

Ibn Bājjah’s Conception of the Soul and the Reconstruction of Human Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a comprehensive conceptual exploration of the works of Ibn Bājjah (Avempace, 1085–1138 CE), focusing on his philosophical conception of the soul and its significance for the reconstruction of human psychology. It situates Ibn Bājjah within his intellectual milieu and highlights the breadth of his scholarship across philosophy, medicine, logic, astronomy, and particularly metaphysics and psychology. The goal is to present his model of the soul and self in a clear, systematic way by reading it through epistemological, ontological, axiological, and theological lenses, with attention to how reason (‘aql), moral action, and remembrance of Allāh relate to human perfection. This conceptual paper is important because Ibn Bājjah remains marginal in contemporary psychological discussions, despite offering a holistic framework that links cognition, ethics, and spirituality rather than treating the mind as value-neutral or purely functional. The paper discusses Ibn Bājjah’s intellectual context, his tripartite theory of the soul (nutritive, animalistic, and rational), the implications of this structure for understanding human behaviour, ethical action, and spiritual refinement. Ibn Bājjah’s analysis of human action as a hierarchical process moving from sensory perception and imagination to desire and rational judgment is highlighted and his contributions contemporary psychology (i.e., positive psychology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology) is articulated. The paper concludes that Ibn Bājjah presents a comprehensive and purpose-driven or teleological view of the study of soul and self (‘ilm al-nafs), where genuine human happiness and fulfilment arise when rational intellect governs desire, allowing the soul to reach intellectual excellence and the ultimate fulfilment lies in knowing and turning toward Allāh.

Keywords: *Avempace, Axiology, Contemporary Psychology, Epistemology, Ibn Bajjah, Ilm an-Nafs, Nature of Soul, Ontology*

INTRODUCTION

The study of the soul and self (‘ilm al-nafs) has long occupied a central place in classical Islamic thought, offering a profound exploration of human nature, consciousness, and moral development. One of the most influential figures in this tradition is Ibn Bājjah (Avempace), an Andalusian philosopher, physician, and polymath whose works bridged rational inquiry and spiritual reflection. Drawing upon both Aristotelian philosophy and Qur’ānic principles, Ibn Bājjah articulated a comprehensive model of the soul comprising the nutritive, animalistic, and rational faculties, each corresponding to stages in human development (Mustofa, 2007). Through key works such as *Kitāb al-Nafs* and *al-Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid*, he examined the path of the self from sensory experience to intellectual illumination, emphasising the role of reason, solitude (‘uzlah), ethical conduct, and the remembrance of Allāh (dhikr Allāh) in attaining human perfection (Muslih et al., 2025). Despite this rich intellectual heritage, Ibn Bājjah’s

distinctive contributions remain largely absent from contemporary psychological discourse. This lack of interdisciplinary engagement limits the potential contribution of Ibn Bājjah's thought to current understandings of wellbeing, self-development, and the cultivation of human potential. In light of this gap, the present article revisits Ibn Bājjah's theory of the soul through epistemological, ontological, axiological, and theological lenses, and considers how his conception of *al-nafs* offers meaningful insights for contemporary discussions on reason (*'aql*), selfhood, and human flourishing.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF IBN BĀJJAH

Ibn Bājjah's real name is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣā'igh. He was born in Saragossa in the north of Spain during the years 475–480 AH, and he died in Fez (Morocco) in Ramaḍān 533 AH (1138 CE). He is known as Ibn Bājjah, which means “silver” in the language of French Moroccan. In the Western world he is known as Avempace. His family came from the al-Tujīb bloodline, known very well in gold businesses and trading. He is thus an al-Tujībī. He lived during the reign of the kingdom of al-Murābiṭūn in the Barbary states (now divided into Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli), a kingdom founded by a Muslim leader named Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jaddālī. Ibn Bājjah had lived in three eras of the Murābiṭūn, namely Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn (483H/1090M), 'Alī ibn Yūsuf (499H/1106M) and Tāshfīn ibn 'Alī (573-539H/1143-1145M). The zeitgeist of these reigns has great influence on Ibn Bājjah's thoughts and scholarly works.

Ibn Bājjah was well-versed in philosophy, mathematics, physics, botany, astronomy, logic, psychology, politics, grammar, literature and music. His thoughts and works had great influence on other Muslim scholars, especially Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185) and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198). Historians view him as a person who was knowledgeable and capable in various sciences. Among his contemporaries, Ibn Bājjah was acknowledged as great as Ibn Rushd in the Maghrib (West), and as great as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā in the Mashriq (East). Ibn Bājjah was an excellent writer and linguist. He was a poet for the al-Murābiṭūn dynasty led by Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm ibn Tafālwīt. In addition, Ibn Bājjah was also a music expert and a reliable 'ūd (gambus) player. Ibn Bājjah was also a ḥāfiẓ (memoriser) of the Qur'ān. Ibn Bājjah was a doctor by profession, mastering various sciences, hence deserving the title polymath. He was once appointed a minister when Abū Bakr Ibrāhīm came to power in Saragossa. In the field of philosophy, Ibn Bājjah is equated with al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Aristotle. In fact, Ibn Bājjah is a major figure in the history of Arabic philosophy. Scholars of his contemporaries regarded him as one of the greatest Arab philosophers and as a leading scholar who pioneered the introduction of Aristotle's philosophical ideas and theories after Ibn Sīnā. He was also actively involved in the efforts to document commentaries on the works of Aristotle.

Ibn Bājjah lived during the reign of the al-Murābiṭūn, a period known for its suppression of philosophers' thoughts. Lawlessness and chaos swept across the country, enemies accusing each other of committing heresy in order to gain prominence and the sympathy of the people. Ibn Bājjah's enemies branded him a heretic, ascribed to him as a drafter of corrupt faith, and of weak faith. He experienced many trials and sufferings and reproaches. They tried several times to kill him, but Allāh saved him from the assassination attempt. According to one narration, he died because he was poisoned by a rival doctor named Abū al-A'lā Ibn Zuhri, who was jealous of his intelligence, knowledge, and fame. Ibn Bājjah died in the month of Ramaḍān in 533 AH / 1138 AD in Fez and was buried next to the tomb of Ibn 'Arabī.

