

The Case of the Animals versus Man
Before the King of the Jinn

A translation from the
Epistles of the Brethren of Purity

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Chapter 1 *The First Creatures*

It is said that when the race of Adam began to reproduce and multiply, humans spread across the earth, land and sea, mountain and plain, everywhere freely and securely seeking their own ends. At first, when they were few, they lived in fear, hiding from the many wild animals and beasts of prey, taking refuge in the mountain-tops and hills, sheltering in caves, and eating fruit from trees, vegetables from the ground, and the seeds of plants.¹ They clothed themselves in tree leaves against the heat and cold, wintering where it was warm and summering where it was cool. But then they built cities and villages on the plains and settled there.²

They enslaved such cattle as cows, sheep, and camels, and beasts like horses, asses, and mules. They hobbled and bridled them and put them to work — riding, hauling, ploughing, and threshing. They wore

1 The vegetarianism of the first humans is a wide-spread motif, suggested as early as Genesis. In Eden, Adam is given to eat ‘of every tree’, except, of course, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16–17). Even after their exile, Adam and Eve are to eat ‘thorns and thistles’ and ‘the herb of the field’ (3:18). But Noah is allowed animal food (9:13). These passages readily suggest that human meat-eating post-dated a vegetarian epoch, and that is what the Ikhwān assume. But the stress in Genesis is on the permission to eat all fruits but one, and on the hardship and toil of the life we know, compared to the life of Eden. Noah and his offspring are permitted meat, so long as living flesh is not consumed. But that suggests that meat was already part of the human diet. The notion of a primal vegetarian diet has mythic roots. Claude Lévi-Strauss elicits from a host of mythic materials a broad theme that makes food stories and ritual practices emblematic of the contrast of nature with culture; see *The Raw and the Cooked*, tr. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). In both Genesis and the *Rasā’il*, we find a moral meaning in that theme: Genesis overlays a humane sensibility on food culture. In the *Rasā’il*, the shared primal narrative is read in mildly ascetic and ecological terms.

2 Natural man, it seems, although not as civilized as his descendants, was also not as dominating. Like other animals, he kept to this own turf. But by finding shelter from the elements and from other species, he gained flexibility in habitat. Thus began human hegemony: in the invasion of new terrain. Nomadic life here, as in Chapter 9 below, is ‘closer to being good’, than settled life, as Ibn Khaldūn puts it in the *Muqaddimah*, 2.4, tr. F. Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), vol. 1, p. 253; gathering, too, seems more natural than agriculture. But the Ikhwān seem to be innocent regarding the ecological impact of that way of life.

these creatures out in service, with toil beyond their strength. Beasts that had roamed the woodlands and wilds unhindered, in search of pasture, water, and all their needs, were checked and trammelled.³

Other animals — the wild asses, gazelles, and beasts of prey, wildlife and birds that had been docile and lived in peace and quietude in their ancestral lands — fled the haunts of men for far-off wastes, forests, mountain peaks, and glens.⁴ But the Adamites set after them with all sorts of devices for hunting, trapping, and snaring, convinced that the animals were their runaway or rebellious slaves.

The years went by, and Muhammad⁵ was sent, may God bless him. He called men and jinn to God and to Islam. One band of jinn answered his call and became good Muslims.⁶ In the course of time, a king arose

3 Like today's animal-rights advocates, the Ikhwān count the frustration of animals' inborn urges as an abuse of domestication. Peter Singer notes the inability of hens to form a pecking order in crowded, battery conditions, and the unnatural confinement of calves raised for veal (lest grazing and muscular activity add sinew and iron to their muscle). The stalls, he writes, are too small to let calves turn to groom themselves with their tongues; see his 'Down on the Factory Farm', in *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). Here liberal premises are stiffened with an appeal to nature: creatures should be left to do what comes naturally to them, since natural inclinations are wholesome and best for all concerned. Cf. Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 8, 15, 25; *Vatican Fragments*, 21, 52; Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* I.10–23. For a counter-argument, finding vegetarianism and a broad rejection of the use of animals itself unnatural, see Walter E. Howard, *Animal Rights vs. Nature*, (Davis, CA: privately published, 1991).

4 Man lays claim to what is best and most advantageous; the animals must be content with the leavings, driven to extreme environments at the fringes of human settlement or relegated to the most remote and inhospitable habitats.

5 The Ikhwān begin from the beginning, like the Arabic universal histories; see Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, Chapter 4. The aim is to establish the aboriginal relations of humans and other animals. But the authors are also anxious to start their own story; they will fill in the cosmogonic narrative, viewed from quite a variety of perspectives, as the case proceeds. So here they move swiftly past the Creation.

6 The reality of the jinn, the demons and sprites of Arabic parlance (cf. Latin *genii*), was taken for granted in popular and traditional Islam. Rejecting rationalistic and naturalistic glosses on the idea of jinn, of which the Ikhwān offer an early example, a traditionally oriented but very recent Qur'an commentary urges: 'Both the Qur'an and the Hadith describe the Jinn as a definite species of living beings. They are created out of fire and like man, may believe or disbelieve, accept or reject guidance. The authoritative Islamic texts show that they are not merely a hidden force, or a spirit. They are personalized beings who enjoy a certain amount of free will and

over the jinn, Bīwarāsp the Wise, known as Mardan, King Heroic.⁷ His capital was on an island called Ṣāʿūn, lying near the equator in the midst of the Green Sea.⁸ The air and soil were good. There were sweet rivers, burbling springs, broad fields, and sheltered dells, a wealth of trees and fruit, lush meadows, streams, herbs, and spices.⁹

It happened in those days that storm winds cast up a sea-faring ship on that island's shore.¹⁰ Aboard were men of commerce, industry, and learning, and others of the human kind. They disembarked and explored the island, finding it rich in trees and fruit, fresh water, healthful air, fine soil, vegetables, herbs and plants, all kinds of cereals and grains that flourished in the rain from heaven. They saw all sorts of animals — beasts, cattle, birds, and carnivores — all living in peace and harmony with one another, secure and unafraid.¹¹

thus will be called to account.' The Holy Qur'an, ed. The Presidency of Islamic Researches IFTA (Medina: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, n.d.), p. 372, note 929. The Qur'an (Sura 72) tells of a band of jinn listening intently to Muhammad as he received and recited his revelations. The listeners confessed the error of their ways and embraced Islam. Tradition makes them emissaries to other jinn. So there were many Muslim jinn, just as there were good and wicked jinn, as the jinn themselves explain in Chapter 26 below. As Kalonymos notes, the fable makes the jinn impartial judges between animals and humans, but the Ikhwān, as he also notes, do not take demonology literally. In discussing the obedience of the jinn to God in Chapter 26 they give a Neoplatonic reading to the idea of the jinn. They treat tales of jinni interference in human affairs as sheer superstition, as the jinn suggest in Chapter 6 below, but cf. p. 240. Kalonymos suppresses the mention of Muhammad's appeal to the jinn.

7 For Bīwarāsp, see Appendix C.

8 Some texts have Balāsaghūn, a Soghdian town about 125 miles (200 km) south of Lake Balkhash. It figured in the military history of the Qara-Khans, et al. But the Ikhwān place their jinni realm on a fanciful island in the Green Sea, the Eastern Indian Ocean. Kalonymos shifts the story's setting to the antipodes, to retain the aura of a fairy tale.

9 The Ikhwān carefully list the natural resources that made this island a favoured spot for animal or human habitation. Likewise with other lands. No habitat is treated unfavourably; even the most extreme environments have features beneficial or necessary to their denizens.

10 Kalonymos expatiates here, with a dramatic account of the storm, the pitching sea, the prayers of the fearful passengers. That last touch echoes the Book of Jonah (1:4–5). David Walker notes parallel set pieces in Judah Halevi, al-Ḥarizī, and Jacob ben Elazar.

11 The animals will argue in Chapters 12 and 32 below that predation and even competition among animals stem directly or indirectly from human doings.

Delighted with the place, these folk decided to settle there. They built dwellings and soon began to meddle with the beasts and cattle, forcing them into service, riding them and loading them down with burdens, as in their former lands. But these beasts and cattle balked and fled. The men pursued and hunted them, using all manner of devices to take them, convinced that the animals were their runaway and rebellious slaves. When the cattle and beasts learned of this belief, their spokesmen and leaders gathered and came before Bīwarāsp the Wise, King of the Jinn, to complain of the injustice and wrongs of mankind against them and to protest the human notions about them. The King sent a messenger to summon the parties to his court.

A group from the ship, some seventy men of diverse lands, answered the summons. When their arrival was announced, the King ordered a fitting welcome for them. After three days he brought them in to his council chamber.¹² Bīwarāsp was a sage, just, and noble king, fair minded and open-handed, hospitable to guests and a refuge to strangers. He had mercy for the afflicted and would not brook injustice but ordained the good and forbade evil,¹³ seeking only to please God and be worthy of His favour.¹⁴ Appearing before the King, the men saw him seated on his royal throne and hailed him with wishes of long life and prosperity. The King then asked, through his interpreter, ‘What brought you to our island? Why did you come uninvited to our land?’

