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TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



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Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
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THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIVES OF IBN AL-HAYTHAM AND IBN RIḌWĀN: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL WAY OF LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophical autobiography

While at first glance autobiography as a genre appears rather modern, a surprising number of autobiographical writings is found in the classical Arabic literature.¹ Many of these have been transmitted within the voluminous Arabic biographical literature and include a host of first-person accounts by philosophers and other practitioners of the sciences of Greek origin. They promise to provide an intimate glimpse into the lives of the philosophers during the first Islamic centuries, as conveyed in their own words. Yet often the autobiographies of learned men are disappointing in this respect. Rather than revealing much about the personal experience of the author, they are succinct and follow a schematic order of presentation. They are not the intimate confessions of a modern autobiography, and clearly the intention was not to portray the author's individual personality.

Nevertheless, it appears that many such autobiographies could be employed to investigate the idea of philosophy that prevailed in the early Islamic centuries. It is the purpose of this study to examine two such works, the autobiographies of the mathematician Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1039) and of the physician 'Alī Ibn Riḍwān (d. 1061 or 1068), from the viewpoint of the idea of the philosophical life.² To what extent does a philosophical autobiography reflect the idea of philosophy as

1 For an overview of the genre of Arabic autobiographical writing, see Rosenthal 1937 and, more recently, Reynolds 2001. Misch's (1949–1969) multivolume history of autobiography also includes a section on Arabic autobiography.

2 Both autobiographies are preserved in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, '*Uyūn al-anbā'*: 550–560 and 561–567, respectively.

a special way of life? When viewed from this perspective, these two autobiographies would seem to reflect two different ideals. Ibn al-Haytham's autobiography reflects the purely contemplative ideal of a scholarly life, whereas Ibn Riḍwān's *sīra* conveys an image of a physician-philosopher following the philosophical precepts of virtue in his daily life. Still, both authors appear to fit their autobiographies into a classical paradigm of philosophy, which involves a special way of living.

A typical scholarly "memoir" follows an order of presentation shared by the autobiographies of learned men in general, whether within the Islamic or Greek sciences. It purports to give a resumé of the author's intellectual history, including family background, date and place of birth, line of teachers, books studied, travels, encounters with scholars, and a bibliography of writings. This type of autobiography resembles a curriculum vitae in that it focuses on the external facts of the author's life rather than on his individual experience.³ The autobiographies are often transmitted as part of the biographical entry for an author in a biographical dictionary, but the transition from third to first person perspective does not necessarily add much personal flavor to the account.

Insofar as Arabic philosophical autobiography may be said to constitute a genre, the famous Christian physician and translator of Greek philosophy and science Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (d. 873) could be identified as its originator. He devised both a treatise enumerating his translations and a proper autobiographical account of his fall from grace with the caliph, owing to the scheming of his fellow Christian physicians.⁴ Ḥunayn was clearly influenced by the autobiographical writings of Galen (129–c.210 CE), of whom he was an eminent translator and to whose fate he explicitly compares his own.⁵ Galen was also an influence on many later writers, including Ibn al-Haytham and Ibn Riḍwān, both of whom repeatedly cite Galen as an authority in their autobiographies.

The most famous Arabic philosophical autobiography is undoubtedly that of Ibn Sīnā.⁶ Ibn Sīnā's *sīra* follows the general pattern of providing a skeleton

3 See Rosenthal 1937: 19 and Gutas 1988: 194–195 for the characterization of Arabic autobiography as a curriculum vitae. Reynolds (2001: 20 ff.), however, attacks Rosenthal and Misch's views that Arabic autobiography reflects a lack of "consciousness of the self". Admittedly, the genre is quite varied and includes lengthier and more personal accounts, but still the contrast to the modern idea of autobiography is notable.

4 For Ḥunayn's autobiography, see Rosenthal 1937: 5–7, 15–19; Cooperson 1997.

5 For the Galenic influence, see Rosenthal 1937: 5–7. The two autobiographical writings by Galen, *Peri tōn idiōn bibliōn* (*Kitāb binaks*) and *Peri tēs takseōs tōn idiōn bibliōn* (*Kitāb fī marātib qirā'at kutubihī*), were translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn himself.

