

**Hamed Najj**  
(*Isfahan University, Iran*)

**IBN KAMMŪNA:  
A JEWISH PHILOSOPHER  
IN THE SCHOOL OF ILLUMINATION**

The development of thought and contemplation throughout the human history has always abounded with numerous ups and downs, the recognition of which depends on the reconsideration of historical, social and political events. It is quite certain that the evolution in political and social systems has played a part in booming or slumping the trends in thought and knowledge. In the Islamic world, political events such as the substitution of the Abbasid dynasty for the Omayyad rule and later the collapse of the Abbasids' long-term rule, the overthrow of the Gurkhanian reign and other political upheavals were influential turning-points in Islamic thought. Meanwhile, the downfall of the Abbasids' autocratic reign and the dominance of the Buddhist Mongolian rulers over the Islamic world made an appropriate background for new thoughts to appear. Additionally, the scientific authority of Khāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and the profound knowledge of Allāma Ḥillī caused the foundations of Shi' thought to become stronger than ever. Also, considering the fact that the Mongolian rulers did not believe in Islam, they paved the way for other beliefs and religions to emerge.

One of the thinkers who took advantage of this open situation and presented his opinions was Ibn Kammūna. Following the compilation of the book *Tanqīh al-Abḥāth*, in which he tried to prove the legitimacy of Judaism, he lost his social honour in Muslim community and became a figure famous for his critical opinions of Islamic thoughts. His name accompanied his famous book throughout the history of Islamic thought. Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, one of his contemporaries, after narrating the story about people's riot against him says:

فامر الشحنة بالنداء في بغداد بالمباكرة في غد إلى ظاهر السور لإحراق ابن كمّونة، فسكن  
العوام، ولم يتجدد بعد ذلك له ذكر. واما ابن كمّونة فانه وضع في صندوق مجلّد وحمل  
إلى حلة وكان ولده كاتباً بها فأقام أياماً وتوفى هناك.

“The police invited the residents of Baghdad to gather early next morning outside the city walls in order to burn Ibn Kammūna and after that the mob was appeased. No one mentioned him again. Ibn Kammūna immigrated to

the city of Ḥilla carrying a copy of his book with him while his son served him as his secretary. He lived there for a while and passed away there.”

For this reason, some of the scholars of his period wrote the very same opinions of his in their books in order to maintain them from being ruined. Some of them even dishonestly plagiarized his writings. Philosophers like Mullā Jalāl al-Dīn Dawwānī from the school of Shiraz and Mīr Dāmād and Mīr Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī ‘Āmilī from the school of Isfahan have referred to his works.

There are two or three points worth mentioning here

1) All the works by Ibn Kammūna, except for *Tanqīh al-Abḥāth* and his treatise regarding the differences between Rabbinites and Qaraites, can be counted as the philosophical links in the chain of Islamic thoughts. The importance of his works and thoughts becomes more obvious when we notice the fact that great philosophers such as Shahrazūrī in *al-Shajarah al-Ilāhiyah* and Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī in *Durrat al-Tāj* have paid special attention to the concepts obtained from Ibn Kammūna’s opinions.

2) The works written by other Jewish philosophers are greatly influenced by Mu’tazilism or Neo-Platonism, for instance the book called *Jāmi’*, written by Yūsuf Baṣīr is under the influence of Mu’tazilite thought or Ibn Gabirol’s book called “The Fountain of Life” is influenced by Neo-Platonists’ views. On the contrary, Ibn Kammūna’s books are under the influence of Avicenna’s notions that are sometimes blended with Illuminate (*ishrāqī*) implications, as he was also familiar with the works of Shaykh al-Isḥrāq. Thus, his ideas are sometimes unsteady and accompanied by some sort of creativity but surely his works are devoid of the originality found in Abū Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s work, named *al-Mu’tabar*, also they are not similar to the works by such Jewish philosophers as Mūsā b. ‘Azra (Moses Ibn Ezra) and Ibn Maymūn (Moses Maimonides), whose books are regarded as very influential in the history of Jewish thought. Ibn Kammūna’s works, by contrast, are merely new versions of Avicenna’s thoughts.