12 Kalonymos shortens the wait to three hours and allows the jinn to speak admiringly of human qualities.

13 The obligation to ordain what is right and forbid what is wrong (Qur’an 3:110, etc.) is a keystone of the Shari‘a. For the elaboration of this norm in Islamic jurisprudence, see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

14 Bīwarāsp is a model king, a princely mirror to be emulated. He combines the Platonic kingly virtue of justice with the traditional virtues of magnanimity, liberality, clemency, and compassion. The frequent reflections on royal virtues and tyrannous vices in our text clearly outline the political message of the Ikhwān. They are meant to stimulate princely pursuit of the ideal and to castigate royal failings. Al-Ghazālī makes pursuit of God’s favour the highest human aim, chary of voicing the ideal of virtue in terms of the pursuit of what is right for its own sake, lest that seem to impart too much autonomy to ethics and personal choice; see Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, p. 115. But note again here that God’s favour is won by merit, not arbitrarily bestowed.

One of the humans answered, ‘We were drawn by all that we have heard of the virtues of the King, his many glorious deeds, his great generosity and noble character, his justice and impartial judgement. We have come before him that he might hear our case and the arguments we shall present, and judge between us and these runaway slaves, who deny our authority. God will uphold the righteous cause and guide your Majesty to a sound decision. For He is *the wisest of judges*.’¹⁵

‘Speak as you wish’, said the King.¹⁶

‘I shall, your Majesty’, said the human spokesman. ‘These cattle, beasts of prey, and wild creatures — all animals in fact — are our slaves. We are their masters. Some have rebelled and escaped. Others obey grudgingly and scorn our service.’

The King replied, ‘What proof or evidence have you to back up your claims?’

‘Your Majesty,’ said the human, ‘we have both traditional religious arguments and rational proof of our position.’

‘Very well,’ said the King, ‘let us hear them.’

So a human orator of the line of ‘Abbās¹⁷ rose and mounted the rostrum, opening his speech with the following exordium: ‘Praised be God, Sovereign of the universe, hope of those who fear Him and foe to none but the unjust. God bless Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets,¹⁸ chief of God’s messengers, and intercessor on the Day of Judgement.

15 Qur’an 11:45; cf. 95:8.

16 The King grants freedom to the disputants to make out their case. Free speech is not presented here as an inherent or universal right. But again the King’s generosity is meant to be taken as a model. See *Pañcatantra* I.110, ed. Olivelle, p.93

17 ‘Abbās ibn al-Muṭṭalib was half-brother to Muhammad’s father and eponym of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, which traced its descent through ‘Abbās’s son. He fought the Muslims at the battle of Badr but, after accepting Muhammad’s mission in 629, gave his wife’s sister to his nephew, the Prophet, as a bride. At the battle of Hunayn, he is said to have turned the tide in favour of the Muslims with a mighty shout. The Ikhwān assign pride of royal place to the orator who is his descendant, and show what they think of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty by allowing his arguments to be refuted by a mule, who is also given a special place among the animal spokesmen.

18 In Islamic theology, the line of prophecy, begun with Adam and continued through Jewish and Christian figures (including Jesus), is sealed, that is, completed — some say confirmed — by Muhammad. Kalonymos suppresses the reference to Muhammad as Seal of the Prophets.

Praised be God *who formed man from water*,¹⁹ and formed his mate from him. He broadcast their seed, men and women, bore them over land and sea, favoured them with dominion, and sustained them with all manner of delights, saying, *Cattle did He create for you, whence you have warmth and many uses. You eat of them and find them fair when you bring them home to rest or drive them out to pasture. They carry your heavy burdens for you to lands you might reach only with great trouble to your souls.*²⁰ He also said, *You are borne upon them and on ships*,²¹ and, *Of the cattle some are for burden and some for meat.*²² And again, *horses, mules, and asses for riding and for splendour, and much that you know not*,²³ and *Praised be God who said: that ye may be seated on their backs and consider your Lord's favour as you ride.*²⁴ There are many other verses in the Qur'an, Torah, and Gospels²⁵ which show that they were created for our sake and that they are our slaves and we their masters. God grant pardon to you and to myself.'

'Cattle and beasts,' said the King, 'you have heard the Qur'anic verses this human has adduced to support his claims. What say you to this?'

At this a spokesman for the beasts, a mule, rose and said:²⁶ 'Praised be God, one, unique and alone, peerless, impassive, ever-abiding, and

19 Qur'an 25:54

20 Qur'an 16:5–7.

21 Qur'an 40:80. Animals here, like ships, are afforded for man's ease. Granted, ships are not a part of nature. But the presence on earth of seas and navigable waterways is an act of grace: *He it is who subdued the sea, that you might eat moist flesh from it and bring forth from it jewellery to wear, and see ships cleaving it, that you may seek His bounty and mayhap be thankful. He pitched towering mountains on the earth, lest it shake you; rivers and passes that you may find your way, and landmarks — for by the stars are they guided* (16:14–16). God's grace is manifest in the fitting of nature to human needs.

22 Qur'an 6:142.

23 Qur'an 16:8.

24 Qur'an 43:13.

25 Kalonymos obliges by supplying two passages from the Torah to fill out the speaker's coda, but he drops the mention of the Gospels.

26 As a proper formal discourse should, the mule's remarks, like those of the 'Abbāsīd representative, open with a *khuṭba*, or exordium, in praise of God. Like an overture, the *khuṭba* in a thematic discourse often sets the tone and foreshadows the themes to come. Since the mule will deal with the rights and wrongs of animal-human relations, his *khuṭba* harks back to the creation and God's first commands, laying a groundwork for an appeal to God's expectations regarding relations among species. Many of the subsequent speakers, animal and human,

eternal, who was before all things that come to be, beyond all time and space, who then said, “*BE!*”²⁷ at which there was a burst of light, which He shined forth from His hidden fastness.²⁸ From this light He created a blazing sea of fire and a surging sea of watery waves, and out of this fire and water He created spheres studded with constellations and brilliant stars.²⁹ He raised up the heavens and spread out the earth, anchored the mountains and framed the many-storeyed heavens as the archangels’ abode, and the spaces between the spheres as dwelling places for the cherubim.³⁰ The earth He gave to living beings — animals and plants. Next He created the jinn from the fiery simoom, and humans out of clay. *He gave man posterity*³¹ — *from vile water in a vessel sure*,³² and allowed man’s seed to follow one another in succession on the earth, to dwell in it, not lay it waste,³³ to care for the animals and profit by them, not abuse or mistreat them. God grant pardon to you and to me.’

‘Your Majesty,’ the mule continued, ‘there is nothing in the passages

follow the mule’s example. The biblical vision of cosmic time and universal history casts its spell over the authors’ imaginations in these little introductions.

27 Cf. Qur’an 2:117, 16:40. Kalonymos translates these Qur’anic echoes without attribution.

28 Cf. Genesis 1:3 and the centrality of light in Neoplatonic imagery.

29 In the allegorical exegesis of the Ikhwān, the sphere of the fixed stars is the pedestal of God’s throne, and eight are said to bear it (Qur’an 69:17; cf. 2:255). The throne itself (Qur’an 9:129, 69:17) is the outermost sphere, most high (Qur’an 83:18–19; the Arabic word is ‘*illiyīn*’; cf. the Hebrew ‘*elyon*’). See Chapter 2 of Epistle 16: ‘On the Spheres’, in *Rasā’il*, vol. 2, p. 26; *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, p. 187; *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 214, 240; Yves Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafā’* (Algiers: Société Nationale d’Édition et de Diffusion, [1975]), pp. 110–111; Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp. 61–62, 76. Such allegories are sharply at variance with the literalism pursued in authoritative Islamic creeds. The *Waṣīyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, § 8 reads: ‘We believe that Allah has seated Himself on His throne. . . . He occupies his throne and what is outside it . . .’ In a tradition ascribed to Ka’b al-Aḥbār, all the heavens, as compared with the throne, are said to be ‘like a lamp hanging between heaven and earth’. The intent is to magnify the throne and dim the allegory. Other authorities, in the same vein, cite a hadith traced to Abū Dharr, which has Muhammad saying: ‘the seven Heavens are, as compared with the chair [called the pedestal by Nasr], as a ring thrown away in the desert. And the relation between the throne and the chair is as the relation between this desert and the ring.’ See A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), pp. 127, 147–149.

30 Even in the heavens there are diverse habitats, each with its own proper denizens.

31 Qur’an 32:8.

32 See Qur’an 23:13.

33 Cf. Isaiah 45:18, ‘So saith the Lord, Creator of the heavens, God who framed

this human cites to support his claim that they are masters and we slaves. These verses point only to the kindness and blessings God bestowed on mankind. God said *He subjected them*³⁴ *to you* — just as *He subjected the sun and moon,*³⁵ *the wind and clouds.*³⁶ Are we to think, Majesty, that these heavenly bodies too are their slaves and chattels, and men their masters? Hardly! God made all His creatures in heaven and earth. He set some in service to others, for their good or to preclude some evil. He subjected animals to man only to help humans and keep them from harm,³⁷ not, as they deludedly suppose and slanderously claim, to make them our masters and us their slaves.³⁸

‘Your Majesty,’ the spokesman of the beasts continued, ‘we and our fathers lived on earth before the creation of Adam, forefather of the human race. We dwelt in the countryside and roamed the country trails. Our herds went to and fro in God’s land, seeking sustenance and taking care of ourselves. Each of us minded his own affairs, kept to the

the earth, founded it and made it: not as a waste did He create it. He formed it to be settled.’