6 Ibn Sīnā, *Sīrat al-shaykh al-ra'īs*. The text, with the complementing biography of his student al-Jūzjānī, has been transmitted by various biographers, including Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, collated by Gohlman into his edition and translation.

of information about his family origins, intellectual history, travels, encounters with scholars, and written works. It is, however, somewhat more eloquent and lengthier than a mere resumé of his scholarly history. Famously, Ibn Sīnā is quite unabashed in portraying his prodigious intellectual capacities during the progression of his studies, as in his well-known affirmation of having completed his philosophical learning by the time he was eighteen.⁷ His autobiography also colorfully depicts the plight of the scholar in the service of rulers, as he flees from one court to the next in response to rapidly changing political circumstances.⁸ Equally famous is al-Ghazālī's account of his personal spiritual discovery, *Deliverance from error (al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl)*.⁹ A few centuries later, one may mention the autobiography of the Peripatetic philosopher 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1231), whose *sīra* follows the familiar scheme of a progression of studies and scholarly output.¹⁰

Neither of the two autobiographies dealt with in this study was written by a philosopher proper. Rather Ibn al-Haytham was chiefly a mathematician and physicist, while Ibn Riḍwān was a physician. Both men, however, viewed their scholarly lives from a philosophical perspective, the first from that of the pursuit of theoretical perfection, and the second from the point of view of practical virtue. Both attest to Greek philosophers, Aristotle in particular, as being the authoritative source for their way of life. Neither man, however, has written an autobiography in the modern sense of attempting to portray the individual experience of the author's life. Rather, both appear to be attempts to demonstrate that their lives fit within a scholarly ideal which goes back to classical antecedents. The two autobiographies appear to reflect two different aspects of the classical paradigm. Ibn al-Haytham's autobiography attempts to fit his life into the paradigm of theoretical virtue, an Aristotelian contemplative life wholly devoted to the search for the truth. For Ibn Riḍwān, the virtuous physician is one who, besides fulfilling the characteristics related specifically to the discipline of medicine, practices a virtuous way of living governed by philosophical principles.

Philosophical life

In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously distinguishes among three major ways of life that man can choose to lead: a life of pleasure

7 Ibn Sīnā, *Sīra*: 36–38.

8 Gutas (1988: 196–197) sees a parallel in the outline of Ibn Sīnā's life and the biographies of Aristotle, adopted to Arabic tradition from Ptolemy and the late antique Alexandrian circles.

9 al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*.

10 For a recent survey of al-Baghdādī's autobiography, see Gutas 2011.

(*bēdonē*), a political life (*bios politikos*), and a contemplative life (*bios theōrētikos*).¹¹ Each is based on a different perception of what the highest human good or happiness consists. While for the majority of mankind the highest good is pleasure, the more refined identify the highest human end with honour (*timē*) and an active life in politics. In the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, Aristotle argues for the superiority of the contemplative life over the active life and identifies the highest form of happiness with theoretical activity.¹²

The idea that philosophy in the classical world was first and foremost a way of life has been emphasized in particular by Pierre Hadot.¹³ For Hadot, the classical idea of philosophy does not revolve around an abstract set of theoretical doctrines that bear no relation to the philosopher's living. Rather, as the goal of philosophy a transcendent ideal of theoretical and spiritual perfection emerges. Even theoretical philosophy is what Hadot calls a theoretical praxis,¹⁴ as in Aristotle's contemplative life, which will lead the philosopher to the highest form of contemplative happiness. Beyond this, the classical ideal of philosophy emerges as a way of life in the further sense of a practical way of life that follows a certain ethical ideal of conduct. While Aristotle does seem to subjugate practical virtue to the ultimate contemplative end, even for Aristotle, the good life also involves moral virtue.¹⁵ In the Neoplatonic schools of philosophy, the Aristotelian ideal of the contemplative life was merged with ascetic practices aiming for a return to the true spiritual self through the detachment of the higher soul from its bodily entanglements.¹⁶

It is clear that the Arabic philosophical tradition perceives philosophy as a way of life at least in the sense of a life devoted to contemplation, as the *falāsifa* adopt an essentially Aristotelian ideal of happiness (*eudaimonia/sa'āda*) identified with theoretical perfection. But to what degree does philosophy in the Islamic world also emerge as an ethically defined mode of conduct? Drawing from both Aristotle and the Greek Neoplatonists, the Arabic philosophers appear at least to have adopted an ideal in which philosophy is fully realized through both knowledge and action. This ideal is exemplified in many Arabic definitions of philosophy, drawn from the Neoplatonic tradition, where philosophy is defined as the pursuit of both knowledge and virtue. It is also clearly manifest in Abū

11 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*: 1095b17–19.

12 For the somewhat ambiguous relationship between the theoretical and the practical life in the whole of the *Nicomachean Ethics* see, for example, Nagel 1972.

13 Hadot 1995: 2002.

14 Hadot 2002: 81.

15 Life according to moral virtue (*ho kata tēn allēn aretēn*) is declared to be happy in a secondary sense (*deuterōs*) (1178a9), but is still necessary, since human beings cannot restrict themselves only to the divine activity of contemplation.

