prevents us from taking Ibn Bājjah at his word. What seems a fragmentary discussion serves at times as a didactic tool that puts a critical distance between the author and his readers. Rather than being lulled into accepting his commentary as true based solely on Ibn Bājjah's authority, we are forced to compare what Ibn Bājjah writes against what Plato said in order to get a handle on what we are reading. One might say that this is commentary at its best insofar as Ibn Bājjah's treatise engenders the need to confront the ancient sources and think critically about what is in them at the same time we are evaluating his text. It is in engaging the multi-layered writings of Plato's *Republic* and Ibn Bājjah's *Governance* simultaneously that the critical reader begins to make sense of the problems treated in political philosophy. It is with this expectation in mind that we tackle our author's account of household governance and what he gleans from Plato.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Recall that Ibn Bājjah asserts in section two that "governance is applied less to the latter [household governance], to the point that governance of the household is said metaphorically and in a restricted sense" (38.8-9). What prompts Ibn Bājjah to raise the question of the household again in section four, if we are assured that governance is applied to it less and only metaphorically? Perhaps this question of household governance merits investigation due to the ascendance of dynastic rule in the medieval Muslim world. This form of governance favors loyalty to family relations and thus tends to weaken the individual's attachment to the city. In ancient Greece, public life dominated private life in

a way that is not duplicated in the city of Ibn Bājjah's day. The lack of participation of even male landowners in the governance of medieval cities, to say nothing of the remoteness of centralized dynastic rule, interfered with the immediate connection of the individual to the city.⁹ The importance of the household in Plato's time differed in fundamental ways from the household in medieval Muslim cities, which Ibn Bājjah does not describe specifically, although he points to households as "existing matters" (40.7). It could be for this reason that he uses Plato as his odd starting point for delving into the political significance of the household, i.e., to downplay the significance of the household in order to restore the close relationship between the individual and the city.

GOVERNANCE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

As it seems now, Ibn Bājjah revives the discussion of household governance interrupted in section two with the aim of disabusing the many of the opinion that household governance belongs to the order of prior forms of governance "as pertains to pre-eminence and perfection" (38.7). The perfection of the household, as he says at the end of this section, is "not among matters sought after for their own sake" (40.8). In truth, he argues, the perfection of the household is derivative of two other possible forms of perfection, either of which the household's perfection constitutes only a part. The truly prior forms of perfection, which may be sought for their own sake, include that of the city and that of the human being.

Governance for the sake of perfecting the human being is a new form of

⁹ For an account of the political rule of Muslim dynasties from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, cf. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*. (New York: MJF Books, 1991), ch. 8. For a historical look at the city and the household in ancient Greece, see D. Brendan Nagle's *The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

governance not mentioned by him heretofore. That he presents the end of man as a form of perfection coincidental with the perfection of the city is ambiguous, as he leaves it open whether man's perfection can only be achieved within the city. In contrast, Aristotle in the *Politics* repeats emphatically that "the city is...prior by nature to the household and to each of us" (1253a19-20) and that "the city is both by nature and prior to each individual" (1253a25). Ibn Bājjah's ambiguous text thus hints at a radical departure from ancient philosophy. Whether he indeed thinks that the individual can pursue perfection independently of the city will be considered in Chapter 5 on the governance of the solitary.

Let us begin to explore in detail what is said about governance of the household in section four of the *Governance*. We will go slowly and review the text almost line by line to be sure nothing is overlooked in this packed discussion.

Ibn Bājjah starts with the source he is most in agreement with, namely what Plato says in the book Ibn Bājjah literally refers to as *Political Regime*¹⁰ (*Al-Siyāsah Al-Madaniyyah*).¹¹ That Ibn Bājjah does not opt for the more common Arabic title for the *Republic*, namely *Al-Siyāsah*,¹² (he reverts to this title in another work at 125.13) at first suggests an error in translation. Alternatively, he may be talking about more than just the *Republic* in this section, that is, he intends the corpus of Plato's political works, collectively referring to these writings as "*Al-Siyāsah Al-Madaniyyah*." In any case, the ambiguous title reinforces the constant need to distinguish between what is written by Ibn

¹⁰ Note that "regime" is the actual title in Greek for Plato's work. However, the name Socrates finally attaches to his city in speech is *kallipolis* or "beautiful city" (527c). See Bloom 465 n.13.

¹¹ It is also possible that this is a mistaken title or veiled reference to Alfarabi's book by this title.

¹² For a useful discussion of the meaning and uses of the term *siyāsah* in medieval Arabic philosophy, see Fauzi M. Najjar, "Siyāsa in Islamic Political Philosophy," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, edited by Michael E. Marmura (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 92-110.

Bājjah and what Plato himself says. Recalling that Ibn Bājjah does not quote anything directly from Plato’s text, and given his unconventional rendering of its title, he signals an interest less in the literal content of Plato’s text than in rendering its general message in a way that addresses existing matters in his own city. Ibn Bājjah’s commentary reminds Muslim readers that Plato is relevant to them, while it refrains from spelling out a clear program of governance based on what he finds in the Platonic corpus.

THE HOUSEHOLD AS A PART OF THE CITY

What does Ibn Bājjah tell us Plato has in mind when he speaks of the household and its governance? He rapidly summarizes what he has gleaned from Plato’s teaching as follows. We start by looking at it “insofar as a household is a household” (39.10), i.e., insofar as it is a true or healthy household, and not a deficient or sick one, as we will distinguish below. We learn that the true household is first and foremost “a part of the city” (39.10).¹³ As far as Ibn Bājjah is concerned, we should look at the household strictly with reference to the city and how it contributes to its political life—by nature the household is political. Other aspects of the household, ones we would expect to encounter here, are simply ignored. In particular, Ibn Bājjah says precious little about human beings and their relationships in the household in this entire section, other than attributing to

¹³ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a book Ibn Bājjah indicates in this treatise he had access to (see 42.2), Aristotle explains that humans naturally form associations not just to live, but to live well. Thus Aristotle extrapolates from the naturalness of humans pairing for reproduction to the natural formation of a city in order to live virtuously. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), 1162a16-28. The language here is highly reminiscent of Aristotle’s description of the organic origin of the city in the *Politics* as well (cf. *Politics*, 1253a19-24). It is doubtful that the medieval philosophers had access to the *Politics*. See Rémi Brague, “Note sur la traduction arabe de la *Politique*, derechef, qu’elle n’existe pas” in *Aristote politique*, edited by Pierre Aubenque (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 423-433. Cf. Shlomo Pines’ contention that the text may have existed in part in the article “Aristotle’s *Politics* in Arabic Philosophy” in *Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1986), 146-156.

Plato the all-too-important opinion that “only the human being has a natural household”¹⁴ (39.10-11). This opinion implies that nature has uniquely equipped humans to seek associations that meet more than the simple need for procreation shared by other animals. Animals are not seen as having the capacity to associate in a manner equivalent to humans, i.e., subordinating their individual needs and those in their care to the overall well-being of the city. For this reason, “only the human being has a natural household.”

Ibn Bājjah’s Plato does not go on to give specifics about how the household is governed from within, especially overlooking the dynamics of family relations among members of the household. Ibn Bājjah generally sanitizes his discussion on the household of anything concerning love or duty to one’s own.¹⁵ He distances himself from these things in a way that makes them seem tangential. His paraphrasing entitles him to filter what comes out of Plato’s mouth, so that Platonic ideas appear harmonious with the concerns of the religiously-guided community. Thus, his paraphrasing of Plato ends up depicting the household in very broad brushstrokes.

The de-personalization of the household may be directly related to how Ibn Bājjah reads Plato, although we cannot determine this precisely from the treatise. He may abolish the concern for marital and family relations, because he interprets Plato ultimately doing the same in Book V of the *Republic*.¹⁶ Or perhaps he finds Plato’s account of eugenic breeding¹⁷ too preposterous to discuss openly and too far reaching to

¹⁴ Cf. *Politics* 1264b3-5. Aristotle says that household management is non-existent for animals.

¹⁵ The Greek word for ‘household’ (*oikos*) is cognate with a word occurring numerous times in the *Republic* often translated as “one’s own” (*oikeios*). See esp. *Republic* 462c-464e and Bloom, 459n.23.

¹⁶ See notes 3 and 6 above.

¹⁷ In Book V, Socrates presents three waves, or laws, for the just city. The first and second concern the “right acquisition and use of children and women” (451c). The first wave discusses the “female drama” (451c-457c), namely, the equality of the sexes insofar as men and women in the ruling class “must share all

recommend itself to a Muslim audience. In any case, he entirely sidesteps Plato's theory of selective breeding and common parenting, implying that it is less than germane to the immediate discussion. The lack of interest in the human attachments that form a household suggests that it is not essential to discuss these for the limited purpose of understanding what governance has to do with the household.

Moving on, we learn that "he [Plato] explains that the best existence of what is a part is its existence as a part" (39.11). We are speaking here of the correct governance of a household that recognizes its dependence on the city and what is good about belonging to it. For Ibn Bājjah, the household is in no sense a whole—to depict it as autonomous and self-sufficient and capable of existing *apart* from the city would be a distortion of its nature. Ibn Bājjah presents the city as an organic whole, and by definition each household is a "natural" albeit incomplete part. The household is dependent on the city not only for its preservation but, more importantly, for its excellence, as we will explore further on in this chapter. Having said practically nothing about other attachments pertaining to the household, Ibn Bājjah insinuates that its relation to the city is the single most important relation of the household. The household that aims at its best existence recognizes that it is incomplete without the city, i.e., it sees being a part of the city as best and serves the city's needs in line with pursuing what is best for itself, rather than seeing the city as contributing nothing to or detracting from its well-being. To achieve its best existence, then, the household identifies its well-being according to what is good for the city.

From what Ibn Bājjah tells us, it goes without saying that the household is a

pursuits in common" (457c). He then follows up with a discussion of procreating for the sake of the best children that began in the previous chapter at 423c-d. For Socrates' specific discussion of the second wave concerning eugenic breeding, see 458d-461e.

political concern, though he speaks of the household as political only insofar as its governance aims at what is best for the city as a whole. To him, all of this is implicit in his saying that the household is a part of the city. Indeed, in a rather candid moment, he acknowledges that Plato does not even mark the distinction between household governance and city governance as he does: “Therefore, he does not set down governance of the household as a part of the political art, for that was already said in the political art” (39.11-12). The political art referred to here is concerned with the perfection of the city. The means to that perfection, as indicated in Chapter 1, is the art of correct governance.

At long last, we see now why Ibn Bājjah insists on applying the term “*tadbīr*” to both the management of a household and the governance of a city. That *tadbīr* applies to both signifies that not only the term, but the reason for its application, is the same for both the household and the city. For Ibn Bājjah, the application is determined by what the intended goal of an object is. For household governance, the end is described above as “best existence,” i.e., the well-being of the household. Since the household is a part of the city, this implies that perfection in the one is a part of, or necessarily depends on, perfection in the other. Thus Ibn Bājjah insists on applying *tadbīr* to both the household and the city, because he seeks to underscore the dependence of the well-being of the household on the well-being of the city. This further illuminates his assertion that governance applies to the household only metaphorically, meaning that there cannot be well-being of the household without the city realizing its perfection. In short, the household cannot be perfect except within the perfect city. This observation prepares us for the discussion below concerning virtue and household governance.

WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT THE HOUSEHOLD FROM THE *REPUBLIC*

Next, we investigate the relationship of the city to the household, that is, what the city as a whole contributes to each household so that it counts as a part of the city. In summary fashion, Ibn Bājjah's Plato explains in the *Republic*: "(a) what the household is; (b) how it comes into existence, for its best existence is for it to be shared (*mushtarak*); and (c) what its sharing consists in [literally, how its sharing is described]" (39.12-14). Curiously, points *a* and *b* are not elaborated in the treatise. Rather, their insertion here forces us to come to terms with a question that has long been nagging at us: what is Plato's *Republic* doing in Ibn Bājjah's account on the household in the first place? We continue to be struck by the absurdity of the claim that Plato explains what the household is and how it comes into existence, given that the *Republic* abolishes the household, at least for the ruling class, and in its place brings into existence a city that acts as a household writ large—one that shares *everything* in common, including education in the gymnasium as well as spouses, children and property.¹⁸ Surely points *a* and *b* are not meant to be taken literally that Ibn Bājjah agrees with the idea of abolishing the household and sharing everything in common. Rather, Ibn Bājjah is prodding the astute reader to consider where his account overlaps that of Plato's and where it does not.

How do we begin unraveling the ambiguous claim that Plato speaks about the household in the *Republic*? For starters, there is the other problem pointed to earlier in the chapter that remains with us until now: Ibn Bājjah insists on keeping Plato in the

¹⁸ Regarding the notion of the city as the soul writ large, Socrates explains that for the city to be ruled by what is "divine and prudent," every citizen must be ruled "by something similar to what rules the best man." Thus every citizen "must be the slave of that best man who has the divine rule in himself." In this way, "all will be alike and friends, piloted by the same thing" (590c-d). Cf. 462c-d where Socrates' interlocutor acquiesces that the best governed city "is most like a single human being," a "city tying the body together with the soul in a single arrangement under the ruler within it."

forefront of his conversation on the household, yet he deliberately glosses over thorny details in the *Republic* that would mire his discussion in controversy. He continues to say nothing about the troublesome account of women and children, as if to keep this glaring issue tucked under the rug. What are we to make of Ibn Bājjah's fast-and-loose paraphrasing, i.e., seeking to make Plato's text relevant to his Muslim audience at the risk of distorting what Plato says? We recognize that only the careful reader will take the time to figure this out, as casual readers will be tempted to set the *Governance* aside for not making immediate sense.

One who reads the treatise carefully might find that Ibn Bājjah is trying to say something remedial of Plato's account of women and children by treating the forgotten household anew as an eradicable feature of the city. Or, better yet, Ibn Bājjah aims to preserve the spirit of what is clearly intended to be an ironic tale in the original, i.e., to hint at the remote possibility of perfection in political life. According to one contemporary scholar, Plato's book is not intended as a genuine program of civic reform, but a "cautionary tale" that teaches moderation in human action by means of imagining the practically impossible as realizable.¹⁹ The *Republic* attempts to show that it is preposterous to govern a city as if it were an expanded household—that the city does not come into being and exist only for the reasons that a household does.²⁰ Likewise, the point of Ibn Bājjah's defiance of the commonly held opinion about the pre-eminence of the household and his provocative reading of Plato is didactic—to spark debate within his own community of readers about the exaggeration of the household's importance to the city. While not going so far as to abolish the household in speech as Plato has done, Ibn

¹⁹ See Joshua Parens (2006), 2.

²⁰ Cf. *Republic* 509c-d and *Politics* 1252a7-16. See also note 16 above.

Bājjah reduces it to a needy outgrowth of the city and assigns no perfection to the household separate from what is good for the city. By concentrating on the public features of the household to the exclusion of internal relationships usually associated with it, we get an unobstructed view of the limited political significance Ibn Bājjah attaches to the household in direct contrast to what the many believe. To some, it will seem that Ibn Bājjah follows Plato closely here, insofar as he judges the household's entire well-being in terms of the city.

VIRTUE AND THE HOUSEHOLD

Let us investigate what the household's sharing consists in, a discussion that spans much of the remainder of section four. While we learn above that the household's best existence is existence as a part, here we add that its best existence is to be shared. What does this sharing consist of in terms of the household's best existence? Apparently, Ibn Bājjah means for the household to come into existence in a city that is virtuous and thus to share in the virtue of the city, for the next line reads: "The household in any but the virtuous city—namely, in the four cities that were enumerated²¹—has a deficient (*nāqīṣ*) existence and possesses something that is not natural" (39.14-15). Ibn Bājjah indicates that, on account of a city being imperfect, every household that is a part of it must also be deficient, that is, other than the perfect household. The perfect household cannot partake of virtue nor can it be called virtuous, if the city (upon whose virtue household virtue is predicated) is imperfect.

What is meant by "a deficient existence" and possessing "something that is not

²¹ In this treatise, four cities are enumerated in Part III at 74.17. They are identified as imamate, timocracy, democracy, and tyranny.

natural”? The following sentence offers a puzzling answer: “[T]he only perfect household is the one in which there can be nothing additional that would become a deficiency, like the sixth finger.²² For the particular characteristic of what is masterful is that anything additional in it is a deficiency” (39.15-17). To Ibn Bājjah, imperfection in the household is caused by a change that, under normal circumstances, would not occur as a household comes into existence, but results from an imperfection produced in the household on account of the pre-existent imperfect city that alters every household coming to be in it—just as an abnormal outgrowth, like a sixth finger,²³ emerges on a body, according to Aristotle,²⁴ on account of an “excess of material” in the embryo. Apparently, a sick household cannot escape from its defect, as every household appears to be an appendage of the city, and the imperfect city necessarily appends something to each of its households that causes them to “possess something that is not natural.”²⁵

To say the least, Ibn Bājjah offers a highly constrained view of the virtuous household. To think that it must be prevented from sharing in *anything* “additional that would become a deficiency” leaves little chance of the household being or becoming

²² For a brief discussion of the phenomenon of polydactyly (extra fingers or toes), esp. hexadactyly (six fingers or toes), based on biblical and medieval sources, see A. M. Honeyman, “186. Some South Arabian Instances of Polydactyly,” *Man* 61 (1961), 161-162. Contrary to Ibn Bājjah, Honeyman indicates that the usually hereditary occurrence of the sixth finger was not considered a deficiency but a sign of royalty; in one instance, its absence was read as the mark of an illegitimate birth.

²³ The analogy of the sixth finger is itself deficient if we recognize that the phenomenon occurs by nature (as distinguished from convention [40.2]). It is not necessarily a deficiency (*naqs*) to be born with additional digits to the hand or feet—either can function normally with the extra digit and it may even help the appendage to function better than normal. Ibn Bājjah means that deficiency in the household is never a good thing. The household’s existence in an imperfect city prevents it from ever being masterful (*muḥkam*).

²⁴ See Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* (Loeb Classical Library 366), translated by A. L. Peck, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 4.770.6-9ff.

²⁵ In section 8 of Part I, Ibn Bājjah applies this line of thinking to the solitary. He says there that his discussion is “intent upon the governance of the solitary human being” to whom “a matter external to nature has become appended” (43.15-16). Similarly, he intends for the isolated weed “to remove from himself the accidents that keep him from happiness or from obtaining of it what is possible” (43.20-21).

“masterful.” To erase all doubt that Ibn Bājjah sees the situation of the virtuous household as nearly impossible as this, he further reads Plato as saying: “And [he explains] that the rest of the households are deficient in relation to it and sick because the conditions that differentiate them from the virtuous household lead to the destruction of the household and to its ruin. Therefore, they resemble sickness” (39.17-19). Following this last point Ibn Bājjah ceases to paraphrase Plato and, after a brief digression, resumes his discussion of the household in his own name.

DIGRESSION: NAMELESS WRITERS ON DEFICIENT HOUSEHOLDS

Ibn Bājjah interrupts the discussion on sharing and the household to draw attention to “a group” of nameless writers (clearly in contrast to the named writer who has dominated the first part of this discussion, i.e., Plato), who “has taken it upon themselves to provide a discussion of these deficient households—namely, the sick ones” (39.19-20). He indicates that their “books about household governance have already reached us” (39.20). Swiftly, Ibn Bājjah dismisses their statements as “rhetorical” (39.20) and passes over them without further comment.²⁶ We cannot determine from this brief passage who the authors or books in question might be, and nothing further is said about the consequence of this group’s attempt to discuss the deficient or sick households, which has apparently met with success insofar as their books have “already reached” him.

At the end of section four, however, two books are mentioned that Ibn Bājjah does not approve of, *Kalīla wa Dimna* (40.14) and *The Arab Sages* (*Ḥukamā’ al-‘Arab*

²⁶ We contrast “rhetorical” (*balāghīya*, 39.20) versus “science” (*‘ilm*, 40.12) at the end of this chapter.

[40.14]).²⁷ The first book is an ancient literary classic transmitted from India via Persia, which reached the Arab world in the eighth century. It contains animal fables relating moral as well as political lessons, in which good does not always triumph over evil. The second book cannot be identified from the title. Later in the treatise, Ibn Bājjah will disparage another popular book, this time naming its authors:

Books like the *Book of Ingenious Devices* by the Banū Shākir²⁸ have been set down with respect to the actions that it is possible to reflect upon. But everything in them is play and things whose intent is to arouse astonishment, not whose intent concerns the essential perfection of a human being. So to discuss them is an evil and ignorance. (42.5-8)

Ibn Bājjah takes on these books and their authors because they represent a source of careless speech about actions in the Muslim world that excites the imagination in harmful ways. These books meet with disapproval because they take pleasure in depicting things like the “sick” household, while distorting or neglecting the right way to govern the household. Especially the young, who are most attracted to play things such as these books, tend to be harmed by the opinions in them that do not temper their excitement with sound moral judgment. Undoubtedly, he finds such popular books dangerous—their continued transmission throughout the Muslim world secures them the authority of tradition, whereby they become a force to be reckoned with. Their toying with morality promises to have a deleterious effect on the inhabitants of the city, who undoubtedly receive mixed messages (or are left to their own devices) regarding which actions are

²⁷ *Kalīla wa Ḍimna* originated as the *Panchatantra*, a collection of animal fables. It is said to have been translated from the original Sanskrit into Syriac and then into Arabic in the eighth century by Ibn Al-Muqaffa (circa 759-762 AD).

²⁸ See Banū (sons of) Mūsā bin Shākir, *The Book of Ingenious Devices (Kitāb al-Hiyāl)*, translated by Donald R. Hill (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979). *The Book of Ingenious Devices* discusses the invention of mechanical devices. This reference in the treatise was originally thought to be incorrect. See Joaquín Lomba (2006), 100 n.36.

right or wrong. The discussion on sick and deficient households prior to this digression appears to be prompted in part, then, by books circulating in the cities of his own time that represent images of the household and other political matters contrary to what is best for the city. This is another way of justifying a return to Plato, or perhaps the most important reason for doing so, insofar as Plato offers something better than rhetoric on the subject of correct governance, namely, critical thinking.

HOUSEHOLDS THAT EXIST NOT BY NATURE BUT BY CONVENTION

Following this digression, we pick up where we left off above with the deficient and sick households and what the household ought to share in. We now find Ibn Bājjah taking credit for his own thoughts, rather than invoking Plato. He starts by summarizing what has transpired so far, and then introduces a new concern:

It is evident from what we have said that the households other than the virtuous household are sick. They are all distorted. They do not exist by nature; indeed, they exist only by convention. (40.1-2)

Ibn Bājjah reiterates that the imperfect households are sick and indicates that this means they are “all distorted.” He newly asserts that these households “exist only by convention” (*bi al-waḍʿ*). Ibn Bājjah states above that, on account of possessing something that is not natural, the household comes into being deficient and sick. Here he asserts that its subsequent existence will be contrary to nature. That is to say, nature as a rule intends each household to be governed for the sake of virtue; to be governed for the sake of something that is non-virtuous implies that the household exists contrary to nature. In so saying, Ibn Bājjah leaves even less room for virtue to make its way into the household. He apparently tolerates nothing less than attempting to govern the whole city

for the sake of virtue, the only scenario whereby the household itself can become virtuous. To pursue virtue within individual households in a city that is other than virtuous appears to be fruitless, for the household's "constituent parts [*fuṣūl*] are only [by convention], unless there is something that they share in with the virtuous household," which exists only in the virtuous city (40.2-3).

Apparently, all the constituent parts of every household in the city must share in virtue for the household to be virtuous. Nay, some of its constituent parts *must* do so in order for it to qualify as a household in the first place, as we read in what follows. Nowhere in the treatise does Ibn Bājja specify what he means by these constituent parts, but in all likelihood he is speaking rather obliquely about the relationships between adult members of the household on the basis of which the household is founded. Ibn Bājja continues: "Now the discussion of it [the household] has a known, necessary organization [*niẓām ma'lūm ǧarūrī*]. And it is fancied that the discussion of this shared part is scientific [*ilmī*], for no household escapes having many shared matters that are such as to be in the virtuous household" (40.3-5). While the way of investigating the household's sharing in virtue may proceed in an organized manner, he does not presume that his discussion will produce hard science of what its sharing consists in. Perhaps for this reason Ibn Bājja sees the possibility of a perfect household to be so remote, given that human knowledge of the best household is difficult to ascertain.

Ibn Bājja does not claim to know with scientific certainty what sharing in virtue truly is. What Ibn Bājja does claim to know is that, without being able to observe that many matters in the household share in virtue, it is a household in name only: "If a household does escape that, it is not possible for it to remain [a household]; and it is a

household only through the ambiguity of the name [or by homonymy, *bi ishtirāk al-ism*]” (40.6). So an imperfect household must be partly virtuous, yet it will not be completely so. Insisting that the discussion of household governance is of immediate relevance (and not idle musing on a forgotten topic), albeit a discussion that is admittedly not of the highest priority, he frees himself from the question of the household’s sharing in virtue thus: “So let us leave off discussing it and set it aside for one who has some leisure time to discuss existing matters” (40.6-7). In this way, Ibn Bājjah signals that he is nearing the end of his discussion on household governance.

Before breaking off this discussion entirely, Ibn Bājjah reflects on the relative importance of household governance with respect to other forms of governance that are discussed in the remaining four sections of Part I. Ibn Bājjah says that the household is a means to an end, more precisely, a means to two ends: “Moreover, the perfection of the household is not among matters sought after for their own sake. What is wanted from it is perfecting the city or the natural end of the human being” (40.7-9). At last, he shows an interest in the human being, juxtaposing the city and the individual in a way that the reader could not have anticipated. Still, the reader cannot be entirely satisfied, as no mention is made of human relations relevant to the city or the household.

The attention paid to the human being until now has been scant, which has left the impression that humans for some reason are being kept in the deep background of the discussion on governance. Not only is “human being” mentioned only once in the previous three sections (37.9), but Ibn Bājjah also summarizes at the end of section three: “As we have said, when governance is said without qualification, it signifies governance of cities” (39.3). That is, nowhere prior has he indicated that perfection of the human

being as an end of governance should be pursued for its own sake.

We now get the new impression, albeit abruptly, that the discussion of the household is intended to inform not only the earlier discussion of the city, but also the discussion to come of the solitary. He asserts, but leaves it for his readers to fill in the details, how “it is evident that its discussion [i.e., the household] is part of the discussion of a human being’s governance of himself” (40.9). More specifically, he indicates that section four of the *Governance* is a preliminary step, or an “introduction” as he puts it in his concluding remarks, to his final discussion of the solitary: “So in either of the two instances, it is a part of a city so that the discussion of it is part of the discussion of cities, or it is an introduction to another end so that the discussion of it is part of the discussion of that end” (40.9-11). To be clear, what is surprising here is (i) that Ibn Bājjah speaks about an end to governance other than the city and (ii) that he makes governance of the individual a distinct end in itself. He does not say that the city and the human being are equivalent ends, nor does he define what the relation is between the city and the individual.

DIGRESSION: THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

Section four ends with a second digression closely tied to the first, in which Ibn Bājjah resumes his critique of other writers. If all that has been said until now about household governance is well-founded, then it follows for Ibn Bājjah that nothing is to be gained by studying the household from any approach other than the philosophical one:

From this it becomes evident that the discussion of household governance based on what is generally accepted is of no avail, nor is it a science. Rather, if it is, then it is so only momentarily, as occurs in what the stylists write in the books of literature that they call psychological, like *Kalīla wa Dimna* and *The Arab Sages (Ḥukamā’ al-‘Arab)*,

comprising deliberative maxims (*waṣāyā mashūrīya*). Most often this is found as parts of a book, as what is found in the chapters that contain [tales about] the companions of the sultan, the bands of brothers (*ma'āshara al-ikhwān*) and what is similar to that. (40.11-16)

Recall that Ibn Bājjah spoke in the first digression about “a group” who has written books that he judges to be “rhetorical” (*balāghīya* [39.20]). Now he censures “stylists” (*balāghīyūn*) who pretend to offer a science of household governance, i.e., self-styled “psychological” (*naḥsānīya*) books containing maxims or tales intended as advice to courtiers or other officials. Ibn Bājjah flatly rejects these books, insofar as he denies them both theoretical and practical value or, as he puts it, they are neither of avail nor science. He indicates what makes his approach superior by exploring the presumed “avail” or “science” in other books: “Now what is opportune (*ṣādīf*) in that is so temporarily and with respect to a given way of life. So when that way of life changes, those opinions that are universal statements change and become particular after having been universal; and after having been useful, they become harmful or repudiated” (40.16-41.1). It is essential to Ibn Bājjah that a writer intend his discussion to have lasting value that transcends the particulars of one’s city and can be useful to other ways of life. Writing that does not meet these criteria should be regarded with suspicion. In a rare direct appeal to his reader to sit up and pay attention, Ibn Bājjah commands us to convince ourselves that this analysis is true: “That will be evident to you, if you seize upon the books set down in that vein and compare every discussion to the time [that comes] after its time” (41.1-2).²⁹ More will be said about writing in Chapter 4.