34 Camels, that is; Qur’an 22:37.

35 Qur’an 13:2.

36 Qur’an 2:164.

37 See Chapter 9 below, where the agrarian and pastoral delegates spell out what humanity would lose if they gave up the animals.

38 Maimonides deems it the height of arrogance to suppose that the celestial bodies were created just to serve mankind: ‘Do not be misled by its saying of the stars “to light the earth and rule by night and by day” (Genesis 1:17–18), supposing it to mean that they exist to do this. It is simply describing their nature. . . . The good they constantly shed may seem to the recipient to mean that they exist solely for his sake. But that is like a city dweller’s supposing that the government exists just to safeguard his house from robbers at night. That’s true in a sense, for his house is protected, and he does benefit in that way from the government. So, speciously, house protection looks like the government’s *raison d’être*.’ Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* III.12–13, ed. with French translation by S. Munk (Osnabrück: Zeller, 1964), vol. 3, p. 25b. The translation here is Goodman’s. The mule reads Sura 16 rather differently than does the scion of the House of ‘Abbās: the Qur’an (16:12) does speak of the subjection of sun, moon, and stars, and even of night, and day. But what they are subject to is God’s command. They need not be seen to serve just for man’s sake. As in Biblical usage, the Qur’an may express a result as a purpose. For all outcomes are foreseen by God. Man does benefit from God’s ordering of nature. And even a casual beneficiary should feel the gratitude Muhammad calls on from the discerning: we are given a commodious environment, but that does not make us its lords or owners, free to deal with nature as we like.

place best suited to his needs — moor, sea, forest, mountain, or plain. Each kind looked after its own, absorbed in raising our broods and rearing our young on the good food and water God allotted us, safe and unmolested in our domain. Night and day we praised and hallowed God, and God alone, assigning Him neither rival nor peer.³⁹

‘Ages later God created Adam,⁴⁰ the ancestor of humankind, and made him His vice-regent on earth. His offspring reproduced, and his seed multiplied, spreading over the earth, land and sea, mountain and plain. Humans encroached on our ancestral lands. They captured sheep, cows, horses, mules, and asses from among us and enslaved them, subjecting them to the exhausting toil and drudgery of hauling, ploughing, drawing water, turning mills, and being ridden. They forced us to these tasks with beatings, bludgeonings, and every kind of duress, torture, and chastisement throughout our lives.

‘Some of us fled to deserts, wastes, or mountain-tops, but the Adamites pursued us, hunting us with every kind of wile and device. Whoever fell into their hands was yoked, haltered, caged, and fettered. They slaughtered and flayed him, ripped open his belly, cut off his limbs and broke his bones, tore out his sinews, plucked his feathers or sheared his hair or fleece, and set him on the fire to cook, or to roast on a spit, or put him to even harsher tortures, torments ultimately beyond description. Even so, the sons of Adam are not through with us. Now they claim this is their inviolable right,⁴¹ that they are our masters and we their slaves. They treat any of us who escapes as a fugitive, rebel, and shirker — all with no proof or reason beyond main force.’⁴²

39 The animals observed the laws of nature. That was their worship. The animal spokesman freely sets his rational arguments alongside appeals to tradition and makes no show of favouring tradition over reasoning, as Islamic traditionalism in the times of the Ikhwān was coming to demand.

40 The close of Chapter 8 below reveals strikingly how little stock the Ikhwān place in a literal six-day Creation.

41 As readers of mediaeval texts know, ideas of rights flourished long before the Tennis Court Oath, albeit not in the same sense assigned, say, in the English Glorious Revolution of 1688 or later.

42 The Ikhwān, like most philosophers, especially those in the wake of Plato and the monotheistic scriptural tradition, reject the notion that might makes right.

Chapter 2

When the King heard this, he ordered a herald to carry the news throughout the kingdom and summon his forces and followers, vassals from all tribes of jinn, the folk of Sāsān,⁴³ the offspring of Khāqān,⁴⁴ and the children of Shayṣabān — judges, justices, and jurisconsults, the folk of Idrīs and the sons of Bilqīs.⁴⁵ Then he took his seat to judge the case of the animals against the delegates and advocates of men. He addressed the human leaders first: ‘What have you to say of the injustice, oppression and usurpation charged against you by these beasts and cattle?’

‘They are our slaves’, said the human spokesman. ‘We are their masters. It is for us, as their lords, to judge them. To obey us is to obey God. Whoever revolts against us is a rebel against God.’

The King replied, ‘Only claims grounded in clear proof are accepted in this court. What proof of your claims do you offer?’

‘We have philosophical arguments and rational proofs that our claims are sound’, said the human.

43 Clifford E. Bosworth describes the Banū Sāsān as the fraternity of beggars, swindlers, confidence men, tricksters, and conjurors. The legendary founder of that way of life was one Shaykh Sāsān, dispossessed son of the legendary Persian Shah Bahmān ibn Isfandiyār, who took to vagabondage among the Kurds. Persians as a nation, Bosworth writes, were said in one legend to have been reduced to beggary after the Arab conquest and the fall of the Sāsānian dynasty. So there is an ethnic edge in the inclusion of the people of Sāsān among the jinni jurists. See C. E. Bosworth, ‘Sāsān, Banū’, *EI2*, vol. 9, p. 70; and Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

44 The Khāqān would be a Turkic ruler, grand khan of a tribal federation; see J. A. Boyle, ‘Khākān’, *EI2*, vol. 4, p. 915. Superstition may associate such nomads with the jinn, especially if dispossessed and relegated to a life as tricksters and mendicants.

45 The summons addresses fairy creatures of all sorts, the King’s own vassals and those of the Khāqān, the progeny of Bilqīs, the wise Queen of Sheba, and those of Idrīs, the eponymous father of all learning, equivalent to the Hebrew Enoch. The vagabonds here are not the human jongleurs and tricksters of whom Hamadhānī and others wrote, but errant sprites and spirits that folklore pictures as roaming the earth with their tricks and japes. Shayṣabān, as Bosworth notes, seems to derive his name from the late Hebrew and Syriac ‘*shoshbīn*’, or ‘best man’, itself taken from the Latin ‘*socius sponsi*’. The noun became the name of a particular angel and in Muslim usage, a jinni; cf. Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld*, vol. 1, pp. 122–123, note 75.

‘What are they?’ asked the King.

‘Our fair form, erect stature, upright carriage, and keen senses, our subtle powers of discrimination, our sharp minds and superior intellects all show that we are the masters and they, our slaves.’⁴⁶

The King turned to the spokesman of the beasts. ‘How do you answer these allegations?’

‘There is nothing in what he says to support what this human claims.’

‘Is it not a royal trait to sit erect and stand upright, and aren’t bent backs and bowed heads the marks of slaves?’ asked the King.

‘God aid your Majesty to the truth’, the animal spokesman answered. ‘Listen and you shall know that God did not give them this form or shape them in this way to mark them as masters. Nor did He create us in the form we have to brand us as slaves. He knew and wisely ordained that their form is best for them and ours for us.’

Chapter 3

An Explanation of the Divergence of Animal Forms

The animal delegate continued: ‘God created Adam and his offspring naked and unshod, without feathers, fleece, or wool on their skin to protect them from heat and cold. He gave them fruit from the trees as their food and the leaves of trees for their clothing.’⁴⁷ Since the trees

46 ‘In man, the forelegs and forefeet were replaced by arms and by what we call hands. For of all animals man alone stands erect, in keeping with his godlike nature and being. For it is the work of the godlike to think and to be wise; and no easy task were this under the burden of a heavy body, pressing down from above and obstructing by its weight the motions of the intellect and general sense. When the weight and bodily substance become too great, in fact, the body inevitably tilts towards the ground. Nature, in such cases, to support the body, has replaced arms and hands by forefeet, and so made the animal a quadruped. For, as every animal that walks must necessarily have two hind feet, such animals become quadrupeds, their bodies leaning down in front from the weight the soul cannot sustain. For all animals except man are dwarflike in form: the upper part large, and that which bears the weight and is used in going forward, small. . . . This is the reason no animal is as intelligent as man.’ Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium* IV.10.686a27–b22.

47 Cf. Genesis 3:7, 3:21: Adam and Eve cover their nakedness, once they notice

spread high in the air, He made man stand erect, to reach the fruit and leaves readily. Since He gave us the grass on the ground as our food, He made us face downward, to make it easy for us to reach it.⁴⁸ This and not what he claims is why God made them erect and us bent over.’

‘What, then, do you say of God’s words, *We formed man at the fairest height?*’ asked the King.⁴⁹

The animal replied, ‘The prophetic books have interpretations and explanations that go deeper than the surface, known to *those well rooted in knowledge*.⁵⁰ Let the King inquire of scholars expert in the Qur’an.’

it, by sewing fig leaves together. But God clothes them in animal skins on their expulsion from Eden.

48 Each species is adapted to its niche. It is not inherent beauty or intrinsic merit that determines the forms of any species, including humankind.