THE WORKS OF IBN BĀJJAH

Ibn Bājjah produced many works in various fields. The works that he produced numbered approximately 31 works (Goodman, 2020). Ibn Bājjah's original works were written in Arabic and have been translated into Hebrew and Latin. The original manuscripts and translations are preserved in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, the Berlin State Library in Germany and the Escorial Library in Spain. There are two well-preserved manuscripts of Ibn Bājjah in the libraries of Oxford and Berlin. Ibn Bājjah wrote many essays; most of them, however, are missing and only a very small number of his works survived. Many of his works that survived are only in the form of treatises (short notes) and short commentaries, and many of them are untitled.

Ibn Bājjah wrote many essays in the fields of science, logic and philosophy (Najāti, 2002). He also produced many essays explaining the books of Aristotle and Galenos, as well as books on medicine and engineering. Ibn Bājjah also wrote on psychology. Many of Ibn Bājjah's works and writings available to us today are in fact from his student Abū Bakr Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Azīz, who is popularly known as Ibn al-Imām. Ibn al-Imām was the one who collected the whole books written by Ibn Bājjah and compiled them into volumes. This compilation has become the primary source of reference for the disciples of Ibn Bājjah. However, many of his works are incomplete and, according to Ibn Ṭufayl, many of Ibn Bājjah's works are separated from their final parts (Terkan, 2005).

Among the famous works of Ibn Bājjah are al-Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid (The Governance of Solitary), Risālat Ittiṣāl al-'Aql bi-l-Insān (Letter on the Union of the Intellect with Human Beings), al-Risālah al-Wadā' (The Valedictory Letter or The Letter of Bidding Farewell), al-Risālah al-Akhlāq (The Letter of Ethics), al-Tardiyyah (Poetry of Praise), Kitāb al-Nabāt (Book of Plants), Kitāb al-Nafs (The Book on Soul), and Risālah fī l-Ġāyah al-Insāniyyah (Treatise on the Objective of Human Beings). In relation to psychology, his work Risālat al-Wadā' discusses divinity, human existence, nature and a description of medicine. Likewise, Risālat Ittiṣāl al-'Aql bi-l-Insān contains discussion on human intellect ('aql) and reasoning (Mahadzir et al., 2019).

One of the most notable works of Ibn Bājjah is Kitāb al-Nafs (The Book of Soul). The book explicates issues related to the human soul, its relation with Allāh, and the highest achievement of human existence (i.e., the ultimate human happiness). This issue was heavily influenced by the ideas of Greek philosophical thought. For this reason, Ibn Bājjah made many reviews of the works and writings of Aristotle, Galen, al-Fārābī and al-Rāzī. Kitāb al-Nafs is, in fact, the result of the description and explanation of Aristotle's writings, namely *De Anima* (al-Ma'sūmī, 1992). Ibn Bājjah studied these writings in detail and, as a result, Aristotle's philosophy is presented according to a more Islamic and monotheistic view. Kitāb al-Nafs is always attributed to Ibn Bājjah's original and independent work as well as a commentary on the works of Aristotle. There are eleven chapters in this book which describe in detail the human soul. All of these chapters talk about humans and life. To Ibn Bājjah, humans cannot live unless something moves them (Sudarmono, 2017). Therefore, when the soul and the person are connected and complete each other, this ultimately makes a human live and lead a human life.

Besides Kitāb al-Nafs, among the greatest works of Ibn Bājjah are al-Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid and Risālat Ittiṣāl al-'Aql bi-l-Insān, which emphasise the classical theme of aspects of the intellectual movement from a state of potential to an actual state and the final

contact of reason acquisition with an active mind, which is only the privilege of a small number of people who are able to achieve it (Zaini, 2015). Through Ibn Bājjah, Aristotle’s philosophy has changed its face into the face of Islam. Ibn Bājjah had studied and understood Aristotle’s philosophy well and because of this, the issues he put forward often inclined to Aristotle’s view. In spite of this, Ibn Bājjah tried to process Aristotle’s metaphysical problems according to the Islamic view. Therefore, according to Ibn Bājjah, Allāh is not only moving but Allāh is the Creator and regulator of the entire universe.

Ibn Bājjah’s philosophical thought turned into a life ethic that protested materialistic and worldly views and it became a practice during his time. This is clear in Ibn Bājjah’s work on *Ādāb al-‘Uzlah* (The Way of Seclusion). In his opinion, if we see general ignorance, then we must abstain at least in thought. Ibn Bājjah wrote several descriptions or commentaries on Aristotle’s essays related to *manṭiq* (logic), metaphysics and others. He also often referred to Plato, Aristotle, Galen, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Gazālī in his books. His works were largely in the field of philosophy and all of them were written in Arabic and then translated into Hebrew (Jewish), then into Latin and finally into English.

However, Ibn Bājjah’s idea of metaphysics (i.e., the nature of existence) from an Islamic point of view has been criticised as imperfect (Sun‘iyyah, 2017). A more perfect explanation of metaphysics can be seen in the philosophy of Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd. Both Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd were influenced by Ibn Bājjah. Despite the imperfection, in his book *al-Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid* (The Governance of Solitary), he affirmed that only through holding and believing in the existence and the power of Almighty Allāh alone will a human being find happiness and peace in his life. This book also discusses the theme of self-isolation. Ibn Bājjah’s work was judged by Ibn Ṭufayl as an incomplete work (Terkan, 2005), however, Ibn Bājjah’s works on solitude inspired Ibn Ṭufayl to harmonise religion, philosophy and science. Ibn Ṭufayl thus took the initiative by writing a work on the story of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān, a story that illustrated how knowledge obtained through observation, experiment, and reasoning does not contradict divine revelation. Table 8.1 below summarises the notable works of Ibn Bājjah:

Table 8.1. The notable works of Ibn Bājjah

Title	Brief Description
1. <i>Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid</i> (The Governance of Solitary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book consists of 17 chapters containing philosophical studies of human actions and mental powers with emphasis on the life of the individual in society.
2. <i>Kitāb al-Nafs</i> (The book on Soul)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book contains his exposition of the nature of the Soul under eleven discourses (chapters) each of which is intended to explain a specific dimension of soul.
3. <i>Risālat al-Wadā‘</i> (Essays on Bidding Farewell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book narrates about divinity, human existence, nature and medicine.
4. <i>Ittiṣāl al-‘Aql bi-l-Insān</i> (The Union of the Intellect with Human Beings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book discusses the relationship between men and reason.
5. <i>Fī al-Mutaḥarrrik</i> (The Moving)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book discusses the human instinct and the language that serves as the basis for thinking.
6. <i>Risālah fī l-Ġāyah al-Insāniyyah</i> (Treatise on the Objective of Human Beings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This book discusses the purpose of human creation.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS OF IBN BĀJJAH