²⁹ This nudge to the reader is reminiscent of the ending to the previous discussion on governance of the cities: “To ponder that is easy for anyone who has the slightest grasp of political philosophy” (39.5-6). Together these lines show that Ibn Bājjah wants the reader to take more than a passing interest in the discussion.

HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS DISCUSSION

Stepping back from the text to get a sense of the big picture, we see that Ibn Bājjah insists on the subordination of the household to the city by nature so as to leave no doubt that this is the understanding around which common opinion ought to be formed. He indicates that the relationship of the city and the household is strictly one of whole to part. His provocative choice of Plato as a spokesman for household governance singles out ancient philosophy as the foremost authority on the proper relationship of the household to the city and not popular contemporary authors. We are mistaken to pay too much attention to writers who inflate the importance of certain households (e.g, those of sultans or tribal bands of brothers) and other private relations particular to a given time, at the expense of caring about the most important reason for having these human relations—the pursuit of virtue for the sake of the best human existence.

Stated differently, Ibn Bājjah's argument is that one's preference for the household as the quintessential model of governance in the city is essentially irrational, because household governance does not necessarily intend the virtue of its members. The virtuous household cannot be brought about on its own no matter how well it is governed, since the relations that form the constituent parts of the household are not founded solely on the basis of merit. It is more likely that relations among the inhabitants of the household are grounded in irrational preferences that do not inspire the perfection of the human being. The city, on the other hand, has the potential to order relations among human beings so that preference is given to those who act virtuously. In a word, the best governed city is the one that is rationally ordered in accord with virtue for the sake of producing the best way of life for its inhabitants.

The discussion of household governance in the treatise is framed by one

concerning the cultivation of true speech about all matters of governance. While the three previous sections on city governance speak many times about “action,” the word does not appear again in section four. Instead, we find an emphasis on speech, with eighteen separate mentions of or variations on the word “discussion” (*qawl*). In other words, section four acts to convince us that one’s understanding about political matters depends upon knowing how to speak about them properly. In addition, Ibn Bājjah stresses that readers have not really gotten to the bottom of household governance on the basis of his text alone. We are directed many times to look outside the *Governance* to consult other books before making up our minds about what governance truly is. He especially implores us to compare Plato’s *Republic* against writers of his own day as well as days to come. In short, he intends for each of us to carry on a discussion in our minds as we read the treatise. Only by making many comparisons can we begin to see past popular opinion that blinds us to the best political relationship among human beings, the relationship based on sharing in virtue that promises to bring us closer to agreement about how the city should be governed.

CONCLUSION

To be sure, the complicated question of governance demands discussion and appropriately enough Plato’s *Republic* is the starting point, as useful as it is timeless as an antidote to unexamined opinions. That Ibn Bājjah speaks at considerable length about household governance, given his very brief mention of city governance, suggests something about his intended audience: they are those in need of learning about (but not necessarily a science of) household governance, especially the understanding that it is

better for the city not to be beholden to the household for its governance. The tension between the household and the city with respect to governance is framed as a battle of the books between ancient philosophy and popular literature. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of the city fought by the philosophers in opposition to other writers, including grammarians and stylists, whose teachings fail to consider what is truly best for human beings, not simply as members of a household, but as political beings.

To summarize the various opinions about the household that are presented in section four, the reader learns that the perfect household is a part of the city and shares in its virtue. As for imperfect households, all have a deficient existence; they possess something that is not natural; they are sick; the conditions that differentiate them from the virtuous household inevitably lead to the destruction of the household and to its ruin; all households are distorted; and they do not exist by nature, but only by convention. Finally, their constituent parts are “only by convention, unless there is something that they share in with the virtuous household.” This is a long list of concerns, likely prompted by the state of households at the time, that tends to mark every existing household as a problem in the city. The description of the household in the treatise all but argues for its marginalization, insofar as the household in all but the virtuous city is depicted as thoroughly sick and deficient and thus as incapable of contributing to virtue in the city. In the end, Ibn Bājjah all but strips the household of its presumed political importance in section four, assigning it practically no role in producing the best life for human beings.

CHAPTER 3

IBN BĀJJAH'S VIRTUOUS CITY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines Ibn Bājjah's teaching about the virtuous city in section five of Part I of the *Governance*. In it, I attempt to explain why Ibn Bājjah bases his teaching on the arts of medicine and judging as indicators of what ought not to be in the virtuous city. My reading of this negative orientation to the virtuous city relies on Socrates' treatment of these same arts in the first three books of the *Republic*. I argue that the art of judging leads us to confront the underlying problem of the absence of justice in the human soul, while the art of medicine is symptomatic of the limit imposed on human reason by bodily desires. By investigating the more readily understood arts of medicine and judging, Ibn Bājjah offers us insight into the more elusive, yet the more politically necessary, art of virtue.

Ibn Bājjah's abrupt return to the topic of the virtuous city signals a break in the discussion. Little attention is paid to the household in the remainder of the treatise. But recall that the first mention of the virtuous city occurs in the previous section on household governance, i.e., the discussion of the virtuous city properly begins in section four. The virtuous city is briefly mentioned as Ibn Bājjah distinguishes a perfect household (*al-manzil faqaṭ huwa al-kāmil* [39.15-16]) from a sick one, which belongs to an imperfect city

and which “has a deficient existence and possesses something that is not natural” (39.15). Such conditions within the sick households “that differentiate them from the virtuous household lead to the destruction of the household and to its ruin” (39.18). The conditions that lead to it being virtuous depend on it being part of a virtuous city. That is, the virtue or perfection of the household comes about only if the city is virtuous. On its own, the household cannot bring about the complete happiness of the individuals within it, insofar as the household can be governed without concern for the well-being of the city.

The hierarchical relationship intended between the city and the household explains why Ibn Bājjah introduces the idea of the virtuous city in his discussion (39.14) immediately before he begins to speak of the perfect household (39.15-16). The conditions leading to the best existence of the household insofar as it is a part of the virtuous city requires it:

- (i) to be healthy rather than sick or distorted
- (ii) to be perfect and masterful (in the sense of there being nothing that could be added to it that would become a deficiency)
- (iii) to exist by nature and not convention.

Looking ahead, we see that the conditions of health and perfection return in this section, while what is by nature returns in section six.

Having summarized what is expected of the household as a part, we now seek to learn what the whole—the city—is. For Ibn Bājjah, the virtuous city is constructed of the building blocks of true opinions and virtuous actions. He summarizes at the end of section five: “It is evident that in the perfect virtuous city, every human being is given the best of what he is prepared for. All of its opinions are true, and there is no false opinion in it. Its actions alone are unqualifiedly virtuous” (41.17-18). He says essentially the same

thing at the top of section six: “It is evident that every opinion other than an opinion of its inhabitants that arises in the perfect city is false, and every action that arises in it other than its customary actions is erroneous” (42.2-3). How do we evaluate the perfection of a city on the basis of these two components? Apparently, Ibn Bājjah anticipates this question, for he provides the following test in the middle of section five:

Among the particular characteristics of the perfect city is that there is no physician and no judge [*qaḍī*] in it, whereas among the general characteristics of the four simple [imperfect] cities is that they require physicians and judges. As a city becomes distant from the perfect one, it requires these two more and the rank of these two sorts of people becomes more venerable. (41.14-17)

The test for determining the kind of city we have is whether physicians and judges exist in it. Admittedly, the connection between the principles regarding opinions and actions and the test for practitioners in the city as a way of evaluating the city’s perfection is not at all obvious and will need to be explained in the course of this chapter. For now, we get the sense that almost no one can be said to live in a perfect city, once we acknowledge that all existing cities fail the test—all cities have physicians and judges and, generally speaking, these practitioners are more or less esteemed for their arts. So what is Ibn Bājjah suggesting about the virtuous city? Can it ever come into being? If not, why should his discussion of the virtuous city matter to us? We will try to make sense of these questions as we outline the discourse in section five.

The previous chapter on the household prompts another question whose answer partially emerges in section five: what role does the individual human being play as the constituting element of both the household and the city? Ibn Bājjah says little about the role of the individual in the household, though he assures us that the discussion of the

household “is part of the discussion of a human being’s governance of himself” (40.9). By contrast, he is not shy about discussing the presence of humans in the virtuous city. In fact, section five speaks for the first time of humans in the aggregate as “inhabitants” of the city (41.4, 7, 13, 16). Yet ultimately his discussion reverts to the single individual, emphasizing that in the virtuous city “every human being is given the best of what he is prepared for” (41.17-18). What precipitates the switch near the end of section five to the individual, after a promising show of interest in human relations? No doubt it begins with the immediately preceding statement, quoted above, which thrusts upon the reader the realization that existing cities¹ must be “distant from the perfect one,” insofar as physicians and judges exist in them and their rank is indeed “venerable” (41.15-16). For this reason, the re-introduction of the individual strikes us as a second start to the conversation on the virtuous city, as it assumes the perspective of “the human being” rather than “the inhabitants” of the virtuous city.

Now, do we go so far as to say that Ibn Bājījah intends the upcoming discussion of the virtuous city to be a part of—which is to say, subordinate to—the discussion of a human being’s governance of oneself? This certainly seems plausible, especially since almost nothing is said about the nature or the purpose of the city with respect to its rulership, regime, or laws in the latter half of Part I.² That is, Ibn Bājījah leaves us with the impression that the knowledge of opinions and actions is the whole of city governance. Moreover, section five closes by mentioning the only book in it referred to

¹ While here Ibn Bājījah does not speak explicitly of existing cities, he does so in section seven, assuring us that there are physicians and judges in them: “We will turn aside from a summary of that, nor will we occupy ourselves with an investigation of the ways of life existing in this time. Rather, there are three sorts of them whose existence it is possible to find, and they are the weeds, the judges [*ḥukkām*], and the physicians” (43.7-9).

² Cf. Alfarabi’s explicit treatment of medicine as analogous to soul-crafting for the sake of ordering a city virtuously, and a physician as analogous to a statesman or a king, in *Selected Aphorisms* 1-5.

by name, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which in itself suggests that the concern for virtue with respect to the individual is paramount to that of the city (42.2). While there is much that points us in the direction of the individual in section five, there are things said in other parts of the treatise that will ultimately clarify the relationship between the city and the individual. So one must suspend judgment on this question until the discussion of solitary governance and its relationship to that of the city is examined in Chapter 5.

WHAT IS NOT IN THE VIRTUOUS CITY

Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of the virtuous city opens with this surprising statement: “The virtuous city is particularly characterized by the absence of the art of medicine and the art of judging” (41.3). It is a line of reasoning that closely mimics what Socrates says in Books II and III of the *Republic*. Socrates outlines “a feverish city” (372e), as opposed to the city arranged strictly to meet basic needs that he also refers to as “healthy” (369b-372e). Socrates begins:

When licentiousness and illness multiply in a city, aren’t many courts and hospitals opened, and aren’t the arts of the law court and medicine full of pride when even many free men take them very seriously? (*Republic* 405a).

Socrates’ young interlocutor Glaucon raises no objection and so Socrates presses on:

Will you be able to produce a greater sign of a bad and base education in a city than its needing eminent doctors and judges not only for the common folk and the manual artisans but also for those who pretend to have been reared in a free fashion? Or doesn’t it seem base, and a great sign of lack of education, to be compelled—because of a shortage at home—to use a justice imported from others who are thus masters and umpires? (*Republic* 405a-b)³

³ Cf. Averroes, *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, sections 37-39.

There is no sense imitating Glaucon's assent. For surely we must raise an objection to such a strange account of what corrupts a city, if we are to find our investigation of the virtuous city meaningful. Ibn Bājjah offers no explanation for singling out the arts of medicine and judging, so we turn to the *Republic* for clarification. Socrates indicates that these arts form a "bad and base" way of educating citizens, especially the city's guardians. The guardians, those charged with defending the city from outsiders (374a-e), must be "entirely eager to do what they believe to be advantageous to the city and would in no way be willing to do what is not" (412e). Socrates explains that the one who comes to need a judge learns to pride himself "on defending and accusing," believing himself "clever at doing injustice and competent at practicing every dodge...for the sake of little and worthless things" (405b). Similarly, the need for medicine arises "as a result of idleness and a way of life...full of humors and winds like a marsh" (405d). To ensure the guardians care for the city properly, then, they must be taught arts that dispose them to act on behalf of the common good. In the best city, the proper arts for the civic-minded guardians are conducive to living ascetically. While Socrates explanation helps us to understand the original reasons for pointing the finger at medicine and judging, to the extent carelessness in one's personal conduct translates into neglect of the common good, one nevertheless wonders whether these arts truly form a "bad and base" education, and whether their elimination would necessarily pave the way for virtue in the city.

The argument here concerning judging and medicine as arts turns on the way these arts, that combine a particular body of knowledge with practical skill, or, more simply, which constitute a set of informed opinions and corresponding actions, can be said to have moral suasion. How can we say that the practice of some art (as a doctor or

judge) or our reliance on it (as a patient or litigant) is good or bad? In Book I of the *Republic*, Socrates indicates that one who practices an art can use it to do harm just as easily as to do good (333e-334b). This is consistent with what he says later in Book III, where he attributes the “current art of medicine” to the Thracian gymnastic-master Herodicus (5th century BC), who misused his knowledge of medicine to prolong life for himself when stricken with an incurable illness (406a). Socrates regards Herodicus’ art as “an education in disease” (406a), in contrast with the original art of medicine founded by the ancient Greek god Asclepius, who “knew that for all men obedient to good laws a certain job has been assigned to each in the city at which he is compelled to work, and no one has the leisure to be sick throughout life and treat himself” (406c). So it would seem that these arts in themselves are value-neutral, while humans are morally accountable for using them in moderation to good ends. Yet Ibn Bājjah suggests that an art in itself can be corrupt, if it is composed of and, through its application, cultivates false opinions and erroneous actions. By their very presence in the city, the arts of medicine and judging serve a harmful purpose. For this reason, they must be eliminated.

Before looking more closely at the arts, we should note that, while Socrates calls the necessary city “true”⁴ and “healthy” (372e), he never refers to any city (*polis*) in the *Republic* as “virtuous” (root: *aretê*). But he does consider his city in speech as possessing the sum of all virtues, calling it “wise, courageous, moderate, and just” (427e). Ibn Bājjah likely adopted the name “virtuous city” in solidarity with the wide use of it in Alfarabi’s

⁴ In his interpretive essay, Allan Bloom insists that “true” as it is used here with respect to the necessary city has a guarded meaning: “The fact that Socrates says that it is the true city does not mean that he thinks it could come into being or that he would wish it to do so. Rather, by this assertion, he implies that the city really exists to serve the body and that this city, devoted to the satisfaction of the simplest desires, serves the body best. ...Perhaps Socrates’ assertion that it is the true city is not in contradiction, but in agreement, with Glaucon’s characterization of it as a city of sows” (Bloom, *Republic* 346).

corpus, including in the *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, *Political Regime*, *Selected Aphorisms* [SA] (esp. §57-§67), *Book of Religion* [BR], as well as *Enumeration of the Sciences*. For Alfarabi and Ibn Bājjah to embrace the idea of the virtuous city necessitates calling other cities something else. Alfarabi easily refers to them as “ignorant” (*jāhiliyyah* [e.g., SA sec. 51, BR sec. 14a]) or “non-virtuous” (*ghair al-fāḍilah* [e.g., BR secs. 15, 17]), whereas Ibn Bājjah chooses to finesse the question. Until now, we find him reluctant to speak of any city as lacking in knowledge or virtue. In this section of the treatise, one of the only times he has specifically described a city as being anything but perfect or virtuous, he quietly refers to the cities that have physicians and judges as “simple” cities (*basīṭ* [41.15]).

Now back to the question of the arts. It is strange that Ibn Bājjah begins his discussion by reciting what is not in the virtuous city. In the *Republic*, the arts of judging and medicine are preceded by numerous details about the necessary and healthy city, whereas Ibn Bājjah tells us first about non-existent things in his virtuous city. That is, at the same time that he revives interest in the virtuous city, his choice of a starting point forces us to consider what stands in the way of its realization.

That both Socrates and Ibn Bājjah pick the particular arts of medicine (*ṭibb*) and judging (*qadā'*) to occupy the same stage in depicting the virtuous city does not make their point any less curious. It does seem that these arts have been arbitrarily singled out for criticism—neither strikes us as a leading indicator of a city in decline. The art of medicine hardly seems germane to a political discussion, and more often than not its practitioners are far removed from political wrangling, whereas it is very hard to imagine a city doing without the art of judging. Yet almost no time is spent discussing the art of

judging here, while the rest of the discussion dwells at length on health and medicine.

How do we interpret Ibn Bājjah’s curious treatment of these arts? What is so particularly meaningful about their absence? What more do we need to know to benefit from this discussion?

First, given the emphasis on medicine and not judging, Ibn Bājjah’s treatment suggests that these arts are singled out more for their power to hold our attention than as genuine excesses of a political regime. That is, we should not take things too literally or we will miss the opportunity for a more robust understanding of Ibn Bājjah’s teaching on the city. More will be said about this as we go along.

Second, the purpose of Ibn Bājjah’s discussion is to issue a reproach to his fellow citizens. To him, the presence of these arts are symptomatic of a general decline in human behavior, i.e., relying too much on others to do things that each of us is equipped to take care of ourselves. While speaking of the art of medicine, Ibn Bājjah says: “It is evident that in the perfect virtuous city, every human being is given the best of what he is prepared for” (41.17-18). This paraphrases what Socrates says is justice in the *Republic*—“the minding of one’s own business and not being a busybody” (433b). Socrates explains:

“That rule we set down at the beginning as to what must be done in everything when we were founding the city—this, or a certain form of it, is, in my opinion, justice. Surely we set down and often said, if you remember, that each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit.” (*Republic* 433a)

In a nutshell, then, Ibn Bājjah subscribes to the Socratic idea of justice, “one man one art” (*Republic* 370b). Socrates’ vision of nature is that it equips every citizen to practice independently some art that contributes to the overall life of the city. Stated differently,

he equates justice with self-sufficiency, while he characterizes a city's dependence on doctors and judges as a form of consensual slavery (405b). In Ibn Bājjah's own words, it is one thing for us to practice arts endowed by nature, such as shoemaking or weaving (38.3-4); it is another for us to invent (*istanbat*) arts "to parry defective governance" (44.5-6). In assigning to others the task of administering to our health or arbitrating our disputes, we consent to an imperfect distribution of justice that cannot help but adopt the rule of treating individuals equally, i.e., with little regard to what nature has endowed even though this is precisely what is needed. The way to preclude justice from becoming one size fits all, as we will understand in the coming passages, is for humans to maintain good relations among themselves, treating others with affection so quarreling does not occur, and to oversee the care of their own bodies, so as to prevent ill health due to over-indulgence or neglect.

If Ibn Bājjah is right, that this is how things are meant to be, what should be said about humans failing to get along and not exercising restraint in bodily matters? This implies that humans have trouble knowing what it means to be virtuous. If they are not autonomous in following the light of their own reason in seeing the common advantages of doing what is good, then it necessarily follows that their obedience to the rule of another—a judge or a physician or even the laws of the city—must be problematic. How does the city, which approximates the rule of reason by establishing the rule of law, persuade others to aim at what is good, if humans are not naturally disposed to obey the commands of reason internally, that is, to apply governance in their own lives? Voluntary obedience to authority demands recourse to some internal or external thing more immediately compelling and thus more reliable than the internal rule of reason for most human beings.

The city's governance thus appears to be an alternative to self-rule that persuades by appealing to self-interest or that coerces by fear of punishment or pain, or some combination of self-interest and coercion. If this is so, can the city ever be brought to perfect virtue—can people be relied on to seek virtue for the sake of the common good, if they are taught by the city to weigh the good according to what is in it for them? The tension-ridden task of bringing about the virtuous city can best be described now as tempering the needs of the body in order to cultivate the conditions for the perfection of the human soul. As we move through Ibn Bājjah's account of the virtuous city, and see that he upholds a very strict sense of what it means to be virtuous, we realize that a great gap must separate the city as we know it from its virtuous counterpart, thus rendering the task of bringing about the virtuous city impossible.

AFFECTION AND JUSTICE

Ibn Bājjah's first positive assertion about the virtuous city indicates that it is bound by a kind of civic friendship. The aim of this bond is to unify the city so it acts like one body in doing things on behalf of the common good. Reversing order, Ibn Bājjah takes up the art of judging first, claiming that its absence in the virtuous city is "because affection (*al-maḥabba*) is wide-spread (*ajma'*) among the citizens, and there is no quarreling among them at all" (41.4).⁵ And this is akin to what Socrates says about friendship and quarreling, albeit less assertively, in the first book of the *Republic*:

"For surely, Thrasymachus, it's injustice that produces factions, hatreds, and quarrels...and justice that produces unanimity and friendship. Isn't it so?"
"Let it be so, so as not to differ with you."

⁵ See also Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8 and 9 and Alfarabi's *Selected Aphorisms*, par. 63.

“And it’s good of you to do so, you best of men.
Now tell me this: if it’s the work of injustice, wherever it is,
to implant hatred, then, when injustice comes into being,
both among free men and slaves, will it not also cause them
to hate one another and to form factions, and to be unable
to accomplish anything in common with one another?”
“Certainly.” (351d)

What precipitates quarreling and turns humans against their better natures? Ibn Bājjah does not supply an answer, but Socrates does, blaming it on “licentiousness” multiplying in the city (405a). Desiring more than we deserve means we become more self-regarding and less other-regarding in our daily pursuits. In place of perfect justice, which disappears when humans give in to greed and, in so doing, abandon the freedom to rule over themselves, laws must be instituted in the city.

Socrates’ exchange with Thrasymachus begins to reveal why the absence of virtue in the city is *the* political problem. Virtue is the foundation of peaceful co-existence among human beings. It is the work of virtue to implant “unanimity and friendship” among members of the city. The virtuous city represents the triumph of human reason over self-centered desires in the soul that are destructive of the common good. According to Socrates, friendship comes about only when every citizen is first “his own friend,” insofar as each embraces justice first in his soul (443d). Ibn Bājjah correlates affection and virtue in nearly the same way as Socrates does friendship and justice. He explains, “Therefore, when a part of it [the virtuous city] is stripped of affection and quarreling comes about, justice (*‘adl*) must be set down; and there must necessarily be someone to carry it out, namely, the judge” (41:4-5). Ibn Bājjah implies that the judge restores some measure of justice in the city once affection among citizens decays.⁶ He further suggests

⁶ Cf. Aristotle’s discussion of judges in *Nicomachean Ethics*: “For this reason...whenever people have a

that setting down what is just necessarily yields a second-best form of justice. On the one hand, it simplifies matters considerably—what is just is set down by law, so that all can know what is expected. On the other hand, neither judge nor law can take the place of citizens treating each other with genuine civility for the sake of peaceful co-existence. In short, the art of judging is symptomatic of incomplete virtue in the city, which is caused by incomplete virtue in the human soul. As a result, nothing short of perfecting the human soul can eliminate the art of judging. Ibn Bājjah’s ambiguous proposal to rid the virtuous city of the art of judging now seems all but absurd, given the nature and enormity of the underlying problem he must simultaneously overcome. Thus it makes sense to cut the discussion about judging short, for it threatens to complicate his investigation of the virtuous city just as it is getting started.

Friendship, preceded by justice in the human soul, sets the standard for what defines human relations in the virtuous city for Plato. According to Aristotle, however, friendship and justice are hardly equivalent virtues in the city.⁷ To speak more precisely, Aristotle says that friendship is sufficient to bind the city together, while justice is not necessarily a prerequisite of this friendship, meaning that there is no need of justice among friends:

Friendship seems to hold cities together, and lawmakers seem

dispute, they appeal to a judge, and going to a judge is going to justice, for the judge is meant to be a sort of ensouled justice...” (1132a19-22).

⁷ In his notes to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Joe Sachs says that Aristotle’s “heavily mathematical treatment of justice...omits any reference to the beautiful, which was said to be the end and aim of all virtue of character (1115b 12-13, 1122b6-7). This suggests that justice is in some way an incomplete, or undeveloped, virtue, and this will be confirmed in the discussion of friendship in Bks. VIII and IX. The active condition of the soul that is necessary and sufficient to make shared life possible may not raise the life that is shared to the form that most fulfills human capacities. Justice may still be a necessary step toward that higher condition” (90, n. 122). Sachs later summarizes: “Friendship is more natural than justice, holds together the complete life of cities..., is sufficient by itself to ends to which justice is necessary but not sufficient, and, like virtue of character in general, but unlike justice, achieves something beautiful” (144, n. 232).

to take it more seriously than justice, for like-mindedness seems to be something similar to friendship.... And when people are friends there is no need of justice, but when they are just there is still need of friendship, and among things that are just, what inclines toward friendship seems to be most just of all. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a22-29)

This argument for the superior status of friendship may illuminate why Ibn Bājjah does not see justice as *the* virtue, or highest end, of the virtuous city. Indeed, he postpones introducing it by name until the opposite city comes about on account of quarreling. While affection among citizens takes its bearings in part according to what is right, one's attachment to others is motivated by a mutual longing for something that justice alone cannot satisfy. Aristotle helps us to see this as well: "And friendship is not only necessary but also beautiful, for we praise those who love their friends, and an abundance of friends seems to be one of the beautiful things." (*N.E.* 1155a39-32). So the necessary city is not the virtuous city for Ibn Bājjah—he does not absent the arts of medicine and judging from the virtuous city in order to speak of it as a way of life concerned only with satisfying basic human needs. Rather, by putting affection ahead of justice, Ibn Bājjah imagines the virtuous city as a city united by a common interest in cultivating virtue that manifests itself as widespread love of others, which is tantamount to loving what is beautiful. Justice only gains ascendance for Ibn Bājjah when the city is stripped of this affection, i.e., when the inhabitants of the virtuous city lose sight of the beautiful. Since justice alone is not sufficient to bind the city together, eliminating the art of judging will not be enough to bring the city to its virtuous self. In the same way, we will see that eliminating the art of medicine is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for bringing about virtue in the city.

ON HUMAN ACTIONS

The art of judging is left aside despite its obvious political relevance for securing justice in the city, while the case for the relevance of medicine in political life is not so easily made. Accordingly, Ibn Bājjah draws out his point more slowly with respect to health and the virtuous city. In fact, he sticks with medicine as an analogy right up until the end of Part I, at which point he states most succinctly the important role medicine plays in his discussion:

And just as the true opinions with respect to medicine come back to the natural arts, while those with respect to the art of judging come back to the political art, so do those with respect to this [solitary governance] or what concerns the happiness of the solitary individual come back to the natural art and the political art. (44.6-9)

Similarly, he cites “medical practice” as the lone example of action that is uniquely human in Part II of the treatise, which we will discuss momentarily (47.15). And let us not forget that the previous discussion repeatedly describes the imperfect household in terms of sickness and deficiency. So what is the point of these recurring references to health and medicine? It could be that the things we readily see as political are perhaps not the best teachers of the way things ought to be in the virtuous city, while what is almost completely removed from politics, and motivated by factors other than what commonly motivates political life, helps us to see our way more clearly. In the *Governance*, it seems there is a distinct problem associated with the analogy of medicine that rivals anything straight-forward political matters, like the art of judging, might convey. To each part of his discussion, Ibn Bājjah apparently gives its due.