49 Qur’an 95:4. Kalonymos identifies the point as ‘an Ishmaelite’ thesis. In the debate surrounding al-Ghazālī’s claim that nothing could be better than the world God made, Ibn al-Munayyir reads the verse as meaning that man is the best of God’s actual creatures, not the best He *could* have made. See Eric Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī’s ‘Best of all Possible Worlds’* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 164. The Ikhwān allow the jinni sage to interpret the verse freely, taking advantage of the possibilities that its diction and syntax afford.

50 Later Islamic hermeneutics distinguishes the freer interpretation of *ta’wīl* from the closer type, *tafsīr*. Both kinds are necessary, but the former carries greater risks. Qur’an 3:7 alludes to those whose knowledge is deep. As punctuated by Sunnis, it reads: *He it is who sent you down this Book in which are sure verses, the substance of the Book, and others that are unclear. Those who waver in their hearts pursue its uncertainties, eager for strife and avid to explain them. But none but God knows the interpretations. And those well rooted in knowledge [al-rāsikhūn fī al-‘ilm] say ‘We believe in it. All is from our Lord.’ Yet none can heed it but those with hearts to understand.* The passage seems to warn Muhammad’s hearers not to try to gloss the Qur’an for themselves. But later generations saw in the mention of problematic verses an invitation to interpretation: the well rooted in knowledge were the exegetes most able to interpret hard passages well; numbered among the faithful, they were destined for a divine reward (Qur’an 4:160). Qur’an 3:7 is a key proof-text for the juridical concept of *muḥkamāt*, revealed verses whose sense is plain, requiring no elaborate interpretation — as distinguished from *mutashābihāt*, verses acknowledged to be obscure and in need of interpretation. Sufi and Shi’i exegetes understand ‘those well rooted in knowledge’ (*rāsikhūn fī al-‘ilm*) to be a specific class of experts. They punctuate the verse to read: *But none but God and those well rooted in knowledge know the interpretation.* Hence the interpretive authority of the Shi’i imams. See al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmū’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. Sufis, similarly, validate the

So the King asked the jinni sage, ‘What is the meaning of *at the fairest height*’?

‘On the day God created Adam,’ the jinni replied, ‘the stars were at their zeniths, the points of the signs of the zodiac were solid and square, the season was equable, matter was ready to receive form. So his body was given the finest form and soundest constitution.’

‘That would suffice to warrant their boasts of nobility and excellence’, said the King.

The wise jinni said, ‘The passage has another meaning, in the light of God’s words: *who proportioned thee in just the form that pleased thy Lord*.⁵¹ This means, He made you neither tall and thin nor short and squat but at a mean.’

The animal spokesman said, ‘He did the same for us. He did not make us too tall and too thin or short and squat but well proportioned. So we, the same as they, have a graceful and graciously given form.’

‘How can you think that animals are well proportioned and evenly formed?’ the human asked. ‘We see the camel’s long neck, small ears, and short tail. The elephant has enormous bulk, great tusks, and broad ears, but tiny eyes. The cow and water buffalo have long tails and thick horns, but no tusks. Rams have two great horns and a thick tail, but no beard. Goats have a fine beard, but no fat tail — leaving their private parts exposed. Rabbits have a small body but lippy ears, and so it goes.

authority of saintly figures; see Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, ‘*Arā’ is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*. The Ikhwān here are careful not to relegate such interpretive words to one of the animals.

- 51 Qur’an 82:7–8. Taken literally, the verses might suggest that God physically handled Adam’s clay. Al-Ghazālī wrote a commentary on them, and Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) reverts to them in his *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, in view of the opening they afford for a discussion of the interaction of matter and spirit. The Ikhwān read the passage as referring to the modulation of matter for the receipt of form. They use the Qur’anic reference to form as a way of naturalizing their own Neoplatonic idea of Form, as a divinely imparted intellectual principle that gives each being its specific essence and strengths. Ghazālī refers unfavourably to the Ikhwān, calling their work ‘the dregs of philosophy’; see *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, in *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, tr. William Montgomery Watt (London: Allen Unwin, 1953), p. 53. But in the same work (pp. 41–42) he urges that one judge claims on their merits: if one rejected all that is contained in works, say, of *falsafa*, one would have to reject much of the Qur’an and hadith, simply because so much from these sources is cited by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’.

Most animals — wild beasts, carnivores, birds, and crawling creatures are unevenly built and misproportioned.’

‘Not at all, O human’, said the animal spokesman. ‘You’ve missed the beauty and wisdom of their creation. Don’t you see that a slight to the work is an affront to its Maker? You should start from the recognition that all animals are the work of the wise Creator, who made them as He did with reason and purpose, to benefit them and protect them from harm.⁵² But this is grasped only by Him and *those who are well rooted in knowledge*.’⁵³

‘Tell us, then,’ said the human, ‘if you are the learned spokesman of the beasts, why is the camel’s neck so long?’

‘To match his long legs,’ he answered, ‘so he can reach the grass on the ground — and also to help him rise with a load, and so that he can reach all parts of his body with his lip to scratch and rub them. The elephant’s trunk takes the place of a long neck. His big ears serve to shoo flies and gnats from the corners of his eyes and mouth. For his mouth is always ajar. He can’t fully close it because of his protruding tusks. But those are his defence against predators. The rabbit’s big ears give him cover. They are his blanket in winter and shade in summer. For his skin is tender and his body delicate. In just this way we find that God adapted the parts of every species to its needs in seeking the beneficial and avoiding harm. This is what Moses meant, peace be upon him, when he spoke of *Our Lord who gave its nature to every thing and guided all things*.’⁵⁴

52 Inquirers must presume the wisdom of Creation. Just as scientists assume that efficient causality is universal and seek causes, not stopping whenever evidence falters to ask whether causality has petered out, so biologists must presume the universality of functional causality, that is, teleology, the subordination of form to function. The assumption is not arbitrary but educated by experience and rewarded by understanding. Yet it *does* reach beyond the evidence at hand, as it must if it is to work heuristically. Nature would be unintelligible without the assumption of causality, and biology would be impossible without teleology.

53 Qur’an 3:7.

54 Qur’an 20:50. Both anatomical form and ethological function are God’s work: form is the product of creation; function, of divine guidance. Galen holds a similar view, but he situates himself, and other Greeks like Plato, in a middle ground between what he sees as the Mosaic story, that God simply ordered, say, the eye-lashes to stay short and the forehead to be mobile, and the view of Epicurus, ascribing all adaptations to chance. Galen prefers Moses to Epicurus,

‘As for the fair form you boast of, there’s nothing in that to support your claim that you are masters and we slaves. An attractive form is simply one that sparks desire between males and females in any species, drawing them together to pair and mate, to produce progeny and new generations for the survival of the species. Our males are not aroused by your female beauties, nor are our females drawn to the charms of your males — just as blacks don’t find the charms of whites attractive, or whites those of blacks, and just as boy-lovers have no passion for the charms of girls and wenchers have no desire for boys.⁵⁵ So, Mr Human Being, your boasts of superior beauty are groundless.’

Chapter 4 *On the Acute Senses of the Animals*

‘Your vaunted powers of perception and discernment are not unique. There are animals with finer senses and sharper discrimination. The camel, for one, despite his long legs and neck and the elevation of his head so high in the air, finds his footing on the most punishing and treacherous pathways in the dark of night, where you could not make out your way and not one of you could see without a lantern, torch, or candle. A fine charger can hear distant footsteps in the dead of night.

for linking purpose with design. He does not think chance adequate to yield useful traits. But he faults Moses for neglecting the material basis of adaptations, slighting science, as if God had only to command hair and skin to obey. See *De Usu Partium* II.14–15, in *Opera*, ed. Kühn, vol. 2, pp. 156–164; tr. May, pp. 530–537; see also Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: OUP, 1949), pp. 11–37.

- 55 Since form follows function, physical beauty must be subjective, answering to adaptive needs. It does not reflect a being’s standing in the ontic hierarchy. The Ikhwān argue from the putative variations in attraction among individuals and cultures. Cf. Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *Complete Essays*, II, 12, pp. 355–356, citing Seneca; Darwin, *Descent*, ed. Barrett and Freeman, vol. 22, p. 630. The animal delegate does not place blacks and whites in different species. Any divergence of taste would serve his case. He might have argued simply that males are attracted to females of their own species, and *vice versa*. But the homosexual case evidently seemed clearer cut to the Ikhwān — despite the absence of any immediate reproductive benefit; and the presumed racial differences in tastes are adduced to heighten the sense of subjectivity. For Islamic views on race, see Bernard Lewis, *Race and Color in Islam* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

Often he will wake his master nudging him with a forefoot to warn him of an enemy, a predator, or an impending raid.⁵⁶ An ass or cow is often seen to find its way home when led off on a path it did not know and abandoned by its master. Yet some men can travel the same road time and again and still stray from it and lose their way.

‘In a flock of sheep and ewes a great number may give birth in a single night. Then, early in morning they’re driven out to pasture, not to return until nightfall. Yet when the young, a hundred or more, are released, each is seen to find its dam, without any doubt by the mother or confusion by the young.⁵⁷ For humans, a month or two or more must pass before they can distinguish their own mother from their sister, or their father from their brother. So where are the wonderful senses and discernment you boast of against us?