Ibn Bājjah is a major figure in the history of Arab philosophy. Scholars of his contemporaries have regarded him as one of the greatest Arab philosophers and as a leading scholar who pioneered the introduction of Aristotle's philosophical ideas and theories after Ibn Sīnā (al-Ma'šūmī, 1992). Ibn Bājjah was also an Andalusian philosopher involved in providing commentaries on the works of Aristotle. He was, in fact, the first person in al-Andalus to begin a period of writing philosophy books. Ibn Bājjah had broad insight into the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, and he was interested in the opinions of Eastern Muslim philosophers, such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Bājjah's thinking is similar to that of al-Fārābī in terms of his interest in solitude, reflection, and rational reasoning (Santosa, 2015). His interest and works, founded on the writings of Aristotle, Plato, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, led to his own philosophical thoughts that are discussed here from the lens of epistemology, ontology and axiology.

Ibn Bajjah on Epistemology

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy of science that deals with the study of knowledge, in particular the theory of knowledge, with underlying questions of what knowledge is and how knowledge is acquired and developed (Ponterotto, 2005). In terms of epistemology, Ibn Bājjah postulated that knowledge cannot be acquired by the senses alone but by active intelligence (al-Ma'šūmī, 1965). Active intelligence, according to Ibn Bājjah, is the highest function of human intellect and the type of intelligence that gives glory to Allāh the Almighty (Haque, 2004). This means an active intellect is the kind of intellect that strongly connects to one's belief in tawḥīd (oneness of Allāh). That is, one's ability to relate each piece of information and reasoning to the existence of Allāh and the wonders of His creations. Ibn Bājjah asserted that humans are capable of active intellect with the help of knowledge and if they are clean from the ugliness of society. He further commented that society can paralyse the thinking power of the individual and prevent him from achieving intellectual perfection.

Knowledge acquisition according to Ibn Bājjah is a combination of senses and reason. In the matter of knowledge of facts, he used the rational - empirical method. However, regarding the truth of the existence of Allāh he used philosophy and philosophical reasoning. According to Ibn Bājjah, the truth itself can be obtained by humans when humans are in 'uzlah (solitary; Shihab, 2018), and sound knowledge obtained through active intelligence enables one to attain prosperity and build character and personality. Ibn Bājjah's view on the origin of the emergence of knowledge is similar to that of Piaget, a Western psychologist who lived in 1896–1980 AD, who stated that humans know something through their senses (Sitorus & Idris, 2012). Of course, judging from his lifetime, Ibn Bājjah's opinion emerged long before Piaget's opinion. Ibn Bājjah argues that the emergence of knowledge begins with the senses that capture images of sensory objects and store the images in the collective senses after the sensory objects disappear from the senses. Then, the senses send them to the imagination, where the mind perceives all universal meanings. According to him, the path of knowledge is the path that ascends from the senses to the mind. Sensing is, therefore, an important initial stage for the process of thinking or rational reasoning. This is because, according to Ibn Bājjah, something that has not been sensed through something similar to it or on which it is based, is impossible to imagine and think about. Thus, if a person does not have one of the senses, he automatically experiences a lack of knowledge. Therefore, epistemologically, Ibn Bājjah stressed the role of

the senses and active reasoning (reasoning in conjunction with Allāh the Almighty) as the way to acquire knowledge, ultimately leading to the recognition of divine order and truth.

Ibn Bajjah on Ontology

Ontology is a branch of philosophy of science that deals with the question of what is the nature of reality and being, and in what kind of structures and classifications (Ponterotto, 2005). In this regard, Ibn Bājjah believed that everything that exists is divided into two, namely the moving (the body) and the not moving (the spirit). What moves is matter, which is limited in nature, and the cause of its movement comes from an unlimited force, namely reason (Mustafa, 2007). Correspondingly, to achieve closeness to Allāh, Ibn Bājjah recommends doing three things, namely: (1) making our tongues remember Allāh and glorify Him, (2) making our organs and body act according to the insight of the heart, and (3) avoiding anything that divert the heart from remembering Allāh. Ibn Bājjah admired al-Ġazālī and stated that al-Ġazālī's method enabled people to gain knowledge of Allāh, and that this method was based on the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallā llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam). In spite of this, initially Ibn Bājjah rejected the Ṣūfī concept that the ultimate human end is the pleasure which results from witnessing the divine world internally. In support of his view, Ibn Bājjah mentioned among other things that, if the pleasure of the internal senses were the ultimate human end, then reason (which is a higher power than the internal senses) as well as its knowledge would be superfluous and futile (Protama, 2018).

Although Ibn Bājjah criticised al-Ġazālī, in the end, he agreed with al-Ġazālī's view. Ibn Bājjah said that the final stage of the progress of the human mind and spirit is not total humanity, but the perfection of this blessing occurs through the nūr (light) bestowed by Almighty Allāh in the bosom of the intellect (Hanif, 2019). This light is the same as the light described by al-Ġazālī; this light is regarded as the key to knowledge acquisition. Ibn Bājjah added that whoever obeys Allāh, then Allāh will reward him with that reason. On the other hand, whoever is disobedient, Allāh will close him from the light, so that he is in darkness and ignorance. Therefore, ontologically, to Ibn Bājjah, the nature of being can be categorised into the body (the moving) and the spirit (the force). The spirit attains its ultimate happiness by knowing its Creator, Allāh the Almighty, through remembrance and obedience, and it continues to endure permanently even after its separation from the body.

Ibn Bajjah on Axiology

Axiology is another branch of philosophy that deals with the role and place of values and morality. In this regard, Ibn Bājjah classifies human actions into animal actions and human actions (Mahadzir et al., 2019). Animal actions are actions that are primarily motivated by instinctive motives driven by desire and speculation. Human actions are actions based on reason that are not affected by desire or speculation. According to Ibn Bājjah, only people who act under the influence of mind (rationality) and justice alone and have nothing to do with the animal aspect of themselves can be respected for their actions (Sundasorno, 1997). Hence, values and morality according to Ibn Bājjah depend on the motive behind the human action. It can thus be interpreted that actions driven by desire and speculation and in the absence of reason are indeed actions that are the opposite of values and morality. Therefore, axiologically, Ibn Bājjah believes that values and morality lie in reason and justice.