Let us not overlook the significance of the ordering of this exposition either, as we find ourselves almost immediately turning to the art of medicine once the concern for

the common good breaks down and greed enters the city. Ibn Bājjah begins by looking at humans as political beings with respect to affection, but when that affection proves itself tenuous, as it can be undone by petty quarrels, he shifts his focus almost entirely to bodily matters, which are seemingly apolitical. While the art of judging necessarily acts upon multiple parties in a dispute, the art of medicine is nothing if it is not an art that administers to the health of single individuals. In the *Republic*, the general art of doing what is “naturally most fit” is called justice (433a), while the particular art of medicine “gives what...is owed and fitting to” bodies (332c). Socrates builds upon the knowledge of the particular arts, which the many know of directly from experience, to educate them in what it means to be an art, which is then useful for understanding the elusive art of virtue, i.e., *the* human art insofar as the practice of virtuous actions is solely concerned with bringing about human happiness.

By changing subjects from judging to medicine, Ibn Bājjah is able to keep his discussion of the virtuous city from getting sidetracked. He takes one more step to rein it in by limiting his thinking to one aspect of the city, namely, its actions. He says that “all of the actions of the virtuous city are correct, and this is the particular characteristic adhering to (*talzamuha* [cf. 39.5]) it” (41.6-7). At the end of section five, he insists that the actions of the virtuous city are not only correct, but also virtuous: “Its actions alone are unqualifiedly virtuous” (41.18-19). This is to say, that of the two things he mentions as constituting the virtuous city—true opinions and correct actions—*the* characteristic that he seems to identify with the virtuous city is its having virtuous actions. Opinions are discussed later in sections six and seven, yet nothing is said anywhere in the treatise about opinions being virtuous as well.

To digress slightly, we should mention that the correlation of correct actions and the virtuous city is consistent with Ibn Bājja's original association of correct actions and governance early on in the treatise (cf. 37.2 and 39.3-4). Governance is notably missing from our discussion here. Presumably, there is no need of it, because the actions of the virtuous city, by definition, are well-ordered. Ibn Bājja hints as much in the upcoming part on medicine ("nothing in the virtuous city is disorganized [*ghair muntaẓim*]" [41.9]). And in the final section of Part I, he states explicitly that there is no need to discuss governance if the city is perfect (44.4).

Now back to the question of actions in the virtuous city. Undaunted by the problem of virtue in the human soul underlying the art of judging, Ibn Bājja changes course as though he now seeks to construct the virtuous city from the ground up. On the surface, insisting that the virtuous city's actions must all be correct buys him time, since it reinforces his statement that judging and medicine, to the extent they are invented arts concerned with action, belong elsewhere. But if we scratch the surface, we see that the virtuous city must be an even more remote possibility if its actions do not admit of error, given the pervasiveness in political life of what is erroneous as he defines it and according to the medical examples he uses (see below). It is a massive task to remove error from human life by the means he suggests, i.e., eradicating the erroneous actions associated with medicine. This shows that the virtuous city cannot be meant as a genuine alternative to the cities we have. The true purpose of the discussion is not to turn our attention forward to a new beginning for the city, but to turn it upwards—to set our sights on higher things concerning the human soul, like virtue, friendship, justice, as well as beauty. Presumably, the potential for these things resides in every city, or at least the

discussion here gives us every reason to believe this is so.

Let us now consider what makes certain actions “unqualifiedly virtuous” and what qualifies the actions that are not. Ibn Bājjah responds to the latter part first in the treatise. He says that “[w]hen any other action is virtuous,” i.e., when an action is said to be virtuous but in truth is only qualifiedly so, it is such “in relation to some existing corruption” (41.19-20). He cites the following examples forthwith:

Now to amputate a limb from the corporeal entity is harmful in itself, even though it may be accidentally useful—as with someone whom a snake has bitten and whose body becomes healthy by [that limb] being severed. Similarly, scammony [42] is harmful, even though it may be useful to someone with a disease. These matters have been summarily treated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. (41.19-42.2)⁸

Ibn Bājjah suggests that certain medical practices that are normally harmful are deemed good relative to a corresponding greater harm that threatens the body. No one considers amputation or inducing catharsis by scammony to be good and useful actions in and of themselves. Are all praiseworthy actions in the imperfect cities of this qualified type? Ibn Bājjah says nothing about the possibility of unqualifiedly virtuous actions occurring alongside qualifiedly virtuous actions in the city. So while it may be imprudent to state so openly, Ibn Bājjah certainly gives the impression that he excludes unqualifiedly virtuous actions from all but the virtuous city. In Part II of the treatise, a discussion devoted entirely to human actions, no where is this impression contradicted (45.1-48.18).

And so the discussion of virtuous actions in Part I eventually draws our attention to Part II. Here Ibn Bājjah divides the actions of human beings into three “genera”

⁸ The part Ibn Bājjah is referring to in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is ambiguous and I find none of the following citations conclusive. Fakhry believes that he is referencing “Eth Nicom III, 1 et passim” (42n1). Berman claims the reference is to “V.II.1138b1 ff., vii.5 ff., passim” (133n7), while Asin Palacios cites “1.III, c. I et passim” (40n10).

(48.14): human (*insāniyyah*), bestial (*bahīmiyyah*), and corporeal (*jamādiyyah*) (48.13). The actions of greatest concern are those committed by choice, which is defined as “the will coming about through deliberation” (46.10). These actions, Ibn Bājjah asserts, are distinctly human actions: “Everything that is found in a human being by nature and that is particularly characteristic of him with respect to actions comes about by choice” (46.6-7). Corporeal actions happen necessarily regardless of will, like falling down from above (46.1), so he leaves these aside. Thus the bulk of his effort is spent distinguishing between bestial and human actions, for most of the actions of the human being in the “four [imperfect] ways of life” are one or the other (47.11). Ibn Bājjah speaks of deliberation and thought, but the examples he cites in Part II (breaking a stone or a piece of wood [46.16] and eating cherries [47.1]) reveal that he is primarily interested in single voluntary actions of a physical or material nature that require little deliberation (unlike governance, cf. 37.3). It seems that virtuous actions do not always require extensive knowledge or effort, if they can be as simple as knowing to break a stick so it will not harm another, or to eat cherries to better one’s health. Yet what makes virtuous actions so elusive is choosing to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. Ultimately, what matters most for Ibn Bājjah is intention.

Apparently, bestial and human actions are distinguished by the “motive force” that prompts them. For bestial actions, the motive force is “the passions that are generated in the bestial soul,” such as “desire, anger, fear, or what resembles them” (47.9-10; 47.6). Human actions, on the other hand, are motivated by thought, not passion: “Thus, what moves the human being is what thought makes obligatory..., regardless of whether the thought is certain or merely presumptive” (47.7-9). Accordingly, the motive force behind

them is “opinion or belief existing in the soul” (47.10). Ibn Bājja has already indicated that correctness and error necessarily adhere to human actions. But he makes it difficult for us to judge the merit of an action, since it depends on our ability to discern the intention of the doer, rather than basing our judgment on the observable consequences of the action. To compound this difficulty, he puts forth the following critical summary account of the relationship between the human soul and action, which puts virtue practically out of reach for those who are always compelled by desire rather than reason:

Now whoever does an action due to opinion and what is correct, not paying attention to the bestial soul and what is generated in it, is a human being for whom it is more appropriate that this action of his be divine than that it be human. It must come about, therefore, that this human being is virtuous with respect to the formal virtues so that when the rational soul passes judgment about something the bestial soul does not oppose it but passes judgment about that matter in the way that opinion has passed judgment about it. The condition of the bestial soul is then such that it obtains the formal virtues. For it has the formal virtues only by means of the rational soul. The divine human being is, therefore, necessarily virtuous by means of the formal virtues.

So if he is not virtuous by means of these virtues and the bestial soul in him opposes his action, that action is either defective or forbidden or does not come about at all. That action is reprehensible [to him] and difficult for him, for the bestial soul naturally heeds and is obedient to the rational soul except for the human being who proceeds along a course that is not natural – like one who has moral habits of a beast of prey. ...

Therefore, anyone whose bestial soul has overwhelmed his rational soul to the point that his desire opposed to his opinion always compels him is a human being such that the worst beast is better than he. ... As Hippocrates says, whenever a diseased body is nourished, its sickness increases. (47.18-48.11).

Nature establishes that the bestial soul “heeds and is obedient to the rational soul,” and from this equilibrium humans can move toward two extremes: “the divine human being”

or “the human being such that the worst beast is better than he.” To be divine, the human being must have a soul in which the opining rational part always ranks above the desiring bestial part. This means that the rational part of the soul does not pay “attention to the bestial soul and what is generated in it,” but instead tames the bestial soul to the point that it always wants what the rational soul correctly chooses. That Ibn Bājjah immediately follows this up by elaborating on the human being with bad moral habits suggests that he does not invest a great deal of optimism in the divine alternative. It would be rare to find a human being who is consistently able to ignore the passions of the bestial soul, among them desire, anger, and fear, and opt to do what is right instead. Also, the lack of particular metaphors or relevant examples in the text suggests that Ibn Bājjah finds little in the known world one can model virtuous actions on, whereas he readily describes bad moral habits as bestial. By the end of Part II, then, Ibn Bājjah effectively concedes that political life as we experience it has limited utility in helping us understand perfect virtue. This understanding must be acquired on an individual basis, not collectively as inhabitants of the city, which returns us, albeit warily, to the analogy of medicine.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Ibn Bājjah launches into the discussion of medicine as though this analogy alone can establish the correlation between correct actions and the virtuous city. To reiterate, somehow he thinks he can persuade us better to do what is right by using allegorical examples from medicine than direct examples related to anything distinctly political. Here we speak of mushrooms, wine-drinking, exercise, dislocated joints, snake bites, and scammony. The different areas of medicine he touches on include medication, physical

therapy, and surgery. The following litany of examples illustrates how Ibn Bājjah argues his way out of needing medicine in the virtuous city:

[I]ts inhabitants do not nourish themselves with harmful foods. So they do not need to be aware of medicaments or of other comparable things for asphyxia from mushrooms. Nor do they need to be aware of therapy for [excessive] wine-drinking, since nothing in the virtuous city is disorganized. Similarly, if they fall away from exercise, many sicknesses arise. It is evident that these do not befall it. And it is likely that there is no need in it of therapy for more than dislocated joints and what is comparable and, in general, for the sicknesses whose particular causes arrive from outside such that a fine healthy body is not able to rouse itself and repulse them. Now many healthy people have already been observed whose major wounds heal by themselves, and other such things have been observed. (41.7-13)

Curiously, these examples do more to persuade us that the art of medicine is needed than not. The well-organized virtuous city depends on its inhabitants not bringing sickness onto themselves. They are compelled to eat and drink moderately, to exercise regularly, and each is to have a “fine healthy body” so constituted that it can “rouse itself and repulse” illness in almost every case. Therapy is needed in the virtuous city only to treat external sicknesses and to set dislocated joints.

To be sure, Ibn Bājjah is not saying that the inhabitants of the virtuous city are free of sickness and injury altogether, but free only of those that are brought on voluntarily. By necessity, there must be treatments for major wounds that do not heal on their own. Socrates, too, acknowledges that the art of medicine is not required in the healthy city “except in case of necessity” (410b). But does this exception not mean that medicine is needed in the virtuous city? Indeed, Ibn Bājjah vacillates between calling medicine an art (41.3, 43.19) and a science (44.5), as if he could conceive of two different kinds of medicine. Yet his final word is that “the science of medicine” is

eliminated just as “the art of judging” (44.5-6). So Ibn Bājjah does not retreat from his original position demanding the absence of medicine in the best city. Has Ibn Bājjah contradicted himself? Has Socrates not done the same? Do they really mean that the art of medicine is a genuine excess, since there is some need of it in the healthy city after all? And what becomes of this discussion of the virtuous city if the art of medicine is needed, regardless whether we limit it to treating only curable sicknesses and wounds? This discrepancy reveals that the claim that certain arts do not belong in the virtuous city cannot be taken at face value. Stated differently, our authors wish to impart in us a healthy skepticism toward opinions about political matters that defy common sense.

To illustrate this point further, let us consider one other exception related to medicine before concluding. While lack of attention to health that leads to immoderate reliance on the art of medicine may be blameworthy, it is not simply the case that health is a matter of human will that can be scrutinized according to one standard. Nature, too, plays an important part in determining the constitution of a human body. Yet Ibn Bājjah keeps completely silent about nature in this discussion. All humans start out life with bodies that are constituted differently and thus have different health needs. Nothing is said about those who require extraordinary care for incurable maladies due to no action of their own. Ibn Bājjah sets up a standard of health intended for all individuals that neglects the special case of those in need of constant care. Is it not clear, then, that his standard does not tolerate this exception? And if this interpretation is true, what does it potentially mean in practice? For Socrates, the solution is to let those perish who can never heal or take care of themselves, as such a person would prove “of no profit to himself or to the city” (*Republic* 407c-e). Socrates exaggerates matters to the fullest a few lines down to

make sure the absurdity of his argument resonates:

Will you set down a law in the city providing as well for an art of medicine such as we described along with such an art of judging, which will care for those of your citizens who have good natures in body and soul; while as for those who haven't, they'll let die the ones whose bodies are such, and the ones whose souls have bad natures and are incurable, they themselves will kill? (409e-410a)

This outrageous proposition makes sense only to the extent we concede that cultivating “good natures in body and soul” based on the limited use of medicine will necessarily translate into political well-being. It requires that citizens willingly put the needs of the city ahead of those of every individual. But the sick person’s will to live cannot be so easily suppressed for the sake of most others living well. And if it means doing what is patently unjust—neglecting to care for the chronically ill or wholesale killing of those whose souls are said to be beyond rehabilitation—it would hardly be reasonable to expect free persons to consent to such unreasonable actions. To wit, no real freedom is exercised in the city by permitting the abuse of some members of society in the name of the common good. Since Socrates’ radical solution is implausible, it cannot be a desirable means to make the city more self-sufficient. Thus, one cannot recommend it as good for the city or the individuals who share in it.

IBN BĀJJAH’S VIRTUOUS CITY: THE MORAL TEACHING

What is Ibn Bājjah’s purpose in keeping Socrates’ discussion of the virtuous city alive, despite the monstrous actions associated with the just city in the *Republic*? What makes Ibn Bājjah’s particular presentation of the virtuous city effective in turning our attention to virtue? For one thing, Ibn Bājjah’s sanitized account prevents us from seeing

the vicious side of Socrates' impracticable just city, whereby we are permitted to believe that man's longing for the virtuous city is a completely noble hope. He does so by simplifying matters regarding the invented arts of medicine and judging without so much as a hint that his own account contrives the way things are or ought to be in the city. This is unlike the dialogue in the *Republic*, where many fantastic things are said about the just city in a way that does not dull our senses as we read, but instead triggers moral outrage. The only excitement Ibn Bājjah stirs in his account is that he genuinely celebrates the idea of the "perfect virtuous city" and insists on the complete perfection of its core elements. For the most part, he calmly presents what he thinks are the simple facts about the virtuous city at a studied level of abstraction. There is no attempt to argue for the truth of anything, as if everything he says is perfectly self-evident.

Thus Ibn Bājjah puts the burden on the reader to defend or deny the merit of his philosophizing. Demanding readers who are not satisfied with this account must work for a fuller answer. He directs them to Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Otherwise, Ibn Bājjah gives nothing away. In so doing, he ultimately protects the city's sense of morality, since discussions that investigate what is virtuous tend to degenerate into relativism, i.e., causing others to doubt and ultimately deny that standards exist for political life in the first place. To avoid such an indictment, Ibn Bājjah repeatedly insists that actions necessarily adhere to correctness and error. And he attributes to the virtuous city all things perfect, true, and correct. While Ibn Bājjah does not define what morality is nor does he precisely enumerate which virtues he has in mind, he nevertheless insists on the existence and the necessity of virtuous action to reinforce morality as something every city should strive for. Ibn Bājjah's discussion encourages the positive human desire

to live in a close-knit city that promotes doing good to others, that is alive to the truest pleasures of common life, and that respects the highest things that are good and beautiful in the world.

At the same time, Ibn Bājja lets on that numerous variables are at play that diminish the possibility of bringing about the virtuous city. Most importantly, the path to what is best demands that we choose actions carefully. He insists that human actions are driven by equally powerful motive forces—both reason and passion are natural determinants of actions. The virtuous city, insofar as it has only correct actions, must have citizens who act correctly, that is, they must possess the necessary virtues to pursue what is best for the city. And so they must show great indifference to their own good in always choosing what is for the common good. Ibn Bājja seems to express doubt that humans can be so philanthropic. There is a permanent struggle within the human soul and nothing less than a divine human being acting in accordance with reason can serve as its master. This mastery of the soul does not mean that man can overcome his nature—man cannot change the constituting parts of his soul. For this reason, the desiring part appears to impose a natural limit on man's ability to bring about the virtuous city.

Even if human nature is the source of the absence of the virtuous city, Ibn Bājja is reluctant to declare all existing cities devoid of virtue. So where is virtue to be found, if the less-than-perfect cities are not exactly non-virtuous? In the next chapter, we will investigate opinion, the motive force behind human action, and explore the role it plays in moving the individual to virtue. While the realization of the virtuous city may prove well-nigh impossible, this does not exhaust virtue as a concern for individual human beings nor our longing to see virtue come about in political life.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, Ibn Bājjah's quest for the virtuous city begins with the art of judging, a discussion that stops at the brink of the paramount political problem of virtue in the human soul. Then it slowly introduces us to the art of medicine as a way of helping us wrap our minds around the enormity of this problem, starting with the many barriers to acquiring virtue that our bodily desires present. In between, Ibn Bājjah interjects that the transformation to the virtuous city must come about little by little, that is, correct action by correct action. To a large extent, then, the discussion of the virtuous city is a lesson in moderation: to implement changes with the intention of bringing about the "perfect virtuous city" requires uncommon devotion to others, steadfastness in doing what is right, and considerable personal sacrifice. Ibn Bājjah leaves us wondering if ordinary humans are up to this extraordinary task, let alone an entire city. In other words, at the same time that he treats the virtuous city as a universal human aspiration, he prevents us from getting too carried away with the idea of trying to bring the virtuous city into being. That is to say, once we raise the question of actualizing the virtuous city, reality sets in, and we come to recognize the virtuous city for what it is: a distant hope.

CHAPTER 4

THE DECLINE OF THE VIRTUOUS CITY

INTRODUCTION

After distinguishing the virtuous city from ones in which the arts of judging and medicine are present in section five, Ibn Bājjah proceeds to poke holes in the virtuous city in sections six and seven. Whatever optimism was shown for the potential perfection of the city in section five is now set aside. Recall that Ibn Bājjah insists at the end of section five that all opinions in the “perfect virtuous city” are true and its actions are “unqualifiedly virtuous” (41.18-19). In section six, the discussion of the virtuous city is reduced to these two vital components. Ibn Bājjah concedes that the best city, like all things that come into being, is subject to decay. The abiding question is, what precipitates the decay of the virtuous city? It appears the answer lies in opinions and actions.

Section six begins: “It is evident that every opinion other than an opinion of its inhabitants that arises in the perfect city is false (*kādhīb*), and every action that arises in it other than its customary actions is erroneous (*khaṭā’*)” (42.2-3). What makes this statement interesting is what it conveys about being perfect—and imperfect—as a city. The city achieves perfection when its inhabitants hold only true opinions in common and only correct actions are habit forming. Other opinions or actions than what exist in the perfect city are necessarily the opposite of what is true or correct and thus harmful to the

city's virtue. Or, to put this another way, the virtue of the city lies in its unity. Diversity of opinion and action is a condition that afflicts other cities. But even imperfect cities should be wary of innovation. Scientific books, for example, that introduce new ideas and actions into an existing city without concern for their effect on the common opinions and customary actions that bind the city together, are denigrated as "evil and ignorance" (42.7-8). Discussion of the city's decline extends into section seven, as we confirm that introducing "false opinions" causes sickness in the virtuous city, at which point "its affairs have disintegrated" and on account of which the city forfeits being "perfect" (43.2-3). To be sure, Ibn Bājījah sets very high standards for the perfect city, given that all opinions and all actions in it must contribute to its perfection. The practical lesson to be drawn is that the virtue of the city declines as its members lose sight of what is essential for the city's cohesion.

OPINION AND ACTION IN THE VIRTUOUS CITY

Why does "every opinion" and "every action" extraneous to the virtuous city matter? What do they have to do with the decline of virtue in it? Let us look at opinions first and then opinion and action together. On the limited occasions Ibn Bājījah speaks of the polar opposite of virtue in the first two parts of the treatise,¹ things that are "evil" (*sharr*), he inevitably refers to matters concerned with opinion that humans should avoid. For instance, evil can take the form of a discussion (*qawl*) that is either oral (39.9) or "set

¹ In Part III of the treatise, we learn that what is evil does not always have to be so. Ibn Bājījah acknowledges the opinion in political science that isolation is "wholly evil" (*sharrān bil-ḍat*), but contends that "accidentally it is good" (*bil-'ard fa-khair*) as that which "occurs" (*y'ard*) with most of what is according to nature" (91.2-3). In Part One, isolation is presented as a state of being in the imperfect city for the weeds, those in the city who are "strangers with respect to their opinions.... [who] have traveled in their thoughts to other rankings that are like homelands for them" (43.13-14).

down” (*wada’a*) (42.5-8), or thought (*fikr*) that wholly fails to move the soul to virtuous action (48.10). It appears that evil for Ibn Bājjah manifests itself almost exclusively in the form of opinion. How does opinion in the soul generate evil? The answer to this question is rooted in two parts, one concerning knowledge, the other action.

First, concerning knowledge, in the two instances that Ibn Bājjah refers to some discussion as evil, he also mentions “ignorance” (*jahl* [39.9, 42.8]). Virtue comes about because proper knowledge of the way things are in the world exists in the soul. Presumably one who has proper knowledge of virtue is compelled to act on behalf of this knowledge. In lieu of this knowledge, humans in imperfect cities are guided at most by rational opinion in their souls. Insofar as opinion is not the same as knowledge, it necessarily falls short of the mark in governing one’s soul to virtue. Evil comes about when rational opinion loses the authority to govern assigned to it by nature, i.e., to compel the soul to move the body in the direction of virtuous action (48.7-10). Bad opinion “set down” that *always* works to the detriment of virtue in the soul is “evil and ignorance” (42.7-8).

Before looking further into evil, let us first consider how opinion in the soul moves a human being to act. We have already seen that Ibn Bājjah insists on a direct correlation between opinion and action. In our discussion of Part II in the last chapter, we learned that action comes about by translating hidden “motive forces” in the soul into a form of animated speech interpreted by the body (47.9-10). How successful the body is as a conduit of these motive forces seems irrelevant. Ibn Bājjah is mostly quiet about the body throughout his account of action in Part II. What he does say is that action comes about for humans on account of two forces that correspond to his two-part ordering of the

soul: either action comes about by means of what “thought” (*fikr*), described as “opinion or belief existing in the soul,” “makes obligatory” (*awjab*) in the rational part of the soul, or by “passion” (*infi’āl*) generated in the bestial part of the soul (47.7-10). Actions obligated by thought are fully “human” actions and actions “preceded in the soul only by a passion of the soul” are “bestial” actions (47.5-7). Ibn Bājjah explains the relationship between bestial and human actions as follows:

Seldom is the bestial [action] found separate from the human, because it is inevitable that a human being who is in a natural condition will in most circumstances—except rarely and when it is passion that is the reason for his movement—think about how he will do something. Therefore, the bestial in him uses the human part so as to improve its action. But the human is found separate from the bestial, and medical practice is of this sort. However, it may be accompanied by a passion from the bestial soul. (47.11-16)

Nature assigns the rational part of the soul the task of commanding and the bestial part that of obeying (48.4-5). But the cause of action in humans is not attributable solely to nature as it is for other animals and plants. Humans as humans are compelled to act on account of something more, that is, “choice” (*ikhtiyār*) (46.7). Choice is defined as “the will coming about through deliberation” (46.10). Ibn Bājjah insists that it is not possible for an action that is “due to...choice” to be “found in any of the other kinds of bodies” than that of a human being (46.7-8). Moreover, it is certainly possible for a person to will an act without deliberation, but, as he emphatically states in Part III, action for which thought is not used is not unique to humans “beyond that its object is a body whose constitution is a human constitution” (75.8-9). Thus, only action that involves choice, an exercise of free will preceded by thought, distinguishes it as a “human action” (46.9). Bestial actions that are motivated by passion rather than reason in the human soul

constitute the will coming about in the absence of thought (Fakrhy 75.7).

About what do humans deliberate that produces opinion and then compels them to act? Ibn Bājjah indicates at the end of Part II that the primary difference between bestial and human actions is that ends are defined only for the latter. While bestial action “does come about from us,” it “is not for the sake of anything” (48.16-17). To be fully human, actions must not only be voluntary, but one must also meditate on the actions that produce some intended goal. In the best scenario, the human will chooses a goal that is favored by reason—we want what is determined by our rational soul. So humans deliberate about the means to the goals of human life, about the possible actions that correspond to such a goal, and what the likely outcome of a chosen action will be.

In Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle indicates that “deliberating (*bouleusis*) is a certain kind of inquiring” (VI.1142a31) and that humans “deliberate about things that are up to us and are matters of action.... For the causes responsible for things seem to be nature, necessity, and chance, and also intelligence and everything that is due to a human being” (III.1112a31). In a word, deliberation concerns rational inquiry into actions, of which humans are the sole cause. Thus, the one who deliberates best can bring about the best human actions: “And one who is a good deliberator simply is someone who, by his reasoning, is apt to hit upon what is best for a human being among actions” (1141b12-13). To be clear, for Aristotle, deliberation aims necessarily at choosing actions that are salutary for human beings. Hence he conceives of deliberation as choosing actions that will bring about some goal “most easily and most beautifully” (1112b18). The goal of human action, however, does not require deliberation:

We deliberate not about ends but about the things that are related to the ends, for a doctor does not deliberate about

whether he will cure someone, nor a rhetorician about whether he will persuade, nor someone holding political office about whether he will produce good order, nor does anyone else deliberate about ends, but having set down the end, they consider in what way and by what means it would be the case. (1112b12-14)

Thus, Aristotle argues that every end or goal of a human being, properly understood, must be related to some art, and every human art aims at the good.

Once the rational soul has grasped the end nature intends for human life in the universal order of things, the human being can begin to inquire into which actions are possible and necessary to attain this end. The superiority of the motive force in the rational soul to determine action is premised on the conviction that the universe has a discernible order accessible to unassisted human reason, and that it is possible for the rational person to discover the place of the human being within that order. As we indicated in the previous chapter, virtue is *the* art of human beings true to the natural order that seeks to produce the highest human good, namely, happiness. The art of virtue, as presented by Ibn Bājjah, assumes that humans are political beings by nature, i.e., that most humans need to live in a virtuous city to be perfectly virtuous, though a rare type of human being can achieve a limited form of virtue alone. We will get to the life of the solitary in the next chapter.

So we say that an action is a human action to the extent it has doing good as its primary goal. If it happens to satisfy some passion along the way, it is only accidentally a bestial action (47.4). And so it is that even mundane actions, like breaking a stick or stone (46.15-47.1) or eating cherries (47.1-5), become matters of interest, insofar as these actions manifest whether the action was intended to be good in general or only to meet a bodily need. Human action looks to the altruistic good that can be done or the harm

prevented for another person: we break a stick that has scratched us to protect someone else from getting scratched. The result of a bestial action is to gratify one's own passion, regardless of the benefit or the harm that might accrue to oneself or to others in generating that action: we break the stick out of anger just because it hurt us. The human action seeks to serve the good in general; the bestial action satisfies the self. To be sure, the distinction between bestial and human actions draws a fine line, as the distinction rests mainly on the intention of the human being and not the result of one's actions.