‘As for your supposedly superior minds — we find not the least trace or sign of that. If you had such powerful intellects you would not have boasted over us about things which are not your own doing or won by your own efforts but which are among God’s manifold gifts, to be recognized and acknowledged as acts of grace. The intelligent take pride only in things of their own doing — wholesome arts, sound views, true sciences, upright conduct, just practices, ways pleasing to God.⁵⁸ As far as we can see, you have no advantage to boast of but only groundless claims, baseless allegations, and bootless choler.’

56 Pliny the Elder tells of horses that allowed only their master to ride, or defended a master in battle, or grieved at his death; *Natural History* VIII.64–65.

57 See Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.1.12, tr. Barney et al., p. 247: The sheep ‘recognizes its mother before other animals, so that even if it has strayed within a large herd, it immediately recognizes the voice of its parent by its bleat’.

58 Cf. Jeremiah 9:23–24: ‘Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, or the hero glory in his might, or the rich man glory in his wealth. But let him that glories glory in this: knowing and understanding Me. For I am the Lord that worketh grace, right, and justice on earth. It is in these that I delight, saith the Lord.’ The animals adopt the Stoic axiom that one is accountable only for what one controls. For the Stoics that meant only the inclination of one’s own will. Kant similarly deemed only the good will an unqualified good. But the animal spokesman suggests a wider scope for justified pride: there are arts, industries, sciences, views, actions, and practices that one might claim as one’s own. The Ikhwān see these, too, as gifts of God but do not treat that fact as incompatible with human responsibility.

Chapter 5

The Animals Charge Humans with Oppression

The King then said to the human, ‘You have heard their reply. Have you anything to add?’

‘Yes, your Majesty. There is more evidence that we are their masters and they our slaves. We buy and sell them, feed and water them. We clothe and shelter them from heat and cold, and protect them from predators that would tear them to pieces. When they fall ill, we treat their illnesses and care for them.⁵⁹ We train them when they’re raw, bear with them when they’re mad, put them out to pasture when they’re spent — all in kindness and compassion for them. But these are things masters do for their servants and owners for their property.’

‘You’ve heard his claims’, said the King. ‘Answer as you see fit.’

The spokesman of the beasts replied, ‘He argues that they buy and sell us. The same is done by Persians to Greeks and Greeks to Persians when they conquer one another. So which is the slave and which the master? The Indians treat the Sindians the same way, and the Sindians, the Indians; the Abyssinians, the Nubians; and the Nubians, the Abyssinians. The Arabs, Turks, and Kurds do the same to each other. Which, pray, are the slaves and which the masters?⁶⁰ Are these

59 Aristotle, *Politics* I.5.1254b10–11: ‘All tame animals are better off when ruled by man; for then they are preserved.’

60 The Ikhwān reject the triumphalist bent of thinkers like Aristotle and al-Fārābī, who entertain the thought that the fortunes of war might tend to enslave those who are fit only to be slaves, or who, at the very least, seem likely to profit from their servitude by acquiring a higher level of culture or religion. See Aristotle, *Politics* I.9.1256b23: ‘From one point of view, the art of war is a natural art of acquisition, for the art of acquisition includes hunting, an art which we ought to practise against wild beasts, and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just.’ Al-Fārābī writes that a prince employs two classes of persons to form the character of his subjects: ‘a group employed by him to form the character of whoever is susceptible of having his character formed willingly, and a group employed by him to form the character of those who are such that their character can be formed only by compulsion.... The [province of the] latter is the art of war, the power by which one excels in organizing and leading armies and using the implements of war and warlike people to conquer nations and cities that do not willingly do what will lead them to happiness.’ Al-Fārābī, *Fi taḥṣīl al-ṣā’ada*, trans. after Muhsin Mahdi in *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 36–37.

not, just Majesty, the mere turns of human fortune, with the changing influences of the stars and conjunctions of the constellations? As God Himself said, *These are but the days whose revolutions I bring about among men.*⁶¹ But *none comprehends but the learned.*⁶²

‘As for feeding and watering us, as he says, and everything else he says they do for us, these things are not done out of kindness or compassion, as he claims, but for fear lest we die and they lose their investment in us and the benefits they take from us — drinking our milk, wearing our fleece or wool or fur, riding on our backs, and having us carry their burdens.’

Then the ass spoke up and said, ‘Your Majesty, had you seen us as prisoners of the sons of Adam, our backs laden with rocks, bricks, earth, wood, iron, and other heavy loads, struggling and straining to

61 Qur’an 3:140. The verse in full: *If ye are stricken with a wound, so are the enemy stricken with a wound. These are but the days whose revolutions I bring about among men — that God may know who is faithful, and take martyrs from among you. For God loves not wrongdoers.* Muhammad comforts his followers on a defeat. The Ikhwān read the passage allegorically. Hence their aside, that no one understands it but the learned. The ‘days’ often mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry are battle days — thus, the fortunes of war, whose turns or ‘revolutions’ God is said to bring about. Since the Qur’an speaks of revolutions in human fortunes, the animals see an allusion to the turning of the heavens: in rising and falling constellations learned astrologers read visible signs of destiny. The Ikhwān fuse ecological and dynastic with astral succession. Temporal dominance, the animals infer, is no proof of absolute supremacy or warrant of hegemony in God’s plan: today’s victor is tomorrow’s victim. The thought is immemorial — in a lament for the fall of Ur (ca. 2004 BCE), the city’s patron, Nanna the moon god, is abjured from weeping: ‘The sentence of the gods assembled is not to be reversed. . . monarchy was given to Ur, but not eternal rule. From of old when the land was founded and folk multiplied, who has ever seen a royal realm endure? Ur’s dominion was long. Now it is spent. Weary yourself no more, my Nanna. Leave your city’, paraphrasing Jack Sasson’s rendering (after Noah Kramer) in *Hebrew Origins: Historiography, History, Faith of Ancient Israel* (Hong Kong: Chung Chi College, 2002), p. 103. The lament is quoted more fully in William Hallo, ‘Lamentations and Prayers in Sumer and Akkad’, in Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), vol. 2, p. 1873; the full text can be found at the Oxford Faculty of Oriental Studies (2006): <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.3&charenc=j#>
Fate and the gods have issued their decree. No moral or spiritual fault is cited to warrant its severity. But a similar lament for the destruction of Sargon’s capital, Agade, blames the hubris of King Naram-Sin. See Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 2, p. 838.

62 Qur’an 29:43.

go forward, while they stood over us, stick in hand to beat us brutally about the face and back in anger, you would have pitied us and shed tears of sorrow for us, merciful King. Where then are their mercy and compassion?’⁶³

The ox said, ‘Had you seen us, your Majesty, as prisoners in the hands of the Adamites, yoked or bound to a water wheel or mill, with muzzles to our face and blinders on our eyes, as they beat us with sticks and clubs about the face and flanks, you would have pitied us and shed tears. Where, then, is their mercy? Where is the compassion they speak of?’

The ram said, ‘You would have pitied us, your Majesty, had you seen us as their prisoners, when they seized our smallest kids and lambs and tore them from their dams to steal our milk. They took our young and bound them hand and foot to be slaughtered and skinned, hungry, thirsty, bleating for mercy but unpitied, screaming for help

63 The Ikhwān assign virtual subjecthood to the animals, ascribing interests to them and interpreting their inarticulate struggles and strivings. By giving speech to the animals, the fable breaks the barrier of their inarticulacy and gives voice to their desires and hurts. The Torah uses the same device when Balaam’s belaboured ass turns and addresses him about the angel blocking his way: ‘She said to Balaam, “What have I done to thee that thou hast struck me three times now. . . . Am I not thy she-ass that thou hast ridden all thy life, down to this day? Have I ever done such a thing to thee?”’ (Numbers 22:28–30). Vergil assigns virtual subjecthood to the wounded deer in *Aeneid* VII.781–783, filling the woods with its groans, as if begging to be spared. The lines are echoed and translated by Montaigne, Pope, Dryden, and many others; see Montaigne, ‘Of Cruelty’, in *Complete Essays*, II, 11, p. 316; Hassan Melehy, ‘Montaigne and Ethics: The Case of Animals’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 46 (2006), pp. 96–107; Philip P. Hallie, ‘The Ethics of Montaigne’s “De la cruauté”’, in *O Un Amy! Essays in Honor of Donald M. Frame*, ed. Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1977), pp. 156–171. As Melehy and Hallie note, Montaigne prefers evoking empathy to invoking the convention of animal speech, partly as an expression of scepticism about reason (and scripture?) and partly to meet the suffering stag and other inarticulate sentient creatures on their own ground. In classical Arabic criticism, negative capability rests on *taghāyur* (‘changing places’), a move anticipated by Balaam’s she-ass. Pre-Islamic poets often apostrophized wolves, camels, or horses — and, of course, abandoned campsites. But, as the scholar poet Abū Tammām remarked, the addressees ‘were not in the habit of answering’. Geert Jan van Gelder observes, ‘Speaking animals do not occur regularly’ in Arabic literature, ‘before the fables of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*’ (p. 332) — a source warmly acknowledged by the Ikhwān; see Geert Jan van Gelder, ‘The Conceit of the Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 32 (1987), pp. 329–360.

with none to aid them. We saw them slaughtered, flayed, dismembered, disembowelled, their heads, brains, and livers on butchers' blocks, to be cut up with great knives and boiled in cauldrons or roasted in an oven, while we kept silent, not weeping or complaining. For even if we had wept they would not have pitied us.⁶⁴ Where then is their mercy?