16 Hadot 2002: 158–160.

Bakr al-Rāzī's treatise *Book of the philosophical life* (*Kitāb al-sīra al-falsafiyya*), which is one of the few treatises explicitly delineating the practical guidelines for the philosophical life. The treatise is itself cast in an autobiographical form in the sense that the author attempts to prove that his own life falls within the boundaries of a philosophically defined way of living with respect to both its theoretical and practical aspects.

IBN AL-HAYTHAM

Ibn al-Haytham was a prominent scholar of mathematics and physics who became famous in the West as Alhazen, particularly for his contributions to the development of optical theory. Like many of his contemporaries, he was a polymath and devised treatises on medicine and philosophical subjects as well. Perhaps naturally for a scholar with such empirical inclinations, Ibn al-Haytham's autobiography presents his life as completely devoted to the pursuit of truth. While the autobiography itself makes no effort to emphasize his practical virtue, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a introduces the biographical entry with a description of his character as an embodiment of both the theoretical and practical aspects of an ideal philosopher: "He was of a virtuous soul, strong intellect, and versatile in sciences. None of his contemporaries equalled him in mathematical knowledge, or even came close. He was constantly devoted to study, prolific in writing, advanced in asceticism, and loving of the good."¹⁷ Although Ibn al-Haytham entered administrative service in Iraq during his youth, his soul was always inclined towards "the virtues and wisdom" (*al-faḍā'il wa-l-ḥikma*). Hence, he had to feign insanity in order to rid himself of his ministerial post, and the related distractions (*shawāghil*) that prevented him from devoting his time completely to theoretical activity.¹⁸

In the autobiography proper, Ibn al-Haytham presents his philosophical endeavors above all as the choice of a contemplative way of life set against the earthly concerns of the majority of mankind. He places himself in the company of Galen whom he paraphrases:

My state was like that mentioned by Galen in the seventh chapter of his *On the method of healing* (*Methodos therapeutikē*), where he is addressing a student:
I do not know why I came to be like this ever since childhood, whether

17 "Wa-kāna faḍīl al-nafs qawiyy al-dhakā' mutafanninan fī al-'ulūm. Lam yumāthilhu aḥad min ahl zamānihi fī al-'ilm al-riyāḍī wa-lā yaqrub minhu. Wa-kāna dā'im al-ishtighāl, kathīr al-taṣnīf, wāfir al-tazahhud, muḥibban li-l-khayr." *Uyūn*: 550.

18 *Uyūn*: 550–551. Once he had emigrated to Egypt, the story of feigning insanity in order to be liberated from the service of the ruler, this time the famously capricious Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim, is repeated in the biography.

because of a strange co-incident, divine inspiration, insanity, or some other cause, but I always thought little of the common people, and paid no attention to them, while I desired the love of truth and search for knowledge. I became convinced that people cannot attain within this world anything better or more proximate to God than these two things.¹⁹

Furthermore, Ibn al-Haytham presents the beginning of his intellectual development in terms reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's later spiritual autobiography. As for al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-Haytham's impetus to follow the quest for the truth lies in the skepticism aroused by the multiplicity of beliefs and sects around him:

Ever since childhood I was filled with doubts about these various beliefs held by people and the way each sect among them would hold fast to the doctrine that they believed in. I was doubtful of all of them, convinced that the truth is one, and that the difference of opinions concerning the truth is due to the different ways to it. When I became mature enough to understand intellectual things, I devoted myself to the search for the source of truth and directed my desire and thought to understanding that by which the distorted beliefs are removed and the abysses of the tormented skeptic are driven away.²⁰

Accordingly, Ibn al-Haytham says that he plunged into an investigation of the variety of doctrines and religious sciences, without finding a cure for his doubts in any of them. But whereas al-Ghazālī's skepticism was not cured by philosophy either, Ibn al-Haytham discovered a certain foundation for his beliefs in the Aristotelian curriculum of philosophical sciences: "I realized that I could only arrive at the truth from doctrines whose origin is in sensible things and whose form is in intellectual things. I did not find this anywhere else except in the logical, physical, and metaphysical sciences that were established by Aristotle."²¹

19 "Fa-kuntu kamā qāla jālīnūs fī al-maqāla al-sābi'a min kitābihi fī ḥīlat al-bur' yukhāṭib talmīdhahu: lastu a'lam kayfa tahayya'a li mundhu ṣībā'i, in shi'ta qulta b-ittifāq 'ajīb, wa-in shi'ta qulta b-ilhām min Allāh, wa-in shi'ta qulta bi-l-junūn, aw kayfa shi'ta an tunsab dhālika, innī izdaraytu 'awāmm al-nās w-istakhfaftu bihim wa-lam altafit ilayhim, w-ishtahaytu ithār al-ḥaqq wa-ṭalab al-'ilm, w-istaqarra 'indī annahu laysa yanāl al-nās min al-dunyā ashyā' ajwad wa-lā ashadd qurba ilā Allāh min hādhayn al-amrayn." *Uyūn*: 552.