OPINION AND EVIL

The aspect of choice is unique to humans on account of having something rational present in the soul (46.7-8, 46.13-14). Yet our capacity for voluntary action allows for humans to miscalculate, that is, to pursue actions for the sake of some end lower than the good preferred by the rational soul. Among the "external goods" (65.4-5, 69.10) mentioned in the treatise that are pursued in other than the virtuous way of life are bodily pleasures (62.12-15), money or wealth (64.9-10, 65.3, 65.22-23), honor and reputation (65.4, 69.9), and conquest (74.17). These lower ends are not ends in truth. Rather, "the preparatory things in the virtuous city are goals in the others" (62.11). In the case of the imperfect city, where lower ends define its way of life, the healthy individual who is inclined to obey his or her rational soul will come to view the city's way of life as "not natural to the soul":

The relation of those conditions is like the relation of the ways of life to the soul. Just as health is supposed to be singular contrary to these many [conditions] and health alone is a natural matter for the body. These many [conditions] are external to nature. Likewise, the lasting

way² of life is the natural situation of the soul, and it is singular contrary to the remaining ways of life and they are many, and the many are other than natural for the soul. (91.7-11)

What about the extreme case of pursuing a way of life that “always” (48.8) wants things contrary to the rational part of the soul? Just short of calling such a life evil in Part II, Ibn Bājjah summarizes this case in one of his harshest appraisals in the treatise:

[T]he bestial soul naturally heeds and is obedient to the rational soul except for the human being who proceeds along a course that is not natural—like one who has the moral habits of a beast of prey. Therefore, one whose anger becomes excessive resembles at that moment a beast of prey with respect to his moral habits.

Therefore, anyone whose bestial soul has overwhelmed his rational soul to the point that his desire opposed to his opinion always compels him is a human being such that the worst beast is better than he. It would be more decent to say of him that he is a beast but that he has the thought of a human being by which that action [of his] is accomplished. Therefore, that thought of his is at that moment an evil added to his evil, as with praiseworthy nutrition for an ailing body. As Galen says, whenever a diseased body is nourished, its evil increases. (48.4-11)

Here Ibn Bājjah implies that it is possible for a soul to be so divided as to oppose nature completely and thus to be beyond rehabilitation. A human being can reach a state such that nothing can cause him or her to think rationally. Opinion in the soul is thus overpowered by desire—running full speed “along a course that is not natural”—so that the bestial part becomes completely deaf to the rational part’s call to virtue. As such, thought generated by the rational soul is now forced to serve the bestial part of the soul, and thus thought becomes “an evil added to his evil.” Shocking as it sounds, one point increasingly becomes clear: both good and evil can take up residence in the soul,

² Reading *al-sīrah al- iqāmiyyah* with Asin Palacios (79), rather than *al-sīyar al-imamāmiyyah* with Fakhry.

depending on one's predilection for opinions and actions that are good or evil (cf. *Republic* 491b-c). The overall tendency of these remarks is not to suggest that living a wholly unnatural, bestial life is any more likely than living a purely rational one. More often, matters concerning human thought "by which...action is accomplished" at any given "moment" are not so easily categorized, but rather occupy a middle ground. At times, thought compels action, at other times thought is overcome by passion. In short, the competition between the rational and bestial parts of the soul rarely reaches a conclusion. There is a constant tension between reason and desire in the human soul as each motive force seeks mastery over the human will.

While the bestial human being may not be a common threat to the city, bestial desire in the soul remains an issue. What does its presence in human life mean for the way a city must be governed? We have noted that Ibn Bājjah readily acknowledges the potential in human beings for bestial action as well as human action. Since bestial desire is a part of the soul and bestial action is inevitable for all but the rarest of human beings, this means that the virtuous city cannot escape corruption and decline. The city is only perfectible to the extent the nature of its inhabitants is perfectible. And its inhabitants are only as perfect as their bestial desire can be controlled by reason. Thus, even the virtuous city must have mechanisms in place to stomp out evil. For both good and evil are innate qualities of the human being.

Given what might otherwise appear here as a preoccupation with bestial matters on account of investigating decline in the virtuous city, we must take care not to construe the discussion of bestial matters as condemning all but the virtuous city as evil—it cannot be that all cities other than the virtuous one are occupied by humans behaving like beasts

of prey, if we mean for humans to peacefully co-exist. Ibn Bājjah contends that the city inhabited only by beasts of prey cannot exist:

As for the one whose goal is a bestial goal, either obtained by human thought or not obtained, the usage of his humanity and the usage of his bestiality is one. And it makes no difference if he then exists with the constitution of a human being that is hiding a beast, or if he is single [i.e., complete] beast. And it is clear that whoever has this by means of the bestial act, no city can be composed of him and that he cannot even be part of a city in the first place. (75.9-12)³

For Ibn Bājjah, the possibility of a soul turned to evil does not translate into the possibility of an evil city. As we will discuss later in the chapter, every imperfect city, that is a city in more than name only, presupposes having many things in common with the virtuous city. So having pushed the analogy as far as he could, Ibn Bājjah arrives at the point where the city no longer appears to be the soul writ large,⁴ an analogy which has dominated Ibn Bājjah's thinking until now. That is, he has characterized the city as one-dimensional; it is a macrocosm of what happens in the soul. It is uncommon for the treatise to discuss the city in the dimension of something that shapes the soul in turn, for instance, in the way that the city determines the character of the household (39.14-15). The household cannot escape the deficiencies that afflict the city. In contrast, the human soul can be guided independently of the common opinions and customary actions that govern the city that is other than virtuous. This means that the imperfect ways of life in the city do not have to prevent one's pursuit of the virtuous life. More will be said about this in the following paragraph, while a fuller explanation awaits us in the next chapter.

³ Compare Alfarabi's statement in the *Political Regime*: "Now those who are bestial by nature are not citizens, nor do they have any civic associations at all" (Butterworth, forthcoming translation, par. 92).

⁴ The dialogue in the *Republic* is premised on the Socratic thesis that it is possible to investigate justice in the individual soul by observing it in the city, as "there is more justice" in the "bigger" where it is "easier to observe closely" (368d-369a).

THE ORIGIN OF VIRTUE IN THE CITY AND THE SOUL

Until now, we have assumed the existence of virtue without inquiring into its origin. What does it mean for a city to be virtuous, based on what we have learned from the treatise thus far? To recapitulate, it means that every part of the city is well-ordered in accordance with nature, so that the city is bound by a kind of civic friendship. In other words, the virtuous city presupposes an all-virtuous citizenry, whose lives are perfectly ordered and self-sufficient, wherein all manner of civil discontent is vanquished. This says that the “inner being”⁵ of each person is well-ordered, that the human will in every instance is directed by the rational soul to choose all the opinions and all the actions one needs to live well. Or, as Ibn Bājjah indicates at the top of section six, every opinion and every action in the city is conducive to virtue in the city.

The crucial ingredient of the virtuous city appears to be attainment in the soul of knowledge about the way things are in the world, particularly knowledge of what the best life is for human beings, in order to empower the will to choose opinions and actions in accordance with the virtuous life. The city becomes other than virtuous when souls are ignorant of the proper aim of human life and the best means to this end. This ignorance manifests itself in the form of false opinions and erroneous actions. In brief, Ibn Bājjah’s virtuous city is self-sufficient so long as every inhabitant thinks and acts virtuously.

⁵ Compare this argument with Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s contention that “The...*Tadbīr al-Mutawahhīd* (*Regimen of the Solitary*), far from being a political treatise, deals in reality with man’s inner being.” (“Mystical philosophy in Islam,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy* (New York, 2000), 6:616-620.) Nasr’s reading is simply not supported by the text. Every effort is made in the treatise to link the city and the soul, and thus the political and the personal. To ignore the political aspect of the treatise deprives the text of a central tenet—that the best life for the individual in accordance with nature is pursued in the virtuous city. Indeed, all human life for Ibn Bājjah takes place in the city, virtuous or not. To focus on inner being to the neglect of political being seems to argue for radical individualism that inevitably would lead to widespread isolation, which in the end cannot be good for human beings living together. In the next chapter, we discuss Ibn Bājjah’s treatment of isolation as a necessary evil only for the solitary.

Nothing more is needed to order the city, neither rulers nor laws, so long as every human being in the city lives correctly.

If the way to a virtuous city is by means of well-ordered lives, what is necessary to bring virtue about in individual souls? For instance, is the way to a well-ordered life only by means of the all-virtuous city? Or does Ibn Bājjah suggest that humans can be virtuous on their own? As far as one can tell, Ibn Bājjah's position is that the soul can attain knowledge requisite for the virtuous life independent of the city. The household, which by definition is a part of the city, is beholden to the city insofar as the household necessarily shares the city's predominant way of life (40.17-18). The same is not true for the individual. Ibn Bājjah says in Part III that no human being is a part of the city except if the city is virtuous, this being the only case in which every citizen rightly assimilates to the city's way of life: "If a human being is part of a city, then the goal of all of his actions is the city. That is so if he is in the virtuous city only" (62.8-9). If the city is other than wholly virtuous, then it becomes incumbent upon the individual to learn how to lead a virtuous life. Along these lines, the cave analogy in the *Republic* suggests that only citizens educated to virtue by the city are obligated to serve the city in their actions (520b-c). In particular, only the just city can obligate the philosopher-king to rule (520a-b). Conversely, the unjust city that aims at an end contrary to virtue, such as pleasure or honor, necessarily educates its citizens to that end, a city which the wise are not obligated to rule (520b).

Neither Socrates nor Ibn Bājjah advocates that anything so radical as the all-virtuous city, the all-virtuous citizenry, or the just ruler is likely to come into being, let alone a combination of these. To be sure, Ibn Bājjah says almost nothing in the treatise

about the city educating citizens to virtue and never says that the virtuous city needs justice, let alone a wise philosopher-king.⁶ However, Ibn Bājjah's virtuous city does depend on the unlikely convergence of individuals with virtuous souls. So what becomes of the human soul, given that it must acquire knowledge for its perfection, when the city cannot be relied on to educate it to virtue? In the absence of the virtuous city, it appears that every human being must educate one's own self to virtue. How readily this can happen is certainly helped or hindered to varying degrees by the way of life that is dominant in the city, in particular, how free humans are to pursue such learning. As we will see in the next chapter when we delve deeper into Ibn Bājjah's understanding of opinion in the discussion of the weeds, the possibility of virtue coming to be in the soul other than in the virtuous city is mostly a matter of chance.

WHAT IS FALSE OPINION?

Let us return to the beginning of section six to say something more about the two factors leading to decline in the virtuous city, first about false opinion, then erroneous action. With respect to false opinion, matters can best be clarified by comparing what is said near the end of Book V of the *Republic* about opinion versus knowledge and ignorance. Socrates's discussion is presumably one of the earliest, if not the earliest, treatment of the problem of false opinion and it is known that Ibn Bājjah had access to this reading.⁷ So the comparison of their teachings is not unwarranted.

⁶ Recall that justice does not come about for Ibn Bājjah until a part of the virtuous city is stripped of affection and quarreling ensues, at which point a judge, i.e., an outsider to the dispute, is needed to restore harmony (41.4-6).

⁷ There are other substantive discussions of false opinion to illuminate Ibn Bājjah's teaching here. For example, the treatment of false opinion in Alfarabi's *Book of Letters* concerns religion as much as it does philosophy (see Charles Butterworth, translation forthcoming, Part II, chapter xxiv). See also Alfarabi's

Let us start our discussion of false opinion as it is discussed in the treatise by noting that, while the emergence of false opinion is said to alter matters in the virtuous city, turning it into an imperfect city, Ibn Bājjah does not say that what is true is replaced in the imperfect city by what is false. The potential for independent thought by “weeds” who discover truth on their own upholds the possibility of true opinion in the imperfect city (43.1-3). Subsequently, the presence of both types of opinion in the city makes the discernment of true opinion difficult.

Other issues complicate the problem of falsehood. For one thing, the “falseness” of an opinion, especially of a belief cherished by inhabitants throughout a city, is not something most people “notice,” and so it can prove dangerous to attempt to point out the falsehood of an opinion directly that the many see as true (42.10-11). Moreover, Ibn Bājjah insists on the existence of falsehood at the same time he declares that speaking intelligently about what is false, i.e., forming true opinions about what is false, is itself problematic, as what is false does not “have a delimited [*maḥdūda*] nature” (42.3-4). On the authority of the *Posterior Analytics*, he insists that it is not “at all possible to know what is false” (42.4-5).

To explain briefly what is meant by a false opinion, in Part III of the treatise (51.18-57.19), Ibn Bājjah speaks at length about false opinion with respect to syllogistic reasoning (*qiyās* [55.1]). He provides two examples of erroneous syllogisms, i.e., two-

Selected Aphorisms nos. 68-87 for a discussion of sound versus erroneous opinions concerning being and happiness (Butterworth 44-57). Averroes, in his commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, says false opinion is when “a man departs from his belief willingly...just as shunning evil can be only through his willing so” (Lerner 34). Finally, Maimonides speaks about false opinions with respect to science and God in the *Guide of the Perplexed* (Pines 16, 68, 70; 82-84, 146, 152, 225). He tells us that false opinions are called ‘death’ in the Bible, in accordance with the term ‘living’ used “in the sense of acquisition of knowledge” (93; cf. *Deuteronomy* 30:15). Neither religion nor voluntary will enter into the general discussion of false opinion in Ibn Bājjah’s treatise.

part logical arguments consisting of a subject and a predicate, in which the subject of the syllogism is true and the predicate is false. The false predicate may be something that is impossible to be true (e.g., to say someone has been killed and then to say that the person has been brought back to life [54.2-5]). Or it may be possible for the predicate of an argument to be true, but not for the subject (e.g., to claim that Zayd is a grammarian, but he is really not [54.5-7]).

While the reference to the *Posterior Analytics* by Ibn Bājjah is ambiguous,⁸ Socrates in the *Republic* tries to make sense of falsehood by associating truth, or knowledge, with being. Briefly, he argues that the thing which is unknowable is what “in no way *is*” while “what *is* entirely” is “entirely knowable” (476e-477a; italics in the translation). Accordingly, true opinion⁹ is knowledge of the thing that truly exists—of “things that are always the same in all respects” (479e). Socrates suggests that false opinion is tantamount to mistaking a likeness for what is real (476c), which amounts to knowing “nothing at all” of what exists, or “ignorance” (478b-c). So we reserve the name “true opinion” only for opinions about things of which it is possible to have knowledge, things that have “being purely and simply” (479d). To opinions about things of which it is impossible to have knowledge, what Socrates eventually refers to as “not-being” (479d), Ibn Bājjah assigns the name “false opinion.”

To say something about opinion in general to round out our discussion, let us look

⁸ The thing lacking in false opinion, as the reference to the *Posterior Analytics* [PA] suggests but does not clarify, might be coherence, insofar as false opinion states a conclusion that does not stem from a common set of premises. In any case, the reference to the *PA* is ambiguous. Berman cites Aristotle, *PA* I.16.79b23-80b6 (*MPP* 133, n.8). Joaquín Lomba (2006) says there is nothing precisely related to Ibn Bājjah’s comment in Aristotle’s work, but quotes the line at *PA* 88a: “*Las falsedades no derivan todas de un idéntico y singular grupo de principios*” (100, n.35). Neither reference is conclusive.

⁹ In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Socrates’ interlocutor states there are two kinds of opinion, one true and the other false, and explicitly defines knowledge as opinion that is true (187b). See their probing discussion of false opinion from 187c to 201c. Aristotle also states that “rightness of opinion is truth” (NE 1142b11).

at the beliefs Socrates attributes to the many versus the philosopher with respect to matters of opinion in Book V of the *Republic*. Here Socrates repeatedly argues that opinion mostly lies between the extremes of false opinion and true opinion, i.e., “between ignorance and knowledge” (477a, 478d). By this he means that opinion “participates...in *to be* and *not to be*” at the same time (478e). That is, opinion occupies the realm of becoming, while knowledge is assigned to the realm of being, and ignorance to the realm of not-being. Opinion takes the form of “the many beliefs of the many about what’s fair and about the other things” (478d), such as what is beautiful, just, and holy versus ugly, unjust, and unholy (479a).¹⁰ The many “opine all these things but know nothing of what they opine” (479e). They “look at many fair things but don’t see the fair itself and aren’t even able to follow another who leads them to it...” (479d). Socrates makes the following analogy early on in the discussion to illustrate the difference between opinion and knowledge that the many apparently overlook:

Is the man who holds that there are fair things but doesn’t hold that there is beauty itself and who, if someone leads him to the knowledge of it, isn’t able to follow—is he, in your opinion, living in a dream or is he awake? Consider it. Doesn’t dreaming, whether one is asleep or awake, consist in believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness, but rather the thing itself to which it is like? (476c)

Unlike the many, the philosopher, who recognizes the difference between knowledge and opinion, “believes that there is something fair itself and is able to catch sight both of it and of what participates in it, and doesn’t believe that what participates is it itself, nor that it itself is what participates...” (476c-d). For the many, knowledge of what *is* does

¹⁰ In the *Theaetetus*, the argument “man is the measure of all things” (152a) is attributed not to the many, but to the pre-Socratic thinker Protagoras (ca. 485-415 BCE), who apparently defended this thesis in a lost book provocatively titled, *Truth*.

not extend beyond what is perceptible through the physical senses of the material world. What is fair, for example, has no being other than what one believes to exist of it in fair things. All truth is relative to the person making an observation of the fair, just, beautiful, and so on in particular objects. Hence, opinion about what is in the material world is always true for the person who believes it, which leads us to infer that there can be no such thing as false opinion for those who think this way. To them, knowledge and opinion are the same thing.

For the philosopher, “those who delight in each thing that is itself” (480a),¹¹ sense perceptions occupy the realm of opinion, the realm of what comes to be and passes away, rather than the realm of things as they truly *are*. The philosopher “believes” (476c) in eternal beings whose existence does not terminate in their likenesses. For likenesses can participate in a thing as well as its opposite, that is, in being and not-being. For instance, nothing prevents an object from appearing beautiful and ugly to different observers at the same time, or to the same observer at different times as the object comes into being and passes away. The appearance of a thing may be all that is perceptible of what is beautiful, but this does not preclude the possibility that something beyond what is perceptible exists of what is beautiful. There must be an idea of what *is* beautiful that is some one thing that does not change, unlike opinion, and that sets the standard for what is identical in all objects said to be “beautiful.” Indeed, without the presumption of a universal idea of the beautiful, speech about beautiful things would be non-sensical. More generally, without the belief in universal ideas, on which the philosophic life itself is premised, the pursuit of knowledge would be futile.

¹¹ Cf. the philosopher Aristotle’s doubts about the truth as well as the practical utility of Plato’s theory of universal forms in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.6.1096a-1097a).

In Part II of the treatise, Ibn Bājjah says that all “opinion or belief” exists in the rational part of the soul, regardless of whether the opinion is true, false, or lies between truth and falsehood (47.10). This means that human souls have the capacity for knowledge as they do opinion and ignorance—opinion in the soul may be perfectible, but it is likewise fallible in its claim to know what *is*. In short, the soul is equipped to generate both true and false opinion. Ibn Bājjah’s overall argument concerning opinion may now be summarized as follows. Every opinion—whether it is true or false, whether it takes the form of thought, oral speech, or written discourse—can trace its original existence to the same point as far as humans are concerned, namely, the rational part of the soul. Because the soul is a conduit for every kind of opinion, this means that truth does not attach to an opinion automatically on account of its presence in the soul. Every opinion, spoken or unspoken, must be examined critically and reinforced by argument if one is to ascertain its participation in truth or falsehood. In particular, we should not assign truth to written speech automatically, a matter we will turn to shortly.

For Ibn Bājjah, the formation of opinion is not a matter to be taken lightly. It demands great care and diligence, as it directly determines one’s ability to live well. Such care and diligence starts with a charitable disposition toward opinions in the marketplace of ideas that are strange and difficult to grasp, a challenge we become acquainted with first-hand in working through Ibn Bājjah’s unconventional use of words in the treatise, especially *tadbīr* and *mutawahhīd*. It is the ability to tolerate, if not to engage seriously, alternative opinions to the ones most cherished in political life that his teaching on opinion aims to foster.

WHAT IS ERRONEOUS ACTION?

We now move on to discuss erroneous action. We do so by looking first at action in conjunction with opinion. Recall that, prior to section six, Ibn Bājjah shows greater interest in action than opinion. For instance, in section three, we learn that governance must admit of correctness and error (39.4 and 7-8), but nothing is said about truth and falsehood, as if the “most generally accepted signification” (*ashhar dalālatihā*) is simply accurate, that governance is only about “ordering actions” (37.2). Again, in section five, wherein Ibn Bājjah is giving his own account of how matters ought to be, he identifies only actions as perfect. Opinions that belong to the virtuous city are said to be true, whereas its actions are “unqualifiedly virtuous” (41.18-19). Actions that belong to other cities are only “qualifiedly” so—an action elsewhere may be said to be virtuous, but it is so “in relation to some existing corruption” (41.19-20). Along with the nearly exclusive attention paid to action in the first five sections of Part I, the whole of Part II offers an understanding of human versus bestial action. All told, a smattering of attention is paid to opinion in the treatise. Still, as we already begin to see in section five, where Ibn Bājjah first speaks of opinion alongside action, he puts opinion ahead of action and does so in many instances in which the terms appear together. There is a less subtle effort to assert the primacy of opinion in section six, notwithstanding the much higher frequency of the word “action” versus “opinion” everywhere else in the treatise. It could very well be, then, that true opinion is more fundamental to governance than correct action, even though it is an issue with which the many are apparently less familiar.

To investigate the special emphasis here on opinion versus action, we need to consider the following questions:

- (i) First and foremost, what role does Ibn Bājjah assign to action versus opinion in defining the virtue of a human being—is it possible to show that one of these two means to virtue ultimately precedes the other?
- (ii) What is the relation of the “existing corruption” discussed in section five to erroneous action, and does false opinion contribute anything to this corruption? That is, given their juxtaposition in section six, how is false opinion joined to erroneous action in eroding the virtue of the city?

To answer these questions, we will consider the relationship of virtue to opinion as well as action in the treatise so far.

Once again, let us return to the previous section, section five, to examine the role Ibn Bājjah assigns to opinion and action in bringing about virtue in the city. Ibn Bājjah suggests in section five that virtue is uniquely characteristic of action, while he says very little about opinion. He refers to action in the virtuous city as both “virtuous” and “correct,” but never speaks of opinion as virtuous, thereby implying that correct action is the most vital component of the virtuous city. Stated differently, until section six, it appears that action is the necessary and sufficient means to attaining virtue. To this effect, he says in section five that “all of the actions of the virtuous city are correct, and this is the particular characteristic necessitating it” (41.6-7). Yet, as we noted above, Ibn Bājjah associates evil with ignorance twice in the treatise (39.9, 42.8), i.e., with a lack of true opinion rather than with bad actions, thereby indicating that correct action is not all that is needed for virtue in the city. By remaining mostly silent about the body in his discussion of action in Part II, he further stresses that whatever virtue attains in human life takes place on account of something in addition to action:

Now whoever does an action due to opinion and what is correct, not paying attention to the bestial soul and what is generated in it, is a human being for whom it is more appropriate that this action of his be divine than that it be human. It must come about, therefore, that this human being is virtuous with respect to the formal virtues.... The condition of the bestial soul is then such that it obtains the formal virtues. For it has the formal virtues only by means of the rational soul. The divine human being is, therefore, necessarily virtuous by means of the formal virtues. (47.18-48.2)

Since even “divine” human action is “due to opinion,” opinion must be prior to and a cause of virtuous action in humans. Indeed, the human being becomes “virtuous with respect to the formal virtues” on account of divine action, when “only by means of the rational soul” the bestial soul acquires the formal virtues. In other words, that which resides in the rational part of the soul, i.e., opinion, precedes whatever action the body takes in the process of bringing what is correct about. Correct action as a means to virtue originates in the soul in the form of knowing “what is correct,” whereas the role the body plays in bringing about correct action appears to be secondary, perhaps even inconsequential, since the body is not rewarded by anything, like pleasure, as is the case with bestial action. Thus, with respect to bringing virtue about, it appears that the soul precedes the body and opinion takes precedence over action.

While we find that the treatise emphasizes opinion over action in the final analysis, on account of the proximity of opinion to knowledge, two points need to be emphasized. First, the fact that only actions are called “virtuous” in the treatise, and not opinions, serves to remind us that it is not enough to have knowledge about what is correct to bring about the virtuous city. Virtue must come about in the form of correct actions to constitute a fully human life. In turn, action presupposes human society, for as

we said earlier, the practice of virtue rightly understood looks to benefit others and not simply oneself. We take up the question in the next chapter of how far this human society must extend, whether the virtuous life requires us to benefit only a small group of like-minded friends, an entire city, or even an entire nation. And we will consider what happens to the individual when the city is so imperfect that the pursuit of virtuous action must be suspended, that is, when total isolation is necessary for the philosopher.

Second, while both opinion and action are necessary for virtue, we should stress that neither is sufficient to bring virtue about. Both are partial means to the perfection of the human being as a whole. The perfection of opinion in the form of true opinion and the perfection of action in the form of correct action are the means, as we will see at the end of Part I, to the perfection of human life, that is, the attainment of happiness by means of the virtuous way of life (43.20-21). Unlike other living entities, plant or animal, humans are not endowed by nature with all that is needed to attain the perfection for which they were created. The rational part of the soul must be educated in the opinions and actions needed to attain virtue for the sake of human happiness. As it goes, there are numerous impediments to acquiring the soul's proper education: false opinions have as much chance of ruling the rational soul as true ones; the human will can put opinion in service of erroneous action, as much as it can unite opinion and action in choosing to do what is correct; and the greatest barrier of all to educating one's soul—Ibn Bājjah's treatise notwithstanding—is that humans lack an exact science comprised of true opinions and correct actions to pass on from generation to generation. We will say more about this last point below when we address the issue of speech that is set down, i.e., opinion that has the greatest power to motivate action in the city.

CORRUPTION IN THE CITY

If we shift our attention from the virtuous city to the imperfect one, or virtue once the virtuous city declines, then our discussion must evolve from understanding perfection to pursuing it. We must move past description to prescription. Our focus now becomes the eradication of what blocks virtuous action in the imperfect city. To this end, we look to the “existing corruption” described in section five that creeps into the city. It appears to be something akin to the “added” thing discussed in section four that renders the household sick and deficient. Recall that Ibn Bājjah describes deficiency in the household as something additional “that is not natural” (39.15) that can “lead to the destruction of the household and to its ruin” (39.18). He likens this deficiency to “a sixth finger” (39.16) that renders the hand deficient, but a hand nonetheless. He summarizes his argument on the corruption of the household thus:

It is evident from what we have said that the households other than the virtuous household are sick. They are all distorted. They do not exist by nature; indeed, they exist only by convention. Therefore, their constituent parts are only by imposition, unless there is something that they share in with the virtuous household. (43.1-3)

To clarify, every household must have “many shared matters that are such as to be in the virtuous household”; otherwise, it is a household “only through the ambiguity of the name” (40.5-6). Likewise, the seeds for the virtuous city are already implanted in every imperfect city; the question is how to clear the way in order for these seeds to grow.

In almost parallel fashion in section seven, the city, too, is said to be “sick” when false opinions are introduced into it, at which point “its affairs have disintegrated, and it has become other than perfect” (43.2-3). The upshot of the sick city is that perfection, or happiness, remains limited to those few called “weeds” occasionally found in the

imperfect city, “who happen upon a true opinion that is not in that city or is contrary to the one believed in it” (42.14-15). Happiness attained in the sick city is at most that of “the isolated individual,” or more than one, “as long as a nation or a city does not agree upon their opinion” (43.10-12). False opinions, as we will see in a moment, can compound problems in the city when written down, heightening their power to motivate action. Add to this the presence of erroneous actions that likewise precipitate decline, and we see that corruption in the city has many outlets. Whereas sixth fingers are rare in human beings, the potential for corruption in the city is vast, if Ibn Bājjah indeed means by corruption the addition of false opinions alone or together with erroneous actions. Still, what corrupts the virtuous city does not destroy the potential for virtue in the imperfect city. For just as the sick household shares in many things with the virtuous household, every city, that is more than nominally so, gets its identity from possessing elements that belong to the virtuous city.

OPINION THAT MOVES THE MANY TO ACTION: THE PROBLEM OF SET-DOWN SPEECH

We move on now to the most pressing issue concerning erroneous action as it is presented in the text. Recall that Ibn Bājjah says at the beginning of section six that action other than what is customary in the virtuous city is erroneous. Hence, erroneous action must have something to do with being the opposite of customary, or what is innovative. To Ibn Bājjah, change in customary actions can prove de-stabilizing for the entire city. Knowledge of how to act in the virtuous city depends on habit, that is, on performing actions the same way for many generations, so that one barely needs to think when setting out to do what is correct. In other words, good actions depend more on

habituation than deliberation.