The camel joined in, 'Also had you seen us, your Majesty, as prisoners in the Adamites' hands, our muzzles bound with rope, our halters gripped by drivers who forced us to carry heavy loads in the dead of night, while all others slept, making our way through dark defiles and arid plains over a rocky track, bumping into boulders and stumbling with our tender pads over rocks and rough, broken ground, hungry and thirsty, our sides and backs bruised and sore from the rubbing of our saddles, you would have pitied us and wept for us. Where then is their mercy?'

The elephant said, 'Had you seen us, your Majesty, as prisoners of the sons of Adam, with chains on our feet and cables about our necks while they held iron goads in their hands to beat us about the pate and drive us left or right, powerless to defend ourselves, despite our great bulk, our mighty frames, long tusks, and immense strength, you would have pitied us and wept for us. Where then are the tenderness and compassion this human claims they feel for us?'

Then the horse spoke, 'Your Majesty, had you seen us as their prisoners on the field of battle, bits in our mouths, saddles on our backs, plunging unprotected through clouds of dust, hungry and thirsty, swords in our faces, lances to our chests, and arrows in our throats, awash in blood, you would have had pity on us, O King.'

The mule said, 'Had you seen us, your Majesty, as their captives, with hobbles on our feet, bridles at our throats, bits in our mouths, and locks at our crotches to curb us from satisfying our natural desires, loaded down with pack saddles, while those base, foul-mouthed men who rode atop them, our keepers and drivers, berated us with the vilest words at their command, whipping us about the face and hindquarters in such fury that often they were carried away and reviled themselves

⁶⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.1.9: 'The sheep is a mild, wool-bearing sort of cattle, with a defenceless body and a docile temperament', tr. after Barney et al., p. 247.

and their human sisters, saying, “This ass’s prick up the arse of the dealer’s wife!” or the buyer’s or the owner’s — their own fellows! All these abuses turn back upon them, since they deserve them most.

‘Your Majesty, if you consider how dense, vulgar, uncouth, and foul-mouthed humans are, you’ll be amazed at how little they discern their own odious ways, vicious traits, depraved characters, and vile actions, their manifold barbarities, corrupt notions, and conflicting dogmas. They don’t repent or take stock but ignore the warnings of their prophets and scorn the commands of their Lord, who said, *Let them show compassion and indulgence. Would you not wish God to show you mercy?*⁶⁵ And, *Tell the faithful to forgive those who have no hope in the days of God.*⁶⁶ He also says, *Every creature on earth depends for its sustenance on God, who knows their every lair and refuge.*⁶⁷ And, *There is no creature that treads the earth or flies on wings that is not a nation like you.*⁶⁸ And He said, *That you may sit solid on their backs and recall the grace of your Lord and say, praised be He who subjected them to us, for we could not have done it. And to our Lord we shall return.*⁶⁹

When the mule had finished speaking, the camel turned to the much-maligned pig and said, ‘Stand up and speak. Tell of the Adamites’ oppression of the swine. Set your complaint before the merciful King. Perhaps he will pity us and free us from their thrall, for you, too, are of the cattle.’

65 Qur’an 24:22: *Let not those with affluence and ease among you shun to share with kin and with the poor and with those who have emigrated in the cause of God. Let them show compassion and indulgence. Would you not wish God to show you mercy? For God is most merciful and compassionate.* Again, the Ikhwān assign universal scope to appeals spoken at a particular historical juncture. In the animals’ plea, the unfortunate are the beasts; humans are the affluent who should show indulgence. The appeal to kinship is not in the portion of the verse quoted and is not relied upon in the appeal of the beasts.

66 Qur’an 45:14. Those who have no hope in the days of God — that is, in resurrection and redemption — here again, that means the animals, as revealed in the eschatology spelled out at the close of the *risāla*.

67 Qur’an 11:6.

68 Qur’an 6:38. The passage continues. *We have omitted nothing in the Book. Then to their Lord they will be gathered.* The animals here seem to presume the Mu‘tazilite view that they too will be requited in the hereafter, although the Ikhwān reject that view in the end.

69 Qur’an 43:13–14.

But one of the jinni scholars said, ‘No indeed! The pig does not belong to the cattle. He’s a beast of prey. Don’t you see that he has tusks and eats carrion?’

‘No,’ said another jinni, ‘he belongs with the cattle. Don’t you see he has hooves and eats grass and hay?’

Another said, ‘No, he’s a cross between cattle and wild beasts, like the elephant, or the giraffe, who is a cross between an ass and a camel.’⁷⁰

Then said the pig, ‘Good Lord! I don’t know what to say or of whom to complain, with all the welter of conflicting things that are said of me. You’ve heard the opinions of the wisest jinn, and men differ even more about us. Their doctrines and sects are even further apart. Muslims call us accursed and grotesque. They loathe the sight of us and find our smell revolting and our meat disgusting. They hate even to say our name. But Romans eat our meat with gusto in their sacrifices and think it makes them blessed before God.

‘The Jews detest, revile, and curse us, although we’ve done them no harm or wrong, but just because of the enmity between them and the Romans and Christians.’⁷¹ Armenians treat us the same as others treat

70 ‘The giraffe, *camelopardus*, is so called because while it is covered with spots like a pard it has a neck like a horse, ox-like feet, and a head like a camel’; Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.2.19. As Mary Douglas explains, ambiguously classified animals may be sacralized. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 169–170.

71 The Beirut text adds in a note: ‘This again is a chimerical notion on the part of the Ikhwān, since the Jews’ loathing of swine antedates Christianity.’ It is biblical, of course (Leviticus 11:7). The whole passage in the *risāla* is somewhat anachronistic. For ‘Romans’ (*abnā’ al-Rūm*) would usually mean Byzantines, Greeks of the Eastern Roman Empire, but they did not eat pork with gusto in their sacrifices; pagan Greeks and Romans did. As Pliny writes in his *Natural History* VIII.72.206: ‘A pig is suitable for sacrifice four days after birth.’ But pagan Greeks and Romans did not think that sacrificing swine made them blessed before (the monotheistic) God. The Ikhwān may have in mind the sacrifices of swine that Antiochus Epiphanes (r. 175–163 BC) ordained in his own honour. This foe of the Hasmoneans ruled Syria, but his ardent Hellenism might allow him to be called a *Rūmī*. As for the ‘sacrifices’ of the Christians, see the jinni rejoinder to the Christian in Chapter 19 below. Muslim abhorrence of swine, a forbidden food in Islam, may stem from Muhammad’s early Jewish contacts. The Jerusalem Talmud (Berakhot, 2) treats swine as a symbol of filth, and the

sheep or cows. To them our fat bodies, rich meat, and many young are special blessings. Greek doctors use lard in their treatments and prescribe it in their medicines and therapies.⁷² Husbandmen mingle us with their cattle and feed us in the same stalls, believing that an animal's condition is improved by contact with us or even scenting our smell. Magicians and sorcerers use our skins for their books, spells, amulets, and magic devices. Saddlers and shoemakers prize our bristles and vie for the pluckings from our snouts, so badly do they need them.⁷³ No wonder we're confused. We don't know whom to thank and against whom to complain of injustice.'

When the pig had finished speaking, the ass turned to the rabbit, who was standing between the camel's forelegs, and said, 'Tell about the mistreatment rabbits have suffered at the hands of man. Set your complaint before the King. Perhaps he will look into our case in his mercy, take pity on us, and set us free.'

But the rabbit said, 'We are already free of the tribe of Adam. We no longer venture into their dwelling places but have withdrawn into forests and glens, safe from their wrongs. Still we are harassed by dogs, hunting birds, and horses, who abet men against us. They carry men to us and search us out for them, along with our brethren the gazelles, wild asses, wild cattle, mountain sheep, and mountain goats.

'It's excusable for dogs and birds of prey to aid man against us', the rabbit went on. 'They have a reason to eat our meat, since they're not of our kind but are carnivores. But the horse is a beast. Our meat is not for him. So he should take no part in aiding men against us, unless out of ignorance, stupidity — failure to grasp the true nature of things.'

Babylonian Talmud (Menuḥot 64b) regards one who raises swine as accursed; see also Goodman, *God of Abraham* (New York: OUP, 1996), pp. 230–232.

72 Paul of Aegina writes that fats and grease of 'all kinds dilute and warm the human body, but their powers vary according to the different temperaments of animals. That of swine, then, is the most humid of all, its powers being like those of oil. Hence it blunts sharp pains.' *The Seven Books*, vol. 3, pp. 354–355.

73 Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.1.26: 'The hairs of pigs are called bristles [*setas*] and are named from the sow [*sue*]. From these we name "shoemakers" [*sutores*], because they sew [*suant*], that is, stitch together leather with bristles.' Isidore's etymology may be fanciful, but the connection of sewing and suturing with the Latin for 'cobbler' is sound.

would clearly see and understand that God's providence encompasses all creatures, great and small, and they would not utter such slanderous lies. That is all I have to say. May God Almighty have mercy on us all.'