20 "Innī lam azal mundhu 'ahd al-ṣībā murtāban fī i'tiqādāt hādhihi al-nās al-mukhtalifa wa-tamassuk kull firqa minhum bi-mā ta'taqiduhu min al-ra'y, fa-kuntu mutashakkikan fī jam'ihi mūqinan bi-anna al-ḥaqq wāḥid wa-anna al-ikhtilāf fihi innamā huwa min jihat al-sulūk ilayhi. Falammā kamaltu li-idrāk al-umūr al-'aqliyya inqāṭa'tu ilā ṭalab ma'din al-ḥaqq wa-wajjahtu raghbati wa-ḥadsī li-idrāk mā bihi tankashif tamwīhāt al-zunūn wa-tanqashi' ghayābāt al-mutashakkik al-maftūn." *Uyūn*: 552.

21 "Fa-ra'aytu annanī lā aṣīl ilā al-ḥaqq illā min ārā' yakūn 'unshuruhā al-umūr al-ḥissiyya wa-ṣūratuhā al-umūr al-'aqliyya. Fa-lam ajid dhālika illā fimā qarrarahu Aristūṭālīs min 'ulūm al-manṭiq wa-l-ṭab'iyyāt wa-l-ilāhiyyāt." *Uyūn*: 552.

Ibn al-Haytham goes on to give a fairly detailed account of his study of the Aristotelian curriculum of theoretical philosophy, proceeding through the principal parts (*uṣūl*) and doctrines of logic, physics, and metaphysics. After mastering the three philosophical sciences and their derivatives (*furū'*) he claims to have become aware of the frailty of human nature. Because the human intellect is subject to corruption through aging, he deemed it necessary to set down his knowledge of the rational sciences in writing. In the end, Ibn al-Haytham states, once again paraphrasing Galen, that his productive activity serves three purposes: to benefit others who, like him, are searching for the truth, to serve as an intellectual exercise (*riyāḍa*) for himself while writing, and to serve as a safeguard for his old age and the inevitable decay of his intellectual capabilities.²²

Like many of the philosophical autobiographies, Ibn al-Haytham then provides a detailed bibliography of his writings, thus bringing to an end the account of his intellectual development from his youthful skepticism, through the studies of Aristotelian philosophy, up to the activities of a mature scholar. The purpose of this kind of autobiography appears to be above all to prove the author's position among learned men, which Ibn al-Haytham also gives as a motive for including a bibliography of his writings: "I set forth what I have written on the three principle sciences so that from it one can come to know the degree of my concern with the search for truth and my desire to understand it. Through it, the truth of what I said about my soul abstaining from similitude with the common people and the foolish masses and ascending to likeness with the good and pious friends of God may be ascertained."²³ At the end of the *sīra*, Ibn al-Haytham also claims that his works have served a similar purpose. They are not for the education of the ignorant, but are "to be understood by the quick-witted and virtuous people, so that they would come to know my standing within these sciences and become convinced of my degree in the love of the truth."²⁴

Ibn al-Haytham's autobiography, thus, offers a view of the philosophical life akin to Aristotle's contemplative life wherein theoretical activities supersede all others. Moreover, his *sīra* portrays the contemplative life as being manifested in the Aristotelian curriculum of philosophy, despite the fact that Ibn al-Haytham

22 'Uyūn: 553–554.

23 "Wa-anā ashraḥ mā ṣana'tuhu fī al-uṣūl al-thalātha li-yūqaf minhu 'alā mawḍi' 'ināyatī bi-ṭalab al-ḥaqq wa-ḥirṣī 'alā idrākīhi, wa-tu'lam ḥaqīqat mā dhakartuhu min 'uzūf nafsī 'an mumāthalat al-'awāmm al-ra'ā' al-aghbiyā' wa-sumuwihā ilā mushābahat awliyā' Allāh al-akhyār al-atqiyā'." 'Uyūn: 554.