What Ibn Bājjah says briefly about erroneous action in section six culminates in a discussion of things set down in books. To be specific, Ibn Bājjah gives the example of the *Book of Ingenious Devices*, a text written in the mid-ninth century, i.e., at least two centuries prior to the time of Ibn Bājjah. Ibn Bājjah's reason for impugning the book is not entirely clear.¹² Given how far the book predates him, it is not obvious in what sense this old book may still be regarded as innovative, other than to say that its having been written in the first place somehow departs from the customary actions of the timeless virtuous city. The complaint here is not so much about the content of this one book, but books in general whose opinions have the enduring power to move countless individuals to erroneous action. By challenging an old book, he treads lightly in shaming others for misguided writings that have the potential to educate the many in opinions and actions that run counter to what is conducive to virtue. In short, writing is a special form of speech that should be used with extreme care, but this is not a rule that can be imposed on writers. It is an opinion of which they must be persuaded. At the end of this discussion we will show how Ibn Bājjah tries to be persuasive by putting his own advice to use in the treatise.

The discussion in section six abruptly returns to erroneous action as follows: “Now an erroneous action may be performed in order to obtain another goal by means of it” (42.5-6). Strangely enough, the focus switches suddenly from committing erroneous actions to writing about them, in this case, in a book about mechanical engineering¹³:

¹² See note 28. It has been suggested that Ibn Bājjah's reference to this book is incorrect.

¹³ Alfarabi's *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Chapter 3, outlines the seven “major” parts of the mathematical sciences, including the science of mechanical devices (see Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of*

Books like the *Book of Ingenious Devices* by the Shākir have been set down with respect to the actions that it is possible to reflect upon. But everything in them is play and things whose intent is to arouse astonishment, not whose intent concerns the essential perfection of a human being. (42.6-7)

Ibn Bājjah warns that the discussion about action in books like this one, in contrast, of course, to the discussion in his own treatise, “is an evil and ignorance” (42.7-8). It appears that the worst use the soul can make of a human being is to compel him or her to set down opinions in a book for a purpose other than the perfection of the human being. While books like the *Book of Ingenious Devices* are intended to produce certain limited goals, insofar as their “intent is to arouse astonishment,” Ibn Bājjah suggests that, in fact, they meet another goal that may be unintentional, but is no less culpable. We will try to say something about this unintended goal next.

Let us expand on the last point about books, as does Ibn Bājjah. He indicates that all manner of speech concerning opinion or action has moral value, but great care should be taken when setting down opinions and actions in the city: “[I]n the perfect city, speeches about someone who has an opinion other than its opinion or an action other than its action are not set down. In the four [imperfect] cities, that is possible” (42.8-9). Ibn Bājjah cannot be so misinformed as to think that the city itself should regulate the writing of books or their circulation, given the threat it would pose to philosophical writing. What he seems to be advocating is a form of self-censorship by men and women of science to avoid setting down ideas that chip away at the cohesion of the city, insofar as it concerns “the essential perfection of a human being.” In disparaging books that fail to meet this

Islamic Political Philosophy, 76-78). Mahdi explains that the “practical science” of mechanical devices in Alfarabi’s work “deals with the applicability of mathematical knowledge to natural bodies, the production of instruments, and in general the ‘principles of practical, political arts.’”

goal as “evil” and “ignorant,” he favors subjecting written works to the most intense scrutiny, especially books that attempt science, i.e., that claim to impart universal knowledge, but in fact are written to promote a particular way of life.

Ibn Bājjah sees that the best way to conceive of human life is as a part of an ordered whole that is inherently good by nature. This understanding presumes that all parts of the whole look to the good of every other part. Unlike all other parts of the universe, humans have the potential to disrupt the natural order. Care should be taken to prevent the popularization of ideas that encourage the alteration of things as they are ordered in nature. Ibn Bājjah cautions us against a frame of mind towards the universe that sees all manipulable objects of nature as our “playthings.” We must remind ourselves that objects in the universe are there for the good of mankind, especially for the perpetuation of our species, not to be corrupted or destroyed by individual actors for trivial reasons. In taking actions set down in a book about mechanical devices to task, Ibn Bājjah attempts to cultivate respect for nature by appealing to our senses, that is, in a way that has the potential to persuade every sort of reader, including those who are not writers. In the process of teaching humans to care for external beings in nature, Ibn Bājjah brings us that much closer to caring about the inner part of our being, namely, our souls. Indeed, if it were not for his abiding concern for the soul, a book on mechanical devices would hardly warrant commentary in a treatise as short as this one.

While this explanation may help us to understand why Ibn Bājjah shows disproportionate interest in a seemingly innocuous book, let us say something more about the paradoxical notion that a book can be “evil and ignorant.” For Ibn Bājjah, most written speech ought to come with an expiration date. Great care should be taken not to

transmit books that incite others to do what is contrary to the best life for human beings. He says earlier in the treatise, when roundly censuring books on household governance that have “reached” him (39.20), that such “rhetorical books” (39.20) are useful “temporarily and with respect to a given way of life” (40.17). This type of book is “of no avail nor is it a science” (40.12). We are told that the intent of rhetorical books is to arouse emotion while neglecting “the essential perfection of a human being,” that is, educating others to virtue (42.7). Presumably the opposite of rhetorical books are philosophical treatises like this one, that speak to the good of others by promoting belief in timeless truths. Books that pretend to science at best promote belief in opinions whose usefulness diminishes over time. Again, such books are useful only “with respect to a given way of life” (40.17). As that way of life changes, “those opinions that are universal statements” for it also change (40.18). Opinions that are temporarily useful for a given way of life “become particular after having been universal; and after having been useful, they become harmful or repudiated” (40.18-41.1). Presumably their harm consists in turning others away from what is truly useful and beneficial to the city.

As we said earlier, opinions whose nature changes over time, in this case becoming harmful after having been useful, lie between true and false opinions. But opinions in books take on the form of something that can outlive the way of life for which they were intended, meaning that their potential for harm is unlimited. Thus, pseudo-universal opinions set down in rhetorical books constitute “evil and ignorance,” or false opinion, to the extent they have the power to educate the many *ad infinitum*.

So it seems that set-down speech can take on a life of its own once it leaves the hands of its author. Written speech is dangerous on account of its inevitable indifference

to the way of life in cities other than the one for which it was intended as well as those unintended readers who stumble upon it. Such indiscriminate speech has the potential to move innumerable souls away from virtue, who receive it out of context and thus are likely to ignore or misconstrue its intended utility.

Taking care not to repeat this mistake in his own treatise, Ibn Bājjah does not entertain the possibility that some form of false opinion could be added to the city or the soul that would render it not merely sick or deficient, but utterly deformed and beyond rehabilitation, so as to lack the potential for virtue entirely. Reminiscent of the way he avoids ever speaking about the city as non-virtuous, Ibn Bājjah characterizes evil in the soul as a matter of opinion and not as an insurmountable condition. That is, he is careful not to set down anything in this writing that would make humans completely despair of the possibility of seeing vice defeated in one's lifetime, however extraordinary an effort this would take. Nothing explicit is said of the city or the individual as being other than capable of attaining virtue. In sum, humans, and by extension the city, are good by nature, whereas evil comes about on account of voluntary ignorance, in particular, by the action of writing books that disregard "the essential perfection of a human being."

CONCLUSION: THE VIRTUOUS CITY AS ANTIDOTE TO RELATIVISM

For Ibn Bājjah, the difficulty of attaining knowledge about what *is* does not deter him from making the quest for knowledge the basis of the virtuous life. Both opinion and action must be informed by knowledge to be perfect. Both must be judged by a superior standard that exists outside of them, namely, what is good. Otherwise, we are left with the empty precepts of moral relativism, the ill-wrought notion that all opinions and actions are of equal value; that they conform to no objective, unifying end; and that all

we can know about the universe is limited to what appears to be, that is, what our physical senses perceive of material reality—that, in reality, there is nothing but matter in motion. This relativism renders the rational scrutiny and defense of virtue futile. Yet, do we not commonly draw a distinction between living and living well? How do we account for the universality of notions like justice, beauty, and happiness without recourse to an inherent moral sense in the human species?

Ibn Bājjah submits that choosing among opinions and actions for the sake of some end is the course intended for humans by nature, and this course is as obvious to humans as matter in motion in the physical universe is observable to the naked eye. Humans constantly choose or reject ideas in the hopes of gaining greater clarity about which opinions and actions to adopt and which to avoid in the pursuit of happiness. To deny that choosing among moral alternatives is the normal, let alone the intended, course for humans to follow in conducting their lives, to say nothing of it being the necessary way of governing cities, is to ignore that daily life abounds with opinions and actions that appeal to one intangible end or another, and that these ends are simply not of equal value for living well. In short, political life revolves daily around moral questions for which we must find adequate solutions. As Ibn Bājjah underscores, every opinion and every action in the city is laden with morality.

To summarize, those who would dispute philosophy's search for truth must repudiate that every individual has moral being and therefore moral purpose. For Ibn Bājjah, there is no such thing as a value-neutral quest for knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge that can inform and deepen our perceptions of the visible universe springs from an inherent longing to know what the good life truly is and which opinions and

actions serve this highest end. To abandon this longing for the good, and thus forego the pursuit of knowledge about the world as a whole and what constitutes the best life for humans in it, is tantamount to denying that evil exists. It is to believe that everything one says or does is a matter of preference alone and therefore every choice is rational. In the end, moral relativism teaches individuals to trust their physical senses to guide them, however haphazardly, while treating their faculty of reason with indifference.

As this chapter has tried to show, the city cannot afford to delude itself into embracing moral relativism the way an individual can, since it must set standards for opinions and actions to maintain order among its inhabitants. Ibn Bājjah sees that the city is ruled by opinions and actions that are necessarily choices in favor of one competing idea of the good versus another. That is, every opinion or action in the city is a choice that forfeits the city's claim to value neutrality. By nature or by design, the political sphere is a morally contested space. What is to be hoped for, then, is for the city to be ordered so that rationally sound opinions and actions are the ones preferred.

CHAPTER 5

ON SOLITARY GOVERNANCE

There have always been philosophers who think that they can pursue wisdom as private men regardless of the quality of public life; that they should tend exclusively to their own private gardens; and that their task as philosophers is to explore the depths of their own souls, imaginations, and intellects. Perhaps there are times and places that necessitate these views. Yet one need not make a virtue out of necessity.

Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 62

INTRODUCTION

Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of the solitary at the end of Part I appears to respond to the dilemma the philosopher faces as a result of finding only imperfect cities in the world (44.4-5). The philosopher identifies the general absence of the perfect city as a problem, because it is the only city whose inhabitants are friendly to philosophy, while all other cities seem intolerant of or even hostile to it. The only perfect city for Ibn Bājjah, as we learned in Chapter 3, is “the perfect virtuous city” (41.17). The absence of this city prompts him to devote the end of Part I and later Part III to defending the possibility of attaining happiness as a solitary in imperfect cities. Here the contrast between the active life of politics and the philosopher’s private activity of inquiring into the nature of things is most acute as Ibn Bājjah’s account of the weeds takes over.¹

¹ On the origin of weeds (*nawābit*), see Wadād al-Qādī, “The Earliest ‘Nābita’ and the Paradigmatic ‘Nawābit,’” *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993), 27-61. See also E. I. J. Rosenthal, “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Bajja,” *Islamic Culture*, 25 (1951), 205 n. 63, and Ilai Alon, “Fārābī’s Funny Flora: Al-Nawābit as “Opposition,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1989), 222-251.

Without further delay, then, we turn our attention to the relationship between politics and philosophy, that is, the city and the individual. There are three remaining sections to cover in Part I, each advancing the discussion of the individual toward the long-awaited discussion of solitary governance. Our focus shifts in the middle of section six, from the decline of the virtuous city covered in the last chapter, to the question of the solitary, the philosophically-minded isolated individual in the imperfect cities. In section six, we discover that individuals in the imperfect cities who happen upon a true opinion not found in or contrary to the opinions of the city are called “weeds” (*nawābit* [42.15]). Section seven continues discussion of the weeds as one of the ways of life that exists “in this time” (43.9), which he claims to be as knowable to us as other extant ways of life, for example, the lives of physicians or judges that were encountered earlier, and adding now the Sufi way of life. Lastly, section eight introduces us to the “solitary” who pursues governance on his or her own so as to attain “the best existence” (*a’fdal wujūdātih* [43.16]), namely happiness, despite living in one of the imperfect cities. Ibn Bājjah splits his teaching on the solitary between Part I and Part III of the treatise. He also speaks about Sufism in these two parts. Therefore, this chapter will combine material from these parts of the treatise to flesh out Ibn Bājjah’s teaching on solitary governance.

No other philosophical figure looms as large in the all-important weeds discussion as Alfarabi (AD 870-950). The only other named figure in the last sections of Part I is the ancient Greek physician Galen (AD ca.128-ca. 200), who is twice referred to by name (43.18, 44.1). In section eight, Galen serves as a foil to Ibn Bājjah’s analogy regarding political health. By contrast, Alfarabi, mentioned by name only once in the entire treatise (43.6), is not openly challenged in Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of the pivotal “weeds.”

Nonetheless, Ibn Bājjah's account of the weeds in the *Governance* reveals itself as a commentary on the parallel teaching in Alfarabi's *Political Regime*. In fact, we are practically told to consult Alfarabi on these matters, as his name is strategically dropped just as the discussion of weeds has ended. Comparison of their parallel accounts shows that Ibn Bājjah makes higher demands of political life than Alfarabi, mainly because achieving the virtuous city for Ibn Bājjah does not admit of degrees to the extent it does for his predecessor. To illuminate these two medieval accounts, we will first explore the idea of the philosopher as a solitary in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

WEEDS IN THE CITY

Once we leave the comfort of the virtuous city, where everything necessary for political life is perfectly known and correctly done, we face a host of problems generated by moral uncertainty. Foremost is the random manner in which humans living in other than the virtuous city come into contact with opinions needed to live well. As we learned in the last chapter, set-down speech becomes a primary source of confusion, as books do not automatically constitute a source of true opinion:

Therefore, in the perfect city, speeches about someone who has an opinion other than its opinion or an action other than its action are not set down. In the four [imperfect] cities, that is possible. (42.8-9)

Ibn Bājjah's point is that a book in the imperfect city rarely fulfills its political role, i.e., to set down rational opinions that are conducive to bringing about virtue in the city. Ibn Bājjah's objective, as a different kind of writer, is to help us see that overcoming the dominant opinions of the day is important, whether they originate in speech or in books, and that there are rewards for taking virtue seriously over a lifetime. The purpose of this

treatise is to provide food for thought to those who have embarked on their own philosophical journey in search of what is good.

Among the central questions that Ibn Bājjah’s readers encounter on this journey is how to sort through the morass of competing ideas in the city in order to educate oneself to virtue. To this end, one must wonder how Ibn Bājjah’s treatise itself educates one to virtue. That is to say, how does Ibn Bājjah instruct one to arrive at true opinions and correct actions that will lead to the best life? In terms of the initial escape from false opinions, erroneous actions, and now add “mistaken sciences” (*‘ulūm mughlatah*), Ibn Bājjah describes the start of this lifelong journey as follows:

For it may be possible for an action there to be unknown, and a human being is guided to it by nature or is taught it by someone else and does it. Or a false opinion is there, and some human being notices its falseness. Or there may be mistaken sciences in them such that they [the inhabitants] do not believe in anything or most anything in them with respect to either of the contradictory [positions] in them. And by nature or by being taught it by someone else, a human being happens upon the one of the contradictories that is true. (42.9-13)

To make this teaching more accessible, Ibn Bājjah looks to giving names to those who are able to cast off ignorance that is either native to their souls or that they inherit on account of what exists in the city. To begin, he points out that a name has yet to be assigned to the self-educated person or the person instructed by another in actions or sciences not generally known: “Now for the sort of person who does a correct action or is taught a correct science that does not exist in the city, there is no common name (*ism*)” (42.13-14).² To be without a common name suggests that the case of doing what is

²That Ibn Bājjah combines the sciences with actions and not opinions, this indicates that here he means by sciences those that are practical or applied. Recall that art and science are used interchangeably in the treatise in reference to medicine (art: 41.3, 43.19; science: 44.5). Later in the treatise, Ibn Bājjah includes the sciences among “the rational virtues” that aim at perfection (64.19-20).

correct is not normally thought to be as interesting or relevant as the case ahead—knowing what is true. It appears that opinions outrank actions and practical sciences in their importance in educating one to virtue. By drawing attention to this subtle discrepancy, Ibn Bājjah notes the lack of interest, compared to his own, in actions and sciences as separate components of one's education. That the case does not have a name is a sign of its common neglect, but perhaps also a measure of its real value to Ibn Bājjah, as he does not supply a name himself for the person educated in correct action or science. This latter point highlights again the dependency of action on opinion in the treatise, despite the ubiquity of action in the treatise as discussed in the preceding chapter.

Although no explicit reason is given for preserving the anonymity of the case of doing what is correct, the order of the present discussion suggests that this case may be subsumed in the one that follows. Certainly it makes sense to look to true opinions and beliefs as the basis for defining what is correct in practice. But does this not diminish the role that hands-on experience plays, i.e., the actual practice of an art or a natural science, in learning how to do what is correct? Indeed, does anyone think that humans have to formulate arguments about the good prior to doing what is right? The treatise is strangely silent about the need for practical experience in the arts and sciences to bring about correct action. In Ibn Bājjah's case, the pregnant pause to take notice of the nameless agent of correct action calls attention to the act of writing³ Ibn Bājjah himself employed to set down this discussion. Yet it goes without saying that this craft is applied by Ibn Bājjah in service of opinion. It makes sense, then, to subordinate the discussion of action to the one that follows, insofar as the most worthy action of the human being directly concerns opinion:

³ Ibn Bājjah takes notice of his craft of writing in Part III (see 58.6-8).

intellecting in the soul of “the simple substantial intellects” (79.16-80.2).⁴

The component of education on which consensus seems to have formed about its importance, reflected in the fact that the person who undertakes it was eventually given the special name “weed,” is the transcendence to true opinion. Ibn Bājjah reviews this case with proper ambivalence, pointing out that not every weed is good:

But those who happen upon a true opinion that is not in that city or is contrary to the one believed in it are called weeds. As their beliefs become more numerous and of more major import, this name is ascribed more to them. This name is said of them in particular, and it may be said generally of anyone whose opinion is other than the opinion of the citizens of the city—whether it is true or false. This name is transferred to them from the plant sprouting on its own among the crops. We ourselves particularly characterize by this name those who have true opinions. (42.14-19)

Since the name “weed” connotes any person with an opinion contrary to the city, “whether it is true or false,” Ibn Bājjah’s ambivalence about the benefit of the weeds is justified. For the act of opposing common opinion cannot appear on the surface to be good for the city. Arguably, then, Ibn Bājjah takes care not to give the weeds a more favorable introduction. In part, this must be to avoid inciting the city’s predictable reaction to those who would live in accordance with opinion contrary to its own.

The analogy of the knower of true opinion to an unwanted plant intentionally masks intellectual daring as something undesirable and even odious. To be sure, the comparison to an accidental growth (not unlike a sixth finger, another added thing due to natural accident whose utility is ambivalent) is meant to be provocative. The name “weed” comes across as both playful and derogatory. Those few individuals, happy to

⁴ By contrast, in the *Republic* the highest action in the city concerns the art of justice. It is the art that governs every citizen practicing “one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit” (433a).

pursue truth for its own sake that lies beyond the opinions and beliefs imposed by the city, will see past the negative image of the weed and find it instructive. The many, who would oppose the common opinions of the city with nothing more true or useful, and thus with only what would further enslave the soul to false opinion, will hopefully be turned off to the quest for knowledge by the uninspiring likeness. As the discussion of the weeds winds its way through sections six, seven, and eight, it becomes clear that Ibn Bājjah aims to single out for instruction those weeds who can be steered to a noble purpose. It seems better for all other inhabitants of the city not to aspire to the career of a weed, but not to doubt the weed's dedication to the city either. For among the weeds will be those with the intention of informing the virtue of the city. That is, in the midst of transcending common opinions and actions, the good weed will do so looking to advance the well-being of the city or, at the very least, to do it no harm.

What is the thing common among the weeds that they would share this name in common? They are the ones in the city who take it upon themselves to look for meaning behind the predominant opinions of the city. The nature of weeds is to exist without a clear sense of how they come to be and without a defined purpose relative to the environment they emerge in. The analogy speaks to humans living in a city that is not well-ordered, since Ibn Bājjah's weeds exist only in imperfect cities: "It is evident that among the particular characteristics of the perfect city is for there to be no weeds in it when this name is said particularly—for there are no false opinions in it" (43.1-2). They are inhibited from speaking freely with others, who do not share their uncommon opinions, and so the weeds stand at a remove from everyday life in the city. For the most part, the weeds must be content to live an uneasy existence, making their way in the city

quietly and alone. From the perspective of the many in the city, this is as it should be. Independent thinkers, who call into question the beliefs and customs of the city, deserve the name “weeds” or worse. From the outside looking in, no one who cares for the city should declare life as a weed useful or good.

Yet these weeds are self-sufficient; they make minimal demands on the city that sustains them. They barely need others to ensure their survival. Above all, the weeds Ibn Bājjah cares about most, “those who have true opinions,” are singularly adept at seeing people and things for what they really are. Thus they are capable of contributing knowledge essential to the city that it lacks. Nonetheless, the name “weed” implies that it will always be an undesirable element in the city, however palpable a case is made for their seeking truth. Must it follow that the weed will be indifferent or even adversarial to the city, given its opposition to the weed’s way of life? And is there nothing that moves the city to seek the benefit of the weed’s wisdom, however contrary it appears? Ibn Bājjah implies that a confluence of these two events can take place, if the city and the weed come to some understanding of the conditions needed for them to co-exist. This discussion continues below in the segment on the ways of life in the imperfect cities.

For now, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the weed analogy, let us turn to the parallel accounts of the lone philosopher in the city in Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Alfarabi’s *Political Regime*. We will briefly cite from these works to trace the origin of the idea of the weed, starting with the oldest source first. This inquiry will then establish a basis of comparison for the upcoming discussion on the best life, which Ibn Bājjah outlines for the solitary in Part III of the *Governance*.

PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

The relevant discussion in Plato's *Republic* appears in Book Seven as part of the analogy of the city to a cave. This book marks a major transition in the dialogue, as the description of the just city is completed at the end of Book Seven, and the consideration of different types of human souls as the means of differentiating among political regimes is taken up at the beginning of Book Eight. The nature of the soul becomes the main subject hereafter, whereas very little is said about the just city in the last three books of the *Republic*.

In Book Seven, Socrates contrasts “the philosophers who come to be among us,” that is, in the just city he has only now finished founding, and the men who “come to be in the other cities” who “grow up spontaneously”:

“Well, then, Glaucon,” I said, “consider that we won't be doing injustice to the philosophers who come to be among us, but rather that we will say just things to them while compelling them besides to care for and guard the others. We'll say that when such men come to be in the other cities it is fitting for them not to participate in the labors of those cities. For they grow up spontaneously [*automatoi gar emphuontai*]⁵ against the will of the regime in each; and a nature that grows by itself and doesn't owe its rearing to anyone has justice on its side when it is not eager to pay off the price of rearing to anyone.” (*Republic* 520a-c)

Let us go over this passage in some detail. Although Socrates does not refer to philosophers explicitly as “weeds,” scarcely a better name fits this “nature that grows by itself and doesn't owe its rearing to anyone.” The philosopher reared in an imperfect city owes nothing to it, because the city could not have intended for one to be reared in

⁵ All Greek text in this chapter is taken from the Perseus website. See *Perseus Digital Library Project*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. March 2008. URL= <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>>.

philosophy. These “lovers of wisdom” (480a), whose love compels them to engage in the lifelong pursuit of knowledge, necessarily prefer a quiet, sedentary life in contrast to the practical activities characteristic of the city. That the city would ever compel the rule of philosophers, who share no interest in its activities insofar as they are philosophers, turns out to be wishful thinking. The city’s prejudice against philosophers is strengthened by the added difficulty that humans face, even in Socrates’ just city, distinguishing a true philosopher from a false one (490d-e). Indeed, the reputation of those who pursue philosophy in cities known to Socrates’ interlocutors is that they become “queer,” “vicious,” and “useless” (487d). So much in the *Republic* points to the philosopher as an unwelcome interloper in the city’s affairs that one cannot help but read the *Republic* as tacitly counseling the philosopher to take every precaution in his relations with the city.

So contrary to Socrates’ presumptuous line of reasoning above, the real issue at stake is not whether the philosopher can be compelled to rule the city, but the extent to which the city can be convinced to tolerate philosophers in its midst. How does the true philosopher, who naturally cares to see as much happiness come about in the city as possible,⁶ overcome the city’s mistrust of philosophers, believing that the pursuit of philosophy is essential for the city’s happiness? The short answer Ibn Bājjah seems to give in his treatise is that the philosopher must make a compelling case for philosophy as a branch of political science, i.e., as concerned first and foremost with what is conducive to good governance in the city.

⁶ Socrates suggests that the guardians “who care for the city,” including the philosopher-king who is chosen from among them, ought to believe “that the same things are advantageous to it and to himself, and when he supposed that if it did well, he too himself would do well along with it, and if it didn’t, neither would he” (412d).

ARISTOTLE'S *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS*

We turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics* to gauge how its account of the life of the philosopher responds to Socrates' presentation in the *Republic*. First, does Aristotle make concessions to help move the city and the philosopher in the direction of the other? Initially, he does appear willing to concede the superiority in human life of something that concerns both the city and the individual to the intellectual pursuits of the philosopher. In Book I, he emphatically asserts that "a human being is by nature meant for a city" (1097b11). Aristotle makes this assertion in the context of explaining what it means to be self-sufficient: "And by self-sufficient (*autarkeia*) we mean not what suffices for oneself alone, living one's life as a hermit (*monôtên*), but also with parents and children and a wife, and friends and fellow citizens generally..." (1097b8-11). Aristotle thus begins by affirming that society, and not isolation, is the way of life intended by nature for human beings as a species (1097b15). What nature intends, which can be deduced on account of the unique human faculty of speech, is community life (1098a4). Certainly, the superiority of community life is what every city would want its citizens to believe is best and in fact the many will hold this opinion. That Aristotle speaks so confidently here imitates the authoritative manner in which the city expresses its opinions to citizens by way of laws and customs. However forcefully Aristotle makes this argument on behalf of the city, it does not preclude exceptions to nature's rule, i.e., the individual who achieves self-sufficiency living the hermit's life.

Under most circumstances, the occasional hermit would not be of particular interest or concern to the city. But there is one sort of hermit who ought to matter politically—the person devoted to living in accordance with virtue. In the *Republic*,

Socrates says that the city and the individual are virtuous in the same way (441d), the order of the three classes in the just city—citizens, then guardians, and then rulers (428d-429a), each having counterparts in the soul, namely, desire, spiritedness, and calculating reason (439d-e). Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* does not identify the city and the soul as corresponding in this way. While Aristotle does allow for the possibility of the best life in the city, the life of wisdom in accord with the intellect, this is said to be possible only for those with sufficient leisure to pursue it (1177b13). There is no class in Aristotle's city that is leisured, only leisured individuals. That is, Aristotle strictly adheres to the Socratic principle, "one man one art" (370b), in assigning to the leisured philosopher the sole art of pursuing wisdom without the additional task of ruling the city. One could object that the hermit, insofar as philosophy is a leisured activity rather than work, appears to contribute nothing to the active life of the city. In response, the case will be made below that the solitary life in the *Governance* pursues the good not for the sake of the philosopher alone, but for the city as well.

In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, ostensibly devoted to a discussion of pleasure, Aristotle narrows the scope of his inquiry to arrive at what he claims is most pleasant in human life, namely, the attainment of wisdom over the course of a lifetime:

And we believe that pleasure must be mixed in with happiness, and by general agreement the most pleasant of the ways of being-at-work in accord with virtue is that which goes along with wisdom; at any rate, philosophy seems to have pleasures that are wonderful in their purity and stability, and it is reasonable that the way of life of those who have knowledge is more pleasant than that of those who are seeking it. (1177a22-28).