Chapter 19 *The Court in Session*

The next day, when the animal delegates had arrived from all their distant lands and the King of the Jinn had taken his seat, a herald announced, 'Hear ye, hear ye! Let all who have grievance or suit attend. For the King is seated in judgement.'

Present were the jinni judges, jurists, and justices, jurymen, and sages, as well as the parties: human and animal delegates who had come from every quarter. Ranged in rows before the King, they hailed him with wishes of long life and felicity. The King gazed left and right. Beholding the immense diversity of shapes and forms, colours, sounds, and songs before him, for some time he was overcome with wonder. Then, turning to one of the wise jinni philosophers, he said, 'Look at these marvellous creatures, handiwork of the All-Merciful.'

'I see them, your Majesty', came the reply. 'I see them with the eyes of my head, but in my heart I behold their Creator. Your Majesty is amazed at them, and I am amazed at the wisdom of the Creator who formed and fashioned them, raised and reared them, who gave them being, and preserves and provides for them still, *who knows their every lair and refuge*.²⁴⁷ All this, writ plain in His Book, with nothing left out or forgotten but each detail clear and precise.²⁴⁸ Hidden from sight by veils of light and far beyond reach of thought and fancy, He made

all species by the Active Intellect (and manifested in their organs, habits, and strategies) are vehicles of divine providence over particulars.

247 Qur'an 11:6. Cf. Job 38–40.

248 Divine omniscience and human destiny are both associated with the Book and the celestial Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawh al-mahfuz*). The Book is at times synonymous with revelation and law, but it also refers to God's plan, the universal pattern of all that is, the source of the Forms through which nature is governed. See Oliver Leaman, 'Preserved Tablet', in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2006).

his works manifest, expressing and revealing what was concealed in His inviolable fastness,²⁴⁹ so that eyes might apprehend and need no further proof or argument.²⁵⁰

‘Know, wise Majesty, that the forms and shapes, figures and types you see in the corporeal world, the world of bodies and physical appearances, are but copies, spectres, idols, imitations of the Forms in the world of spirits. The Forms *there* are luminous and clear; these are dark and opaque. The relationship of these to those others is like that of pictures painted on boards or the surface of walls to the forms of living beings of flesh and blood, skin and bone. For the Forms in the realm of spirits cause motion, but these are what they move, and lesser forms are silent and still. Forms here are objects of the senses, but *those* are objects of thought. They endure, but the rest perish and fade.’²⁵¹

249 A hadith widely circulated and admired, especially among Sufis, despite the doubts of hadith scholars as to its provenance, ascribes to God the words: ‘I was a hidden treasure, and I wished to be known, so I created all creatures, that I might be known’; see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 131.

250 Qur’an 6:59: *His are the keys of the unseen, which He alone knows. He knows what is on land and sea. No leaf falls but He knows it; not a grain in the dark of the earth, no thing fresh or dry but is in His clear Book.* Qur’an 10:61: *Nothing about you, no recitation of yours, no act that you do but We witness it. When you go forward with it, not the weight of an atom on earth or in heaven escapes thy Lord, nor anything greater or less, but is in His clear Book.* As the Ikhwān gloss the verses, the Qur’an intends not some divine memorandum book, as if God might forget a detail of things if He lacked a written reminder, but rather an affirmation of the plainness and evidence of God’s handiwork, God’s clear hallmark in nature. The conceit of God’s being veiled by light is ancient. It is well rooted in the philosophic repertoire and in the symbolic vocabulary of scriptural monotheism. Psalm 93 presents God as robed in majesty. For, mere human notions of majesty do not reach the Absolute but only point in the direction of God’s transcendence. Aristotle argues that some truths are missed by their very manifestness, as light (proverbially) is of no use to the bat; *Metaphysics* II.1.993b10–11: ‘as the eyes of bats are to the blaze of day, so is reason in our soul to the things that are by nature most evident of all.’ The Stoics favoured a phrase that Sufis later repeated widely: ‘One does not use a candle to seek the sun.’ Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-anwār*, develops an elaborate schematism of veils of light, citing the hadith: ‘God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the glory of His face would consume all who saw Him’; see note 318 below. Given the transcendence of the God of monotheism, His hallmarks in nature are crucial evidence of His unseen glory; thus Psalm 19 complements Psalm 93, making the heavens witnesses to the work of the unseen God.

251 Cf. Qur’an 28:88: *All things perish except His face.* Linking evanescent nature and its eternal Creator in the jinni philosopher’s appeal to divine design are the

The jinni sage then rose and declaimed, ‘Praised be God, Creator of all creatures, Giver of being to all that is, first Author and Deviser of all that is made, who governs all times, ages, and moments, Architect of space and the dimensions, who regulates the spheres and sends forth the angels, who raises up the heavens as their dwelling place and spreads forth the level earth beneath the storeyed skies, who formed all creatures, with all their varied hues, traits, and tongues, who gives them countless gifts and bounties, their Author and Creator, Guide and Master of their fate, Bestower of life and death. Glory and exaltation to Him who is at once near and far, near to the solitude of those who call upon Him, far from the reach of the grasping senses. The tongues of those who would limn His true attributes weary in the attempt, and the minds of the discerning fall into confusion at the thought of His glory, His majesty, His awesome dominion, and the clarity of His signs and proofs. No power of mind can apprehend Him, and no power of speech can describe Him. He is God, unique and triumphant, august and much-forgiving, who created jinn before Adam, from the flame of the simoom, airy spirits, and ethereal phantoms, swiftly moving with wondrous forms, floating with ease, freely through the air, by God’s providence and grace.

‘He it was who made every sort of creature — jinn, humans, angels, animals of every kind. He ordered them by ranks and classes, at His pleasure, some as the highest of the high — the cherubim and His pure servants, formed from the light of His throne and charged with bearing it; some as the lowest of the low — rebel demons and their kin, infidels, idolaters, and hypocrites, jinni and human alike. But some are intermediate: His upright servants, male and female, who are Muslims and believers. Praised, then, be God who graced us with faith and led us to Islam, making us his vice-regents on earth, as He stated, *that I may observe how you act*.²⁵² And praised be God who by His grace favoured our king with clemency, learning, justice, and equity. Hear the King now and obey if you are wise. That is all. God’s forgiveness on me and upon all of you.’²⁵³

pure and ideal archetypes by which God created, that is the Platonic Forms; see Plato, *Republic* VI.507–VII.521.

252 Qur’an 10:14.

253 Echoing Plato’s creation story in the *Timaeus*, the philosophical jinni ascribes the origin of all things to God’s temporal instantiation of the eternal Forms. God’s act is immanent, although He Himself remains transcendent. Hence His

wisdom's decree and the demands of His rule. His is the praise for that; and for all the rest of His blessings, praises abounding.'

When the jinni sage had finished speaking, the King said, 'We have heard your claims, O race of humans, and what you have gloried in, and you have heard the response. Have you anything to add beyond what you have mentioned? If so, present your proofs, adduce your arguments, elucidate your claims, and we shall heed them, if you speak truly.'

Chapter 42

At that, the orator from the Ḥijāz, from Mecca and Medina, rose and said, 'Yes, your Majesty. We have other virtues and distinctions which show that we are lords and that these animals are slaves to us and we are their masters and owners.'

'What are they?' asked the King.

'The promises our Lord gave us, that we of all living beings will be resurrected and raised up, brought forth from our graves and dealt our reckoning on the Day of Judgement, admitted by the Straight Path and entered into Paradise, the Lovely Garden, the Eternal Garden, the Garden of Eden, Garden of Sanctuary, the Realm of Peace and Abiding, Abode of the Faithful, the Tree of Beatitude, the Spring of Salsabīl, rivers of wine, of honey, of milk, and pure, sweet water, with tiered palaces and dark-eyed maidens to wife, and God close by, all-merciful, all-glorious, all-bountiful, and the scent of the breeze and the verdure, all described in the Qur'an in some seven hundred verses.⁵⁵² All this these animals lack, and it shows that we are the masters and they are our slaves. We have further distinctions too that would take too long to list. I have said my say. God grant pardon to me and to you.'

At this point the delegate of the birds, the nightingale, rose and said, 'Yes, as you say, O human. But bear in mind the rest of the promise, O humans — chastisement in the grave, the interrogation of Nakīr and Munkar,⁵⁵³ the terrors of Judgement Day, the strict reckoning,

⁵⁵² E.g., Qur'an 15:45–48, 37:40–49, 38:50–52.

⁵⁵³ Nakīr and Munkar are the angels that interrogate the dead in the grave and torment those who deserve chastisement. Qur'an 6:93, 8:52, 47:29, etc., allude to

the threat of the flames and torments of hell, the blazing hell-fire, the inferno, the furnace, the abyss, the Crush,⁵⁵⁴ and the Pit,⁵⁵⁵ shirts of pitch,⁵⁵⁶ pus to drink, eating of the Tree of Zaqqūm,⁵⁵⁷ the Master of Wrath standing by, Gatekeeper of the Fire, the demons at hand, Satan's massed hordes — all described in the Qur'an — for every verse of promise, another of warning and threat.⁵⁵⁸ All this is for you, not for us. We are exempt. We have no promised reward, but we face no threat of retribution. We accept our Lord's judgement, neither for nor against us. He withheld the blessing of His promise but spared us the dread of His threat. So the evidence is balanced. You stand on equal footing with us and have no advantage to boast of.'