24 "Lākin huwa bi-an yudrikahu al-fahīm al-fāḍil minhum li-ya'rifū rutbatī fī hādhihi al-'ulūm wa-yataḥaqqaqū manzilatī min ithār al-ḥaqq." 'Uyūn: 558.

himself was primarily a mathematician and physicist. Any mention of the practical-moral aspect as forming part of the philosopher's quest for truth is also notably absent. Surprisingly, Ibn al-Haytham does not even include practical philosophy within the principal parts of philosophy, even though ethics and political philosophy would naturally follow upon metaphysics within the standard Aristotelian curriculum of sciences. Nor does he mention ethics as being included in his own studies, and even less so the Islamic religious sciences, which he declares to be of no use for the pursuit of truth.²⁵

Even though Ibn al-Haytham seems to view philosophy as a purely theoretical enterprise, he does accord an ethical-religious *end* to theoretical philosophy: "The fruit of these sciences is knowledge of the truth and action according to justice in earthly affairs. For justice is the pure good through which man defeats the weariness of the earthly world and attains the bliss of the hereafter. Thus, he will receive as a substitute for the hardships that he has encountered during his finite stay in the worldly sphere an eternal life in bliss in the otherworldly sphere."²⁶ Thus, while Ibn al-Haytham, following topical Arabic definitions of philosophy as the pursuit of true knowledge and correct action, also perceives an ethical goal for the practice of philosophy, the goal appears to follow naturally from the three theoretical parts of philosophy.

IBN RIḌWĀN

Although Ibn Riḍwān was a physician, not a philosopher, for him, as for all physicians in the period, the two disciplines were interrelated.²⁷ Like philosophy, medicine pertained to the rational sciences of primarily Greek origin and as such was intimately connected to philosophy. Many of the most famous philosophers were practicing physicians, and all physicians would include philosophy within their study curriculum.²⁸ In the depiction of his everyday life in his autobiography, both Rosenthal and Reisman see Ibn Riḍwān as conforming to the clas-

²⁵ *Uyūn*: 552.

²⁶ "Fa-inna thamarat hādhihi al-'ulūm huwa 'ilm al-ḥaqq wa-l-'amal bi-l-'adl fī jamī' al-umūr al-dunyawiyya. Wa-l-'adl huwa maḥḍ al-khayr alladhī yaf'alahū yafūz ayn al-'ālam al-arḍī wa-bi-na'im al-ākhirā al-samāwī wa-yu'tāḍ 'an šu'ūbat mā yalqāhu bi-dhālika muddat al-baqā' al-munqaṭī' fī dār al-dunyā dawām al-ḥayāt mun'imān fī al-dār al-ukhrā." *Uyūn*: 558.

²⁷ For Ibn Riḍwān and his works, see Meyerhof & Schacht 1937, which includes editions and translations of his biographies, Dols 1984; Reisman 2009; 2012.

²⁸ In his classification of the theoretical sciences, *Aqsām al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*: 110, Ibn Sīnā, the most eminent of the physician-philosophers, places medicine within the applied (*far'iyya*) parts of physics.

sical ideals of a virtuous physician.²⁹ He draws from Galen and the Hippocratic corpus in particular, the two authors whom he identifies as the main sources for a physician's education. But Ibn Riḍwān also builds on the philosophical ideals of the good life. As noted by Reisman, within the physician's ethical education, the medical corpus was incorporated into the philosophical texts, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and some Neo-Pythagorean treatises.³⁰ Galen himself, of course, was a major philosophical influence for the emerging Arabic tradition, in particular as a mediator of Platonism, and often in ethical contexts. Galen's own view of the relationship between medicine and philosophy is reflected in the treatise entitled *That the best physician is also a philosopher* (*Hoti ho aristos iatros kai filosofos/Kitāb fī anna al-ṭabīb al-fāḍil faylasūf*).³¹ But besides Galen, Ibn Riḍwān seems to have been inspired by various other philosophical authorities in his ethical ideals.

At the end of his autobiography Ibn Riḍwān himself provides the contents of the rather concise curriculum of authorities that he is following: "as for the rest, I either sell them for any price I can get or store them in chests, although selling is better than storing."³² These include the standard medical authorities Galen and Hippocrates, as well as other ancient authorities on astronomy, agriculture, and pharmacology. More interestingly for his ethical ideals, however, he lists Plato, Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and al-Fārābī as his philosophical sources. Given that Ibn Riḍwān also mentions al-Rāzī's medical encyclopedia, *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī al-ṭibb*, as a medical authority, the possibility arises of the *Book of the philosophical life* also being an influence on his autobiography, especially taking into account the similarities between the two texts. Finally, besides the rational sciences, Ibn Riḍwān states that he has followed five books of *adab* and ten books on religious law (*sharʿ*) by unknown authors, thereby inserting an Arabic-Islamic element into his philosophical ethics.

The philosophical context of Ibn Riḍwān's autobiography can also be gauged from his other works. In particular, *On seeking the way to happiness through medicine* (*Fī al-ṭaṭarruq bi-l-ṭibb ilā al-sa'āda*), a short treatise depicting the ethical ideals of a physician, provides theoretical background for the concrete practice that appears in the autobiography. In the treatise, Ibn Riḍwān subscribes to the Aristotelian ideal of the contemplative life:

29 Rosenthal 1937: 22–24; Reisman 2009: 562–563.

30 Reisman 2012: 26–27.

31 See, for example, Mattock 1972 for the Galenic treatise on virtue preserved in Arabic and Fichtner 1989 for the bibliography of Galenic works and their Arabic translations.