What Aristotle says next must be parsed with his earlier discussion of self-sufficiency (1097b8-11), for now he stops just short of telling us that the hermit's way of life is best:

And what is referred to as self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) would be present most of all in the contemplative life, for while the wise and the just person, and the rest, are in need of the things that are necessary for living, when they are sufficiently equipped with such things, a just person still needs people toward whom and with whom he will act justly, and similarly with the temperate and the courageous person and each of the others, but the wise person is able to contemplate even when he is by himself, and more so to the extent that he is the more wise. He will contemplate better, no doubt, when he has people to work with, but he is still the most self-sufficient person. (1177a28-1177b2).

While it is possible to contemplate alone, the wise person contemplates “better” (*beltion*) in the company of others. Note, however, that Aristotle says that as one becomes “more wise” (*sophôteros*), one is able to contemplate “more so” (*hosôti*) alone. Presumably, the more the wise person does something, the wiser, i.e., better, he will be at doing it. Thus, upon closer reading, we extract from this passage two ways of becoming better at the sedentary activity of contemplation, rather than only one. That the ensuing passage identifies happiness with contemplation means that Aristotle holds out the possibility of the hermit attaining happiness all on one’s own once the hermit excels at contemplation: “And happiness seems to be present in leisure, for we engage in unleisured pursuits in order that we may be at leisure...” (1177b5). No special mention is made here of the need for others to help one attain this happiness.⁷ The wise person would thus seem to be self-sufficient in the most complete respect of attaining happiness as a result of the being-at-work of his intellect.

As a kind of summary of the best life, albeit one full of conditional statements, Aristotle tells us next what “the complete happiness of a human being” is. In comparison

⁷ Cf. 1157b20-22: “[N]othing is so characteristic of friends as living together; for those in need crave benefits, while those who are blessed [i.e., not in need, or self-sufficient] crave daily companionship, since it belongs to them least of all to be solitary (*monôtai*).”

to the tone he adopts in Book I, he now speaks in a far more tentative manner and in more general terms than he did when speaking about what is best for human beings in the cities, that is, as a species. His presentation of the best life for the human being is divided into two parts, starting with the following passage:

So if, among actions in accord with the virtues, those that pertain to politics and war are pre-eminent in beauty and magnitude, but they are un leisured and aim at some end and are not chosen for their own sake, while the being-at-work of the intellect seems to excel in seriousness, and to be contemplative and aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its own pleasure (which increases its activity), so that what is as self-sufficient, leisured, and unwearied as possible for a human being, and all the other things that are attributed to a blessed person, show themselves as the things that result from this way of being-at-work, then this would be the complete happiness of a human being, if it takes in a complete span of life, for none of the things that belong to happiness is incomplete. (1177b17-25)

Here, at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we encounter an argument nearly the opposite of what we find at the beginning of the book. It is as if Aristotle intends to counter the strongest claim on behalf of the city with that of the wisest individual, to allow us to see that both make rational, albeit contrary, claims to self-sufficiency. Even if the most self-sufficient way of life is the life of contemplation, this cannot be the life that the many ought to choose or the city would not exist. To be sure, Aristotle is not making the outrageous proposal of reforming the city to make the leisured life possible for more citizens, as the life of contemplation would not exist without the other activities in the city enabling the philosopher to meet the needs of the body. Indeed, Aristotle recognizes that self-sufficiency as a citizen, in terms of having access to other people and goods in order to meet one's bodily needs, is a necessary part of the self-sufficiency of the wise person, although this dependency on others should be kept to a minimum:

So happiness extends as far as contemplation does, and the more it belongs to any beings to contemplate, the more it belongs to them to be happy, not incidentally but as a result of contemplating, since this is worthwhile in itself. And so happiness would be some sort of contemplation. But there will also be need of external prosperity for one who is a human being, since nature is not self-sufficient for contemplating, but there is also a need for the body to be healthy and for food and other attentions to be present. But one certainly ought not to suppose that someone who is going to be happy will need many things or grand ones, if it is not possible to be blessed without external goods; for self-sufficiency does not consist in excess.... (1178b28-1179a3)

To be sure, most human beings will not find contemplation, however much Aristotle assures them that it results in complete happiness, more desirable than all other activities in the city, precisely because of the hermit's life associated with it. Or, as Aristotle later puts it, as if a coda to the ostensible theme of pleasure in Book X, "living temperately and with endurance is not pleasant to most people" (1179b34). So the life of contemplation cannot be a life intended for the many. But it seems to make all the difference that the possibility of this life be kept alive in the city. For although the city and the wise person make competing claims to self-sufficiency in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, no claim is presented by Aristotle on behalf of the city to contest that the life of contemplation is the best way of life simply and most desirable for the individual capable of pursuing it.

To conclude this brief account of the best life according to Aristotle, let us consider the second part of his discussion concerning the complete happiness of the human being. Here he suggests, somewhat unexpectedly, that complete happiness may not really be in the realm of what is possible for humans:

But such a life would be greater than what accords with a human being, for it is not insofar as one is a human being that he will live in this way, but insofar as something divine

is present in him.... So if the intellect is something divine as compared with a human being, the life that is in accord with the intellect is divine as compared with a human life. But one should not follow those who advise us to think human thoughts, since we are human,...but as far as possible one ought to be immortal and to do all things with a view toward living in accord with the most powerful thing in oneself, for even if it is small in bulk, it rises much more above everything else in power and worth.... What was said before will be fitting now too: what is appropriate by nature to each being is best and most pleasant for each, and so, for a human being, this is the life in accord with the intellect, *if that most of all is a human being*. Therefore this life is also the happiest. (1177b25-1178a8; italics added)

As it turns out, the life of the wise person we have been discussing, the only one lived “in accord with the intellect,” is something “divine as compared with a human life” and is “greater than what accords with a human being.” Ibn Bājjah says nearly the same thing about the solitary in Part III of his treatise (79.16). To paraphrase, the best life as a wise person requires that one transcend one’s humanity. It seems that one’s very nature must change—that the individual must generate a new self to achieve completion. The primary purpose of Aristotle’s account of the best life, then, may not be to encourage isolation, but to direct the reader to confront the intellectual limits of one’s mortal being. Since more than human powers must be called upon to bring about transcendence, the perfectibility of human life, that is, the likelihood of living the life of a fully self-sufficient person, is questionable. To be sure, few individuals will be persuaded to expend maximum intellectual effort, while denying all but the necessary desires of the body, for the promise of immortality. As such, Aristotle cannot really guarantee that the life of contemplation will make one completely happy. If the life of the hermit appears not to be the best way to attain complete happiness, then the city can rest easy with the ways it pursues happiness. The other conclusion one cannot help but draw from

Aristotle's discussion, however, is that living in accord with one's intellect, what he imagines as a way of life in imitation of the divine, is better, though much harder, in comparison to other alternatives available in the city. Thus, it is not as leisured a life as one is initially made to believe.

ALFARABI'S *POLITICAL REGIME*

That Ibn Bājja calls the possessor of true opinion in the imperfect city by the odd name "weed" prompts one to wonder about the origin of the name, or the name-giver, or rather, the image-maker. For the name "weeds" is an image of a group of people in the city that we do not have names for otherwise.⁸ It does seem to matter to Ibn Bājja that the image have a maker and that his readers know who he was. Indeed, it seems that in due time he reveals his name, that is, he invokes the name of the one whose image of the weeds in all likelihood inspired his discussion. In doing so, Ibn Bājja conveys to his readers that images are an important matter for philosophic investigation.

Although the idea of the "weeds" has a rich history in Arabic literature, Ibn Bājja's account calls to mind Alfarabi's discussion first and foremost. Given that Ibn Bājja has been parsimonious about naming names until now, the special attention paid to Alfarabi at the end of his weed account would suggest that Alfarabi is not just another author writing on the weed, but the image-maker *par excellence*. His name is revealed in

⁸ Cf. Michael Kochin's reading of the weeds account in "Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60.3 (1999), 399-416. Kochin claims that "[u]nlike Alfarabi, Ibn Bājja will [not] study images" (407) and "seemingly has so little tolerance for falsehood" (408). In the end, Kochin concludes that Ibn Bājja lacks "a concern for image-making" (416). To the contrary, Ibn Bājja explicitly says in Part III: "As for the use of lying, it perhaps enters into achieving (*inālat*) the happiness of the inhabitants of the [imperfect] cities, but not by means of pure [reading *al-buḥt* rather than *al-baḥth* with Fakhry] lies, but rather by means of riddling (*al-ghāz*) lies. All of this could be investigated in political science" (57.1-2).

the treatise in a general statement that follows immediately on the heels of the weeds account, with a strange, almost meaningless attribution to something Alfarabi said. To the casual reader, then, it would seem that Ibn Bājjah has hardly overstated his debt to his philosophical predecessor:

When all of the ways of life that are in this time and in those that have gone before, according to most of the accounts that have reached us—except for what Abū Naṣr relates about the way of life of the original Persians⁹—they are all composed of the five ways of life [the perfect virtuous city plus four imperfect cities]. And most of what we find with respect to them has to do with the four ways of life. (43.4-7)

Ibn Bājjah's exceedingly modest attribution would seem out of proportion for anyone less worthy of distinction than Alfarabi at the point in the treatise in which his name is inserted. But here the modest reminder of Alfarabi's name with respect to a comment about the original Persians has exactly the opposite effect on readers who are already familiar with Alfarabi's account of the weeds. These readers will meet the sight of Alfarabi's name at the end of Ibn Bājjah's account with great satisfaction, confirming that Ibn Bājjah did have Alfarabi in mind when writing about the weeds, but chose, for whatever reason, to keep him in the deep background. So to the careful reader, nothing more needs to be said. In fact, Ibn Bājjah's simplified account of the weed bears such a strong resemblance to one sort of weed in Alfarabi's lengthier version in the *Political Regime*, that it goes without saying that Ibn Bājjah's account responds to Alfarabi's.

To characterize Alfarabi's treatise as a whole, the *Political Regime* is a distinctly

⁹ Ibn Bājjah's reference is inconclusive, but he may have in mind Alfarabi's summary of the Athenian Stranger's account of the Persian monarchy in his *Summary of Plato's "Laws."* See Thérèse-Anne Druart's Arabic edition *Le Sommaire du livre des "Lois" de Platon* in *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 50 (1998), 109-155.

public work written in a manner more accessible to the common reader than many of his other writings. It is subtitled, *On the Principles of the Beings*. It is the only extant work by Alfarabi in which the weeds are discussed.¹⁰ The text is divided into two parts: Part I concerns the order of the universe; Part II, which includes the discussion of the weeds, concerns the political order of cities.

Alfarabi's weeds are introduced as part of a taxonomy of cities that are contrary to the virtuous one. Unlike Ibn Bājjah, Alfarabi includes the weeds as part of the virtuous city. This means that perfection is not a precondition for Alfarabi's city being virtuous. For Ibn Bājjah, the virtuous city is by definition perfect in terms of its having only true opinions and correct actions, whereas Alfarabi allows for falsehood and error in his virtuous city. If he doubts the possibility of the virtuous city being perfect, Alfarabi does not wear this doubt overtly here. He introduces the weeds as part of an enumeration of cities contrary to the one he calls virtuous:

Contrary to the virtuous city is the [a] ignorant city, [b] immoral city, and [c] errant city. Then there are [d] the weeds in the virtuous city, for the station of weeds in cities is that of darnel in wheat, the thorns of plants within the crop, or the rest of the grasses that are useless or harmful to the crop or seedlings. (87.5-7; §92)¹¹

To speak more precisely, Alfarabi declares that weeds exist in all cities, the virtuous city and its contraries alike. However, he is most interested in those that exist in the virtuous city. Relegating “the station of weeds in cities” to being “useless or harmful,” Alfarabi

¹⁰ The term *nawā'ib* appears in Alfarabi's *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (*Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*), but they are not included in the virtuous city itself. See *Ārā'*, ed. Friedrich Dieterici (Leiden, 1895), 61, 18. Cited by E. I. J. Rosenthal (1951), 204 n. 59, who changes the term to *nawābit*. Cf. Ilai Alon (1989), 222 n. 3 and 230 n. 66.

¹¹ The page and line number reference the Arabic edition of Alfarabi's *Al-Siyāsāt al-Madaniyyah* by Fauzi Najjar (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq Publishers, 1993). The second number references the section in the translation by Charles Butterworth in *Alfarabi: Political Writings* (forthcoming, Ithaca: Cornell Press).

downplays the political role of weeds in general. In contrast, Ibn Bājjah reports of his chosen weeds, which exist only in imperfect cities, that “their existence is a reason for the perfect city arising” (43.4). It is doubtful that Alfarabi shares this optimism.

Let us jump to the end of Alfarabi’s discussion of weeds to explain why. He describes the station of weeds in the city less metaphorically there as “embedded among the inhabitants of the city as a whole.” He says that the weeds do not form a city within the virtuous city. That is, if they are organized in any fashion, Alfarabi denies that they would form a “large association,” most likely meaning a large faction that would seek to divide and take over the city.¹² He assures us of this in the closing remarks of the

Political Regime:

These, then, are the sorts [of weeds] growing among the inhabitants of the city. From their opinions, no city at all is attained, nor a large association from the populace. But they are embedded among the inhabitants of the city as a whole. (107.18-19; §121)

The relevance of the weeds to the city, as we learn here, consists in the opinions they espouse, not their political ambition. Alfarabi recognizes that adverse arguments concerning political matters can have significant consequences. But “useless or harmful” elements are a permanent part of the political landscape. The city cannot deny the presence of weeds any more than it can destroy them. To what extent the city can accommodate free speech and to what extent it must constrain it is the abiding political issue here, not the perfection of the city.

According to Alfarabi, there are “many sorts” (104.7; §122) of weeds in the

¹² See Socrates’ account in the *Republic* of the origin of faction in the just city (546a-547a). It is an odd event that precipitates decay in the city out of which faction is born—bad timing in the conception of children. Apropos of the weed analogy, Socrates’ account of the city’s “dissolution” opens thus: “bearing and barrenness of soul and bodies come not only to plants in the earth but to animals on the earth...” (546a).

virtuous city. But among his many weeds, he distinguishes just four sorts. What these sorts share in common is the desire to penetrate the images, or salutary opinions, put forth by the virtuous city's original lawgiver, which help convey the intention of the law to the many. The weeds share in common a discontent with some part of the lawgiver's message, but they differ in how to treat it. The first sort "holds fast to the actions by which happiness is gained, except that in what they do they are intent not upon happiness but upon some other thing a human being may gain through virtue—such as honor, rulership, wealth, or something else" (104.7-9; §122). Deliberately or unconsciously, these "opportunists" (*mutaqanniṣīn* [104.10]), blinded by passion for an end proscribed by the law, thus seek to betray the noble purpose of the images—to keep the city one. The second sort grasps the lawgiver's images correctly. But having grasped these images, these weeds "are not persuaded by what they have imagined" and thus falsify the lawgiver's images "for themselves and for others by means of arguments" (104.17-18; §123). These are the only weeds to whom Alfarabi ascribes good intentions: "In doing so, they are not contending against the virtuous city. Rather, they are asking for guidance and seeking the truth" (104.18-105.1; §123). More will be said about this sort below. The third sort "falsifies what they imagine...even when they obtain the ranking of truth...in seeking domination alone or in seeking to embellish one of the purposes of the inhabitants of the ignorant [cities] to which they are inclined" (105.7-9; §124). These weeds "do not like to hear anything that firmly establishes happiness and truth in the soul nor any argument that embellishes them and prescribes them for the soul, but meet them with sham arguments that they suppose will discredit happiness" (105.9-11; §124).

Finally, there is a fourth sort, which is described at length and presumably is the

most numerous of the weeds. Alfarabi tells us that it is not possible for this sort “to be elevated to the level of truth, because it is not within the power of their minds to understand it. It may chance that many of these [people] deem much of what they imagine to be false, not because there are truly topics of contention in what they imagine, but [because] their imagination is defective” (105.16-18; §125). Among the fourth sort of weeds, “according to intelligent persons and in relation to the philosophers,” are those “in the position of ignorant simpletons.” (106.8-9; §125). To summarize, the four sorts of “useless or harmful” weeds are, if we are to assign each of them a name: (i) opportunists; (ii) truth seekers; (iii) falsifiers of truth; and (iv) defective imaginers.

Without pointing fingers, Alfarabi tries to suggest why most weeds, with one notable exception, might be harmful to the city. In penetrating the images of the lawgiver conveyed through the law about what is the best life for citizens in the city, most of the weeds pretend to know what it is that the images are for. In reality, their falsifying leads to their own harm as well as to harming others in bringing about disobedience to the law. Only a few weeds falsify the images of the lawgiver to discover a higher truth that lies beyond the law, for whom the virtuous life remains a possibility. This sort attains knowledge that ultimately corroborates the lawgiver’s intention:

Whoever is like this has his level of imagination elevated to things that are not falsified by the arguments he brings forth. If he is persuaded in thus being elevated, he is left [there]. But if he is not persuaded by that either and falls upon topics he can contend against, he is elevated to another level. It goes on like this until he is persuaded by one of these levels. But if he does not chance to be persuaded by one of the levels of imagination, he is elevated to the ranking of truth and made to understand those things as they are. At that point, his opinion becomes settled. (105.1-6; §123)

The weeds Ibn Bājjah “particularly characterize[s] by this name,” that is, the weeds “who

have true opinions” (42.19) are most likely modeled on this sort.

The lawgiver cannot feel all that reassured that the weeds in general will not combine to undermine his efforts. Yet, Alfarabi proposes almost nothing for the lawgiver to do about them, except to take the following extreme measures that are buried in the middle of his account:

[I]t is obligatory for the ruler of the virtuous city to watch over the weeds, keep them busy, and cure each sort by means of what is particularly suited to it—either expulsion from the city, punishment, imprisonment, or assigning them tasks even though they do not strive after them.¹³ (106.9-11; §125)

Perhaps it is to help us identify the weeds in the city that Alfarabi dictates this treatment. For even in his virtuous city, there will be those persecuted for their opinions. Such are the inhabitants of the city we ought to call “weeds.” The city’s response to the weeds is disproportionate, according to Alfarabi, given that the weeds pose no real existential threat to the city, only an apparent one. While such treatment is “obligatory,” Alfarabi does not say that it is correct to use it, even (or especially) as a means to preserve a city whose common good is supposedly virtue. From the city’s perspective, it is a matter of necessity: obedience to the city’s ruling opinions and actions—its laws and customs—is the ruler’s first priority if he is to maintain order in the city. Thus, to question openly the version of truth on which the law relies appears in all cases to be subversive of the city.

We say version of the truth for, unlike Ibn Bājjah, no lawgiver, and thus no city ruled by law, has a claim to truth for Alfarabi. Herein lies the root of the difference of opinion between Alfarabi and Ibn Bājjah about weeds in the city. For Alfarabi, even the

¹³This last option is reminiscent of the argument in the *Republic* that philosophers in the just city ought to be compelled to rule (520b-c).

best city is inherently unjust, insofar as it must crack down on opinions that do not serve its highest end, if it is to remain a virtuous city. For Ibn Bājjah, no such opinions exist in the virtuous city. In the case of Alfarabi, the presence of false opinion calls into doubt the genuineness of the city's virtue. For Alfarabi, truth is not the highest end of the virtuous city, but rather it may be sacrificed by the lawgiver for the preservation of the city. Thus the virtuous city, the highest political good, and truth, the highest human good, are at odds with one another. For Alfarabi, there are two alternatives for virtue in human life: a city that is virtuous but sacrifices truth and thus is inherently imperfect, or the life of the weed, who attains truth, but whose perfection is at best paradigmatic for a city that is governed by half-truths.

Ibn Bājjah's account of the weeds takes matters one step further, for he says "their existence is a reason for the perfect city arising—as has been explained elsewhere" (43.4). If the readings laid out above of the lone philosopher in three works that precede Ibn Bājjah's *Governance* are accurate, then we can rule out that "elsewhere" here means Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, or Alfarabi's *Political Regime*. In fact, Ibn Bājjah may very well be the first to establish this relationship between the perfect city and the weeds, his statement to the contrary notwithstanding.

The comparison above with Alfarabi's account of the weeds aims to show that Ibn Bājjah's version is not a mere recounting of Alfarabi's. Ibn Bājjah tries to solve the problem of inherent injustice in Alfarabi's virtuous city by eliminating the apparent source of its injustice, i.e., false opinion. If the virtuous city and its inhabitants all possess truth, there remains no cause for disagreement in the city and hence the weeds will not exist at all. That is, the fundamental tension between the city and the individual is

resolved, once the common good of the city equals the highest good of the human being. But this further strains the possibility of the perfect virtuous city. For, as we have already acknowledged, the task of bringing about the perfect virtuous city is a massive goal, and here we get one more indication why this is so.

The discussion of the lone philosopher in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Alfarabi and Ibn Bājjah seem to share a common purpose: to show the limitations on virtue in political life alongside the limitations on complete happiness in philosophic life. To reach the understanding that no part of human life is without natural limitations has the moderating effect of denying every city and every human being the claim of being perfectly virtuous or perfectly happy. The idea of perfection has become most questionable, but that is precisely the point: human beings hoping to be completely happy must be made to associate that happiness with the need to reflect on the truth of their opinions and the correctness of their actions, rather than assume that they have already attained perfection in what they know about the good.

FOUR WAYS OF LIFE IN THE IMPERFECT CITIES

The insertion of Alfarabi's name at the end of Ibn Bājjah's weed account marks a dramatic turn in the treatise. Henceforth deeper interest is vested in the here and now as the discussion newly ponders the role of the individual in the city. An awakening to matters as they are, rather than as they ought to be, is detectable in the more rapid stream of particulars in the discussion, especially the interest in specific "ways of life" (*siyar*), consideration of the nation along with the city, and the unleashing of a flood of historical data plus hadiths and lines of poetry. Among the important historical persons or groups to

be introduced, whose ideas Ibn Bājījah debates in the treatise, are the ancient Greek physician Galen and one sect of Islamic Sufis.

Lest one think that he has abandoned the virtuous city as a concern, his interest in particulars serves to clarify the “best existence” (43.16) in imperfect cities, that of the “isolated weed” (*al-nābat al-mufrad* [43.16 and 19]), whose existence we were already told “is a reason for the perfect city arising” (43.4). Despite that it would make his analysis more credible, Ibn Bājījah prudently steers away from naming contemporary ways of life in which the weeds may be found: “We will turn aside from a summary of that, nor will we occupy ourselves with an investigation of the ways of life existing in this time” (43.7-8). Nonetheless, he all but declares that no contemporary city has a perfect way of life, the nearest example being “the original Persians” (43.6) for whom the exception is made on Alfarabi’s authority, not his own. And so Ibn Bājījah brings us around to believing that every existing city is made up of four ways of life, which will be identified next, none of which is perfect. Somewhat abruptly, then, the treatise reorients itself to the politics of imperfect cities, in an effort to deliberate about the best possible way of life within them.

Until now, Ibn Bājījah’s concern has been for the way of life of inhabitants in the perfect virtuous city. This is the singularly best way of life for humans as a species, supposedly brought into being by the ancient Persian monarchy. Ibn Bājījah’s new discussion thread of the best life concerns human beings as individuals rather than as members of the human species. He indicates that there are four unique ways of life in the imperfect cities:

[As for] all of the ways of life that are in this time and in those that have gone before...except for what Abū Naṣr relates about the way of life of the original Persians...most of what we find with respect to them has to do with the four [imperfect] ways of life. (43.4-7)

In the sentence that follows, Ibn Bājjah enumerates three “sorts” (43.8) of ways of life, leaving his readers guessing about the fourth: “Rather, there are three sorts of them whose existence it is possible to find, and they are the weeds, the judges, and the physicians” (43.8-9). The inclusion of these three sorts is consistent with what has been said before: that “among the general characteristics of the four simple [imperfect] cities is that they require physicians and judges” (41.14-15) and that “[t]he weeds may be found among the four [imperfect] ways of life” (43.3). While four seems to be a magic number for Ibn Bājjah,¹⁴ there is nothing in the treatise that suggests that each of the imperfect ways of life is assigned to exactly one of the four imperfect cities, as Socrates correlates political regimes with different types of souls in Books Eight and Nine of the *Republic* (543a-592b).¹⁵ Rather, it seems that all of Ibn Bājjah’s four ways of life exist simultaneously in each of the imperfect cities.

After naming the three ways of life above, Ibn Bājjah introduces next, in a rather murky fashion compared to the simple enumeration in the preceding sentence, a way of life it may be impossible to find in the imperfect city, thus leaving it to his readers to decide if this is really the fourth sort: “If it were possible for those who are happy to exist in these cities, they would have only the happiness (*sa’ādah*) of the isolated individual

¹⁴ Ibn Bājjah says there are four sorts of imperfect cities, four sorts of ways of life, and four sorts of spiritual forms.

¹⁵ As best as one can tell, for there is no substantive discussion in the treatise of imperfect political regimes, the four imperfect cities are the ones that unexpectedly come to light in Part III: imamate, timocracy, democracy, conquest (74.16-17). Socrates in Books VIII and IX of the *Republic* produces a different list of four inferior regimes in this order: timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. That Ibn Bājjah finds his enumeration more than sufficient for the purposes of the treatise is stated earlier: “[W]e do not intend the enumeration of the sorts of governance, but rather we intend true governance, because it is the most virtuous governance, and because it is possible for the solitary to obtain, by means of it, essential happiness” (56.21-57.1). See E.I. J. Rosenthal’s explanation of imamate in “The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Bajja” in *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951): 208 n. 72. I suggest later in the chapter what the political regime of true governance might be.

(*al-mufrad*)” (43.9-10). Apparently, the discussion of the perfect virtuous city takes for granted the concern with happiness, as the subject did not surface prior to his mentioning it here. To be sure, the qualified form of happiness that is attributed to this tentative fourth way of life presupposes that an unqualified form of happiness exists elsewhere, namely, in the perfect virtuous city.¹⁶ Taking into account Ibn Bājjah’s reservations about the possibility of this last sort, the four possible ways of life in the imperfect cities seem to be: (i) the weeds, (ii) the judges, (iii) the physicians, and provisionally (iv) the happy but isolated individuals.

That Ibn Bājjah insists over and over that there are exactly four ways of life in the imperfect cities, but in the end has the reader questioning the existence of the fourth, forces us to pay attention to his fast-and-loose application of mathematics to phenomena in political science. For Ibn Bājjah, there seems to be an uneasy marriage between mathematics and politics. That he finds it difficult to say for sure that a fourth sort exists signals that the ways of life he is studying here do not admit of easy division nor do they conform to rigorous quantification. It would be better not to approach his attempt to identify ways of life in the imperfect cities as an exact science that produces an accurate reading of political life. Indeed, one should wonder whether such a reading could be had. Rather, Ibn Bājjah’s teasing enumeration belies inherent pitfalls in trying to explain comprehensively, in numbers or words, what human life in the city consists of. So rather

¹⁶ Cf. Steven Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City According to Ibn Bājjah” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. by Charles Butterworth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 228. Harvey thinks Ibn Bājjah “argued patiently for the possibility of intellectual happiness and rejected the likelihood of, and necessity for, political happiness.” I would argue that, in light of the preceding discussion on the virtuous city, one should not jump to the conclusion that Ibn Bājjah sees the possibility of happiness for the individual and not the city. For the discussion of happiness, like correct governance, is necessitated by the absence of the perfect city. This is the reason these are mentioned together and for the first time after its decline.

than expecting it to provide straightforward answers about political matters, Ibn Bājjah's division of the imperfect cities into four ways of life should be read as reminding us of questions that one may not think of otherwise, i.e., as showing individuals the way to investigate political phenomena for themselves. More likely, the point is to clarify the meaning of imperfection to the extent possible by rubbing these four ways of life together.