'How are we equal?' demanded the Ḥijāzī. 'How do we stand on a par, when we have among us prophets and their devisees,⁵⁵⁹ imams, sages, poets⁵⁶⁰ and paragons of goodness and virtue, saints and their seconds,⁵⁶¹ ascetics, pure and righteous figures, persons of piety,

these trials, but the angels are named in only one canonical hadith, in Tirmidhī, *Janā'iz*, Bāb 70. Muslim creeds stress the reality of the ordeal, reacting against the Mu'tazilites, who were castigated for not regarding such terrors concretely enough. See *Waṣīyat Abī Ḥanīfa* §§ 18–19, and *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, I, § 10 and II, § 23, in Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, pp. 104, 129, 195–196; see also Wensinck's discussion, *ibid.*, pp. 117–121, 163–178, 235–236; G. H. A. Juynboll, 'Munḥar', *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 576–577. The doctrine in brief: both believers and non-believers will be sat up in their tombs and asked what they think of Muhammad. The faithful will declare him God's Messenger and will be left in peace until the Resurrection. But sinners and infidels, unable to answer properly, will be beaten by the angels as long as God pleases — perhaps until Judgement Day. Al-Ghazālī includes a famous discussion of the interrogation in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*; tr. T. J. Winter as *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), Book 40, pp. 135–147.

554 Qur'an 104:4–5.

555 Qur'an 101:9.

556 Qur'an 14:50.

557 Qur'an 37:60–64, 44:43–44, 56:52–53.

558 E.g., Qur'an 11:106–108, 22:20–24, 38:49–64.

559 The devisees (*awsiyā'*) of prophets are those whom God's messengers have appointed to carry forward their message. Both the term and the concept are redolent of Shi'i theology. In Sunni theory, the saints (*awliyā'*) are inheritors (*wārithūn*) of a given prophet's mission. But in Shi'i thinking, the prophetic role is passed by inheritance, as it were, to a designated successor.

560 Note the inclusion of poets here, along with others who exercise holy responsibility.

561 The 'seconds' here, (*abdāl*) are a rank of saintly persons capable of rising to the

insight, understanding, awareness and vision, who are like the angels on high! They quest after the highest goods, yearn after their Lord, turn to Him in all things and ever hearken to Him. They look to Him, contemplate His greatness and splendour, trust Him in all things, beseech Him alone, seek Him alone, and hope in Him alone, since their care is His dread.⁵⁶²

Then the animal delegates and jinni sages all said together, ‘Ah humans, now at last you’ve come to the truth. You’ve spoken well and answered aright. For what you claim now is something indeed to take pride in. The deeds you cite are indeed worth performing. The lives and characters of these saintly persons, their manners and thoughts, the studies in which they are versed, are indeed worth vying for. But tell us, O humans, of the qualities and lives of these persons, inform us of their insights and ways, their virtues and godly doings, if you know aught of these. Enlighten us about these, if you can.’

The whole body fell silent, pondering the question. But no one had an answer.

Finally arose a learned, accomplished, worthy, keen, pious, and insightful man.⁵⁶³ He was Persian by breeding, Arabian by faith, a *ḥanīf*

highest rung in the celestial hierarchy.

562 Montaigne qualifies his strictures on illusory physical beauty in a similar vein: ‘This dissertation concerns only the common run of us, and is not so sacrilegious as to mean to include those divine, supernatural, and extraordinary beauties that we sometimes see shine among us like stars under a corporeal and terrestrial veil.’ *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *Complete Essays*, II, 12, p. 357. The argument offered by the *Ḥijāzī* might not be clear at first blush. It belongs to an ancient topos, aimed at cynics and satirists: a group (or humankind at large) should not be judged by the worst but by the best among them. Compare Abraham’s plea for the Cities of the Plain (Genesis 18), asking God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of even a handful of righteous individuals who might be found among them: far be it from the Judge of all the earth to sweep away the righteous with the wicked. God agrees that the whole place should be spared for the sake of the righteous who live there. Their goodness does not exonerate the rest, but it does exclude a global condemnation. Even if one cannot say that all are corrupt, the rest might be worth preserving for the sake of those few.

563 The final speaker, a composite of the highest human attributes, carries the day, establishing human merit and superiority over the animals by appeal to the special status of saints in the order of creation. Animals and jinn alike recognize the wisdom and exemplary lives of these rare figures. Building on that acknowledgment, the final speaker points to the limitless and ineffable virtues of the saintly in language that would resonate with any audience, Jewish, Christian,

by confession,⁵⁶⁴ Iraqi in culture, Hebrew in lore, Christian in manner, Damascene in devotion, Greek in science, Indian in discernment, Sufi in intimations,⁵⁶⁵ regal in character, masterful in thought, and divine in awareness. ‘Praised be God, Lord of all worlds,’ he said, ‘Destiny of the faithful, and foe to none but the unjust. God bless the Seal of Prophets, foremost of God’s messengers, Muhammad, God’s elect, and all his worthy house and good nation.

‘Yes, just Majesty and assembled hosts’, he began. ‘These saints of God are the flower of creation, the best, the purest, persons of fair and praiseworthy parts, pious deeds, myriad sciences, godly awareness,

Shi’i, or Sunni, or, as the Ikhwān reckon, with any sound and upright human creed or culture. Early in the Shi’i tradition the perfect man was identified with the imams whose very existence justified and sustained creation; see M. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism*, tr. D. Streight (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 99, 125. Among the Sunnis, a similar role was given to the loftiest saints of each era; see R. McGregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), pp. 24–26, 107–117, 147–155. Here, however, the ideal man here is more than a figure of eschatology or fixture in the pleroma but a real person. Consummating the history of creation, ‘the perfect man who has realized his Divine Origin’, as Nasr writes (*Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 73), and all those who fulfil mankind’s angel-like potential, justify, by the lives they lead, man’s dominion over nature. Lofty as these characters may be, and critical as their lives are to human claims of excellence, it is the final irony in the case of the animals versus man that none of the many eloquent and thoughtful speakers present can adequately describe them. Yet the clear moral message is that human life itself is given its true purpose by taking up their path in pursuit of perfection.

564 A pure, generic monotheism in the spirit and tradition of Abraham; see Qur’an 3:95, 2:135. The Ikhwān preserve the cosmopolitan outlook they have cultivated throughout the essay, careful, here at least, to avoid giving colour to Islamic exclusivism or triumphalism.

565 ‘Intimations’ (*ishārāt*) are the esoteric hints characteristic of Sufi thought, which fights shy of overt reference to its monistic thrust but (like other mystical traditions) often finds little resonance for its interests in the plain sense of a scriptural passage. Following a distinction ascribed to Ja’far al-Šādiq, Sahl al-Tustarī distinguishes the ‘*ibāra*’ (‘lesson’) of a verse taken at face value and open to the common man, from the *ishāra* (its allegorical allusion), the special province of the mystic elite (*khawāṣṣ*). See Gerhardt Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (New York: de Gruyter, 1980), p. 141. By the time of the Ikhwān, this idea of *ishārāt* was well established in mainstream Sufism, represented, for example in the manual of al-Kalābādhi, *Kitāb al-Ta’arruf li-madhhab ahl ’l-taṣawwuf*, tr. Arberry, p. 76. Not long after the Ikhwān wrote, Avicenna fused the Sufi hermeneutical approach with his own Neoplatonic philosophy in his *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbihāt*.

regal character, just and holy lives, and awesome ways. Fluent tongues weary to name their qualities, and no one has adequately described their inmost core. Many have cited their virtues, and preachers in public assemblies have devoted their lives down through the ages to sermons dilating on their merits and their godly ways, without ever reaching the pith of the matter.⁵⁶⁶

We have now laid out our story in fifty-one epistles⁵⁶⁷ as clearly and concisely as possible, and this essay is one of them. God grant you success, dear brothers, in reading and grasping it fully. May He open your hearts, lay wide your breasts, and enlighten your eyes with the inner meaning of these words, and smooth the way for you to put these thoughts into practice, as He has done with His pure, holy, and devoted saints. For He has the power to effect what He will.

566 The modern printed editions of the Arabic text fill out the story here, as if to compensate for the seeming abruptness and surprising turn of the last few pages. The Zirikli, Tâmir, and Bustâni editions add the following:

And how did the just King rule on the claims of these human strangers, and their responses to the counter-claims of the animals? His order was that all of the animals were to be subject to the commands and prohibitions of the humans and remain subject to them until a new age had dawned. But then they would have a new fate. At this, one of the King's attendants rose and announced, 'You have heard, O animals, the explanations of these humans and you have conceded the that their arguments are sound. You have acknowledged that you are satisfied. So retire and return under God's protection and safe conduct.'

Know, dear brother, that we have now attained our object in this essay. Don't think the less of us, as if this were just a fairytale, some childish story that we brethren have told to entertain ourselves. Our choice of language and our indirect modes of expression may have veiled the truths we wished to convey. But this was only to prevent our losing sight of our true target.

567 The numbering of the epistles differs from one manuscript to another, based on discrepancies regarding the classification of the sciences; in some manuscripts, the total number of epistles is fifty-two, which corresponds with the enumeration in this present series.