32 "Wa-mā siwā dhālika immā abī'uhu bi-ayy thaman ittafaqa wa-immā an akhzunahu fī ṣanāḍiq, wa-bay'uhu ajwad min khaznihi." 'Uyūn: 562.

Aristotle has shown that happiness is life according to reason and that the good and pleasant life is life accompanied by reason. For no one can go through life with his reason being like that of children, as it pertains to the reason of children to seek the animal pleasures. Aristotle also showed in the *Metaphysics* that enjoyment of pleasures and fulfilment of desires through them consists of pleasurable sensations, and he who attains a greater share of these is delighted more through attainment of them. Therefore, the more one perceives the magnificent things, the greater the happiness and more intense the pleasure.³³

Like the *falāsifa*, Ibn Riḍwān identifies the highest form of happiness with intellectual activity, drawing on the familiar argument within Arabic Aristotelianism that the most intense pleasure is yielded by the best perception of the highest objects of perception.³⁴ Ibn Riḍwān's idea of human happiness is not only contemplative, however, but also involves the practice of virtue. In a further passage, he identifies happiness and pleasure with the practice of philosophy in a way that involves both knowledge and virtue as its constituent parts: "The best perceptions, and the most trustworthy in certainty and truth, are the philosophical perceptions by which I mean the reflection in wisdom and practice of justice, generosity, and temperance in the spending of wealth for human happiness in accordance with certainty and truth consists of practicing philosophy in knowledge and practice."³⁵ Interestingly, for Ibn Riḍwān a physician is best qualified to lead his life in accordance with these philosophical ideals, because "he spends part of his day in the bodily exercise occupied with the activities of the physician, while he spends the rest of his day

33 "Wa-qaḍ bayyana Aristūṭālīs anna al-sa'āda hiya al-ḥayāt bi-l-'aql, wa-anna al-'umr al-ṭabīb al-ladhīdh huwa al-'umr ma'a al-'aql, idh laysa aḥad yajtāz al-ḥayāt wa-'aqluhu 'aql ṣabī wa-min 'uqūl al-ṣibyān iltimās al-shahawāt al-bahīmiyya, wa-bayyana ayḍan fimā ba'da al-ṭabī'a anna al-tamattu' bi-l-shahawāt wa-bulūgh al-amānī minhā innamā hiya idrākāt mulidhdha, wa-man kāna ḥazzuhu min hādhihi al-idrākāt al-mulidhdha akthar kāna maghbūṭan bi-mā nālahu akthar, wa-li-dhālika yakūn anna man kāna akthar idrākan li-l-umūr al-'azīma fa-huwa awfar sa'āda wa-akthar ḥazzan." Ibn Riḍwān, *Fi al-taṭarruq bi-l-ṭibb ilā al-sa'āda*: 37.

34 For Aristotle's identification of contemplative activity with the most pleasant and divine of human activities, see *Nicomachean Ethics* (X, 1077a13 ff.) and *Metaphysics* (XII, 7). Among Ibn Riḍwān's predecessors, the Aristotelian idea of contemplation as the most pleasant activity was adopted, among others, by al-Fārābī (*Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*: 61) and Ibn Sīnā (*Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt*: 348 ff.), as an argument for the contemplative view of happiness. For all of them, at bottom lies a similar, albeit un-Aristotelian, definition of pleasure by means of perception, whereby intellectual activity produces the most intense pleasure, since both the act of perception and its object are more perfect than the ones involved in sense perception.

35 "Wa-afḍal al-idrākāt wa-awthaquhā yaqīnan wa-ṣiḥḥa hiya al-idrākāt al-falsafiyya a'nī al-naẓar fī al-ḥikma wa-isti'māl al-'adl wa-l-sakhā' wa-l-'iffa fī nafaqāt al-māl, wa-idhan al-sa'āda al-insāniyya 'alā al-yaqīn wa-l-ṣiḥḥa hiya al-tafalsuf 'ilman wa-'amalan." *Al-Taṭarruq*: 39.

occupied with virtuous actions and contemplation of the heavenly and earthly realm, and in the service of God and obedience of reason.”³⁶

Ibn Riḍwān’s short autobiography consists of two parts. The first follows the standard pattern of a scholarly biography in that it lists the course of his studies and career from earliest youth until the time of writing. In the beginning of his *sīra*, Ibn Riḍwān says that he was destined for the career of physician by temperament, which in turn was determined by the astrological constellations prevailing at his birth, as well as his preference for a life of virtue:

