

The Solitary Being (al-Mu.ta.wah.hed):
Definitions and Dimensions
Of
Ibn Baja (Avempace) Philosophy
(a. 500-533 A.H. / 1106-1138 A.D.)

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Ibn Baja (Avempace) in his philosophical story *Tadbeer al-Mutawahhed (Biography of a Solitary Man or The Governance of the Solitary)* continues on the heritage of Islamic political philosophy of perfect and imperfect states. A theme presented as utopia by Plato and others, but it was discussed in its Islamic perspective by al-Farabi in his *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* (translated as *The Perfect State*). Muslim philosophers discussed the conception of what the state ought to be in order to be perfect and achieve happiness of its citizens. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) noticed that Ibn Baja was the first to establish a way for the 'Governance of the Solitary' in Spain.

Ibn Baja's book has a central theme, which is the life of the philosopher who lives in solitude in an imperfect city and struggles to achieve happiness. This theme is closely related, in Ibn Baja's philosophy, to the connection between the human mind and the active intellect and also related to the type of the form the solitary is seeking, whether in spiritual or corporeal form. The discussion of the latter almost overweighed the main theme of the progression of the life in solitude.

1. Dimensions of the Solitary Being (al-Mutawahhed)

The actions of man are different from those of animals because they are actions toward an end, which Ibn Baja called "Tadbeer" or governance. Setting goals is an activity of reasoning, thus, it manifests the ability of man to rationalize and it also manifests the exercise of free will. Only these actions based on free will are the ones that are the subject of moral evaluation and can be virtuous or not. Also, moral responsibility is only based on this liberty or freedom. The best of tadbeer or governance is that of a man who seeks pure intellectual goals free from any animalistic or corporeal pleasure. This is the ultimate goal in achieving happiness in the intellectual sense. It is clear that this is the happiness of the philosophers or the wise. This level of happiness is achieved through the abstraction of intellectual forms and at the conjunction of the human intellect with active intellect. By this conjunction the human intellect becomes an acquired one in perceiving knowledge and it is free from the connection with the soul. It is this rationality, and not intuition or Sufi experience, that is the ultimate source of happiness. But this state is very rare and seldom available to those of daily life, and the philosopher who achieves it might be alone and in solitude.

2. The Procedures of the Solitary for Ultimate Happiness

The concept of happiness in Ibn Baja's philosophy is related to his conception of the soul. The soul is nonmaterial and immortal. Thus it actualizes itself as such away from the corporeal and the material things.

The solitary being must follow these steps to achieve the ultimate goal of happiness:

1. The solitary individual must give priority for the spiritual forms over the corporeal one, because among the materialists there is no single happy individual. However, the solitary individual should not make the spiritual forms as the very end itself, it is only a level toward the ultimate happiness.

2. The solitary individual should go beyond the goal of the spiritual forms to the intellectual one, and should not socialize with the pure materialist or those who mix their spiritual form with the corporeal one.
3. The solitary individual must socialize with those who seek the intellectual forms; those of knowledge, philosophy, and sciences. But those are very rare and might not exist at all.
4. The solitary individual must isolate himself from the society and do not socialize with the society except in some indispensable situations.

3. Defining the Solitary Being (al-Mutawahhed)

This Solitary individual, socially speaking, can be living within a society but he is alone, he is an alien to the rest of people. He is Mutawahhed, but this term in Ibn Baja's philosophy has three possible meanings, all of them are required to understand his philosophy:

First: the existential meaning, the solitary individual is Mutawahhed as an -unified existential being- in the sense that he combines the multiple parts of the human soul and its goals into one which is the intellectual form, that transcends other faculties of the soul.

Second: the Meta-epistemological, the solitary individual is Mutawahhed in the sense of being –united or conjoined-, as an intellect, with the active intellect.

Third: the social, the solitary individual is Mutawahhed in the sense of being –alien- and different from the rest. He socially speaking with them, but he is alone and in solitude, he isolate himself because they do not understand him, they pull him down to corporeal goals and material pleasures, to drown him in a none sense utterance and futile disputations, while he wants sublime and the nobility of the high minded, a state in which pleasure overflows.

4. Is the Social Nature of Man Contradicts Solitude?

This life of the solitary being present him with a critical socio-political states which is to be alone, while the very nature of man, as Ibn Baja admits, is that he is social by the very human nature. So how can Ibn Baja give a consistent account to this issue?

In fact Ibn Baja answered this question implicitly when he mentioned that he agreed with the philosophers such as Aristotle and al-Farabi that man is social in nature and life of solitude is evil in all aspects since it is contradictory to the very nature of man as a social being. However, Ibn Baja justified the life of the solitary individual as an accidental possibility although it is not essential.

As a physician Ibn Baja said that in the normal situation bread and meat are good nutrition as such, and some poisons are harmful as such, however, in case of illness what was essentially useful, such as meat, becomes accidentally harmful, and what was essentially harmful, such as poison, might become accidentally useful and used as medication for recovery in restoring the normal state of health.

The solitary individual might treat himself with isolation in order to reach his goal. But the illness, according to Ibn Baja, does not belong to the solitary individual, instead it is the society itself that suffers the illness that forces the solitary individual to isolate himself from the society, even though his social nature cries for association instead of isolation, since the socialization becomes accidentally harmful to him. The solitary being by his very nature tends toward socialization but in a society that achieves the ultimate ends of man.

We understand that this solitary being cannot flourish alone; every human needs the rest of the society. Ibn Baja also emphasizes the necessity of the socio-political state not as an end in itself

but only as a means to the ultimate goal of man in his process of perfection, this is why Ibn Baja thinks that the solitary individual can flourish only in a perfect city while imperfect cities increase his struggle. But what how many kinds of cities are there according to Ibn Baja? And which one is the best?

5. Different Kinds of Cities

1. The perfect or virtuous city

In this city the solitary individuals live together. The city has no physicians and psychologists because the solitary individuals live according to the highest level of harmony of the soul, and they live according to a necessary and healthy diet.

This city also has no jurisdiction system or courts, because the solitary individual live according to high stander of moral codes with love and peace, thus they do not have conflicts and enmity or hatred against each other.

Since the citizens of this city are virtuous and follow path of truth, there is no lie or falsehood in this city.

Also the division of labor in this city is set to the best that matches the skills, knowledge, and qualification of each person.

2. The city of dignity (Madinat al-Karamah)

The citizens of this city cooperate in order to live in fame and dignity. This might correspond to one level of the faculties of the soul, but it does not sublime to the ultimate goal of man as such.

3. The city of conquer (Madinat al-Taghallub)

The citizens of this city aim at conquering other nations. Thus, their happiness can be achieved in this goal.

4. The city of the crowd (al-Madinah al-Jama'iyah)

The citizens of this city follow the dictate of their own desire, with no order. They are equal to each other and none of them is better than the rest. Their happiness is achieved by fulfilling the materialistic needs.

For more details see: *The Essence of Islamic Philosophy* by Mashhad Al-Allaf