3) Unfortunately, due to the fact that the philosophical books written in the period between Avicenna and Khāja Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī have not received considerable attention of scholars and publishers and, as a result, the works of this period have not been printed nor deeply analyzed, it is not easy to recognize the major trends of this era and the direction of the course through which thoughts and notions were moving. It is expected that, by taking efficient scientific steps, the future researchers will provide a clearer image of the originality of thoughts presented by the thinkers of this period and demonstrate the sources and works from which Ibn Kammūna’s thoughts stem.

In what follows, we’ll briefly review Ibn Kammūna’s biography and works and then make a few remarks concerning *al-Kāshif*.

‘Izz al-Dawla Abū Riḍā S‘ad Ibn Najm al-Dawla Maṣṣūr Ibn S‘ad Ibn Ḥasan Ibn Hibat Allāh Ibn Kammūna al-Isrā’īlī al-Baghdādī, who is well-known as Ibn

Kammūna, was one of the thinkers of the thirteenth century. He was born in a Jewish family in Baghdad and soon, due to the exigencies of his period, started to study the common sciences of his time. Following the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad in 656/1258, when the Mongols took power in Islamic world, the Jews managed to take important government positions and it was during this time that Ibn Kammūna and his son were given some significant official posts. Among the biographical books there is only very brief mention of him in the book *al-Hawādith al-Jāmi'a wa Talkhīs Majma' al-Ādāb fī Mu'jam Al-Alqāb* written by Ibn al-Fuwaṭī.

There are about 30 works created by Ibn Kammūna, among which *al-Kāshif* is the biggest and the most significant and his commentary on Suhrawardī's *al-Talwīhāt* is the most sophisticated and complex. Having a position compatible with Suhrawardī's, in his commentary on *al-Talwīhāt* he attempts to illustrate the principles of Illuminate philosophy, while in *al-Kāshif*, which was written 9 years later, he demonstrates his own opinions in an independent manner.

*Al-Kāshif* includes the following three sections: logic, natural sciences and metaphysics. The materials presented in these sections in some parts lack logical coherence, though. Yet it is one of the most significant and valuable philosophical works originated after some of the popular Peripatetic works, such as *al-Shifā'*, *al-Taḥṣīl*, *Bayān al-Haqq*, and Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*. As a very brief and summarized review we can count the following defects and weaknesses in *al-Kāshif*:

1) The arrangement of the materials in logic sometimes suffers a sort of rational confusion and requires additional issues to be included before or after some entries so that the presentation of the materials might receive a smooth and logical order. For instance:

- The discussion of *imperfect boundary* should not be given after the discussion of *essential boundary* and *conceptual boundary*.

- His presentation of the issues like *The One, the perfect and the imperfect* within the discussion of *contradiction* and concluding that the two concepts of *oneness* and *plurality* are not *opposite*, is not appropriate.

- His presentation of the divisions of *opposition* does not follow a logical coherence.

- His discussion of the issues of *joy* and *pain* does not have a logical methodology.

- His presentation of this issue that “*it is unlikely to consider two necessary existents under one species*” is not located in a proper position.

- His discussion of *Alive* as one the attributes of Allah has been preceded.

- His diction while expressing some issues especially without giving an introduction is immature. For instance, his discussion of time and place.

2) In the section of logic, the writer has made some serious mistakes, among which are these:

- In the conclusion of the third mode of the second figure, he makes this mistake: although one of the premises of syllogism is particular, its conclusion is negative universal, while it should be negative particular.

- While presenting the fourth mode of the second figure, he has made several mistakes in the formats of both premises and conclusion.

- While proving the conclusion of the second figure through assumption, he makes a mistake.

Unlike Ibn Kammūna, Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī has presented all these materials in the most precise way and has made no such mistakes.