Every man should adopt that profession which is the most suitable and agreeable to him. Now, the medical art comes next to philosophy in obedience to God, and the astrological omens at my birth indicated that medicine should be my profession. Moreover, a life of virtue appeared more pleasurable to me than any other kind of life.³⁷

Hence, after having completed his fourteenth year, he began his “studies of medicine and philosophy”. These were, however, hampered by financial difficulties until he finally established his professional reputation at the age of thirty-two.³⁸

While the beginning of Ibn Riḍwān’s *sīra* follows the standard curriculum vitae format of an Arabic biography, Ibn Riḍwān then proceeds to describe his way of living, going into the mundane activities of everyday life. All this appears to be an attempt to portray his lifestyle as befitting the ideals of the philosophical life to which he subscribed in the treatise *On seeking the way to happiness through medicine*. In his daily life, and particularly financial transactions, Ibn Riḍwān thus depicts himself as following the Aristotelian ideal of moderation, leading a life which is neither overly ascetic nor excessively indulgent:

I practice my profession every day to the degree that is adequate and provides exercise that preserves the health of the body; I eat a meal after a rest following exercise with the purpose of preserving my health. In the manner of my conduct, I strive to be humble, affable, help the anxious, dispel the worries of

36 “Wa-aqdar al-nās ‘alā dhālika al-ṭabīb idhā ṣarafa ba‘ḍ yawmihi fī riyaḍat badanihi fī a‘māl al-ṭibb wa-ṣarafa bāqī yawmihi fī al-‘amal al-ṣāliḥ wa-l-fikr fī malakūt al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ wa-‘abada Allāh wa-aṭā‘a al-‘aql.” *Al-Taṭarruq*: 39.

37 “Innahu lammā kāna yanbaghī li-kull insān an yantaḥil alyaq al-sānā‘i‘ bihi wa-awfaḡahā lahu wa-kānat ṣinā‘at al-ṭibb tutākhim al-falsafa ṭā‘at Allāh ‘azza wa-jalla wa-kānat dalālāt al-nujūm fī mawlidī tadull ‘alā anna ṣinā‘atī al-ṭibb. Wa-kāna al-‘aysh ‘indī fī al-faḡīla aladhdh min kull ‘aysh.” *Uyūn*: 561.

38 This may be compared with the prodigious success of his more famous older contemporary Ibn Sīnā, whose autobiography proceeds from one extraordinary success to another, in medicine as well as in the philosophical sciences.

the distressed, and help the needy. I make it my aim in all this to take pleasure in good deeds and sentiments. Along with this necessarily comes wealth, too, which can be spent, and I use it on the health of my body and the maintenance of my household in a way that amounts to being neither wasteful nor miserly, but adheres to the mediate state in accordance with the judgments of reasoning at each time. I review the utensils of my house and repair what needs repairing, replace what needs to be replaced, provide in my house the necessities of food, drink, honey, oil, and firewood, and the necessary clothing. What remains after all this I spend on good and useful purposes, such as gifts for the family, brethren, and neighbors, and the maintenance of my household.³⁹

Ibn Riḍwān's portrayal of his daily life resembles the guidelines provided by the earlier physician-philosopher al-Rāzī for the ideal philosopher, who should live a life between complete indulgence in pleasures and an unnecessarily harsh asceticism. As for al-Rāzī, the requirements of a philosophical life are rather lenient, roughly corresponding to the Aristotelian ideal of moderation. Interestingly, Ibn Riḍwān is mostly concerned with attesting that he spends his wealth in moderation, that is, neither with lavishness nor stinginess, to which he also related the practice of moderation in the treatise *Approaching happiness*. That Ibn Riḍwān in the managing of his daily life consciously followed the counsel of the Greek philosophers is clear from his statement: "I reflect on (pseudo-)Aristotle's treatise *On Economics* and try to follow its precepts constantly from morning to evening."⁴⁰

Besides adhering to virtue and moderation in his daily affairs, Ibn Riḍwān professes to live up to the philosophical demands for the regulation of the passions: "I beware conceit and love of power, discard greedy desires and worries, and when adversity befalls me, I submit myself to God and accept it in accordance with what is required by reasoning with neither cowardice nor recklessness."⁴¹ Moreover,