One illustration of this would be the distinction Ibn Bājjah draws between the way of life of the weeds, judges, and physicians, versus that of the isolated individual. The only difference that appears to divide them is that the isolated individual has the potential to be a qualifiedly happy individual. This happiness is a unique attribute that does not exist as a possibility for the other ways of life. This point is stated explicitly in section eight: "It [preserving happiness] is not possible in the three ways of life or those composed from them" (43.22-44.1). This one difference distinguishing the isolated life from the other three leads us to raise and reflect on the following questions: What constitutes happiness for Ibn Bājjah? What makes the isolated life ironically happy and not the other ways of life? Does this mean that happiness exists or does not exist in the imperfect cities? We will address these questions as the chapter moves along.

The following point illustrates in a different way how Ibn Bājjah's discussion of ways of life serves to nurture critical thinking. That the judge and the physician are included among Ibn Bājjah's ways of life offers a clue as to what is common to all four. Normally, one would consider the judge and the physician to be occupations, many more of which can be said to exist in cities. What makes these occupations more interesting than all others that they are worthy of special designation as two of the four ways of life?

Indeed, in their immediate context, their inclusion seems to shore up the argument that divisions in matters of political science are highly arbitrary, which leads to the speculation that calling them a way of life is essentially meaningless. Other more likely divisions of life in the city would be along the lines of the rulers versus the ruled, the rich versus the poor, and the old versus the young. To be sure, nothing on the surface explains why the judge and the physician are worthy of special designation, which means that Ibn Bājjah could not have meant for us to take their inclusion at face value. Rather, their inclusion prods us to inquire into the intention of Ibn Bājjah the division-maker.

The need to interpret the unlikely choices of the judge and the physician as exemplary ways of life in the imperfect cities prompts one to look for clues elsewhere in the treatise to explain this designation. Both the physician and the judge figured briefly in the discussion of the arts of judging and medicine in section five, which depicts these as bad arts contrived in the absence of virtue to compensate for opinions and actions that are less than perfect.

Looking ahead, Ibn Bājjah does not controvert his negative opinion of the judge in the treatise, while the case of the physician turns out to be more interesting. At the end of section eight, he says that the best way of life for the isolated individual is “to obtain happiness when it does not exist” or “to remove from himself the accidents that keep him from happiness or from obtaining of it what is possible” (43.20-21). Once happiness is obtained, then “[p]reserving it is comparable to the preservation of health” (43.22). That is to say, to administer to human life, to govern it well, one must take a comprehensive view of what is healthy for the individual—the view Socrates attributes to the mythological physician Asclepius (*Republic* 407c-d). Ibn Bājjah distinguishes this

approach from the narrow concern for bodily health to the detriment of the soul, an approach Socrates associates with the ancient Greek physician Herodicus (*Republic* 406b). For Ibn Bājjah, it seems that the art of medicine is only practiced in his day by physicians of the latter sort.

While distinguishing between the preservation of health and the art of medicine seems to be his intention in section eight, the case of the physician is more complicated, for Ibn Bājjah depicts the ancient Greek physician Galen as playing the role of both Socrates' good and bad physician, that is, as a spokesman for both health and medicine.

First he says of Galen in section eight:

So we will speak about how he [the solitary human being] governs himself so that he might obtain the best existence, just as the physician speaks about how the isolated human being in these cities is to govern himself so that he is healthy either by preserving his health—as Galen wrote in the book *Preservation of Health*¹⁷—or by recovering it if it ceases, as described in the art of medicine. (43.16-19)

Then he modifies his position on Galen just a few lines down:

Preserving it [happiness] is comparable to the preservation of health. It is not possible in the three ways of life or those composed from them. The opinion Galen and others have of that is similar to alchemy and astrology. This is what he describes as the medicine of souls and that as the medicine of bodies, while government is the medicine of communities. (43.22-44.3)

Presumably, Ibn Bājjah objects to Galen's reference to "the medicine of souls" and his subsequent analogy of governance to medicine, which effectively separates the care of the body from the care of the soul. Ibn Bājjah would revise Galen's analogy to say that

¹⁷ See Heinrich von Staden, "Health," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, ed. Nigel Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 337. Von Staden indicates: "Starting in the 5th century BC a sizeable body of Greek literature developed on the preservation and restoration of health by means of regimen (*diata*), i.e., by a stable mode of living, including diet, exercise, bathing, and other regular habits." Apparently, no work was "more influential than Galen's monumental *Health (Hygieina)*," in which he "assigned the preservation of health to 'hygiene' ('the art of health') but the restoration of health to therapeutics."

governance, like health, is for the sake of producing a state of well-being—that soul-health ensures a good body and thus a healthy individual. Ibn Bājjah indicates in Part III that he means to speak of health with respect to exactly one way of life, i.e., one form of governance that is truly concerned with well-being:

The relation of those conditions is like the relation of the ways of life to the soul. Just as health is supposed to be singular contrary to these many [conditions] and health alone is a natural matter for the body. These many [conditions] are external to nature. Likewise, the lasting way¹⁸ of life is the natural situation of the soul, and it is singular contrary to the remaining ways of life and they are many, and the many are other than natural for the soul. (91.7-11)

Thus, Ibn Bājjah would have us understand governance as a holistic treatment for the soul and the body only with respect to the way of life of the individual who “might obtain the best existence.” This is not to say that all other ways of life or those composed from them are entirely unhealthy, that they are completely diseased and incurably evil, although some ways of life may fall into this category. Rather, the pervasive inattention in the imperfect cities to what constitutes the best existence, and the reliance on judges and physicians to make up the difference, denies most ways of life consideration as possible paths to happiness. As such, the imperfect cities will be composed of an incurable mixture of ways of life, the one that pursues health and the rest that rely on the art of medicine.

Juxtaposing the ways of life of the judge and the physician with the isolated way of life in the imperfect cities prompts one other observation. The juxtaposition reveals that the pursuit of happiness, like judging and medicine, is an art that must be practiced

¹⁸ Reading *al-sīrah al-iqāmiyyah* with Asin Palacios (79), rather than *al-sīyar al-imamāmiyyah* with Fakhry.

daily, that it must be one's life's work. To be sure, it is not the arts as such that Ibn Bājjah is contending against, but only bad arts. As ways of life that he insists are not found in the perfect virtuous city, the arts of judging and medicine must be the life's work of individuals who enable the pursuit of ends contrary to virtue. As we have already seen, the presence of judges and physicians in the city is representative of its lack of self-sufficiency, a necessary precondition for the virtuous city. To paraphrase Ibn Bājjah's earlier criticism in section five, judges facilitate the city's dependence on justice, when affection is the superior common good, while physicians facilitate dependence on external aids to overcome internal sicknesses in the form of immoderate desires, when obtaining and preserving a healthy soul and body is the best regimen. For these reasons, judges and physicians contribute fundamentally to the city's imperfection. The role of the weeds is different and will be considered below. For now, we summarize that Ibn Bājjah blames the city's imperfection in large measure on the presence of these two ways of life, because they represent in the city that which facilitates many people falling short of self-sufficiency. The antidote in the imperfect city is the isolated life, whose sole art or life's work is to bring about happiness. Why isolation is a necessary precondition for bringing happiness about in the city will be examined below.

Let us move on to the case of the weed to consider the difference between it and the isolated individual, for they seem not to be identical. It should be noted first that Ibn Bājjah has finally surrendered himself to speaking in some fashion about the treatise's namesake, the solitary, a topic that the weeds account all too well prepares us to view as politically charged. That is to say, if it were not for the weeds analogy, we would hardly be quick to recognize the political significance of the isolated individual. With respect to

the weeds, meaning those who have true opinions in the imperfect cities, he says that “their existence is a reason for the perfect city arising (*sabab ḥūdūth al-madīnah al-kāmilah*)” (43.4). By reading the definite article with *sabab*, Lawrence Berman translates this sentence as follows: “Their existence is *the* cause that leads to the rise of the perfect city, as explained elsewhere.”¹⁹ Accepting this translation, Steven Harvey provides the following interpretation: “The nature of weeds, however, is such that if they are not quickly uprooted, they can take over the land. Ibn Bājjah refers to this possibility in a single passing statement. Their existence is the cause that leads to the rise of the perfect city, as explained elsewhere. This possibility is not suggested again.”²⁰

This reading of the passage founders on the insertion of the definite article, if the weeds are not “the” cause of the perfect city, but only one, albeit necessary, reason for its arising. If the existence of weeds is not the exclusive reason, then their existence is not the sufficient cause of the perfect city. If this interpretation is accurate, then something more is needed to bring about the city’s perfection. We get a sense of what might be missing in this all-important statement in section seven:

Correct governance is only the governance of the isolated individual, whether it is a single isolated individual or more than one, as long as a nation or a city does not agree [*yajtami’ ‘alā*] upon their opinion. (43.10-12)

The other ingredient needed for the perfect city, and now add nation, is agreement on the same opinion as the isolated individual. No mention is made of the weeds taking over the

¹⁹ See Lawrence Berman’s partial translation of the treatise in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Ralph Lerner and Mushin Mahdi (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1991), 127 (italics added).

²⁰ See Steven Harvey, 208. Harvey’s reading suggests that Ibn Bājjah admits the weeds are potentially factious. But the weeds Ibn Bājjah writes about hold only true opinion that will gain ascendance in the city not by force, but by agreement.

city and governing it by force, only by consent.²¹ Ibn Bājjah takes it for granted that the opinion of the isolated individual with respect to governance will be as good for the city as it is for the individual. We will say more about this momentarily.

But for the moment, and a key moment at that, it would seem that the perfect way of life in the city, the perfect political regime Ibn Bājjah has been searching for all along, has finally come to view—a truly democratic regime, wherein each citizen freely consents to take responsibility for governing oneself correctly to bring about correct governance in the city and thus the happiness of the city as a whole.

That no city and no nation agrees on “their” opinion necessarily means that isolated individuals are at odds with every city or nation about the best way of life. Ibn Bājjah hints, by his substitution of “their” where the reader expects “true,” that the problem of conflicting opinion lies in the fact that cities and nations judge things not as one should, in absolute terms of true versus false, but in relative terms of ownership, i.e., “their opinion” versus the opinion the city has chosen to govern itself by. One would like to think that constructive criticism of the predominant way of life in a city or a nation could prove useful. But an individual’s opinion that cannot demonstrate its truth absolutely, yet claims to expose shortcomings in the city’s governance, will most likely be seen as harmful and be met with hostility.

The city can hardly be expected to respond otherwise. By definition, every imperfect city is founded on false opinion. As we saw above in Alfarabi’s account of the weeds, the city’s preservation depends on obedience to an approximation of truth in the

²¹ Lest one think Ibn Bājjah a pacifist, he mentions the art of war in Part I (38.3 and 9) and uses examples of violence and war against others and oneself to speak of acts of “nobility” (*sharīf*) in Part III (77.14-78.15), especially examples from Arabic poetry (e.g., 78.1, 5-6 and 7).

form of images and other salutary opinions set down by the city's lawgiver, rather than to truth *per se*. From the perspective of a city or nation, then, it is not a matter of defending its opinion because it is simply true, as it is for the isolated individual, but because it is the one the city is founded on. Maintaining order in the imperfect city or nation depends upon citizens believing that the opinion of the city is their own. Any claim to a superior opinion that does not belong to the city thus threatens to subvert the order on which the city is founded, inasmuch as it incites others to question the truth that holds the city together. To the city, all examination of its opinion has the mark of disobedience. To do battle with the city's opinion with the best intentions, then, one cannot be armed with anything less than true opinion for the outcome to be constructive.

While most existing cities or nations are imperfect so far as opinion is concerned, Ibn Bājjah sees them as capable of accommodating an individual living in accordance with a contrary opinion and even one that claims to be superior, however unsettling that sounds at first. He assures individuals of the possibility of correct governance in the absence of the city's agreement upon their opinion, just as he assures them, at least in principle, that happiness is possible in the imperfect cities. But for the privilege of living in accordance with one's own opinion, one pays the price of living in isolation. That is, governing oneself in accordance with opinion that opposes that of the city requires that one relinquish certain freedoms. It is no wonder, then, that the only political regime Ibn Bājjah's isolated weed might be ambitious to bring about is freedom-loving democracy.

Let us return to the difference between the weed and the isolated individual to show why they are not entirely identical. In the quote on correct governance above, we see that an imperfect city or nation will react to the opinion of the isolated individual in

much the same way one would expect it to react to that of the weeds. This sets up an important affinity between Ibn Bājjah's idea of the isolated individual and that of the weed, implying that the isolated individual possesses true opinion, though this is not stated explicitly. This means that every isolated individual is a weed. However, the converse is not true, for Ibn Bājjah assigns something to the isolated individual, in addition to happiness, that he has not assigned to the weeds: correct governance. Putting things together, he seems to say that correct governance must converge with true opinion in the same individual, and by extension in the same city or nation, for happiness to exist. While many weeds may happen upon an opinion that is true, given the provisional nature of happiness associated with the isolated way of life, Ibn Bājjah must mean that very few, if any, weeds will obtain in an organized manner true opinions that they will then be capable of correct governance. Only the weed who hits upon correct self-governance is politically significant and deserves the new name "solitary"; the rest remain as they are. To verify that this reading is sound, while simultaneously appreciating the centrality of this idea of convergence to the treatise, one has only to note what Ibn Bājjah writes in section eight, where he brings to life the hybrid persona, the "isolated weed" (*al-nābat al-mufrad*): "[T]his discussion is for the isolated weed: how to obtain happiness when it does not exist, or how to remove from himself the accidents that keep him from happiness or from obtaining of it what is possible" (43.19-21). This is the clearest statement in the treatise that some form of happiness is possible for the individual even in the imperfect cities.

SUFISM AND THE SOLITARY

After the weeds discussion in sections six and seven and just prior to introducing the “solitary” (*mutawahhid*) at the beginning of section eight, Ibn Bājjah identifies a different name at the end of section seven for the isolated individual used by the Sufis:

These [isolated individuals] are the ones the Sufis have in mind when they speak of “strangers.” For whether they are in their homelands or among their contemporaries and neighbors, they are strangers with respect to their opinions. They have traveled in their thoughts to other rankings (*marātib*) that are like homelands for them—and so on with the rest of what they [the Sufis] say. (43.12-14)

Ibn Bājjah takes a vested interest in the Sufi “stranger,” who does not feel at home in one’s homeland, in one’s neighborhood, or even among members of the same generation, because this stranger does not share like-minded opinion with others. For isolated individuals to overcome the ranking in their homelands as “strangers” (*ghurabā’*), the Sufi solution is to take refuge in thoughts of “other rankings that are like homelands for them.” In Part III of the treatise, Ibn Bājjah offers a more drastic solution that speaks to isolated individuals who must necessarily cut themselves off from others in the city. Before laying out the extreme case of isolation, let us first consider what remains of the discussion of Sufism, which also carries over into Part III.

No contemporary opinion presented in the treatise seems to have caught Ibn Bājjah’s attention like the spiritual teaching he ascribes to a strand of Sufism, identified in the treatise by its most famous proponent, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (AD 1058-1111) (55.14). This foray into contemporary Sufism quickly betrays that Ibn Bājjah does not give it nearly the same consideration as the bygone philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, and Alfarabi, whose ideas are also mentioned in the treatise, but with whom Ibn Bājjah does not disagree

openly. His intention in engaging Sufi thought is not simply to make sense of it, but specifically to correct it. His correction is revealing of the battle line he draws between rationalism and a certain strand of Sufism that denies that “[l]earning (*ta'allum*) and teaching (*ta'līm*) and diligence (*muthābarah*) in the sciences (*'ulūm*)” (69.3) are necessary to attain knowledge of the highest being. Ibn Bājjah suggests that this is not “Sufism in truth” (*al-ṣūfiyyah ammā fī al-ḥāqīqah* [69.3]). Our discussion of Sufism that follows elaborates on the difference between the solitary life in the city, which assumes the centrality of reason in attaining happiness, versus the self-proclaimed spiritual way of life of those among the Sufi “strangers” who would abandon the rational component of the soul in their quest for other rankings. As such, Ibn Bājjah’s critique of Sufism touches on the debate between faith and reason.

It is interesting that Ibn Bājjah calls a spiritual teaching to rational account owing to its antagonism to reason. Ibn Bājjah’s conviction about the ability of reason to make sense of this teaching is met by the conviction of its Sufi proponents that the path to other rankings is essentially an extra-rational matter. As such, Ibn Bājjah’s criticism cannot be directed to those Sufis whose belief is marked by an indifference to reason. His audience must be those in the city who are sympathetic to rational argument, among whom he provokingly elevates the variant strand “Sufis in truth.” It follows that one must be suspicious of portrayals of Ibn Bājjah as a proponent of mysticism or a teacher of metaphysics, given his professed devotion to human reason as superior to all other paths to human happiness, along with his concomitant skepticism, like Aristotle’s, about humans acquiring knowledge of all things concerning metaphysical being. We will say more about these things as we come across them below.

Strikingly similar to the starting point of Part I, which begins at the beginning, so to speak, with a grammatical inquiry into the meaning of governance [*tadbīr*], Part III begins with a discourse on the relevant Arabic word *rūḥ*, translated as “spirit.” Ibn Bājjah says that the word is often used as a synonym in Arabic for *nafs*, which has been translated as “soul” (49.1). He casts doubt on identifying spirit with soul, because it implies that both have exactly the same meaning. He counters that “the philosophizers (*mutafalsifūn*) use it [i.e., *rūḥ*] equivocally” (49.1-2). He clarifies that *rūḥ* “is used for the soul, not insofar as it is a soul, but insofar as it is a motive soul” (49.5). Ultimately, he identifies spirit as pertaining to “substances” (*al-jawāhir*) [49.7]. Ibn Bājjah indicates that the “related” (*mansūb* [49.6]) utterance *rūḥānī*, translated as “spiritual,” is not native to Arabic (49.8-9). The noun based on this form, *rūḥāniyyah*, is used by Sufis to describe the inner spirituality of a human being. Ibn Bājjah discusses the etymology of this word as being similar to terms contrived by those he has named philosophizers: “The form (*shakl*) of this utterance is not Arabic. It has entered the Arabic language in the sort [of utterances] that came without reference (*ghair qiyās*) according to Arab grammarians. For that which is related (*muqās*) is to say *rūḥī*” (49.8-10). Thus, Ibn Bājjah implies that the concept of spirituality native to Sufism is something of a foreign import to Arab discourse. In so doing, Ibn Bājjah attempts to put critical distance between the opinions found in Sufism and those of his own Arabic-speaking community.

This opening appears to be the beginning of Ibn Bājjah’s response to Sufism. It contrasts the Sufi understanding of *rūḥ*, as part of the common understanding among Arabic speakers, with that of the philosophists, those who are pretenders to philosophy, or perhaps Ibn Bājjah means they only wish to appear as such. The comparison highlights that

the term *rūḥ* is an important term in Arabic, but nonetheless an ambiguous one that no one has a claim to understand definitively. To complicate matters, Ibn Bājjah notes that the related term *rūḥāniyyah* must have been coined by Arabicizing a foreign word in the same manner employed by those dabbling in philosophy, whom he credits with inventing words like *jusmāniyyah* (physicality [49.11]) and *naḥsāniyyah* (psychicality [49.11]). The form of these words mimics the construction of terms he uses himself in Part II to label three kinds of human action: *insāniyyah* (human), *bahīmiyyah* (bestial), and *jamādiyyah* (corporeal) [48.13]. Thus, in an ostensible effort to deconstruct the meaning and uses of *rūḥ*, Ibn Bājjah chips away at the mystery behind the concept of spirituality revered by Sufis and brings it within the realm of rational inquiry by means of the science of linguistics.

From here, the discussion transitions to an inquiry into spiritual forms (*al-ṣuwar al-rūḥāniyyah*), the subject of Part III as indicated in its title. Ibn Bājjah identifies four sorts of spiritual forms (49.14-50.5):

- (i) The spiritual forms of the celestial bodies (*al-ajsām al-mustadīrah*) (49.14), which are not in any way hylic²² (*layyasa hayūlāniyyan bi-wajh* [49.17]) and are not explored in the discussion (50.6-7).
- (ii) The second sort of the spiritual forms—the one which includes the active intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*) and the acquired intellect (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*) (49.14-15)—is not a sort of spiritual form that is hylic in the first place, since it was never at anytime a hylic necessity (50.2-3). Rather, it is related to hyle because it completes (*mutammim*) the hylic intelligibles, and it is [either] the acquired [form] (50.3-4), or the agent for them [i.e., the hylic intelligibles], and the latter is the active intellect (50.4).

²² The term “hyle” can also be translated “primordial matter.”

- (iii) The hylic intelligibles (*al-ma'qūlāt al-hayūlāniyyah*) (49.15) have a relation (*nisbah*) to primary matter (Greek, hyle; Arabic, *hayūlā*), as Ibn Bājjah explains (49.17-50.1). In terming this relation a “hylic relation” (*nisbah hayūlāniyyah* [50.1]), Ibn Bājjah emphasizes that the intelligibles in question are more material than spiritual (*rūhāniyyah*). Differently stated, because he considers that they are rooted in primary matter or that their existence—even their substance—derives from and is based in primary matter, they are not essentially spiritual (50.1-2).
- (iv) The intentions (*ma'ānī*)²³ that reside in three faculties of the soul, namely, common sense (*ḥiss mushtarak*), imagination (*takhayyul*), and memory (*dhikr*) (49.15-17). The sort under which these notions are enumerated is in-between the sort which apprehends the hylic intelligibles and the sort which apprehends the hylic²⁴ forms (50.5). Ibn Bājjah later refers to these collectively as “the three faculties” (55.5 and 6). They are sometimes called the internal senses.

Among these sorts, Ibn Bājjah is most interested in the latter three that are capable of human apprehension. In fact, he is primarily concerned with the intelligibles associated with the active intellect, which he calls “universal spiritual forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-rūhāniyyah al-'āmmah*) (50.7-9), and the notions that are opposite to these intelligibles that reside in common sense, which he calls “particular spiritual forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-rūhāniyyah al-khāṣṣah*) (50.9-10). The universal spiritual forms have no existence in

²³ For the translation of *ma'ānī* as “intentions,” see Michael Blaustein, “Aspects of Ibn Bajja’s Theory of Apprehension,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, eds. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 207-210. The article also has a useful comment on the phrase “internal senses” (204, 211 n.5); see also Harvey, 213 n. 27.

²⁴ Reading *al-hayūlāniyyah* with Moses of Narbonne rather than *al-rūhāniyyah* with Fakhry.

corporeal objects other than the human being who apprehends them, whereas the particular spiritual forms do (50.11-13). As it seems to be the case, common sense is the internal sense that processes external sense perceptions into apprehensions of spiritual forms that are here called notions, and the active intellect processes the acquired notions in common sense as well as the other faculties into universal forms. The aim of the intellect in general is to ascertain spiritual forms that are true (*sādiq*) essentially (*bi-al-dhāt*), rather than acquiring forms accidentally (*bi-al-'ard*) that thus can be either true or false (*kādhīb*) (51.18-19).

The concept of spiritual forms emerging here evokes the Socratic theory of ideas (*eide*), as exemplified by the idea of the good central to the cave analogy in the *Republic* (517b-c) discussed in the last chapter. Indeed, Plato (71.6, 86.6) as well as Socrates (74.7) and the *Republic* (71.6) are mentioned by name in Part III approvingly. Also, Aristotle's name appears numerous times,²⁵ with repeated references to ideas Ibn Bājjah favorably attributes to Aristotle. By combining the Sufi term for "spirituality" with a term meaning "forms," Ibn Bājjah thus signals that Part III may serve as a guide to readers for understanding how ancient philosophy can be brought to bear on spiritual matters.

The introduction to spiritual forms gradually builds up to this sharp statement of Ibn Bājjah's disagreement with the Sufis:

Therefore the Sufis claim ultimate happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-quṣwā*) can be apprehended (*idrāk*) not by study, but by devotion and by not letting there be a blink of the eye without remembering the Absolute (*dhikr al-muṭlaq*), because when that is done, all three faculties are brought together and it [attaining ultimate happiness] becomes possible. All of that is supposition. (55.17-19)

²⁵ Aristotle is mentioned in Part III at 53.10 and 20, 57.6, 64.21, 67.11, 68.6, 73.12, 78.9, and 85.13.

For some Sufis, the aim of the continual remembrance of God's name is to induce a state of transcendence to other ranks, which, according to Ibn Bājījah, they equate with ultimate happiness. This transcendence is the result of agreement in the soul among the "three faculties" minus agreement with the "deliberative faculty" (56.3-6). An illustration of the problem with such agreement is forthcoming. But before getting to that, Ibn Bājījah expands on his argument against this strand of Sufism. He details the importance of learning to the attainment of ultimate happiness by calling to mind an important faculty of the soul that is strangely missing here, the deliberative faculty of reason. Though his meaning is clear, he draws attention to the absence of this faculty rather obliquely, referring to it indirectly as "the noblest part of the human being"

To do what they presume is something unnatural. If this goal that they presume were true and were to be a goal for the solitary, apprehending it would be by accident and not by essence. If it were apprehended, no city would come from it, and the most venerable parts of the human being would be superfluous and inactive. His existence would be in vain. And all mathematics and the three sciences that make up theoretical wisdom would be in vain. And not just this alone, but also the presumed arts such as grammar and what is like it. (55.19-56.2)

While there seems to be agreement that the attainment of happiness is the proper goal of human life, Ibn Bājījah all but declares that the Sufis have misconstrued the path to that end. He indicates that any action that one claims is necessary for the attainment of happiness must be conducive to happiness for the individual as well as the city. That means this action is central to the governance of both. To pursue what is best for both the individual and the city requires that one have at one's command "all mathematics and the three sciences that make up theoretical wisdom.... And not just this alone, but also the presumed arts such as grammar and what is like it." To attain happiness without learning

and without knowledge of the sciences and the arts is equivalent to doing so without a plan, rather than deliberately as one should. To reiterate, “the noblest part of the human being,” whose rejection falsifies all the learnings in the sciences and arts, must be the faculty of reason.

Ibn Bājjah argues that there has to be something that establishes agreement among the different notions residing in the three faculties, as each faculty that concerns external sense perceptions is capable of being deceived or erring (52.1-13; 56.12-17). Thus no one is capable of judging what is true on the basis of sense perceptions alone. What reflects on the notions residing in the three internal senses to produce agreement among them about the true existence of a spiritual form in a corporeal object is where the deliberative faculty of reason comes in. To illustrate that agreement among the three faculties of the soul without reason cannot establish certainty, while underscoring the contemporary relevance intended for this discussion, Ibn Bājjah uses two worldly examples, the Nile River in Egypt and the city of Fustat, an existing city in Egypt that serves here as a second point of reference:

An example of that is that the Nile is in Egypt. About this, certainty has been established. But not about the spiritual form of Egypt and the Nile’s place in it with respect to the common sense of anyone who has not seen it as it is. This is because common sense did not combine with the two faculties [imagination and memory]. If their combination happens for a human being, the city of al-Fuṣṭāt and the location of the Nile with respect to it would occur for him as it is in existence, and he would witness the spiritual forms as they are in their existence. (56.6-10)

The crux of Ibn Bājjah’s disagreement with the Sufis is how to gain certainty about the existence of universal spiritual forms that are completely incorporeal. Ibn Bājjah suggests that certainty cannot be demonstrated for a human being about these

forms in the same way that the existence of particular spiritual forms can be apprehended by encountering them in sensible objects. In the example above, one can confirm with certainty the existence of the particular spiritual form of the Nile River by visiting the river and observing it for oneself. Ibn Bājjah suggests that this kind of self-evident demonstration is what the intellect aims at with respect to universal spiritual forms, not by means of sense perception, but by means of syllogistic reasoning (*qiyas* [55.1]). Ibn Bājjah's point is that certainty does not occur for human beings about metaphysical matters as it does about matters for which there is physical evidence. With regard to metaphysical beings, nearly all humans remain in the pursuit of certainty, not in possession of it. All, that is, except for the solitary.