IBN BĀJJAH ON THE NATURE OF SOUL

According to Ibn Bājjah, the soul is the perfection of the body and the human soul is different from the human body. He believes that, unlike the body, the soul does not undergo changes and ageing. In this sense, Ibn Bājjah further explicated that the soul is spiritual and eternal (Zuhara, 2018). This means, even after death, in the hereafter, it is the soul that will receive recompense, both rewarding pleasure (heaven) as well as torment and punishment (hell). The human soul, Ibn Bājjah believes, develops from the plant to the animal and finally to the rational life. Hence, the soul according to Ibn Bājjah can be classified into the nutritive soul, the animalistic soul and the rational soul. The first two, according to Ibn Bājjah, are non-rational and the totality of all parts of the soul is the human soul.

The Nutritive Soul

The nutritive soul, according to Ibn Bājjah, is a field in the soul that serves to drive the process of growth, nourishment and reproduction (al-Ma'ṣūmī, 1992). The power of nutrition, or the soul that feeds, is the first perfection of the mechanistic and nourishing body. In all breathing bodies there is a force that forms new cells supplied from the nutrients that come from food. This force replaces the damaged parts in the body so the body can survive. In other words, in every living being there is a force which drives excess food to replace worn-out parts of the body and the remaining part is moved by growth, and this force is the nutritive soul. The nutritive soul according to Ibn Bājjah is the lowest state of the soul responsible for sustaining life through growth and nourishment. It nevertheless plays a crucial role in regulating the heart as the centre of bodily vitality. This means this faculty of the human soul that functions for nourishment and growth is similar to those of plants and animals.

The Animalistic Soul

With the progress from the plant to the animal life, which Ibn Bājjah termed the sensitive life, one moves from mere vegetation to sensation, movement and desire. First, sensation is acquired by the five external senses, namely vision, hearing, smell, touch and taste. In addition to these five senses, Ibn Bājjah also coined the term “collective sense”. The details of Ibn Bājjah’s discussion of the five senses and the collective sense have been illustrated in Najātī (2002), as follows:

i. Vision

The faculty of vision is the initial perfection of the eye and is the seeing soul. The power of sight is the power in the eye by which colour can be perceived. The eye can perceive colour through the air. Air is not able to help the eye in the process of perception except with light, because light is an important condition for perceiving colour. According to Ibn Bājjah, the centre of the eye is in the retina.

ii. Hearing

Hearing is the perfection of the sense of hearing. The power of hearing perceives the effect that takes place in the air due to the collision of two objects colliding with each other, and that process is the source of the sense of hearing.

iii. *Smell*

Olfaction is the capture of the meaning of smell, namely the smell perceived by the sense of smell in the nose when the animal breathes air. Everything that contains taste also contains odour. Therefore, the taste of everything is known by its smell. The sense of smell is very important for animals that are being targeted as prey; and most animals use it in their life. This sense organ is weak in humans but very strong in animals, because animals really need it.

iv. *Taste*

The sense of taste senses the taste of everything. Taste moves the moisture of the mouth or saliva, so it receives it like the air receives colour. Moisture stimulates the sense of taste. The moisture of the mouth is different from the essence of taste so that the taste does not hinder the recipient of the taste that contradicts it. Therefore, a sick person sums up all feelings as bitter, because the moisture in his mouth is bitter. Taste plays a crucial role in animals' search for food, consequently, animals rely primarily on this sense to evaluate what is edible, making minimal sensory input sufficient for locating and capturing prey.

v. *Touch*

Touch is the power to understand the object being touched. The senses of touch are the flesh and skin around the body and the nerves spread over both of them.

Collective Senses

According to Ibn Bājjah, if an object is perceived by more than one of the five senses, a collective sensory faculty must exist to apprehend these combined sensory qualities, known as the collective senses. The collective sense perceives multiple sensory attributes of an object. For example an apple has taste, smell, colour, heat, cold and determines that each of these qualities is different from one another.

Imagination and Desire

Besides sensation, the forces of the animalistic soul are imagination and desire. Regarding imagination, Ibn Bājjah defined imagination as the place where the highest forms of all that can be sensed become understood. Ibn Bājjah classified two kinds of sensory objects: first, the special objects related to each sense organ, such as colours for sight and sound for hearing; second, the objects that are not sensed by the sensory organs but are sensed by the collective sense, for example length and shape. To Ibn Bājjah, the traces of the sensory objects that are still present in the collective senses move the imaginative power so that it can capture these traces when the sensory objects disappear from the sense organs in the form of fantasies (Najāī, 2002). Imagination, therefore, functions as the imitation of sensory objects, and the representations formed within the imaginative faculty correspond to the perceptions previously

apprehended by the collective sense. Further, imagination is not only found in humans, but also in most animals. With this force, animals perform various movements such as the motion of desire and make many skills such as pollination by bees and surviving underwater for spiders.

Regarding desire, Ibn Bājījah defined desire as the mental force that moves animals and humans toward what they like and away from what they do not like (Najāṭī, 2002). The first mover for animals is desire, which is of two types and has two opposite actions. First, *maḥabbah*, which means liking or love and is a source of effort and pursuit, for example the power of appetite such as eating and anger. Second, *karāhiyyah*, which means dislike or hatred and is the basis for escape or the act of leaving, for example fear and boredom (Sitorus & Idris, 2012). Desire is activated by the imaginative faculty in both animals and humans when the movement is animalistic; however, in humans as rational beings, the primary mover is an idea, which may be either correct or erroneous. According to Ibn Bājījah, human action originates not in the body but in a sequential psychological–intellectual process whereby an idea is mentally represented through imagination, unified by the collective sense, transformed into desire, and only then translated into bodily movement. Animals are motivated solely by imaginative desire (*shawq khayālī*) grounded in sensory representation and oriented toward pleasure or survival, whereas humans uniquely possess intellect (*‘aql*), enabling them to act not only from imagination but also from rational desire (*shawq ‘aqlī*) directed toward truth and moral goodness. Imaginative desire and rational desire contradict each other, because the former draws the soul toward immediate, pleasure-based impulses while the latter directs it toward truth, virtue, and perfection, and the dominance of one over the other explains moral struggle, ethical failure, and spiritual development. In sum, the animalistic soul is driven by sensation, imagination and desire; hence its nature is non-rational and very instinctive.