3) His diction is not clear and strong, while defining the philosophical concepts, like the way various objects are marked by different kinds of oppositions.<sup>1</sup> In some parts his wordings and sentence structures are not sound and accurate, for instance in some places he writes: «ونحن الذى يظهر لنا» instead of «والذى ظهر لنا» or he writes «وهذا كله وامثاله من الحادث تحقق انها اسباب وانما يتم تحقيق ذلك مما ينضم من القران والاحوال التى توجب الحدس المفيد لليقين».<sup>2</sup>

Also in some parts, his exaggerated conciseness prevents the reader from a full understanding. For instance: while proving the second figure, he mentions the general rules and does not pose the details or he does not express different modes separately.

4) He has made some mistakes in using some Arabic terms, which stems from his weakness in Arabic lexical and morphological sciences.

5) He has made a mistake in creating logical divisions like dividing God's attributes in 7 categories, while they are 6 or 8.

Despite all above-mentioned weaknesses in this book, all materials expressed in the sections natural sciences and metaphysics have been penetrated and reflected in the greatest Persian encyclopedia of Illuminate philosophy, called *Durrat al-Tāj*, written by Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and, surprisingly, Shirazi has made no mention of Ibn Kammūna and *al-Kāshif* while narrating the translation of these two sections in his book.<sup>3</sup> Let us have a quick look at a couple of passages of these two works:

*Al-Kāshif*. P. 124. ويجوز صدور الاشياء والكثيرة عن الواحد الحقيقي اذا كان بعضها صادراً عنه بتوسط صدور بعض؛ وباختلاف الآلات والقوابل والحيثيات والشرائط لا يمتنع في العقل أن يصدر عن الواحد. ولكن

وجائز باشد. *Durrat al-Tāj*. Vol. 3. P. 41. صدور اشياء كثره از واحد حقيقي چون بعضى صادر باشد ازو به توسط صدور بعضى. وبا اختلاف آلات، وقوابل، وحيثيات وشرائط ممتنع نيست عقلاً، كى از

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kāshif*. P. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Kāshif*. P. 250.

<sup>3</sup> This has already been pointed out in the article written by Professor Sabine Schmidtke and Dr. Reza Pourjavadi: Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's *Durrat al-Tāj* and its Sources // *Journal Asiaticque* 292 i-ii 9 (2004). P. 309–328.

واحد زائد بر واحد صادر شود. ولكن اين بحقيقت صدور نباشد الا از كثرى، نه از واحدی من حيث انه واحد.

والفرق بين العشق *Al-Kāshif*. P. 435. والشوق: ان العشق هو الابتهاج بتصور حضرة ذات ما هي المعشوقة، والشوق هو الحركة الى تتميم هذا الابتهاج اذا كانت الصورة متمثلة من وجه غير متمثلة من آخر كما يتفق ان يتمثل في الخيال ولا تكون متمثلة في الحس. فكل مشتاق فانه قد نال شيئاً ما، وفاته شيء ما، وفاته شيء، ولهذا لم يجز أن يصدق على الواجب أنه مشتاق وجز أن يصدق عليه انه عاشق.

و الفرق میان *Durrat al-Tāj*. Vol. 5. P. 74 عشق وشوق انست کی عشق ابتهاج است به تصور حضرت ذاتی که معشوق است، وشوق حرکتی است که تتمیم این ابتهاج کند، چون صورت متمثل باشد از وجهی، و غیر متمثل از وجهی دیگر، چنانکه اتفاق میافتد کی متمثل باشد در خیال، متمثل نباشد در حس، بس هر مشتاقی چیزی را دریافته باشد، و چیزی ازوفوت شده. و از این است که جایز نیست کی بر واجب صادق شود کی مشتاق است، و جایزست کی صادق شود برو کی عاشق است.