To reject the primacy of reason and to substitute in its place meditation on God's name as sufficient action to attain certainty about spiritual forms is to make insufficient use of one's intellectual capacities. For Ibn Bājjah, there is only one path to happiness, one that he assures us "Sufis in truth" have already adopted:

Learning and teaching and diligence in the sciences are included in this sort. Sufism, if it is in truth, is included in this sort, and if it is according to their intention which they heed, then it is included in the universal spiritual [form] which is the perfection of the rational [faculty]. (69.3-5)

The path Ibn Bājjah sets forth is very different from the Sufi model, but these paths must intersect, as he insists that two well-known Sufis, Uways al-Qaranī and Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham (68.4-5),²⁶ have been "overcome" (*taghallaba 'alā*) by "the very finest spirituality" (*al-rūḥāniyyah al-laṭīfah jiddan* [68.2-5]). While this is genuinely high praise, Ibn Bājjah does not say that these men are happy. For something more is needed

²⁶ See Steven Harvey 223 and 223 n. 52.

for ultimate happiness to come about. That is, Ibn Bājjah does not present the rank of “spiritual form” (69.2) as the highest rank. This, despite that he includes within the same rank as the “Sufis in truth” those who pursue “learning and teaching and diligence in the sciences” (69.3-4). Ibn Bājjah explains that it is only “on account of their intention that they are known by,” that these two ranks are mistakenly “included in the universal form, which is the perfection of rationality” (69.4-5). The perfection of the intellect is the highest rank assigned to the solitary, which will be detailed below. For now, we summarize that the solitary life succeeds in attaining the highest rank, insofar as it puts to use all the human faculties nature provides to attain ultimate happiness.

To say something about the shortcoming of Sufism, rather than its potential to lead one to the very finest spirituality, we are told that the act of continually remembering God’s name that the Sufis believe will lead to happiness is missing a vital component necessary for political life. Insofar as it bypasses the rational faculty, Sufi meditation cannot be justified on rational grounds. As such, the belief that it leads to happiness cannot be ascertained by reason, but only by faith. To call it a matter of faith, however, is not an adequate defense of this action, yet a rational defense is necessary, given that the city is filled with rival opinions about what constitutes happiness and which actions are needed to bring it about. Without a proper defense of their understanding of Sufism against its detractors, those who would deny its truth, this Sufi teaching cannot rise above the level of common opinion, or as Ibn Bājjah says, “supposition” (55.19). In turning away from learning, the sciences, and the arts, this particular Sufi way of life lacks an adequate criticism of the errant ways of life in the city that it rejects and lacks an adequate defense of the superiority of its own way of life. That said, this strand of Sufism

cannot be the basis for the correct governance of an individual or a city or a nation.

Despite the admiration certain Sufis warrant above, the life of the Sufi stranger can be in many ways the antithesis in the imperfect cities of the solitary life, a way of life that, unlike this strand of Sufism, forces the imperfect city to come to terms with reason's formidable claim to superiority as a way of life.

ON SOLITARY GOVERNANCE

As Ibn Bājjah's dispute with Sufism illustrates, one must be leery of opinion and action prescribed for the attainment of happiness that are not open to rational scrutiny, for common opinion generally falls short of a thorough understanding of what constitutes the best way of life. According to what is said elsewhere in Part III, human beings frequently mistake happiness to consist in things that are not really happiness, but are only means to this end. Ibn Bājjah is all but explicit in the following passage that spirituality is among these mistaken ends. We learn that these are only means by comparing the end designated for the perfect virtuous city, namely, the life in accordance with true opinion. The perfection of the city obtains when the opinion and the action of every individual contributes to the city's virtue. The happiness of the individual culminates in uniting with others to form the perfect virtuous city:

If a human being is part of a city, then the goal of all of his actions is the city. That is so if he is in the virtuous city only. As for the remaining four cities and what is composed of them, their inhabitants are estranged (*tuqṣīhi*) from them by another goal, whose pleasure they prefer. Therefore, the preparatory things in the virtuous city are goals in the others. (62.8-11)

In the perfect virtuous city, life is well-ordered by definition. It therefore makes no sense

to speak of correct governance with respect to this city, as its inhabitants all share the same true opinions, just as we learned at the end of Part I that it makes little sense to speak of this city needing the remedial arts of judging and medicine:

[W]hat we are discussing here [solitary governance] is eliminated when the city is perfect. And the usefulness of this discussion is eliminated, just as the science of medicine, the art of judging, and the other arts that are contrived to parry defective governance are eliminated. (44.3-6)

And so it only makes sense to speak of correct governance relative to the existence of an imperfectly governed city. And correct governance concerns only the isolated individual, who is not a part of the city, on account of seeking a way of life in accordance with opinion that is not predominant. Correct governance is strictly a matter of an individual ordering one's actions then. It is self-governance in the narrow sense. What end does Ibn Bājjah intend for the isolated individual to pursue to bring about happiness that is not an end recognized by the city, i.e., an end that all other inhabitants of the city have a hard time equating with happiness?

To outline the idea of the solitary's happiness, let us start with section eight of Part I, which introduces the idea of the solitary, the only individual for whom "the best existence" (*afḍal wujūdātihī*) is possible in the imperfect cities:

In this discussion, we ourselves are intent upon the governance of this solitary human being. It is evident that a matter external to nature has become appended to him. So we will speak about how he governs himself so that he might obtain the best existence.... (43.15-16)

Ibn Bājjah is clear that the discussion in Part III is intended for the benefit of this solitary human being. The primary task of his correct governance is to remove "a matter external to nature" that handicaps the solitary. One conjectures that this appended matter is false

opinion. We confirm this conjecture by turning to the discussion of the solitary life in the final part of the treatise.

All at once, in the middle of Part III, we learn that the solitary is philosophic in nature, completely spiritual, and that intellectual acts render the solitary divine and virtuous and the possessor of wisdom. Simultaneously, then, Ibn Bājjah reveals the nature of the opinions and actions that make this the best way of life in the imperfect cities:

Therefore everyone who prefers his corporeal [form] to something of his spiritual [form] cannot reach the ultimate goal. Thus no singular corporeal [individual] is happy and every happy [individual] is a pure spiritual [one]. Nonetheless, it is necessary for the spiritual [individual] to do certain corporeal actions, but not for their own sake, and to do spiritual actions for their own sake. Likewise the philosopher (*fāyilasūf*) must do many spiritual actions, but not for their own sake, and do all of the intellectual actions for their own sake. By means of his corporeal [actions], he is the human being who exists, and by means of his spiritual [actions] he is more noble, and by means of his intellectual [actions] he is divine and virtuous. For the one who possesses wisdom is necessarily virtuous and divine. (79.10-16)

Ibn Bājjah identifies the “intellectual form” as the highest rank to which the individual can aspire, which transcends all other ranks in the human world. That is to say, by means of the spiritual form, the human being attains only an intermediary rank. At the end of the treatise, we learn that the intermediary forms are not ends (91.12). We read in the following passage what justifies calling the human being who attains the intellectual form “virtuous and divine”:

If he achieved the ultimate goal, and that because he intellects the simple substantial intellects..., then he would be on account of that one of those intellects (*'uqūl*) and it would be true about him that he is divine only. The mortal sensible characteristics and the refined spiritual characteristics would be removed from him. The description of simply divine befits him. (79.18-80.2)

To add things up, Ibn Bājjah outlines three sorts of actions for the solitary that elevate the form of this exceptional individual from a human being to a spiritual being to a divine being: (i) the corporeal acts that “enable him to exist as a human”; (ii) the particular spiritual acts that “render him more noble”; (iii) and the universal spiritual acts, also referred to as the intellectual acts, that “render him divine and virtuous.” It would seem this ordering of the solitary’s actions constitutes the order for his correct governance and the rank of divine virtuous being presumably constitutes the state of ultimate happiness for the solitary in the imperfect cities.

It goes without saying that governance is discussed here solely in terms of private actions that are possible for the individual, not actions intended for the city on behalf of its inhabitants individually or collectively. The final matter Ibn Bājjah addresses, then, is what benefit correct governance on the part of the solitary might have for the governance of the imperfect cities. The following passage presents the best scenario in the treatise for the relationship of the solitary to the city:

All of these [characteristics] might come to be for the solitary without the perfect city. By means of the first two ranks [corporeal and particular spiritual] he cannot be a part of this [perfect] city nor its goal nor its agent nor its preserver. By means of the third [rank], he might not be part of this city, but rather its ultimate goal. For he cannot be its preserver nor its agent while he is a solitary. (80.3-6)

This passage indicates that it is not sufficient to have one person realize happiness to bring about happiness in the entire city. That is to say, Ibn Bājjah does not suppose that the perfect city would materialize once the solitary comes to rule it. Ibn Bājjah is explicit that no solitary acting alone can bring the perfect city about. The onus is not on one individual, but instead on every individual, to make the city perfect. The only possible

way for the perfect virtuous city to come about remains for every opinion in it to be true and for every action to be correct. Until such time that others in the city should come to agree of their own volition upon the solitary's opinion, the only role for the solitary in the city is to serve as a model of the best life for others to emulate. In short, Ibn Bājjah has no intention of thrusting the solitary into public service without the blessing of every other individual in the city.

In the *Republic*, it seems that Socrates treats the happiness of the individual as incidental to the happiness of the city: “[I]t wouldn’t be surprising if these men, as they are, are also happiest. However, in founding the city we are not looking to the exceptional happiness of any one group among us but, as far as possible, that of the city as a whole” (420b). Ibn Bājjah, on the other hand, treats the attainment of ultimate happiness by the solitary as if it is a critical part of bringing happiness about in the city. It is not until Part III that one understands all that is involved in governing to attain this happiness. Ibn Bājjah’s intent in assigning to the solitary the same way of life as the inhabitants of the perfect virtuous city is to equate the best citizen with the best human being. Ibn Bājjah would have his readers believe that everyone in the city ought to aspire to perfect virtue, though he concedes that imperfection in the city denies this way of life to all but the solitary. To put it differently, the perfection of the city is not prior to the individual’s attainment of happiness, but rather they are mutually dependent: for the city to be perfect, each citizen must lead a perfectly virtuous way of life. For the individual to be unqualifiedly happy, there must be complete freedom in the city to live the life that brings happiness about, i.e., isolation must be eliminated as a precondition for the life of reason.

Throughout his treatise, Ibn Bājjah has consistently spoken of the life of the

individual in relation to how one's city is governed, whether well or badly. In section four, he writes: "What is wanted from it [governance of the household] is perfecting the city or the natural end of the human being" (40.8-9). Again, in the final lines of section eight, Ibn Bājījah says that true opinions concerning the governance of the solitary "come back to" (*yurja* ') both the natural art that concerns the happiness of the individual and the political art that concerns the perfection of the city:

And just as what in these of true opinions with regard to medicine come back to the natural arts, while the ones with regard to the art of judging come back to the political art, so do the ones in this [i.e., with regard to the governance of the solitary] come back to the natural art and the political art. (44.6-9)

The final lines of Part I indicate that Ibn Bājījah wishes matters to converge with respect to governance, meaning that one should conceive of true governance as contributing to the happiness of both the individual and the city. He conceives of the perfect virtuous city as the one which is governed so that only the highest form of the human being is able to flourish, in which case all inhabitants of the city attain complete happiness. In the case of the imperfect cities, Ibn Bājījah keeps the possibility of happiness alive, but only for the solitary, the one who is devoted to attaining the perfection of the soul, the best way of life the city has forsaken. For Ibn Bājījah, the paramount political question, then, is not who rules in the city, but which form of governance predominates. That is to say, the solitary awaits the dawn of the perfectly governed city.

For the most part, Ibn Bājījah leaves readers with the impression that both the perfect virtuous city and the solitary life are utterly self-sufficient. It is not until the end of the treatise that he amends this impression by introducing one important feature of the solitary life, having friends in the sciences:

So what is apparent concerning the situation of the solitary is that it is necessary for him not to befriend the corporeal one nor whomever's goal is the spiritual [form] spoiled by corporeality. Rather, it is necessary for him to befriend people in the sciences. However, people in the sciences are few in some ways of life and are many in some, so that it happens in some of them that they have disappeared. (90.17-19)

This passage reveals that Ibn Bājjah regards befriending a few people in the city as a “necessary” part of the solitary life, though it advises the solitary to choose these people carefully to avoid being led astray. One is not sure he means for the solitary to befriend those adept in the sciences or simply the youth who are eager to learn. In either case, Ibn Bājjah implies that friendship is a justifiable dependence on others so long as it is for the sake of learning. Apparently, these people in the sciences are all the friends the solitary ever needs. He thus throws suspicion on all other inhabitants of the imperfect cities as tempting one away from the virtuous life, thus rendering contrary to virtue nearly all relations in the city. Understandably, then, the solitary wishes for the city to be ruled by true opinion and correct action to eliminate the need for such extreme caution and compulsory segregation.

Ibn Bājjah's intent here is not to suggest how the solitary can improve his situation with respect to others in the imperfect cities. His aim is to address the question of what one should do to preserve the possibility of happiness in the city, the end to which all humans aspire, if the solitary were presented with the worst set of political circumstances. What should the solitary do if there are no people in the sciences to befriend? Does one abandon one's relationship with the city in addition to avoiding relations with all of its inhabitants?

Ibn Bājjah reveals in the passage above that he does not mean for the idea of isolation to be taken so literally in ordinary political circumstances. For the most part, the solitary can get along in the city that is imperfect. But what of the case that friendship with others in the sciences is not possible for the solitary? Ibn Bājjah suggests that in this extreme case, more drastic measures may be necessary if one is to continue pursuing the sciences, including complete isolation or even self-imposed exile:

Therefore, the solitary is obliged in some ways of life to isolate (*ya'tazil*) from people altogether as much as he can. So that he will not have close contact with them except in necessary matters, or to the extent (*bi-qadr*) that is necessary, or he will emigrate to the ways of life in which the sciences exist, if they are to be found. (90.20-22)

Ibn Bājjah confesses that the sole interest the solitary has in the city is to find like-minded friends to exchange ideas with about matters that are not of immediate interest to the city. Finally, then, at the end of the treatise, Ibn Bājjah addresses the objection that the solitary life seems to share little in common with all other ways of life in the city—that there is little that is political about the solitary life other than its presence in the imperfect cities. Ibn Bājjah hopes the solitary can be forgiven for having a narrow interest in the city on account of an uncommon way of life that cannot be well understood by others. The benefit the city is made to anticipate in accommodating the solitary life is the attainment of certainty about intellectual forms, which promises to bestow the greatest happiness to human beings in the city. Once this promise is made, Ibn Bājjah positions himself to appeal to the city to acquiesce in the pursuit of the rational sciences by individuals who prefer to work in isolation, i.e., without interference from others in the city. Ibn Bājjah believes that in most cases the city will grant this freedom. It is only in extreme circumstances that retreat to another way of life is recommended for the solitary. That Ibn Bājjah conditions

this move on there being ways of life elsewhere in which the sciences exist, i.e., “if they are to be found,” suggests that ways of life friendly to philosophy are not all that common.²⁷

To wrap up his discussion on the solitary, Ibn Bājjah boldly insists that nothing he has just said concerning isolation contradicts the principle that “the human being is political by nature”:

This is not contradictory to what was said in political science and to what has been explained in natural science. For it has been explained there that the human being is political by nature (*al-insān madanī bi-l-tabʿ*). It has been explained in political science that isolation is wholly evil. However, this is what is so by essence; accidentally it is good, as that occurs with most of what is according to nature. (90.22-91.3)

On what grounds does Ibn Bājjah believe that the idea of the solitary does not oppose the teaching that the human being is political by nature? For one thing, he argues that isolation should not be judged as “wholly evil,” as though it were equivalent to the acts of adultery, stealing, and murder that are said to admit of no mean in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (1107a12). For accidents occur in nature, so that what is good by nature does not always attain in particular cases. That one is born into an imperfect city is accidental; that one ought to live virtuously is nature’s intention. One could make the

²⁷ Unlike Alfarabi, Ibn Bājjah does not specify that emigration must be to another city, perhaps because he is less optimistic that a better one could truly be found. Cf. Alfarabi’s advice on emigration at the end of the *Selected Aphorisms in Al-Fārābī’s Fuṣūl Muntaza‘ah (Selected Aphorisms)*, ed. Fauzi Najjar Alfarabi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq Publishers, 1993), 95, translated in *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts* by Charles Butterworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 60-61: “Those human things that are the greatest voluntary things and arts in the tyrannical city are likely to be evils, disasters, and reasons for disasters being generated in the world. Due to that, the virtuous person is forbidden to reside in the corrupt regimes, and it is obligatory for him to emigrate to the virtuous cities if any exist in actuality in his time. If they are non-existent, then the virtuous person is a stranger in this world and miserable in life; death is better for him than living.” This advice is slightly modified in Alfarabi’s *Book of Religion*: “[T]he most virtuous persons, forced to dwell in ignorant cities due to the non-existence of the virtuous city, need to migrate to the virtuous city, if it happens to come into being at a certain moment” (Butterworth, 104). For the Arabic, see *Alfarabi’s Book of Religion and Related Texts (Kitāb al-Millah wa-Nuṣūṣ Ukhrāh)*, edited by Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq Publishers, 1968), 56.

argument, then, that the human being is political by nature not only insofar as one is born into a city, but also insofar as one can conduct a virtuous life in it. We recall that both the city and the citizen must partake of some measure of virtue to be a city or a human being more than in name only.

To remove the appended matter that corrupts the soul, namely, false opinion, it is imperative that the solitary have recourse to isolation as a means of recovering the opinions necessary to live in accord with virtue. Isolation enables the solitary to limit his exposure to false opinions. As far as Ibn Bājjah's highest way of life is concerned, the sole purpose of the solitary having contact with others is for the sake of attaining true opinion. Ibn Bājjah confesses that people are unlikely to share the solitary's quest for truth. Even the completely isolated, friendless solitary, who shares much in common with Aristotle's hermit, governs his life better than all others in the city. "For the multitude, correctness is like a genus for the precise and masterful act" (39.1-2). For Ibn Bājjah, correct governance as it exists in the life of the solitary does not have to be perfect to be preferred.

CONCLUSION

Once he has made clear how the solitary life may be useful to the city in the middle of Part III, that is, by restoring correct governance to the city, Ibn Bājjah breaks his silence about the relationship of the solitary to the city at the end of the treatise. In doing so, readers get a sense of the strain the solitary is operating under. While he clarifies that he does not mean by isolation for one to pursue the solitary life in total seclusion, he all but excludes human relationships from the best life. Thus, the solitary hardly seems to live happily, according to what is most commonly said to be happiness.

Ibn Bājjah's defense of the solitary life, which on the surface appears to be so politically disengaged, is that the solitary must be free to suspend momentary interests and desires for the sake of attending to the highest matters regarding the soul, which concern the happiness of the solitary and the city alike. By partaking of none of the immediate pleasures and goods available in the city, among them personal relations other than those that advance knowledge of the sciences, the solitary thereby devotes himself solely to the acquisition of true opinion. This being the one thing most needful in the imperfect cities to bring about happiness by way of correct governance, the isolation of the solitary proves to be a good accidentally for the city. In this way, isolation is not antithetical to the solitary's political nature, but in service of it in the imperfect cities. All told, the solitary's pursuit of the way of life in accordance with the intellect is a unique yet peculiar form of devotion to the city.

CONCLUSION

RESTATEMENT OF THESIS

The objective of this dissertation has been to establish the political foundations of Ibn Bājjah's *Governance of the Solitary*. To this end, the previous five chapters present a comprehensive reading of the treatise as a sustained discussion on governance, in particular, the two forms Ibn Bājjah treats as most important to all human beings who share the common goal of attaining happiness: governance of the virtuous city and governance of the solitary in the imperfect cities. It has been my contention that the problem of the solitary presented in the treatise cannot be understood apart from the problem of the "perfect virtuous city," the absence of which necessitates the discussion of governance with respect to the "very best existence" possible for human beings in the imperfect cities.

In general, Ibn Bājjah's treatise responds to the permanent tension between politics and philosophy, the tension between the pursuit of political happiness and the happiness of the isolated individual, both of which are intended for the human being by nature. The treatise constitutes a political teaching about how the city and the philosopher can find common cause in the pursuit of correct governance for the sake of attaining the highest life intended by nature for human beings. In the case of the virtuous city, its inhabitants think and act in a way that is conducive to the best life for every human being

in it. That is to say, Ibn Bājjah's virtuous city does not depend on the existence of the best rulers or laws, but primarily the best citizens. Correct governance is not a way of life that can be brought about by imposing it externally, but must take root in and emerge from the rational soul. What takes place in the soul in governing an individual by means of virtue for the sake of happiness is therefore the model for what individuals in the city ought to agree on as the best manner of governing themselves politically.

In the case of the imperfect cities, the isolated life exists as a continuous reminder of what approximates the highest life in the virtuous city governed in accord with reason. While the solitary seeks true opinions intended to lead the city to the attainment of happiness, i.e., human perfection, Ibn Bājjah recognizes that the city will likely fail to accept the truth known to the solitary and govern itself accordingly. Inhabitants of the imperfect cities are more inclined to associate happiness with what produces earthly rewards, such as pleasure, honor, freedom, or money. Nonetheless, Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary life requires that one pursue this life not for its own sake, that is, not for the purpose of transcending life in the city, but precisely on behalf of the city. That is, the virtuous city, rather than the intermediary goal of conjunction with the divine, is the proper end of the philosophic life. As such, Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary is not intended to foster radical individualism, but rather the conviction that rational inquiry is essential to the health of the city. Thus, the philosopher ought to persevere in caring about the well-being of the city, even if the city is completely hostile to philosophy. In most cases, Ibn Bājjah insists that the patient accommodation of philosophy to the city's imperfect way of life is possible. Simply put, there is no reason the city and the solitary cannot co-exist, so long as the solitary is mindful of the limitations on the philosophic life inherent in imperfect cities.

The life of the solitary thus acts as a counterweight to the other ways of life in the city that prevent it from attaining its perfection. The solitary resists the common opinions found in the imperfect cities about what constitutes human happiness, substituting well reasoned, albeit less common, opinions that point to the highest goal of the virtuous city. Ibn Bājjah's political teaching thus serves to shake the reader out of complacency in the inferior goals mistakenly ranked highest in political life. While the happiness of the solitary is incomplete without the existence of the virtuous city, the solitary life remains the superior way of life in the imperfect cities, insofar as it is genuinely devoted to learning what is needed to bring about happiness in the city.

IMPORTANCE OF IBN BĀJJAH'S TEACHING

To be sure, a first impression might lead one to characterize the *Governance of the Solitary* as advocating a break with the ancient philosophic tradition in favor of individual happiness, and thus as a precursor to the teaching of radical individualism present in modern philosophy. Although Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary argues for re-examining the role of the philosopher in the city as envisioned by his ancient predecessors, this re-examination should not be taken as a rejection of the political orientation of philosophy. Rather, Ibn Bājjah upholds two important principles in common with Plato and Aristotle: (i) that the goal of political life is the same as the goal intended by nature for human beings, namely, the attainment of happiness by means of a virtuous way of life; and (ii) that one should have modest expectations about seeing the city put into practice what comes to be known in political science.

It is now possible to convince oneself that the treatise calls for a return to the

teachings of Plato and Aristotle to restore the notion that the philosopher needs the cooperation of the city in order to be fully human. At a minimum, the philosopher needs to work in tandem with the city to make it possible to pursue the philosophic life openly and freely, rather than as a solitary, and to do so looking to benefit the city and not only oneself.

As recognized by his successors in medieval philosophy, Ibn Bājjah's teaching on the solitary does make a unique contribution to political philosophy, though the solitary is not the whole of his teaching on governance. This said, Ibn Bājjah's idea of the solitary does offer a nuanced understanding of the role of the philosopher in the city that departs from Socrates's idea of the philosopher-king in the *Republic*, by shedding doubt on the need to compel the philosopher to rule. To Ibn Bājjah, the life pursued in accord with reason is incompatible with compulsion; the philosopher must serve the city voluntarily. To this end, Ibn Bājjah openly confesses the solitary's limitations as a lone human being in moving others to consent to a way of life that will lead them to complete happiness. The task Ibn Bājjah assigns the solitary instead is to put forth true opinion that the city and its inhabitants then have the choice to agree on and govern themselves by voluntarily.

All in all, the emphasis on choosing the good without compulsion means that not only the solitary, but every inhabitant of the imperfect city is charged with educating oneself in true opinion and correct action in order to deliver the city from its imperfection. As Ibn Bājjah would have it, the city is saved one individual at a time, with the hope that the perfection of the first individual will reverberate throughout the city. In sum, the *Governance of the Solitary* leaves open the possibility of the perfect city aided by philosophy, but recognizes it as a very distant goal, one that involves the long, though ultimately rewarding, task of educating citizens to virtue.

SYNOPSIS OF DISSERTATION

As stated above, the main question covered in the five chapters of this dissertation is the problem of governance. Chapter 1 defines governance as the ordering of actions for the sake of an intended goal. In sections one through three of Part I, Ibn Bājījah introduces and ranks different sorts of governance that are commonly spoken about. The most important objective of the first chapter is to isolate human governance from divine governance, which, Ibn Bājījah explains, is called governance only metaphorically. It is necessary to make the distinction between human and divine governance for it to be possible to speak of governance as correct and erroneous. This is contrary to the popular view that all order in the world is essentially masterful and precise on account of its emanating from divine governance. Ibn Bājījah indicates why this common opinion is harmful. To associate all order in the world with the divine is to put the governance of cities outside the scope of human reason, and thereby to absolve the governors of cities of political accountability.

Chapter 2 focuses on one sort of governance, that of the household, elaborated on in section four of Part I. It is a subject that is hardly discussed in the remainder of the treatise. Here, Ibn Bājījah, again contrary to popular opinion, denies that household governance is a pre-eminent form of governance. At best, household governance is a means to the perfection of the city or the attainment of the natural end of the human being. Hence, the importance of this chapter is to identify governance of the city and that of the individual as the most salient forms of governance in human life.

Chapter 3 concerns Ibn Bājījah's central teaching on the virtuous city. He seeks to present the virtuous city as the highest goal of governance to be attained in human life,

although governance is never mentioned in section five of the treatise. Ibn Bājjah is explicit, however, that all actions in the virtuous city are correct. At the end of section five, he suddenly introduces a second component of governance, namely, true opinion, which he did not include in his earlier definition. This implies that the importance of true opinion to governance is not generally known, and so the introduction of true opinion in section five acts to correct the common understanding of governance. The relationship of true opinion to correct action is revealed in Part II of the treatise, where we learn that rational opinion in the soul is the “motive force” behind human action. For this reason, it is a primary concern for governance.

Chapter 4 unites governance with its two basic components, opinion and action. In the virtuous city, every opinion must be true and every customary action must be correct. By definition, then, what is false or erroneous does not exist in the virtuous city. Hence, Ibn Bājjah is a proponent of radical egalitarianism with respect to opinions and actions in the virtuous city. The significance of this chapter is to indicate that the act of governing in the city is based on ordering opinions by distinguishing between what is true and false and ordering opinions by distinguishing between what is correct and erroneous. As discussed in the conclusion of this chapter, to doubt that the city must order opinions and actions in this manner is to render it impossible for the city to argue the existence of good and evil. We see that the preservation of the city depends upon its ability to argue for standards of the good based on the conviction that the rational life is the best human life.

Finally, Chapter 5 on solitary governance rounds out both the discussion of the treatise and this dissertation. The chapter presents the discussion of spiritual forms in Part III as the culmination of the teaching on solitary governance in Part I. It argues that the

perfection of the human intellect, which Ibn Bājjah identifies as the natural goal of the solitary, is only an intermediary goal. The goal that the individual can attain acting alone is only a means to the highest goal, the perfect virtuous city, which cannot be attained without the cooperation of many human beings. This political goal is founded upon agreement by the many on the opinion of the solitary concerning correct governance. In the event that the many see nothing useful in the opinion of the solitary, or worse find it intolerable, Ibn Bājjah thinks it still necessary for the solitary to put forth a vision of the perfect city to which the imperfect cities can aspire.

That is to say, no exception is made for the solitary to live in the city without contributing to its well-being. The principle “one man one art,” which is laid out in the *Republic* for governing Socrates’ city in speech in accord with virtue, applies to the solitary as it does every other inhabitant of the city. The art of the solitary pursued on behalf of the common good is the art of intellection of spiritual forms. Simply put, the virtuous city does not exist to make the best life possible for the rare solitary, but the best possible life for all its inhabitants. According to Ibn Bājjah, not until every inhabitant of the city abides by the principles of correct governance, can it be said that the life of a human being is completely happy.

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