The Rational Soul

The rational soul is the reasoning faculty, a place where everything has its meaning. By acquiring thought (reasoning), one rises to the level of rational speculation; in some noble individuals, to the level of a universal divine soul. The latter stage represents the highest level of human perfection. Ibn Bājījah further added that the intellect is either potential (theoretical) or actual (practical). Humans and animals are the same in terms of mental powers except for the rational power or the power of reason, which belongs only to humans (Santosa, 2015). The sensory and imaginative powers only perceive objects, while the rational powers perceive abstract things. Rational power is not always actual. Rational power is sometimes potential and sometimes actual. Changing from potential to actual is information that is obtained by the soul through sensory objects, and which is depicted in the imagination. The rational power performs reasoning with its attention on imaginary objects so that it can grasp general meanings or something rational with the help of illumination of the Active Intellect. According to Ibn Bājījah, reason has great value. He views that humans can know everything, know themselves, and know the Active Intellect with their minds (Bučan, 2016). The stages in making contact with the Active Intellect are not spiritual in nature but are grounded in rational reasoning or thinking power. To Ibn Bājījah, the perfect state of the human soul is when the mind comes into contact with the Active Intellect (i.e., reasoning founded on the concept of *tawḥīd*, also known as divine intellect) that then reaches the level of what he termed the “acquired intellect”, that is, the accumulated knowledge possessed by a person (al-Ma’šūmī, 1965).

In addition to the above, Ibn Bājjah defined sensory power as the process of receiving the perception of the perceived object image. On this basis, sensing is the reception of the senses to images of sensory objects in a way that is free from matter. The liberation of the perceived images has several levels, and each level is called *nafs* (soul) and *quwwah nafsāniyyah* (spiritual or psychic power) (Hanif, 2019). Among these levels are the senses, imagination, and logic, which are the highest levels. Ibn Bājjah further asserted that there are two kinds of sensory objects. First, special objects related to each sense organ, such as colour for sight and sound for hearing. Second, the objects that are not sensed by the external sense organs but are sensed by the collective senses (fantasy), such as length and shape. Ibn Bājjah further added that sometimes the senses make mistakes and lie, for example, sick people feel food that is different from the actual taste.

As per Ibn Bājjah’s classification of human actions into animal actions and human actions, animal acts are actions that are based on the fulfilment of needs that are purely physical. For example, eating is classified as an animal act insofar as it is used solely to fulfil appetitive needs. Eating is classified as a human act as long as the act is based on the intention to maintain body strength and achieve blessings in life. The basis of the difference between the two, for Ibn Bājjah, is not in the actions but in the motives. If it is driven by animal desire, it means animal action, but if the action is based on reason, then it is a human act. The speciality of humans compared to other creatures is the power of thought that is the source of their actions. All actions and behaviour that are based on common sense are called *ikhtiyāriyyah* (humane or voluntary actions), for example eating and drinking which are carried out with the aim of maintaining life and achieving virtue in life. If a person’s actions are based only on his thoughts for the sake of truth, then his actions are more divine, i.e., actions that are carried out on the basis of intellectual satisfaction in order to be able to relate to Allāh. This requires virtue that transcends formal virtues. So that if the mind has decided something, it is not opposed by the animal soul. Basically, the animal soul is subject to reason, except for humans who deviate from their human nature, so that their behaviour resembles that of an animal. In order to subdue the animal aspect of himself in order to achieve a higher goal, he must begin by carrying out his human aspect. Figure 1 below summarises Ibn Bājjah’s idea of the nature of the soul and its forces.

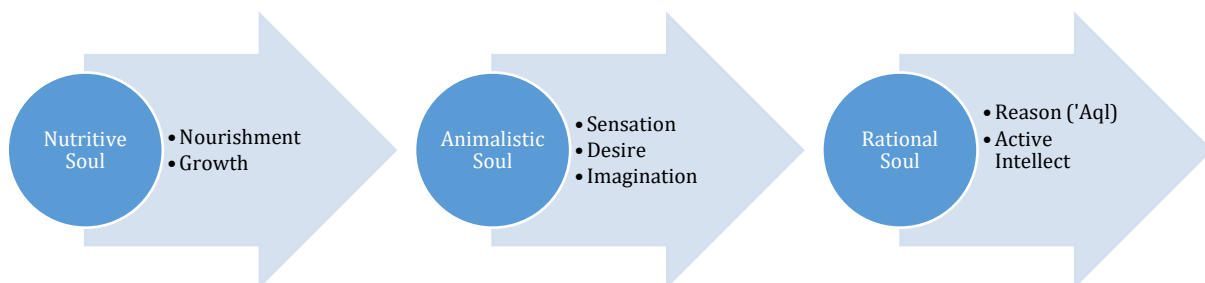


Figure 1. The nature of soul and its forces according to Ibn Bājjah

IBN BĀJJAH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUL

Ibn Bājjah has comprehensively explained the nature of the soul although many of his works are incomplete due to his early death. Ibn Bājjah also affirms that the intellect (*‘aql*) bestowed on human beings and the relationship of the servant with the Almighty Allāh as the Creator of the universe are inseparable (Zuhara, 2018). It is connected through perfect thinking, i.e., the Active Intellect, leading to the perfection of human creation resulting in knowing oneself and then knowing the Creator, the Almighty Allāh, and at the same time believing in Him (*īmān*). Ibn Bājjah discussed the development of the soul based on the concept of *al-nafs* (self). He emphasised the interconnection between the self (*al-nafs*), intellect (*‘aql*), knowledge and oneness of Allāh (*tawhīd*) in explaining the development of the soul. The details of Ibn Bājjah’s discussion on the development of the soul have been illustrated by Mahadzir et al. (2019) and are explicated here in the following paragraphs.