It is worth saying that Ibn Kammūna himself has quoted various materials from the books like Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifā'* and *Risālat fī 'l-'Ishq*, Bahmanyār's *al-Taḥṣīl* and Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* and other books, but has not pointed to the sources or their writers.<sup>4</sup> Here are a few instances:

وما هو مقبول من *Al-Kāshif*. P. 349. الشرع ولا سبيل لنا الى اثباته الا من طريق الشريعة وتصديق خبر النبوة وذلك هو الذى للبدن عند البعث، وهو المعاد البدنى. وخيرات البدن وشروره معلومه.

يجب ان يعلم أن المعاد *Al-Shifā'*. P. 423. منه ما هو منقول من الشرع ولا سبيل الى اثباته الا من طريق الشريعة وتصديق خبر النبوة، وهو الذى للبدن عند البعث وخيرات البدن وشروره معلومة.

ولا يجوز مفارقة *Al-Kāshif*. P. 458-459. هذا العشق لشيء من الموجودات، اذ لو فارقتها لاحتاجت الى عشق آخر به يستحفظ هذا العشق عند وجوده، اشفاقاً من عدمه، ويسترده عند فواته قلقاً لبعده؛ ولصار احد العشقين معطلاً.

Ibn Sīnā's *Risālat fī 'l-'Ishq*. P. 376. فواجب اذا وجود هذا العشق فى جميع الموجودات المدبره وجوداً غير مفارق البتة، والا لاحتاجت الى عشق آخر يستحفظ هذا العشق الكلى عند وجوده اشفاقاً من عدمه، ويسترده عند فوئه قلقاً لبعده، ولصار احد العشقين معطلاً.

<sup>4</sup> For more detail on this, see my introduction on the new edition of *al-Kāshif*. Published by Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin, and the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in 2009 (*'Izz al-Dawla Ibn Kammūna*. *Al-Kāshif* (Al-Jadīd fī 'l-ḥikma). Edited with an Introduction by Hamed Najj Isfahani).

*Al-Kāshif*. P. 472. ومن عناية البارئ جلّت  
عظّمته أن الماده لما امتنع قبولها لصورتين  
معاً، وكان الجود الالهى مقتضياً لتكميلها  
باخراج ما فيها بالقوة من قبول الصور الى  
الفعل، قدر بلطيف حكمته زماناً غير منقطع  
فى الطفين تخرج فيه تلك الامور من القوة الى  
الفعل واحد بعد واحد، فتصير الصور فى جميع  
ذلك الزمان موجودة فى موادها، والمادة  
كاملة بها.

Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*. Vol. 3. P. 318.  
وكان الجود الالهى مقتضياً لتكميل المادة  
بإبداع تلك الصور فيها واخراج ما فيها بالقوة  
من قبول تلك الصور الى الفعل قدر بلطيف  
حكمته زماناً غير منقطع فى الطفين، يخرج  
فيه تلك الامور من القوة الى الفعل واحدا بعد  
واحد فتصير الصور فى جميع ذلك الزمان  
موجودة فى موادها و الماده كاملة بها.

### References

- Ibn Sīnā*. Kitāb al-Shifā': Metaphysics. Ed. G. Anawati, I. Madkour, and S. Zayed. Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'amma li-'l-kitāb, 1960.
- Ibn Sīnā*. Risāla fī 'l-'ishq. Qum, 1979.
- Ibn al-Fuwaṣṣī*. al-Ḥawāḍith al-Jāmi'a. Ed. M.R. Shaybī. Baghdad, 1932.
- Ibn Kammūna*. Azaliyyat al-Nafs. Ed. I. Barkhah. Tehran, 2007.
- Ibn Kammūna*. Al-Kāshif (Al-Jadīd fī 'l-ḥikma). Ed. H. Nājī Isfahānī. Tehran, 2008.
- Khāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*. Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa 'l-Tanbīhāt. 3 vols. Tehran, 1982.
- Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī*. Durrat al-Tāj. Ed. M. Mishkāt. 5 vols. Tehran, 1951.