39 "Ataşarrāf fī kull yawm fī şinā'atī bi-miqdār mā yughnī wa-min al-riyāda allatī taḥfaz şihḥat al-badan wa-aghtadhī ba'd al-istirāḥa min al-riyāda ghidhā' aqşid bihi ḥifz al-şihḥa wa-ajtahid fī ḥāl taşarrufī fī al-tawādu' wa-l-mudārāt wa-ghayāth al-malhūf wa-kashf kurbat al-makrūb wa-is'āf al-muḥtāj. Wa-aj'al qaşđī fī kull dhālika al-iltidhādḥ bi-l-af'al wa'l-infi'ālāt al-jamīla. Wa-lā budd an yaḥşul ma'a dhālika kasb mā yunfaq fa-unfiq minhu 'alā şihḥat badanī wa-'imārat manzilī nafaqa lā tabluḡ al-tabdḥir wa-tanḥaṭṭ ilā al-taqṭir wa-talzam al-ḥāl al-wuṣṭā bi-qadr mā yūjibuhu al-ta'aqqul fī kull waqt. Wa-atafaqqad ālāt manzilī fa-mā yaḥtāj ilā işlāḥ aşlaḥtuḥu wa-mā yaḥtāj ilā badl badaltuḥu wa-u'idd fī manzilī mā yaḥtāj ilayhi min al-ṭa'am wa-l-şarāb wa-l-'asal wa-l-zayt wa-l-ḥaṭab wa-mā yuḥtāj ilayhi min al-thiyāb fa-mā faḍala ba'd dhālika kullihī şarāftuḥu fī wujūḥ al-jamīl wa-l-nāfi' mithla i'tā' al-ahl wa-l-ikhwān wa-l-jirān wa-'imārat al-manzil." *'Uyūn*: 561–562.

40 "Wa-atadabbar maqālat Aristūṭālīs fī al-tadbīr wa-ākhudḥ nafsī bi-luzūm waşāyāḥā bi-l-ghada wa-l-'aşı." *'Uyūn*: 562.

41 "Fa-aḥdhur al-'ujb wa-ḥubb al-ghalaba wa-aṭraḥ al-hamm al-ḥirşī wa-l-ighṭimām wa-in dahamanī amr fādiḥ aslamtu fihī ilā Allāḥ ta'ālā wa-qābaltuḥu bimā yūjibuhu al-ta'aqqul min ghayr jubn wa-lā tahawwur." *'Uyūn*: 562.

at the end of each day, Ibn Riḍwān practices retrospection, reminiscent of the practices of various philosophical schools in antiquity, with regard to both his actions and passions in order to improve his conduct: “When I am alone, I inspect the actions and sentiments of the just past day; I delight on what was good and beneficial, and grieve for what was bad and harmful, and resolve not to repeat it.”⁴²

CONCLUSIONS

The two autobiographies examined in this study appear to share a common purpose in that the authors of both present their lives in a way that corresponds to an ideal of the philosophical life going back to antiquity. The two accounts, however, represent two different perspectives on what constitutes a philosophical way of living. Ibn al-Haytham’s autobiography portrays the scholarly life as a purely theoretical activity, even excluding practical philosophy from the study curriculum altogether. Philosophy emerges as a special way of life devoted to the search for truth, which he contrasts with the common way of life led by most people. Although Ibn al-Haytham also appoints an ethical end for the practice of philosophy, he makes no effort to show that his own life was particularly virtuous. In this respect, his autobiography somewhat resembles that of Ibn Sīnā, whose autobiography also paints an image of a philosopher completely devoted to scholarly activity, but makes no effort to present its author as a paradigm of virtue.

Ibn Riḍwān’s autobiography, on the other hand, portrays a wholly different picture of the scholarly life, rather resembling the practical guidelines for the philosophical life outlined by al-Rāzī. Like al-Rāzī, Ibn Riḍwān discusses the conduct of his personal life in very concrete terms, set against the background of an Aristotelian ideal of moderation, as if attempting to demonstrate that his daily conduct is that of a scholar following the philosophical ideals of living. The difference in emphasis between the two autobiographies could reflect the fact that Ibn al-Haytham was first and foremost a mathematician and optician, that is, an empirical scientist, whereas Ibn Riḍwān was a practicing physician. But the two autobiographies could also be seen as reflections of two different sides of the ideal of philosophical way of life in the Islamic world.

42 “Wa-atafaqqad fī waqt khalwatī mā salafa fī yawmī min af’ālī wa-infi’ālī fa-mā kāna khayran aw jamīlan aw nāfi’an surirtu bihi, wa-mā kāna sharran aw qabīḥan aw ḍarran ightamamtu bihi wa-wāfaqtu nafsī bi-an lā a’ūd ilā mithlihi.” *Uyūn*: 562. See Hadot 2002: 198 ff. for the practices of self-vigilance among the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Neoplatonists, and, in particular, with Galen, who could well be Ibn Riḍwān’s inspiration here. In *On the diagnosis and treatment of the passions proper to each person’s soul (Peri diagnōseōs kai therapeias tōn en tē hekastou psukhē idiōn pathōn/Maqāla fī ta’arruf al-insān ‘uyūb nafsīhi)*, Galen recommends the examination of oneself morning and evening.

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