Man is created and endowed with intellect (*‘aql*) that enables human beings to weigh, think, and distinguish between the good and the bad, as well as the beneficial and the harmful. Therefore, those who believe in Allāh and do good will be rewarded by Allāh with reward (*thawāb*) and paradise, and as for the disbelievers and those who commit evil, they will be punished in hell for their sins. Humans are created by Allāh as servants (*‘ibād*) and vicegerents (*khalīfah*) on earth. Human beings, as servants of His creation, need to be aware of the responsibilities and trusts that are commanded and will even be held accountable in the hereafter. Thus, Ibn Bājjah stated that the development of the soul through the concept of *tawhīd* should be a part of human life in order to maintain its status as *khalīfah* on this earth. The scientists in the past mastered various fields of knowledge, but they still connected their hearts with Allāh. Ibn Bājjah stated that every knowledge will definitely be based on *tawhīd* or oneness of Allāh (Pratama, 2018). This is because all knowledge belongs to Allāh which is bestowed on each of His servants through inspiration and also experience. For example, the inspiration, experience and teachings that Allāh gave to human beings through the story of Qābil and Hābil (Cain and Abel).

Accordingly, based on the concept of *al-nafs* (self), Ibn Bājjah stated that the main foundation in the development of the soul through Islamic thought is the belief that Allāh is the Creator, Administrator and Ruler of the universe as a whole. Allāh is the only God who created humankind and life. High conviction that Allāh as the Creator has devised the perfect discipline or *sharī‘ah* to follow. According to the Islamic law (*sharī‘ah*) of Allāh, this does not mean coercion, but rather a precise awareness that Allāh is truly Rich, Just and Most Perfect. The failure of man to obey the commands of Allāh in the field of *sharī‘ah* indicates the failure of man to know his own Creator. In sum, the development of the soul based on the concept of *al-nafs* according to Ibn Bājjah will produce human beings who always connect themselves with Allāh, in fact affirming that all things belong to Allāh. Thus, man must be aware that everything in this world will not last, and everything belongs to Allāh; from Allāh we come and to Allāh alone we will return.

Ibn Bājjah defined *al-nafs* (self) in two ways, namely habit (*tabī‘ah*) and spirit (*rūh*). Both of these are present in humans. Habits, for example, are seen by Ibn Bājjah as traits or dispositions that are carried by human beings. Habits cannot stand on their own; instead they need to be in the living human being. This is because, with human habit, the person moves and

does something. As for the soul, Ibn Bājjah saw that it also had to be attached to the human body. The spirit alone is incapable of doing anything; instead, the spirit needs the body to do something. The human body cannot move without the spirit. This means that both need each other. The combination of spirit, body and habit completes the human self which Ibn Bājjah interpreted as the perfect *al-nafs*.

Furthermore, according to Ibn Bājjah, human perfection is found in two states, namely internal and external perfection. Internal perfection is human ingenuity that is neither demonstrated nor taught. On the other hand, external perfection is ingenuity and wisdom that is translated for the common good. Thus, Ibn Bājjah's definition of *al-nafs* becomes more complex. This is because Ibn Bājjah examined every inch of the term *al-nafs*, the result of which formed man. Ibn Bājjah also asserted that the development of the soul is also associated with the development of *al-nafs* as a whole. In explaining the development of *al-nafs* in its entirety, Ibn Bājjah insisted that human beings endowed with intellect should translate it into something that is thought to relate to behaviour and deeds. In this context, Ibn Bājjah states that human beings are always ready to receive knowledge. The process of receiving knowledge proves that human beings have a mind. Thus, the mind is utilised to think, learn something, remember and so on. Strictly speaking, the process of receiving knowledge and thinking to get answers will make the human being perfect.

Ibn Bājjah also said that whoever does not know the origin of something through his thoughts, then all his knowledge is wrong. This is where *tawhīd* or Oneness of Allāh began to be linked in the mind of Ibn Bājjah. This is because everything must have an origin. Thus, man must think about its origin. Humans who think will surely get the answer. This is because the origin of human beings is that they are created by Allāh, as has been recorded in the Qur'ān through Sūrat al-Insān verses 1 to 3: *Has there [not] come upon man a period of time when he was not a thing [even] mentioned? Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.* Knowledge is a light that will surely illuminate the mind until it finds the origin of something. According to Ibn Bājjah again, every intellect in man is hidden. Thus, when a person knows and learns something, at that time the mind will be more perfect. When the human mind is translated into action, it will prove that everything has a Creator (Allāh). Therefore, thinking about the existence of the self will lead to knowledge of the existence of God (Allāh).

Ibn Bājjah divided human beings into two groups. First, the group known as “*manūsia ḥayawān*” or “*al-insān al-bahīmī*”, i.e., humans from this group are those who like to follow desire (*hawā*) and are guided and controlled by it. The second group is people who think theoretically and use common sense and act guided by perfect common sense. According to Ibn Bājjah, human beings may be distinguished according to whether their actions are governed by desire or intellect. Those described as *al-insān al-bahīmī* are individuals who allow desire (*hawā*) to dominate their behaviour, thereby functioning in a manner analogous to animals despite their human form. In contrast, truly human individuals are those who engage in theoretical reflection, exercise sound judgment, and act in accordance with rational and ethical principles. For Ibn Bājjah, it is this second group that fulfils the authentic demands of human life, as their disciplined intellect enables the emergence of genuine insight or inspiration (*ilhām*) grounded in reason rather than impulse.

Ibn Bājjah also talked about the senses found in humans in explaining the development of the soul. Ibn Bājjah divides the human senses into three parts, namely the sense of feeling, the sense of sharing and the sense of imagination. According to Ibn Bājjah, the sense of feeling is the human heart that gives birth to feelings and desires. The senses that share are the senses that use all the human senses. The third sense is the sense of imagination. In this case, it is the sense of imagination that has equipped the animal because the animal is not endowed with intellect. As such, animals use these imaginative senses to live and also strive for survival such as hunting, mating and so on. Thus, it is this sense of imagination that makes these animals more perfect. Al-Ġazālī states that humans are also included in the group of animals. But human beings are distinguished by the presence of this heart, intellect and kindness that make human beings special. In the meantime, Ibn Bājjah distinguishes between humans and animals. This is because the advantage of the human being is in his intellect that can determine whether something is right or wrong.

According to Ibn Bājjah, knowing something has two delights. First, the delicacy in confidence when a person knows something is true or false. Second, the delicacy of knowing something new. In conclusion, Ibn Bājjah, in explaining the development of the soul, stated that the lowest human being cannot be equated with animals at all because the human being is still capable of living in a society. Apart from that, Ibn Bājjah also thinks that the main purpose of the power of the intellect is to produce wisdom. Therefore, according to Ibn Bājjah, the main motivator of human beings is the intellect and the intellect can be used to reach a goal and desire and share with others. Thus, the result of the combination of *al-nafs* and the intellect moves the sense of feeling, the sharing senses along with the senses of high imagination that produce the philosophy of human life and civilisation. According to Ibn Bājjah, every human action, when viewed from the soul, can be categorised into three forms: (1) occasional, or only physical; the majority, (2) there are times when the act is born from the particular spiritual (sense of perception, imagination and memory); the knower, and (3) actions resulting from universal spirituality; this is the perfect form of the soul which shows its absolute unity between body and spirit; the happy state. For this reason, Ibn Bājjah emphasised that people who act only depending on matter (body) are abominable and despicable, while those who act depending on the soul or spirituality (form) are people who are superior and noble. Figure 2 below depicts the development of the soul or self (*al-nafs*) according to Ibn Bājjah.

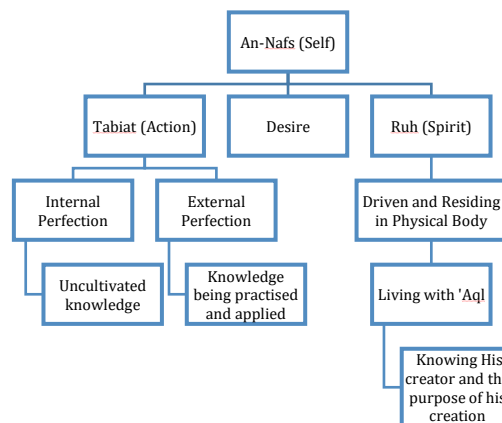


Figure 2. Development of soul or self (an-nafs) according to Ibn Bājjah

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF IBN BĀJJAH TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Ibn Bājjah argued that psychology or *‘ilm al-nafs* is the most noble science, and it is an important introduction to arrive at other sciences, especially the science of *ma‘rifat Allāh* (knowing the Almighty Allāh). Note that, psychology here does not refer to the modern or contemporary psychology that has been defined for example by Cicarelli and White (2025) as the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes. This definition is insufficient for Ibn Bājjah’s conception of *‘ilm al-nafs*. His study of the self encompasses the ontological reality of the soul, its ethical orientation, and its teleological aim toward human perfection and the Divine power, rendering it inherently normative rather than value-neutral. Interpreting Ibn Bājjah’s psychology (*‘ilm al-nafs*) solely through a modern scientific lens therefore risks obscuring its integrated philosophical and spiritual dimensions which are central to his understanding of the human self. To Ibn Bājjah, it is impossible for a person to know the various principles of science if he or she does not know the soul and its essence. If one does not know the condition of the soul and its essence, then one does not believe in all matters even more. In addition, psychology, according to Ibn Bājjah, provides the power of taking premises (i.e., written words as a precursor to drawing a conclusion or a proposition that supports and strengthens the conclusion), which is a prerequisite for all the natural sciences for those who study the sciences (i.e., scientists). Furthermore, the wisdom of civilisation cannot be elaborated systematically without knowing the problems of the soul. Despite the difference between the modern psychology and *‘ilm al-nafs*, Ibn Bājjah’s works are very relevant to contemporary psychology, especially his works on happiness, solitude and memory. These works are relevant to the following fields of psychology:

Positive Psychology

Ibn Bājjah discussed the happy personality or the happy individual in relation to the concept of happiness, solitude, following the sunnah and possessing noble character. These four concepts are interrelated to create a happy person (Sitorus & Idris, 2012). First, to Ibn Bājjah, happiness can be achieved through rational reasoning; rational reasoning is the way for humans to reach their natural perfection and realise the highest happiness. In fact, the goal of philosophical thought, according to him, is the unity of the human mind with the Active Intellect, where at that time humans become part of the realm of reason and can create happiness for themselves. Ibn Bājjah once criticised the Ṣūfīs by saying that the Ṣūfīs think that the understanding of the greatest happiness sometimes occurs without a learning process, namely by concentration and always remembering. He also criticised al-Ġazālī, who views that the rational world will not be revealed to humans except with seclusion. After that, man will see the divine light, so he feels great pleasure. Ibn Bājjah said that indeed al-Ġazālī underestimated the problem when he thought that happiness can be obtained by someone through the path of possession of the essence with the *nūr* (light) that Allāh bestows on the heart. Whereas the truth is that pure rational reasoning that is not tainted by sensual pleasures is the only way to see Allāh, while Ṣūfistic knowledge, which consists of sensory images, is actually a barrier to achieving *ma‘rifat Allāh*, because it covers the face of reality.

In the end, however, Ibn Bājjah embraced the orientation of Ṣūfism after he had criticised it and embraced the notion of divine illumination of the human mind, which can bring true happiness to him. In light of this, Ibn Bājjah’s concept of happiness is different from the

one in contemporary positive psychology that has defined happiness as positive emotions and the absence of negative emotion (Campton et al., 2020), as it goes beyond positive emotions with connections to Allāh the Almighty.

Social Psychology

In relation to social psychology (i.e., the study of how people behave and make decisions when they interact with others or live within a society; Cicarelli & White, 2025), according to Ibn Bājjah, a country can be divided into a perfect state and an imperfect state. The former would have a virtuous city whose members are all complete in knowledge, while the latter owns a non-virtuous city where the contrary is the case (Latif, 2019). Additionally, Ibn Bājjah described two alternative functions of the state, which are to assess people's actions in order to guide them to achieve their desired goals and to devise ways of achieving certain goals. This is because he believes that some people prefer to rule and some others prefer to be ruled. Ibn Bājjah further adds that the perfected person (the knowledgeable and the happy individual) may reside in either a virtuous city or a non-virtuous city. When residing in a non-virtuous city, the perfected person must live in solitude although isolation in itself is undesirable because the perfected person may appear as a stranger whose opinion contradicts the majority's opinion. Ibn Bājjah also suggested that the perfected person living in a non-virtuous city must minimise social contact and, whenever possible, migrate to a virtuous city.

Furthermore, Ibn Bājjah warned that society can paralyse the ability of individual thinking and prevent it from achieving perfection (Kohar, 2020). This is because society is covered with low deeds and lustful desires. Meanwhile, with his own strength, humans can reach high dignity through thoughts and actions. Therefore, one must isolate one's mind and soul from society, and free oneself from the ties of tradition, which is mostly controlled by superstition. Isolating thoughts and souls do not mean one does not get along with society. But one should be able to control himself and be able to control his passions, not be dragged into the stream of the lowly actions of society (Dunlop, 1945). In other words, he must be centred on himself and always feel that he is an example for people to follow, as well as a maker and drafter of legislation for society, not sinking into that society. So, the "loner" in Ibn Bājjah's concept is more emphasised on the attitude of life in society, not on the place of residence. In this sense, "loners" are always in the midst of society, no matter how damaged that society is. Ibn Bājjah's concept of solitude, therefore, may contribute to understanding how society and the living environment may influence one's behaviour, which is the central focus of social psychology. In spite of this, it is important to note that, unlike social psychology that focuses on how people's behaviour is shaped by society and interactions with others, Ibn Bājjah evaluates society normatively, focusing on whether it supports or obstructs the moral and intellectual perfection of the self (*al-nafs*).

Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology focuses on mental processes such as thinking, memory, attention, and reasoning (Cicarelli & White, 2025). Ibn Bājjah has mentioned the power of memory in his book, *Tadbīr al-Mutawahhid* (The Governance of Solitary), in a special chapter on spiritual images, namely images of sensory objects that exist in the collective senses and the power of imagination (Najātī, 2002). In contemporary psychological terms, these are called cognitive

images or mental imagery. Given the period of his life and works, Ibn Bājjah can be considered as an initiator of the concept of mental imagery. Additionally, memory to Ibn Bājjah is one of the forces that move the human's animalistic soul although, in his understanding, the act of remembering does not exist in animals because animals, unlike humans, do not have the power of reasoning (*'aql*). However, to Ibn Bājjah, memory is equally present in humans and animals and what distinguishes memory in humans and animals is the process of remembering, where in animals there is no mental power for it and it is purely resultant from imagination and desire. To Ibn Bājjah, remembering and memory in animals, therefore, are not associated with rational power, unlike humans, for whom remembering involves rational power because humans are created with *'aql*. His idea about rational power in remembering and memory is similar to the concept of elaborative rehearsal in cognitive psychology, where information that is processed in a more in-depth way can be stored permanently in long-term memory. Note, however, cognitive psychology examines mental processes such as perception, memory, and reasoning through empirical and value-neutral methods, without reference to the soul or ultimate purpose. In contrast, Ibn Bājjah situates cognition within the broader framework of *al-nafs*, viewing intellect as an ontological and ethical faculty oriented toward human perfection and the Divine. As a result, his approach is holistic and teleological, whereas cognitive psychology remains functionally descriptive.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Ibn Bājjah's views can be recapitulated into the following points:

First, Ibn Bājjah considers psychology, or *'ilm al-nafs*, to be the most noble of all sciences and a necessary foundation for understanding other fields of knowledge, especially the science of knowing Allāh, the Almighty Creator (*ma'rifat Allāh*). He argues that a person cannot truly understand any branch of knowledge without first understanding the soul and its nature. Without knowledge of the soul, intellectual certainty and genuine belief remain incomplete.

Second, Ibn Bājjah defines the soul as the first perfection of the body, meaning that it is the principle that gives life, organisation, and direction to the human body. He identifies several powers of the soul, including the nutritive power, the sensory power, the imaginative power, and the rational power. Each of these powers plays a distinct role in human growth, perception, thought, and action.

Third, Ibn Bājjah explains that knowledge begins with the senses. The senses perceive external objects and transmit their images to the imaginative faculty. From these images, the intellect abstracts universal meanings. Sensory perception is therefore a necessary starting point for thinking, because what has never been sensed cannot be imagined or rationally understood.

Fourth, rational reasoning is the primary means through which human beings achieve perfection and attain true happiness. Ibn Bājjah maintains that the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry is the union of the human intellect with the Active Intellect. Through this union, human beings participate in the realm of reason, and divine illumination of the intellect enables the attainment of lasting happiness.

Fifth, Ibn Bājījah warns that society can negatively influence individuals, especially when it is dominated by moral corruption, superstition, and uncontrolled desire. Such social conditions can weaken independent thinking and prevent individuals from achieving intellectual and moral perfection. For this reason, he advocates a form of intellectual and moral withdrawal, not as physical isolation, but as protecting one's reason and values from harmful social influences.

Sixth, Ibn Bājījah affirms that Allāh grants human beings innate capacities and gifts. Some of these are naturally present, while others must be cultivated through effort and divine guidance as conveyed by the Prophets. By following prophetic teachings, individuals develop inner insight that allows them to understand the nature of beings, their origins, and their ultimate purpose, thereby recognising Allāh as the One and incomparable Creator.

Seventh, Ibn Bājījah outlines three practices essential for attaining closeness to Allāh: consistent remembrance and glorification of Allāh through speech, aligning one's actions with the moral insight of the heart, and avoiding anything that distracts the heart from divine remembrance. He emphasises that these practices must be maintained continuously throughout one's life.

Eighth, Ibn Bājījah distinguishes between animal actions and genuinely human actions based on intention rather than outward behaviour. Actions driven purely by physical appetite, such as eating solely for pleasure, are considered animal actions. However, the same action becomes human when guided by rational intention, such as maintaining health in order to live ethically and fulfil one's responsibilities.

Ninth, what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is their capacity for rational thought, which serves as the basis of voluntary action. Actions guided by reason are described as *ikhtiyāriyyah* (volitional) actions. When actions are motivated by the pursuit of truth and guided by intellect, they approach a higher, more refined level of human conduct.

Tenth, Ibn Bājījah presents a comprehensive understanding of the human self through the concept of *al-nafs*, viewing it as an integrated whole that includes intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Through the proper development of these dimensions, human beings are perfected and become qualified to fulfil their role as *khalīfah* (vicegerent) on earth. A clear and well-developed intellect naturally seeks truth and recognises the oneness of Allāh, affirming that the ultimate purpose of human existence lies in worship and servitude to the Creator.

Finally, Ibn Bājījah emphasises the elevated status of human beings among created beings, attributing this distinction to the intellect as the source of moral responsibility and purposeful action. Human life, he argues, is animated through the interaction of multiple elements, with *al-nafs* at its core. The development of the soul is therefore a holistic process that must be understood systematically in order to cultivate a harmonious relationship between the created servant (*'abid*) and the Creator of the universe.

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